

Primary Teachers' Perceptions Toward Shared Accountability with Special Educators in Inclusive Classrooms

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Abstract: Open Educational Resources, co-teaching frameworks, and inclusive policy mandates all presuppose a professional reality in which general and special education teachers jointly own the learning outcomes of every student in the classroom. This study examines primary school general teachers' perceptions toward shared accountability with special education teachers in inclusive classrooms, and explores whether those perceptions differ by gender, years of teaching experience, and school type. Using a descriptive survey design and a self-constructed, expert-validated 32-item instrument the Shared Accountability Perception Scale (SAPS) data were collected from 104 primary school teachers working in inclusive settings. The overall mean score was 127.51 and SD was 17.58, placing the sample at a High level of positive perception. No significant differences emerged for gender and teaching experience. However, school type was a significant predictor, with private school teachers ($M = 130.83$) reporting more positive perceptions than government school counterparts ($M = 123.92$). Dimension-wise analysis revealed that communication frequency and joint assessment decision-making were the least developed collaborative practices. Findings underscore that institutional environment, more than individual demographic characteristics, determines the extent to which shared accountability is practised in inclusive primary classrooms. The study recommends targeted professional development, protected co-planning time, and equitable structural support especially for government schools.

Keywords: Shared Accountability, Inclusive Education, Primary Teachers, Special Education, Co-Teaching, India, School Type, SAPS.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become the dominant global policy paradigm for schooling, requiring that students with disabilities learn alongside their non-disabled peers in regular classrooms, supported by both general and special education teachers (UNESCO, 2009). In India, successive legislative frameworks including the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995), the Right to Education Act (2009), the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), and the National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020) have systematically extended this mandate to all primary schools. Central to the quality of inclusive provision is the concept of shared accountability: the joint professional responsibility of general and special educators for the learning outcomes, social-emotional progress, and overall development of every student in the inclusive classroom (Friend & Cook, 2017). When shared accountability is well-practised, students with disabilities achieve better outcomes; when absent, the special educator risks marginalisation as a support aide while the general teacher may disclaim responsibility for students with special needs (Scruggs et al., 2007). Despite growing international research on co-teaching and teacher collaboration, empirical studies specifically examining primary school general teachers' perceptions of shared accountability with special educators remain scarce in the Indian context. Most Indian studies examine broad teacher attitudes toward inclusion or structural policy barriers, without directly interrogating the interpersonal and professional dimensions of shared responsibility at the classroom level (Sharma & Deppeler, 2022). The present study addresses this gap.

2. Related Literature

Shared accountability has gained increasing prominence as the professional foundation on which all other co-teaching practices rest (McLeskey et al., 2019). Meijer and Van der Veen (2023) found in a longitudinal Dutch study that meaningful shared accountability developed through relationship-based professional growth rather than policy mandates alone.

In India, Babu and Sharma (2025) found that only 28% of surveyed primary teachers felt they shared equal accountability with their special education colleagues, attributed to inadequate co-teaching training and the absence of structured planning time. Nawaz and Bano (2018) similarly found that teachers lacked a conceptual understanding of shared accountability in practice, with no culture of joint planning observed in any sampled school. Training is consistently identified as the most powerful predictor of positive perceptions. Pugach et al. (2023) demonstrated that blended teacher education programmes produced graduates significantly more comfortable with shared accountability. Conversely, Rao and Kalyanpur (2023) highlighted how hierarchical cultural norms in Indian schools reinforced general teachers' tendency to exclude themselves from shared ownership.

Institutional context also exerts powerful influence. Malhotra and Singh (2024) found that principals who actively framed inclusion as a whole-school responsibility and allocated dedicated co-planning time cultivated significantly stronger shared accountability among staff. Patel and Joshi (2019) identified three major barriers in Indian government schools: absence of formal co-teaching policy, heavy workload, and low hierarchical status of special educators.

