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General Education Teachers' Attitudes and Social Acceptance of Students with Special Needs in Inclusive Schools

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Abstract

This study examines the attitudes and social acceptance (SA) of teachers from various disciplines working in general education schools that implement inclusive education. We employed a descriptive survey design within a quantitative framework. The sample comprised 201 teachers from different subject areas in primary and secondary schools under the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) where inclusive practices are implemented. We collected demographic data using a participant information form and obtained research data through two instruments: The Teachers' Attitudes Toward Students with Special Needs Scale and the Teacher Social Acceptance Scale for Individuals with Special Needs. We analyzed the data using SPSS software and interpreted the findings in light of existing literature. The results show that primary school teachers exhibit higher levels of SA and more positive attitudes toward students with special needs compared to secondary school teachers. Furthermore, teachers' attitudes and levels of SA vary by subject area. Teachers with family members who have special needs reported higher scores in the emotional and awareness sub-dimensions of attitudes. These findings offer valuable implications for policymakers, academicians, researchers, and the MoNE in designing and enhancing teacher education and professional development programs within general education settings.

Keywords: Inclusive education, students with special needs, general education teachers, social acceptance, attitudes.

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Introduction

Inclusive education is defined as the practice in which all children, including those with special needs, receive education in the same school or classroom regardless of their physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, or linguistic characteristics, with instruction adapted to their needs and necessary supports provided (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] Salamanca Statement, 1994). In Türkiye, 384.250 students with special needs are educated within this framework (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2023b). Teachers are the most crucial component for the success of these practices (Bayar & Üstün, 2017; Demirbilek & Levent, 2020). Therefore, students' achievement and acceptance largely depend on general education teachers' attitudes and levels of social acceptance (SA) (Lautenbach & Heyder, 2019).

Teachers' attitudes toward students with special needs are considered important for the success of inclusive education settings and for student outcomes. In this context, the meta-analysis conducted by Van Steen and Wilson (2020) revealed that teachers' willingness to make necessary adaptations for students with special needs is directly related to their attitudes. In their study, Sharma and Sokal (2016) concluded that the more positive teachers' attitudes are, the more prevalent classroom-based inclusive settings become. Teacher attitudes and levels of SA are among the strongest and most consistent predictors for peer acceptance, quality of inclusive education, classroom climate, and student outcomes (de Boer et al., 2011; Garrote et al., 2020; Lautenbach & Heyder, 2019). It has been noted that these variables are generally more influential than factors such as available resources, class size, or type of disability (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Accordingly, the inclusion of a student with special needs in a general education classroom is regarded as closely linked to teacher attitudes (Fazlıoğlu & Doğan, 2013). A teachers' positive attitude toward their student is important not only for the acceptance of the student with special needs (Aktan, 2023; Aydoğdu, et al., 2020), but also for students with typical development (Batu & Kırcaali-İftar, 2011). Conversely, negative teacher attitudes toward students with special needs negatively affect these students' academic achievement and social participation (Subban & Sharma, 2005).

SA is defined as the perception of individuals with special needs by their typically developing peers as being like any other individual, and the presence of positive attitudes toward them (Özyürek, 2010). One of the major challenges of inclusive education settings is the acceptance of students with special needs by their typically developing peers (Siperstein et al., 2011). In this regard, the teacher can be considered a role model who establishes social norms in the classroom. Blazar and Kraft (2017) note that teachers' attitudes and behaviors serve as examples for others. Indeed, teacher attitudes influence the attitudes of peers toward students with special needs (Bayar & Üstün, 2017). Thus, a teachers' accepting attitude both promotes peer acceptance and contributes to the development of the social and communication skills of students in inclusive settings who are accepted by their peers (Çolak et al., 2013). Therefore, SA is described as a prerequisite for the students' ability to sustain their social existence (Ürün & Yeşil, 2023).

Despite the critical importance of SA and teacher attitudes, inconsistencies are observed in existing research findings. Meta-analyses by Van Steen and Wilson (2020) and Guillemot et al. (2022) reported that teacher attitudes were positive. However, Long et al. (2025), in a meta-analysis conducted with Chinese teachers, found that teachers generally had moderately positive attitudes ($g = 0.42$), and that neither type of disability nor school level significantly predicted teacher attitudes, self-efficacy, or the relationship between these two variables. A review study also showed variation in the attitudes of primary school (PS) teachers. The review noted that teacher attitudes were neutral or negative, and that no study showed clearly positive attitudes; moreover, the number of quantitative studies on this topic remains limited (de Boer et al., 2011). Another systematic review similarly found that primary school teachers generally exhibited neutral or ambivalent attitudes toward inclusive education (Lindner et al., 2023). Grieve (2009) also reported variability in teacher attitudes. Empirical findings from Türkiye do not present a clear picture regarding which variables are significant. In our review, we note that existing studies show teacher attitudes generally remain at a moderate level (Akdemir et al., 2022). There is relatively more agreement regarding the branch variable; Yanardağ et al. (2023) and Orakcı et al. (2016) confirmed that branch significantly differentiates attitudes, whereas Öztürk et al. (2024) suggested that

classroom teachers may hold more negative attitudes. Eşkil et al. (2022), however, found no significant difference in attitude scores between physical education teachers and others.

