Teacher Readiness for Inclusive Education under NEP 2020: A Systematic Review of Competency Gaps and Theoretical Frameworks in the Indian Elementary Context

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ABSTRACT:

Inclusive education in India has gained renewed policy significance under the National Education Policy 2020 and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, which emphasise equitable participation, accessibility, and quality education for Children with Special Needs. However, the effectiveness of inclusive classrooms depends largely on teacher readiness, as teachers serve as the primary agents for translating policy mandates into classroom practice. This systematic literature review examines teacher readiness for inclusive education in the Indian elementary education context by synthesising research on competency gaps, self-efficacy, pedagogical adaptation, and affective preparedness. Literature was reviewed from Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, ResearchGate, and relevant grey literature sources, including NCERT, National Education Policy 2020 documents, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan reports, UDISE+, and government policy documents. The review was guided by the Cognitive–Behavioural–Trait framework, which conceptualises teacher readiness through cognitive knowledge, behavioural implementation, and affective preparedness. The findings reveal a persistent knowledge–practice gap, where teachers possess conceptual awareness of inclusion but face difficulties in implementing inclusive instructional strategies. Behavioural barriers include limited differentiated instruction, weak classroom adaptation, and inadequate assistive technology integration. Trait-related findings indicate that low self-efficacy, inclusion anxiety, and limited psychological acceptance negatively affect inclusive classroom effectiveness. Based on these findings, the study proposes the Inclusive Teaching Competency Model to integrate policy literacy, pedagogical agility, digital readiness, empathy, and self-efficacy. The review provides practical implications for competency-based teacher education, long-term professional development, and supportive institutional ecosystems for sustainable, inclusive education.

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Keywords: Inclusive Education, Teacher Readiness, Cognitive–Behavioural–Trait Framework, Inclusive Pedagogy, Inclusive Teaching Competency Model.

1. Introduction

The focus of inclusive education has gone beyond enrolment to inclusive participation, inclusive access and inclusive learning. International documents, such as the 'Salamanca Statement' stated that all learners, disabled and otherwise, should be included in meaningful learning in mainstream education provision (UNESCO, 1994). In a similar manner, Ainscow and Miles (2008) explained inclusion as a process of successive diminishing exclusion and successive increasing participation of all students. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in India have put emphasis on equitable and inclusive learning opportunities for Children with Special Needs (CwSN) (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

Further, the inclusive mandates of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 also reinforced the same with the focus on equal access to education, reasonable accommodation and mainstream classes (Government of India, 2016). Thus, the diversity of skills, socio-cultural background, emotional development and language/ learning style is more and more recognised as a value within the classroom (Norwich, 2013). The change has made it more important than ever to have teachers with the skills and knowledge to ensure inclusive pedagogical practice is effective.

One of the determining factors for the effective implementation of inclusive education is the readiness of teachers. Since inclusive policies cannot guarantee meaningful participation unless teachers have the competence to implement them in the classroom, the key requirement is for them to get to know what meaningful participation entails. The critical element is for teachers to understand the meaning of meaningful participation, and for inclusive policies and plans to be effective, teachers must have the capacity to implement these in the classroom. Practices are very important in schools and classrooms, Booth and Ainscow (2002) emphasised, practices that are based on participation are key to inclusion. Likewise, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) claimed that it is a pedagogy that calls for adaptation of instruction for all learners, not for learners with a deficit.

The human infrastructure of inclusive education could then be viewed as teacher readiness. Requires Pedagogical knowledge, Classroom Management skills, Collaboration, Emotional readiness and a positive attitude towards diversity. One of the most powerful factors that impact on student learning outcomes was highlighted by Hattie (2008) as the effectiveness of teachers. However, the practice of differentiated instruction, learner participation and curriculum adaptation is often a long way from what is expected in the policy and the reality in the classroom (Tomlinson, 2017).

While there has been increased awareness of inclusion, the implementation of policy in classrooms is still a great way off. Many teachers display conceptual understanding of inclusive education, but not adequate competency in implementing the pedagogical strategies that are used in inclusive education (De Boer et al., 2011). Forlin and Chambers (2011) mentioned the same problems, and that, along with improving the knowledge, the teacher preparation program may raise concerns regarding practical implementation. There are also some pedagogical carry-over problems which can be a major hurdle in the inclusive elementary classroom. Black-Hawkins and Florian (2010) indicated that teachers find it difficult to put the theory they have been trained in into practice in the classroom. Furthermore, Sharma et al. (2008)

discovered that concerns regarding classroom management and learner diversity and instructional adaptation remain after professional development. Therefore, inclusive education needs to be grounded in competency, self-efficacy and psychological preparedness as well as on policy knowledge to be implemented in a sustainable way.

