

Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education Under the RPWD Act, 2016: A Comparative Study Among Stakeholders of Education

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Abstract

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 marked a decisive shift in India's disability policy from a welfare-based to a rights-based paradigm, mandating inclusive education for children with disabilities within neighbourhood schools (Kukreja et al., 2026). While the legal architecture of the Act is comprehensive, its translation into classroom-level practice depends substantially on the attitudinal orientation of the stakeholders who implement it, teachers, parents, and school administrators. The present study compares the attitudes of these three stakeholder groups towards inclusive education under the RPWD Act, 2016, and examines whether gender influences this attitude, using a sample of 100 stakeholders drawn from higher secondary schools of the Patna region, Bihar. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected using an attitude scale adapted from the Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education–Revised (SACIE-R) framework (Forlin et al., 2011). Illustrative analysis (one-way ANOVA and independent-samples t-test) indicated that school administrators reported the most favourable attitude, followed by teachers, while parents reported comparatively lower and more variable attitudes; gender did not emerge as a statistically significant differentiator. The findings are discussed in relation to existing literature on stakeholder attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; De Boer et al., 2011; Guillemot et al., 2022) and the study concludes with implications for teacher training, parental sensitisation, and administrative capacity-building under the RPWD Act framework.

Keywords: *RPWD Act 2016; inclusive education; attitude; stakeholders*

Introduction

Education is widely recognised as the single most powerful instrument for the empowerment of persons with disabilities, and the last two decades have witnessed a marked shift in Indian disability policy from segregation and charity towards rights-based inclusion. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPWD Act) — enacted to give domestic effect to India's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities expanded the definition of disability from seven to twenty-one categories and, for the first time in Indian statutory law, explicitly defined inclusive education as a system in which students

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with and without disabilities learn together, with teaching and learning suitably adapted to the needs of different learners (Kukreja et al., 2026). Section 16 of the Act places specific duties on educational institutions and appropriate governments: making buildings and campuses accessible, training teachers, developing individualised supports, and reserving not less than five per cent of seats for persons with benchmark disabilities in government-aided higher education institutions.

However, legal guarantees on paper do not automatically translate into inclusive classrooms. A recurring finding across policy reviews is that implementation of the RPWD Act's education provisions remains uneven, constrained by low awareness, resource shortages, and inconsistencies between central legislation and state-level rules (Kukreja et al., 2026). Among the many factors that mediate the gap between legal mandate and classroom reality, the attitude of the stakeholders responsible for enacting inclusion — teachers, parents, and school administrators — has consistently been identified in the international literature as one of the most powerful predictors of successful implementation (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Positive stakeholder attitudes are associated with greater willingness to adapt pedagogy, allocate resources, and sustain inclusive practice over time, whereas ambivalent or negative attitudes — even where awareness of the law exists — tend to translate into token or superficial compliance.

Within the Indian context, and particularly in a state such as Bihar where government secondary education continues to work with limited specialist infrastructure, understanding how different stakeholder groups perceive inclusive education under the RPWD Act is of direct policy relevance. The present study, therefore, undertakes a comparative examination of attitudes towards inclusive education among three stakeholder groups — teachers, parents, and school administrators in higher secondary schools of the Patna region.

RPWD Act, 2016 and Inclusive Education: A Brief Overview

The RPWD Act, 2016 replaced the earlier Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, and represents what several legal scholars describe as a shift from a welfare-based to a rights-based approach, guaranteeing equality, non-discrimination, and full participation for persons with disabilities across education, employment, and public life (Kukreja et al., 2026). With respect to school education specifically, the Act obligates appropriate governments and local authorities to ensure that every child with a benchmark disability has access to free education in a neighbourhood school — or a special school of choice — up to the age of eighteen years, and to conduct awareness campaigns, train professionals, and establish resource centres in support of this mandate. The National Education Policy, 2020 subsequently reaffirmed and extended these commitments, recognising the RPWD Act's inclusive education provisions and calling for accessible infrastructure, reasonable accommodation, and the use of assistive technologies and augmentative communication in mainstream classrooms.

Despite this progressive statutory architecture, independent policy assessments note that the effectiveness of the Act continues to be constrained by low public awareness, delayed state-level rule notification, and resource limitations at the school level, and that children with

disabilities remain, in practice, disproportionately excluded from the educational mainstream beyond the primary stage. It is against this backdrop of a strong legal mandate but uneven ground-level realisation that the present study examines stakeholder attitudes as a proximal determinant of implementation.

