

Assessing the Inclusive Stance of (Prospective) Teachers – Design and Validation of a Measurement Instrument

Yvonne Erhardt, University of Münster, Germany, yerhardt@uni-muenster.de

Prof. Dr. Stefanie van Ophuysen, University of Münster, Germany, vanophuysen@uni-muenster.de

Prof. Dr. Sina Schürer, University of Bielefeld, Germany, sina.schuerer@uni-bielefeld.de

Abstract (max. 600 words)

According to the OECD (2023), addressing heterogeneity within inclusive education constitutes a central task of schools. Inclusion is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond the joint teaching of students with and without disabilities to encompass further dimensions of heterogeneity, such as gender, migration background, and individual talents (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2024). Consequently, a wide range of partly contradictory definitions of school inclusion coexist in the literature (e.g., Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Grosche, 2015). Across these approaches, three core elements emerge as particularly relevant for the present study: **diversity**, understood as the appreciation of heterogeneous learning groups; **individuality**, referring to the consideration and valuation of individual characteristics and needs; and **community**, defined as unconditional participation and belonging within a social collective.

Teachers are frequently attributed a key role in the implementation of inclusive education. However, empirical findings regarding the relevance of teachers' orientations toward inclusion remain inconsistent. While some studies highlight the importance of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (e.g., Heyder et al., 2020; Lenkeit et al., 2024), other studies fail to confirm such associations (e.g., Garrote et al., 2020). Two issues are particularly relevant when interpreting these findings.

First, previous research has predominantly focused on **attitudes toward inclusive schooling** (Lüke et al., 2021), rather than on a broader **inclusive stance**. Although the terms attitude and stance are often used interchangeably (Collins Dictionary, n.d.), they differ conceptually. Attitudes refer to evaluations of a specific object (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), whereas a stance denotes a broader, value-based orientation that guides perception and judgment across situations (Kurbacher, 2008). While attitudes are primarily affective, a stance is more cognitive in nature and involves conscious reflection on moral, ethical, and cultural values, which is fundamental to taking responsibility (Kurbacher, 2008).

Second, many existing instruments conceptualize inclusion narrowly as the joint teaching of students with and without special educational needs. This approach risks neglecting broader dimensions of heterogeneity emphasized by the OECD (2023) and UNESCO (2024). To address this research gap, the present study aims to develop and validate a new measurement instrument assessing (pre-service) teachers' **inclusive stance** based on a broad understanding of inclusion.

Building on the discourse on inclusion and Kurbacher's (2008) conceptualization of stance, an inclusive stance is defined as the conscious recognition of diversity, individuality, and community as **values** that guide teachers' **role understanding and behavior**. Kurbacher (2008) argues that holding certain values does not necessarily result in corresponding behavior. This assumption provides the rationale for analytically distinguishing between value orientation and role understanding (as a prerequisite for action) in the operationalization of inclusive stance. Accordingly, the developed instrument operationalizes inclusive stance along three dimensions (diversity,

individuality, community), each assessed from two perspectives: value orientation and role understanding.

Against this background, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. Can the theoretically assumed factor structure of the inclusive stance instrument be empirically confirmed? To what extent is inclusive stance expressed in this study?
2. To what extent is there a relationship between a teacher's value orientation and their understanding of their role?

Furthermore, a teacher's inclusive stance can be assumed to be related to their conviction regarding inclusive learning settings. Teachers who value heterogeneous learning groups, individual student characteristics, and unrestricted participation in a community, and who feel responsible for these aspects, are more likely to view inclusive learning settings as desirable. This results in the third research question, which is also used to validate the instrument.

3. Is an inclusive stance positively associated with attitudes toward an inclusive school system?

Methods (max. 400 words)

Data were collected at German universities in North Rhine-Westphalia using an online questionnaire administered between October and December 2025. Faculty members teaching compulsory courses were asked to distribute the survey during class or to allow the project team to do so. Alternatively, the questionnaire was distributed via email. The final sample comprised 338 pre-service teacher education students. Of these, 27.5% were enrolled in bachelor's programs, 62.7% in master's programs, and 9.8% in a second master's program with a focus on integrated special education. The mean age was 23.87 years ($SD = 3.08$); 74.6% identified as female and 0.9% as diverse.

For the instrument for measuring the inclusive stance 21 items were newly developed, evenly covering the three content-related facets (diversity, individuality, community) and referring to teachers' value orientation and role understanding. Accordingly, the newly developed instrument consists of six subscales: the three value orientation subscales each comprise three items, whereas the three role understanding subscales each comprise four items. Responses were recorded on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Attitudes toward an inclusive school system were assessed using the PREIS short scale (Lüke & Grosche, 2020; $\alpha = .86$).

To examine the factorial structure of the new instrument, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in R (version 4.5.1) using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). Items were specified to load on the three latent factors, while value and role understanding were modeled as bifactors. As Mardia's test indicated violations of multivariate normality, robust maximum likelihood estimation (MLR) was applied.

Convergent validity was examined using Spearman correlations with the PREIS short scale.

Conclusion (max. 300 words)

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis indicate a good model fit ($RMSEA = 0.034$; $SRMR = 0.040$; $CFI = 0.975$) and satisfactory internal consistencies for all three subscales ($\alpha_{Diversity} = .84$; $\alpha_{Individuality} = .78$; $\alpha_{Community} = .76$). These findings support the theoretically derived three-factor/bifactor structure of the newly developed measurement instrument, confirming its factorial validity.

Furthermore, strong and significant correlations were found between pre-service teachers' value orientations and their role understanding (Diversity: $r = .59, p < .01$; Individuality: $r = .59, p < .01$; Community: $r = .40, p < .01$), highlighting the close interrelation between values and professional role conceptions within an inclusive stance. In addition, inclusive stance was moderately to strongly associated with attitudes toward an inclusive school system (Diversity: *Spearman's* $\rho = .60, p < .001$; Individuality: *Spearman's* $\rho = .30, p < .001$; Community: *Spearman's* $\rho = .34, p < .001$). Pre-service teachers reporting a more pronounced inclusive stance also tended to demonstrate more positive attitudes toward inclusive schooling.

Overall, the sample exhibited a predominantly positive inclusive stance ($M = 3.66, SD = 0.32$). This may be partially explained by sample characteristics: most participants reported prior experience with heterogeneous learning groups (90.5%), with more than half describing these experiences as good to very good (58.8%). It could be assumed that contextual factors, such as the educational setting, type of teaching experience, and the quality of prior encounters with heterogeneity, may influence the development of an inclusive stance. Future research should therefore examine contextual factors that foster the development of an inclusive stance. In the long term, the validated measurement instrument may support teacher education by facilitating the systematic reflection on values and role understanding related to inclusive education. The potential applications and limitations of the instrument will be discussed in the presentation.

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