

Exploring Pre-Service English Teachers' Sentiments and Concerns Toward Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores pre-service English teachers' sentiments and concerns toward inclusive education in the Indonesian EFL context. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study examines affective readiness by focusing on two dimensions measured through the SACIE-R instrument: sentiments and concerns, which provide more specific insights into emotional acceptance and perceived implementation challenges than general attitude measures. A descriptive quantitative design was employed, involving 40 pre-service English teachers from Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur who had completed the Inclusive Education course. Data were collected using a modified version of the SACIE-R questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings indicate that pre-service teachers demonstrated low to moderate positive sentiments toward inclusive education, suggesting cautious acceptance accompanied by lingering emotional discomfort and uncertainty when interacting with students with disabilities. In addition, a moderate level of concern was identified, particularly related to pedagogical competence, classroom management, peer acceptance, and availability of instructional resources. These patterns reveal a gap between cognitive awareness of inclusive principles and emotional as well as practical readiness for classroom implementation. The study highlights the need for stronger experiential learning opportunities, structured practicum exposure, and institutional support within teacher education programs to strengthen affective readiness and build confidence in managing inclusive classrooms.

Key words: Inclusive Education; Pre-service Teachers; Sentiments; Concerns; EFL Context

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, inclusive education has gained significant attention in global educational discourse as a response to increasing diversity in schools and the growing demand for equitable access to quality education (Walton &

Engelbrecht, 2024). Inclusive education emphasizes the fundamental right of all learners, including those with disabilities and special educational needs, to participate meaningfully in mainstream schooling with adequate support. Rather than segregating learners based on ability or background, inclusive education promotes shared learning environments that value diversity, participation, and social justice. UNESCO conceptualizes inclusive education as a systemic transformation of regular schools to accommodate and welcome every learner, regardless of individual differences or learning needs (Fadlulla Zain et al., 2022). Diversity within the inclusive framework extends beyond disability and encompasses variations in sociocultural background, gender, language, and ability (Bešić, 2020). When implemented effectively, inclusive education benefits not only learners with disabilities but also their peers, teachers, and the broader educational community by fostering empathy, collaboration, and inclusive social norms (Zahro et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, inclusive education is formally defined as an educational service system that integrates learners with special needs into regular schools to learn alongside their peers (Kristen et al., 2020). This national commitment is reinforced through Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 70 of 2009, which mandates that all learners, including those with disabilities and those with exceptional talents, are educated within the same schooling environment (Kusumaningrum et al., 2024). Furthermore, Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System guarantees the right of every citizen to access non-discriminatory and high-quality education, including learners with special needs (Juntak et al., 2023). Collectively, these policies reflect Indonesia's formal alignment with international principles of educational equity and social inclusion. However, translating policy mandates into consistent classroom practices remains a complex and uneven process across regions and school contexts.

Despite strong regulatory frameworks, the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia continues to face persistent challenges. One major obstacle is teachers' limited conceptual and practical understanding of inclusive education, which significantly shapes their attitudes and instructional decisions toward students with special needs (Aisy & Aprilia, 2025). Insufficient teacher preparation has been consistently identified as a barrier to effective interaction and differentiated instruction in inclusive classrooms (Sharma et al., 2021). When teachers lack confidence, pedagogical strategies, and institutional support, students with disabilities may experience marginalization, reduced participation, and limited access to meaningful learning opportunities. These challenges are intensified in classrooms where teachers must simultaneously address curriculum demands, diverse learner needs, and limited resources. Consequently, inclusive education risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative if teacher readiness is not adequately addressed.

Within this context, pre-service teachers represent a critical group for sustaining inclusive education in the long term. As future educators, they will directly shape

classroom climates, instructional practices, and student interactions. Their beliefs, emotions, and perceived competence developed during teacher education programs influence how they interpret inclusion policies and enact inclusive practices in real classrooms. International studies consistently highlight that pre-service teachers' readiness is shaped not only by knowledge and skills but also by affective factors such as emotional acceptance, anxiety, and confidence toward working with diverse learners (Sharma et al., 2015). These affective dimensions influence willingness to adapt instruction, collaborate with specialists, and manage inclusive classrooms effectively.

