

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education in Ecuador: A Multidimensional Analysis of Positive Perceptions and Pedagogical Challenges

Actitudes de los docentes hacia la educación inclusiva en Ecuador: un análisis multidimensional de las percepciones positivas y los desafíos pedagógicos.

Gli atteggiamenti degli insegnanti nei confronti dell'educazione inclusiva in Ecuador: un'analisi multidimensionale delle percezioni positive e delle sfide pedagogiche.

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Abstract

Teachers' attitudes are central to the implementation of inclusive education, yet evidence on their multidimensional structure remains limited in Ecuador. This study examined teachers' attitudes using a contextual adaptation of the Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES) and explored differences according to demographic and professional variables. A quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional design was applied to a convenience sample of 103 in-service teachers from public, private, and government-aided private schools in Manabí. The adapted instrument showed excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .928$) and adequate construct validity (KMO = .886; Bartlett's $\chi^2 = 1136.24$, $p < .001$). Teachers reported favorable overall attitudes ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.73$), with Social Inclusion receiving the highest score ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.78$). Physical, Academic, and Behavioral Inclusion remained favorable but comparatively lower. Most demographic and professional variables produced no significant differences; however, advanced training was associated with more favorable Social Inclusion scores. The results indicate that positive attitudes provide an important foundation for inclusion but do not by themselves demonstrate readiness for implementation. Continued professional development and institutional support are required to translate favorable perceptions into effective inclusive practices.

Keywords: inclusive education; teachers' attitudes; educational inclusion; teacher education; Ecuador.

Resumen

Las actitudes docentes son fundamentales para implementar la educación inclusiva; sin embargo, en Ecuador aún es limitada la evidencia sobre su estructura multidimensional. Este estudio analizó las actitudes de los docentes mediante una adaptación contextualizada de la Escala de Actitudes hacia la Educación Inclusiva (ATIES) y exploró diferencias según variables demográficas y profesionales. Se aplicó un diseño cuantitativo, no experimental y transversal a una muestra por conveniencia de 103 docentes en ejercicio de instituciones fiscales, particulares y fiscomisionales de Manabí. El instrumento adaptado presentó excelente consistencia interna (α de Cronbach = .928) y adecuada validez de constructo (KMO = .886; χ^2 de Bartlett = 1136.24, $p < .001$). Los participantes mostraron actitudes globales favorables ($M = 4.06$; $DE = 0.73$), con la mayor puntuación en Inclusión Social ($M = 4.46$; $DE = 0.78$). Las dimensiones Física, Académica y Conductual también fueron favorables, aunque relativamente inferiores. La mayoría de las variables demográficas y profesionales no produjo diferencias significativas; no obstante, la formación avanzada se relacionó con puntuaciones más favorables en Inclusión Social. Los resultados muestran que las actitudes positivas constituyen una base importante, pero no prueban por sí mismas preparación para la implementación. Se requiere formación continua y apoyo institucional para convertir las percepciones favorables en prácticas inclusivas efectivas.

Palabras clave: educación inclusiva; actitudes docentes; inclusión educativa; formación docente; Ecuador.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education is a central component of equitable and high-quality educational systems. It has evolved from a model focused on placing students with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream classrooms toward a broader commitment to participation, diversity, accessibility, and meaningful learning for all students (Ainscow, 2020; Florian, 2014; UNESCO, 2020). International frameworks, including the Salamanca Statement and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, have reinforced the obligation of educational systems to remove barriers to learning and participation (UNESCO, 1994; United Nations, 2006).

Despite these advances, a persistent gap remains between inclusive policies and classroom practice. Effective inclusion requires accessible environments, curriculum differentiation, formative assessment, behavioral support, collaboration, and sustained institutional resources. Teachers are therefore key agents because their daily decisions determine how policy is translated into opportunities for participation and learning (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Teachers' attitudes influence their willingness to accept learner diversity, adapt instruction, collaborate with specialists, and implement inclusive strategies. Nevertheless, attitudes are neither fixed nor one-dimensional; they develop through the interaction of professional preparation, experience, perceived competence, school culture, and institutional support (de Boer et al., 2011; Van Steen & Wilson, 2020). Favorable beliefs are consequently necessary, but they may coexist with uncertainty about the practical demands of inclusion.

