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Inclusive Education from Teachers' Perspectives: Application of the TAIS-R Scale in Slovakia

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Abstract

This study focuses on analysing primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in the Slovak context using the revised Teacher Attitudes to Inclusion Scale (TAIS-R). The objective was to identify how teachers evaluate two dimensions of inclusion: general attitudes to inclusion (GAI) and training and perceived competence (TAPC), and to determine whether these dimensions differ statistically significantly. The research sample consisted of 250 respondents; after excluding incomplete questionnaires, the final analytical sample comprised 235 primary school teachers.

A questionnaire method was employed using the Slovak version of the 19-item TAIS-R scale, rated on a six-point Likert scale. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, paired comparison of factor scores, correlation analysis, and analysis of variance. The results revealed that teachers rated their training and perceived competence more positively than their general attitudes to inclusive education, with this difference being statistically significant. The findings confirm the utility of the two-factor interpretation of the TAIS-R and highlight the need for systematic, practice-oriented professional development for teachers in the field of inclusion.

Keywords: inclusive education, teacher attitudes, TAIS-R, primary education.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education represents a significant area of contemporary pedagogical discourse. Its objective is to create educational environments that enable full participation of all pupils regardless of their individual needs, disabilities, or social background (Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). Moreover, inclusion does not merely represent the integration of pupils with specific needs into mainstream classrooms, but rather a broader concept of equitable and equal access to

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education. Teachers play a crucial role in the implementation of inclusive education, as their attitudes and perceived competencies significantly influence the success of incorporating inclusive principles into pedagogical practice. Research indicates that positive teacher attitudes support effective inclusion, whereas uncertainty or insufficient professional preparedness may lead to more cautious acceptance of inclusive measures (Avramidis, Norwich, 2002). Furthermore, evidence suggests that teachers may declare positive attitudes towards inclusion whilst simultaneously not feeling adequately prepared for its practical implementation (Sharma et al., 2012). One instrument for assessing teachers' attitudes towards inclusion is the Teacher Attitudes to Inclusion Scale – Revised (TAIS-R) (Boyle et al., 2024). This instrument distinguishes two dimensions: general attitudes to inclusion (GAI) and the domain of training and perceived competence (TAPC). This approach enables the capture of the discrepancy between value-based acceptance of inclusion and teachers' practical preparedness. The aim of this study was to analyse primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education using the TAIS-R scale in the Slovak context and to identify differences between individual dimensions of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion.

Based on the theoretical background and previous research findings, the study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Slovak primary school teachers evaluate general attitudes towards inclusive education (GAI) and training and perceived competence (TAPC)?

RQ2: Is there a statistically significant difference between the GAI and TAPC dimensions?

RQ3: Do teachers' attitudes towards inclusion differ according to demographic variables such as age and pedagogical experience?

2. Theoretical background

Inclusive education has been among the most significant topics of pedagogical research and educational policy in Slovakia in recent years. The fundamental principle of inclusion is the creation of a school environment that enables the education of all pupils regardless of their health, social, or cultural disadvantage. However, the success of inclusive education depends to a considerable extent on the attitudes of teachers who implement inclusion directly in pedagogical practice.