Teacher readiness is distributed in the literature on inclusive education in different ways, either as teacher attitudes, teacher self-efficacy or pedagogical competence. Use of competency-based synthesis to integrate cognitive, behavioural and affective aspects in inclusive teaching is still less in the Indian context of elementary education. Moreover, affective readiness (empathy, confidence and psychological acceptance of diversity) is yet a rather under-researched aspect of classroom implementation (Meyer & Gordon, 2014).

Hence, the current systematic review aims to provide an integrated understanding in the context of NEP 2020 and with a particular focus on inclusive elementary education in the framework of the cognitive–behavioural–trait (CBT). Based on this rationale, this study has the following research questions and objectives.

- **RQ1:** What are the main issues of competencies associated with teacher readiness in inclusive education?
- **RQ2:** What are the disconnections between policy and classroom implementation of inclusive education?
- **RQ3:** How do affective factors such as self-efficacy, empathy, attitudes and affect inclusive teaching competency?

To answer these research questions, the following research objectives are used to guide the present review:

- To investigate teachers' cognitive, behavioural and affective aspects of readiness for inclusive education
- To explore the conflicts that may occur between policy awareness at the national level and classroom level implementation of inclusive education policies
- To show a need for the Inclusive Teaching Competency Model (ITCM) to enhance teachers' readiness for NEP 2020

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The present study used Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as the type of research design to analyse the teacher readiness for inclusive education in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and the competency gaps in relation to inclusive education within the elementary education system in India. The objectives of the study were to structure, assess and collate all the relevant national and international literature in a transparent way in which a systematic review approach was deemed appropriate. The method used in the SLR is more structured and strict when considering the process of search, screening, eligibility and inclusion that can be used to improve objectivity and replicability of the study, unlike the general narrative review. The relationship between teacher preparedness, inclusive classroom practices, teacher self-efficacy, teacher attitudes, teacher professional competence and inclusive education of CwSN is examined.

The review is done from this particular perspective, the cognitive–behavioural–trait (CBT) perspective, which already plays a major role in the article. This framework can be used to conceptualise teacher readiness as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes what teachers know, what teachers do and what teachers believe. Therefore, the methodology was formulated to identify studies regarding the concern about awareness of the policy, the competence in inclusion classroom, attitudes, self-efficacy and the readiness in the profession.

2.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

A systematic literature search was conducted on the academic databases and grey literature.

Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR and ResearchGate databases were the academic databases used. The databases were chosen as they are pertinent to research in Education, Teacher Education, Inclusive Pedagogy, Special Education and Policy. The areas of interest were teacher readiness, inclusive education, teacher self-efficacy, attitudes towards inclusion, teachers' competence, inclusive classroom practices and elementary education.

To keep the Indian policy context of the article, apart from journal articles, grey literatures were also explored. This is important because the article is placed in the background of the Indian elementary education system, where the policy documents provide background information on inclusive education, infrastructure, enrolment of CwSN and teacher development programmes.

The database search yielded a total of 168 records, and additional searching by manual reference shelf checking and related source searching, as illustrated in Figure 1, yielded 12 records. So the first records that were located were 180.

2.3 Inclusion Criteria

The following study criteria were adopted: all studies were included. The decision was to have the publication period as 2010 - 2026, to cover the period before and after the significant policy interventions such as the RPWD Act 2016, NEP 2020, etc. Second, the research should be related to inclusive education, teacher readiness, teacher self-efficacy, teacher competence, attitudes or inclusive teaching practices. Thirdly, preference was given to research on elementary education or the school-level inclusive classroom. Fourthly, national and international studies were included as it was believed that the Indian context would be contained by the broad studies. Lastly, peer-reviewed research articles and policy reports were added.

2.4 Exclusion Criteria

Studies which focused exclusively on higher education, clinical or medical interventions and studies outside of the scope of inclusive pedagogy were excluded. Studies which were not centred on teacher readiness, inclusive classroom practice, competence, attitude and self-efficacy were also excluded. Conceptual papers without empirical evidence, duplicate results, overlapping samples, limited and/or incomplete sources were excluded during the eligibility assessment process.