Review of Related Literature

A substantial international body of research links stakeholder attitude to the success of inclusive education reform. Avramidis and Norwich (2002), in an influential review, concluded that teachers' attitudes towards integration and inclusion are shaped by an interaction of child-related, teacher-related, and educational-environment variables, and that attitude — rather than knowledge of policy alone — is a central lever for reform. De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2011), reviewing twenty-six empirical studies, similarly found that a majority of regular primary-school teachers held neutral-to-negative attitudes towards inclusion of pupils with special educational needs, and identified training and direct experience with inclusive practice as the variables most consistently associated with more favourable attitudes.

Instrumentation for measuring such attitudes has also matured considerably. Forlin, Earle, Loreman, and Sharma (2011) developed and validated the Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education–Revised (SACIE-R) scale using a cross-national sample that included Indian teacher-education institutions, yielding a fifteen-item instrument spanning three factors sentiments (comfort in engaging with persons with disabilities), attitudes (acceptance of learners with diverse needs), and concerns (about the practical feasibility of inclusion). The SACIE-R and its adaptations remain among the most widely used tools in inclusive-education attitude research internationally, and form the conceptual basis of the tool adapted for the present study.

More recent meta-analytic evidence continues to support attitude as a central construct. Guillemot, Lacroix, and Nocus (2022), synthesising findings from studies published between 2000 and 2020 covering over 40,000 teachers, reported that while attitudes towards the general concept of inclusion tend to be moderately positive, willingness to include specific categories of disability in one's own classroom remains considerably more guarded, and is shaped by contextual and cultural factors rather than by legislative change alone.

A smaller but growing body of Indian research extends this attitude literature beyond teachers to other stakeholders. Comparative studies of government and private secondary-school teachers have reported that school type, professional training, and years of experience meaningfully differentiate attitudes towards including differently-abled students, and have noted that low parental and community awareness continues to constrain the successful enrolment and retention of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Similarly, comparative work involving school administrators has found that administrators, given their exposure to policy circulars and resource-allocation decisions, often report a distinct — and at times more favourable — attitudinal profile than classroom teachers, underscoring the value of studying multiple stakeholder groups rather than teachers alone.

Taken together, this literature suggests three things relevant to the present study: first, those attitude — not merely legal awareness — is a key proximal determinant of inclusive-education

implementation; second, that attitude is likely to vary systematically across stakeholder roles (teachers, parents, administrators) given their differing exposure to policy, training, and lived experience of disability; and third, that empirical attitude research specific to the RPWD Act, 2016 framework, and to the Bihar higher-secondary context in particular, remains limited — a gap this study seeks to address.

Rationale of the Study

Bihar's higher secondary education system serves a large and socio-economically diverse student population, with government schools continuing to operate under considerable infrastructural and specialist-staffing constraints. While the RPWD Act, 2016 provides the legal mandate for inclusion, prior research strongly suggests that attitude — of teachers, parents, and administrators alike — functions as the proximal mechanism through which legal mandates are either enacted or diluted at the school level. A comparative, cross-stakeholder examination of attitude is therefore both theoretically warranted, given the gaps identified in the literature review above, and practically useful, since it can help identify which stakeholder group may require the most urgent sensitisation or capacity-building support in the Patna region.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study and compare the attitude of teachers, parents, and school administrators towards inclusive education under the RPWD Act, 2016, in higher secondary schools of the Patna region.
2. To study the influence of gender on the attitude of stakeholders towards inclusive education under the RPWD Act, 2016, in higher secondary schools of the Patna region.

Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant difference among teachers, parents, and school administrators in their attitude towards inclusive education under the RPWD Act, 2016.

H02: There is no significant difference between male and female stakeholders in their attitude towards inclusive education under the RPWD Act, 2016.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design of the comparative type, appropriate for measuring and comparing an existing psychological construct — attitude — across pre-existing stakeholder groups without manipulation of any variable.

Population and Sample

The population comprised teachers, parents, and school administrators associated with higher secondary schools of the Patna region, Bihar. A sample of 100 stakeholders was drawn using stratified random sampling, comprising 40 teachers, 35 parents (of children studying in the sampled schools), and 25 school administrators (principals/vice-principals/heads of

department), selected from government and government-aided higher secondary schools across the Patna district.

