

## **TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF RURAL KENYA**

**Catherine Nyaguthii Mwarari**

Catholic University of Eastern Africa  
Nairobi, KENYA.

cnyamaina@gmail.com; cmwarari@tangaza.ac.ke

### **ABSTRACT**

*Although inclusive education has been acknowledged as the means through which learners with special needs can access quality education, the practice is yet to be fully introduced and implemented in public primary schools in Kenya. Research indicates that effective implementation of inclusive education is contingent upon teachers' favourable attitudes towards inclusive education. This article explores the attitudes towards inclusive education of public primary school teachers in rural Kenya in reference to selected demographic variables namely: gender, age, marital status and educational qualifications. The study adopted a cross sectional survey design, with 462 teachers from Murang'a County as participants. Participants responded to a questionnaire with items on demographic information and Wilczenski's Attitude Towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES). Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data. The study findings revealed that teachers in Murang'a County have negative attitudes towards including learners with special needs in regular classrooms. Further, results indicated that age, marital status and educational qualifications have an influence on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. There is need to focus on favourable attitude formation during pre and in-service teacher training through a range of activities which include exposure to working with children with special needs to facilitate effectual implementation of inclusive education.*

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, attitudes, special needs, demographic variables

### **INTRODUCTION**

More than two decades since the Salamanca Statement of 1994 that led to the formal inception of inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994), the practice is yet to gain ground in the Kenyan Education system. This is despite the presence of an elaborate legal backing for inclusive practices. Inclusive education in Kenya is grounded on the provisions made in the Kenya constitution (Republic of Kenya, 2010), the Basic Education Act (Republic of Kenya, 2013), the Sector policy of learners and trainees with disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2018) as well as the Sustainable Goal No.4 on Equitable, inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all.

## **Education for learners with special needs in Kenya**

The education of learners with disabilities in Kenya was initiated by faith based organisations in the 1940s with the establishment of special schools while units and integrated programmes were introduced by the Ministry of Education in the 1970s (Republic of Kenya, 2009). A shift in the education of learners with disabilities from special schools and integrated units occurred with the formulation of the special needs policy of 2009. The policy advocated adoption of inclusive education as a means of facilitating children with special needs access quality education (Ministry of Education, 2009). However, research indicates a considerably low pace in regards to the implementation of inclusive education practises in Kenya (Bii & Taylor, 2013; Buhere & Ochieng, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2018; Mwangi & Orodho, 2014). The Sector policy on learners and trainees with disability cites prevailing negative attitudes by communities towards persons with disabilities as one of the key challenges to the provision of quality education to learners with disabilities (MOE,2018). Effective implementation of inclusive education is to a large extent dependent on the attitudes of teachers (Peebles and Mendaglio, 2014; Sharma, Simi & Forlin 2015; Thaver, Lim & Liau, 2014).

### **Attitude of teachers towards inclusive education**

Perhaps the area that has received much attention in inclusive education practices is teacher's attitude towards including learners with special needs in regular classroom. Ajzen's theory of Planned behaviour postulates that an attitude is a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to a person, object, event or institution (Ajzen, 1991). Literature indicates mixed attitudes towards inclusive education by teachers with some holding positive attitudes (Odongo, 2012; Peter & Nderitu, 2014; Sharma, Aiello, Pace, Round, & Subban, 2018 Sharma, Simi & Forlin, 2015) and other negative attitudes (Mukhopadhyah,2009; Mwangi & Orodho,2014). Notably is that much of the literature is context specific (Chhabra, Srivastava and Srivastava 2010; Hadjidakou & Mnasonos, 2012).

In Kenya attitudes towards children with disabilities can be traced back to cultural factors. In most parts of Africa, a child with a disability is a symbol of a curse befalling the whole family. Disabilities are attributed to witchcraft, sex related factors and supernatural forces (Franzen, 1990; Munyi, 2012). This kind of perception undoubtedly leads to negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities and culminates in children with disabilities being denied their rights which include right to quality education as also noted by Peter and Nderitu (2014) and Kochung (2011). Of note is that studies on attitudes towards inclusive education in Kenya have not determined if demographic variables have any impact on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion which is the focus of this study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design**

Cross sectional survey design was used for this investigation. This design enables the collection of data on more than one case and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables, which are then examined to detect patterns of association (Bryman, 2008). This was the intent of this study whilst endeavouring to establish teachers' attitude towards inclusive education in rural Kenya.