The effect of in-service training remains controversial. Karasu (2019) and Eşkil et al. (2022) reported that in-service training positively influences teacher attitudes, whereas Kandemir et al. (2021) and Orakcı et al. (2016) found no significant relationship. The gender variable (Karasu, 2019; Orakcı et al., 2016) did not significantly affect attitudes; however, Taşpınar et al. (2024) reported that female teachers demonstrated more positive attitudes.

Research indicates a strong relationship between teacher competence and attitude. Filiz (2021) found that as teacher competence increases, attitude levels also rise. Eşkil et al. (2022) reported that teachers with students in inclusive settings had higher attitude scores. The SA literature also shows similar inconsistencies. Aktan (2023) argued that SA differs significantly across demographic factors, while Uçar (2023) and Özdemir and Abbak (2025) suggested that the primary determinants are professional factors. Avcıoğlu (2017) emphasized the need for further research in this field.

We conclude from these findings that teacher attitudes are strongly influenced by cultural (Guillemot et al., 2022; Heyder et al., 2020; Van Steen & Wilson, 2020), demographic and country-specific factors (Van Steen & Wilson, 2020), as well as the education system and other variables (Heyder et al., 2020), indicating the necessity of conducting context-specific studies.

Literature Review

A review of both national and international literature reveals that teachers' attitudes and their role in fostering SA are central to the success of inclusive education practices (Bayar & Üstün, 2017; Lautenbach & Heyder, 2019; Van Steen & Wilson, 2020). Furthermore, teachers' attitudes directly influence the academic and social skills of students with special needs, as well as their acceptance by peers (Blazar & Kraft, 2017; Subban & Sharma, 2005). While international meta-analyses and systematic reviews report generally positive teacher attitudes, some studies indicate neutral or even negative stances. These studies collectively highlight that attitudes are significantly shaped by educational systems, professional support structures, and cultural contexts (Guillemot et al., 2022; Heyder et al., 2020; Van Steen & Wilson, 2020).

Research conducted in Türkiye similarly suggests that teacher attitudes tend to be moderately positive (Akdemir et al., 2022), yet findings regarding demographic variables (such as seniority and gender) and professional factors (including in-service training and subject specialization) remain inconsistent (Eşkil et al., 2022; Kandemir et al., 2021; Karasu, 2019; Orakcı et al., 2016; Yanardağ et al., 2023). Similar inconsistencies are observed in the literature on SA, where it remains unclear whether the determining factors are primarily professional (Özdemir & Abbak, 2025; Uçar, 2023) or demographic (Aktan, 2023).

In conclusion, for inclusive education practices to succeed, we argue that it is essential to adopt an approach that not only considers universal best practices but also carefully integrates Türkiye specific educational, contextual, structural, and cultural elements. Consequently, we identify a clear need for further research in this field to better understand the country-specific variables influencing teacher attitudes and SA. We believe that identifying these contextual factors is essential for developing targeted policies and effective, culturally responsive teacher training programs that can enhance the success of inclusive education practices in Türkiye. This study aims to address that gap by investigating the determinants of teachers' attitudes and SA within the national context, thereby contributing to the development of more effective and sustainable inclusive education strategies.

Research Aim and Questions

Therefore, in this study, we aim to address these uncertainties within the Türkiye context. We examine general education teachers' attitudes and SA levels toward students with special needs using valid and reliable scales (Aktan, 2021; Atik & Düzdemir, 2023) and evaluate both constructs simultaneously within the same sample. We designed this systematic approach to clarify the relationship between these two critical variables and various demographic and professional factors, address inconsistencies in the literature, and provide an evidence-based foundation for teacher training.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes and SA of teachers' in schools that apply inclusive practices toward students with special needs. To fulfill this objective, we formulated and examined the following research questions:

i. What are the levels of SA and attitudes with general education teachers' about students with special needs?
ii. Do the SA levels and attitudes toward students with special needs among general education teachers working in schools with inclusive education vary based on their level of demographic characteristics?

Method

Research Model

In this study employs a descriptive survey model to investigate the attitudes and SA of general education teachers toward students with special needs in schools implementing inclusive practices. We selected this model because it allows for the quantitative description of large participant groups (Groves et al., 2004). By adopting this approach, we aimed to collect quantitative data from a large and diverse sample of general education teachers, thereby enabling an examination of their attitudes and SA within inclusive educational settings.

Participants

The participants are general education teachers working in inclusive classrooms within general education schools located in the Tepebaşı and Odunpazarı districts of Eskişehir province. The study population includes all such teachers in these districts. We used an appropriate sampling technique that involves including easily accessible and voluntary participants in the study (Yıldız, 2017). Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participating teachers.

