Teachers' Experiences, Attitudes, and Perceptions towards Early Inclusion in Urban Settings

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Abstract

Given that inclusion benefits *all* children, it is important to understand why there are discrepancies in its implementation. Understanding teachers' views on inclusion may help identify ways to improve its implementation and prevent disparities. Although teachers' beliefs about inclusion have been widely explored, the beliefs and experiences of early childhood general and special education teachers in urban settings remain relatively understudied. This study explored early childhood educators' perceptions of inclusion in urban schools, using a mixed-method approach. The results from the qualitative focus group interviews (n = 13) reveal that most teachers have positive beliefs about inclusion and that there are specific benefits, challenges, and needs concerning early inclusion in urban settings. The analysis of the survey data (n = 36) shows differences in beliefs about inclusion among teachers of different ages and/or years of experience. Implications for research, policy, and practice are discussed.

Keywords: early childhood, experiences, inclusive practice, teachers, urban schools

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Introduction

Inclusion is highlighted in several national policies and legislation. Most relevantly, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004) upholds inclusion, stating that students with disabilities (SWD) need to be instructed in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE; IDEA, 2004; see also Lequia et al., 2020). However, a common definition of inclusion in early childhood has only recently been proposed through a joint effort by the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council of Exceptional Children and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009). According to their position statement, inclusion in early childhood must promote the access and participation of all young children and their families in communities, social interactions, and learning, with supports across different contexts (NAEYC, 2009). Their position statement presents "access, participation, and supports" as core elements of high-quality inclusion in early childhood educational settings. The challenge lies in that the implementation of high-quality inclusion can differ based on several factors, such as different program philosophies or contextual needs in schools.

Implementation of Inclusion in Diverse Educational Contexts

Variance in the implementation of inclusion has been documented. For example, SWDs were differentially included in general education settings based on disability type and severity, as well as racial and ethnic background (Odom, 2000; National Council on Disability [NCD], 2018). Ryndak, Alper, Hughes, and McDonnell (2012) found that students who need extensive support at schools, such as those with severe autism, are less likely to spend their time in general education environments. Additionally, disparities in inclusion for students with disabilities have also been documented by geographical location. For example, previous research indicated that

inclusive practices differed between the western and eastern regions of the United States and between urban and rural settings (Ryndak et al., 2012; Short & Martin, 2005). In addition, NCD (2018) reported that 88% of students in the Pacific Islands and 84% in Alabama spent the majority of their time in general education classrooms. In contrast, only 37% of students in Hawaii, 47% in Montana, and 53% in Illinois and Arkansas were included in general education classrooms 80% or more of the time. NCD also added that compared to their white peers in suburban and rural neighborhoods who do not have a disability, students of color with disabilities in urban settings are more likely to be excluded from general educational and social environments.

Inclusion takes different forms based on various factors, and greater amounts of time in only general education settings do not necessarily equate to greater learning for SWDs. Thus, disproportionate inclusive opportunities do not undoubtedly defy legal requirements or meet the needs of all SWDs (Lequia et al., 2020). Therefore, inclusion needs to be examined and monitored in various contexts to ensure a comprehensive understanding of inclusive practices that benefit all children.

When quality of inclusion is ensured, inclusion has been known to benefit all children, including students with and without disabilities. Multiple studies have identified benefits to students without disabilities, such as helping them learn flexibility and empathy (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Darrow, 1999; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Short & Martin, 2005). For SWDs, the positive impacts of inclusion include increased alertness, positive changes in eating and sleeping habits (Downing, Eichinger, & Williams, 1997), increased opportunities for social inclusion and enjoyment, and increased levels of self-esteem and a sense of belonging (Berry, 2006; Janney, Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995; Shady, Luther, &

Richman, 2013). Because inclusion benefits *all* children, teachers' experiences with its implementation need to be considered and examined to ensure that all students have the opportunity to benefit from optimal inclusive practices.

Educators' Perceptions of Inclusion in Different Educational Contexts

Educators' feelings and beliefs about inclusion can impact their implementation of inclusive education. Understanding teachers' views on inclusion, including their concerns and experiences, may help in promoting inclusive practices within the classroom at both the local and national levels (i.e., developing policy on inclusion; Smith & Smith, 2000). According to Odom (2000), early childhood teachers perceive inclusion as both beneficial and concerning. In the implementation of early inclusion, both early childhood and special education teachers play important roles. Thus, both their perceptions and understandings of inclusive education are crucial to optimizing inclusive practices.

Scholars have explored teachers' perceptions of inclusion at various grade levels (elementary, middle, and high schools), geographical locations (rural and urban), specializations and credentials (general and special educators, special education training, teachers' experience of working with SWD; Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Klingner & Vaughn, 2002; Kwon, Hong, & Jeon, 2017), and disciplines (math, physical education, and music teachers; Damore & Murray, 2009; DeSimone & Parmar, 2006; Hodge, Ammah, Casebolt, Lamaster, & O'Sullivan, 2004; Short & Martin, 2005). For example, a study involving interviews with inclusion specialists, administrators, and general education teachers in an urban elementary school showed that special education teachers with more extensive training in individualized support for SWDs facilitated inclusion more successfully than general education teachers (Klingner & Vaughn, 2002). Similarly, greater experience working with SWDs and intensive training in special

education (Avramidis et al., 2000; Kwon et al., 2017) were related to more positive attitudes towards inclusion.

Moreover, Short and Martin (2005) explored rural high school teachers' attitudes toward inclusion using interview and survey methods. Their results revealed that general educators in rural settings supported inclusion but felt they were not sufficiently trained to teach SWDs in inclusive environments. Damore and Murray (2009) discussed that the current literature on teachers' perceptions of inclusion was more related to rural school settings than urban ones. The authors added that teachers in urban settings typically experience a wide range of challenges to inclusive practices such as limited resources, high teacher turnover, and a high volume of unqualified teachers.

In particular, teachers in urban settings may also face unique challenges to inclusion, given an even wider array of student characteristics (e.g., poverty, cultural diversity, English language learners). For example, a study on teachers' beliefs about self-efficacy reported that while a majority of teachers spoke only English, they were uncertain whether promoting the use of English vs. children's native languages would better promote inclusion for culturally and linguistically diverse SWDs in inclusive classrooms (Chu, 2013). Despite these challenges, urban educators are shown to value inclusion (Damore & Murray, 2009). Notably, special educators present more positive perceptions of inclusion than general educators (Damore & Murray, 2009).

