Measuring Student Teachers' Self-Efficacy to Implement Inclusive Practice: Adaptation of the TEIP Scale and Intergroup Comparisons

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ABSTRACT
A growing trend in countries with educational policies oriented toward humanistic education is the application of the idea of inclusion in schools, aimed at supporting all students without exception and fully accommodating their needs. This approach is supported, among other factors, by the preparation of future teachers during their undergraduate studies. In addition to developing their professional competencies as inclusive educators, it is essential to monitor how much they trust their ability to influence educational dynamics in response to various instructional situations associated with classroom management. The purpose of this paper is, on the one hand, to adapt the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) scale (Sharma et al., 2012) for a sample of teaching students at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, and on the other hand, to analyze the factors affecting their ability to guide (manage) student behavior, collaborate with other educational stakeholders, and implement inclusive teaching practices. The research sample consisted of 141 master's degree students from the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Science at UPJŠ (average age AM=23.18; SD=1.33). To validate the research tool, we employed exploratory factor analysis (principal component analysis), as the obtained data did not correspond with the original model, which we tested using confirmatory factor analysis. Both the research instrument and its dimensions demonstrated optimal internal consistency. Considering the selected variables describing the research sample, we identified a statistically significant difference in the efficacy of student teachers in managing student behavior (field of study), in conducting inclusive teaching (year of study, completed types of pedagogical practice), and in collaboration with other stakeholders of education (passing of the subject/subjects with the issue of inclusive education). Findings suggest that increasing students' self-efficacy in these areas requires attention to their mastery experiences in reflecting on the possibilities of professional preparation, with regard to their specialization in the humanities and sciences.

1. Introduction

Currently, schools face a significant challenge as they must navigate the tension stemming both from societal demands and from within the educational institutions themselves, striving to transform into organizations capable of flexibly responding to the diverse needs of students. This can be achieved by motivating teaching and professional staff to innovate their professional competencies, enabling them to better understand their students. However, what should not be underestimated, within the framework of implementing the concept of inclusive education, is the preparation of future teachers at universities. These future educators should embody pro-inclusive values and serve as sources of ideas for creating modern schools with learning environments that facilitate the education of all students without distinction.

Inclusive education, when considered in its more explicit definition that extends beyond addressing the needs of students with special educational requirements, encompasses a complex set of pedagogical and didactic activities. These activities aim to resolve difficulties and challenges faced by students as unique individuals, viewing their specific characteristics as opportunities to enrich the educational process. This perspective is supported by key documents such as The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education [1] and Inclusive Education for Learners with Disabilities [2].

According to Tannenbergerová [3], inclusive education is a means of delivering the rights that

inherently belong to children. It is not merely an international legal commitment that we have undertaken alongside other European Union member states.

The vision for creating progressive primary and secondary schools in Slovakia is outlined in the Strategy for an Inclusive Approach in Education [4]. Alongside fostering an educational environment that acknowledges the individuality and potential of students, the strategy emphasizes moving away from the paradigm of segregating students based on academic performance. Instead, it advocates for an educational philosophy that supports students in adapting to changing conditions in both life and learning.

For experienced teachers, the focus lies on fostering an interest in lifelong learning in the areas of inclusive education, such as pedagogical diagnostics, differentiated instruction, and the application of the reflective practice model. For student teachers, including expert teachers, emphasis is placed on assessing their self-confidence when working with students who have diverse educational needs stemming from disabilities or exceptional talents. Central to this is their ability to evaluate the energy (or capacity) they can dedicate to managing both routine and unexpected situations in teaching, particularly those involving students with special educational needs as well as their typically developing peers. This discussion revolves around perceived efficacy, which plays a crucial role in the preparation of student teachers. The importance of this is underscored by studies such as those by Power et al. [5], Gavora [6], and Dixon et al. [7].

The self-efficacy of student teachers[1] (pre-service teachers) in implementing inclusive practices is a predictor of their resilience, encompassing their ability to overcome challenges, cope with stress, and adapt to change [8]. A study by Sharma et al. [9] demonstrated that perceived efficacy in carrying out inclusive practices among student teachers is a stronger predictor of the implementation of inclusive methods (approaches) than their attitudes toward inclusive education.

The self-perceived competence (the perception of one's ability to facilitate goal achievement and meet professional needs) of student teachers is a predictor of their attitudes toward inclusive educational practices [10].

