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## GENDER POLARISATION AND PRESERVICE TEACHERS' BEHAVIOURAL AFFECTION TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

In light of the fact that one gender predominates in Malaysia's teacher training programmes and teaching profession, it is evident that research on attitude and gender is vital. This study looked at the behavioral affinity preservice teachers have for inclusive education in regard to gender. This study used the survey method with a quantitative research methodology. A series of questionnaires was distributed to the respondents, who comprised 189 females and 65 males. Descriptive statistics and the independent sample t-test were employed. The results demonstrated that the preservice teachers' behavioral attachment for inclusive education was not gender-related [ $t(252)=1.499$ ,  $p=.137$ ]. It follows that preservice teachers' attitudes on inclusive education are not significantly influenced by their gender. The findings of this study suggest that gender-based interventions should not be the exclusive focus of initiatives to support inclusive education among preservice teachers. Rather, focus should be placed on other characteristics, such as exposure to inclusive education techniques. Furthermore, by shedding light on preservice teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, this study adds to the corpus of research already available on the subject. These results can be used by educators and policymakers to create teacher training programmes that effectively support inclusive teaching methods.

**Keywords:** Gender, Teacher training programme, Preservice teachers, Behavioural affection, Inclusive Education, T-test

### INTRODUCTION

Gender polarisation, characterised by the division of individuals into rigid gender roles and the reinforcement of binary gender stereotypes, continues to be a prevalent societal issue. It affects various aspects of human life, including education (Ridgeway, & Correll, 2004; Connell, 2009). Inclusive education, on the other hand, promotes the idea that all students, regardless of their gender, abilities, or backgrounds, should have equal opportunities to learn and participate in education (Florian, & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Ainscow, & Miles, 2008). The attitudes and behaviours of teachers, particularly preservice teachers who are undergoing teacher education, play a crucial role in creating an inclusive classroom environment (Pjil et al., 2013; Slee, & Weiner, 2019).

The influence of gender polarisation on preservice teachers' behavioural affection towards inclusive education has emerged as an important area of research (Abdullah et al., 2022; Anuradha, & Shuvankar, 2014; Kent et al., 2022; Landis, 2019; Orakçı et al., 2016). Understanding how gender polarisation impacts preservice teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and practices is essential for developing effective strategies to promote inclusive education. By examining the relationship between gender polarisation and preservice teachers' behavioral affection towards inclusive education, researchers aim to shed light on the barriers and opportunities for creating inclusive classrooms that cater to the diverse needs of students.

This research seeks to explore the complex interplay between gender polarisation and preservice teachers' behavioral affection towards inclusive education. It aims to investigate how preservice teachers' beliefs, biases, and stereotypes, which may be influenced by societal gender norms, affect their attitudes and practices in fostering inclusivity in the classroom. By examining the factors that contribute to or hinder inclusive practices among preservice teachers, this study hopes to inform teacher education programmes and policy initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and inclusive education.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender polarisation, which is typified by the categorisation of people into inflexible gender roles and the propagation of binary gender stereotypes, continues to be a noteworthy social problem with extensive consequences. Its impact is seen in a number of areas, including education. On the other hand, inclusive education strives to guarantee that every student, regardless of gender, ability, or background, has an equal chance to learn and succeed in learning environments (Pjil et al., 2013; Slee, & Weiner, 2019). Teachers, especially preservice teachers completing their teacher education, are essential to the realisation of inclusive education. In order to create an inclusive classroom where diverse students feel respected, encouraged, and empowered, their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours are essential.

Promoting more inclusive educational practices requires an understanding of how gender polarisation affects preservice teachers' behavioural affection for inclusive education (Kent et al., 2022; Landis, 2019; Orakçı et al., 2016). Through an analysis of the interactions between gender polarisation and the attitudes, prejudices, and behaviors of preservice teachers, researchers aim to pinpoint the potential and obstacles for establishing inclusive learning environments that meet the different needs of every student.

Studies indicate that gender polarisation can have a substantial impact on the attitudes and views of preservice teachers on education, affecting their understanding of gender roles and expectations in the classroom (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). These deeply ingrained gender preconceptions may unintentionally impact how preservice teachers engage with and assist students, which may contribute to inequity and restrict learning and development opportunities. Differential treatment, resource allocation, and instructional methods can arise from biases that favour male students in math and science or assume that girls are better suited for language arts (Connell, 2009). The emergence of an inclusive classroom that values and supports each student's skills and interests may be hampered by these biases.