2.5 Selection of Studies

The four stages of the PRISMA process were identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Some duplicate records (n = 35) were removed, leaving 145 (100%) unique records. Of the 355 records screened, 92 were not included as they did not fulfil the screening focus. This left 53 records to be assessed for eligibility. Thirty-eight of these were excluded because they did not have a focus on teacher readiness; they did not take place in an elementary education context; they lacked empirical evidence to support the concepts; they duplicated findings; they shared samples; or they were inaccessible or provided incomplete data. Finally, there were 15 empirical studies that were included in a systematic review. The studies are related to teacher self-efficacy, teacher attitudes, teacher readiness, teacher competence, teacher emotional exhaustion and implementation of inclusive education. The last set of studies comprises the evidence base for the results and thematic findings for this review. The details of the studies included in the review, including the identification, screening, eligibility and final inclusion process, are shown in Figure 1 PRISMA Flow Diagram.

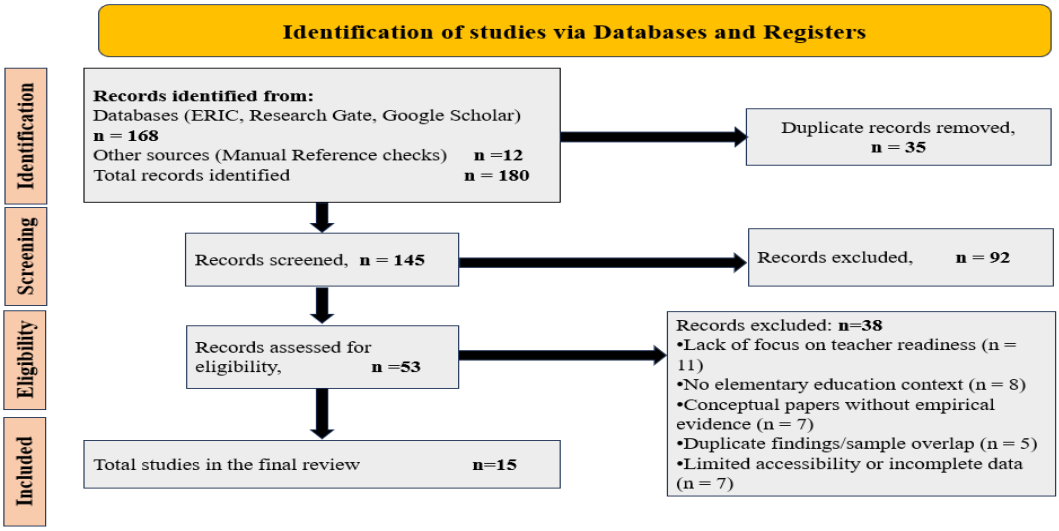

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram Showing the Study Selection Process for the Systematic Literature Review

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Cognitive–Behavioural–Trait (CBT) Framework

The present study that was conducted based on the framework of the 'Cognitive – Behavioural – Trait (CBT)' to understand the teacher readiness for inclusive education under NEP 2020. The teacher readiness is considered a complex phenomenon consisting of cognitive readiness, behavioural competence and affective and trait readiness to work with inclusion. The cognitive dimension includes teachers' understanding of inclusive education policies, their awareness of disability and their differentiated instruction and curriculum adaptation (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). The behavioural dimension focuses on implementing a strategy into the classroom, working together and inclusive practice (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The trait dimension is related to teacher attitudes, empathy, beliefs and confidence in diverse learners (Pajares, 1992). The concepts of inclusive participation as described by UNESCO (1994, 2017) are used as the basis for the framework, and the integration of knowledge, practice and positive psychological attitude is emphasised for the success of the inclusion.

3.2 Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997) is a good theoretical base to understand teacher self-efficacy in inclusive classrooms. Teacher self-efficacy is the confidence and belief that teachers have in their ability to manage diverse classrooms, make adaptations to teaching methods and support SENDs. Studies have shown that self-efficacious teachers are more likely to be committed in terms of differentiated instruction, learner participation and engagement in an inclusive classroom (Sharma et al., 2012). Likewise, Savolainen et al. (2012) and Alnahdi and Schwab (2021) identified that teacher self-efficacy is very closely related to positive attitudes towards inclusion. Low self-efficacy, on the other hand, is likely to result in feelings of inclusion anxiety, emotional fatigue and resistance to inclusive teaching.

3.3 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

To explain teacher readiness in relation to bigger institutional and social systems, the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is offered. Besides teacher competence, classroom interaction, school climate, institutional support and educational policy are also factors that impact inclusive education. At the microsystem level,

there is the interaction between teachers and learners, and the mesosystem is the interaction among teachers, parents and administrators (Friend & Cook, 1992). Macrosystem involves wide-ranging influences like NEP 2020, SSA and RPWD Act 2016. The idea of this framework has been emphasised with the focus on creating a positive educational environment and policy systems for inclusive classroom effectiveness.

