FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract. This paper explores the key factors that influence teacher self-efficacy in delivering inclusive education, based on the literature review conducted by Woodcock et al. (2022). It identifies structural, cultural, and policy-related elements as critical determinants of how confident and prepared teachers feel when addressing diverse student needs. Inclusive school policies, guided by international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, help foster environments where teachers are empowered to implement inclusive practices. Equally important is the development of a school culture that values diversity, promotes equity, and nurtures a sense of belonging for all students. The analysis reveals a strong correlation between institutional support and teacher belief in their instructional competence. These findings are particularly relevant for countries like Uzbekistan, where inclusive education is emerging as a national priority. Aligning policy, professional development, and school culture can significantly enhance teacher self-efficacy and inclusive teaching outcomes.

Keywords: Inclusive education, teacher self-efficacy, school culture, educational policy, professional development, diversity, Uzbekistan.

Introduction

Inclusive education (IE) has evolved from a global ideal into an essential framework guiding educational reform worldwide. Since the Salamanca Statement (1994), the call to educate all learners—including those with diverse needs—within mainstream classrooms has gathered momentum. However, implementing inclusive education in practice requires more than policy mandates or student integration. It requires a teaching workforce that feels confident and capable of addressing diversity in all its forms. Teacher self-efficacy—the belief in one's ability to affect student learning and manage instructional challenges—is a critical component in this process. Without high self-efficacy, even the most well-intentioned policies risk ineffective classroom application.

The study by Woodcock, Gibbs, Hitches, and Regan (2023) explores the complex interplay between teacher beliefs, institutional structures, and inclusive education practices, with a particular focus on the Australian context. Their findings suggest that teacher self-efficacy for inclusive education is not formed in isolation but is instead shaped by policy environments, school culture, and professional development opportunities. The study underscores how systemic supports influence not just attitudes, but actual instructional capacity. This analysis will examine the key themes emerging from the study's results and discuss their interrelationships with existing literature, offering broader implications for countries like Uzbekistan, which are in the early stages of inclusive education reform.

Methodology

The authors conducted a thematic analysis of existing open-source literature and policy frameworks to investigate the factors influencing teacher self-efficacy in inclusive education.

This approach enabled them to identify patterns across multiple domains—such as educational policy, school culture, and teacher mindset—while situating their findings within broader national and international contexts. The study used a qualitative lens to draw correlations between inclusive policy development, school-level ethos, and the practical challenges faced by teachers in diverse classrooms (Woodcock et al., 2023, p. 3).

Results

Teacher self-efficacy for inclusive education is significantly influenced by a variety of structural, cultural, and policy-related factors, as explored by Woodcock et al. (2022). Central to this self-efficacy is the presence of inclusive school policies that not only enable access for students but also support teachers in becoming inclusive practitioners. Such policies, guided by frameworks like Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and national documents such as the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, create environments where inclusion is mandated and operationalized (Woodcock et al., 2022, p. 3). The explicit encouragement to remove barriers, ensure equitable access, and promote student wellbeing contributes to teachers' confidence in their ability to teach all learners effectively. This institutional backing can be correlated with higher levels of teacher engagement and belief in their capability to deliver inclusive education practices (Woodcock et al., 2022, p. 3).

The cultural dimension of inclusion, particularly the nurturing of an inclusive school ethos, plays an equally pivotal role in shaping teacher self-efficacy. Woodcock et al. (2022) stress the importance of a school culture where diversity is celebrated and every student feels a sense of belonging. Teachers operating in environments that value fairness, equity, and respect for all students are more likely to believe in their own ability to meet diverse learning needs (p. 4). This aligns with Booth and Ainscow's (2020) emphasis on inclusive cultures as catalysts for teacher development, which de-emphasize student labels and fixed notions of ability. As Florian and Spratt (2013) argue, when teachers reject deterministic views of ability and instead hold high expectations for all students, their belief in their own instructional competence strengthens. Thus, a reciprocal relationship emerges: an inclusive culture enhances teacher efficacy, which in turn fuels more effective inclusive practices.

Further strengthening this relationship is the recognition by teachers that any student—not just those formally identified with disabilities—can face barriers to learning. Woodcock et al. (2022) explain that when teachers internalize the principle that inclusion is about all students, their sense of responsibility and efficacy broadens (p. 4). Teachers who adopt this inclusive mindset are better equipped to proactively identify and respond to classroom diversity. This recognition is directly tied to professional development and the availability of inclusive resources, as emphasized in inclusive policy frameworks (Woodcock et al., 2022, p. 3).

Therefore, teacher self-efficacy is not only a personal trait but also a product of systemic support and professional reinforcement, which must be sustained by institutional policies and inclusive pedagogy.

The correlation between policy, culture, and teacher self-efficacy is clear: effective implementation of inclusive education requires alignment between national and regional educational policies, school-wide inclusive cultures, and individual teacher beliefs and practices.

Teachers who perceive their environments as supportive and aligned with inclusive values report higher self-efficacy, which leads to greater engagement with inclusive strategies (Woodcock et al., 2022, p. 5). This is supported by Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018), who note that belonging and community significantly influence inclusive practices. Therefore, fostering inclusive school environments—both structurally through policy and culturally through shared values—plays a decisive role in empowering teachers to believe in and execute inclusive education. The interaction of these factors underpins the systemic nature of teacher self-efficacy and suggests that efforts to improve inclusive education must address all these layers simultaneously.

