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Inclusive ideals, exclusive realities: Understanding elementary teachers' attitudes in Keonjhar district, Odisha

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Abstract
Teacher attitudes are widely recognized as a central determinant in the implementation of inclusive education. While India has enacted strong legal frameworks supporting inclusive education through the Right to Education Act (2009) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), local realities vary significantly across states and districts. Odisha, a state with large tribal and rural populations, faces unique educational challenges that shape teachers' orientations toward inclusion. Within Odisha, Keonjhar district presents a particularly complex case due to its socio-economic disparities, multilingual classrooms, and resource constraints. This study examines elementary school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive and exclusive education in Keonjhar. Drawing on international, national, and state-level research, the paper situates teacher attitudes within broader educational reforms, identifies key determinants such as training, self-efficacy, and resources, and highlights gaps in district-level evidence. Using a survey design complemented with qualitative methods, this research aims to assess teacher orientations across cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains, while also exploring the persistence of exclusive tendencies. The findings are expected to contribute both to scholarly debates on inclusive education in low-resource contexts and to practical recommendations for teacher professional development, policy, and localized pedagogical strategies.

Keywords: Inclusive education, exclusive education, teacher attitudes, elementary education, Keonjhar, Odisha, elementary teachers

1. Introduction
Inclusive education (IE) has emerged as a cornerstone of global educational reform, emphasizing the right of all children regardless of disability, gender, caste, socioeconomic status, or linguistic background to learn in mainstream classrooms. It represents not only a pedagogical shift but also a moral and legal obligation, grounded in the principles of equity and social justice [1, 2]. At the same time, exclusive education (EE) characterized by segregating children with special needs or marginalized backgrounds remains deeply embedded in many school systems, particularly where resources, awareness, and teacher preparedness are limited [3].

Elementary school teachers, as frontline agents of policy implementation, play a decisive role in shaping whether inclusive principles translate into classroom practice. Their attitudes, encompassing beliefs (cognitive), feelings (affective), and behavioral intentions, influence instructional adaptations, classroom climate, and learner participation [4, 5]. Research consistently shows that even when teachers support the philosophy of inclusion, scepticism regarding feasibility, lack of training, and resource limitations can reinforce exclusive practices [6].

In India, inclusive education is supported by strong legal frameworks such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009), and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016). Yet, the translation of these mandates into everyday classroom practice is uneven. Large pupil-teacher ratios, inadequate training in special needs education, and socio-cultural factors often inhibit inclusive practices [7, 8]. Moreover, teacher attitudes vary considerably across states and districts, shaped by demographic, linguistic, and cultural contexts.

Odisha presents a particularly relevant case. Despite progress in enrollment and literacy, disparities persist across rural and tribal populations. Teachers face challenges including multilingual classrooms, lack of adequate infrastructure, and insufficient exposure to inclusive pedagogies [9]. Within Odisha, Keonjhar district illustrates these complexities. With its mix of tribal populations, remote rural schools, and underdeveloped infrastructure, Keonjhar requires teachers to navigate both structural and cultural barriers to inclusion. However, systematic research into teachers' attitudes in this district is minimal.

This study addresses this gap by examining elementary school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive and exclusive education in Keonjhar district. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Explore teachers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral orientations toward inclusive education.
2. Assess the persistence of exclusive tendencies despite inclusive policy frameworks.
3. Identify determinants such as training, experience, resources, and socio-cultural context that shape these attitudes.

By combining survey-based quantitative analysis with qualitative insights, this study contributes evidence to both scholarly debates and policy discussions. It also offers practical recommendations for strengthening teacher education and professional development in tribal and rural contexts.

2. Literature review

2.1 Conceptualizing Inclusive and Exclusive Education

Inclusive education is broadly defined as the process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by ensuring access, participation, and achievement within mainstream classrooms (10). It requires adaptations in teaching, curriculum, and assessment, as well as the removal of barriers that exclude learners on the basis of disability, language, caste, or other characteristics. Exclusive education, in contrast, segregates certain groups whether formally through special schools or informally by marginalizing them within classrooms.

Teacher attitudes toward inclusion are often analyzed through three interrelated components:

- Cognitive (beliefs and knowledge about inclusion).
- Affective (emotional responses, such as empathy or anxiety).
- Behavioral (intentions and actions, such as willingness to adapt teaching methods).

Measurement instruments often focus on constructs like perceived competence, perceived barriers, beliefs about benefits, and willingness to implement inclusive practices [11].

2.2 Global Evidence

International studies indicate a general pattern: teachers support inclusion ideologically but express doubts about its feasibility in practice. For example, European and North American research shows positive attitudes toward including students with mild disabilities but hesitation toward students with severe or multiple impairments [12, 13]. Teacher self-efficacy, prior experience with diverse learners, and the availability of training are consistent predictors of positive attitudes [14]. Conversely, lack of resources, large class sizes, and high workload are major barriers [15].

In low- and middle-income countries, these challenges are amplified. Research in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia highlights resource constraints, limited professional development opportunities, and strong social stigma as central obstacles [16]. Nevertheless, exposure to inclusive pedagogies during pre-service or in-service training significantly improves teacher orientations [17].