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of Participating Teachers

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Female	149	74.12
Male	52	25.87
Total	201	100
Presence of Students with Special Needs in the Classroom		
Yes	152	77.94
No	43	22.05
Total	195	100
Teachers' Branch		
Classroom Teacher	111	55.22
Science Teacher	16	7.96
English Teacher	15	7.46
Social Studies Teacher	6	2.98
Mathematics Teacher	14	6.96
Turkish Teacher	15	7.46
Visual Arts Teacher	2	0.99
Technology Design Teacher	3	1.49
Religious Culture and Ethics Teacher	5	2.48
Physical Education Teacher	7	3.48
Information Technologies Teacher	2	0.99
Total	201	100

Table 1 continuing

Variable	n	%
Educational Level		
PS	117	58.20
Secondary School	84	41.79
Total	201	100
Professional Seniority		
1-5 years	5	2.52
6-10 years	12	6.06
11-15 years	27	13.63
16-20 years	39	19.69
21 years and above	115	58.08
Total	198	100
Presence of Individuals with Special Needs in the Family		
Yes	20	10.15
No	177	89.84
Total	197	100
Educational Status		
Associate Degree	4	2.02
Bachelors' Degree	168	84.84
Masters' Degree	22	11.11
Doctoral Degree	4	2.02
Total	198	100

An analysis of participant demographics revealed that the majority (74.12%) were female and 25.87% were male. Most teachers (77.94%) had students with special needs in their classrooms, while 22.05% did not. Regarding subject area (branch), Classroom teachers constituted the largest group (55.22%), followed by Science teachers (7.96%) and English teachers (7.46%), with other branches represented at lower percentages. In terms of educational level, 58.20% taught in PSs and 41.79% in secondary schools. Professional seniority data indicated that 58.08% of participants had 21 or more years of experience, and 19.69% had 16-20 years. Additionally, 10.15% of teachers reported having a family member with special needs. Concerning educational status, most participants held a bachelors' degree (84.84%), while 11.11% had a masters' degree and 2.02% a doctoral degree.

We included data from a total of 201 teachers in the final analysis. We excluded several incomplete responses: Six teachers did not indicate whether they had students with special needs, three did not report professional seniority, four did not specify having a family member with special needs, and three did not provide their educational background.

Data Collection Tools

Participant Information Form: We collected demographic information using a form that asked about gender, education level, graduated program, branch, current educational level taught, years of professional experience, whether they have a family member with special needs, and whether they have students with special needs in their classroom.

Teacher Social Acceptance Scale for Individuals with Special Needs: Developed by Aktan (2021), this scale was created with data from 930 teachers. It comprises two sub-dimensions: Teacher Social Acceptance Behaviours (SAB) and Social Acceptance Competency Development (SACD), totaling 31 items. Scores can range from 5 to 95 for the SAB dimension (neutral point: 57) and from 5 to 60 for the SACD dimension (neutral point: 36). Scores below the neutral point are interpreted as negative, at the point as neutral, and above as positive. Item analysis confirmed all items were discriminative. The scale demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.94, composite reliability of 0.91, and test-

retest reliability of 0.91. We therefore deemed it a valid and reliable tool for assessing teachers' SA levels.

Teachers' Attitudes towards Students with Special Needs Scale: Developed by Atik and Düzdemir (2023), this scale evaluates teachers' attitudes through three sub-dimensions: Behaviour and Adaptation, Responsibility and Adaptations, and Emotion and Awareness. Total scale scores range from 5 to 60 (neutral point: 36), while sub-dimension scores range from 5 to 20 (neutral point: 12). The researchers established both structural and content validity. The scale contains 12 items and reported Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of .91 for Behaviour and Adaptation, .72 for Emotion and Awareness, and .61 for Responsibility and Adaptations. Following Kline's (2010) guideline that coefficients around 0.70 are acceptable, we considered this a valid and reliable measurement tool.

Ethical Approval

We followed ethical principles throughout the study. Prior to data collection, we obtained ethical approval from the Bartın University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Protocol No: 2023-SBB-0797, Date: 11.12.2023).

Data Collection Process and Analysis

We first obtained official permission from the Eskişehir Provincial Directorate of National Education. We then collected data from teachers in primary and secondary schools within the Tepebaşı and Odunpazarı districts of Eskişehir province. We visited permitted schools, informed administrations about the research and ethics approval, and briefed teachers on the studys' objectives. Voluntary participants signed an informed consent form before completing the demographic form and scales. We requested that completed forms be returned in sealed envelopes to ensure confidentiality. We distributed 250 scale sets and received 219 returns; after excluding 18 due to incorrect or incomplete responses, we retained 201 for analysis.

We analysed the quantitative data using SPSS software, applying both descriptive and inferential statistical methods at a .05 significance level. We assessed normality via the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and skewness-kurtosis values. Although skewness and kurtosis fell outside the ideal range of -1.5 to +1.5, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated significance levels above 0.05, leading us to decide on using nonparametric tests. Descriptive analyses included percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations.

Findings

This section presents the results of statistical tests examining how teachers' SA levels vary based on several factors: The educational level they teach (grade level), professional tenure, highest level of education, presence of a family member with special needs, gender, presence of students with special needs in their classroom, and teaching branch. The analysis also includes the subscale scores of the Social Acceptance Scale (SAS) and the Attitudes Scale. For the SAS, we applied non-parametric tests namely the Kruskal-Wallis H test and the Mann-Whitney U test as the data were not normally distributed. For the Attitude Scale, where the data met the assumption of normality, we conducted parametric tests, including independent samples t-tests, ANOVA, and Post Hoc Tests (Tukey HSD). Table 2 presents the comparison of SA scale scores according to these demographic characteristics.