In the Slovak context, research on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion began to develop more substantially following the adoption of the Strategy for an Inclusive Approach in Education and Training in 2021. This strategy defined inclusion as one of the priorities of the Slovak education system and emphasised the need for systemic changes in teacher preparation, school support, and pedagogical practice (Eurydice, 2022). In an extensive Slovak study conducted on a sample of 926 kindergarten and primary school teachers, the relationships between teachers' attitudes, length of pedagogical experience, and professional development were examined. The results showed that the majority of teachers hold neutral to moderately positive attitudes towards inclusive education. More positive attitudes were exhibited particularly by teachers who had completed training in inclusive pedagogy or had practical experience with pupils with special educational needs. The research also demonstrated that longer pedagogical experience does not automatically translate into more positive attitudes towards inclusion (Cabanová et al., 2022). These findings are further supported by a study that analysed the cognitive, affective, and behavioural components of teachers' attitudes using the MATIES scale. The authors point out that Slovak teachers generally accept the idea of inclusion at a theoretical level; however, in practical implementation, they often experience uncertainty, concerns, and insufficient preparedness. Significant differences emerged between age groups of teachers – older teachers exhibited higher levels of emotional stability and practical preparedness, whilst younger teachers were more open to new inclusive trends but less confident in practical application (Barnová et al., 2022). Another Slovak study focused on the attitudes of kindergarten teachers and teaching assistants. The authors demonstrated in their study that pre-primary education professionals exhibit the most positive attitudes in the behavioural domain, i.e., in their willingness to implement inclusive practices in everyday practice. The research also confirmed that teachers involved in projects supporting inclusion held significantly more positive attitudes than teachers without such experience. The authors further emphasise that practical experience with inclusive education is among the strongest factors in forming positive teacher attitudes (Kušnírová et al., 2022).

Research conducted among prospective teachers suggests that attitudes towards inclusion are formed during university preparation. Studies from 2020 and 2025 compared the attitudes of student teachers. The results showed gradual improvement in the emotional readiness of future

teachers to work in an inclusive environment; however, a weaker level of the cognitive component of attitudes was observed, i.e., beliefs about the practical feasibility of inclusion in schools. The authors note that teacher preparation in Slovakia remains more oriented towards legislative and administrative aspects of inclusion rather than the development of practical and reflective competencies (Vojtko, Duchovičová, 2025).

The professional literature highlights inconsistent understanding of the concepts of inclusion and integration in relation to inclusion issues. Ambiguous differentiation between these concepts may negatively affect teachers' attitudes and the manner of implementing inclusive principles in the school environment.

Based on the analysed sources, it can be stated that Slovak teachers generally support inclusive education; however, their attitudes are conditioned by multiple organisational, professional, and systemic factors. The key prerequisite for successful inclusion remains quality teacher preparation, systematic professional development, availability of supportive professional teams, and the creation of an inclusive school culture. Current developments in the Slovak education system indicate a gradual shift towards more positive perceptions of inclusion; however, the implementation of inclusive education continues to require substantial systemic support and stable conditions for pedagogical staff (Cabanová et al., 2022; Barnová et al., 2022; Vojtko, Duchovičová, 2025).

3. Research methodology

The research sample consisted of 250 primary school teachers. Participants were recruited from primary school teachers who attended continuing professional development courses organised by the research team. The courses were attended by teachers from different regions of Slovakia. At the end of the courses, participants were invited to complete the questionnaire voluntarily and anonymously. The sampling procedure can be characterised as a non-probability convenience sampling approach, as participation depended on teachers' attendance at the professional development courses and their willingness to participate in the study. No probabilistic selection procedure was applied. Although the courses were attended by teachers from different regions of Slovakia, detailed regional information was not systematically collected as part of the questionnaire. Therefore, the precise regional distribution of the final sample cannot be established.

Prior to the analysis, data completeness was verified. Questionnaires with missing responses were excluded from processing using the listwise deletion method. Thus, 15 questionnaires were excluded, and the final analytical sample comprised 235 respondents, of which 97 % were women (n = 228) and 3 % were men (n = 7). The pronounced gender imbalance is broadly consistent with the predominantly female composition of the teaching profession in Slovakia.

In terms of age, the most strongly represented respondents in the research sample were those in the age category of 41 years and above (35.7 %) and respondents aged 36–40 years (28.5 %). The youngest age category (18–20 years) was represented to a lesser extent (7.2 %, n = 17).