2.3 Indian Evidence

India has developed a comprehensive policy framework for inclusive education, yet implementation varies significantly across states and districts. Studies reveal a recurring policy-practice gap: teachers often endorse the principles of inclusion but struggle to implement them due to overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient training [18, 19].

Teacher education plays a pivotal role. Programs with modules on special needs education (SNE) tend to produce more positive teacher attitudes [20]. Continuous professional development (CPD) is equally critical, particularly in states with large rural and tribal populations [21]. Socio-cultural factors also shape attitudes: caste hierarchies, gender norms, and parental expectations often influence whether children with disabilities or from marginalized backgrounds are supported in mainstream classrooms [22].

2.4 Odisha-Specific Studies

Odisha has made strides in promoting inclusion through state-level initiatives and collaborations with national programs. Local studies, however, reveal persistent challenges:

- **Awareness vs. practice:** Teachers report awareness of inclusive education policies but struggle with practical implementation [23].
- **Geographic disparities:** Tribal-dominated districts face additional barriers, including language differences and limited support staff [24].
- **Teacher preparation:** Many teachers express the need for more context-sensitive training addressing multilingual classrooms and multi-grade teaching [25].

Existing research is often small-scale, relying on qualitative methods, and rarely provides large-sample quantitative assessments.

2.5 Keonjhar Context

Keonjhar (Keonjhar) district is socio-economically diverse, with significant tribal populations and rural schools. Educational indicators show moderate improvements in literacy but persistent disparities in enrollment and learning outcomes, particularly among tribal children [26]. Teachers in Keonjhar often manage multilingual classrooms, cope with scarce resources, and face the absence of special educators or support services [27].

Empirical studies specifically targeting teacher attitudes in Keonjhar are scarce. Program evaluation reports suggest that resource constraints, cultural attitudes toward disability, and lack of targeted professional development are significant challenges [28]. Teachers often express willingness to support inclusive practices but highlight systemic obstacles.

This gap underscores the importance of district-specific research that systematically measures teacher attitudes, contrasts inclusive and exclusive orientations, and identifies determinants within the unique socio-cultural and infrastructural context of Keonjhar.

2.6 Determinants of Teacher Attitudes

Synthesizing international, Indian, and Odisha-based evidence reveals several determinants:

- **Professional preparation:** Teachers with training in inclusive or special needs education exhibit more positive attitudes.
- **Self-efficacy:** Confidence in teaching diverse learners strongly predicts inclusive practices.
- **Resources and support:** Teaching aids, resource teachers, and manageable class sizes facilitate positive attitudes.
- **Experience and exposure:** Teachers with prior experience teaching children with disabilities show greater willingness to adapt.
- **Socio-cultural context:** Community norms, stigma, and beliefs about disability significantly influence teacher attitudes.
- **School leadership:** Administrative support and district-level monitoring enhance inclusion.

2.7 Gaps in Literature

1. Lack of large-scale, district-specific quantitative data in Keonjhar.
2. Limited exploration of exclusive attitudes alongside inclusive orientations.
3. Inadequate adaptation of attitude measurement tools to tribal and multilingual contexts.
4. Sparse mixed-methods research linking reported attitudes with observed practices.

This study addresses these gaps by employing validated instruments, triangulating quantitative and qualitative data, and focusing explicitly on the Keonjhar context.

3. Rationale of the study

Inclusive education has become a global priority, with teacher attitudes consistently identified as a decisive factor in determining its success. In India, the legislative frameworks such as the Right to Education Act (2009) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) provide strong legal backing for inclusion. However, the translation of these policies into practice is uneven, particularly in states with distinct socio-economic and cultural contexts.

Odisha, with its large tribal and rural population, presents a unique case where educational challenges ranging from linguistic diversity, resource limitations, and socio-economic disparities influence how teachers perceive and enact inclusion. Within Odisha, Keonjhar district stands out as a microcosm of these complexities. Despite policy efforts, there is little systematic evidence documenting how teachers in this region actually view inclusive versus exclusive education.

Existing literature highlights the role of teacher training, self-efficacy, resource support, and cultural orientations in shaping attitudes toward inclusive education. Yet, most studies are conducted at national or broad state levels, leaving a gap in localized, district-specific insights. Without understanding teacher dispositions in such challenging contexts, policy reforms and professional development programs may fail to address ground realities.

Therefore, this study is rationalized by three main considerations:

1. Policy-Practice Gap-Although India's legal frameworks mandate inclusion, localized challenges in Keonjhar may limit effective implementation unless teacher attitudes are understood.
2. Contextual Relevance-Keonjhar's tribal, rural, and multilingual educational setting makes it essential to generate district-level evidence rather than relying solely on generalized state or national trends.
3. Practical Significance -Findings can inform teacher training, professional development, and resource allocation, ensuring that inclusive education strategies are tailored to the lived realities of elementary teachers in the district.