Table 2.

Comparison of SAS Scores According to Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	Number	Percentage	SAS (Mean)	Teacher Acceptance Behaviours (Mean)	Social Acceptance Competency Development (Mean)
Gender					
Female	149	74.12%	143.12	89.57	53.55
Male	52	25.87%	138.27	87.39	50.89

Table 2 continuing

Demographic Characteristics	Number	Percentage	SAS (Mean)	Teacher Acceptance Behaviours (Mean)	Social Acceptance Competency Development (Mean)
Professional Seniority					
1-5 years	5	2.52%	150.87	93.40	57.47
6-10 years	12	6.06%	139.86	88.53	51.33
11-15 years	27	13.63%	141.63	88.97	52.66
16-20 years	39	19.69%	137.90	86.90	51.00
21 years and above	115	58.08%	143.06	89.58	53.48
Inclusive Class					
Yes	152	77.94%	141.35	88.87	52.48
No	43	22.05%	144.18	89.83	54.35
Education Level					
Associate Degree	4	2.02%	145.50	91.50	54.00
Bachelors' Degree	168	84.84%	141.70	88.88	52.82
Masters' Degree	22	11.11%	143.56	89.98	53.58
Doctoral Degree	4	2.02%	136.00	86.75	49.25
Teachers' Branch					
Classroom Teacher	111	55.22%	145.87	91.02	54.85
Science Teacher	16	7.96%	134.56	86.56	49.65
English Teacher	15	7.46%	132.64	86.47	47.97
Social Studies Teacher	6	2.98%	143.53	89.60	53.81
Mathematics Teacher	14	6.96%	131.32	83.47	47.86
Turkish Teacher	15	7.46%	137.92	86.47	51.46
Visual Arts Teacher	2	0.99%	149.09	92.66	56.43
Technology and Design Teacher	3	1.49%	146.67	92.00	54.67
Religious Culture and Ethics Teacher	5	2.48%	139.87	89.60	50.27
Physical Education Teacher	7	3.48%	150.00	94.00	56.00
Information Technologies Teacher	2	0.99%	130.50	82.50	48.00
School Level					
PS	117	58.20%	145.42	90.89	54.53
Secondary School	84	41.79%	136.91	86.37	50.54
Individuals with Special Needs in Family					
Yes	20	10.15%	142.55	89.75	52.80
No	177	89.84%	141.89	88.97	52.92

SAS, Social Acceptance Behaviours and Social Acceptance Competency Development Subscale Findings

The total SAS scores (N = 201) ranged from 79 to 155, with a mean of 141.86, indicating a relatively high overall level of SA among participants.

Grade Level: To investigate differences in SA levels by grade level, we applied Kruskal-Wallis H tests. The results revealed significant differences (SD) between PS teachers (M = 118.31) and secondary school teachers (M = 76.89) on the SAS (H (1) = 24.901, $p < .001$), Social Acceptance Behaviours (H(1) = 4.931, $p < .001$), and Social Acceptance Competency Development (H (1) = 4.823, $p < .001$) subscales. PS teachers demonstrated higher SA levels than secondary school teachers. Table 3 presents the detailed Kruskal-Wallis H test results for these scores by school level.

Table 3.

Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for SAS, Social Acceptance Behaviours, and Social Acceptance Competency Development Scores by School Level

Dimension	Group	n	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	p
SAS	PS	117	118.31	24.90	1	.001*
	Secondary School	84	76.89			
Social Acceptance Behaviours	PS	117	117.97	24.22	1	.001*
	Secondary School	84	77.36			
Social Acceptance Competency Development	PS	117	117.70	23.26	1	.001*
	Secondary School	84	77.74			

Our analysis showed that professional seniority ($p > .05$) and educational background ($p > .05$) did not significantly affect teachers' SA levels. Similarly, we found no significant associations with having a family member with special needs ($p > .05$), gender ($p > .05$), or the presence of students with special needs in the classroom ($p > .05$).

In contrast, we observed significant effects for teachers' subject areas. Post-hoc comparisons indicated that Science ($p = .024$), English ($p = .002$), Mathematics ($p = .031$), and Turkish teachers ($p = .023$) scored higher than Physical Education teachers on different subscales. Furthermore, Classroom teachers scored higher than English teachers on the SA scale ($p = .014$) and higher than Technology and Design teachers in Competency Development ($p < .001$). An additional difference was noted, with English teachers scoring higher than Physical Education teachers in Competency Development ($p = .043$). These results are detailed in Table 4 (ANOVA results of the SAS by teachers' branch).

Table 4.

SAS Teachers' Branch ANOVA Findings

Dimension	df	F	Sig
SAS	10	5.306	.001*
SAB	185	5.22	.001*
SACD	10	4.341	.001*

Attitude Scale: Behaviour and Adjustment, Responsibility and Adaptations, Emotion and Awareness Subscale Findings

Table 5.