### **Participants**

Multistage sampling technique was used in this study. Simple random sampling was used to get the four out of the eight sub-counties in Murang'a county. A sample of 66 schools (30% of the total 221 schools in the four zones) was then randomly selected for the study. Stratified sampling technique was used to obtain the teachers sample. The selected sample of schools was divided into two strata: lower primary comprising of classes one to three and upper primary consisting of classes' four to eight. In lower primary, one teacher, the class teacher who is responsible for the class and teaches all the seven subjects was selected. One teacher was randomly selected to represent a grade where schools had more than one stream. In the upper primary, teachers were divided into 6 strata according to the subjects taught in upper primary. One teacher was randomly selected to represent the six subjects taught in upper primary. Thus, in the 66 sampled schools, seven teachers were selected from each school thus giving a total sample of 462 (66 X 7) teachers.

### **Instruments**

A questionnaire was used in this study. It had a section on demographic profile and Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES) developed by Wilczenski in 1992. ATIES has 16 items and was established to elicit participants' attitudes toward inclusion of learners with special needs into regular classrooms. The participants rate their responses (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = disagree somewhat; 4 = agree somewhat; 5 = agree; 6 =strongly agree). ATIES generates a total score that may vary from 16 to 96. A lower score is indicative of a less favourable attitude while, a higher scale denotes a more favourable attitude.

ATIES was initially used in the USA however, it has been widely used. Khan (2011) used it to measure teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in Bangladesh. Kuyini and Desai (2007) also used the scale to measure principals and teachers' attitude towards inclusive education in Ghana. In sub Saharan Africa, the scale was utilised by Chhabra, Srivastava and Srivastava (2010) to measure teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education in rural schools in Botswana. ATIES validation by its author showed a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.92 and in Kuyini and Desai's study, the scale's reliability analysis showed a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.73 (Kuyini & Desai,

2007). ATIES has not been utilised in studies in Kenya promoting the researcher to test its reliability. The present study established a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.8 for the scale during a pilot study. Table 1 indicates the 16 items on the ATIES.

**Table 1. Items used in the Attitude towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES)**

Item No.	Item statement
	Students who/whose:
1.	Academic is 2 or more years below the other students in the grade should be in regular classes.
2.	Are physically aggressive toward their peers should be in regular classes.
3.	Cannot move without the help from others should be in regular classes.
4.	Are shy and withdrawn should be in regular classes.
5.	Academic achievement is 1 year below other students in the grade should be in regular classes.
6.	Speech is difficult to understand should be in regular classes.
7.	Cannot read standard print and need to use Braille should be in regular classes.
8.	Are verbally aggressive toward their peers should be in regular classes.
9.	Have difficulty expressing their thoughts verbally should be in regular classes.
10.	Need training in self-help skills and activities of daily living should be in regular classes.
11.	Use sign language or communication boards should be in regular classes
12.	Cannot control their behaviour and disrupt activities should be in regular classes.
13.	Need an individualized functional academic program in everyday reading and math skills should be in regular classes.
14.	Cannot hear conversational speech should be in regular classes.
15.	Do not follow school rules for conduct should be in regular classes.
16.	Are frequently absent from school should be in regular classes.

### Data Collection

Prior to data collection, the researcher requested for all the necessary documents from various offices. A letter of introduction from the Postgraduate Department, Catholic University of Eastern Africa to enable get a research authorisation letter from the National Council for Science Technology and Innovations (NACOSTI) was sought. The letter from NACOSTI instructed the researcher to seek clearance from the County

Commissioner, Murang'a County and the County Director of Education and this was duly done.