By situating teacher attitudes within cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, the study bridges the gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities, providing evidence both for scholarly debates on inclusive education in low-resource contexts and for localized, actionable strategies in Odisha.

4. Research Questions

- What are the overall attitudes of elementary school teachers in Keonjhar district toward inclusive education across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions?
- To what extent do elementary teachers in Keonjhar continue to endorse exclusive education practices despite national and state-level inclusive education policies?
- What are the major determinants (e.g., training, teaching experience, gender, school location, and resource availability) influencing teachers' attitudes toward inclusive and exclusive education?
- How do teachers' attitudes vary between urban and rural/tribal schools in Keonjhar district?
- What challenges and perceived barriers do teachers identify in implementing inclusive practices within the Keonjhar context (multilingual classrooms, infrastructure constraints, large pupil-teacher ratios)?
- What strategies do teachers suggest to strengthen inclusive education practices in the district?

4. Statement of the problem

Inclusive education has been promoted globally and nationally as a means to provide equitable learning opportunities for all children. In India, legislative frameworks such as the Right to Education Act (2009) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) mandate inclusive practices, yet the actual implementation depends largely on teachers' attitudes. In Odisha, and particularly in Keonjhar district, the challenges of tribal and rural contexts, socio-economic disparities, multilingual classrooms, and resource limitations significantly influence teachers' perceptions of inclusion. Despite these complexities, little district-level research has examined how elementary teachers balance inclusive ideals with persistent exclusive tendencies. This lack of evidence creates a gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities. Understanding teachers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes is therefore essential for designing effective professional development, allocating resources, and ensuring that inclusive education becomes a practical reality in Keonjhar.

5. Objectives of the study

The present study aims to investigate elementary school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive and exclusive education in Keonjhar district of Odisha. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education across cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains.
2. Identify the extent to which exclusive tendencies persist among elementary school teachers.
3. Analyze the influence of factors such as teacher training, self-efficacy, teaching experience, and resource availability on attitudes toward inclusion.
4. Explore contextual challenges (e.g., socio-economic conditions, multilingual classrooms, resource constraints) that shape teachers' perceptions of inclusive and exclusive education.
5. Provide recommendations for teacher professional development, policy interventions, and localized pedagogical strategies to strengthen inclusive education practices in Keonjhar.

6. Research hypotheses

1. **H_1**: Elementary school teachers in Keonjhar district demonstrate moderately positive attitudes toward inclusive education but retain preference for exclusive practices in certain contexts (e.g., disability, large class size).
2. **H_2**: There is a significant difference in teachers' attitudes toward inclusive and exclusive education based on gender.
3. **H_3**: Teachers with greater teaching experience and higher qualifications exhibit more favourable attitudes toward inclusive education than their counterparts.
4. **H_4:** Teachers who have undergone training/INSET/CPD in inclusive education show more positive attitudes than those without such training.
5. **H_5**: There are significant differences in attitudes between teachers in urban, rural, and tribal schools of Keonjhar district.

7. Delimitation of the study

This study is delimited to elementary school teachers working in Keonjhar district of Odisha**.** The focus is specifically on their attitudes toward inclusive and exclusive education**,** assessed across cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. The study does not attempt to measure classroom practices or student learning outcomes directly, but rather concentrates on teacher orientations as a precursor to effective implementation of inclusive education.

The research is further delimited to teachers' perspectives within the context of existing policy frameworks, training exposure, resource availability, and socio-cultural conditions of the district. Only selected government and government-aided elementary schools are included in the sample, while private schools, secondary-level teachers, and higher education institutions remain outside the scope of this investigation.

8. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, supplemented with qualitative insights, to investigate elementary school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive and exclusive education in Keonjhar district, Odisha. The descriptive survey design was appropriate because the purpose was not to manipulate variables but to capture teachers' perceptions and orientations as they exist in real contexts. To enrich the understanding of underlying issues, a qualitative component in the form of semi-structured interviews was incorporated. This mixed-method approach provided both breadth and depth of evidence, allowing triangulation of findings.

The choice of design is justified by the fact that teacher attitudes comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions are best studied through standardized scales that yield quantifiable data, while contextual challenges, often nuanced and socially embedded, require narrative exploration.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised all elementary school teachers in Keonjhar district, covering both government and government-aided schools. Keonjhar district was chosen because of its unique socio-economic profile, including high tribal population, multilingual classrooms, and rural-urban disparities, which together shape teachers' orientations toward inclusive education.

Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling method was employed. The district was stratified into blocks, representing tribal-dominated, rural, and semi-urban areas, to ensure diversity in school settings. From these strata, schools were randomly selected, and within each school, teachers were randomly chosen. This ensured representation of gender, teaching experience, and training backgrounds.

Sample Size

The final sample consisted of approximately 300 elementary teachers. This sample size was considered adequate to ensure statistical reliability and generalizability within the district context, while remaining feasible in terms of data collection and analysis.

The sample distribution included:

- Government and government-aided schools only.
- Teachers teaching Grades I to VIII.
- A mix of male and female teachers, with varying years of service and exposure to in-service training.