Comparison of Attitude Scale Scores Based on Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Variable	Category	n	%	Attitude Scale (Mean)	Behaviour Adaptation (Mean)	Responsibility and Adaptations (Mean)	Emotion and Awareness (Mean)
Gender	Female	149	74.12	42.42	12.26	17.03	13.12
	Male	52	25.87	42.75	12.23	17.54	12.98
Professional Seniority	1-5 years	5	2.52	43.80	14.20	16.40	13.20
	6-10 years	12	6.06	41.00	11.00	17.50	12.50
	11-15 years	27	13.63	42.66	12.70	16.8	13.06
	16-20 years	39	19.69	41.34	11.98	17.08	12.28
	21 years and above	115	58.08	43.01	12.28	17.24	13.47

Table 5 continuing

Demographic Variable	Category	n	%	Attitude Scale (Mean)	Behaviour Adaptation (Mean)	Responsibility and Adaptations (Mean)	Emotion and Awareness (Mean)
Individuals with Special Needs in Classroom	Yes	152	77.94	42.27	12.03	17.06	13.17
	No	43	22.05	43.03	12.84	17.39	12.79
Educational Status	Associate Degree	4	2.02	42.75	12.50	17.00	13.25
	Bachelors' Degree	168	84.84	42.47	12.32	17.13	13.01
	Masters' Degree	22	11.11	42.65	11.42	17.59	13.64
	Doctoral Degree	4	2.02	43.25	13.25	16.25	13.75
Teachers' Branch	Classroom Teacher	111	55.22	43.30	12.62	17.38	13.29
	Science Teacher	16	7.96	42.49	11.81	17.31	13.36
	English Teacher	15	7.46	43.40	13.20	17.53	12.66
	Social Studies Teacher	6	2.98	40.33	11.66	15.83	12.83
	Mathematics Teacher	14	6.96	42.07	11.57	17.42	13.07
	Turkish Teacher	15	7.46	40.52	11.13	16.46	12.92
	Visual Arts Teacher	2	0.99	42.50	10.00	17.00	15.50
	Technology and Design Teacher	3	1.49	34.333	10.33	12.33	11.66
	Religious Culture and Ethics Teacher	5	2.48	39.50	10.05	16.83	12.61
	Physical Education Teacher	7	3.48	41.28	12.14	17.42	11.71
	Information Technologies Teacher	2	0.99	40.50	13.50	14.00	13.00
Educational Level	PS	117	58.20	43.32	12.67	17.36	13.28
	Secondary School	84	41.79	41.38	11.67	16.89	12.81
Presence of Individuals with Special Needs in Family	Yes	20	10.15	45.12	12.21	18.10	14.80
	No	177	89.84	42.19	12.24	17.04	12.91

Table 5 presents the comparison of attitude scale scores according to demographic characteristics. The total attitude scores of the participants' (N = 201) ranged from 16 to 60, with a mean score of 42.51.

Table 6.

Grade Level of Education t Test

Dimension	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Attitude	2.15	197.56	.033*
Behaviour and Adjustment	1.92	189.34	.057
Responsibility and Adaptations	1.17	181.79	.244
Emotion and Awareness	1.38	190.79	.170

Grade Level: Our t-test analysis revealed a significant difference (SD) between primary and secondary school teachers' overall attitude scores, t (199)= 2.068, p = .040, with PS teachers obtaining higher scores. However, we found no significant differences in the subscales of Behaviour and Adjustment, t (199) = 1.884, p = .061; Responsibility and Adaptations, t (199) = 1.164, p = .246; or Emotion and

Awareness, t (199) = 1.349, p = .179. Table 6 provides the detailed results of the attitude scale and the t-test based on the educational level taught.

Professional Seniority: Our analysis indicated no significant differences in overall attitudes or in any of the subscales (all p > .05).

Educational Background: We found that attitudes did not differ by educational level (all p > .05).

Presence of a Family Member with Special Needs: A significant difference emerged in the Emotion and Awareness subscale, where teachers with a family member with special needs scored higher, t (195) = 3.407, p = .001. No other scores reached statistical significance (all p > .05). These results are detailed in Table 7, which presents the t-test outcomes for the presence of a family member with special needs.

Table 7.

t Test for Individuals with Special Needs in the Family

Dimension	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Attitude Scale	2.05	24.61	.052
Behaviour and Adjustment	-.0.03	22.14	.980
Responsibility and Adaptations	2.25	30.27	.032*
Emotion and Awareness	4.49	28.47	.001*

Gender: We found no significant differences in overall attitudes or in any subscales based on gender (all p > .05).

Presence of Students with Special Needs in the Classroom: Our analysis indicated that teachers' attitudes did not differ based on the presence of inclusive students, either overall or in the subscales (all p > .05).

Attitude Scale by Branch: Regarding overall attitude scores, English teachers scored higher than Technology and Design teachers (p = .034), and Classroom teachers scored higher than Technology and Design teachers (p = .023). In the Responsibility and Adjustments dimension, we found multiple significant differences, all favouring other subject areas over Technology and Design teachers: Science (p = .005), English (p = .004), Mathematics (p = .005), Turkish (p = .020), Classroom (p = .002), Religious Culture & Ethics (p = .029), and Physical Education (p = .009). We detected no significant differences in the Behaviour and Adaptation or Emotion and Awareness dimensions (all p > .05). These results are detailed in Table 8, which presents the ANOVA test outcomes for the Attitude Scale by teachers' branch.

