European Journal of Educational Research

Volume 7, Issue 3, 421 - 430.

ISSN: 2165-8714

http://www.eu-jer.com/

Regular and Special Education Mexican Teachers' Attitudes toward School Inclusion and Disability

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Received: February 25, 2018 ▪ Revised: April 7, 2018 ▪ Accepted: April 16, 2018

Abstract: The aim of the present study was to elucidate Mexicans teachers' attitudes toward school inclusion and disability. To achieve this goal, 119 regular education and 88 special education teachers answered The Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities scale. Subsequent analyses revealed that attitudes to both groups were similar in terms of direction but dissimilar in magnitude factor. In addition, while the attitude structure in both samples involved three factors, these were unique to each group: Regular education teachers (Perceived Benefits and Negative Effects inside the Inclusive Classroom/Performance inside the Inclusive Classroom, Teaching Ability/Education System, Performance inside the Inclusive Classroom/Education System) and the special education teachers group (Perceived Benefits inside the Inclusive Classroom/Education System, Teaching Ability/Performance inside the Inclusive Classroom, Perceived Benefits and Negative Effects inside the Inclusive Classroom/Performance inside the Inclusive Classroom). Theoretical and applied implications of these findings are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: *Attitudes, school inclusion, students with disability, regular education teacher, special education teacher.*

To cite this article: Mezquita-Hoyos, Y. N., Sanchez-Monroy, M. H., Morales-Martinez, G. E., Lopez-Ramirez, E. O., & Reyna-Gonzalez, M. R. (2018). Regular and special education Mexican teachers' attitudes toward school inclusion and disability. *European Journal of Educational Research, 7*(3), 421-430. doi: 10.12973/eu-jer.7.3.421

Introduction

Education is a human right. Every human being is entitled to receive quality education without discrimination based on his or her sex, race, or physical or intellectual condition. An inclusive educational approach is essential for the humane development of a society. Thus, there is a growing interest in the societal attitudes towards the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities (PWID) in the mainstream educational system. For example, there are numerous studies exploring the psychological properties of attitudes towards school inclusion through scales (e.g., Alahbabi, 2009; Ross-Hill, 2009), questionnaires (Kalyva, Gojkovic, & Tsakiris, 2007), and interviews (Gaad, 2004). Some researchers have focused on special education (Alahbabi, 2009), while others studied attitudes of regular education teachers (Mahat, 2008), parents of students with intellectual disability (Waddington & Reed, 2006), and university students (Malinen & Savolainen, 2008). Moreover, research spans the entire globe, with studies of this type conducted in the United States (Ross-Hill, 2009), Jordan (Al-Zyoudi, 2006), Serbia (Kalyva et al., 2007), Australia (Westwood, 2001), and Pakistan (Fontana & Lari, 2001), among others.

Previous research in this field has shown that attitudes toward school inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities have become more positive (Florez, Aguado, & Alcedo, 2009). This is the case for PWID inclusion into regular educational settings, where studies have been conducted in the US (Gao & Mager, 2011), Russia (Oreshkina, 2009), India (Raver, 2001), and many other countries worldwide. Still, significant differences among countries (Leyser, Kepperman, & Keller, 1994) and study samples (Kalyva et al., 2007; Ross-Hill, 2009) can be observed regarding the magnitude of positive attitudes. Overall, these differences can be attributed to contextual (Alahbabi, 2009) and educative variables (Leyser et al., 1994), as well as humanistic variables (Al-Zyoudi, 2006; Kalyva et al., 2007; Leyser et al., 1994).

After examining the contextual variables pertaining to United Arab Emirates, Alahbabi (2009) reported that teachers' attitudes toward school inclusion depend on the educational setting (regular or special) and the school level (pre-school, primary, secondary, and high school), as indicated by Leyser et al. (1994). Regarding education system, Kalyva

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et al. (2007) reported that, in Serbia, teachers belonging to a special education school had a more significant positive attitude toward school inclusion than regular education teachers. In addition, Leyser et al. (1994), Al-Zyoudi (2006), and Kalyva et al. (2007) found that teaching experience, training, and personal beliefs have considerable impact on teachers' attitudes. Furthermore, personal characteristics affect attitudes and perceptions toward school inclusion of PWID. For instance, Gaad and Khan (2007) reported that teachers' beliefs about their training in a school inclusion program modulates their attitude towards inclusion of PWID inside a mainstream education.