Regarding length of pedagogical experience, the most numerous group was the category of teachers with 2–5 years of experience (46 %, n = 108). The second most numerous group consisted of teachers with 6–10 years of experience (24.7 %, n = 58). Teachers with 0–1 year of experience accounted for 12.8 % (n = 30), teachers with 11–15 years of experience 9.4 %, and teachers with 16 or more years of experience 7.2 %.

Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidential handling of data. All participants provided informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire.

3.1. Research instrument

The Teacher Attitudes to Inclusion Scale – Revised (TAIS-R), translated and adapted for use in the Slovak context, was employed to assess teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. The instrument is based on the revised TAIS scale (Boyle et al., 2024) and utilises a six-point Likert scale, whereby a higher score, following appropriate recoding, indicates a more positive attitude towards inclusion.

The version of TAIS-R employed consisted of 19 items rated on a scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 6 ("strongly agree"). The items were divided into two factors: General Attitude towards Inclusion (GAI) and Training and Perceived Competence (TAPC). The GAI factor comprised items 1–9 and examined general attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with specific

needs in mainstream educational settings. The TAPC factor comprised items 10–19 and focused on teachers' perceived professional preparedness, experience, competence, and support when working with pupils with specific needs. In accordance with the conclusions of the Scottish study (Sharma et al., 2012), both factors were interpreted independently, as combining both factors into a single overall score lacks sufficient psychometric support.

The Slovak version of the TAIS-R was prepared using a forward-backward translation procedure to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence with the original instrument. First, the original English version of the scale was translated into Slovak independently by two researchers with expertise in inclusive education and educational psychology. The preliminary Slovak version was subsequently reviewed and harmonized through discussion among the research team.

Following this step, the Slovak version was back-translated into English by an independent bilingual expert who had not participated in the initial translation process. The back-translated version was then compared with the original instrument in order to identify potential discrepancies in meaning, terminology, and conceptual interpretation. Minor linguistic adjustments were subsequently made to improve clarity and semantic consistency.

The preliminary Slovak adaptation of the TAIS-R was pilot tested on a small sample of primary school teachers to assess comprehensibility, clarity of wording, and contextual appropriateness of individual items. Feedback obtained during the pilot phase resulted in several stylistic modifications intended to improve item readability and cultural relevance within the Slovak educational context.

In addition, the instrument underwent expert review by specialists in inclusive education, pedagogy, and psychometrics, who evaluated the content validity and linguistic adequacy of the translated items. The final Slovak version of the TAIS-R was subsequently administered in the main research sample.

3.2. Data collection and processing procedure

Data collection was conducted using the questionnaire method. Statistical processing was based on the two-factor structure of the TAIS-R scale. Descriptive statistics, factor reliability, and two factor scores were calculated: GAI and TAPC. The GAI factor comprised items 1–9 and expressed teachers' general attitudes towards inclusive education. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded so that a higher score indicated a more positive attitude towards inclusion. The factor achieved acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.736$), whilst the mean score ($M = 3.31$; $SD = 0.71$) indicated a rather neutral to moderately positive attitude towards inclusion. The TAPC factor consisted of items 10–19 and captured perceived preparation, professional competence, and teacher support when working with pupils with specific needs. It achieved good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.845$) and a higher mean score ($M = 3.85$; $SD = 0.84$), suggesting that teachers rated their practical competence more positively than the general concept of inclusion. The difference between TAPC and GAI was statistically significant, $t(234) = 8.12$, $p < 0.001$. The correlation between factors was weak but statistically significant, $r = 0.150$, $p = 0.021$, which supports the interpretation of GAI and TAPC as related yet distinct constructs.

3.3. Item – level analysis

The item-level analysis was conducted to identify the strongest areas and key barriers in teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education across the individual TAIS-R items. Figure 1 presents the mean scores for all TAIS-R items, divided according to the two-factor structure of the scale: GAI and TAPC. The dashed line represents the midpoint of the six-point scale.