However, much of the Indonesian research on inclusive education has primarily examined pre-service teachers' attitudes as a single construct, often measured through general attitude scales (Manar, 2016, as cited in Amalia, 2022). While attitudes provide useful information about overall dispositions, they do not sufficiently capture the emotional complexity underlying teachers' readiness to implement inclusive practices. International literature emphasizes that affective readiness involves more nuanced components, particularly sentiments (emotional acceptance and comfort) and concerns (perceived challenges and anxieties related to implementation) (Sharma & Jacobs, 2016). These dimensions offer deeper insight into how teachers emotionally respond to diversity and how confident they feel about managing inclusive classrooms. Without examining these affective components separately, important barriers to effective implementation may remain hidden behind generally positive attitude scores.

The distinction between sentiments and concerns becomes particularly relevant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. EFL classrooms often involve additional pedagogical complexity due to language barriers, multicultural student populations, and communication demands. Pre-service English teachers may face unique challenges when supporting students with special needs while simultaneously managing language instruction, assessment demands, and communicative interaction. Emotional discomfort, uncertainty, and perceived lack of competence may be intensified when teachers are required to accommodate diverse learning needs in a second-language environment. Therefore, investigating affective readiness within the EFL teacher education context offers important insights into how inclusive education policies intersect with language teaching realities.

To theoretically frame these affective processes, this study draws on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that behavioral intention is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2022). Within this framework, attitudes influence individuals' emotional responses and evaluations toward a behavior, while perceived behavioral control reflects beliefs about one's capability to perform that behavior effectively. In the context of inclusive education, sentiments may reflect affective attitudes toward teaching students with diverse needs, whereas concerns may reflect perceived barriers, anxieties, and self-efficacy related to implementation. TPB thus provides a relevant

conceptual lens for understanding how emotional acceptance and perceived competence jointly shape pre-service teachers' readiness to engage in inclusive teaching practices.

Unlike previous Indonesian studies that primarily emphasize attitudes toward inclusion as a broad construct, this study deliberately focuses on sentiments and concerns as two distinct yet interrelated dimensions of affective readiness. By utilizing selected subscales of the SACIE-R instrument within an EFL pre-service teacher population, the study aims to capture more specific emotional patterns related to acceptance, discomfort, confidence, and perceived challenges. This approach allows for a more nuanced interpretation of readiness than general attitude measures alone. Furthermore, situating the findings within the TPB framework strengthens theoretical interpretation by linking affective tendencies to behavioral intention and perceived control, an area that remains underexplored in Indonesian inclusive education research.

Accordingly, this study seeks to explore pre-service English teachers' sentiments and concerns toward inclusive education in the Indonesian EFL context. By examining affective readiness rather than solely cognitive attitudes, the study contributes empirical evidence that can inform curriculum design, practicum structure, and institutional support mechanisms in teacher education programs. Understanding these affective dimensions is essential for preparing future teachers who are not only knowledgeable about inclusion but also emotionally prepared and confident to implement inclusive practices in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusive Education: Concepts and Policy Context

Inclusive education is a global movement that emphasizes equal access to quality education for all learners, including those with special needs. According to UNESCO, inclusive education is an educational approach that views every child as a unique individual with distinct needs and potential (Nadhiroh & Ahmadi, 2024). It provides opportunities for learners with special needs to study alongside their same-age peers who do not have special needs (Mosvita & Susetyo, 2024). Inclusive education aims to integrate children with special needs into the same learning environment as their peers, allowing them to learn and develop together. This approach is considered a solution that ensures children with special needs have the opportunity to study alongside regular students in mainstream schools (Milnasari et al., 2025). Therefore, based on the explanation above, inclusive education is an educational approach and model that promotes equal learning opportunities by integrating children with special needs into mainstream classrooms, allowing them to learn and develop alongside their peers.

In Indonesia, this principle is formalized through Law No. 20 of 2003, Article 5 Paragraph 1, which stipulates that citizens with physical, emotional, mental, intellectual, or social disabilities are entitled to receive special education (Kristen et al., 2020). East Kalimantan is one of the provinces in Indonesia that has implemented inclusive education policies. Recent regional data indicate that East Kalimantan has around 3,950 students with special needs enrolled across different schools (Kemendikbudristek, 2025). This figure indicates that access to education for children with special needs is becoming increasingly open. With this growing number, pre-service teachers' readiness and perceptions toward inclusive education have become essential requirements.

