



# Teachers' Professional Competence and Classroom Practices in Inclusive Education of Children with Special Needs: A Study in Malda District, West Bengal

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**Abstract:** The present study investigates the level of professional competence of teachers and its influence on classroom practices in inclusive education for children with special needs in Malda District, West Bengal. The present study adopts a quantitative research approach, aiming to objectively measure teachers' professional competence and classroom practices using statistical techniques. To systematically collect data from secondary school teachers, a descriptive survey method was employed. The population of the study comprised all secondary school teachers in Malda District, West Bengal, involved in inclusive education for children with special needs. A total of 80 teachers were selected as the sample to ensure adequate representation and manageable data collection. Simple random sampling was employed to provide each teacher an equal chance of selection, minimizing bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample. For the present study, a structured Likert scale questionnaire, named the "Teachers' Competence and Classroom Practices Scale (TCCPS)," was used as the primary tool to assess teachers' professional competence and classroom practices in inclusive education of children with special needs. Statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, t-test, and Pearson correlation were applied. The findings reveal that teachers possess a moderate to high level of professional competence; however, classroom practices remain moderately effective. A significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.68$ ) was found between competence and classroom practices, indicating that higher competence leads to better implementation.

**Keywords:** Professional Competence, Classroom Practices, Inclusive Education, Special Needs.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a contemporary educational approach that aims to provide equal learning opportunities for children with special needs by integrating them into mainstream classrooms. This approach not only fosters the academic, social, and emotional development of learners but also promotes principles of social justice and equity. Teachers play a pivotal role in the effective implementation of inclusive practices. Their professional competence—which encompasses knowledge, skills, and attitudes—directly influences classroom practices and the overall learning experience of children with special needs.

In the context of Malda District, inclusive education is gradually expanding; however, its effectiveness largely depends on teachers' preparedness, instructional strategies, and pedagogical skills. Competent teachers are able to design and implement lessons that accommodate diverse learning needs, facilitate peer interaction, and foster an inclusive and supportive classroom environment. Therefore, examining teachers' professional competence alongside their classroom practices provides critical insights for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of inclusive education.

## 2. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

Reviewing related literature is an essential step in research, as it involves the organized exploration and evaluation of earlier works connected to the study. It helps in establishing theoretical clarity and contextual understanding of the research problem. Therefore, significant prior studies have been critically reviewed to develop a clear basis for the current study. All of the reviews of this work that the researchers have done are discussed below.

**Avramidis & Norwich (2002):** Avramidis and Norwich conducted a comprehensive review examining teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. The study revealed that positive teacher attitudes significantly enhance teaching

effectiveness and inclusion success. Factors such as training, experience, and institutional support were found to influence these attitudes. Implication: Attitude acts as a foundation for effective inclusive classroom practices.

**Sharma & Desai (2002):** Sharma and Desai investigated teachers' concerns regarding inclusive education in India. The findings indicated that teachers often experience apprehension due to lack of training, insufficient resources, and inadequate institutional support. Implication: Professional competence alone is insufficient without systemic support.

**Das, Kuyini & Desai (2013):** This study explored whether Indian teachers are prepared for inclusive education. Results showed that although teachers possess theoretical knowledge, they lack practical skills required for classroom implementation. Implication: There exists a gap between competence and actual teaching practices.

**Singh, S., Kumar, S., & Singh, R. K. (2020).** Research explores "A study of attitude of teachers towards inclusive education. The objective was to examine teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on demographic variables. The sample consisted of 108 pre-service and in-service teachers selected through quota sampling. A survey method was used, and data were analyzed using statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, and t-test. The findings indicated moderate to favourable attitudes among teachers, with variations based on gender, locality, and service type.

**Chandra, S. (2021):** Researched on "Attitudes of Elementary School Teachers Towards Inclusive Education" The objective was to compare teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on various demographic variables. The sample consisted of 238 teachers selected through random and purposive sampling techniques. A survey method was used with a standardized attitude scale. The findings revealed significant differences in attitudes based on gender, experience, and qualifications, with male and urban teachers showing more positive attitudes.

### **3.RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

Inclusive education seeks to ensure equitable learning opportunities for children with special needs; however, its effectiveness is largely determined by teachers' professional competence. In Malda District, despite gradual expansion of inclusive practices, teachers often encounter challenges in implementing effective classroom strategies due to insufficient training and resources. Therefore, this study is imperative to examine the professional competence of teachers and its impact on classroom practices, providing critical insights to enhance the quality of inclusive education.

### **4. OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF IMPORTANT TERMS**

**4.1.** In this study, Professional Competence refers to the combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable teachers to effectively plan, manage, and deliver instruction in inclusive classrooms. It reflects their preparedness, instructional capabilities, and ability to address the diverse learning needs of children with special needs.

**4.2.** Classroom Practices refer to the actual strategies, methods, and behaviors employed by teachers during teaching and learning in inclusive settings. It reflects how effectively teachers translate their professional competence into practical actions that support the participation and learning of all students, including those with special needs.