The visual distribution of item scores shows that higher values were concentrated mainly in items related to practical inclusive strategies, whereas lower values appeared in items associated with perceived barriers, professional training, and classroom conditions. This pattern supports the interpretation that teachers evaluate concrete inclusive practices more positively than some broader organisational and professional conditions of inclusion.

Tables 1 and 2 summarise the strongest areas and key barriers identified at the item level. The strongest results were linked to pupil participation, individualised instruction, appropriate support, and adaptation of teaching materials. In contrast, the key barriers were associated with pupils' social readiness, the perceived impact of inclusion on teaching, and insufficient professional training. Overall, the findings indicate a discrepancy between teachers' willingness to implement

inclusive strategies in everyday teaching and their more cautious perception of the conditions required for effective inclusion.

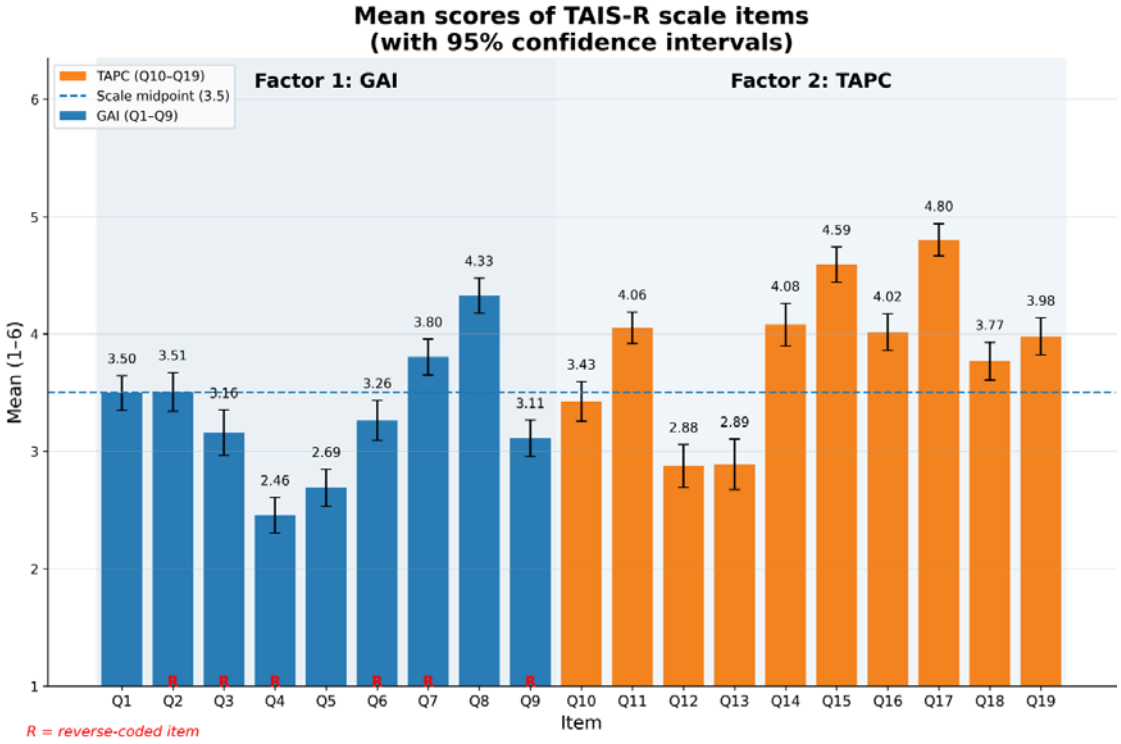


Fig. 1. Mean scores of TAIS-R scale items with 95 % confidence intervals

Table 1. Strongest areas identified in the TAIS-R item-level analysis

Item	Recoded mean score	Agreement with original statement (%)	Substantive interpretation
Q17	4,80	89,79 %	I ensure that all children can participate in teaching.
Q15	4,59	83,40 %	I provide individualised instructions to pupils with specific needs.
Q8	4,33	75,74 %	With appropriate support, I could teach all pupils in the same classroom.
Q14	4,08	67,23 %	I provide alternative materials for pupils with specific needs in the classroom.
Q11	4,06	70,64 %	I am capable of positively influencing the education of pupils with specific needs.