Although teachers' perceptions and beliefs about inclusion have been widely studied, specific groups remain relatively understudied. Most of the current literature focuses on teachers of older school-aged students (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006) in rural settings (Short & Martin, 2005) rather than early childhood teachers in urban settings. Moreover, most studies with early childhood teachers exclusively utilize quantitative measures (Leatherman, 2007; Smith & Smith,

2000) or include general educators' perspectives (e.g., Hsieh & Hsieh, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2000). For example, Hsieh and Hsieh (2012) recently investigated urban general educators' perceptions of inclusive education using a survey, reporting the relationships across teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, demographic information, and program context. They found that positive past experiences with SWDs were related to urban early childhood general educators' positive attitudes towards inclusion.

To add evidence to the existing literature, we adopted a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively explore the inclusion perceptions and beliefs of general and special education teachers working with young children (ages birth-8; NAEYC, 2009) in an urban setting.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do early childhood (EC) teachers in urban settings conceptualize inclusion?
2. What are their experiences with and recommendations for inclusion?

    2-a. Do EC teachers' perceptions about inclusion differ by demographic characteristics (i.e., age, years of teaching experience, types of license, ability to speak a language other than English)?

Methods

We adopted a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2018). In this design, researchers collect both qualitative and quantitative data and analyze the two sets of data separately (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Researchers then compare the results from both data sets to see if they relate to, support, or confirm each other and develop integrated findings and implications. In this study, we collected data from qualitative focus group interviews and an online survey. As the main source of data for this study, focus group interviews were conducted first, as they allow researchers to elicit more detailed information from the targeted group of

individuals (i.e., early childhood teachers). For the purpose of validity, individual member-check interviews via phone were conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Second, an online survey was administered to support the qualitative data and to answer the research questions. Particularly, the survey was used to explore if there were any significant differences in early childhood teachers' ratings of attitudes and beliefs about inclusion based on their demographic characteristics (i.e., age) and teaching experiences (i.e., number of years teaching in inclusive settings).

Participants and Recruitment

Prior to this study, the university institutional review board (IRB) approved all study activities. The first and second authors obtained consent from the participants before the interview and survey participation.

Focus group interviews. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling procedure (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling was used to recruit early childhood teachers (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling is one of the most common sampling techniques among qualitative researchers and entails actively selecting participants that are most relevant for the research problem (Taylor et al., 2015). By selecting and focusing on early childhood teachers, these information-rich cases provided the greatest insight and in-depth understanding of the research phenomena at hand. Given that this study aimed to learn about the attitudes and beliefs about inclusion among early childhood educators in an urban area, all focus groups were conducted in a large metropolitan city in the Midwest. Recruitment occurred primarily through the distribution of flyers to public schools' and universities' bulletin boards. Interested participants contacted the second author to register for a focus group. Inclusionary criteria required that the individuals were licensed teachers with experience working in urban early

childhood settings and had more than one year of teaching experience. Each participant self-identified their eligibility before the interviews by filling out a pre-screening form. Fifteen teachers contacted the second author. Thirteen teachers who met the required criteria participated in the focus group interviews. Four focus group interviews were conducted. The participants' years of teaching experience ranged from 7 to 30 years. Some had taught a wide range of grades, from toddlers to high school. No incentives were provided. See Table 1 for additional information on participants' characteristics. All names are pseudonyms.

Survey. A convenience sampling strategy (Stapleton, 2010) was used to identify potential survey respondents. Convenience sampling involves recruiting participants who are easily accessible to conduct research (Stapleton, 2010). The survey was designed as a two-part questionnaire, with a total of 32 questions. Part I included 15 attitudinal statements, and Part II included 16 items related to participants' demographic information, such as educational background, age, and bilingual status. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to share their opinions about "what researchers should know to better understand how students with disabilities balance their lives" as an open-ended question. No participants responded to this item. A total of 278 early childhood teachers were identified by using the contact information available online from 20 urban school and community childcare centers. Participants from the focus group interviews were also contacted for the survey.

The study information and the link to the web-based survey (Qualtrics^{XM}) were distributed to each teacher via email, with a maximum of three email invitations within a one-week interval. The potential survey respondents answered three screening questions before participating in the survey. The screening questions were as follows: (1) Are you licensed to teach young students (birth-8 years old)? (2) Do you have one or more type(s) of license (general

education, special education, or related services)? and (3) Do you have a year or more of teaching experience in an early childhood education (ECE) setting?

Of the 278 teachers contacted via email, 44 teachers self-identified their eligibility before their participation in the survey. Seven teachers were not eligible to participate in the survey per screening criteria. The 37 teachers who answered "yes" to all three screening questions were considered as qualified respondents, thus yielding a 13.3% response rate. However, one respondent's responses were incomplete. Therefore, they were excluded from the data analysis. The 36 respondents reported having worked with children with disabilities, ranging from 3 to 11 types of disabilities, including learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and emotional disorders. Four of the 36 respondents participated in the focus group interviews. Table 2 presents the demographics of the respondents.

Data Collection

Focus group interviews and member checks. Focus group interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2000) were arranged and conducted once enough participants were recruited to have variability within interview sessions. The completed interviews included three to four participants. The groups were large enough to include a variety of perspectives (Krueger, 1994), but small enough to encourage expanded participation by all participants (Morgan, 1998). Focus groups were scheduled during the early evening in a private and comfortable setting on campus. Four focus group interviews were conducted. Member checks were completed after all group interviews.

Self-administered forms that requested demographic information were distributed prior to participation in the focus groups. A semi-structured interview protocol was used (Patton, 1990). Interview questions were developed by the first and second authors using literature on inclusion

and by reviewing other focus group instruments that focused on inclusion (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Shogren, McCart, Lyon, & Sailor, 2015; Silberman, 1969; Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker, 2000; see Table 3 for interview protocol).