On the other hand, not all of the teachers supporting school inclusion are willing to accept students with ID in their own classroom (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). In other words, even when teachers believe that school inclusion is important, this does not necessarily imply they have positive attitudes embracing it.

This study assumes that in order to correctly promote more positive attitudes toward implementation of inclusion programs over teachers it is first required a wider comprehension of implicit and explicit cognitive processing mechanisms underlying attitude formation. This is especially true for Latin American contexts where research on this cognitive approach has been lacking. Thus, this study seeks to bring forward insightful information regarding this topic by considering a sample of Mexican teachers.

The *Current Study*

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) estimates that more than one billion human beings are affected by some kind of disability, of whom around 200 million present with a severe disability.
Thus, even when there is a high incidence of disabilities in the population, many countries have neither human nor infrastructure resources to deal with those health conditions or their social implications. As a result, many persons with disability suffer social margination. For instance, in accordance with the WHO (2011) report, people with disability have no access to quality jobs, and are poor and vulnerable in terms of health assistance. This adverse social condition is exacerbated for those having intellectual disabilities.

It is estimated that, in Mexico, five million people have some form of disability, and 19% of this group are aged between 0–29 years old (INEGI, 2010). Furthermore, Mexican nationwide survey reports from ENADID (2014), suggest that at least 46.5% of this population is enrolled in a school program. This percentage is significantly lower when compared to a Mexican typical population. Thus, as a result of limited access to education, PWID are often marginalized and have low quality of life.

Most limitations experienced by people with disabilities are directly or indirectly related to negative attitudes toward them. As previously noted, a negative view toward any type of disability, and intellectual deficits in particular, leads to discrimination (Corrigan, 2000; Corrigan & Watson, 2002). For instance, PWID have limited access to regular education programs (Dávila, Naya, & Lauzurika, 2010; WHO, 2011). In fact, from a historical point of view, social segregation of PWID has been reflected in the education services they are offered, whereby in most countries around the world at least two education modalities are stablished, segregating "regular" children from their "special" peers.

Special educational model was meant to serve PWID by providing them with adapted education programs (Van Steenlandt, 1991), however, the emphasis was traditionally placed on their disability, rather than abilities.
In certain situations, people with ID are offered education within regular school settings if their diagnosis indicates that their special educative needs could be met by this educational model (Duk, 2000). Then, only a small number of children with ID have access to regular education and those in developing countries may not receive any education. According to the World Bank report, in Latin American and Caribbean countries, only 20–30% of typical children and children with ID are enrolled in formal educational programs. Moreover, once children with ID are included into an educational program, they tend to be quickly excluded (Croso, 2010).

Academic research aimed at achieving successful school inclusion and enhancing academic goal achievement for PWID is growing (Francis, Gross, Blue-Banning, Haines, & Turnbull, 2016). However, only a few studies have been conducted in Latin American contexts. Hence, it is necessary to explore is the nature of parents' and teachers' attitudes toward academic potential of children with ID when they are educated within regular school settings. Conducting such research is relevant, since intellectual potential development is at its highest level when children are young, and is influenced by the attitudes of their educators and caregivers. As a result, early-age educators are the focus of the current study due to their relevance and impact on the likelihood of successful school inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities (Diaz & Franco, 2010).

In Mexico, empirical research regarding educators' and caregivers' attitudes toward school inclusion of PWID is limited (e.g., Morales, Lopez, Charles, Castro, & Sanchez, 2013). Published papers on this topic relate to reflections on school inclusion of people with ID (González, 2008), essays on the experiences in educative contexts and politics of inclusion processes (Parra, 2009; Rodríguez, 2008), or qualitative research on social representation of school inclusion and disabilities (e.g., Garnique, 2012). However, the direction and magnitude of teachers' attitudes and the cognitive factors underlying those attitudes remain unexplored. In an attempt to contribute to solve this concern, factor analysis field

research was conducted as a part of the present study, since this approach is useful to exploratory identification of factors underlying psychological processes. This field research technique, in combination with interviews, has been adopted by researchers in other countries and has provided valuable information about teachers' attitudes toward school inclusion of PWID.

