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Teachers' Attitudes and Perceived Barriers to Inclusive Education in Spain. Systematic Review

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Abstract: *Moving towards more inclusive education involves identifying and removing barriers to learning and participation that may exist in school cultures, policies and practices. The values that represent the identity of schools and are embodied in institutional policies, together with teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, can influence inclusion as either enabling factors or barriers.*
The aim of this systematic review is to identify and analyze the studies carried out in recent years on the attitudes and perceptions of pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers in Spain towards inclusive education, as well as those related to the barriers, they encounter in developing more inclusive educational spaces. A systematic review was carried out in accordance with the PRISMA statement, identifying 256 articles of which 28 were selected for review. The results show the growing interest in this area of research. Furthermore, they highlight the positive attitude of teachers towards the use of inclusive practices, although the lack of specific training may influence their attitude. On the other hand, barriers such as the lack of initial training, the tendency to segregate pupils and the scarcity of resources are highlighted as hindering the full development of inclusive education. The conclusions show that it is necessary to transform classrooms through adequate initial training and practices with a theoretical-practical approach.

Keywords: *inclusive education; teaching attitudes; barriers; systematic review.*

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Introduction

Inclusive education has established itself as a fundamental principle in contemporary education policy, especially within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations 2030 Agenda. In particular, SDG 4 seeks to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNESCO, 2015). This goal recognizes education as a basic human right and as an essential driver for sustainable development, the reduction of inequalities and the promotion of more just and cohesive societies. However, actions to achieve quality education are not progressing at the expected pace, according to the special report prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division - UNSD (UNSD, 2023), for the monitoring of the SDGs.

Thousands of people around the world continue to be excluded from education on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic or social origin, language, religion, economic status or disability status (Ainscow, 2020).

An inclusive approach to education implies that the needs of each individual are taken into account and that all learners participate and achieve together. It assumes that all people can learn and that each person has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs (UNESCO, 2025), with particular attention to those at risk of exclusion and/or discrimination.

In this context, inclusive education addresses the removal of any barriers in the education system that hinder the three spheres of inclusive education: presence, participation and achievement for all learners (Messiou, 2024; Ainscow, 2020b). These barriers can be found in the culture of schools, as well as in their educational policies and practices. The cultural dimension refers to the beliefs, values and principles shared by the educational agents belonging to a school; the policy dimension refers to the school's plans and programmes; and practices refer to the actions of the teacher in the classroom (Echeita, 2024).

To address this approach, education systems and institutions need to transform and reconfigure their educational culture, policies and practices on the basis of equity and inclusion (Shah et al., 2016) with the determination that diversity enriches and that options for achievement and learning should be offered to all students from the outset (CAST, 2024). In these circumstances, the teaching profession assumes a great responsibility for the process that takes place in educational institutions to achieve a more inclusive education. In the end, it is the teaching staff who are responsible for implementing educational practices that promote inclusion in the classroom.

From this perspective, it will be necessary to know the barriers encountered in each of the dimensions that make up inclusive education, as

well as the perceptions and attitudes that define their inclusive orientations and practices.

Inclusive education: attitudes and barriers

The concept of attitude and its relationship with behaviour has been a much studied and debated topic. Attitude is an evaluation that includes thoughts and beliefs, grouping feelings and emotions and, finally, includes intentions and behaviours directed at the object of attitude (Briñol et al., 2007), which can be in favour of or against a particular circumstance (Granada Azcárraga, et al., 2013). According to Pacheco (2002) it is a social element, acquired in the processes of socialisation and at the same time it can be modified representing a social change, so attitudes can change and can be learned (Sabatés and Capdevilla, 2010). Therefore, we could say that the attitudes present in the educational community articulate the educational response that favours, or not, the achievement of all students.

For this reason, an inclusive culture is needed in schools that welcomes and accepts all students, regardless of their origins or characteristics, in a safe and stimulating environment (Ayala de la Peña et al., 2020) and that fosters inclusive values, recognising diversity as an element that promotes coexistence and learning. These values should be the essence and hallmark of the identity of all people who are part of the institution (Plancarte Cansino, 2017) and be aligned with the culture, policies and practices that foster inclusion (Booth and Ainscow, 2015).

Factors that may influence teachers' attitudes towards diversity in general, and in particular towards people with disabilities, include training and experience in inclusive education (Coelho et al., 2017), personal beliefs, direct contact with people with disabilities and the institutional culture of the school (González-Rojas and Triana-Fierro, 2018).

Teachers' attitudes have a direct impact on educational practice. According to Suriá Martínez & Villegas Castrillo (2024), if the attitude is positive towards inclusion and diversity, it is related to inclusive practices and a supportive classroom environment, with interest in continuous training actions on awareness and knowledge of educational needs and with the result of institutional leadership promoting positive attitudes towards diversity. If they are negative, exclusionary practices and disinterest in learning more about students' needs may result.