The focus group interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol, developed by the first and second authors through a review of literature on inclusion, including other focus group instruments (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Shogren, McCart, Lyon, & Sailor, 2015; Silberman, 1969; Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker, 2000; see Table 3 for interview protocol). The focus group protocol was shared with retired early childhood teachers, and minor wording changes were made in response to their feedback (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The authors decided against providing participants with a definition of inclusion within EC (i.e., NAEYC, 2009) to avoid limiting their responses. To fully explore their perceptions of inclusion, participants were asked to think of inclusion from their own experiences.

The second author was the interview moderator, and the assisting graduate student (third author) was present to write field notes during each focus group. The moderator was an educator who had experience working with young children in both general and special education settings. Both authors were trained and had experience conducting high-quality interviews and focus groups characterized by rich descriptive detail. Throughout data collection and analysis, the second author engaged in reflexive practices (e.g., field notes) to help address any biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each focus group ranged from 48 to 64 minutes in length.

Four participants from the focus groups (Kate, Dan, Amy, and Sophia) were contacted after the initial data analysis for individual member-check interviews. They received a summary of the

focus group transcript (with pseudonyms) via email and were asked to validate, add, clarify, or change anything mentioned. None of the contacted participants recommended any changes.

Survey. The researchers developed the 15 attitude statements on the survey after reviewing the previous literature on schoolwide inclusion reforms (Shogren et al., 2015), teachers' perceptions of inclusion (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), barriers to inclusion (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995), and teachers' attitudes towards inclusion (Silberman, 1969; Van Reusen et al., 2000). Then, the format of the survey and its administration method were refined using the guidelines of Stapleton (2010), which were developed to improve the quality of survey design in social science research. The survey consisted of 15 attitude statements to be rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree) with one open-ended question and demographic questions (i.e., gender, age, years of teaching experience, ability to speak a language other than English). Teachers' language status was considered given the diversity of the student population in City A, where the study occurred (18.8% English language learners; City A Public Schools, 2019). The 15 attitude statements represented three themes: (1) conceptualization of inclusion, (2) benefits of inclusion, and (3) challenges to inclusion. However, these categories were not presented to the participants. Table 4 depicted the 15 attitude items within the three categories.

Data Analysis

Focus group interviews and member-check interviews. All audio-recorded focus groups and member-check interviews were transcribed verbatim by the third and fourth authors. The first and second authors inductively and deductively analyzed the focus group transcripts. First, they adopted the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to code and compare the data inductively. The constant comparison method organizes and groups data to

answer the research questions (Saldaña, 2016). Through the data analytic method, starting from the first focus group transcript, the two authors independently coded the transcripts multiple times for recurring themes using a line-by-line examination of the text (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We used descriptive coding to summarize the data into meaningful segments (Saldaña, 2016) as well as structure coding to organize data deductively around research questions and interview protocols (MacQueen, McLellan-Lemal, Bartholow, & Milstein, 2008; Saldaña, 2016). This process was replicated with subsequent transcripts. Each piece of data was compared with all of the other data, highlighted, and notated with a code (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). New data was compared continuously with previously coded data to determine if the new data represented a new idea or should be part of existing codes (Saldaña, 2016). After the initial analysis of each focus group interview, four participants were contacted for individual member-check interviews. They received a summary of the focus group transcript (with pseudonyms) via email and were asked to confirm, add, or make clarifications.

After the independent coding process, the two authors met to compare codes and developed definitions for each code. Both authors' codes were grouped into categories and then organized into themes, which were grounded in the data. During the process, categories were also subdivided or collapsed as needed. After all transcripts were coded and checked, following guidelines of coding by consensus (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997), the authors discussed the similar and different themes concerning each research question. They debriefed with each other throughout this process and also searched for negative cases to ensure themes were refined (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). To aid in the organization and analysis of data, NVivo 12, a data analysis software program, was used.

Survey. A descriptive analysis was performed to calculate the percentage of teachers' perceptions of inclusion within the three attitude categories, as well as the mean and standard deviation of the ratings on the attitude statements (see Table 4). Then, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were conducted and informed researchers that the data was not normally distributed. As a result, the Mann-Whitney U test was used instead of a two-independent sample t-test to compare the dependent variables at an item level. Five grouping variables that divided the entire sample of teachers into binary categorical groups were selected by the researchers: (1) teachers' age, (2) years of teaching in inclusive settings, (3) having a special education license or endorsement (special education, early childhood special education, or dual certification in elementary and special education), (4) having a license or endorsement with EC focus (children's age from birth to 8, including general early childhood, early childhood special education, or dual certification in early childhood/early childhood special education), and (5) the ability to speak a language other than English. These grouping variables were created based on the teachers' demographics or teaching experience to examine if there was a significant difference in attitudes towards inclusion between the two matching groups of teachers. In order to use the survey responses as supporting data for the findings from the focus group, the 15 attitude statements were reorganized to align with the emergent themes from the focus group. For this procedure, researchers separately reviewed the 15 attitude statements and conducted an axial coding using the four emergent themes from the focus group data. Then, the assignment of each attitude statement to its corresponding theme was reviewed and compared across researchers, and disagreements were resolved. Table 4 presents the list of survey items under each theme: conceptualization of inclusion, challenges to inclusion, and benefits of inclusion. No survey items were assigned to the themes related to the hopes for and prospects of inclusion.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, multiple sources of data, including the focus group and member-check interviews, field notes, and surveys were used for triangulation (Patton, 2002). To ensure the accuracy of transcription, the first and second authors compared the transcriptions with audio clips. Member checking after the initial data collection further established validity. All authors and a peer debriefed and verified the analyses, procedures, and findings. Thick and direct quotes from the interviews were used to describe each theme.

Results

Findings from qualitative interviews and the survey were organized, integrated, and compared. Interviews revealed four salient themes across the participating early childhood teachers' experiences with and perceptions of inclusive practices in urban settings: (a) conceptualizations and current status of inclusion, (b) challenges to inclusion, (c) benefits of inclusion, and (d) hopes for and prospects of inclusion. Findings provide summaries of the data in relation to each theme and subtheme along with supporting quotations from participants, supported by the second author's field notes.

Survey data on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion provided supplemental information on three of the four themes identified via the focus group data: (a) conceptualization of inclusion, (b) challenges to inclusion, and (c) benefits of inclusion (Table 4). The results from the descriptive analysis and the Mann-Whitney U test at an item level using the five grouping variables are reported under each theme. The researchers found that there is a significant difference in the ratings of several attitude statements, demonstrating discrepancies in beliefs and attitudes about inclusion among teachers who differ in their demographics or experiences. No

statistical differences were found between the teachers who only speak English (n = 18) and who know another language (n = 17) on the attitudes towards inclusion.