Pre-service Teachers Sentiments and Concerns in Inclusive Education

Pre-service teachers in inclusive education refer to prospective teachers who are still undergoing teacher education programs and are being prepared to teach students with diverse learning needs in inclusive classroom settings. The pre-service stage will be considered a critical phase because prospective teachers' attitudes, readiness, and self-efficacy toward inclusive education begin to develop during this period. Research indicates that inclusive training provided during the pre-service stage significantly influence pre-service teachers' readiness to implement inclusive education in schools (Sharma et al., 2015). However, other studies show that although pre-service teachers tend to hold positive perceptions of inclusive education, they still face limitations in policy understanding and practical readiness to effectively implement inclusion in classrooms (Bunbun & Owusu, 2024). Similarly, research on EFL pre-service teachers in Indonesia reveals a gap between high levels of inclusive awareness and positive attitudes and the ability to translate inclusive principles into classroom practice, highlighting that stronger training and practical experiences in inclusive education are required within teacher education programs (Emaliana et al., 2024).

Such readiness should not only focus on cognitive and knowledge aspects but also include psychological and affective dimensions. The SACIE-R instrument (Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education – Revised) assesses three key dimensions of readiness for inclusion: attitude, sentiment, and concern (Forlin et al., 2011). Sentiment is closely related to more personal and emotional feelings such as fear, reluctance, and discomfort toward students with disabilities (Gülbay, 2024). Meanwhile concern refers to questions, uncertainties, and possible resistance that teachers may have in responding to new situations or changing demands (Yan & Deng, 2019). In line with this, concern is defined as a negative expectation toward certain events or behaviors (Jury et al., 2023). Furthermore, subsequent findings revealed that higher levels of concern are negatively associated with teachers' support for inclusive practices (Miesera et al., 2019).

Previous Studies

In Indonesia, most studies have primarily focused on teachers' general attitudes toward inclusive education, such as those conducted by (Amalia, 2022) and (Musayaroh et al., 2023). However, research that specifically examines sentiments and concerns among pre-service teachers remains limited. International studies have consistently reported that pre-service teachers tend to experience higher levels of concern due to limited training and insufficient practicum exposure to students with disabilities. For instance, (Sharma et al., 2021) found that inadequate preparation and lack of hands-on experience significantly contributed to pre-service teachers' concerns about implementing inclusive practices.

Moreover, international research has demonstrated that concerns are negatively correlated with support for inclusive practices (Jury et al., 2023; Miesera et al., 2019). In the Indonesian context, particularly within regional settings such as East Kalimantan, empirical studies addressing affective dimensions of pre-service teachers remain scarce. Existing local studies (eg. Nadhiroh & Ahmadi, 2024; Novembli & Hasanah, 2024) suggest that emotional readiness, confidence, and personal comfort play a crucial role in shaping teachers' acceptance of inclusive education; however, these studies did not explicitly examine sentiments and concerns as distinct constructs. Similarly, (Ediyanto et al., 2020) reported that pre-service teachers generally demonstrate only moderate attitudes toward inclusive education, indicating variability in readiness and underscoring the importance of examining affective factors alongside general attitude measures. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on pre-service teachers' sentiments and concerns toward inclusive education, offering a more nuanced understanding of affective readiness within the Indonesian EFL pre-service teacher context.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design to describe pre-service teachers' sentiments and concerns toward inclusive education. Descriptive research aims to systematically characterize individuals, situations, or phenomena as they naturally occur, without manipulating variables (Siedlecki, 2020). This design was considered appropriate because the study did not seek to test causal relationships or hypotheses, but rather to provide a numerical description of affective tendencies among pre-service teachers based on survey data. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire and analyzed quantitatively to identify overall patterns of sentiments and concerns. The findings were presented in numerical form, including mean scores and standard deviations, to provide a clear overview of participants' affective readiness toward inclusive education.

The population of this study consisted of 218 pre-service teachers enrolled in the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. A purposive sampling technique was applied to ensure that participants possessed sufficient academic exposure and practical experience relevant to inclusive education. Purposive sampling allows researchers to intentionally select participants who are most likely to provide accurate and meaningful information based on predetermined criteria (Campbell et al., 2020). Participants were required to have completed the Inclusive Education course, as this ensured basic conceptual understanding of inclusive education. In addition, participants had completed at least 134 credit hours, passed the Microteaching course, and completed the Community Service Program (KKN). These criteria were applied to ensure that participants had experienced both theoretical and practical components of teacher preparation. A total of 40 students met all inclusion criteria and were included in the sample. Although the sample size was relatively small ($N = 40$), it was considered acceptable for descriptive quantitative research using purposive sampling, where participant selection is based on specific experiential qualifications rather than statistical representativeness (Campbell et al., 2020). The sample size was sufficient to generate stable descriptive estimates and provide meaningful insight into affective trends within the target population.