Table 8.

ANOVA Test for the Teachers' Branch

Dimension	df	F	Sig
Attitude	10	.973	.468
Behaviour and Adjustment	10	.745	.681
Responsibility and Adaptations	10	1.506	.140
Emotion and Awareness	10	.709	.715

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes and SA of general education teachers toward students with special needs in schools implementing inclusive practices. Considering that the vast majority of these students are educated in general education settings, we regard teachers' attitudes and SA as critically important.

SA is a crucial factor shaping the life experiences of individuals with special needs. Teachers, as key agents in education, play a decisive role; their level of SA can directly affect the quality of these students' educational experiences (Uçar, 2023). In this study, we measured teachers' SA levels using the Special Needs Social Acceptance Scale, which includes two sub-dimensions: Social Acceptance Behaviours and Social Acceptance Competency Development. Our analysis, based on the educational level taught, showed a statistically significant difference (SD) between PS Classroom teachers and secondary school

branch teachers, with PS teachers exhibiting higher SA levels. This finding aligns with research by Aktan (2023) and Uçar (2023), who likewise reported more favorable SA among preschool and PS teachers than among secondary school teachers. Similarly, studies focusing specifically on Classroom teachers have found very high levels of SA toward individuals with special needs (Ürün & Yeşil, 2023). This result is further corroborated by the meta-analysis conducted by Guillemot et al. (2022), which demonstrates that special education teachers hold more positive attitudes than their general education counterparts. We can attribute this difference to their specialized knowledge and experience. However, we argue that this variation likely stems not only from training and exposure but also from differences in professional identity, role perception, and school culture. While special education teachers often place the support of students with diverse needs at the center of their professional identity, general education teachers may perceive working with these students as an added responsibility. This highlights the critical importance of strengthening all teachers' knowledge and practical experience in inclusive education.

The consistency of this finding with other studies can be explained through the nature of teacher-student interaction. PS Classroom teachers typically spend the most time with their students, which enables them to cultivate a supportive classroom environment throughout this relational process. This sustained interaction likely enhances both SA and positive emotional attitudes. Thus, our findings support the view that intensive and continuous contact plays a significant role in fostering acceptance (Ürün & Yeşil, 2023), a notion further reinforced by Guillemot et al. s' (2022) finding that increased direct contact is associated with more positive teachers' attitudes. The less positive attitudes observed among subject teachers in secondary schools can be interpreted within the broader framework emphasizing the role of contextual and cultural factors in shaping teachers' attitudes (Van Steen & Wilson, 2020). Contrary to our findings regarding school level, Guillemot et al. (2022) report no significant effect of the school level taught (primary vs. secondary) on teachers' attitudes. We explain this discrepancy by contextual and cultural factors specific to each country. In Türkiye, we believe variables such as curriculum pressure, large class sizes, and high-stakes standardized testing may contribute to the differing outcomes we observed across educational levels. Van Steen and Wilson (2020) emphasize the influence of cultural factors, suggesting that teacher training interventions must consider context-specific elements. We agree that understanding culturally embedded factors is crucial (Savolainen et al., 2012), as they shape individual beliefs and influence how concepts like success are understood. In the Türkiye context, for instance, we posit that societal perceptions of disability and the high value placed on academic achievement may fuel teacher concerns about inclusive education.

The observed differences across subject areas indicate that teachers' disciplinary backgrounds are meaningfully associated with their levels of SA. Specifically, Physical Education teachers demonstrated significantly higher scores on the Social Acceptance Scale (SAS) and Social Acceptance Behaviours sub-dimension than Science teachers, while Technology and Design teachers showed lower levels of Social Acceptance Competency Development compared to Classroom teachers. These findings suggest that the nature of the subject taught contributes to variations in teachers' SA. Disciplines like physical education, which typically require frequent instructional adaptations and promote intensive social interaction, may offer more opportunities for inclusive practices and direct engagement, thereby fostering more positive attitudes. This interpretation is consistent with research highlighting the influence of context-specific teaching experiences on attitudes (Heyder et al., 2020). Heyder et al. (2020) further highlight the importance of examining attitude subdimensions, as they may conflict. We agree that interventions should therefore consider all dimensions of attitudes. Furthermore, we observe that this finding underscores a tension within inclusive systems, as performance-driven educational climates can weaken inclusive foundations and contribute to the social marginalization of students who struggle academically (Paulsrud, 2022). Thus, we argue that while some subjects may inherently promote greater SA, an intense emphasis on academic achievement in others can concurrently hinder full social inclusive.

The higher overall SA scores among Physical Education teachers and the relatively high Social Acceptance Competency Development scores among Visual Arts teachers underscore the potential role of experiential, practice-oriented subjects in supporting inclusive attitudes. These results point to the importance of teacher education. Specifically, the extent to which special education content is integrated into pre-service programs may influence teachers' readiness to support SA in inclusive classrooms. From

a practical perspective, the findings highlight the need for differentiated in-service training tailored to specific subject areas. Targeted interventions may be particularly beneficial for teachers in disciplines where lower SA levels were observed. In line with Uçar (2023), ongoing professional development emphasizing inclusive practices is essential. In Türkiye, teachers express a clear need for in-service training (Değirmenci-Kurt & Tomul, 2019; MoNE, 2023a), and we consider strengthening their emotional and pedagogical readiness critical. Therefore, we propose that subject-specific in-service programs could be particularly effective.