#### **4.3. Inclusive Education**

In this study, inclusive education refers to an educational approach that ensures the integration of children with special needs into regular classrooms. It emphasizes equal opportunities, participation, and the provision of necessary support to meet diverse learning needs.

#### **4.4. Children with Special Needs**

In this study, children with special needs refer to those learners who require additional support due to physical, intellectual, emotional, or learning difficulties. They necessitate specialized attention and appropriate educational provisions to ensure their effective participation and development.

### **5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The present study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess teachers' professional competence in inclusive education.

2. To examine classroom practices in inclusive education.
3. To analyze the relationship between teachers' professional competence and their classroom practices.
4. To study gender differences in competence and classroom practices.

## 6. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the above objectives, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant correlation between teachers' professional competence and their classroom practices in inclusive education.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in professional competence and classroom practices between male and female teachers.

## 7. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The present study is delimited to the following areas:

- i. The study is confined to secondary schools in Malda District, West Bengal.
- ii. The sample is limited to 80 teachers selected through simple random sampling.
- iii. The study focuses only on teachers' professional competence and classroom practices, excluding other factors such as administrative support and parental involvement.
- iv. The data collection is restricted to the specific period of the study, and therefore, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the selected schools.

## 8. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

### 8.1. Methodology

The present study adopts a quantitative research approach, aiming to objectively measure teachers' professional competence and classroom practices using statistical techniques. To systematically collect data from secondary school teachers, a descriptive survey method was employed. This combination of approach and method allows the researcher to obtain measurable data and analyze relationships between professional competence and classroom practices in an inclusive education setting.

### 8.2 Variables of the Study

The study includes two primary variables, namely teachers' professional competence and classroom practices in inclusive education. Gender is considered as a categorical variable, comprising male and female teachers, to analyze group differences..

### 8.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

**Population:** The population of the study comprised all secondary school teachers in Malda District, West Bengal, involved in inclusive education for children with special needs.

**Sample:** A total of 80 teachers were selected as the sample to ensure adequate representation and manageable data collection.

**Sampling Technique:** Simple random sampling was employed to provide each teacher an equal chance of selection, minimizing bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample.

### 8.4. TOOLS OF THE STUDY

For the present study, a structured Likert scale questionnaire, named the "Teachers' Competence and Classroom Practices Scale (TCCPS)," was used as the primary tool to assess teachers' professional competence and classroom

practices in inclusive education of children with special needs. The scale was developed and standardized by the present researcher. Responses were recorded on a 5-point scale: Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1, enabling quantitative measurement of teachers’ attitudes, skills, and classroom practices.

**8.5 Validity and Reliability**

**Validity:**

The content validity of the instrument was established through expert review by specialists in the field of education. Their valuable suggestions were incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items.

**Reliability:**

The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach’s Alpha method. The obtained reliability coefficient was 0.82, indicating a good level of internal consistency of the questionnaire.

**8.6 Data Collection Procedure**

Data were collected through direct interaction with the respondents. Prior informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality of their responses was strictly maintained. The collected data were systematically coded, classified, and tabulated for further statistical analysis.

**8.7 Statistical Techniques**

The following statistical techniques were used for data analysis:

- **Mean** – to determine the average level of teachers’ professional competence and classroom practices.
- **Standard Deviation** – to assess the variability in responses.
- **t-test** – to compare male and female teachers with respect to professional competence and classroom practices.
- **Pearson’s Correlation** – to examine the relationship between teachers’ professional competence and their classroom practices.

**9. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA**

The present chapter deals with the analysis and interpretation of data collected from 80 in-service teachers. The data have been analysed in accordance with the objectives of the study using appropriate statistical techniques such as Mean, Standard Deviation, Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation, and t-test.

<b>Table-1: Classification of Levels for Interpretation of Teachers’ Professional Competence and Classroom Practices</b>		
<b>Level of Interpretation</b>	<b>Mean Score Range (Professional Competence)</b>	<b>Mean Score Range (Classroom Practices)</b>
<b>Low</b>	<b>1.00 – 2.33</b>	<b>1.00 – 2.33</b>
<b>Moderate</b>	<b>2.34 – 3.66</b>	<b>2.34 – 3.66</b>
<b>High</b>	<b>3.67 – 5.00</b>	<b>3.67 – 5.00</b>

**Interpretation:**

In the case of teachers’ professional competence, mean scores ranging from 1.00 to 2.33 were considered as indicating a low level of competence. Scores between 2.34 and 3.66 were interpreted as moderate, while scores from 3.67 to 5.00 indicated a high level of competence.

In regard to classroom practices, mean scores ranging from 1.00 to 2.33 indicated a low level, scores between 2.34 and 3.66 indicated a moderate level, and scores from 3.67 to 5.00 indicated a high level of classroom practices in inclusive education.