Table 2. Key barriers identified in the TAIS-R item-level analysis

Item	Recoded mean score	Agreement with original statement (%)	Substantive interpretation
Q4	2,46	85,53 %	Pupils with specific needs must possess the necessary social skills to behave appropriately in the classroom. (reverse item: agreement indicates less inclusive attitude).
Q5	2,69	22,13 %	The presence of children with specific needs in my mainstream classroom has minimal impact on my teaching.
Q12	2,88	32,34 %	I receive adequate training for the day-to-day management of children with specific needs.

Item	Recoded mean score	Agreement with original statement (%)	Substantive interpretation
Q13	2,89	32,77 %	I have completed relevant training in the past five years.
Q9	3,11	63,83 %	Children with specific needs learn best when grouped with others with similar needs. (reverse item: agreement indicates less inclusive attitude).

Notes: Recoded mean score refers to values after reverse coding, where higher scores indicate a more positive attitude towards inclusion. For reverse-coded items, agreement with the original statement indicates a less inclusive attitude.

3.4. Impact of demographic variables

Length of pedagogical experience had a statistically significant effect on the GAI factor, $F(4, 230) = 5.94$, $p < 0.001$. The most positive attitude towards inclusion was exhibited by beginning teachers with 0–1 year of experience ($M = 3.73$), with scores decreasing as experience increased, reaching the lowest value in the 11–15 years category ($M = 2.83$). Teachers with 16 or more years of experience achieved a slightly higher score ($M = 3.11$), but still lower than beginning teachers. A similar trend was observed with age: the youngest respondents (18–20 years, $M = 3.97$) achieved the highest GAI score, whilst scores decreased among older age categories.

The exceptionally positive attitudes of beginning teachers towards inclusion may be interpreted as reflecting a combination of individual, professional, and contextual factors. Early-career teachers may enter the profession with a strong commitment to embracing learner diversity, upholding principles of equity, and creating conditions that enable the participation of every student. Their attitudes may also be positively influenced by their recently completed pre-service teacher education, in which inclusive education is presented as an important professional and ethical value. However, these findings may also be partly associated with their relatively limited practical experience, as beginning teachers may not yet have been exposed over an extended period to the full range of organisational, staffing, and pedagogical demands associated with inclusive practice.

However, exposure to the realities of everyday school practice may weaken initially positive attitudes, particularly when teachers, despite their commitment to inclusive principles, lack the practical conditions necessary to ensure equitable access and appropriate support for all learners. Potential barriers may include an insufficient number of teaching assistants, variability in their professional preparation, staff instability, and unclear delineation of roles and responsibilities. Further challenges may arise from the limited capacity of school support teams, insufficient access to special educational or psychological support, large class sizes, time and administrative pressures, a lack of methodological guidance, limited opportunities for the individualisation of instruction, and insufficient collaboration among teachers, specialist staff, school leadership, and students' families. Repeated experiences of a mismatch between inclusive expectations and the resources actually available may subsequently undermine teachers' professional self-efficacy and contribute to frustration, exhaustion, or the belief that inclusion cannot be implemented effectively under existing conditions.

The TAPC factor was not influenced by length of experience, $F(4, 230) = 1.47$, $p = 0.211$, suggesting relative stability of perceived competence across career phases. The results thus point to a discrepancy between the attitudinal and competence dimensions of inclusion: teachers perceive themselves as relatively competent in practical work with pupils with specific needs, yet their general attitude towards inclusion remains more cautious. The interpretation therefore proceeds from the two-factor structure of the TAIS-R, which distinguishes between general attitudes to inclusion (GAI) and professional preparedness or perceived competence (TAPC).