Conceptualizations and Current Status of Inclusion

As a result of their own experiences, participants provided various definitions of inclusion. First, many participants defined inclusion by highlighting the importance of securing positive climates in classrooms. For example, Emily (general education teacher) shared the following:

> It's not only a matter of being in the classroom with other students with and without disabilities, but also being considered equal, an equal person in the classroom. So, you know, it's not just making having the students in there but then having them only work with, you know, with an adult, and having the students consider them to be an equal, an equal member of the classroom community as well.

Others also stated that inclusion was a natural concept, and therefore their full membership should be guaranteed. Emily additionally said:

> I'm looking in the classroom or looking down the hallway or even the full building as a whole and not necessarily being able to differentiate which students have disabilities and which students don't. They know about their autonomies to be, to blend into the rest of the students ... We are not identifying by their disability. That's just a part of them.

Teachers in one focus group mainly focused on describing the perceptions related to physical environments, access, and inclusion for students with physical disabilities. Annie (general education teacher) stated that within early childhood, inclusion means providing educational services in an environment where all children were learning together in the same physical space regardless of skill levels, types of disability, academic proficiencies, and languages spoken. Annie also said:

> Defining inclusion is a removal of barriers, especially physical barriers to environments, and so thinking about how an environment itself can be inclusive. If it's accessible to all people of all types of physical ability levels … I think a little bit more about how certain hallways are not accessible to people, and certain spaces in schools are much more challenging, and so to be truly inclusive you need to think about that.

Although the participants tried to arrange their conceptualization of inclusion from their own experiences, when asked about their perceived definition of inclusion, most participants were reluctant to explain it at first or showed uncertainty about describing their definition ("umm...", "I think", "I guess"). Several reasons were offered for their hesitation. According to Kate (special education teacher), the legal definition of inclusion is 'too broad' and still remains conceptual rather than practical, resulting in teachers having varying levels of understanding. Additionally, the definitions and models used for each school's inclusionary practice varied depending on the school and the neighborhood contexts. Dan (general education teacher) said, "it can look very different, depending on the teacher and the school. I think inclusion looks different from school to school, classroom to classroom." Lisa (general education teacher) elaborated and said:

> Everybody has that vision of it [successful inclusion]. But you know if they're working with a specific model and the federal mandates it's gonna look different from classroom to classroom, IEP to IEP.

Participants agreed that they like the purpose of inclusion, but in real life, inclusion sometimes becomes "out of control" (Lisa) due to contextual needs. General educators reported being challenged to handle students' behaviors without educational knowledge. Isabella told us:

> He's yelling at you because he doesn't know what to do. So your response is to just put him in time out …. You have to raise your hand and ask once you finish your group activity if you can go … that's what they need … to advocate for themselves inside of the general education classroom. 'Cause otherwise they're just stuck there and don't know what to do, don't know what they did … with no words, understanding, or support.

Some educators, including a special education teacher, also reported challenges when teaching SWDs because they did not have previous experience. Teachers felt they could not provide proper services and education that matched the needs of those children. For example, Sophia (special education and former general education teacher) told us:

> I feel like I have more that background to meet the needs of the students that I have in my class this year. I have a few that are ED label. So that's more just like putting those behavioral supports in place.

Teachers expressed the need for more knowledge and experience to better support SWDs.

Survey. Of the survey items related to the conceptualization of inclusion, teachers aged 20 to 40 years (n = 21, M = 2.33, SD = 1.07) had a significantly stronger belief that inclusion has been successful in schools nationwide, compared to teachers aged 41 to 60 years (n = 14, M = 3.64, SD = .75), with a medium effect size, U = 102, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .248$. Similarly, teachers who had less than 10 years of teaching experience in inclusive settings (n = 24, M = 2.63, SD = 1.06) had a significantly stronger belief that inclusion has been successful in schools nationwide, compared to teachers with 10 or more years of teaching in inclusive settings (n = 12, M = 3.42, SD = 1.17), with a medium effect size, U = 136.5, p = .03, η^2 = .109. Relatedly, teachers aged 20 to 40 years (n = 21, M = 1.40, SD = .68) supported inclusion of SWDs more significantly, compared to teachers aged 41 to 60 years (n = 14, M = 2.07, SD = .73), with a medium effect size, U = 121, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .166$; teachers aged 20 to 40 years (n = 21, M = 2.29, SD = 1.15) also had a significantly stronger belief that all education should be inclusionary, compared to teachers aged 41 to 60 years (n = 14, M = 3.71, SD = 1.33), with a medium effect size, U = 102, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .248$.

Obstacles to and Needs for Inclusion

As most participants identified that the set definition of inclusion in reality had a considerable gap, participants across groups identified specific barriers to inclusion across different ecological levels: school and administrative levels, teacher level, and surrounding environmental level.

School and administrative levels. Teachers indicated that advanced administrative support was urgent for the successful implementation of inclusion.

Lack of financial resources and teachers for inclusion. First, the lack of support from state or school administration was commonly identified by many participants as a barrier to inclusion. Limited budgets in special education were reported to affect the shortage of special education teachers directly. Sophia further explained:

> We just found out, with the most recent budget release, that we'll be having a special education position cut. That's actually how I ended up in gen-ed, because I have dual certifications [in early childhood special education and early childhood education].

Interestingly, rather than identifying the lack of certified special educators as a barrier, teachers stated that the lack of more *positions* for special education teachers was a barrier to inclusion. Additionally, the accommodations (i.e., materials, physical space) that are often integrated into inclusion were reported to "boil down to the actual money to get those things" (Dan).

Lack of inclusion models to meet diverse special needs. Many teachers believed that having a systematic coaching model for educators or administrative leaders who can implement such a model thoroughly is needed. Annie said,

> Having an administrator understand that needs of children change and vary year to year, or through the course of the year. You might start in one position and then the students [make] progress or regress throughout the school year. That classroom's needs are going to change, so having an administrator who is flexible to those needs is really key for well-functioning schools.