Professional preparation is especially relevant because it can strengthen knowledge, self-efficacy, and confidence when responding to heterogeneous classrooms. Evidence indicates that training and prior experience are more consistent predictors of favorable attitudes than demographic characteristics alone (Savolainen et al., 2012; Sharma et al., 2008; Van Steen & Wilson, 2020). This distinction redirects attention from whether teachers endorse inclusion to whether they possess the competencies and support needed to implement it.

The Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES) operationalizes this complexity through four dimensions: Physical, Academic, Behavioral, and Social Inclusion (Wilczenski, 1992, 1995). A multidimensional approach can reveal that teachers strongly value interaction and belonging while expressing greater concern about curriculum adaptation, accessibility, or behavioral

management. Such information is more useful for professional development than a single global attitude score.

Latin American countries have incorporated inclusive principles into legislation, but implementation remains uneven because of disparities in resources, specialized services, and teacher education. Ecuador reflects this regional pattern: its legal framework recognizes inclusion and non-discrimination, yet empirical evidence based on standardized multidimensional instruments remains scarce. Research conducted in specific national contexts is necessary because attitudes are shaped by educational policies, preparation systems, institutional capacity, and sociocultural conditions (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2020).

Accordingly, the principal gap concerns the limited evidence on how Ecuadorian teachers evaluate distinct dimensions of inclusion and whether these evaluations vary across professional profiles. Addressing this gap can identify the dimensions that require targeted pedagogical support and provide psychometric evidence for a contextualized instrument.

The objective of this study was to examine Ecuadorian teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education using a contextual adaptation of the ATIES and to determine whether overall and dimension-specific attitudes differed according to demographic and professional characteristics.

Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1. Ecuadorian teachers will report generally favorable attitudes toward inclusive education.

H2. Teachers' attitudes will differ across the four dimensions of inclusive education assessed by the adapted ATIES.

H3. Teachers with more extensive professional preparation in inclusive education will report more favorable attitudes than teachers with limited or no preparation.

H4. Teachers' overall attitudes toward inclusive education will not differ substantially according to demographic characteristics but may vary according to their level of professional preparation in inclusive education.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

A quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional, descriptive-comparative design was used to characterize teachers' attitudes across the four ATIES dimensions and examine differences according to demographic and professional variables. The design was appropriate for identifying patterns and associations without manipulating study conditions.

2.2. Participants

The study was conducted in Manabí, Ecuador, from 7 November to 12 December 2025. The convenience sample comprised 103 in-service teachers from public, private, and government-aided private institutions and from different educational levels. Participants were recruited through professional networks. Eligibility required active employment in an Ecuadorian educational institution, voluntary acceptance of informed consent, and completion of the questionnaire. The non-probability procedure limits population-level generalization but was suitable for the exploratory contextual objective.

2.3. Instrument

Data were collected through an Ecuadorian contextual adaptation of the Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES) developed by Wilczenski (1992, 1995). Terminology and wording were adjusted to current Ecuadorian educational practice while preserving the original conceptual structure. The final instrument contained 16 items equally distributed across Physical, Academic, Behavioral, and Social Inclusion. Responses used a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating more favorable attitudes. Internal consistency was estimated for the overall scale and each dimension using Cronbach's alpha. Construct validity was examined through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure, Bartlett's test of sphericity, and exploratory factor analysis. These procedures assessed the adequacy of the correlation matrix and the correspondence between the empirical structure and the four-dimensional model.

2.4. Data Collection Procedure and Ethical Considerations

The questionnaire was administered online between November and December 2025. Before accessing it, participants received information about the study's purpose, voluntary nature, confidentiality, and academic use of the data. No personally identifiable information was requested; responses were stored in a secure database accessible only to the research team.

Participants could withdraw without consequence. The procedure followed principles of autonomy, anonymity, confidentiality, and responsible data management.