The study by Ahsan et al. [11] yielded two significant findings. The first indicates that the perceived efficacy of student teachers correlates with their attitudes toward inclusive education. The second reveals that student teachers with higher perceived efficacy in implementing inclusive practices exhibited lower levels of concern regarding inclusive education.

Pov and Kawai [12], in the conclusion of their study on the self-efficacy of student teachers in implementing inclusive practices and the concerns arising from inclusive education, draw attention to the need for improving teacher preparation programs.

Based on the findings of these studies, monitoring the efficacy of implementing inclusive practices appears to be a relatively suitable tool for self-diagnosis. More importantly, however, it serves as a means for evaluating the pre-service preparation of future teachers. Therefore, our first research objective was to adapt the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) scale [13] for use with student teachers (which is also a foreign trend, as indicated by studies such as Cardona-Molto et al. [14], Alnahdi [15]). The second objective was to assess the factors contributing to a potential increase in the efficacy of student teachers in implementing inclusive practices through its three main components.

2. Research Methodology

A. Translation of the instrument and its piloting

To measure the self-efficacy of student teachers in implementing inclusive practices, we used the

[1]Almost throughout the paper, we use the unifying term student teachers (it is a synonym for terms such as pre-service teachers, pre-service educators, etc.).

Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) scale developed by Sharma et al. [13], which was originally designed to monitor the efficacy of students working with learners in inclusive classrooms. We performed a back translation of the instrument, modifying only certain items by incorporating a modal verb into the sentence core to indicate potentiality (e.g., "I can"). In the original version of the questionnaire, various phrases expressing the capacity to handle situations related to inclusive education were used (e.g., "I am confident," "I am capable," "I can"). However, reflecting on the translation process, we opted to standardize the wording of potentiality across the scale, consistently using the phrase "I can". Instead of the term students with disabilities, we used the term disadvantaged students because student teachers may also teach students from other sociocultural backgrounds during their practice. Prior to the final distribution of the scale to students, we conducted a pilot study (N=10) and a preliminary study (N=38). We observed that respondents did not suggest any content-related or stylistic modifications. They answered 18 statements by choosing one of 6 alternatives (*1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – disagree somewhat, 4 – agree somewhat, 5 – agree, 6 – strongly agree*).

B. Validity and reliability of the instrument

In the process of validating the scale, we initially prioritized confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) since we were familiar with its factor model. We tested an alternative model with three factors (both uncorrelated and correlated) and, finally, a single-factor model. In none of these cases did the fit index values (CFI – Comparative Fit Index, TLI – Tucker Lewis Index, RMSEA – Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, SRMR – Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual, GFI – Goodness of Fit Index) approach the cut-off criteria for model acceptance [16]. Even after allowing residual covariances between content-similar items of factors, no significant improvement in model fit was observed.

Based on the aforementioned findings, we subsequently subjected the collected data to exploratory factor analysis, using the principal component method with oblique promax rotation. This approach facilitated a clear interpretation of the resulting factors (or more accurately, components). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (0.797) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < 0.001$) confirmed the suitability of this procedure for evaluating the structure of the research instrument. The number of factors was limited to three, respecting the original factor structure presented in the study by Sharma et al. [13].

Item loadings were required to exceed 0.40, and cross-loadings above this threshold across multiple factors were not permitted. One item ("I can create a welcoming environment for parents visiting the school.") did not meet these criteria due to a low factor loading (< 0.40). Additionally, two items were eliminated for conceptual reasons, as they did not fit within the identified factors. These items ("I can help families improve their child's academic performance." and "I can design tasks that align with the individual needs of students with disadvantages.") had the lowest loadings for their respective factors, with the first also exhibiting a low communality value (not exceeding 0.40).

The correlations between factor scores ranged from 0.29 to 0.35. The cumulative variance explained by the variables prior to the final rotation was 55.74%. In all three cases, Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.70 (0.804, 0.785, and 0.735). For the entire research instrument, Cronbach's alpha was 0.839, which is considered a very good result, confirming the internal consistency (reliability) of the individual dimensions as well as the overall instrument. For a more detailed overview of the values, see Table I.