According to Abdullah et al. (2022), there were notable disparities in the level of knowledge among preservice teachers in the north about inclusive education for students with special educational needs. It was shown that preservice male teachers knew more on average than preservice female teachers. Gender is a constant variable when opinions toward inclusive education are examined. It may be concluded that research on attitude and gender is still crucial given that one gender group predominates in teacher training programmes and professions (Kent et al., 2022; Landis, 2019). Nonetheless, a number of research discovered that differences in gender stream had little bearing on preservice teachers' views toward inclusive education (Anuradha & Shuvankar, 2014; Orakçı et al., 2016).

The inclusion and equality of preservice teachers' classroom practices are directly impacted by their behavioral attachment to inclusive education. Teachers that actively challenge gender polarisation, identify and address hidden biases, and establish a climate that promotes equitable chances for learning

and engagement are essential to the success of inclusive education (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Preservice teachers have the power to challenge gender norms in the classroom and advance inclusive practices thanks to their developing pedagogical philosophies and changing professional identities (Pijl, Frostad, & Mjaavatn, 2013). Preservice teachers can help create inclusive classrooms that promote the achievement of all students by critically analysing their own ideas, participating in reflective practices, and gaining the required knowledge and skills.

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate the complex link that exists between preservice teachers' behavioural attachment to inclusive education and gender polarisation. Through a thorough analysis of current literature, researchers want to acquire a deeper understanding of the ways in which gender polarisation shapes the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of preservice teachers. Additionally, they seek to identify tactics that promote inclusive learning environments. Comprehending these relationships is crucial in formulating efficacious teacher education programmes and policy measures that foster gender parity and establish inclusive learning environments that foster the holistic development of all students.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used the survey method in conjunction with a quantitative research methodology. The participants, who comprised 189 females and 65 males, were given a set of surveys. For data analysis, descriptive statistics and the independent sample t-test were employed.

### Participants

The 254 respondents were undergraduate students taking up Inclusive Education course in sem II session 2022/2023. This cross-sectional online survey was created using a Google Forms (GF) since it was a practical solution to make data gathering easier. The affordability of GF surveys is one of its most prominent benefits. It can reach a greater sample size at a lower cost and require less resources than in-person or telephone surveys (Couper, 2000). The students gave their approval and freely engaged in the study.

### Ethics

In accordance with the principles of the International Declaration of Helsinki (2022), the study received approval from the director of Institute of Teacher Education Tun Abdul Razak Campus. The study's goal, voluntariness, secrecy, and anonymity were all explained to the respondents, and their agreement was gained through informed consent forms distributed to them and they were given sufficient time to consider their participation and ask any questions they might have had.

### Measures

The Preservice Teachers' Behavioral Affection toward Inclusive Education Scale (PTBAIES) (2023) was utilised to evaluate the behavioural affinity of incoming instructors for inclusive education. The Preservice Teachers' Behavioural Affection towards Inclusive Education Scale (PTBAIES) is a dual-dimensional scale consisting of two components: behavior and affection, with the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient at .802. It was cross-culturally modified from a well-established scale named the Multidimensional Attitudes towards Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES) (Mahat, 2008). It provides useful insights into the attitudes, intentions, and behaviours of preservice teachers that can guide activities for professional development, policy-making, and teacher education programmes (Clipa et al., 2019). The scale offers a thorough framework for evaluating how prepared and dedicated preservice teachers are for inclusive education, enabling targeted interventions to address any potential gaps and difficulties.

The PTBAIES consists of 10 items that cover affective and behavioural characteristics in two different dimensions. A 6-point Likert scale with a range of 1 (Strongly Agree) to 6 (Strongly Disagree) is used to measure the PTBAIES. High internal consistency is shown by the PTBAIES's affective (.78), behavioural (.86), and total (.80) PTBAIES scores.

## RESULTS AND FINDING

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

All responders provided a total of 254 replies. Table 1, 2 dan 3 provides a general overview of the respondents' backgrounds. It is notable that there were 189 females (74.4%) and 65 males (25.6%) of respondents, and that they were primarily Malay (53.9%), Sarawak Native (32.7%) and Sabah (10.6%), and Chinese (2.8%). While 37.4% of them chose Malay Language, Islamic Education (33.9%), 14.2% chose (TESL), 14.6% of them chose physical education.