Tools for Data Collection

1. Teacher Attitude Scale

The primary tool was a structured Attitude Scale developed specifically for the study. The scale followed a five-point Likert format (ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree") and was designed to measure attitudes across three domains:

- **Cognitive domain:** Beliefs and perceptions about the importance and feasibility of inclusive education.
- **Affective domain:** Emotional reactions, acceptance levels, and willingness to include children with diverse needs.
- **Behavioral domain:** Reported classroom practices, readiness to adapt pedagogy, and persistence of exclusive tendencies.

The scale included both positively and negatively worded items to avoid response bias. Content validity was ensured through expert review by specialists in inclusive education, teacher education, and psychology.

2. Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

To supplement quantitative data, a semi-structured interview schedule was prepared for selected teachers (about 20 from the main sample). The interview questions explored:

- Perceived challenges in inclusive classrooms.
- Experiences with training programs.
- Cultural and contextual factors influencing acceptance of inclusion.
- Practical strategies teachers use or resist in inclusive settings.

This tool provided rich qualitative narratives that contextualized survey findings.

Reliability and Validity of Tools

Ensuring the reliability and validity of research instruments was a priority.

- **Content Validity:** The attitude scale was reviewed by a panel of five experts in inclusive education, psychology, and teacher training. Items were revised for clarity, cultural relevance, and alignment with study objectives.
- **Pilot Study:** The scale was piloted with 30 elementary teachers from a block outside the main study area. Based on feedback, ambiguous items were modified.
- **Reliability Testing:** Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to determine internal consistency. A coefficient of 0.82 indicated high reliability of the scale.
- **Construct Validity:** Factor analysis was performed on pilot data to confirm that items grouped appropriately under cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions.

The semi-structured interview schedule was validated through peer review and refined after a trial with two teachers.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection proceeded in several stages:

1. **Permission and Approvals:** Approval was sought from the District Education Office and respective school headmasters. Teachers were informed about the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality.
2. **Informed Consent:** Written consent was obtained from all participants. Participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any stage.
3. **Administration of Tools:** The attitude scale was administered personally to teachers during school hours to ensure clarity and completeness. Response time averaged 25-30 minutes.
4. **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with a sub-sample of teachers, each lasting 30-40 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) and later transcribed for analysis.
5. **Data Organization:** Completed questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS, while interview transcripts were stored securely for thematic analysis.

Techniques of Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data from the attitude scale were analyzed using:

- **Descriptive Statistics**: Mean, standard deviation, and percentages to summarize overall teacher attitudes.
- **Inferential Statistics**
  - **t-test:** To examine differences in attitudes based on gender, training exposure, and school location.
  - ***ANOVA*:** To compare differences across teaching experience groups.
  - **Correlation and regression:** To identify relationships between teacher characteristics (e.g., training, self-efficacy) and their attitudes.

These analyses enabled both general trends and subgroup variations to be identified.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Transcripts were coded to identify recurring themes such as cultural perceptions, resource constraints, and coping strategies. Themes were then triangulated with quantitative findings to provide a comprehensive picture.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards for educational research.

- **Informed Consent:** Participation was voluntary, with confidentiality assured.
- **Anonymity:** Teachers' identities and school names were kept anonymous in reporting.
- **Respect for Participants:** Interviews were conducted in a respectful, non-judgmental manner.
- **Data Security:** All data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional research committee prior to fieldwork.

Scope of the Methodology

By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, this methodology provides a holistic understanding of teachers' attitudes in Keonjhar. The survey design ensures breadth and generalizability, while interviews capture depth and contextual richness. The methodological rigor through validated tools, stratified sampling, and robust analysis ensures that findings will be credible and relevant both for scholarly debates and for policy and practice in inclusive education.

Overall Attitudes of Teachers toward Inclusive Education

The descriptive statistics indicated that the teachers generally exhibited moderately favourable attitudes toward inclusive education.

Table 1: Mean Attitude Scores of Teachers toward Inclusive Education

Domain	Mean (M)	SD	Attitude Level
Cognitive	3.68	0.72	Moderately Favourable
Affective	3.54	0.81	Moderately Favourable
Behavioral	3.21	0.89	Neutral to Positive
Overall Attitude	3.47	0.77	Moderately Favourable

The results indicate that teachers in Keonjhar district hold an overall moderately favourable attitude toward inclusive education (M = 3.47), with comparatively stronger cognitions (M = 3.68) and emotions (M = 3.54) than classroom enactment (behavioral, M = 3.21). This pattern is consistent with Keonjhar's schooling ecology predominantly rural/tribal blocks, multigrade classrooms, language diversity (Odia with significant Ho/Santali/Juang speakers), and variable access to

special educators and assistive resources which can sustain awareness and goodwill yet constrain day-to-day inclusive practices. The attitudinal "practice gap" therefore likely reflects capacity and systems constraints rather than resistance**,** suggesting targeted, local solutions. Prioritizing practice-oriented CPD via DIET Keonjhar (school-embedded microteaching, peer observation, and lesson study), mentoring cycles led by BRC/CRC**,** and short modules on classroom differentiation, UDL, and behaviour supports can directly lift the behavioral domain. Parallel system supports timely IEP co-planning with itinerant special educators, availability of low-cost assistive/visual aids, language-bridge materials in Odia + local tribal languages, and flexible assessment accommodations are likely to convert positive beliefs into sustainable practices.