Before the pilot study, the selected research assistants underwent a short training conducted by the researcher on how to use the research instruments. The training focused on purpose of study, reading through research tools and providing clarifications of the items. After the training, a pilot study was carried out in Kandara sub county (one of the sub counties not sampled for the study). The pilot study provided feedback that was used to enhance the reliability and validity of the research tools. Following review of the research tools, questionnaires were then distributed to the sampled schools. Appointments were made with participants on the date to collect them.

### **Data Preparation and Analysis**

Quantitative data was coded and entered into the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the quantitative data from the questionnaires. The results were presented graphically in terms of figures and tables. To test if selected demographic variables had any influence on teachers' attitudes, t-tests were used.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Teachers' attitude towards inclusive education**

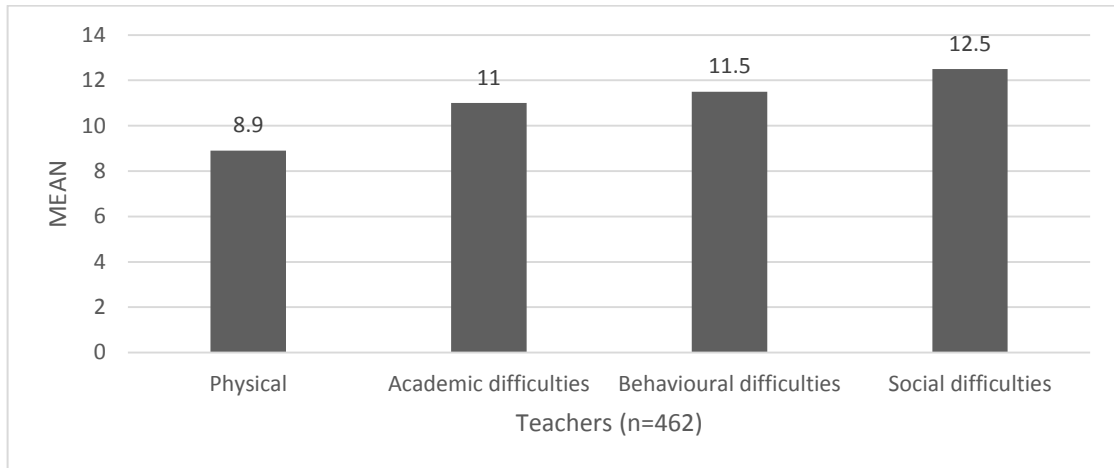
The score analysis on the attitudes towards inclusive education of the 462 teacher participants indicated an overall mean of 2.7 with a standard deviation of 1.4 against a highest possible mean of 6.0 as indicated in Table 2. This points to attitudes that falls between response 2 and 3 (that is between disagree and somewhat disagree). Findings indicated a higher response rate within the disagreement level (strongly disagree/disagree/ disagree somewhat) than the agreement level since only 5 out of the 16 items had a higher response rate in the agreement level (strongly agree/agree/ agree somewhat).

Further, teachers strongly disagreed with items related to sensory impairments since an overwhelming majority indicated (at the disagreement level) that they were not willing to include learners who use sign language or communication boards (85.3%), those who cannot hear conversational speech (80.1%) and those cannot read standard print (85.5%). Teachers were however accommodative to learners who have social difficulties as indicated by the 58.3% of teachers who were willing to accommodate learners who are shy and withdrawn. Other categories that teachers were willing to accommodate were those whose academic standards fall 1 year below that of their peers (48.9%) as well as those who are frequently absent from school (45.9%). These findings show that teachers were only slightly accommodative to learners who have emotional and behavioural difficulties, those with mild learning difficulties but they were not prepared to include learners with: sensory difficulties mental handicaps physical disabilities severe learning difficulties and those with severe behaviour problems.