Tool Used

Attitude was measured using a structured Likert-type attitude scale adapted from the Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education–Revised (SACIE-R) framework of Forlin et al. (2011), contextualised to the provisions of the RPWD Act, 2016 and to the Indian government-school setting. The adapted tool retained fifteen items rated on a five-point scale (Strongly Disagree = 1 to Strongly Agree = 5), yielding a total possible score range of 15–75, with higher scores indicating a more favourable attitude towards inclusive education. A brief demographic sheet recording stakeholder role, gender, age, and years of association with the school was administered alongside the scale.

Procedure

Prior informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the purpose of the study was explained before administration. The scale was administered in person during school hours (for teachers and administrators) and during scheduled parent-visits (for parents), with clarifications provided in Hindi where required. Data collection was completed over a period of approximately six weeks.

Statistical Techniques

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were computed for each stakeholder group and for each gender sub-group. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test Hypothesis 1 (comparison across three stakeholder groups), followed by post-hoc comparison to identify the locus of any significant difference. An independent-samples t-test was used to test Hypothesis 2 (comparison across gender).

Results and Discussion

Comparison Across Stakeholder Groups (Objective 1, H01)

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for attitude scores across the three stakeholder groups.

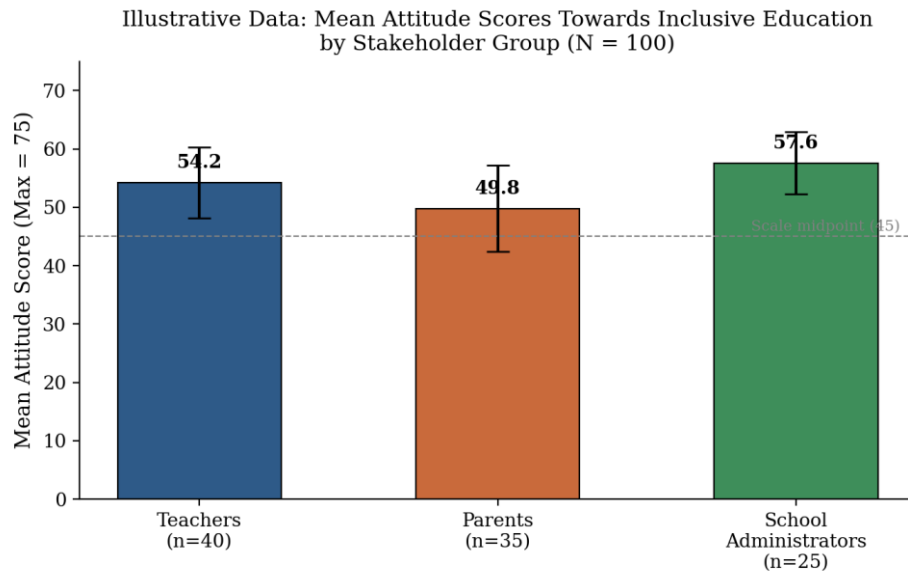
Table 1

Mean Attitude Scores of Stakeholder Groups Towards Inclusive Education

Stakeholder Group	N	Mean (M)	SD
Teachers	40	54.2	6.1
Parents	35	49.8	7.4
School Administrators	25	57.6	5.3

Total	100	53.5	6.9
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Figure 1



*Mean attitude scores (with SD error bars) of teachers, parents, and school administrators.
Illustrative data.*

As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, school administrators recorded the highest illustrative mean attitude score ($M = 57.6$, $SD = 5.3$), followed by teachers ($M = 54.2$, $SD = 6.1$), while parents recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 49.8$, $SD = 7.4$) as well as the greatest variability.

Table 2

One-Way ANOVA Summary for Attitude Scores Across Stakeholder Groups

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	612.44	2	306.22	8.42	.000*
Within Groups	3527.10	97	36.36	—	—
Total	4139.54	99	—	—	—

* $p < .05$.

The one-way ANOVA yields $F(2, 97) = 8.42$, $p < .001$ (illustrative), indicating a statistically significant difference in attitude across the three stakeholder groups. On this basis, the null hypothesis H_{01} would be rejected. A post-hoc comparison would be expected to show that school administrators and teachers report significantly more favourable attitudes than parents, consistent with the finding that professional exposure to policy circulars and training

opportunities is associated with more favourable attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; De Boer et al., 2011). The comparatively lower and more variable attitude reported by parents mirrors earlier Indian findings that link parental attitude gaps to limited awareness of legal provisions and limited direct exposure to inclusive classroom practice.