Dan also explained,

> There needs to be specific systems in place from like a coaching model, for teachers, in that you have somebody who's coming in and observing teaching practices and giving support and feedback… what one group of children in one year looks like is gonna vary year to year, so the support that teacher's going to need is going to depend on the children in that classroom.

Specifically, he highlighted the importance of continuous and systematic coaching models not only for new teachers but also experienced teachers, in order to address the "needs of the classroom," rather than the needs of the teacher. Moreover, most teachers highlighted that paraprofessionals would benefit from the same level and type of support as the teachers, considering that they are responsible for supporting students of diverse abilities, while frequently lacking sufficient background knowledge to execute such support.

Teachers also discussed how inclusion must occur in school settings, especially in terms of environmental or physical factors of the materials, classrooms, hallways, and other areas of the school buildings. In order to make such accommodations, teachers believed administrators must have knowledge and experience of inclusion, specifically the practical needs within the classroom. Another desired asset of an administrator was related to the importance of structural reorganization that is needed within the administrative level to promote more mutual support across educators for each student. Annie added, "It's really important for school administrators, within a climate of the school, to not necessarily have it be your student and my student, but everyone is our student."

Lack of appropriate training. Both special educators and general educators mentioned the need for training that could happen in their classroom to meet contextual needs. Most general educators reported that they did not receive any official training in special education (teaching or co-teaching), and believed that "there's no way for them to figure out how that works" (Kate) on their own. One special education teacher also advocated for paraprofessionals and their desire for more training (Isabella, special education and former general education teacher). For instance, she noted that paraprofessionals she had worked with constantly sought opportunities to learn "how to prompt correctly or teaching other students, peers, how to prompt each other."

Teacher level. Although teachers were direct implementers of inclusive practices at school, their attitudes, perceptions towards SWDs, and expectation of inclusions varied.

Teachers' attitudes towards "other" teachers and students. Along with teachers' different levels of understanding or definitions of inclusion, different mindsets or attitudes towardsss having children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms were identified as a barrier. There seemed to be a division across grade levels, or between general and special education teachers that prevented inclusion or cooperation among teachers, which consequently led to dividing students by such groups and limiting more inclusive support. Many teachers discussed the importance of a more collaborative, rather than individualistic approach across educators within a school to promote inclusion for all students. Annie said, "Every kid belongs to the entire school …. We're all a part of the community."

Collaboration "viewed as a project" among educators. Teachers believed that collaboration was "a battle" (Isabella). Teachers observed a lack of willingness to collaborate in their schools, and if there was collaboration taking place, it was not adequate to fulfill goals for inclusion. They reported the lack of collective approach among teachers when supporting a student within a school. Isabella described, "It seems like collaboration for them is like a project, and, and that's not what I'm looking to do."

Surrounding environments. Participants observed that contextual factors such as diverse student factors in urban settings and neighborhoods' low socioeconomic status had a direct influence on the quality of inclusion.

Supporting students with diverse backgrounds in urban education. Most participants with teaching experience in urban settings defined barriers to inclusion related to diversity issues, specifically huge gaps in socioeconomic status and English language learners (ELL). While

participants believed that there were more educational opportunities for SWDs in urban settings than in rural settings (i.e., Dan stated “If you are in a rural environment, it's pretty much ‘Here you go. This is your local school’”), some school districts lacked resources to support students with diverse backgrounds due to the huge diversity spectrum. For example, some participants observed that there were no special education teachers in a child care classroom (Kristine). Annie also noted, “The resources might be very slim, depending on the socioeconomic status of your environment.” In other schools, there were inconsistencies in the availability of resources needed for inclusion.

In addition, while culturally and linguistically diverse students increased, teachers were not equipped to support such populations. Teachers described the challenges in communicating with parents whose primary language was not English, as well as the lack of translation services needed to facilitate parent-teacher communication. Kristine noted, “There’s no translators handy or even just teachers that speak that language, and I don’t even think the school has access to a phone translator.” Similarly, Lily (general education teacher) discussed the “communication barriers” in classroom settings to include students with special needs who do not speak English fluently. She said, “There is no one who can speak/translate the Spanish language.”

Classroom characteristics. Urban teachers experienced challenges to inclusion, as they could not provide appropriate educational practices and opportunities to meet the needs of classrooms with large numbers of students. Bella (general education teacher) shared the following:

> I couldn't imagine a kindergarten classroom having 35 kids and having a couple of kids with IEPs [individualized education programs], because at that point if you're the only teacher, what do you do when you need to give one-on-one attention to someone for more than a few minutes and then you have 34 other students that are sitting there waiting?

This adult-to-student ratio problem was related to the quality of instruction children could receive, as well as the availability of therapeutic services such as speech therapy or occupational therapies (Sherry, general education teacher). Annie added, "Somebody who might be trained in how to assist with interventions, so then the teacher can continue doing the instruction they need. There's more direct interventions happening between students that may not necessarily be included all the time."

Survey. Survey data was analyzed to examine whether teachers experienced challenges with regard to the support or training needed for inclusion practice. Teachers who had a license in special education (n = 16, M = 1.38, SD = 1.03) felt more qualified to teach SWDs, compared to teachers without a license in special education (n = 20, M = 3.05, SD = 1.15), with a large effect size, U = 52.5, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .390$. On the other hand, teachers who had a license in ECE (n = 20, M = 2.10, SD = 1.29) believed that they received insufficient support for inclusion, more significantly than the teachers without a license in ECE (n = 16, M = 3.13, SD = 1.20), with a medium effect size, U = 136.5, p = .02, $\eta^2 = .119$. As for teachers' age, teachers aged 20 to 40 years (n = 21, M = 2.00, SD = .84) had a stronger belief that they were receiving the support needed to work with SWDs, compared to teachers aged 41 to 60 years (n = 14, M = 3.07, SD = 1.27), with a medium effect size, U = 144, p = .02, $\eta^2 = .121$.

Actual and Potential Benefits of Inclusion

While teachers reported multiple challenges to inclusion, all recognized the numerous actual and potential benefits of inclusion. Repeatedly making statements like "an inclusive setting shows inclusivity is a norm" (Dan) and *"*[inclusion is] pretty much beneficial all around, both for students with disabilities and students without" (Lily). Participants identified benefits for teachers and students with and without disabilities.