For the purposes of interpreting the results of the Slovak version of the TAIS-R, we compared our findings with the Scottish study (Boyle et al., 2024), which represents the foundational psychometric validation of the revised scale. The comparison of Slovak results with international research was conducted primarily at the level of instrument structure and interpretation, not as a direct statistical comparison of attitude levels between countries or research samples. The authors of this study confirmed that the TAIS-R measures two separate constructs – GAI and TAPC – whilst recommending against interpreting a single overall scale score. The same interpretive framework proved useful in the Slovak sample; however, it was further demonstrated that the difference between factors is not merely descriptive but statistically significant. Furthermore,

the weak but statistically significant correlation between GAI and TAPC, $r = 0.150$, $p = 0.021$, supports the conclusion that these are related yet distinct dimensions of attitudes. The Slovak results therefore neither confirm nor refute the levels of attitudes identified in the comparative international study but extend their conclusions by demonstrating, in the Slovak context, a statistically significant tension between teachers' declared practical competence and their more cautious general acceptance of the inclusive model.

3.5. Implications and recommendations

For practice, the results indicate a need to strengthen continuous and practically oriented teacher education in the field of inclusion. It is insufficient to appeal to positive attitudes; teachers require concrete methodological procedures, accessible support services, time for collaboration, and conditions that reduce the perceived burden of inclusive education. The Slovak sample confirms the utility of the two-factor interpretation of the TAIS-R. The results simultaneously highlight the need to distinguish between declared practical competence and general acceptance of the inclusive model.

3.6. Limitations of the analysis

The sample is unevenly distributed by gender, age, and teaching experience, while regional representation could not be assessed because regional information was not systematically collected. An important limitation concerns the non-probability nature of the sampling procedure. Because participants were recruited from teachers attending professional development courses, the sample may overrepresent teachers who are more actively engaged in professional learning or who have a particular interest in topics related to inclusive education. This selection bias may have influenced the observed pattern of teachers' attitudes and perceived competence. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all primary school teachers in Slovakia. Rather, they provide evidence concerning the attitudes of the participating group of teachers from different regions of the country.

The comparison of men and women, in particular, is only indicative given the very low number of men. Regional differences may be influenced by low representation of certain regions. Rasch analysis was not conducted in this analysis, as the aim was to process the collected data according to the validated two-factor structure of the TAIS-R. For independent psychometric validation of the Slovak translation, it would be appropriate to supplement with confirmatory factor analysis, Rasch analysis, or at least exploratory factor analysis on a larger and more balanced sample.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study point to a certain ambivalence in Slovak primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Although respondents evaluated their own professional preparedness and practical competence in working with pupils with specific educational needs relatively positively, their general attitudes towards inclusive education remained more cautious and less unequivocally supportive. This discrepancy between the GAI and TAPC dimensions proved statistically significant and supports the interpretation of inclusive attitudes as a multidimensional construct rather than a single unified disposition. Similar conclusions were reported by Boyle et al. in the Scottish validation study of the TAIS-R, where the authors emphasized that teachers may simultaneously support inclusive practices at a practical level whilst expressing reservations about inclusion as a broader educational model (Boyle et al., 2024). The Slovak findings therefore contribute to growing international evidence that teachers' acceptance of inclusion is strongly shaped by contextual and systemic conditions rather than only by personal beliefs or professional competence.

One of the most significant findings of the present study is the tension between perceived competence and more reserved general attitudes towards inclusion. Respondents reported relatively positive evaluations of their ability to adapt instruction, provide individualized support, and implement inclusive strategies in everyday teaching practice. At the same time, they expressed concerns regarding the broader implementation of inclusion in mainstream classrooms. This result may reflect the difference between teachers' confidence in managing individual pedagogical tasks and their perceptions of the institutional and organisational realities of inclusive education. In practice, teachers may feel capable of supporting individual pupils, yet simultaneously perceive inclusive education as insufficiently supported by the school system, educational policy, staffing conditions, or material resources. Similar patterns have been identified in international research, where teachers

frequently report that the success of inclusion depends not only on their personal competencies but also on external support structures, including school leadership, availability of specialists, classroom conditions, and manageable workloads (Avramidis, Norwich, 2002; Sharma et al., 2012).