These researchers have focused on contextual variables, such as teaching grade (Leyser et al., 1994), educative system type (Alahbabi, 2009), teaching experience, training, and teachers' beliefs (Al-Zyoudi, 2006; Kalyva et al., 2007; Leyser et al., 1994), and the nature of disabilities, while failing to examine perceptions of those working with and raising children with ID.

Currently, several scales exploring attitudes toward school inclusion of PWID exist. In a technical report, Cullen (2010) presented nine such scales, including The Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities (ORI) scale (Antonak & Larrivee, 1995); The Interaction with Disabled Persons Scale (IDPS) (Gething, 1991); The Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education (SACIE) (Loreman, Earle, Sharma, & Forlin, 2007); Inclusive School Program Survey (ISP Survey) (McLeskey, Waldron, Swanson, & Loveland, 2001); Concerns about Integrated Education Scale (CIES) (Sharma & Desai, 2002); and The Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion Scale (TATIS) (Cullen, 2010). These scales aim to measure the following dimensions: (a) teachers' perceptions of students with moderate disabilities, (b) beliefs about school inclusion, and (c) perceptions regarding roles and functions of professional teachers.

For the present study, the Opinions Relative to Integration of Students with Disabilities scale (ORI; Antonak & Larrivee, 1995) is of particular interest. This scale is a modified and updated version of a school integration scale developed by Larrivee and Cook (1979). It measures mainstream teachers' attitudes toward school inclusion of people with ID by considering four dimensions: (1) benefits of school inclusion, (2) the way a class is conducted, (3) the perceived ability to teach students with ID, and (4) benefits of special education versus regular education. Given the 0.83 Cronbach's alpha (Gamst, Liang, & Der-Karabetian, 2011) reported for this scale and its extensive scope, ORI was employed in the present study to examine teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of children with ID into mainstream education.

Methodology

Research Goal

The aim of the present study was to determine the explicit attitudes toward inclusion of children with ID into mainstream education and to explore the psychological factors affecting those attitudes by surveying a sample of *regular* and special education teachers working in Mexican school system.

Sample

The study sample comprised of 207 teachers (119 belonging to regular school program and 88 working in special education program). In terms of gender, 86% of the sample was female, whereas the remaining 14% of teachers were males. The average age of the participants was 33. Participation in the study was voluntary and no financial compensation was provided. The demographic characteristics of the study sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characterization of Teachers in the Sample

		Sample	
Variable	**Level**	**RET (*n* = 119)**	**SET (*n* = 88)**
Sex	Women	94 (79%)	85 (97%)
	Men	25 (21%)	3 (3%)
Age (years)	Average age	M = 39 (SD = 10)	M = 28 years
Civil status	Married	77	61
	Single	38	24
	Other (widow, etc.)	4	3
Religion	Catholic	92 (77%)	74 (84%)
	Christian	7 (6%)	4 (5%)
	Other	5 (4%)	2 (2%)
	None	5 (4%)	3 (3%)
	Not specified	10 (8%)	5 (6%)
Participation in school inclusion	Yes	100 (84%)	
	No	3 (3%)	
	Not specified	16 (13%)	88 (100%)

Table 1. Continued

		Sample	
Variable	**Level**	**RET (*n* = 119)**	**SET (*n* = 88)**

Type of attended disabilities	Intellectual Disability	61 (51%)	80 (91%)
	Motor Disability	4 (3%)	
	Sensorial Disability	10 (8%)	3 (3%)
	Multiple Disability	21 (18%)	5 (6%)
	Not specified	18 (15%)	
School level	Daycare		6 (7%)
	Preschoo	12 (10%)	25 (28%)
	Elementa	71 (60%)	42 (48%)
	Junior	10 (8%)	4 (4%)
	High school	9 (8%)	3 (3%)
	University	11 (9%)	
	Not specified	6 (5%)	8 (9%)
Years of Teaching		M = 8	M = 27