3.4 TPACK and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

TPACK emphasises the interweaving of the technology, pedagogical and content knowledge, while UDL is a framework of teaching and learning that provides students with multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (Rose, 2000; Rose & Meyer, 2002). They are policy settings which encourage the use of assistive technology, adaptive teaching methods, and learner-centred instructional design. The literature, however, suggests that many teachers are still having problems with the integration of ICT, and readiness for digital pedagogy. This indicates that in inclusive education reforms, strengthening of the professional training is needed.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Overview of Included Studies

A total of 15 empirical studies were included in the systematic review that were on teacher readiness, self-efficacy, attitudes, competency, and inclusion in elementary and mainstream education. The selected studies have been undertaken in various countries around the world, such as Saudi Arabia, Finland, Scotland, Macao (SAR), Australia, Indonesia, Turkey, Israel, the United Kingdom, Germany, South Africa, Belgium and the Philippines. This international representation reflects the significance and importance of teacher readiness for inclusive education worldwide and emphasises the importance of inclusive pedagogical practices in education systems.

From the literature surveyed, teacher readiness was identified as a multi-faceted phenomenon – comprising cognitive readiness, behavioural readiness and affective/psychological readiness for inclusive education. The majority of the studies mentioned the importance of teacher self-efficacy and how this is a key factor in successful implementation in inclusive classrooms. A greater teacher confidence in inclusive practice led to a greater inclination to use differentiated teaching strategies, collaborative teaching approaches and student-centred learning.

The research tendencies of the selected studies indicated that although the general attitudes of teachers towards inclusion were examined in the early studies, the studies in later years focused on the examination of more developed sub-dimensions of the teacher attitudes, such as emotional exhaustion, the measurement of inclusive competence, the collaboration of teachers with one another and inclusive pedagogy supported by technology. Some research highlighted that although teachers are conceptually in favour of inclusion, they are encountering problems with curricular adaptations and classroom management, as well as with implementing disability-specific teaching.

A further key aspect mentioned in the literature was the need for professional training and learning through experience to become an effective inclusive teacher. Teachers who were targeted for special education training or teachers who had direct experience in inclusive classrooms showed higher levels of confidence, better attitudes and higher levels of skills for instructional adaptations.

The results also demonstrated that the context of inclusive education implementation (school climate, institutional support, collaborative culture and access to professional development opportunities) had a significant influence on the implementation of inclusive education. Scottish, South African and Belgian studies highlighted the importance of the enabling learning context as a key factor in boosting teacher effectiveness and

sustaining inclusive teacher practice. Table 1 represents the characteristics, methodological approaches and key findings of the 15 studies included in the systematic review and highlights the international nature as well as the growing number of studies on teacher preparedness for inclusive education. All studies emphasise the importance of self-efficacy, pedagogical competence and inclusive pedagogical competence for such a successful implementation in the classroom and the importance of training.

Table 1. Summary of Empirical Studies on Teacher Readiness and Self-Efficacy in Inclusive Education

Author(s) & Year	Country/Context	Sample/Participants	Research Focus	Key Findings
Franzen et al. (2024)	Germany	355 primary school teachers	Predictors of teachers' self-efficacy for inclusive education	Mastery experiences and prior inclusive teaching experiences significantly enhanced teachers' self-efficacy and willingness to implement inclusive practices.
Kuok et al. (2022)	Macao (SAR)	508 teachers in inclusive schools	Relationship between self-efficacy, emotional exhaustion, and work engagement	Teachers with stronger efficacy in inclusive instruction demonstrated lower emotional exhaustion and higher work engagement.
Miesera et al. (2019)	Germany	909 pre-service teachers	Attitudes, concerns, and self-efficacy toward inclusion	Higher self-efficacy and positive attitudes increased intentions to teach inclusively, while concerns negatively affected readiness.
Moon (2023)	Philippines	194 elementary school teachers	Teacher readiness and implementation of inclusive education	Teachers were only moderately ready in instructional adaptation, assessment, and monitoring, while training significantly improved readiness.
Muñoz (2026)	Philippines (Cebu)	40 secondary school teachers	Teachers' readiness and self-efficacy toward inclusive practices	A significant positive relationship existed between teacher readiness and self-efficacy in inclusive

