



# Measuring pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education: Psychometric properties of the TAIS scale



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- A scale measuring attitudes towards inclusive education was developed.
- Five samples were used to study the scale.
- The scale was unidimensional and had good psychometric properties.
- It is recommended for use among teachers and pre-service teachers.

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## ABSTRACT

The Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education (TAIS) scale was designed to measure pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, as defined in the Salamanca Statement of UNESCO. The 10-item scale was developed using a sample of 185 final-year pre-service subject teachers. It was validated in four subsequent studies with various samples of teachers and pre-service teachers. The unidimensionality of the scale was established in all samples except the first-year students, and its validity was confirmed in psychometric analyses. The scale is suggested for use in intervention studies aiming to develop positive attitudes towards inclusion among teachers and pre-service teachers.

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## 1. Introduction

It has been widely acknowledged that the demands on schools and teachers are becoming increasingly complex in the modern society (e.g. OECD, 2005). The OECD report (p. 97) describes the new challenges facing schools as follows:

Society now expects schools to deal effectively with different languages and student backgrounds, to be sensitive to culture and gender issues, to promote tolerance and social cohesion, to respond effectively to disadvantaged students and students with learning or behavioural problems.

Attempts to successfully tackle these demands have been conceptualised in the idea of inclusive education, first launched as an

international goal by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), and recently defined as non-discriminatory quality education for all in a way that respects diversity and the different needs of students (UNESCO, 2009).

The demand for inclusive education became part of the international legal framework through the enactment of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). According to Article 24.1 of the convention, "State Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels" (United Nations, 2006, p. 16). Inclusion has now been established as a key concept in the educational policy of many international organizations, including the United Nations (2006), UNESCO (1994), the OECD (2005), the WHO (2011), the European Commission (2010), The Council of the European Union (2010), and the European Agency of Special Needs Education (EADSNE, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012).

The growing international commitment to human rights has led to the view that separate educational facilities for diverse

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populations represents a threat to their equal rights as citizens. While initially having a special focus on children with disabilities, inclusion is now used to refer to full learner diversity, including gender, sexual orientation, ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious background, socio-economic status, disability and special educational needs (European Agency of Special Needs Education, 2010, p. 7). Inclusive education has become a vehicle for resisting all kinds of rejection, be it based on disability, race, gender, poverty or other forms of difference.

A recent conclusion of the Council of the European Union confirmed that the excellence of educational systems and the pursuit of social inclusion of all citizens should not be seen as mutually exclusive but as complementary goals, stating that “successful inclusion of pupils with special needs in mainstream settings benefits all learners” (2010, pp. 4–5). The aim is a high performing school system committed to both equity and excellence.

The most enduring attainment of the international movement on inclusive education might well have been the vastly increased knowledge regarding how to promote inclusion in the classroom. The number of research articles and textbooks on inclusive education has grown exponentially (e.g. UNESCO, 2001). This research has identified the central importance of teacher education and especially pre-service teacher education in the pursuit of inclusive schools (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010; UNESCO, 2001, 2008; WHO, 2011). The WHO World Report on Disability (2011) deemed the appropriate training of mainstream teachers crucial in achieving confident and competent teachers for children with diverse educational needs. According to the report, “The principles of inclusion should be built into teacher training programmes, which should be about attitudes and values not just knowledge and skills” (WHO, 2011, p. 222). This emphasis is in line with empirical findings on the importance of teacher characteristics to learner achievement. When the contributions of student, home, school, teacher, curricula, and teaching-related variables were compared, it was found that the variables relating to the teacher characteristics had the largest effect on learning (Hattie, 2009). In particular, the accepting relationship towards the child has been confirmed as an influential factor associated with good learning outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007).

### 1.1. Measuring teacher attitudes towards inclusive education

In order to study the effects of teacher training programmes, it is fundamental to be able to use psychometrically sound instruments to measure the attitudes of teachers and pre-service teachers towards inclusive education. Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education have been an object of extensive study for decades (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) whereby the number of studies amount to several hundred (De Boer et al., 2011). Typically, each study has used its own method/s to measure teacher attitudes. Generally, however, these studies have not paid much attention to the psychometric properties of their measuring instruments to the extent that the exact wordings of the variables assessing teacher attitudes are not reported.

Attempts have also been made to construct reliable and valid scales to measure teacher attitudes towards inclusion. The development of psychometrically sound scales is advisable because such scales improve the reliability and validity of the measurements and provide possibilities for comparative studies and further theoretical development. Some examples of scales developed thus far are given in Table 1. The list is based on a preliminary, unsystematic literature search from some main electronic databases, including ERIC, PsycINFO, Academic Search Elite, ProQuest Education Journals,

ProQuest Psychology Journals and PsycARTICLES, using “attitudes”, “teacher”, “teacher attitudes”, “pre-service teachers” and “inclusion” as keywords. In all, 144 studies on teachers' or pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion were found. The means of measuring these attitudes were examined, and the study was added to the list presented in Table 1 if the following three conditions were fulfilled: a) the items of the attitude scale were given in the study, b) some psychometric data on the scale was reported, for example, reliability or factor structure, and c) the attitude scale was used in at least one other study to further examine its validity. Without seeking a precise description of the current situation, Table 1 provides an overall picture of some of the main instruments developed in the field.

### 1.2. Aim of the study

Considering the fact that a great number of scales have been developed for this purpose, one could ask whether there is a need for additional scales. However, there are no absolute criteria for an ideal scale measuring teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The characteristics of a good scale depend on several factors, including the specific purpose of the research. In the present study, five criteria were underscored. The first criterion was construct validity. In order to warrant good construct validity, the scale should encompass a wide array of themes considered critical in the implementation of inclusive education. The second criterion was brevity. The scale should be sufficiently brief to ease its enclosure into questionnaires, which may include several other scales. However, the level of brevity should not be achieved through reduced coverage of the target construct. The third criterion was internal consistency as a measure of reliability. A good scale requires that the items have sufficiently high intercorrelations with each other. This indicates that they measure the same construct. The fourth criterion was unidimensionality. This requirement was based on the theoretical assumption that teacher attitudes towards inclusion ideally contain only one dimension extending from acceptance to rejection. If it is possible to construct a one-dimensional scale, it would make further analysis simpler and more understandable. The fifth criterion was simplicity. The items should be easy to understand and answer.

No one of the existing scales presented in Table 1 fulfilled all of the five criteria listed; especially, unidimensionality was not acquired by any of the scales. In fact, unidimensionality was not always a requirement because the content of some scales was divided into distinct domains. The reliability of all scales listed in Table 1 was good. The length of the scales varied between 12 and 30 items, and many scales were quite short. However, the shortest scale, MTAI-SF (Stoiber, Gettinger, & Goetz, 1998), was developed on the basis of a sample containing both parents and teachers and, therefore, did not purely represent the perspective of teachers. The construct validity of some scales could be questioned. The PIE scale of Moberg (1997) mainly contained items about facts and not values, example “All students will receive appropriate education and related services in regular education”. Such statements of fact could very well be rejected by persons who may otherwise support inclusion. Therefore, the scale seemed to measure quite extremist attitudes rather than a wide array of opinions.

The aim of this study was to develop a scale that would incorporate all the five criteria set above. The planned target group for the application of the scale were pre-service and in-service teachers. The scale development process consisted of several phases. In study I, the new scale was constructed stepwise on the basis of psychometric analysis using a sample of pre-service subject teachers as participants. In Finland, subject teachers work mainly at junior secondary education level in grades 7–9. In the subsequent

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