Instruments and Procedures

This study used a questionnaire as the main instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was adopted from Pre-Service Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education During Their Studies in Bahrain Teachers College by (AlMahdi & Bukamal, 2019), which was modified from the Sentiment, Attitude, and Concern about Inclusive Education–Revised (SACIE-R) scale developed by Forlin et al. (2011) From the original pool of items, an initial set of 16 statements related to pre-service teachers' perspectives on disability was selected and was subjected to reliability analysis. Following this process, only items that met acceptable reliability criteria were retained for further analysis. The final instrument consisted of 11 items divided into two subscales: sentiment (7 items) and concern (4 items). All items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). The sentiment subscale measured pre-service teachers' affective responses toward individuals with disabilities, while the concern subscale assessed their concerns about teaching students with disabilities. The concern subscale was used to address Research Question 2, which focused on pre-service teachers' level of concern toward inclusive education. All items in the questionnaire were negatively worded; therefore, reverse scoring was applied during data analysis so that higher scores consistently reflected more positive sentiments and lower levels of concern toward inclusive education.

The data in this study were collected using a questionnaire. First, the researcher obtained permission from the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur. Then, participants were selected based on predetermined criteria, namely pre-service English teachers who had completed the

Inclusive Education course, Microteaching, and KKN. The questionnaire was distributed online using Google Forms. Before filling out the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would be kept confidential. A total of 40 valid responses were collected. After data collection, all responses were checked and negatively worded items were reverse scored. The data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics with the help of SPSS.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive quantitative analysis with the assistance of SPSS software. Each item was measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Prior to analysis, negatively worded items were reverse-scored to ensure that higher scores consistently reflected more positive sentiments and lower levels of concern toward inclusive education. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were calculated for each item and for each dimension of the instrument, namely sentiments and concerns. Item-level analysis was conducted to identify specific aspects of inclusive education that elicited the highest and lowest responses among pre-service teachers. Composite scores for each dimension were obtained by averaging the item scores within each subscale. These composite scores were used to describe overall tendencies in pre-service teachers' sentiments and concerns toward inclusive education. To facilitate interpretation, mean scores were categorized into levels (low, moderate, and high) based on equal interval calculations of the four-point Likert scale.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Pre-service English Teachers' Sentiments toward Inclusive Education

This section presents findings related to pre-service English teachers' sentiments toward inclusive education. The sentiment subscale consisted of seven negatively worded items measured using a four-point Likert scale. All items were reverse-scored so that higher scores indicated more positive sentiments.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics of Sentiment Subscale

Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
0.754	7

The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.754, indicating acceptable internal consistency and suitability for further analysis.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Sentiment Items (N=40)

Item	Mean	SD
S1 R	2.18	0.93
S2 R	1.95	0.81
S3 R	2.65	0.74
S4 R	1.98	0.83
S5 R	2.98	0.97
S6 R	1.68	0.83
S7 R	2.40	0.93

Table 4.2 showed that the mean scores of the sentiment items ranged from 1.68 to 2.98, indicating a moderate level of positive sentiment toward inclusive education. The overall mean score of the sentiment subscale was 2.26, which suggested that the participants demonstrated moderate affective readiness, with lingering emotional discomfort toward disability-related situations.

Pre-service English Teachers' Concern toward Inclusive Education

This section addresses the second research question regarding pre-service English teachers' concerns toward inclusive education. The concern subscale consisted of four negatively worded items that were also reverse scored so that higher scores indicated lower levels of concern.

Table 4. Reliability Statistics of Concern Subscale

Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
0.769	4

The reliability analysis of the concern subscale produced a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.769 across four items. This result indicates good internal consistency and suggests that the concern subscale reliably measures pre-service teachers' concerns related to inclusive education.

Item	Mean	SD
C1 R	1.93	0.76
C2 R	1.90	0.87
C3 R	1.80	0.72
C4 R	1.80	0.79

The results showed that pre-service English teachers experienced a moderate level of concern toward inclusive education. Concerns related to inadequate resources, limited pedagogical skills, classroom management challenges, and peer acceptance of students with disabilities were consistently reported. These findings indicate that although respondents conceptually support inclusive education, they remain uncertain about their practical ability to implement inclusive practices effectively, particularly in real classroom contexts. Overall, the concern subscale reflects that

structural and competence-related factors remain significant sources of apprehension, especially regarding preparedness and institutional support.

Viewed through the Theory of Planned Behavior, the relatively low sentiment scores indicate that affective attitudes toward disability among pre-service teachers remain underdeveloped, despite their prior exposure to inclusive education coursework. Although participants had completed formal training, their emotional acceptance of learners with disabilities appeared limited. At the same time, the moderate level of concern reflects constrained perceived behavioral control, particularly in relation to pedagogical competence, classroom management, and institutional support. Within the TPB framework, this combination of weak affective attitudes and limited perceived control may reduce future intentions to implement inclusive practices consistently, even when cognitive endorsement of inclusion is present.