*RET = Regular Education Teachers; SET = Special Education Teachers

Instruments and Materials

A Spanish version of The Opinions Relative to Mainstreaming Scale (ORI; Antonak & Larrivee, 1995) was used as a data collection instrument. The 25 items comprising this scale require from participants responses on a six-point Likert scale, left anchored at -3 = "Totally disagree" and right anchored to 3 = "Completely agree." The highest scale ranking that can be obtained from ponderation consist of 150 points (3 points as a maximum per item plus a constant of 75 points), with a middle point of 75.

Procedure

In order to recruit participants for the study, online invitations were sent to teachers working in special and regular education institutions by using an online survey system, Facebook, e-mail, and WhatsApp. Each invitation to participate included a link to the electronic survey and, once it was activated, a welcome screen and instruction on how to proceed were provided. Next, the participants were presented with a demographic questionnaire (focusing on age, sex, religion, etc.), followed by the ORI survey. This survey took between 10 to 20 minutes to complete. Upon study completion, the system sent a "thank you" note to the participant.

Study Findings

The ORI results showed that, in general, regular and special education teachers that participated in this study had a positive view towards school inclusion of students with ID. The average score obtained by participants (M = 95, SD = 17) was around 20 points higher that the scale midpoint, varying from a very low favorable attitude (47 points below the middle point) up to a favorable attitude score (132 points higher than the middle point). In order to ascertain if these attitudes are influenced by the type of school in which teachers worked, a student's t test was performed. Figure 1 shows a significant difference in positive attitude toward inclusion between regular education teachers' scores (M = 93, SD = 18) and those obtained by the special education teachers (M = 100, SD = 15) ($t(205) = 3.15$, $p = .001$). These results were further explored by conducting factor analysis for each group to check if the differences in attitudes were due to specific psychological structure or factor structure.

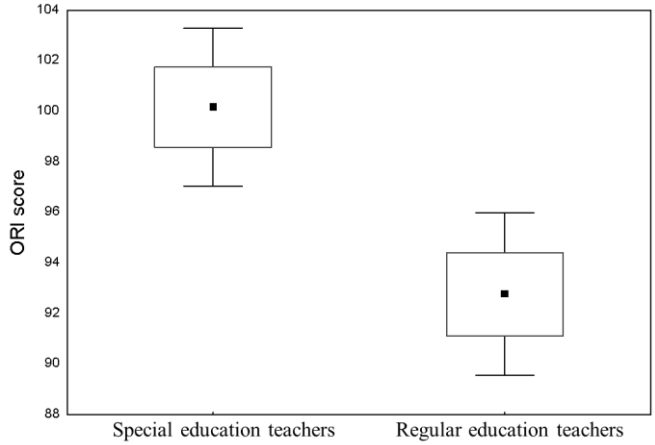

Figure 1. Obtained ORI scores and means for both groups (special education teachers vs. regular education teachers).

First, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on both groups data. This scrutiny suggested elimination of 7 items (4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 19, and 21) from the ORI scale for the regular education group (RET), as well as six items (1, 2, 6, 9, 15, and 18) from the special education group (SET), as these items loaded lower than .37 (Larrivee criterion) on one or

more factors. The factorability of the retained ORI items was examined. The results pertaining to each group are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Factorability and Reliability Test Results Conducted on the Retained ORI Items for Both samples

Sample	Items	Cronbach alpha	KMO	Bartlet's test of sphericity
RET	18	.71	.709	(χ^2 (153) = 567.408, p <. 001).
SET	19	.76	.681	(χ^2 (171) = 464.933, p <. 001).

A factor analysis was conducted on the retained scores (18 items for RET and 19 items for SET). Principal-axis factor extraction with normalized varimax rotation were used to determine the factor structure underlying attitudes toward school inclusion to both groups. Factor analysis results (Table 3 and 4), as well as visual inspection of eigenvalues (Figure 2) suggest a three- factor solution for the RET sample that has a moderately plausible psychological interpretation Furthermore, a three-factor solution for the SET sample provides a significant psychological interpretation. Here, an item was considered if its loading was greater than .37, otherwise was assigned to a factor where it had the highest factor loading.