2.5. Statistical Analysis

Analyses were performed in IBM SPSS Statistics. Frequencies and percentages described participants, while means and standard deviations summarized ATIES scores. Reliability and construct validity were evaluated as described above. Assumptions of normality and homogeneity were examined before group comparisons. Welch's independent-samples t test was used for two-group comparisons when appropriate, and one-way ANOVA for variables with three or more categories. Cohen's d and eta squared (η^2) quantified effect size; statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

3. Results

3.1. Participant Characteristics

The sample included 103 teachers, of whom 83.5% were women and 16.5% men. Participants represented different age groups, qualifications, levels of teaching experience, educational stages, and institution types. Master's degrees were reported by 47.6%, 85.4% had worked with students with SEN, and 89.3% had received limited or advanced training in inclusive education. These characteristics provided heterogeneous professional profiles for the comparative analyses.

3.2. Psychometric Properties of the Ecuadorian Adaptation of the ATIES

The adapted ATIES demonstrated excellent overall internal consistency ($\alpha = .928$). Dimension-level coefficients ranged from .694 for Physical Inclusion to .927 for Social Inclusion. Factorability was supported by KMO = .886 and a significant Bartlett's test, $\chi^2(120) = 1136.24$, $p < .001$; the four-factor solution explained 72.85% of total variance. Together, these indicators supported use of the contextual adaptation.

Table 1 Reliability of the Ecuadorian Adaptation of the ATIES

Dimension	Items	M	SD	Cronbach's α
Physical Inclusion	4	3.91	0.79	.694
Academic Inclusion	4	3.97	0.90	.809
Behavioral Inclusion	4	3.90	0.93	.877

Social Inclusion	4	4.46	0.78	.927
Overall ATIES	16	4.06	0.73	.928

Table 2 Construct Validity of the Ecuadorian Adaptation of the ATIES

Construct Validity Indicator	Value
KMO	.886
Bartlett's χ^2	1136.24
df	120
p	< .001
Variance explained by four factors	72.85%

3.3. Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education

Teachers reported favorable overall attitudes toward inclusive education (M = 4.06, SD = 0.73), but scores varied across dimensions. Social Inclusion was highest (M = 4.46, SD = 0.78; highly favorable). Academic (M = 3.97, SD = 0.90), Physical (M = 3.91, SD = 0.79), and Behavioral Inclusion (M = 3.90, SD = 0.93) remained favorable but comparatively lower. The pattern suggests stronger endorsement of interaction, acceptance, and belonging than confidence in dimensions requiring accessibility, curriculum adaptation, differentiated instruction, or behavioral support.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education by Dimension

Dimension	Items	M	SD	Interpretation
Physical Inclusion	4	3.91	0.79	Favorable
Academic Inclusion	4	3.97	0.90	Favorable
Behavioral Inclusion	4	3.90	0.93	Favorable
Social Inclusion	4	4.46	0.78	Highly favorable
Overall ATIES	16	4.06	0.73	Favorable

Item-level results were consistent with the dimensional pattern. The highest scores concerned interaction, empathy, social acceptance, belonging, and teachers' responsibility for inclusion. Lower scores concerned learning conditions for visual or hearing impairment and management of disruptive behavior. These contrasts identify the practical areas in which additional pedagogical preparation may be most valuable.

Table 4 Item-Level Descriptive Statistics for the Ecuadorian Adaptation of the ATIES

Dimension	Item	Abbreviated content	M	SD
Physical	1	Inclusion of students with physical disabilities with adequate support	4.38	0.89
Physical	2	Learning of students with visual impairment in regular classrooms	3.69	1.27
Physical	3	Participation of students with hearing impairment in regular classrooms	3.44	1.18
Physical	4	Access and full participation of students with reduced mobility	4.15	1.03
Academic	5	Achievement of academic goals by students with SEN	3.66	1.25
Academic	6	Benefits of curriculum adaptation	3.80	1.26
Academic	7	Functional academic programs within regular classrooms	4.04	1.05
Academic	8	Inclusive teaching and teacher professional development	4.40	0.93
Behavioral	9	Integration of students with behavioral problems	4.01	1.04
Behavioral	10	Management of disruptive behaviors in regular classrooms	3.49	1.15
Behavioral	11	Behavioral difficulties should not justify exclusion	3.97	1.13
Behavioral	12	Inclusion improves social skills of students with behavioral difficulties	4.13	1.03
Social	13	Interaction promotes respect and empathy	4.53	0.84
Social	14	Teacher role in promoting social acceptance	4.51	0.85
Social	15	Development of social skills through shared learning	4.34	0.85

Social	16	Inclusion strengthens school community and belonging	4.46	0.91
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3.4. Differences According to Demographic and Professional Variables

Overall ATIES scores did not differ significantly by gender, age, qualification, teaching experience, educational level taught, institution type, previous inclusive-education experience, or work with students with SEN. Effect sizes were small. Training in inclusive education showed the strongest trend, $F(2, 100) = 2.66, p = .075, \eta^2 = .051$, with progressively higher means from no training to advanced training, although the overall comparison did not reach $p < .05$.