An analysis of Woodcock et al. (2023) reveals that teacher self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in the effective implementation of inclusive education (IE), and several interrelated factors influence this sense of efficacy. The authors emphasize that inclusion is not merely about physical presence in mainstream classrooms but is a dynamic process requiring responsive and equitable teaching (p. 1). Crucially, teachers' beliefs in the value and feasibility of inclusive education significantly predict their actual use of inclusive practices (p. 2). This aligns with previous studies that identify teachers' attitudes as central to successful inclusion (e.g., Sharma et al., 2012). When teachers perceive themselves as capable of addressing diverse student needs, they are more likely to embrace and enact inclusive strategies. Therefore, fostering high levels of self-efficacy is essential for teachers to internalize and apply inclusive philosophies meaningfully.

Demographic factors such as age, years of experience, and qualifications also correlate with varying levels of teacher self-efficacy. According to the study, younger teachers or those with fewer years of experience may lack the practical confidence to fully implement inclusive practices, even when they hold positive attitudes toward inclusion (Woodcock et al., 2023, p. 2).

This suggests that experiential learning and professional development are critical in developing self-efficacy. Comparatively, more experienced educators often draw from broader classroom exposure, which can strengthen or—conversely—undermine efficacy depending on their prior success with inclusion. These findings resonate with Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which highlights mastery experiences as the most influential source of efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

The implication is that professional development programs must move beyond theoretical frameworks and offer teachers concrete, practice-based opportunities to develop inclusive competencies.

The cultural and systemic variations in how inclusion is understood also influence teacher self-efficacy. For instance, inclusion is defined differently across countries—ranging from the integration of students with disabilities to a broader recognition of diversity based on identity, ethnicity, religion, and more (Woodcock et al., 2023, p. 2). In Australia, inclusive education is framed holistically through national and state policies, yet inconsistency in policy interpretation can undermine teachers' confidence in applying inclusive strategies effectively. The mismatch between inclusive policy mandates and available classroom resources further compounds this issue. Teachers may support the principles of inclusion but feel constrained in their ability to deliver due to systemic barriers, such as insufficient training or lack of institutional support. This reinforces findings from Forlin and Sin (2010), who found that while positive attitudes are necessary, they are insufficient without institutional alignment and resourcing.

Finally, the study underscores the need for an integrated approach where teacher training, policy clarity, and systemic support coalesce to build robust self-efficacy among educators.

Woodcock et al. (2023) advocate for tailored professional development that considers individual teacher demographics and prior beliefs (p. 2). By strengthening teachers' belief in their own competence, such initiatives not only enhance inclusive practices but also foster resilience in facing classroom diversity. Importantly, these efforts must be sustained over time rather than delivered as isolated interventions. Fostering teacher self-efficacy requires a dual focus: empowering teachers personally and addressing structural constraints institutionally. When both domains are aligned, the likelihood of inclusive education being meaningfully and consistently implemented increases significantly.

Discussion

One of the central findings of Woodcock et al. (2023) is the role that structural supports—particularly inclusive policies—play in strengthening teacher self-efficacy. The presence of frameworks such as Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and national documents like the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration establish not just legal mandates but also moral imperatives for inclusion (p. 3).

These policies create an environment where teachers feel institutionally supported to implement inclusive strategies, which in turn boosts their confidence. This is consistent with findings by Sharma and Sokal (2016), who note that supportive policy contexts are directly linked to increased teacher readiness and efficacy in inclusive settings.

Equally influential is the cultural ethos of the school. According to Woodcock et al. (2023), teachers who work in environments that promote equity, fairness, and a sense of belonging for all students tend to report stronger self-efficacy (p. 4). This resonates with Booth and Ainscow's (2020) concept of an inclusive school culture, which prioritizes community and belonging over mere academic performance or standardized metrics. Moreover, Florian and Spratt (2013) argue that when teachers reject fixed notions of student ability and instead believe in the potential of every learner, their instructional self-confidence grows. The correlation between inclusive beliefs and teacher efficacy suggests a feedback loop: inclusive values boost teacher confidence, which in turn fosters deeper inclusive practices.

Another significant factor is the broadening of teachers' perceptions of who benefits from inclusion. Woodcock et al. (2023) highlight how teachers who see inclusion as applicable to all students—not just those with diagnosed disabilities—develop a stronger sense of professional responsibility and capability (p. 4). This expanded view, combined with access to inclusive teaching resources and targeted professional development, forms a comprehensive support system. It affirms the view presented by Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018), who argue that fostering a community of belonging is crucial for successful inclusion. Therefore, teacher self-efficacy is not merely a product of internal belief but is cultivated through a network of policy, pedagogy, and cultural norms.

Conclusion

The study by Woodcock et al. (2023) clearly demonstrates that teacher self-efficacy for inclusive education is influenced by a synergy of structural, cultural, and perceptual factors. Policies that promote equity and inclusion, when aligned with a supportive school culture and professional development opportunities, empower teachers to implement inclusive strategies with confidence and skill.

Moreover, the broader a teacher's understanding of inclusion—as something beneficial to all students—the more likely they are to feel effective in diverse classroom settings.

For Uzbekistan, which is actively reforming its education system to become more inclusive, these findings offer vital insights. Policymakers and school leaders must recognize that building inclusive classrooms starts with building inclusive mindsets among educators. This requires coherent national policies, ongoing teacher training, and school cultures rooted in equity and belonging. As Uzbekistan continues to align with international frameworks on inclusion, prioritizing teacher self-efficacy will be crucial in translating policy into practice and ensuring that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and thrive.

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