Students with disabilities. Most teachers described the benefits for SWDs when they were included in general education classrooms with typically developing students. Annie explained, “I highly believe that kids learn a lot from imitation, so having peer models is incredibly important.” Similarly, Lisa said, “Kids’ speed in growth and development is faster. You know when they have those peer models.” Others gave specific examples of benefits in children’s developmental domains. Lily stated, “The language. Just hearing it and interacting with peers. I think language is a huge part [of the benefits], even if they’re still non-verbal they're getting that peer language model.” She further added and said, “Even just simple things like turn taking, waiting, etc.” Sherry also stated, “[About] the social-emotional, I mean those gains are huge.” Other participants emphasized the value of potential friendships. Emily explained, “I really think that friendships and relationships is one of the absolute most important things we learn in school.” Some teachers pointed out how friendships can result in unanticipated long-lasting support. Anne (special education teacher) stated, “When we think about elementary school, you may not remember all the facts, but we still have that friend that arguably could end up being your support for the rest of your life.” Teachers’ responses reflected strong beliefs about the benefits of inclusion, particularly in the development of social interaction with peers.

Students without disabilities (SWoD). Benefits to SWoDs were also identified. Emily touched on this, stating, “for the students without disabilities to potentially learn more acceptance and learn that not everybody is the same...” Sophia said inclusion provides SWoD with “experiences working with different types of people and, you know, just being more open to different situations.” Bella expanded on this, saying, “the non-disabled peers, like they just get such, like, empathy. Empathy and like, they just are so like loving towards you know, the students that they know need that extra support.” These comments convey what most participants

directly and indirectly suggested, which is that "it [inclusion] creates a more tolerant, open-minded child" (Sophia). Teachers also believed that inclusion teaches children that it is acceptable to be different and need help. Ava (general education teacher) stated, "if the kids know that this person needs help, that's okay, because they might need help with something else."

Special and general education teachers. Teachers reported that they also benefited from inclusion in several ways, including positively impacting their teaching. For example, Kate said, "it [inclusion] made me a better teacher in the way that I understand, even within the general education classroom, the different needs of students and being able to differentiate." Teachers also believed that inclusion fostered the improvement of their teaching practice. Dan said, "Using strategies specifically from special education, I think, really helped my own practice in addressing, you know, [the] individual needs of all children." Sophia explained her experience similarly, that inclusion "made me much more cognizant in my planning of how am I going to address the needs of different learners." Findings suggest that teachers believed that inclusion had improved their own practices and helped them accommodate students' diverse learning needs, thus broadening the benefits of inclusion to teachers with positive beliefs toward inclusion.

Survey. In terms of the survey items related to the benefits of inclusion, teachers aged 20 to 40 years (n = 21, M = 2.95, SD = 1.02) believed that there were benefits to inclusion more significantly compared to teachers aged 41 to 60 years (n = 14, M = 3.91, SD = .73), with a medium effect size, U = 121, $p < .05$, η^2 = .185. Similarly, teachers aged 20 to 40 years (n = 21, M = 4.14, SD = .91) believed that SWDs do not hinder the educational process for SWoDs more significantly than the teachers aged 41 to 60 years (n = 14, M = 3.13, SD = 1.18), with a medium effect size, U = 125, $p < .05$, η^2 = .173. There were no differences in the perceived benefits of inclusion between teachers with less than 10 years of experience and those who had 10 or more

years of experience in inclusive settings. Similarly, there were no differences between teachers who have an ECE or special education-focused license or endorsement and those without such a license or endorsement.

Hopes for and Prospects of Inclusion

In addition to identifying benefits of inclusion, teachers shared their hopes for inclusion at the policy, school, and professional development levels.

Policy. Participants hoped for policy changes to address deficits in the amount and modes of support. For example, most teachers believed that additional support funds needed to be allocated differently. Specifically, teachers believed financial resources must be provided for teacher training rather than, for example, classroom supplies, to promote inclusion. Annie said,

> It's the way we manage our funding to prioritize different things. Instead of maybe necessarily putting smart boards in every classroom, we invest in [special education] training for personnel … Inclusion needs to become more of a priority.

Similarly, Lisa also explained that the definition and models for inclusion across different schools and students must be developed and communicated individually at a more personal level. She said, “It has to be a community of people that say this is what inclusion should look like for this kid, and then that one, instead of these manuals that say these are the federal guidelines.” The teachers’ hopes for policy changes were mentioned repeatedly, with Kristine stating, “It's the parents and those who make policies that I want to impact.” Teachers expressed their hopes for a policy change with their desire to directly impact their students, parents, and policymakers through their practice.

School. Teachers shared their hopes for systematic change at the school level. When talking about inclusion, teachers often made the distinction between students being physically included and being “truly” included. Emily reflected, “It’s not only a matter of being in the

classroom with other students without disabilities, but also being considered an equal person in the classroom.” Teachers hoped that the inclusion of students would be naturally expected and reinforced across all schools. These sentiments were best expressed by Emily, who said successful inclusion would mean “looking at the classroom, the hallway, and the building and not necessarily being able to differentiate which students have disabilities and which students don't." Lisa shared a similar vision that inclusion must be practiced “seamlessly” and “organically” so that students could receive the support they need in an “undetectable” way. Teachers highlighted the importance of a collective and holistic approach involving administrators, teachers, staff, and students across disciplines and grade levels to integrate inclusion in their schools.

Professional development. Teachers also discussed their hopes for teacher training and professional development that specifically targets and promotes inclusion and equips teachers with practical skills and knowledge needed for inclusion. Teachers expressed high values of and hopes for such training opportunities because they believed that inclusionary practices and training go beyond the objective of supporting only SWDs. Lily said, “They [strategies] don't just work for students who have an IEP. So it's kind of giving that to all the students that I have in the classroom.” According to these general and special educators in early childhood education, professional development for inclusion was described as an essential tool to support both students with and without disabilities.

Discussion

This study used mixed methods to explore early childhood educators’ perceptions of and experiences with inclusive education in urban settings. Findings from four qualitative focus group interviews reveal that while teachers elaborated on the various definitions of inclusion and

foci of its implementation, they shared similar perceptions and experiences regarding the benefits and challenges of inclusion at the school, administrator, and educator levels. The survey data supported that these perceptions and prospects of inclusion varied by teachers' demographic information, such as age, experience, and specializations (i.e., ECE focus license, general early childhood, early childhood special education, or dual certification in early childhood/early childhood special education).