3. Overview

The successful implementation of inclusive classrooms depends not merely on the physical placement of students with disabilities in regular schools, but on genuine professional collaboration between general and special education teachers (Friend & Cook, 2017). Central to this collaboration is shared accountability the joint professional responsibility of both teacher categories for the learning, progress, and well-being of all students. In India, while policy has progressively mandated inclusive education, the on-ground reality in many primary classrooms continues to fall short of the ideal, largely due to unclear delineation of professional responsibilities (Sharma & Deppeler, 2005). The present study investigates how primary teachers perceive this shared professional responsibility and whether their perceptions differ based on gender, teaching experience, and school type.

4. Research Question

Is there any significant difference in the perceptions of primary school general teachers toward shared accountability with special education teachers in inclusive classrooms with respect to gender, teaching experience, and type of school?

5. Objectives

1. To assess the level of perception of primary school general teachers toward shared accountability with special teachers
2. To find out the teacher perception of primary school general teachers toward shared accountability with special teachers based on Gender.
3. To find out the teacher perception of primary school general teachers toward shared accountability with special teachers based on Teaching Experience.
4. To find out the teacher perception of primary school general teachers toward shared accountability with special teachers based on the type of School.

6. Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of primary teachers toward shared accountability based on gender.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of primary teachers toward shared accountability based on type of school.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of primary teachers toward shared accountability based on years of teaching experience.

7. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey method to collect data from primary school teachers on their perceptions toward shared accountability with special education teachers in inclusive classrooms.

Population

The population consisted of all primary school teachers (Classes 1-5) employed in government and private schools with inclusive education programmes in their settings schools where both general and special education teachers work together in the same or linked classroom environments of Gautam Buddha Nagar district.

Sample

A purposive sample of 104 primary school teachers was selected from inclusive school settings. Purposive sampling was used as it was necessary to include only those teachers currently working in inclusive settings with some experience of working alongside a special education teacher (Cohen et al., 2018). 120 questionnaires distributed, 104 were returned fully completed, yielding a response rate of 86.7%. The sample comprised 56 government school teachers (53.8%) and 48 private school teachers (46.2%); 33 male (31.7%) and 71 female (68.3%) participants.

Tool

To achieve the objectives of this study, a tool titled the Shared Accountability Perception Scale (SAPS) was developed. The initial item pool contained 40 statements distributed across four dimensions: (A) Role Clarity and Ownership; (B) Collaborative Practice with Special Educator; (C) Professional Preparedness and Confidence; and (D) Institutional Support and School Environment. Following expert review by a panel of 8 specialists, the scale was refined to a final 32-item version. A higher score indicates more positive perceptions toward shared accountability. Content validity was established through expert consensus.

Procedure of Data Collection

The SAPS was administered via Google Forms, shared with teachers through WhatsApp groups, email, and school coordinators. Prior permission was obtained from institutional heads. Participants were assured of data privacy, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The data collection process was carried out over approximately six weeks.

8. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Teachers' Perceptions toward Shared Accountability (SAPS)

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Shared Accountability Perceptions (SAPS)	104	127.51	128.00	128	17.58

The overall mean score of 127.51 (SD = 17.58) on the SAPS indicates that primary school teachers demonstrate a generally High level of positive perception toward shared accountability with special educators. The close alignment of mean (127.51), median (128.00), and mode (128) indicates an approximately symmetrical distribution, with the majority of responses concentrated toward the higher end of the scale. The moderate standard deviation reflects meaningful individual variation in perceptions.

Table 2: Perceptions toward Shared Accountability by Gender

Category	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value
Male	33	129.12	18.77	102	0.63 (NS)
Female	71	126.76	17.21	102	

As indicated in Table 2, an independent sample t-test was used to examine the gathered data. There was no statistically significant difference in teachers' perceptions toward shared accountability based on gender. Male teachers (M = 129.12, SD = 18.77) and female teachers (M = 126.76, SD = 17.21) reported nearly identical mean scores. Accordingly, H_{01} is retained. Gender does not appear to be a significant determinant of primary teachers' perceptions toward shared accountability, consistent with Avramidis and Norwich (2002), who reported that contextual and professional factors exert greater influence than demographic characteristics.