Table I. Structure of the Research Instrument: Efficacy in Implementing Inclusive Practices

Items Saturated by Factors (Components)	**Factors**			
	α	**I.**	**II.**	**III.**
(I) Efficacy in Managing Student Behavior	0.804			
I can calm disruptive or loud students.		**0.882**	-0.051	-0.044
I can correct disruptive behavior in the classroom.		**0.858**	-0.138	0.104
I can prevent disruptive behavior in the classroom.		**0.828**	-0.053	0.099
I can handle situations involving physically aggressive students.		**0.635**	0.226	-0.244
I can clearly express my expectations regarding student behavior.		**0.447**	0.062	0.244
I can enforce classroom rules.		**0.439**	0.340	-0.032
(II) Efficacy in Collaborating with Educational Stakeholders	0.785			
I can collaborate with other professionals (school psychologists, special educators) to develop curricula for disadvantaged students.		-0.027	**0.853**	0.059
I can educate less-informed individuals about laws and regulations related to the inclusion of disadvantaged students.		-0.050	**0.773**	-0.123
I can collaborate with other staff members (teaching assistants, colleagues) in teaching disadvantaged students.		-0.027	**0.760**	0.115
I can involve parents of disadvantaged students in school activities.		0.145	**0.685**	-0.106
(III) Efficacy in Inclusive Teaching	0.735			
If a student does not understand the material, I can provide alternative explanations or examples.		-0.011	-0.034	**0.739**
I can assess students' understanding of the material taught.		0.076	-0.129	**0.716**
I can motivate students to work in pairs or groups.		-0.001	-0.045	**0.684**
I can provide exercises that offer an appropriate challenge for advanced students.		-0.006	0.043	**0.672**
I can use various types of assessment (e.g., portfolio assessment, performance assessment).		-0.076	0.407	**0.561**
Rotated Sum of Squared Loadings		*3.61*	*3.38*	*3.18*

C. Characteristics of research sample

The research sample was obtained through convenience sampling. Data were collected from student teachers using an online version of the TEIP research instrument. The data collection took place during relevant intervals over the years 2023–2024. A total of 144 students participated in the study. After excluding respondents who had not completed any form of teaching practice, the final research sample consisted of 141 respondents. The average age of respondents was 23.18 years (SD=1.33). A

detailed description of the research sample is provided in Table II.

Table II. Distribution of the Research Sample by Demographic Characteristics

Description of the Research Sample	N	%
Gender		
female	120	85.11
male	21	14.89
Field of Study		
humanities	60	42.55
natural sciences	50	35.46
combined subjects	31	21.99
Year of Study (Master's)		
1st Year	101	71.63
2nd Year	37	26.24
Additional Teacher Training Program	3	2.13
Motivation for Teacher Training (Choice)		
primary motivation	59	41.84
secondary motivation	55	39.01
tertiary motivation	27	19.15
Completed Types of Practice (Combinations)		
Observation-pedagogical-psychological practice (MPPa), Interim teaching practice (MPPb)	104	73.76
Above Practices + Continuous practice I (MPPc), All Types of Practice (also Continuous practice II – MPPd)	37	26.24
Completion of Inclusive Education Courses		
no	58	41.13
yes	83	58.87

D. Data analysis

Statistically significant differences between variables were identified using both parametric tests (Student's t-test, ANOVA, and Bonferroni post hoc test) and non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis test). This dual approach was necessary because normality of variable distribution was confirmed only for some subsets, as verified by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The chosen significance level was 0.05. Descriptive statistics included the arithmetic mean (AM) and median (Me). Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27.0.1.0 and JASP version 0.14.1.

3. Research Results

In Table III, we present the existence of statistically significant differences in the dimensions of the TEIP scale concerning the key demographic characteristics of the research sample.

A statistically significant difference was observed in the efficacy of student teachers in managing student behavior based on their field of study (ANOVA = 5.298; p = 0.006). Pairwise comparisons

revealed this difference between students specializing in natural sciences and those studying a combination of humanities and natural sciences (p = 0.007). Respondents specializing in natural sciences achieved higher scores in this dimension (AM = 4.44; Me = 4.33) compared to those in combined subject studies (AM = 4.00; Me = 4.00).

A statistically significant difference was found in the efficacy of student teachers in inclusive teaching based on their year of study (Mann-Whitney U test = 1415.000; p = 0.028). Respondents in the final year of their studies scored higher in this dimension (AM = 4.93; Me = 5.00) compared to those in their first year (AM = 4.73; Me = 4.80).

A statistically significant difference was identified in the efficacy of student teachers in inclusive teaching based on the types of practice they completed (Mann-Whitney U test = 1457.500; p = 0.028). Respondents who completed the final two types of practice, which focused on outcomes, scored higher in this dimension (AM = 4.93; Me = 5.00) compared to those who completed only the first two types of practice, which were predominantly observational (AM = 4.73; Me = 4.80).