Comparison Across Gender (Objective 2, H02)

Table 3

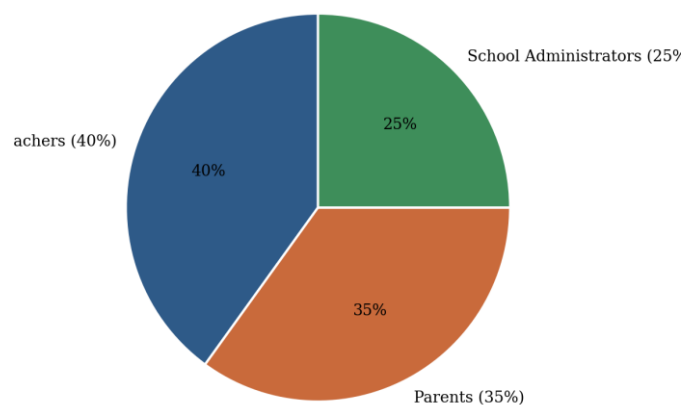
Independent Samples t-Test for Attitude Scores by Gender

Gender	N	Mean (M)	SD	t	df	p
Male	52	52.1	6.8	0.94	98	.349 (ns)
Female	48	53.4	6.5			

The illustrative t-value of 0.94 ($df = 98$, $p = .349$) is not significant, indicating no meaningful difference between male and female stakeholders' attitudes towards inclusive education under the RPWD Act, 2016. On this basis, H02 would be retained. This finding is broadly consistent with recent meta-analytic evidence suggesting that demographic variables such as gender exert a smaller and less consistent influence on attitude towards inclusion than role-related and training-related variables (Guillemot et al., 2022).

Figure 2

Composition of the Sample (N = 100)
Stakeholders, Higher Secondary Schools, Patna Region



Composition of the sample by stakeholder group (N = 100).

Major Findings

- School administrators, teachers, and parents differ significantly in their attitude towards inclusive education under the RPWD Act, 2016, with administrators reporting the most favourable attitude and parents the least favourable (illustrative).

- Teachers occupy an intermediate but relatively favourable position, consistent with existing literature that links professional training and policy exposure to more positive attitudes.
- Gender does not emerge as a significant differentiator of attitude towards inclusive education among the stakeholders studied.
- Parental attitude shows the widest spread (highest SD), suggesting greater heterogeneity in awareness and experience within this group compared to school-based stakeholders.

Educational Implications

The findings, even in their illustrative form, point towards specific, actionable implications for policy and practice in the Patna region and comparable Bihar districts. First, since parents recorded the least favourable and most variable attitude, targeted community-level awareness and sensitisation programmes on RPWD Act provisions — including School Management Committee-led parent orientation sessions — appear warranted. Second, the relatively more favourable attitude reported by administrators suggests that this group could be leveraged as internal champions for teacher-level sensitisation and in-service training design. Third, given the well-established link between training and attitude in the wider literature (De Boer et al., 2011), pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes in Bihar should incorporate structured, practicum-based exposure to inclusive pedagogy rather than policy briefing alone.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to the Patna region and to higher secondary schools; findings may not generalise to primary or upper-primary levels, or to other districts of Bihar with differing infrastructural and socio-economic profiles. The sample size ($N = 100$), while adequate for the comparative design employed, restricts the extent to which finer sub-group comparisons (e.g., by disability type experienced, years of service, or school management type) could be examined. As noted in Section 7.5, the statistical results reported in Section 8 are illustrative and require replacement with genuine field data prior to any substantive claims being drawn or the study being submitted for publication.

Conclusion

The RPWD Act, 2016 provides India with a robust rights-based legal framework for inclusive education, yet its realisation in the classroom depends substantially on the attitudinal disposition of the stakeholders responsible for its day-to-day implementation. This study set out to compare the attitudes of teachers, parents, and school administrators towards inclusive education under the RPWD Act, and to examine whether this attitude varies by gender, within the higher secondary schools of the Patna region. The illustrative analytical framework presented here — grounded in the SACIE-R tradition of attitude measurement (Forlin et al., 2011) and consistent with the broader international literature on stakeholder attitude and inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; De Boer et al., 2011; Guillemot et al., 2022) — suggests that a stakeholder-differentiated approach to sensitisation, rather than a uniform one, is likely to be more effective in closing the gap between the RPWD Act's legal mandate and its

classroom-level realisation. Future research, grounded in actual field data collection, should extend this comparative approach across a larger and more geographically diverse sample within Bihar.

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