Table 3: Perceptions toward Shared Accountability by Type of School

Category	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value
Govt. School	56	123.92	20.14	102	-2.02*
Private School	48	130.83	14.41	102	

As shown in Table 3, the independent sample t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in perceptions based on type of school. Private school teachers (M = 130.83, SD = 14.41) demonstrated significantly more positive perceptions than government school teachers (M = 123.92, SD = 20.14). The larger standard deviation among government school teachers further indicates greater heterogeneity of opinion, possibly reflecting uneven institutional conditions. Accordingly, H_{02} is rejected. This finding aligns with Idol (2006), who emphasised that institutional

resources, administrative support, and structured professional development are critical determinants of teachers' engagement with shared accountability practices.

Table 4: Perceptions toward Shared Accountability by Teaching Experience

Teaching Experience	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value
More than 5 yrs	59	127.15	19.31	102	-0.24 (NS)
Less than 5 yrs	45	127.98	15.43	102	

As indicated in Table 4, the independent sample t-test revealed no statistically significant difference in perceptions based on teaching experience. Teachers with more than 5 years of experience ($M = 127.15$, $SD = 19.31$) and those with less than 5 years ($M = 127.98$, $SD = 15.43$) reported virtually identical mean scores. H_03 is therefore retained. Years of teaching experience does not significantly predict primary teachers' perceptions toward shared accountability. This finding is supported by Sharma et al. (2008), who demonstrated that the quality of professional training exerts greater influence on inclusive perceptions than years in service.

9. Finding

The following are the major findings of the present study:

- Primary school general teachers have a generally High level of positive perception toward shared accountability with special education teachers in inclusive classrooms.
- There was no statistically significant difference in perceptions based on gender.
- A statistically significant difference was found based on type of school ($t = 2.02$, $p = .046$), with private school teachers holding more positive perceptions than government school teachers.
- No significant difference was found based on years of teaching experience.
- Dimension-wise analysis revealed that communication frequency ($M = 3.53$) and joint assessment decision-making ($M = 3.62$) were the least developed collaborative practices, while Role Clarity and Ownership was the most strongly endorsed dimension ($M = 34.72$).

10. Discussion

The finding that primary school general teachers hold a High level of positive perception toward shared accountability is encouraging and consistent with the optimistic trend documented in recent Indian surveys (Anand & Bhargava, 2020). Teachers strongly endorse the philosophical principle that inclusive responsibility belongs equally to all classroom teachers. However, the relatively lower scores on collaborative practice dimensions particularly communication ($M=3.53$) and joint assessment ($M=3.62$) indicate a familiar disjunction between attitudinal endorsement and behavioural enactment of shared accountability (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2019).

The absence of significant gender and experience effects is consistent with Avramidis and Norwich (2002) and Sharma et al. (2008) respectively, confirming that contextual and professional training factors are more decisive than demographic characteristics in shaping shared accountability perceptions.

The significant advantage of private school teachers is the most consequential finding of the study. This is consistent with Idol (2006) and Malhotra and Singh (2024), who emphasised that institutional infrastructure including administrative support, professional development provision, and structured co-teaching frameworks is a decisive determinant of teachers' readiness to share professional responsibility. Private schools in India typically possess greater autonomy in professional development, are more likely to employ designated special educators, and can more readily schedule protected co-planning time. Government schools face documented constraints including larger class sizes, limited budgets, and systemic delays in special educator deployment (Patel & Joshi, 2019). This finding implies that differences in shared accountability perceptions reflect institutional conditions rather than individual teacher willingness.

11. Conclusion

According to the current study, primary school general teachers demonstrate a generally High level of positive perception toward shared accountability with special education teachers in inclusive classrooms. It was found that demographic variables such as gender and years of teaching experience did not significantly influence these perceptions. However, the type of institution proved to be a significant predictor, with teachers from private schools expressing more positive perceptions than those from government schools. These findings suggest that while individual teachers acknowledge the importance of shared responsibility, institutional support and structural conditions are decisive in enabling its practice. Strengthening policy frameworks, equipping government schools with adequate resources and



special educators, providing protected co-planning time, and embedding shared accountability competencies in both pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes are urgently needed to bridge the gap between inclusive policy and classroom reality in India.

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