**Table 2. Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education**

Item No.	Strongly Agree		Agree		Agree somewhat		Disagree somewhat		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Item Mean	SD
	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	14	3.0	55	11.9	79	17.1	121	26.2	77	16.7	116	25.1	2.8	1.4
2	19	4.1	60	13.0	86	18.6	87	18.8	85	18.4	125	27.1	2.8	1.4
3	22	4.8	78	16.9	71	15.4	75	16.2	64	13.9	152	32.9	2.8	1.5
4	34	7.4	140	30.3	95	20.6	62	13.4	32	6.9	99	21.4	3.5	1.6
5	29	6.3	68	14.7	129	27.9	80	17.3	22	4.8	134	29.0	3.1	1.3
6	23	5.0	56	12.1	61	13.2	98	21.2	89	19.3	135	29.2	2.7	1.4
7	17	3.7	21	4.5	29	6.3	59	12.8	105	22.7	231	50.0	2.0	1.2
8	31	6.7	75	16.2	71	15.4	103	22.3	61	13.2	121	26.2	3.0	1.5
9	27	5.8	77	16.7	79	17.1	95	20.6	56	12.1	128	27.7	3.0	1.4
10	21	4.5	61	13.2	47	10.2	61	13.2	71	15.4	201	43.5	2.5	1.5
11	22	4.8	20	4.3	26	5.6	56	12.1	79	17.1	259	56.1	2.0	1.4
12	35	7.6	49	10.6	58	12.6	71	15.4	72	15.6	177	38.3	2.6	1.4
13	25	5.4	47	10.2	50	10.8	88	19.0	82	17.7	170	36.8	2.6	1.3
14	20	4.3	25	5.4	19	4.1	50	10.8	100	21.6	248	53.7	2.0	1.1
15	14	3.0	102	22.1	65	14.1	94	20.3	59	12.8	128	27.7	3.0	1.8
16	20	4.3	119	25.8	73	15.8	82	17.7	53	11.5	115	24.9	3.2	1.7
<b>Overall Mean</b>													<b>2.7</b>	<b>1.4</b>

The study further had the attitude items clustered into the four groups of special needs that Wilzenski, the author of the scale, had identified and referred to them as aspects of inclusion. They were: physical (items 3, 7, 11, and 14), academic difficulties (items 1, 5, 10 and 13), behavioural difficulties (items 2, 8, 12, and 15) and social difficulties (items 4, 6, 9, and 16). Teachers' attitudes were assessed across these four aspects of inclusion. The responses are shown on Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Aspect-Wise Means of Participants Attitudes towards Inclusive Education**

Figure 1 shows that social difficulties had the highest mean score of 12.5. Social concerns (overt shyness, truancy, speech and or language difficulties) are special needs that are not considered problematic by most teachers. Most teachers hold the view that these concerns are resolvable through enhancing social interactions in the classroom and this explains the positive attitudes as noted by Chhabra, Srivastava and Srivastava (2010). Further, as shown on Figure 1, physical difficulties had the lowest mean score (8.9).

Including learners with physical disabilities such as sensory impairments in the regular class is considered a challenge. Most teachers are of the opinion that they need practical knowledge on how to include such learners as observed by Khan, (2011) and Mwachola (2010).

Favourable attitudes towards inclusive education is a critical variable in regards to the preparedness of key implementers to implement inclusive education (Chhabra, Srivastava and Srivastava 2010; Hadjikakou & Mnasonos, 2012; Peter & Nderitu, 2012). The present study's findings indicate that teachers have negative attitudes towards including learners with special needs. Noteworthy was that this negative attitude was manifested in their choice of words for instance when asked for reasons for not considering inclusive practices as the best option for learners with special needs, Teacher from Sub County D remarked, "**those** pupils should be in their own classes." (SDT5) The teacher was not alone in this choice of language that betrayed negative attitudes towards including learners with special needs. An education officer remarked,

when citing lack of resources as a main challenge, “we don’t even have enough resources for **normal** children” (QASO 2).

The finding on unfavourable attitudes towards including learners with special needs among teachers is hardly surprising since according to Munyi (2012); Korir, Mukuria & Adera, 2007, perceptions on disability are largely influenced by a people’s cultural beliefs. Their views are naturally shaped by the way disability is construed in their communities which as aforementioned is associated with curses from gods and ancestors. The study’s findings on negative attitudes towards including learners with special needs in regular classes are attested by Chhabra, Srivastava & Srivastava, (2010); Kristensen, Omagor-Loican & Onen, (2003); Mwangi & Orodho, (2014); Mukhopadhyay, (2012).