In this study, we also examined SA levels based on professional experience, educational status, having family member with special needs, gender, and having students with special needs in the classroom. Our analysis revealed no statistically significant differences for these demographic variables on the SAS and its sub-dimensions. This result is consistent with findings by Aktan (2023), who reported no significant differences based on educational status, and Uçar (2023), who similarly found none in relation to professional experience, educational status, family status, gender, or the presence of students with special needs. Our findings align with Guillemot et al. (2022), who report that gender and professional seniority have no significant effect on attitudes, a conclusion also supported by Van Steen and Wilson (2020) and Long et al. (2025). These converging results suggest that factors such as leadership, school climate, self-efficacy, and perceived support may play a more decisive role than demographics. Indeed, we know that high teacher self-efficacy in inclusive settings leads to greater effort and more effective use of appropriate techniques (Aslan et al., 2025). Corroborating this, Eren (2021) finds a significant positive relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their competence in inclusive practices. These results suggest a need to shift focus from demographic variables to pedagogical and contextual factors in understanding SA, underscoring the complex, multidimensional nature of teacher acceptance. We regard the inconsistency in the literature on this point (de Boer et al., 2011) as noteworthy, particularly when contrasted with findings such as those of Aktan (2023), who reported significant differences based on gender, family status, the presence of inclusive student, and professional experience.

Teachers play a vital role in inclusive education, and its success is significantly dependent on their attitudes and practices (Metin, 2018). In examining teachers' attitudes through a scale measuring Behaviour and adaptation, responsibility and adjustments, and emotion and awareness, we found no statistically significant differences based on the presence of IS in the classroom, professional experience, educational status, or gender. This outcome aligns with the work of Öztürk et al. (2024) and Kandemir et al. (2021), who also found no significant link between these demographic factors and teachers' attitudes. Furthermore, our result is consistent with Öztürk et al. s' (2024) finding of no significant correlation between the presence of students with special needs and teachers' attitudes. However, this contrasts with studies by Yanardağ et al. (2023) and Bayar & Üstün (2017), which observed a significant correlation between professional experiences and attitudes.

Lindner et al. (2023), in a systematic review, report neutral to negative teachers' attitudes, though more positive ones are associated with experience or training. This contrasts with de Boer et al. (2011), who also found neutral to negative attitudes among PS teachers a finding inconsistent with our results. We interpret these inconsistencies as arising from cross-national differences in resources, systems, and cultural values. The results of Ionescu and Vrăsmaș (2022) illustrate the complex nature of teachers' attitudes. While they note an influence of professional experience, unlike our findings, they report that teachers with postgraduate degrees hold more positive attitudes (Ionescu & Vrăsmaș, 2022; Lindner et al., 2023). We suggest this may be because advanced academic training enhances the use of evidence-based practices, critical thinking, and professional autonomy, better equipping teachers to navigate complexity. These mixed findings are consistent with de Boer et al. s' (2011) observation of considerable inconsistency in attitude research and further underscore Heyder et al. s' (2020) assertion that attitudes are shaped by cultural factors, measurement instruments, and educational systems.

Our observation of a statistically significant difference in teachers' general attitude scores by education level with PS teachers showing more positive attitudes than secondary school teachers aligns with the findings of Yanardağ et al. (2023) and points to a potential interrelation between SA and attitudes. We interpret this to mean that the more positive disposition of PS teachers may allow them to more effectively model inclusive behaviour for students (Blazar & Kraft, 2017) and foster the development of inclusive classroom settings (Sharma & Sokal, 2016). Blazar and Kraft (2017) note that teachers

influence student attitudes and behaviours. This leads us to argue that teachers' attitudes in inclusive settings should not be viewed merely as tolerance but as an instructional quality variable affecting student outcomes. Thus, we can consider a teachers' attitude toward inclusive an indicator of their overall effectiveness. Contrasting with these findings, Kandemir et al. (2021) reported no significant differences across branches. We suggest that this discrepancy may be partially attributable to unequal sample sizes, a factor that warrants further investigation. The observed differences across subjects and educational levels reinforce the contextual nature of teachers' attitudes a perspective consistent with Van Steen and Wilson's (2020) meta-analysis highlighting country-specific influences.

Our analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in general attitude scores or in the behaviour and adaptation and responsibility and adjustments sub-dimensions based on whether a teacher has a family member with special needs. However, a significant difference was identified in the emotion and awareness sub-dimension for teachers with such family members. This leads us to conclude that personal experiences exert a strong influence specifically on the emotional and awareness components of teachers' attitudes. In line with our results, Lindner et al. (2023) indicate that knowing a person with special needs is linked to more positive attitudes. Their review also suggests that support, training, and experience can foster positive change. These observations suggest that experiences play a significant role in shaping both emotion and awareness. Therefore, we recommend that teacher education programs actively incorporate emotional experiences to enhance empathy a recommendation supported by the findings of Pesen and Demirhan (2021). We further propose that prompting teachers to consider the possibility of having a child with special needs could foster more empathetic thinking, underscoring the need for a multidimensional training approach that integrates theory with emotional engagement.