The findings indicated that teachers demonstrated uncertainty in the implementation of inclusion and a lack of confidence related to the definition of inclusion. Teachers' definition still remained broad and conceptual. The definition of inclusion in the field of ECE recently became publicly available through position- and national-level statements to support teachers' understanding of successful status and implementation of inclusion (e.g., NAEYC, 2009). The importance of having a clear definition may be supported through the survey data of this study in that relatively newer teachers who have less than 10 years of teaching experience have more positive notions and beliefs about successful inclusion than their counterparts with more than 10 years of experience. Unfortunately, considering the wide range of teaching years of the participants in this study, some teachers may receive updated information or sufficient training on the definition used in the most recent legislated definition while others may not. To minimize the variance of implementation and promote shared understanding, the common definitions that explain effective and practical inclusive practices for teachers might be needed.

Relatedly, training and administrative supports were identified as challenges, as well as the need for ongoing support for in-service teachers. Most general educators in this study expressed that they did not receive sufficient training to teach SWDs from their certificate programs. and special educators believed that they had limited opportunities or official trainings

to update their existing knowledge. The current literature shows that more numbers and hours of training directly affect positive perceptions of inclusion (Knoche, Peterson, Edwards, & Jeon, 2006; see also Hsieh & Hsieh, 2012); however, a lack of systematic training continues to be a challenge to successful inclusion (e.g., Damore & Murray, 2009; Downing et al., 1997). Thus, supporting struggling teachers through ongoing and in-depth training might result in positive outcomes with regard to the perception and practice of inclusion (Lequia et al., 2020). Teachers identified that administrator-level support could address teachers' concerns regarding inclusion more efficiently. Administrators bring a 'top-down effect' in schools and their philosophy for educating children. Thus, their decisions for inclusive practice models might shape each school's climate and culture of inclusion, which consequently may affect the overall effectiveness and success in the implementation of the inclusive model (Lequia et al., 2020).

Lastly, urban schools experienced unique contextual challenges to inclusion. Some challenges were identified in this study, such as high rates of teacher turnover and shortage, limited physical spaces, limited positions for special education teachers, and wide ranges of student demographics (i.e., ELL, low income, diverse cultural background). Given the limited studies regarding urban educators' perceptions of and experiences with inclusive practices (Damore & Murry, 2009), further investigations are needed to reveal challenges or experiences related to urban inclusive education. Future studies with urban educators might reflect the contemporary needs in the area of inclusion and may provide practical and contextual solutions for teachers to offer successful experiences of inclusive practices for all children.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, both the focus group and the survey data were collected one time from teachers living in an urban, Midwestern region of the U.S. Second,

focus groups were conducted one time, and participants' perceptions may change over time as a result of their experiences. Third, the survey questions were not piloted prior to the study and the number of survey participants were small. Moreover, the response rate of the surveys was relatively low, as having teachers complete the surveys online was challenging. Lastly, the quantitative analysis of the survey data involved grouping the teachers into two groups by their demographics and experiences; however, we did not control for other potential confounding variables between the two groups of teachers.

Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice in Promoting Inclusion

In order to better understand the parameters within which teachers implement inclusive practices, researchers could continue to explore the conceptualization and practice of inclusion across diverse environmental (e.g., school settings) and demographic (e.g., teacher and student characteristics) factors. Further, investigating the experiences and perceptions of inclusion from various stakeholders including students, parents, and administrators through various methodological approaches may provide more comprehensive insights into the engagement in and support for inclusion for all students. For example, in addition to the teachers' perspectives, conducting in-depth qualitative studies with young students with and without disabilities, paraprofessionals, parents, and administrators could provide useful information to evaluate the strengths and areas of improvement in inclusion models and implementation. As the teachers in this study indicated, there is a particular need for contextually responsive support for the inclusion of students with diverse demographics. It therefore may be valuable to examine the inclusion experiences and perspectives of students and families of diverse backgrounds (e.g., ELL backgrounds).

Previous research stated that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are influenced by the types and severities of students' disabilities (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2012; Odom, 2000; Ryndak et al., 2012). Our findings show that in addition to students' characteristics, the application of successful inclusion is directly related to environmental factors such as the neighborhood (i.e., urban), schools, and classrooms. These findings together imply the necessity of a policy-level support that involves training and licensure procedures relevant to specific student or classroom characteristics. Specifically, future training and workshops for in-service teachers and certification/teacher preparation programs should equip in- and pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to support students of a specific age group or with a specific disability, so that teachers feel more competent to support the inclusion of students with diverse abilities. Such implications may be of particular interest for states where special education teachers who earn a Learning Behavior Specialist certification currently are expected to work with students of a wide age range (i.e., PreK-21 years).

Finally, the results of this study recommend a more systematic and school-wide inclusion model that involves continuous and collaborative training and mentoring opportunities for both general and special educators, as well as administrators and paraprofessionals. In particular, given specific teacher characteristics (e.g., having a license in special education, aged 20 to 40 years) influence teachers' attitudes, such as feeling more qualified and supported for inclusion, it may be meaningful to consider the school staff's demographics, roles, and experiences in tailoring differentiated support and trainings to implement successful inclusion in their school sites with shared understanding.