Table 3. Factors and Factor Loadings for the Retained Items in the RET Sample

	Regular Education Teacher		
Items	I Benefits and Negative Effects and Performance	II Teaching Ability and Education System	III Performance and Education System
1	.67		
3	.50		
11	.51		
12	.61		
17	.49		
20	.65		
24	.40		
2		.69	
8		.54	
14		.34	
23		.32	
5			.46
13			.59
15			.53
16			.45
18			.22
22			.54
25			.41
Eigen-values	3.52	1.34	1.13
Variance	2.57	1.46	1.96
Prp totl.	.14	.08	.10

Table 4. Factors and Factor Loadings for the Retained Items in the SET Sample

	Special Education Teacher		
Items	I Benefits and Education System	II Teaching Ability and Performance	III Benefits and Negative Effects and Performance
5.	.69		
7.	.72		
13.	.69		
17.	.41		
23.	.36		
24.	.57		
25.	.57		
8.		.32	
10.		.55	
16.		.50	
19.		.54	
22.		.48	
3.			.25
4.			.27
11.			.71
12.			.50
14.			.66
20.			.47
21.			.38
Eigen-values	3.74	1.46	1.05
Variance	2.75	1.46	2.03
Prp totl.	.14	.07	.10

Thus, a tripartite model was obtained from the RET scores. It accounts for 33% of obtained variance and comprises of *Perceived Benefits and Negative Effects inside the Inclusive Classroom / Performance inside the Inclusive Classroom as* the first factor, because it mostly included items related to the beneficial effects that the inclusion process has in the regular classroom. This factor took 20% of the variance and included five out of the eight items form the factor Benefits of Integration and two out of the ten items from the factor Performance of the Inclusive Classroom included inside the ORI scale (Antonak & Larrivee, 1995).

The second factor called *Teaching Ability/Education System*, explained 7% of the variance and consisted of items regarding ability as well as requirements for including students with disabilities into regular classrooms. This second factor had one of the three items of the factor entitled Perceived Ability to Teach Students with Disabilities, two of four items from the Special Education vs General Integrated Education factor, and only one of eight items from the factor Benefits inside the ORI scale (Antonak & Larrivee, 1995).

The third factor explained 6% of the variance and was named *Performance inside the Inclusive Classroom/Education System*, because it mostly contained items related to behavior and performance of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. This factor included five of ten items from the Performance in the Inclusive Classroom factor, and two of four items from the Special Education vs. General Integrated Education factor inside the ORI scale (Antonak & Larrivee, 1995).