Our ANOVA and subsequent Post Hoc tests revealed statistically significant differences in attitude scores across teachers' branches, identifying specific inter-branch variations. This finding is consistent with research by Fazlıoğlu & Doğan (2013), Öztürk et al. (2024), and Yanardağ et al. (2023). We believe these differences underscore the importance of personalizing inclusive education training; rather than a uniform approach, programs should be tailored to the specific challenges and context of each subject area. This contrasts with the results of Kandemir et al. (2021), who found no significant inter-branch differences. Overall, our data suggest that teachers' attitudes are influenced by factors such as knowledge level, support received, and participation in in-service training (Metin, 2018). Research by Sai-Keerthan et al. (2025) identifies a lack of training and resources as key reasons for negative attitudes, while Ionescu and Vrăsmaș (2022) cite insufficient support as a primary factor. We conclude from these findings that legal regulations alone are insufficient for successful inclusive; teachers' emotional and professional readiness is equally crucial. We caution that resource shortages should not be seen only as material constraints but as psychosocial factors that can cause feelings of isolation and inadequacy. Therefore, alongside providing resources, we must ensure support and collaboration in their use to foster genuine attitude change. Saloviita (2020) reports generally negative teacher attitudes toward inclusive but notes that perceived support and trust positively influence them. The study also finds female teachers to be more positive than males, a difference we can link to social expectations. This points to the need to address gender stereotypes in attitude-change efforts. We see that providing support (Değirmenci-Kurt & Tomul, 2019; Sağın & Karadaş, 2023), fostering collaboration, and offering hands-on practice are effective, highlighting the gap between knowledge and application. We argue that learning opportunities like in-class coaching can bridge this gap.

The success of inclusive practices is directly related to teachers' exhibiting positive attitudes towards students with special needs in general education classrooms (Aktan, 2023; Aydoğdu et al., 2020; Fazlıoğlu & Doğan, 2013; Sharma & Sokal, 2016; Van Steen & Wilson, 2020). The finding that PS teachers exhibit more positive attitudes suggests this will positively contribute to fundamental elements of inclusive: The individualization of education and instruction; educational and instructional arrangements; preparation and implementation of Individualized Education Programs; educational assessment; positive behavioural support; and in-class, in-school, and out-of-school support processes. The importance of basic education as a crucial stage further enhances this significance. Classroom teachers, responsible for implementing the common curriculum, can contribute to the academic and socio-emotional development of students with special needs only through positive attitudes and high SA. However, a more inclusive process can also be achieved at the secondary level through educational

and instructional adaptations, coupled with awareness-raising and targeted training efforts aimed at increasing the positive attitudes and SA levels of subject teachers'.

The most striking finding of this study is that teachers' SA and attitudes are more strongly influenced by professional and contextual factors than by demographic variables. A second key finding is the presence of significant differences across subject areas and educational levels. The non-significance of demographic variables such as gender and professional experience, however, leads us to argue for a renewed perspective in inclusive education research one that shifts focus toward systemic and experiential factors. Furthermore, the findings suggest that teacher education must complement theoretical instruction with an emphasis on empathy and emotional factors, leveraging personal experiences where possible. Consequently, this study underscores the critical importance of adopting context-specific, personalized, and multidimensional approaches in teacher training and professional development to foster truly inclusive educational environments.

Limitations

We acknowledge several limitations in this study. First, demographic variables such as teachers' gender, branch, and education level were not equally distributed among participants. Additionally, the study included only primary and secondary school teachers, excluding preschool and high school levels. Some subgroups within the sample were also limited in size. Finally, logistical constraints and requests from school administrations resulted in a one-week gap between distributing and collecting the forms, which may have affected the attention teachers devoted to completing them.

Suggestions

Suggestions for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, we propose several practical implications:

- We recommend that teacher training programs be planned to address factors influencing SA and attitudes.
- We suggest organizing in-service training, informational sessions, and seminars specifically for branches with lower SA levels.
- We advise incorporating elements into training sessions that promote empathetic thinking about having children with special needs.
- We encourage focusing professional development programs on enhancing teachers' knowledge levels, support systems, and participation in in-service training.

Suggestions for Future Studies

For future research, we recommend the following directions:

- We propose conducting experimental or mixed-method research designs that include teacher training programs to measure SA and attitudes.
- We suggest implementing action research studies focusing on improving SA and attitudes in inclusive education settings.
- We recommend including preschool and high school teachers in studies to provide a more comprehensive understanding.
- We advise conducting research with more balanced participant distribution across different demographic variables.
- We encourage undertaking investigations that address the limitations identified in this study regarding sample size and data collection procedures.

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Ethics statement: In this study, we declare that the rules stated in the "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" are complied with and that we do not take any of the actions based on "Actions against Scientific Research and Publication Ethics". At the same time, we declare that there is no conflict of interest between the authors, which all authors contribute to the study, and that all the responsibility belongs to the article authors in case of all ethical violations.

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