Adequate internal and external support is associated with more positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion, whereas insufficient support may weaken teachers' beliefs in their ability to implement inclusion effectively (Monsen et al., 2014).

The results further suggest that Slovak teachers continue to perceive several significant barriers to effective inclusive practice. Among the lowest-rated items were statements concerning the adequacy of teacher preparation for inclusive education, the influence of pupils with specific needs on classroom functioning, and the importance of pupils' social readiness for successful participation in mainstream settings. These findings may indicate that inclusion is still frequently perceived through the lens of potential organisational burden and classroom management challenges. This interpretation corresponds with Slovak studies demonstrating that teachers often support the ethical and philosophical principles of inclusion whilst simultaneously expressing uncertainty regarding its practical feasibility under existing school conditions (Cabanová et al., 2022; Barnová et al., 2022). The implementation of inclusive principles may also be constrained by systemic conditions. In Slovakia, access to support remains strongly tied to the diagnostic categorisation of learners and to decisions made by external professionals, which may limit school autonomy and delay the provision of necessary support. At the same time, progress towards inclusion may be undermined by pressures arising from competitive standards and demands for economic efficiency (Miškolci et al., 2026). The discrepancy between ideological acceptance and practical concerns may therefore represent one of the defining characteristics of inclusive education in transitional educational systems such as Slovakia.

An important aspect of the findings concerns the influence of age and pedagogical experience on teachers' attitudes. Beginning teachers and younger respondents demonstrated more positive general attitudes towards inclusion than older and more experienced teachers. This trend corresponds with several Slovak and international studies suggesting that younger teachers are typically exposed to more contemporary approaches to inclusive pedagogy during university preparation and may therefore perceive inclusion as a natural component of modern educational practice (Vojtko, Duchovičová, 2025). At the same time, experienced teachers may have developed more cautious attitudes due to long-term exposure to organisational pressures, administrative demands, insufficient support systems, or previous negative experiences with inclusion implemented under inadequate conditions. International literature frequently points to the phenomenon of "reality shock," where teachers' initial positive beliefs become moderated by everyday school practice and structural limitations (Avramidis, Norwich, 2002). Exposure to the realities of everyday school practice may lead to changes in the initially positive attitudes of early-career teachers. Research indicates that the demands associated with addressing diverse learner needs, together with insufficient support, may contribute to frustration and to a more variable understanding of inclusion (McKay, 2016). However, other studies report different findings. Longer teaching experience does not necessarily lead to less positive attitudes, as direct experience with learners with special educational needs and the development of professional competencies may be associated with more favourable teacher attitudes (Avramidis, Kalyva, 2007). Similarly, another longitudinal study identified a relative stability of attitudes over time, with higher self-efficacy predicting more positive attitudes and lower levels of concern about inclusion. The stabilisation of attitudes may therefore depend less on the length of teaching experience itself and more on the quality of professional experiences, perceived self-efficacy, and the availability of adequate support (Savolainen et al., 2022).

The present findings may therefore reflect not only generational differences in professional preparation but also broader systemic challenges associated with sustaining inclusive education over time.

Another important interpretation of the results relates to the concept of teacher self-efficacy. Research consistently demonstrates that teachers who perceive themselves as professionally competent are more willing to adopt inclusive practices and adapt teaching strategies for diverse learners (Sharma et al., 2012). In the present study, respondents achieved relatively high scores in the TAPC dimension, suggesting a degree of confidence in their practical abilities. However, the weak correlation between TAPC and GAI indicates that professional competence alone may not automatically lead to stronger ideological support for inclusion. Teachers may therefore perceive themselves as capable practitioners whilst remaining sceptical about whether the current

educational system can realistically sustain high-quality inclusion for all pupils. This finding highlights the importance of distinguishing between competence-related confidence and broader educational beliefs when evaluating teachers' attitudes towards inclusion.