However, research shows that there are mixed findings as regards attitudes of teachers towards inclusion of learners with special needs in regular classes. While the aforementioned researchers found that teachers had negative attitude, other researchers observed that teachers held positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Ali, Mustapha & Jelas, 2006, Peter & Nderitu, 2014, Odongo, 2012). This inconsistency in attitudes can be attributed to the level of knowledge on inclusive practices and exposure to learners with special needs as observed by Peebles and Mendaglio (2014).

Type and severity of disability were other variables affecting attitudes where teachers have more favourable attitudes towards learners who are socially disabled compared to those with physical disabilities and those with less severe disabilities as shown on Figure 1. This finding was corroborated by other studies (Fakolade, Adeniyi & Tella, 2009, Khan, 2011). The implication of these finding is that teachers are not prepared for inclusive practices considering that favourable attitudes towards accommodating learners with special needs is an indicator of preparedness (Buford & Casey, 2012; Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014).

### **Mean Difference in Teachers’ Attitudes towards Inclusive Education Based on Demographic Variables**

The study also sought to determine if there existed any significant mean difference in teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education based on selected demographic variables: gender, age, academic qualifications and marital status. The results are indicated on Table 3.

### **Relationship between teachers’ attitudes and gender**

Table 3 shows that the descriptive statistics suggested that there was a difference in the mean scores of attitudes towards inclusive education between male teachers (M=43.7, SD=14.8) and female teachers (M=43.8, SD=15.2). However, the independent t-test as indicated in Table 3 showed that the difference between the means was not statistically significant at 95% confidence ( $t=0.02$ ,  $DF=460$ ,  $p=0.98$ ). The results thus suggest that



gender may not have any significant impact on teachers' attitude towards inclusive education.

**Table 3. Independent t-test comparisons of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on selected demographic variables**

Demographic Variable	Group	n	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	DF	t-value	p-value
<b>Gender</b>	Male	209	43.7	14.8	460	0.02	0.98
	Female	253	43.8	15.2			
<b>Age</b>	<i>Young (40 years and below)</i>	134	46.4	14.2	460	2.31	0.02
	<i>old (&gt;40 yrs)</i>	328	42.8	15.3			
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	362	43.2	15.0	460	2.85	0.005
	Not Married	100	47.6	14.6			
<b>Academic Qualification</b>	Higher Qualifications (Degree and above)	101	46.1	15.7	460	1.68	0.09
	Lower Qualifications (Certificate and Diploma)	361	43.2	14.8			

In regard to gender and attitudes towards including learners with special needs in regular classes, research shows that there are inconsistencies regarding this relationship (Park & Chitiyo, 2011). Some studies (Alquraini, 2012; Fakolade, Adeniyi & Tella, 2009;) report female teachers having more positive attitudes than their male counterparts while others (Ahmmed, Sharma and Deppeler, 2012) indicate that the converse. This present study is corroborated by (Parasuram, 2006) report that there is no significant difference between gender and attitudes. Ahmmed, Sharma and Deppeler (2012) observe that majority of studies report that female teachers have more positive attitudes than their male counterparts. Females are generally said to be caring owing to their motherly instincts. However, Parasuram (2006) note that the effect of gender on attitudes towards special needs is lessening owing to greater exposure of the male to female roles. This perhaps explains the findings in this present study. Additionally, acquisition of knowledge about learners with special needs may also lead to lack of difference in attitude between genders since knowledge contributes to formation of favourable attitudes (Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014).

### **Relationship between teachers' attitudes and age**

Results from teachers' demographic profile showed that 29% of the total teachers surveyed were 40 years and below in age while majority (71%) stated that they were more than 40 years of age. In this study those who stated that they were 40 years and

below were regarded ‘young’ while those more than 40 years of age were considered ‘old’. The descriptive statistics on Table 3 show that there was a difference in the mean score in attitude between younger teachers ( $M=46.4$ ,  $SD=14.2$ ) and older teachers ( $M=42.8$ ,  $SD=15.3$ ). To test if this difference was statistically significant an independent t -test was carried out. The results showed that the difference was statistically significant ( $t=2.31$ ,  $DF=460$ ,  $p=0.02$ ).