The findings further suggest that emotional acceptance of disability is more resistant to change than conceptual understanding. While most pre-service English teachers expressed general agreement with inclusive education principles, lingering emotional discomfort indicates that theoretical exposure alone may not sufficiently shape affective readiness. This pattern implies that participants may understand inclusion at a policy or ideological level but still experience uncertainty or discomfort when imagining direct interaction with students with disabilities. Such results align with Sharma et al. (2015), who argue that affective dimensions of teacher readiness develop more effectively through sustained experiential learning rather than lecture-based instruction. Direct engagement, observation, and reflective practice appear necessary to cultivate empathy, confidence, and emotional openness toward inclusive classrooms.

Furthermore, the moderate concern scores highlight persistent uncertainty regarding the practical implementation of inclusive education. From a perceived behavioral control perspective, these concerns suggest that participants may feel insufficiently prepared to adapt instructional strategies, manage diverse learning needs, and respond to behavioral or academic challenges in inclusive settings. Limited exposure to differentiated instruction, assistive technologies, and collaborative teaching models may contribute to this uncertainty. This finding supports previous research indicating that teacher education programs often emphasize inclusive policy frameworks and philosophical foundations more strongly than practical pedagogical skill development (Miesera et al., 2019). As a result, pre-service teachers may express positive beliefs about inclusion while simultaneously doubting their operational readiness in real classroom contexts.

The persistence of concern related to resource availability and peer acceptance also reflects broader systemic constraints within educational environments. Pre-service teachers may anticipate limited institutional support, large class sizes, and inadequate access to specialized personnel, which can undermine confidence in their ability to implement inclusive practices effectively. These anticipatory

concerns are particularly relevant in contexts where inclusive infrastructure and professional support systems remain unevenly distributed. Without adequate mentoring and school-based collaboration opportunities, perceived behavioral control may remain low even among motivated teacher candidates.

Taken together, the findings indicate a gap between cognitive endorsement of inclusive education and affective as well as practical readiness to enact inclusive teaching. While participants demonstrate awareness of inclusion principles, emotional comfort and instructional confidence remain areas requiring further development. From a teacher education perspective, this highlights the importance of integrating structured field experiences, guided reflection, and authentic interaction with learners with diverse needs into pre-service programs. Such experiential components may strengthen emotional acceptance, enhance perceived competence, and foster stronger behavioral intentions toward inclusive practice. Aligning coursework with hands-on exposure and institutional support may therefore play a critical role in preparing future teachers to implement inclusive education more confidently and sustainably.

CONCLUSION

This study explored pre-service English teachers' sentiments and concerns toward inclusive education in the Indonesian EFL context using a descriptive quantitative approach grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior. The findings indicate that participants demonstrated low to moderate positive sentiments and moderate levels of concern. Although pre-service teachers generally support inclusive education conceptually, many still experience emotional discomfort and uncertainty regarding their ability to teach students with disabilities. Concerns were mainly related to pedagogical competence, classroom management, peer acceptance, and availability of institutional support. These results suggest a gap between cognitive understanding of inclusion and affective as well as practical readiness to implement inclusive practices. From a behavioral perspective, limited positive sentiments reflect underdeveloped affective attitudes, while moderate concern levels indicate restricted perceived behavioral control. This combination may weaken future intentions to apply inclusive practices consistently, even when policy support and professional expectations are strong. The findings highlight that emotional acceptance and teaching confidence cannot be developed through theoretical coursework alone. Pre-service teachers require meaningful experiential learning, guided reflection, and exposure to inclusive classroom contexts to strengthen empathy, self-efficacy, and adaptive teaching skills.

Teacher education programs should therefore integrate more practice-oriented learning opportunities, such as school-based experiences, simulations, and collaborative problem-solving activities related to inclusive teaching. Institutional support in the form of mentoring, access to learning resources, and professional guidance is also essential to reduce anxiety and strengthen confidence. This study is limited by its small sample size and reliance on self-reported data, which may

restrict generalizability. Future research is encouraged to involve broader samples and longitudinal designs to examine how sentiments and concerns evolve during practicum and early teaching stages. Overall, the study emphasizes that strengthening affective readiness is as important as developing pedagogical knowledge in preparing future teachers for inclusive classrooms.

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