**Table 1:** Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	65	25.6	25.6
Female	189	74.4	100.0
Total	254	100.0	

**Table 2:** Race

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Malay	137	53.9	53.9
Chinese	7	2.8	56.7
Sarawak Native	83	32.7	89.4
Sabah Native	27	10.6	100.0
Total	254	100.0	

**Table 3:** Options

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Malay Language	95	37.4	37.4
Islamic Education	86	33.9	71.3
TESL	36	14.2	85.4
Physical Education	37	14.6	100.0
Total	254	100.0	

### Normality Test

In order to identify the relationship of demographic factors on the level of behavioural affection toward Inclusive Education among preservice teachers and t-test was performed. The data normality assumption should be fulfilled prior proceed with the t-test and anova. Researchers applied skewness and kurtosis test to determine the data distribution of the variables involved. Z values for both skewness and kurtosis should be located in the acceptable region, -3.29 to 3.29 (Kim, 2013). From Table 4, the Z values for skewness was at -.111 whereas the values for kurtosis was at -1.013. Thus, the normality assumption of the data was accepted in this analysis.

**Table 4:** Descriptive statistics

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Behavioural Affection	254	20	60	43.39	7.563	-.017	.153	-.308	.304
Valid N (listwise)	254								

### **Interpretative Scale for the Study Variables**

For the purpose of interpretation in descriptive analysis, each of the study variables was appropriately assigned an interpretative scale as according to the Mathematical formula recommended by (pubhtml5.com, 2020). In order to standardise the interpretation for descriptive analysis on the overall level of the variables, researchers have set five value labels or divisions for each of them as in Table 5. For instance, very low, low, moderate, high and very high levels.

**Table 5:** Interpretative scale for PTBAIES

Value	Value Level
10.00 – 20.00	Very low
20.01 – 30.00	Low
30.01 – 40.00	Moderate
40.01 – 50.00	High
50.01 – 60.00	Very high

### **Level on Preservice Teachers' Behavioural Affection toward Inclusive Education**

As shown in Table 5, descriptively, the overall PTBAIES was at high level, ( $M=43.39$ ;  $SD=7.563$ ). The mean score for all the dimensions: affective ( $M=17.63$ ;  $SD=5.554$ ) dan behavioral ( $M=25.76$ ;  $SD=3.674$ ).

### **Differences in Gender toward Preservice Teachers' Behavioural Affection toward Inclusive Education**

By calculating the internal consistency coefficient of Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of the items for the final PTBAIES model was determined. According to Nunnally (1994), good reliability requires that Cronbach's alpha be greater than or equal to 0.70.

**Table 6:** Group statistics

	Demography	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Behavioural Affection	Male	65	44.60	8.286	1.028
	Female	189	42.97	7.275	.529

**Table 7:** Independent sample test

Variables	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Gender	1.499	252	.135	1.626

An independent-samples-t-test was conducted to compare PTBAIES among male and female preservice teachers. From Table 6 and Table 7, there was a not significant difference in the scores for males ( $M=44.60$ ,  $SD=8.286$ ) and females ( $M=42.97$ ,  $SD=7.275$ );  $t$  (252) =1.499,  $p=.135$ .

## **DISCUSSIONS, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **Discussions**

There was a not significant difference found between male and female preservice teachers' behavioural affection towards inclusive education. This findings is consistent with Anuradha, & Shuvankar (2014) and Orakci et al. (2016). However, the results was contradicted to the previous literature which has found that male and female students were different in terms of their attitudes toward Inclusive education (Abdullah et al., 2022; Kent et al., 2022; Landis, 2019). Male pre-service teachers had a greater mean level of knowledge than female pre-service teachers.

Research on gender differences in attitudes towards inclusive education among teachers has shown mixed results. Some studies have reported gender-related differences, while others have found no significant distinctions. For example, a study by Van Genderen, Eiraldi, and Sugai (2009) found that female teachers generally had more positive attitudes towards inclusive education compared to male teachers. However, other studies, such as one by Gökçearslan and Işık (2017), found no significant gender differences in teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.