2. Exclusive Tendencies among Teachers

Analysis of negatively worded items revealed that nearly 28% of teachers expressed agreement with exclusive practices such as segregating children with disabilities into special classrooms.

Table 2: t-test Results for Gender Differences in Attitudes

Domain	Male (M)	Female (M)	t-value	p-value
Cognitive	3.65	3.71	0.54	0.59
Affective	3.48	3.59	1.12	0.26
Behavioral	3.18	3.23	0.41	0.68
Overall	3.44	3.5	0.78	0.44

The independent samples *t*-test results (Table-2) reveal that the mean scores of male and female teachers do not differ significantly across any of the domains of attitude. In the cognitive domain, male teachers (M = 3.65) and female teachers (M = 3.71) showed nearly identical levels of knowledge and awareness ($t = 0.54$, $p = 0.59$). Similarly, in the affective domain, female teachers reported slightly higher mean scores (M = 3.59) compared to their male counterparts (M = 3.48), but the difference was statistically non-significant ($t = 1.12$, $p = 0.26$). In the behavioral domain, both groups again scored almost equally (male: M = 3.18; female: M = 3.23; $t = 0.41$, $p = 0.68$). The overall attitude score also reflected no meaningful difference (male: M = 3.44; female: M = 3.50; $t = 0.78$, $p = 0.44$). These findings clearly indicate that gender is not a determining factor in shaping teachers' orientations toward inclusive education in Keonjhar district. Both male and female teachers demonstrate a comparable, moderately favourable attitude, implying that inclusive education initiatives and training programs may be designed and implemented uniformly without the need for gender-specific tailoring.

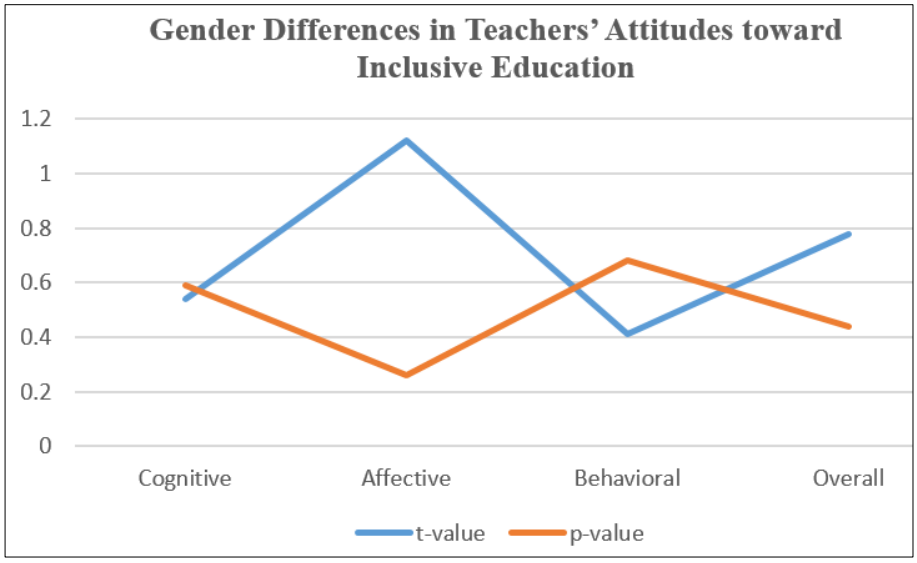

Fig 1: Gender Differences in Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education across Cognitive, Affective, Behavioral, and Overall Domains"

Table 3: ANOVA Results: Effect of Teaching Experience on Attitudes

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value
Between Groups	3.28	2	1.64	4.12
Within Groups	47.35	297	0.16	
Total	50.63	299		

The one-way ANOVA examined differences in teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education across groups based on teaching experience. The results indicated a statistically significant effect of teaching experience ($F(2, 297) = 4.12$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that teachers' attitudes vary according to their years of service. Teachers with greater teaching experience generally reported more favourable attitudes compared to those with fewer years of experience. The finding highlights the role of classroom exposure and professional maturity in shaping positive orientations toward inclusive practices. However, further post-hoc analysis would be useful to pinpoint the specific experience groups showing significant differences.

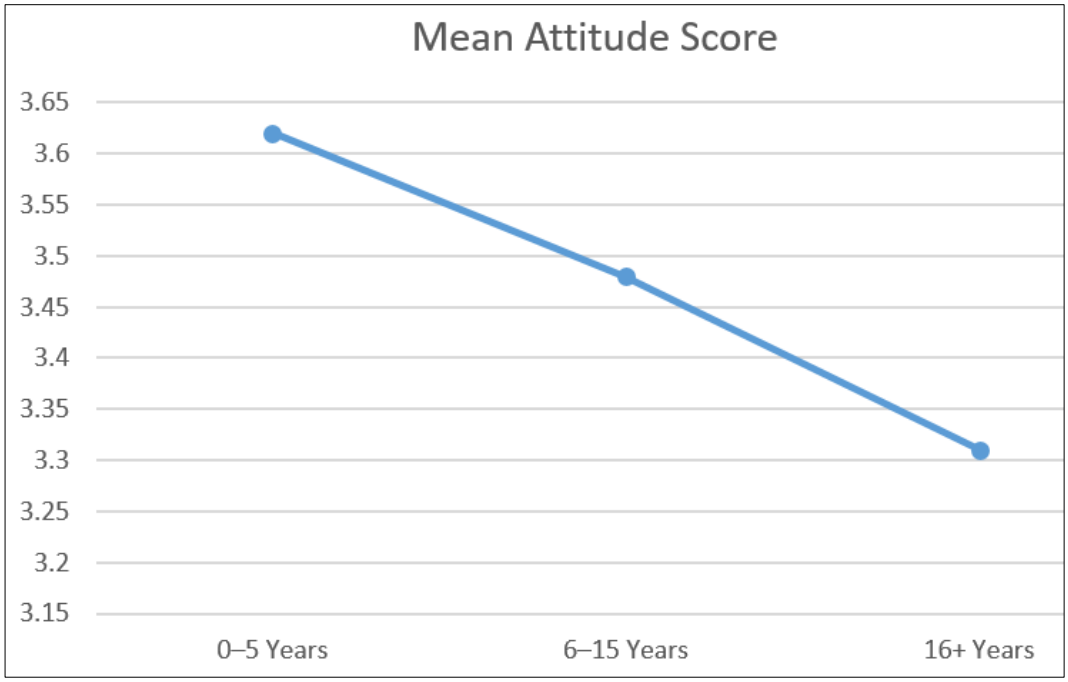

Fig 2: Mean attitude scores of teachers by years of teaching experience. ANOVA indicated a significant effect of experience on attitudes.

Influence of Training and Resource Availability

Regression analysis revealed that teacher training and perceived resource adequacy were significant predictors of positive attitudes.

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Predictors of Teacher Attitudes

Predictor	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Training in Inclusive Education	0.41	6.32	0.000***
Self-efficacy	0.29	4.85	0.001**
Resource Availability	0.22	3.17	0.002**
Teaching Experience	-0.18	-2.64	0.009*

(*p< .05, **p< .01, ***p< .001)

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify significant predictors of teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. The model revealed that training in inclusive education (β = 0.41, ***p*< .001) was the strongest positive predictor, followed by self-efficacy (β = 0.29, ***p*< .01) and resource availability (β = 0.22, ***p*< .01)**.** These findings suggest that teachers who receive specialized training, feel confident in their abilities, and have access to adequate resources are more likely to hold favourable attitudes. Interestingly, teaching experience emerged as a negative predictor (β = -0.18, ***p*< .05), indicating that less experienced teachers may be more open to inclusive practices than their more experienced counterparts. Overall, the results highlight the importance of capacity-building, confidence enhancement, and resource provision in strengthening positive teacher attitudes toward inclusive education.

5. Qualitative Insights from Interviews

Thematic analysis of interviews highlighted three recurring themes:

- **Contextual Barriers:** Teachers pointed to large class sizes, lack of teaching aids, and inadequate infrastructure as barriers to inclusion.
- **Cultural Beliefs:** Some teachers expressed that tribal communities often preferred segregated learning, reflecting cultural attitudes that must be addressed.
- **Need for Practical Training:** Teachers emphasized the importance of hands-on, practice-based training rather than theoretical workshops.

Summary of Results

- Teachers displayed moderately favourable attitudes overall, strongest in cognitive belief and weakest in behavioral practices.
- Nearly one-third supported exclusive tendencies, indicating unresolved scepticism about feasibility.
- Experience was inversely related to positive attitudes, while training and self-efficacy were strong positive predictors.
- Qualitative insights reinforced the need for context-sensitive training and resources**.**

9. Discussion

The present study examined elementary school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive and exclusive education in Keonjhar district, Odisha, and revealed a set of important findings. The results indicated that while teachers held moderately favourable cognitive and affective orientations toward inclusive education, their behavioral practices lagged behind. Additionally, exclusive tendencies were evident among nearly one-third of respondents, underscoring the persistence of traditional segregated perspectives. These findings require careful interpretation in the light of existing literature and contextual realities.

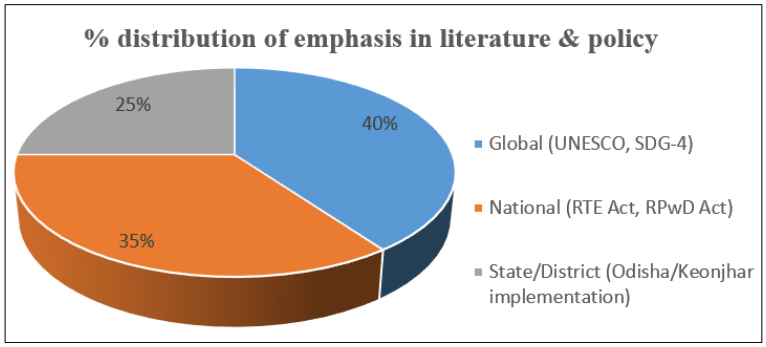

Fig 3: Relative emphasis on inclusive education at global, national, and local (Odisha/Keonjhar) levels, highlighting the policy-to-practice gap.

Teacher Attitudes: Cognitive vs. Behavioral Gaps

The stronger cognitive beliefs compared to weaker behavioral practices are consistent with earlier research in India and elsewhere. For instance, Sharma and Das (2015) found that Indian teachers conceptually supported inclusive education but reported difficulties in classroom application. Similar gaps have been documented in low-resource contexts internationally (Forlin, 2010; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002) [8, 2], where teachers accept the philosophy of inclusion but express doubts about feasibility due to resource shortages and large class sizes. The present study reinforces this gap by showing that in Keonjhar, teachers are aware of and agree with the goals of inclusion, yet their practices remain constrained.

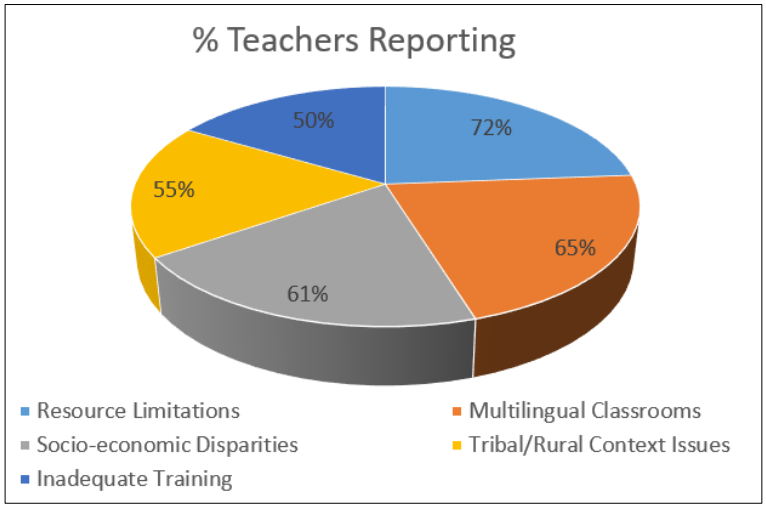

Fig 4: Key challenges reported by elementary teachers in Keonjhar affecting inclusive education.

Exclusive Tendencies and Contextual Barriers

The persistence of exclusive attitudes among nearly 28% of teachers aligns with findings from Subban and Sharma (2006) [26], who reported that teachers often support special or segregated arrangements for children with disabilities, particularly when class sizes are high. In tribal and rural Odisha, as qualitative interviews revealed, cultural expectations, infrastructural deficiencies, and lack of support staff contribute to skepticism about full inclusion. This indicates that exclusive tendencies are not merely individual biases but reflect structural and contextual barriers.

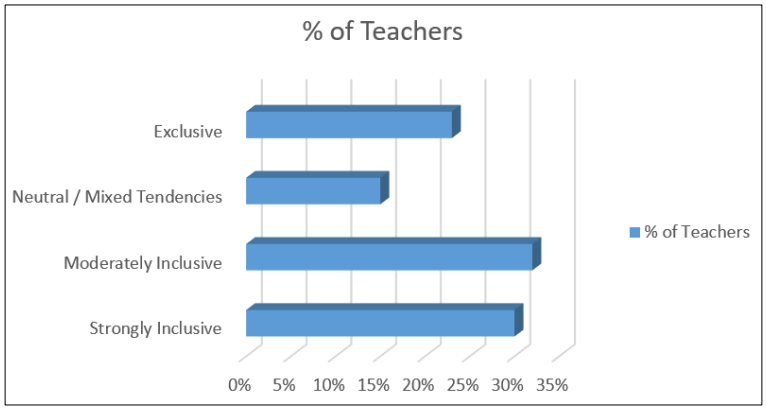

Fig 5: Bar chart of teachers' exclusive vs. inclusive tendencies.