Table 5 Differences in Overall ATIES Scores According to Demographic and Professional Variables

Variable	Test	Statistic	p	Effect size
Gender	Welch's t	-0.88	.386	d = -0.18
Age	ANOVA	F = 0.39	.761	$\eta^2 = .012$
Highest educational level	ANOVA	F = 0.11	.892	$\eta^2 = .002$
Teaching experience	ANOVA	F = 0.40	.753	$\eta^2 = .012$
Educational level taught	ANOVA	F = 1.44	.235	$\eta^2 = .042$
Institution type	ANOVA	F = 0.26	.773	$\eta^2 = .005$
Experience in inclusive education	ANOVA	F = 0.95	.392	$\eta^2 = .019$
Training in inclusive education	ANOVA	F = 2.66	.075	$\eta^2 = .051$
Worked with students with SEN	Welch's t	0.72	.483	d = 0.23

Note. $p < .05$ was considered statistically significant.

Dimension-specific analysis identified one significant training effect: Social Inclusion differed across preparation levels, $F(2, 100) = 3.35, p = .039, \eta^2 = .063$. Post hoc comparisons showed higher scores among teachers with advanced training than among those with no training. Physical, Academic, and Behavioral Inclusion did not differ significantly.

Table 6 Differences in ATIES Dimensions According to Training in Inclusive Education

Dimension	No training M (SD)	Limited training M (SD)	Advanced training M (SD)	F	p	η^2
Physical Inclusion	3.64 (0.73)	3.86 (0.82)	4.20 (0.69)	2.32	.104	.044
Academic Inclusion	3.70 (1.08)	3.91 (0.91)	4.28 (0.72)	2.03	.136	.039
Behavioral Inclusion	3.84 (1.05)	3.83 (0.95)	4.13 (0.80)	0.92	.402	.018
Social Inclusion	4.11 (1.20)	4.41 (0.78)	4.78 (0.32)	3.35	.039	.063
Overall ATIES	3.82 (0.95)	4.00 (0.74)	4.35 (0.48)	2.66	.075	.051

Note. Post hoc comparisons showed a significant difference in Social Inclusion between teachers with advanced training and those with no training.

In summary, the instrument showed satisfactory psychometric performance, teachers expressed broadly favorable attitudes, and Social Inclusion was the most strongly endorsed dimension. Demographic variables were not decisive, whereas professional training was the most relevant differentiating factor. The results therefore support the hypotheses concerning generally favorable and multidimensional attitudes, while providing only partial support for the expected training effect.

4. Discussion

This study found favorable attitudes toward inclusive education among Ecuadorian teachers, while demonstrating that those attitudes were multidimensional. The overall score supported the expectation of broad acceptance, but the difference between Social Inclusion and the three more practice-intensive dimensions showed that agreement with inclusive values does not imply equal confidence across all areas of implementation. This distinction is consistent with international reviews showing that attitudes vary with the type of educational demand, perceived competence, and contextual support (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011; Van Steen & Wilson, 2020).

The particularly high Social Inclusion score indicates strong support for interaction, empathy, participation, acceptance, and belonging. By contrast, the relatively lower Physical, Academic,

and Behavioral scores point to greater perceived complexity when teachers must ensure accessibility, differentiate curricula, adapt assessment, manage behavior, or provide individualized support. These results should not be interpreted as opposition to inclusion; rather, they reveal the gap between philosophical endorsement and confidence in performing specialized pedagogical tasks (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Loreman, 2014).

Teacher self-efficacy helps explain this pattern. Educators may value inclusion while doubting their capacity to organize instruction for heterogeneous classrooms, particularly when resources or specialized support are limited (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Prior research similarly links attitudes and self-efficacy to professional preparation and supportive working conditions (Savolainen et al., 2012). Therefore, positive attitudes constitute a necessary foundation, but effective inclusion also requires competence, collaboration, resources, and institutional leadership.