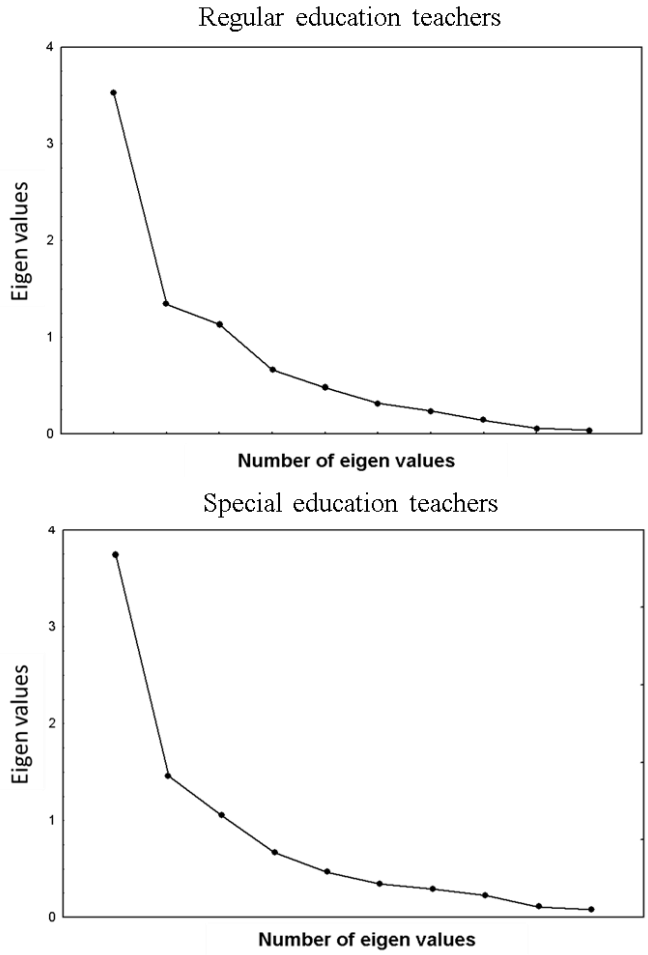

Figure 2. Factor eigenvalues for both groups of teachers.

With regard to the SET data, the analysis also showed that the tripartite model accounted for 33% of the variance. The first factor explained 20% of variance and included items on advantages and benefits of inclusion of students with ID into the regular classroom. Therefore, it was called *Perceived Benefits inside the Inclusive Classroom/Education System*. It included three of the eight items from the factor Benefits of Integration, as well as one from the ten items inside the Performance in the Inclusive Classroom factor, and three out of four items inside the Special Education vs General Integrated Education factor from the ORI scale (Antonak & Larrivee, 1995).

The second factor explained 8% of the variance and was denoted *Teaching Ability/Performance inside the Inclusive Classroom*, as it included items related to teaching abilities and requirements for school inclusion. Here, two of the ten items from the Performance in the Inclusive Classroom factor were included, as well as two out of three items from the Perceived Ability to Teach Students with Disabilities factor, and one of the four items of the Special Education vs General Integrated Education factor from the ORI scale (Larrivee, 1995).

The third factor, called *Perceived Benefits and Negative Effects inside the Inclusive Classroom/Performance inside the Inclusive Classroom*, explained 5% of the variance, and contained items related to challenges that inclusive students face in a regular classroom and the benefits obtained in these situations. It included five of the eight items from the Benefits of Integration factor, as well as two of the ten items from the Performance in the Inclusive Classroom factor from the ORI scale (Antonak & Larrivee, 1995).

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to explore special and regular education teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with ID into regular educational settings. Results obtained by using the ORI scale suggesting a positive change in teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of PWID in mainstream education programs. This finding is congruent with the findings yielded by studies conducted in other countries.

However, in the current study, the extent of positive attitudes seemed to vary significantly depending on the type of education system in which the teachers worked. As was expected, the special education teachers exhibited significantly greater positive attitude compared to teachers working in regular education (see Figure 1). Related to this, the results of some studies suggest that, since special education teachers have experience working with students with ID, this experience positively modifies their perceptions and attitudes toward their school inclusion (e.g., Kalyva et al., 2007).

In this study, 84% of the regular education teachers had some experience working with students with ID in regular classrooms, and 51% of the entire sample have had some contact with students with an intellectual disability. This could have influenced their overall positive attitudes (as indicated by scores above the middle point for the scale). Furthermore, even when special education teachers did not report any direct school inclusion experience with students having ID, it was noticed that if a teacher belonged to an educative institutions connected to other regular educative institutions having school inclusion, then a teacher was more likely to promote school inclusion. However, more systematic research is required to determine the reasons behind the differences in attitudes exhibited by teachers in this study. For example, it would be useful to consider variables such as type of disability the student is diagnosed with, years of teachers' experience in school inclusion programs, etc.

Another point to consider is that, even when both groups presented a similar three-factor structure, the content was in some sense different (see Table 3 and 4). Only one dimension— *Perceived Benefits and Negative Effects inside the Inclusive Classroom / Performance inside the Inclusive Classroom* —was common to both groups. However, even in this factor not all items were similar. For example, the RET group considers the central role teachers play for PWID to achieve school inclusion in mainstream educational setting. In addition to considering the relevance of a teacher role in an inclusive room, the SET group recognized the school system role in which students having ID are submerged. This finding, might imply a difference on perceiving the locus of control in the school inclusion process. These differences between the two groups can be explored further.

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