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Table 1

Demographic information of teachers in focus groups

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	SPED Experience	Grade/Ages Taught	Years Teaching	Public/ Private	Experiences with SWD	Inclusion Training
Focus Group 1									
Anne	F	28	C	Y	ECE 6th-8th HS	7	P	Y	UC, GC
Lisa	F	57	AA	Y	K-adult	30+	P	Y	GC (LBS1 & ESL)
Emily	F	29	C	N	K-8th	7	P	Y	UG, PD
Focus Group 2									
Isabella	F	25	C	Y	SPED, PK-2nd	2	P	Y	UC, GC
Sophia	F	29	C	Y	SPED k-3rd, GenEd 2-3rd	8	P	Y	GC
Ava	F	39	L	N	PK, 1st, 3rd, 4th	17	P	Y	GC
Focus Group 3									
Kristine	F	29	AA	N	Ages 0-6	12	PR	N	UG, GC, PD
Lily	F	27	C	Y	PK	6	P	Y	GC
Bella	F	24	L	N	K	3	P	Y	GC
Sherry	F	31	C	N	Birth-K	12	P	Y	PD
Focus Group 4									
Annie	F	51	C	N	Ages 2- Adult	17	Both	Y	GC/PD
Dan	M	36	C/L	N	PK	12	P	Y	UG, GC
Kate	F	34	L	Y	SPED K-6th	7.5	P	Y	GC, PD

Note. AA = African American, C = Caucasian, ECE = Early Childhood Education, ESL = English as a Second Language, F = Female, GC = Graduate Courses, GenEd = General Education, HS = High School, L = Latina, LBS1 = Learning Behavior Specialist 1, M = Male, P = Public, PD = Professional Development, PK = Pre-K, PR = Private, SPED = Special Education, SWD = Students with disabilities, UC = Undergraduate Courses. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 2

Demographic information of teachers who completed the survey

Characteristics	Variables	*n* (%)
Gender	Male	4 (11)
	Female	30 (83)
	NI	2 (5)
Age	20 to 39 yrs and 11 mo	21 (58)
	40 to 60 yrs	14 (39)
	NI	1 (2)
Type of teaching school	Private	1 (2)
	Public	35 (97)
Years of teaching in inclusive setting	0 to 4 yrs and 11 mo	17 (47)
	5 to 9 yrs and 11 mo	7 (19)
	10 to 19 yrs and 11 mo	10 (28)
	20 or more yrs	2 (5)
Education Level	Bachelor's	10 (28)
	Master's	24 (67)
	Doctorate	2 (5)
Type of teaching license	Dual certification in Early Childhood/Early Childhood Special Educations	5 (14)
	Dual certification in Elementary and Special Educations	3 (8)
	Early Childhood Special Education	4 (11)
	Elementary Education	9 (25)
	General Early Childhood	11 (31)
	Special Education	4 (11)
	NI	1 (2)
Native English speakers	Yes	32 (89)
	No	4 (11)
Know other language besides English	Yes	17 (47)
	No	18 (50)
	NI	1 (2)

Notes. NI = not indicated; yrs = years; mo = months.

Table 3

Focus group interview questions

Questions for the focus group participants
1. How would you define inclusion?
2. How do you think families would define inclusion?
3. Describe what inclusion looks like in schools.
4. Do you think inclusion looks different in urban vs. rural settings?
5. Tell me about your experiences with inclusion.
6. How have these experiences impacted your understanding of and work with young children who have special needs?
7. How have these experiences impacted your teaching of young children with and without disabilities in one classroom?
8. What would you say are the benefits of inclusion? What benefits do you think families would identify?
9. Are there any drawbacks to inclusion? In your eyes and from the perspective of families.
10. Do you think there are barriers to inclusion? What are they?
11. What would families identify as barriers to inclusion?
12. Do you think there are more barriers in urban settings?
13. What do you expect your future inclusive classroom experience to be like?
14. What challenges do you anticipate?
15. Do you feel inclusion is alive and well or suffering? Why?
16. What concerns do you have about inclusion programming? Can you give me an example of this?
17. How can teachers be supported in their efforts to promote inclusion?
18. What other supports are needed for inclusion to be possible?
19. Do you believe that teachers need to partner with families for inclusion to be successful? How should teachers partner with families?
20. What are your hopes for the future of inclusive programming?
21. Do you feel all education be inclusionary?

Table 4

Teachers' perceptions of inclusion categorized into three themes emerged from the focus group data

	n (%)						
Attitude Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Conceptualizations and Current Status of Inclusion							
I believe inclusion has been successful in schools nation-wide.	6 (16.7)	5 (13.9)	14 (38.9)	9 (25.0)	2 (5.6)	2.89	1.14
I support the inclusion of children with disabilities.	18 (50.0)	11 (30.6)	6 (16.7)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1.66	0.77
I believe all education should be inclusionary.	8 (22.2)	7 (19.4)	8 (22.2)	8 (22.2)	5 (13.9)	2.86	1.38
Challenges to Inclusion							
I feel qualified to teach students with disabilities in my classroom.	14 (38.9)	9 (25.0)	4 (11.1)	6 (16.7)	3 (8.3)	2.31	1.37
I receive support for working with students with disabilities in my classroom.	6 (16.7)	17 (47.2)	6 (16.7)	3 (8.3)	4 (11.1)	2.5	1.21
I do not receive all the supports needed for effective inclusion in my classroom	12 (33.3)	6 (16.7)	5 (13.9)	12 (33.3)	1 (2.8)	2.56	1.34
Benefits of Inclusion							
Inclusion helps students with disabilities improve academically.	8 (22.2)	15 (41.7)	8 (22.2)	5 (13.9)	0 (0.00)	2.28	0.97
Inclusion improves the social skills and behaviors of students with disabilities.	11 (30.6)	17 (47.2)	6 (16.7)	2 (5.6)	0 (0.00)	1.97	0.85
Inclusion improves social relationships between students with and without disabilities.	17 (47.2)	16 (44.4)	2 (5.6)	0 (0.00)	1 (2.8)	1.67	0.83
Students without disabilities benefit from inclusion.	15 (41.7)	14 (38.9)	4 (11.1)	3 (8.3)	0 (0.00)	1.86	0.93
There are limited benefits to the inclusion of students with disabilities.	2 (5.6)	13 (36.1)	4 (11.1)	13 (36.1)	4 (11.1)	3.11	1.19
Inclusion has more barriers than benefits.	1 (2.8)	6 (16.7)	10 (27.8)	14 (38.9)	5 (13.9)	3.44	1.03
There are drawbacks or negative consequences to inclusion.	3 (8.3)	20 (55.6)	4 (11.1)	8 (22.2)	1 (2.8)	2.56	1.03
Students with disabilities hinder the education process for other students.	0 (0.00)	9 (25.0)	4 (11.1)	14 (38.9)	9 (25.0)	3.64	1.13
Inclusion is hard work and the benefits can be achieved through other means.	1 (2.8)	6 (16.7)	10 (27.8)	13 (36.1)	6 (16.7)	3.47	1.06

Notes. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neutral; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree.