

Academic Pedagogical Instructors' Perspectives on the Inclusion of Students with Special Needs in Regular Education Settings: Insights from Two Colleges of Education

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the attitudes of academic pedagogical instructors (APIs) toward the inclusion of children with special needs (SEN) in the regular classroom. While extensive research has focused on teachers' attitudes toward including SEN, limited attention has been given to APIs' perspectives. Since these instructors play a crucial role in training future teachers, understanding their attitudes is vital for developing effective teacher education programs.

The study involved 50 pedagogical instructors from two teacher training institutions specializing in elementary education. Data collection methods included focus group discussions and semi-structured individual interviews. Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis principles. The findings revealed predominantly positive attitudes toward inclusion, with minimal opposition. Three significant factors emerged as determinants of these attitudes: concurrent engagement in elementary school teaching and academic instruction; personal connections with individuals with special needs, and professional expertise in special education methodologies. However, the study revealed a significant gap in APIs' preparation. Although they demonstrated strong abilities in conventional teaching methods, they were less familiar with strategies tailored to students with learning disabilities. Consequently, thorough professional development programs are crucial so these instructors can more effectively train future teachers for inclusive classrooms. These findings proposed several practical recommendations: implement mandatory professional development programs focusing on inclusive education strategies, integrate special education components into APIs training curricula, and promote collaboration between special education and elementary school education departments within teacher training institutions.

Keywords: academic pedagogical instructors, higher education, inclusive education, pre-service teacher training, special needs