A statistically significant difference was found in the efficacy of student teachers in collaborating with other educational stakeholders based on the completion of a course/subject focused on the issue of inclusive education within the social science foundation (Mann-Whitney U test = 1868.500; p = 0.023). Respondents who completed such a course scored higher in this dimension (AM = 4.30; Me = 4.25) compared to those who did not complete any course on this topic (AM = 3.99; Me = 4.00).

Table III. Presence of Statistically Significant Differences in the Dimensions of Efficacy in Implementing Inclusive Practices by Student Teachers Based on Selected Variables

Variables	**Dependent Variables**					
Independent Variables	*Efficacy in Managing Student Behavior*		*Efficacy in Collaborating with Educational Stakeholders*		*Efficacy in Inclusive Teaching*	
Gender	**Student's t-test**	**p-value**	**Mann-Whitney U-test**	**p-value**	**Mann-Whitney U-test**	**p-value**
	-1.092	0.277	963.500	0.084	1080.500	0.296
Field of Study	**ANOVA (F)**	**p-value**	**Kruskal-Wallis Test**	**p-value**	**ANOVA (F)**	**p-value**
	5.298	0.006**	1.735	0.420	2.273	0.107
Year of Study (Master's)	**Student's t-test**	**p-value**	**Mann-Whitney U-test**	**p-value**	**Mann-Whitney U-test**	**p-value**
	-0.775	0.440	1847.000	0.917	1415.000	0.028*
Motivation for Teacher Training	**ANOVA (F)**	**p-value**	**Kruskal-Wallis Test**	**p-value**	**Kruskal-Wallis Test**	**p-value**
	0.584	0.559	0.353	0.838	2.136	0.344
Completed Types of Practice (Combinations)	**Student's t-test**	**p-value**	**Mann-Whitney U-test**	**p-value**	**Mann-Whitney U-test**	**p-value**
	-0.697	0.487	1890.500	0.874	1457.500	0.028*
Completion of Courses/Subjects on Inclusive Education	**Student's t-test**	**p-value**	**Mann-Whitney U-test**	**p-value**	**Mann-Whitney U-test**	**p-value**
	-0.160	0.873	1868.500	0.023*	2156.500	0.291

4.Discussion

Before emphasizing the significance of factors influencing the enhancement of student teachers' efficacy in implementing inclusive practices, it is methodologically appropriate to address the successful adaptation of the research instrument TEIP (The Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices). Through confirmatory factor analysis, we found that the data obtained from student teachers did not align with the existing model consisting of three factors. Even after considering alternatives with three uncorrelated factors and one factor, the fit index values indicated weak alignment.

As a result, we proceeded with exploratory factor analysis, which, despite the aforementioned challenges, suggested that a three-factor structure of the research instrument could still be considered. However, this required the elimination of three items (reasons for their removal are described in detail in the methodological section). On the one hand, it should be noted that the preparation of student teachers at the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Sciences at UPJŠ for real-world school practice in primary and secondary schools has specific characteristics. During the first three years of study, the focus is predominantly on academic preparation, with the didactic aspect of how to work with this knowledge and deliver it to students in a way that motivates them to achieve defined educational goals only addressed in the master's program. The teacher training program at UPJŠ is structured in such a way that it does not allow for simultaneous academic preparation and practical teaching (the majority of independent teaching activities occur during final continuous practices).

This may have led students to perceive various activities (as specified in the TEIP scale statements) in a more isolated manner rather than holistically, likely due to the discrepancy between theoretical and practical preparation. On the other hand, the research sample was relatively small and homogeneous (comprising only student teachers from UPJŠ), and the TEIP scale may not fully capture (or be sensitive to) all the specific features of professional preparation.

This reflects the observation made by Selenius and Hau [17], who assert that the TEIP scale is not yet entirely suitable for comparisons across populations and contexts, likely due to the multifaceted nature of the inclusion concept and the associated self-efficacy. Their study also highlights the use of varied approaches to construct validation (by different researchers), including confirmatory factor analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and principal component analysis. Cronbach's alpha values indicated item homogeneity within dimensions (falling within acceptable ranges).

We also focused, as mentioned above, on examining which independent variables have the potential to influence changes in the perceived efficacy of student teachers (with respect to its three dimensions).