Regarding disciplinary approaches, the literature suggests that there may be some gender-related differences. For example, a study by Carpenter and Finley (2005) found that female teachers tend to use more positive and proactive strategies, while male teachers may rely more on reactive and punitive disciplinary approaches. However, it is important to note that individual variation within gender groups is significant, and these differences may not apply to all male or female teachers.

In terms of teaching styles, research has also indicated some potential gender-related differences. For example, a study by Poulou (2007) found that female teachers tend to have a more student-centered and collaborative teaching style, while male teachers may adopt a more teacher-centered and authoritative style. However, similar to the previous points, these findings are not universal, and individual variation within gender groups is substantial.

It's crucial to approach these findings with caution and recognize that generalisations about the attitudes and practices of male and female teachers can oversimplify the complex nature of teaching. Attitudes and practices are influenced by various factors, including personal experiences, educational context, and cultural influences (Mahat, 2008). Therefore, it is essential to consider the unique characteristics and experiences of individual teachers when examining gender-related differences.

Based on the research findings that there is no significant difference between male and female preservice teachers in their behavioral affection towards inclusive education. Gender does not appear to be a determining factor. The study concludes that gender does not significantly influence preservice teachers' behavioral affection towards inclusive education. This suggests that both male and female preservice teachers exhibit similar levels of positive attitudes and behaviors related to inclusive education.

The study indicates that when it comes to inclusive education, preservice teachers, regardless of their gender, demonstrate comparable levels of support, acceptance, and willingness to implement inclusive practices. This implies that teacher education programs can focus on fostering inclusive attitudes without specific emphasis on gender differences.

While no significant gender differences were found on average, it is important to recognise the individual variation within gender groups. Preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education can still vary widely within each gender, influenced by personal experiences, beliefs, and other factors. The conclusions should acknowledge this diversity and avoid generalizations about the attitudes of all male or female preservice teachers.

The research findings support the notion that inclusive education practices should be promoted for all preservice teachers, regardless of their gender. Teacher education programmes and professional development initiatives can emphasize the importance of inclusive practices, providing training and resources to support preservice teachers in developing the knowledge and skills needed to create inclusive classrooms.

The study's conclusions also highlight the need for further research in this area. While this particular study found no significant gender differences, future studies can explore additional factors that may contribute to variations in attitudes towards inclusive education among preservice teachers, such as cultural influences, educational context, or personal beliefs.

In summary, the conclusions drawn from a study finding no significant difference in behavioural affection towards inclusive education between male and female preservice teachers highlight the need for inclusive education promotion for all preservice teachers, regardless of gender. They also emphasise the importance of recognizing individual variation within gender groups and call for further research to deepen our understanding of the complex factors influencing attitudes towards inclusive education among preservice teachers.

## **Recommendations**

Here are some suggestions for further research on the subject of preservice teachers' attitudes on inclusive education and gender inequalities. To find out how preservice teachers' views toward inclusive education change over time and if there are any gender-related variations in this process, longitudinal study can be done. This would offer a more profound comprehension of the ways in which diverse influences develop and impact views. In addition, qualitative research techniques like focus groups and interviews can be used by researchers to get a deeper understanding of the perspectives, experiences, and attitudes of preservice teachers, both male and female, about inclusive education. A more comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes of attitudes can be obtained through qualitative study. Furthermore, comparative research across various cultural contexts can be conducted using cross-cultural studies to investigate possible cross-cultural variances in gender differences. Examining how views linked to gender and inclusive education vary in various cultural contexts might shed light on the intersections between gender and culture.

Other factors, such as personal experiences, prior exposure to inclusive classrooms, educational background, or opinions about disability and diversity, may also influence attitudes toward inclusive education and warrant more investigation by researchers. Gaining insight into the intricate interactions between gender and these elements might improve comprehension of perspectives on inclusive education. Look into any effects that gender disparities in perspectives on inclusive education may have on instructional strategies and student results. Look at any differences in student results, classroom management techniques, or instructional tactics depending on the preservice teacher's gender. Lastly, it is possible to investigate the efficacy of focused professional development initiatives in resolving gender-based disparities in perspectives toward inclusive education. Male and females preservice teachers might be encouraged to adopt inclusive attitudes through the evaluation of particular training programmes or interventions.

## **Conclusion**

By addressing these recommendations in future studies, researchers can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of gender differences in attitudes towards inclusive education among preservice teachers and identify strategies for promoting inclusive practices within teacher education programmes.

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