				instructional practices.
Putri & Ain (2022)	Indonesia	Principals, teachers, and inclusive students	Teacher readiness in handling inclusive students	Teachers lacked readiness due to insufficient knowledge, low acceptance, weak emotional preparedness, and inadequate professional competence.
Sanir et al. (2022)	Turkey	53 pre-service teachers observing 17 teachers	Effective teaching practices in inclusive classrooms	Teachers demonstrated deficiencies in instructional adaptation, classroom management, and behavior management for inclusive learners.
Savolainen et al. (2022)	Finland	1326 teachers	Longitudinal relationship between efficacy and attitudes toward inclusion	Teacher self-efficacy positively predicted attitudes toward inclusion over time, indicating efficacy as a central factor in sustaining inclusion.
Vantieghem et al. (2023)	Belgium	975 pre-service and 600 in-service teachers	Measurement of teacher competencies for inclusive education	Inclusive teaching competency was strongly associated with teachers' beliefs, efficacy, collaboration, and responsiveness to diversity.
Wilson et al. (2020)	Scotland	148 mainstream primary teachers	School climate, mastery experience, and self-efficacy	Positive school climate, collective efficacy, and mastery experiences significantly predicted teachers' self-efficacy for inclusive teaching.

Woodcock et al. (2022)	Australia	41 primary school teachers	Relationship between self-efficacy and inclusive teaching practices	High-efficacy teachers emphasized accessibility and student strengths, whereas low-efficacy teachers focused primarily on behaviour management.
Alnahdi & Schwab (2021)	Saudi Arabia	185 elementary school teachers	Predictors of self-efficacy for inclusive teaching	Positive attitudes toward inclusive education emerged as the strongest predictor of teachers' self-efficacy.
Crispel & Kasperski (2021)	Israel	10 mainstream school teachers	Impact of special education training on inclusion	Special education training improved teachers' attitudes and strengthened their capability to implement inclusive practices effectively.
Drude & Schlebusch (2025)	South Africa	165 teachers	Self-efficacy toward implementing inclusive educational practices	Teachers reported high confidence in collaboration and behaviour management, though inadequate institutional support remained a challenge.
Coates et al. (2020)	United Kingdom	Pre-service teachers participating in a special school placement experience	Effectiveness of special school experience in improving teacher efficacy toward inclusion	Practical exposure to special education settings significantly improved pre-service teachers' confidence, efficacy, and preparedness for implementing inclusive educational practices.

4.2 Cognitive Domain Findings

The cognitive dimension of teachers' readiness primarily focused on teachers' sensitivity and awareness, knowledge, and understanding of inclusive education policy and pedagogical framework. Generally, all the studies reviewed indicated that teachers were conceptually knowledgeable about inclusion, but lacked

functional knowledge in order to implement inclusion.

Some interventions focused on teacher policy sensitivity towards the inclusive educational directive and disability rights policies, and the need for the curriculum to be adapted. There was an awareness of inclusive principles, although there was a challenge for teachers to implement inclusive principles in their classroom decisions regarding teaching/learning.

A very common theme that occurred throughout the literature was that of the lack of pedagogical knowledge regarding a particular disability. The lack of preparation regarding addressing the varying needs of the learners, such as the management of behaviours, individual education plans (IEPs) preparation, differentiated assessment and reasonable accommodation practices were often reported by teachers.

In addition, the literature revealed that there was a lack of AT integration and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Some teachers were familiar with the need for adaptive instruction, but many teachers lacked the ability to systematically adapt instructional materials and the process of the assessment strategies. One study, done in the Philippines and Indonesia, pointed out particularly the lack of preparation of teachers for inclusive pedagogy. Table 2 reflects the most common cognitive and behavioural competency gaps identified in the literature related to differentiated instruction, curriculum adaptation, UDL implementation and integration of assistive technology. The results indicate that teachers' understanding of the concept of inclusion is generally high, but there are problems in implementing inclusion in the classroom.

Table 2. Cognitive and Behavioural Competency Gaps in Literature

Competency Area	Evidence from Literature	Identified Gap	Educational Implications
Policy literacy	Awareness of inclusion policies exists	Weak practical understanding of policy implementation	Need for policy-oriented teacher training
Inclusive curriculum adaptation	Teachers recognise curriculum diversity needs	Limited curriculum modification skills	Training on differentiated curriculum planning
Differentiated instruction	Teachers attempt instructional flexibility	Inconsistent classroom adaptation practices	Strengthening inclusive pedagogy modules
UDL implementation	Limited awareness of UDL principles	Weak implementation of learner-centred design	Integration of UDL in teacher education
Assistive technology integration	Teachers value technology support	Inadequate ICT competency and training	Digital inclusion and ICT readiness programs
Classroom assessment adaptation	Inclusive assessment acknowledged conceptually	Difficulty modifying assessments for diverse learners	Training in alternative assessment practices

4.3 Behavioural Domain Findings

A behavioural component of teacher readiness focused on teacher practices of instructional implementation and inclusion. A majority of studies revealed a disconnect between teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and their in-class skills.