The findings of this study are consistent with other studies (Ahmmed, Sharma and Deppeler, 2012; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Donohue & Bornman , 2013; Sharma, Forlin & Loreman 2008; Thaver, Lim & Liao, 2014) which found that younger teachers hold more favourable attitude than older teachers. In this present studies younger teachers’ positive attitude towards inclusion may be attributed to the fact that they have been exposed to the revised Primary Teacher Education Curriculum (Republic of Kenya, 2004) that has infused issues of special needs in the curriculum. This then implies that in-service training on SNE becomes a prerequisite if the inclusive agenda is to be pushed forward considering that majority of teachers fall in the older category (over 40 years of age)

### **Relationship between teachers’ attitudes and academic qualifications**

The descriptive statistics as shown in Table 3 suggested that there was a difference in the mean scores ( $M=46.1$ ,  $SD=15.7$ ) of teachers with higher academic qualifications and those with lower academic qualifications ( $M=43.2$ ,  $SD=14.8$ ). To establish if the difference was statistically significant, an independent t- test was carried out. The results are shown on Table 3. They revealed that the difference was statistically significant ( $t=2.29$ ,  $DF=460$ ,  $p=0.02$ ). This implies that academic qualifications have an impact on attitudes towards inclusive education with higher those with higher academic qualifications exhibiting positive attitudes. The findings of this study are consistent with other studies (Ahmmed, Sharma and Deppeler, 2012; Fakolade, Adenyi & Tella, 2010; Parasuram, 2006). The later studies found that higher academic qualifications positively correlate with teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion of learners with special needs. An education degree course in Kenya has a compulsory unit in Special Needs Education which evidently exposes the teacher trainee to issues related to special education thus positively impacting on their perceptions towards persons with special needs. Taking in cognisance that majority of teachers are holders of certificates and diplomas as findings indicated, there is an urgent need to in-service teacher on SNE to facilitate their acquisition of knowledge which will ultimately aid in changing their attitudes.

### **Relationship between teachers’ attitudes and marital status**

The study sought to determine if teachers’ marital status had any impact on their attitudes towards including learners with special needs in regular classes. Teachers were clustered into married, single and other. Those classified as single and others were then re-clustered as ‘not married’. The descriptive statistics on Table 3 indicate that “not married” teachers had more favourable attitudes ( $M=47.6$ ,  $SD=14.6$ ) than their married

counterparts ( $M=42.8$ ,  $SD15.0$ ). To determine if the difference was statistically significant an independent t- test was conducted. The results as shown on Table 3 revealed that the difference between the mean scores of teachers who were married and those 'not married' was statistically significant ( $t=2.85$ ,  $DF=460$ ,  $p=0.005$ ). Fakolade, Adenyi and Tella (2009) findings supports the outcomes in this study where they found that teachers who were not married had more positive attitudes towards accommodating learners with special needs in regular classes than their married peers. The implication of this finding is the necessity of seeking for strategies to improve the attitude of teachers towards inclusion considering that married teachers are the majority in primary schools. Research indicates that one of the most viable strategies is to expose them to training in inclusive education (Buford and Casey (2012; Mukhopadhyay, Molosiwa & Moswela 2009; Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014).

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, this research provides preliminary evidence that overall teachers in rural Kenya have negative attitudes towards including learners with special needs in regular classes. Findings showed that age, marital status and educational qualifications have an impact on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. It is recommended that the ministry of education may consider these findings in order to promote inclusive education in public primary schools in rural Kenya. Teacher training curriculum developers may also consider the results of this study when planning teacher training programmes. There is a need to focus on favourable attitude formation during pre and in-service training. Attitude formation is not something that can be manipulated directly as Sharma, Simi & Forlin (2015) have aptly noted. However, as these researchers have further noted, a range of activities which include exposure to working with children with special needs can considerably improve teachers' attitudes.

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