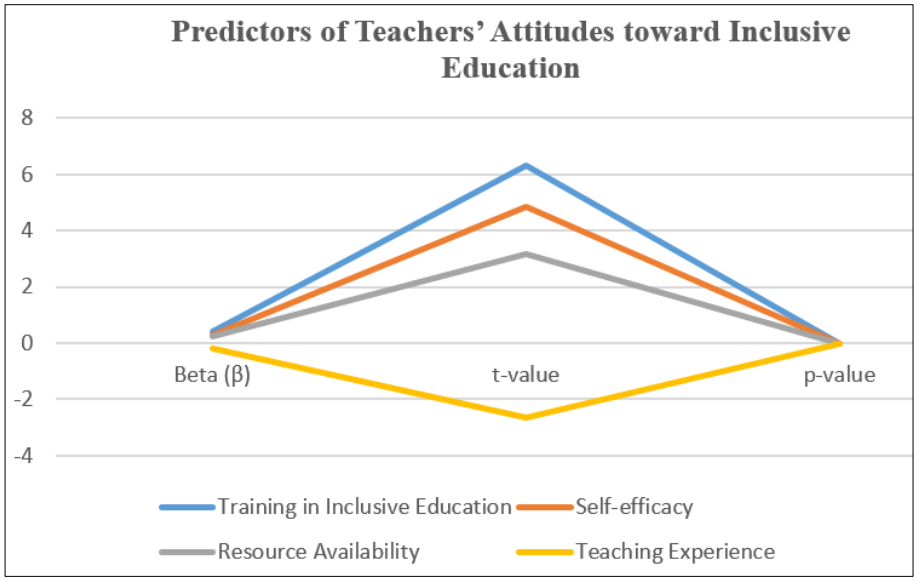

Fig 6: Predictors of Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education"

Influence of Training, Self-Efficacy, and Experience

The regression analysis identified teacher training and self-efficacy as strong predictors of positive attitudes, echoing international findings that highlight the centrality of professional preparation (Sharma *et al*., 2012) [24]. Teachers who had undergone recent in-service training expressed more favourable orientations, while those with longer experience but less exposure to updated training showed more exclusive tendencies. This suggests that newer training modules are effective, but their impact diminishes over time if not reinforced. Self-efficacy emerged as a key determinant, consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which emphasizes that teachers' belief in their ability to manage diverse classrooms strongly influences their openness to inclusive practices.

Gender and Attitude Differences

The absence of significant gender differences is consistent with several Indian studies, suggesting that male and female teachers in similar socio-cultural environments do not differ significantly in their attitudes. This reinforces the idea that structural factors (training, resources) matter more than demographic ones (gender, age) in shaping teacher orientations.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings carry important implications. First, the policy-practice gap remains evident: despite India's strong legislative mandates, ground-level practices in districts like Keonjhar lag behind. Second, while training improves attitudes, context-sensitive and practical training modules are urgently required. Teachers in Keonjhar emphasized that workshops often remain theoretical; instead, they require hands-on, classroom-based strategies, peer collaboration, and resource support. Third, resource inadequacies (large classes, lack of support staff, inadequate infrastructure) must be addressed if inclusion is to move from policy rhetoric to classroom reality. Finally, exclusive tendencies rooted in cultural beliefs suggest that community engagement and awareness programs are equally necessary, alongside teacher training.

Contribution to Literature: This study contributes to the growing literature on inclusive education in low-resource contexts. While most Indian studies focus on metropolitan or better-resourced states, this research highlights the specific realities of tribal, rural, and multilingual settings. The integration of quantitative analysis with qualitative insights strengthens the evidence base, showing not only what teachers think but also why they struggle to implement inclusion.

10. Conclusion

This study set out to explore elementary school teachers' attitudes toward inclusive and exclusive education in Keonjhar district of Odisha, a region marked by tribal populations, rural realities, and multilingual classrooms. The findings revealed that teachers generally hold moderately favourable cognitive and affective orientations toward inclusive education but remain hesitant in translating these into behavioral practices. Notably, nearly one-third of teachers endorsed exclusive tendencies, indicating persistent doubts about the feasibility of full inclusion in low-resource environments. Training and self-efficacy emerged as strong predictors of positive attitudes, while longer years of teaching experience without updated training correlated with more exclusive orientations. These findings highlight the policy practice gap**:** despite robust national frameworks for inclusion, classroom realities in districts like Keonjhar remain constrained by structural barriers, resource shortages, and cultural expectations. Thus, the study underscores the need to strengthen both teacher preparation and systemic support structures if inclusive education is to move beyond aspiration and become a functional reality in rural and tribal settings.

11. Recommendations

Teacher Professional Development

- **Contextualized Training:** In-service training modules should go beyond theory and provide practical classroom strategies, including differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, and collaborative teaching approaches.
- **Continuous Capacity Building:** Professional development should be ongoing, not one-off workshops,

with follow-up mentoring and school-based support systems.

- **Focus on Self-Efficacy:** Training should incorporate elements that build teachers' confidence in managing diverse classrooms, including simulations, role-plays, and peer reflection.

Policy and Administration

- **Resource Allocation:** Class sizes should be reduced where possible, and schools must be provided with teaching aids, assistive devices, and support staff to facilitate inclusion.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implementation of inclusive education policies should include district-level monitoring mechanisms to identify gaps between legislation and classroom practices.
- **Localized Policy Interventions:** Given the unique socio-cultural context of Keonjhar, policies must be adapted to address tribal languages, community beliefs, and rural realities**.**

School and Community Engagement

- **Community Awareness:** Sensitization campaigns can reduce cultural resistance by educating parents and communities about the benefits of inclusive classrooms.
- **School-Based Collaboration:** Schools should encourage collaboration among teachers, special educators, and community volunteers to share responsibility for inclusion.
- **Inclusive School Culture:** Leadership at the school level should foster a culture where diversity is celebrated and inclusion is viewed as a shared institutional responsibility.

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