The most significant behaviour skills identified were differentiated instruction. However, teachers reported that it was often challenging to tailor what they teach, to cope with the different

classrooms and to individualise the approaches for different learners to meet their needs. The gaps highlighted through the observation-based studies were classroom management practices, flexibility of instruction and behaviour support.

A few of the studies highlighted the importance of higher self-efficacy to teacher implementation of inclusive instructional practices. These teachers were more likely to employ collaborative learning, flexible grouping, strengths-based teaching and student-centred teaching.

Digital pedagogical readiness was another theme that emerged, which denotes the ability of teachers to adjust their practices to the digital world. The teachers emphasised the importance of AT and inclusive learning with the support of ICT, but lacked technological competency. The studies reviewed showed the existence of the Technology Pedagogy Gap, as teachers were not trained in using technologies in inclusive teaching and learning.

Another factor that was found to be influenced by collaborative practices was behaviours related to readiness to learn. The inclusive teaching implementation of the teachers who received support from the institution and participated in collaborative P.L.C was higher. Research emphasised school climate, leadership, and collegial relationships among peers as key elements to maintaining inclusive practices.

4.4 Trait/Affective Domain Findings

The affective part of teacher readiness highlighted teacher self-efficacy, emotional readiness, confidence, empathy, and attitudes towards diversity. In all the studies examined, self-efficacy was the most important predictor of successful inclusive practice. High self-efficacy teachers had higher self-efficacy in instructional adaptation, collaborative teaching, classroom management and learner engagement. There was a strong relationship between positive attitudes to inclusion and being willing to make changes to facilitate inclusive practices.

But some of the studies also highlighted emotional exhaustion and feeling anxious about inclusion as a big implementation obstacle. Too many students in a class, lack of institutional support, lack of resources and lack of preparation as a teacher were all listed as stressors. With respect to low levels of organisational structures, this was highly associated with emotional exhaustion in Macao and South Africa. Empathy and psychological acceptance of diversity were also highlighted in the literature. The teachers with a more positive attitude towards the equity and social inclusion of education also had more instructional engagement and commitment to inclusive education practice. On the other hand, low confidence and negative emotions decreased teachers' willingness to use inclusive methodologies.

Professional development and first-hand experiences of inclusive teaching were mentioned again and again as being effective ways to enhance affective readiness. The results demonstrated that the impact on teacher confidence, concerns and attitudes towards inclusive education was great due to in-service training and hands-on experiences. Analysis of the results of teacher readiness was carried out using CBT and presented in Table 3, which shows that the teacher's readiness in inclusive teaching is determined by the interaction between the cognitive readiness, the teacher's readiness in conducting inclusive teaching, and the teacher's emotional readiness. Self-efficacy, institutional support and emotional preparedness were found to be important factors in inclusive educational effectiveness in all studies reviewed.

Table 3. CBT-Based Synthesis of Teacher Readiness Findings

Domain	Major Themes	Challenges Identified	Supporting Studies

Cognitive	Policy awareness, curriculum adaptation, and pedagogical knowledge	Limited practical implementation knowledge and weak disability-specific preparation	Putri & Ain (2022); Muñoz (2026); Moon (2023)
Behavioural	Differentiated instruction, classroom management, UDL implementation, and ICT integration	Weak instructional adaptation and limited technological competence	Sanir et al. (2022); Woodcock et al. (2022); Wilson et al. (2020)
Trait/Affective	Self-efficacy, empathy, confidence, attitudes toward inclusion	Emotional exhaustion, inclusion anxiety, technostress, and low institutional support	Kuok et al. (2022); Drude & Schlebusch (2025); Alnahdi & Schwab (2021)

5. Discussion

5.1 Competency Mismatch in Inclusive Education

Based on the results of the review, there is a gap in inclusive education policies and the practice of inclusive education in classrooms. Despite the strong statements of policy, such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and NEP 2020 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020), there is a lack of representativeness in education, especially in classrooms. Although teachers have conceptual awareness of inclusive education, teacher preparation is more cognitive-oriented rather than a pedagogical adaptation of the content in practice. In addition, Forlin and Chambers (2011) highlighted that teacher education programs in general tend to sensitise and alert all stakeholders to issues of implementation problems.