### 9.1. Analysis of Data Pertaining to Objective 1

**Objective 1:** To assess teachers' professional competence in inclusive education.

<b>Table-2: Professional Competence of Teachers in Inclusive Education.</b>				
<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Level of Competence</b>
<b>Male Teachers</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>0.55</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Female Teachers</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>4.05</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>High</b>

**Interpretation:**

The above table reveals that both male and female teachers possess a high level of professional competence. However, the mean score of female teachers (4.10) is slightly higher than that of male teachers (3.90). The overall mean (4.05) indicates a high level of competence among teachers, with moderate variability.

### 9.2. Analysis of Data Pertaining to Objective 2

**Objective 2:** To examine classroom practices in inclusive education

<b>Table-3: Classroom Practices of Teachers in Inclusive Education.</b>				
<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Level of Practice</b>
<b>Male Teachers</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>0.62</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Female Teachers</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>0.58</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>3.85</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>High</b>

**Interpretation:**

It is evident that both male and female teachers demonstrate a high level of classroom practices in inclusive education. Female teachers show slightly better practices compared to male teachers. The overall mean (3.85) also indicates a high level, with moderate variation.

**9.3. Analysis of Data Pertaining to Objective 3**

**Objective 3:** To analyse the relationship between competence and classroom practices

**Hypothesis (H<sub>01</sub>):** There is no significant relationship between competence and classroom practices.

<b>Table- 4: Correlation between Professional Competence and Classroom Practices</b>							
<b>Variables Compared</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>r-value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Level of Significance</b>	<b>Nature of Relationship</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>Competence &amp; Classroom Practices</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>0.68</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>0.01</b>	<b>Significant (0.01)</b>	<b>Positive (High)</b>	<b>Significant</b>

**Interpretation:**

The obtained correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.68$ ) indicates a high positive relationship between teachers’ professional competence and their classroom practices. The degree of freedom ( $df = 78$ ) and the p-value (0.01) reveal that the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) is rejected.

This result implies that teachers with higher professional competence tend to demonstrate more effective classroom practices in inclusive education. In other words, an increase in professional competence is associated with an improvement in classroom practices.

**9.4. Analysis of Data Pertaining to Objective 4**

**Objective 4:** To study gender differences in competence and classroom practices

**Hypothesis (H<sub>02</sub>):** There is no significant difference between male and female teachers.

<b>Table-5 : Gender Difference in Professional Competence and Classroom Practices</b>									
<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>SED</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Level of Significance</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>Male Teachers</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>0.55</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>1.67</b>	<b>0.09</b>	<b>Not Significant (0.05)</b>	<b>Not Significant</b>
<b>Female Teachers</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>0.5</b>						

**Interpretation:**

The above table reveals that female teachers (Mean = 4.10) have slightly higher scores than male teachers (Mean = 3.90) in terms of professional competence and classroom practices. However, the calculated t-value (1.67) with degree of freedom ( $df = 78$ ) and p-value (0.09) indicates that the difference between the two groups is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant difference between male and female teachers regarding their professional competence and classroom practices in inclusive education. Although female teachers show marginally higher performance, the difference is not statistically meaningful.

## 10. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Based on the analysis and interpretation of data, the following major findings have been drawn:

1. The study reveals that teachers possess a high level of professional competence in inclusive education. Although both male and female teachers show high competence, female teachers have slightly higher mean scores than male teachers.
2. It is found that teachers demonstrate a high level of classroom practices in inclusive education. Female teachers exhibit marginally better classroom practices compared to male teachers.
3. A significant positive relationship exists between teachers' professional competence and their classroom practices. This indicates that higher competence leads to more effective classroom practices.
4. There is no significant difference between male and female teachers in terms of professional competence and classroom practices, although female teachers have slightly higher mean scores.

## 11. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study have several important implications for the field of education:

1. **Teacher Training Programmes:**  
There is a need to strengthen teacher training programmes focusing on inclusive education to further enhance teachers' professional competence.
2. **Professional Development:**  
Continuous in-service training, workshops, and seminars should be organised to improve teachers' classroom practices in inclusive settings.
3. **Focus on Competence Building:**  
Since competence significantly influences classroom practices, special emphasis should be given to developing pedagogical skills and inclusive teaching strategies.
4. **Equal Opportunity for Teachers:**  
As no significant gender difference is found, equal opportunities should be provided to both male and female teachers in training and professional development programmes.
5. **Policy Implementation:**  
Educational policies should support the development of inclusive education by providing adequate resources, training, and support to teachers.

## 12. CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

On the basis of the findings, it can be concluded that teachers involved in inclusive education possess adequate professional competence and are able to implement effective classroom practices. The strong positive relationship between competence and classroom practices suggests that improving teachers' professional competence can enhance the quality of inclusive teaching. Moreover, gender does not significantly influence teachers' competence or their classroom practices. This indicates that both male and female teachers are equally capable of handling inclusive classrooms effectively.

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