The Slovak educational context also plays a significant role in interpreting the findings. In recent years, Slovakia has undergone substantial educational reforms aimed at strengthening inclusive education, including the implementation of support measures, the development of multidisciplinary support teams, and the promotion of inclusive school environments. Nevertheless, the practical implementation of these reforms remains uneven across regions and schools. Many schools continue to experience shortages of school psychologists, special educators, teaching assistants, and other support professionals. Teachers may therefore perceive a discrepancy between official educational policy and the realities of everyday pedagogical practice. Similar observations have been reported in Slovak educational research, where teachers frequently identify insufficient institutional support and lack of practical resources as major obstacles to effective inclusion (Cabanová et al., 2022; Kušnírová et al., 2022). The cautious attitudes identified in this study may thus partly reflect broader concerns regarding the sustainability and practical implementation of systemic reforms.

The item-level analysis further revealed that respondents expressed highly positive attitudes towards concrete inclusive strategies, such as individualizing instruction, enabling all pupils to participate in classroom activities, and adapting teaching materials. These findings suggest that teachers may be more supportive of inclusion when it is understood as a set of practical pedagogical approaches rather than as an abstract systemic principle. This distinction is particularly important because it indicates that resistance to inclusion may not necessarily stem from negative attitudes towards pupils with specific needs themselves, but rather from concerns about organisational demands, insufficient resources, and the complexity of implementing inclusive policies in practice. In this respect, the findings correspond with research emphasizing that teachers' attitudes are often highly context-dependent and influenced by the quality of institutional support available in schools (Ainscow, 2020; Avramidis, Norwich, 2002).

The results also have several implications for teacher education and educational policy. First, they highlight the necessity of strengthening practice-oriented teacher preparation focused on inclusive pedagogy, classroom management, differentiation strategies, and collaboration with support professionals. Teachers require not only theoretical knowledge about inclusion but also opportunities to develop practical competencies through supervised experience and reflective practice. Second, the findings emphasize the importance of continuous professional development throughout teachers' careers. Positive attitudes towards inclusion cannot be sustained solely through initial teacher education; they also depend on long-term professional support, collegial collaboration, and access to specialised expertise. Third, educational policy should focus not only on promoting inclusive values but also on creating realistic conditions that enable teachers to implement inclusion effectively without experiencing excessive professional burden.

Finally, the findings of this study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The research sample was not fully balanced in terms of gender, age, or regional representation, and the predominance of female respondents reflects the demographic structure of the Slovak teaching profession. Furthermore, the study relied on self-report questionnaire data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. The analysis also focused primarily on the validated two-factor structure of the TAIS-R and did not include more advanced psychometric procedures such as confirmatory factor analysis or Rasch modelling. Future research could therefore expand the psychometric validation of the Slovak version of the TAIS-R and examine additional contextual variables influencing teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, including school climate, availability of support services, teacher burnout, and direct experience with specific categories of pupils with special educational needs.

5. Conclusion

This study analysed primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education using the TAIS-R scale in the Slovak context. The results confirmed the two-factor structure of the instrument and demonstrated a difference between teachers' general attitudes to inclusion and their perceived professional competence. Teachers rated their practical preparedness more positively than the concept of inclusive education itself. The research also showed that general attitudes towards inclusion differed according to teachers' age and length of pedagogical experience. A significant finding is that respondents rated concrete inclusive strategies implemented in everyday pedagogical practice more positively than systemic aspects of inclusion.

The findings point to the need to strengthen practically oriented professional teacher education, the availability of support services, and the creation of stable conditions for effective implementation of inclusive education in the school environment.

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