It also suggests that teacher training be heavy on theory rather than one-on-one instruction, classroom flexibility and teacher expertise with students with disabilities. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) felt inclusive pedagogy is not a classification of children with deficits, but a constant adjustment of the pedagogy for all children. Even with this, there are still many teachers who have problems with adapting curriculum, classroom management and individualised accommodation.

5.2 Interrelationship among CBT Domains

The results found that the domains of teacher readiness (cognitive, behavioural and trait (CBT) had a strong interrelationship. Knowledge and understanding of inclusive education are not sufficient to implement inclusive education. Teachers may be aware of inclusive policies and classroom diversity; however, they have problems in applying inclusive pedagogy into real classroom situations. This result supports Shulman's (1987) claim that the competence of the teacher in the classroom is a product of the convergence of pedagogical knowledge and classroom practice.

Affective preparedness has a strong impact on behavioural preparedness. Positive attitudes, empathy and confidence of teachers are more likely to lead to the use of differentiated instructional strategies and approaches that focus on the learner (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Furthermore, Pajares (1992) indicated that teachers' beliefs have a great impact on instructional behaviour and classroom decision-making. Hence, affective readiness acts as a link between the theoretical knowledge and the actual action. Similar results were reported by Savolainen et al. (2012), who found that self-efficacy and positive attitudes are great factors

that predict the effectiveness of inclusive education.

5.3 Teacher Self-Efficacy and Inclusive Outcomes

Teacher self-efficacy was one of the most impactful factors of inclusive educational outcomes. Teachers who have higher self-efficacy in their teaching skills are more likely to do so in line with Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory, to adapt their teaching, work in groups and join students in the learning process in the classroom. Likewise, Sharma et al. (2012) also found that high-efficacy teachers are more likely to be able to manage classroom diversity and ensure participation of the learners.

Positive attitudes towards inclusion and adaptation to the classroom were highly correlated with students' level of engagement. Active participation was more likely to be encouraged by teachers who were empathetic and psychologically accepting of diversity and had students with special educational needs. Low confidence/lack of certainty often resulted in feelings of exclusion and burnout, respectively. This again reiterates the importance of focusing on affective traits of teacher education along with pedagogical aspects (Chakravartya & Shindeb, 2022).

5.4 Institutional and Policy Challenges

The review found that there are a number of barriers in the institutional and policy areas that impact the implementation of inclusive education. Insufficient opportunities for professional development in particular areas (use of assistive technology, differentiated instruction, UDL – Universal Design for Learning). The focus of NEP 2020 is technology-enhanced and inclusive learning, and yet, many teachers are not technologically competent to use the ICTs and are not pedagogically ready to adopt and use the ICTs (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). The same problems emerged in the INTEF (2017) digital competence framework with regard to technology, namely, an increased need in the field of teacher preparation.

Additionally, there are resource constraints and insufficient institutional support that affect the effective implementation. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory considers the individual competency and institutional ecosystems/policy structures as factors that influence teacher readiness. Booth and Ainscow (2002) also identified a supportive school culture, collaboration and practices where pupils are involved to ensure sustainable inclusion.

Another big challenge is using technology in the inclusive classroom. While UDL accommodations allow teachers to plan flexible and student-centred instruction (Rose, 2000), it can be difficult to plan for AT in the classroom. Hence, strengthening the institutional support system, teachers' capacity building and readiness in digital pedagogies are needed for sustainable, inclusive education in NEP 2020.

6. Proposed Model: Inclusive Teaching Competency Model (ITCM)

From the findings of the systematic review, a multi-dimensional framework, namely the Inclusive Teaching Competency Model (ITCM), can be used as a tool to understand the competencies teachers need to be prepared for inclusive elementary classrooms in NEP 2020. The proposed model is based on the conceptualisation of teacher readiness as an integrated interaction between knowledge, pedagogical practice and affective preparedness within the framework of the Cognitive–Behavioural–Trait (CBT). The model shows that to become sustainable and inclusive, it is not sufficient to be aware of the policy, but also instructions must be adapted, and there must be a positive psychological attitude towards learner diversity.