The field of study of student teachers emerges as a factor influencing their efficacy in managing student behavior. The results of the study by Senler and Sungur [18] show that pre-service science teachers had higher perceived efficacy in the use of teaching strategies and classroom management than in student engagement (however, the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale was used). At UPJŠ, students in natural science fields are trained with an emphasis on the use of inquiry-based methods, group teaching, and the application of formative assessment. The focus is on fostering students' intrinsic motivation and deepening their long-term interest in activities through reflective information processing [19, 20]. It seems essential that this training of student teachers be unified (there should be a professional as well as a didactic-methodical connection between the subjects). Perhaps this is why respondents with a study program that included both natural science disciplines achieved higher scores than respondents with a combination of disciplines (natural science and humanities).

The year of study, and particularly the type of teaching practice undertaken by student teachers, is a decisive factor in changes to their perceived efficacy in leading inclusive teaching. Research by Malinen et al. [21] confirms that intensive practice (hands-on teaching experience) enhances the self-

efficacy of pre-service teachers to implement inclusive practices. This is also confirmed by a systematic study by Tümkaya and Miller [22], who declare that student teachers' experiences in the field (as well as the other factors) increase their perceived efficacy in implementing inclusive practice (are associated with it).

The completion of courses addressing inclusive education serves as a key factor influencing the perceived efficacy of student teachers in collaborating with other educational stakeholders. Research by Sokal and Sharma [23] demonstrated that teachers who participated in courses focused on inclusive pedagogy could enhance their efficacy in implementing inclusive practices, provided that these courses adopt a specific form of professional development (although this was mainly true for in-serviceteachers, it is necessary also reevaluate the preparation of student teachers in this regard). In specialized subjects, attention is typically directed toward theoretical aspects of inclusion, which may not be sufficient, as interaction with students with special educational needs plays a crucial role. The conclusion of the research of Loreman et al. [24] is that the type of teacher training program offered by the institution, as well as differences in the level of knowledge about laws and policies related to inclusion, are factors influencing student teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of inclusive teaching.

5. Recommendations For Practice

To increase the perceived efficacy in implementing inclusive practices, it is not enough to merely emphasize the importance of teaching practice, which is a mandatory subject for student teachers. Instead, it is necessary to consider how to create opportunities for students in earlier years of study to gain mastery experiences. Interim teaching practices should be expanded to include educational activities in other educational institutions, and attention should also be paid, following observation sessions, to reflecting on what the mentor teacher considered key in the lesson. Student teachers should be asked for feedback on how they would proceed to optimize individual activities (e.g., how they would address problems that arose during the lesson). Mentor teachers cooperating with the Department of Pedagogy and the Department of Pedagogical Psychology and Health Psychology are selected based on their pedagogical qualities. When analyzing lessons, they usually proceed according to established criteria and methodologies for reflective teaching [25, 26]. Thanks to this approach, student teachers can also encounter positive evaluations or receive recognition for successfully managing lessons (though constructive criticism cannot, of course, be avoided). Organizing more frequent visits to special primary and secondary schools could also be beneficial, where students can familiarize themselves with teaching methods for working with students with special educational needs and subsequently reflect on these experiences.

It is essential not to underestimate the theoretical preparation related to the philosophy of inclusive education and its contribution to shaping modern schools that address the diverse educational needs of students and the professional needs of teachers in school practice. Student teachers should be familiarized with the possibilities for meaningful integration of students and their engagement in mainstream education. At this point, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of close collaboration with the school support team (understanding its functions and resulting competencies) and with parents, who essentially implement interventions (strategies for working with students) developed by teaching and professional staff into the home environment. Adhering to the principle of consistent educational influence on the student is crucial. A teacher rarely manages on their own with their existing competencies (for example, in the case of diagnostics).

Additionally, it is appropriate to monitor the specifics of student teachers' professional preparation for introducing inclusive practices into teaching within the foundational, mandatory subjects (not only those compulsory elective courses from the social science foundation in the bachelor'sprogram). Efforts should be made to structure subjects such as subject-specific didactics inclusively. Several institutes within the Faculty of Natural Sciences at UPJŠ aim to develop

methodologies grounded in constructivist-oriented education. This approach includes the stable integration of concepts like verbal assessment and student self-assessment, which can ultimately be seen as a platform for implementing inclusive practices from the teacher's perspective.

6. Limitations

The primary limitation in generalizing the research findings to student teachers at UPJŠ lies in the use of convenience sampling, which challenges the validity of our conclusions. Additional limitations include the small number of students involved in the study, the imbalance in student teachers regarding the types of teaching practices completed (with a predominance of those who only participated in the first two types of practices focused on observing teaching activities), and the use of principal component analysis to examine the structure of the research instrument. Principal component analysis typically yields overly optimistic solutions, as it does not constitute true exploratory factor analysis.

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