Most demographic and professional characteristics did not significantly differentiate overall attitudes. This result agrees with evidence that age, gender, and years of experience are generally weaker predictors than training, perceived competence, and institutional context (de Boer et al., 2011; Van Steen & Wilson, 2020). Training showed the clearest pattern: teachers with advanced preparation reported significantly stronger Social Inclusion and higher, although not statistically significant, overall scores. The finding supports continued professional learning as a mechanism for consolidating inclusive dispositions and practice.

The practical implication is that professional development should move beyond awareness campaigns. Programs should prioritize curriculum differentiation, inclusive assessment, universal design for learning, accessibility, behavioral support, collaborative teaching, and evidence-based responses to diverse needs (Sharma et al., 2012). Schools and educational authorities must complement training with leadership, specialist services, adequate materials, and professional networks. Assigning responsibility to teachers without strengthening these conditions risks widening the gap between policy and classroom implementation (Ainscow, 2020; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; UNESCO, 2020).

Methodologically, the study provides initial evidence for the reliability and construct validity of an Ecuadorian contextual adaptation of the ATIES. Its four-dimensional structure allows

researchers and institutions to identify specific strengths and professional-development needs that a global score may conceal. The instrument may therefore support future national comparisons, program evaluation, and cross-cultural research, although further confirmation with larger and more diverse samples is required.

The findings must be interpreted in light of three limitations: convenience sampling in one province restricts generalizability; the cross-sectional design does not establish change or causality; and self-report data may be affected by social desirability. Future studies should use probability or geographically diverse samples, longitudinal or mixed-methods designs, and classroom observations to connect reported attitudes with actual practice. Despite these limitations, the study contributes evidence that inclusion depends on the interaction between favorable attitudes, professional capability, and systemic support.

The hypotheses were supported to different degrees. H1 was supported by the favorable overall mean, and H2 by the clear dimensional variation. H3 received partial support because advanced training was associated with significantly stronger Social Inclusion, while the remaining dimensions showed the same positive direction without reaching significance. H4 was largely supported: demographic characteristics did not substantially differentiate overall attitudes, whereas professional preparation displayed the most meaningful effect. This pattern suggests that modifiable professional conditions may be more informative for intervention than fixed personal characteristics.

Within Ecuador, these results are especially relevant because inclusive policy has expanded the responsibility of regular schools to educate increasingly diverse learners. Implementation, however, depends on whether teachers have opportunities to transform general commitment into specialized pedagogical action. The lower means in Physical, Academic, and Behavioral Inclusion identify concrete priorities for teacher education: accessible instructional environments, differentiated planning, flexible assessment, positive behavioral support, and interprofessional collaboration. Strengthening these capacities may improve both teacher self-efficacy and the sustainability of inclusive reforms, while preserving the strong social commitment already evident in the sample.

5. Conclusions

Ecuadorian teachers reported favorable attitudes toward inclusive education, but these attitudes differed across the Physical, Academic, Behavioral, and Social dimensions. Social Inclusion was most strongly endorsed, whereas the comparatively lower scores in the other dimensions indicate greater perceived difficulty when inclusion requires accessibility, curriculum adaptation, differentiated instruction, or behavioral management. Positive attitudes should therefore be interpreted as a necessary foundation rather than as proof of implementation readiness.

Professional training was the most relevant differentiating variable, particularly for Social Inclusion, while demographic characteristics produced no significant overall differences. Teacher education should consequently emphasize practical inclusive competencies and be accompanied by institutional leadership, specialist support, adequate resources, and collaborative professional networks. The adapted ATIES also showed satisfactory reliability and construct validity, supporting its use as a multidimensional diagnostic tool in future Ecuadorian studies.

Because the study used a convenience sample from one province, a cross-sectional design, and self-report measures, its conclusions should not be generalized beyond similar contexts. Future research should incorporate larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal or mixed-methods designs, and direct observation of inclusive practice. Overall, advancing inclusive education in Ecuador requires converting favorable teacher attitudes into sustained pedagogical capacity through continuous preparation and coherent institutional support.

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