6.1 Cognitive Pillar

Inclusive Teaching Knowledge and Skills (Cognitive Pillar) is the knowledge and skills that underpin effective inclusive teaching. This

includes functional policy knowledge of NEP 2020, RPWD Act 2016, inclusive education mandates, etc. Teachers need to have a good knowledge of the different categories of disability, the diversity of learners and classroom accommodations and differentiated curriculum planning. The cognitive aspect also entails skills in the creation and execution of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs), based on learner needs.

The review results show that many teachers have a conceptual understanding of inclusive education, but have problems with putting this understanding into practice in the classroom. So the cognitive pillar is on pedagogical knowledge in practice and not just on policy awareness. Functional literacy in the inclusive education context helps teachers to understand the variations of their learners and take informed decisions in the classroom.

6.2 Behavioural Pillar

The behavioural pillar is a pillar for the concrete implementation of inclusive teaching. The dimension is pedagogical agility, differentiated instruction, strategies for classroom participation, classroom collaborative learning and adaptive classroom management. Two key aspects of inclusive pedagogical practice that are also built into the model are Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK).

Behavioural readiness takes place when teachers can alter the manner in which they teach, what they teach and how they assess, in response to the diversity of learners. Assistive technology is used, and digital scaffolding and flexible teaching strategies are implemented to support participation in the inclusive classroom. However, findings from the analysed studies revealed that there are still many difficulties facing teachers in adapting to their classes and teaching using the introduction of ICTs, particularly regarding the use of ICTs and the differentiated pedagogical approach.

6.3 Trait Pillar

The affective/psychological aspects of teacher readiness are the trait pillar. These include self-efficacy, empathy, confidence, emotional resilience and psychological acceptance about learner diversity. One thing that came up time and time again in the review was teacher self-efficacy as a key determinant of the effectiveness of inclusive education. Those teachers who are more confident and positive about inclusion will be more likely to use adaptive instructional practices and classroom participation.

Emotion and emotional readiness are also important factors of inclusive classroom sustainability. Psychological acceptance of diversity enables teachers to be better able to implement equitable learning environments and minimise exclusionary practices in the classroom. So, affective readiness is a motivational mechanism in the process of supporting cognitive knowledge and the implementation of behaviour.

6.4 Interrelationship of Competencies

The ITCM implies that effective inclusive teaching is not reliant on only one of the cognitive, behavioural and trait competencies. Without cognitive readiness, they will not be effective in the classroom, and without behavioural readiness, they will not provide sustainability of inclusive practices. Hence, integrated readiness is a must for meaningful inclusion (Florian, 2014).

Inclusive digital literacy is also identified as an important linkage between the three domains in the model. When it comes to the effective use of assistive technologies for teaching, more than just technological skills are required of the teacher; they must also be flexible and emotionally ready. The affective readiness in the model is a facilitating element in building confidence and fostering instructional adaptation and commitment to inclusive education under NEP 2020.

7. Conclusion

Based on the findings from this systematic review, teacher readiness to inclusive education is seen as a multi-dimensional competence comprising cognitive, behavioural and affective dimensions. There is still an awareness gap (competency gap) between what is expected in the policy and what is being implemented at the classroom level, although NEP 2020 and inclusive education policies have helped increase awareness on equity and participation. While teachers may have a good understanding of theory, they may struggle with differentiated instruction, curriculum modifications, assistive technology and individualised support in the classroom. This review also finds that affective readiness and particularly self-efficacy, empathy and psychological acceptance of diversity are important enabling factors for sustainable inclusive educational practices. The study has a number of policy/practice implications. To begin with, the Competency-Based Teacher Education (CBTE) should be improved by a long-term and practice-oriented teacher education program instead of a short-term and theory-based teacher education program. Teacher preparation institutions should focus on classroom experience, adapting to the classroom environment and disability-specific teaching skills. Secondly, the TPACK and digital scaffolding frameworks should be systematically included in the curriculum of B.Ed. and M.Ed. to improve teachers' digital pedagogical readiness and competency on AT. Thirdly, supportive institutional contexts are required that enable peer mentorship, a collaborative teaching culture and emotional support systems to increase teacher confidence and anxiety for inclusion. The Inclusive Teaching Competency Model (ITCM) is an integrated model that serves as the backbone of inclusive elementary teachers' readiness. Future studies are needed to validate the model in the educational context in India, however. The affective readiness of teachers and teacher self-efficacy, as aspects of sustainability related to inclusive education, could be explored across the long term in longitudinal studies. Further research can focus on AI-facilitated inclusive pedagogy, assistive digital learning systems, and cross-country views on teacher readiness for inclusive education.

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