Therefore, the attitudes and values surrounding institutional culture shape educational policies and practices and can act as barriers and/or facilitators to achieving more inclusive education.

Several studies have highlighted the barriers that teachers perceive in existing educational policies. Ayala de la Peña et al. (2023) highlight as a barrier

the lack of plans or programmes to raise awareness in schools about diversity, multiculturalism and the transition between educational stages. On the other hand, the scarce participation of families in the life of the school is perceived as a barrier, together with the scarcity of educational improvement projects (Arnaiz Sánchez et al., 2019). On the other hand, initial teacher training is another barrier identified by teachers in multiple studies, with the training model being more theoretical than practical, which can hinder the implementation of a more inclusive pedagogy (Arnaiz-Sánchez et al., 2023a).

In line with the political barriers, the barriers that teachers identify in their educational practices in the classroom are reflected, and the greater the need for training (Silva Laguardia & Alba Pastor, 2025), which reflects the close relationship between training and teacher performance in the school environment. Therefore, the implementation of training programmes is an effective measure to promote inclusion, as it allows for the identification and reduction of barriers and, at the same time, fosters a collaborative environment (Pletser, 2019).

This overview indicates that teachers become either a facilitator or a barrier in the teaching-learning process and are determinant in implementing inclusive practices (Paz-Maldonado & Flores-Girón, 2021). Therefore, teachers' attitudes play a substantial role at the decision-making and policy level as well as at the didactic and practical level (Cojocariu et al., 2025).

Although other systematic reviews have addressed the issue of attitudes towards inclusive education in compulsory education teachers, none to date have focused on the attitudes and perceptions of pre-primary, primary and secondary school teachers towards inclusive education and the barriers encountered by teachers at these stages in the Spanish education system. Lacruz-Pérez et al. (2021) conducted an analysis of studies focusing on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, although they did not analyse the barriers encountered by these teachers; they concluded that attitudes are closer to the idea of inclusive education than to the idea of inclusive education. Hernández-Beltrán et al. (2023) explored teachers' attitudes towards students with disabilities and towards the promotion of inclusive education. On the other hand, the study by Gómez-Marí et al. (2022) analysed teachers' attitudes towards autism spectrum disorder, while García-Barrera (2022) focused its study on the barriers to inclusive education encountered by teachers only in the compulsory stage between 2008 and 2017, and the study by Torres-Zaragoza & Llorent-Bedmar (2024) studied the inclusion of Muslim students in Europe. The review by Guerrero and Guerrero-Puerta (2023), on the other hand, focuses on early childhood, primary and secondary education, but

analyses gender equality through an inclusive school, identifying didactic strategies that help teachers to create inclusive practices in their classrooms.

For all of the above reasons, this systematic review aims to answer the question: What barriers hinder inclusive quality education and what attitudes do pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers have towards inclusive education in Spain? On this basis, the purpose of the following systematic review is to identify and analyse the attitudes and perceptions of pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers in the Spanish education system towards inclusive education, as well as the possible barriers to inclusive education, in response to the following specific objectives:

1. To analyse the attitudes and perceptions of pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers about inclusive education in Spain.
2. To identify the barriers perceived by pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers to inclusive education in Spain.

Methodology

Aims

The purpose of this research is to describe the current state of research on the attitudes and perceptions of pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers about inclusive education in Spain, and to identify the barriers perceived by these teachers in the Spanish education system.

Procedure

The process was based on the indications and analysis protocol for systematic reviews by Ramírez-Montoya and Lugo-Ocando (2020), as well as on the updated PRISMA statement (Page, et al., 2021) for the preparation of systematic reviews. It has been carried out through five phases: 1: research questions, 2: search processes, 3: inclusion and exclusion criteria, 4: data selection and extraction process, 5: data synthesis.

Phase 1: Research questions

In order to analyse research on teachers' attitudes, perceptions and barriers to inclusive education published in the last thirteen years (2013-2025), 10 research questions were formulated, grouped into 3 thematic areas, which are described together with their questions in Table 1. The first area aims to establish the characteristics of the publications and journals in which the subject matter under study is published., The second area focuses on identifying the most commonly used methodological designs in the selected papers, and the last area explores the attitudes and perceptions of teachers

towards inclusive education and the barriers encountered by teachers in the education system, which are identified in selected research.

Table 1. Research questions and themes

Thematic	Questions	Possible answers
Characteristics of the selected studies and journals	Q1. What are the keywords and how are they related?	Keywords of the articles
		Co-term network
	Q2. In which year have the studies been published and in which year are there more publications?	From 2013 to 2025
	Q3. Which journals have published the most on this topic, what is the quartile and how many citations have they received?	Magazines with more publications
		Quartile of the magazine
		Number of appointments
	Q4. What are the authors' affiliations?	Affiliation
Methodology, method and sample of the selected articles	Q5. What kind of methodology is used?	Quantitative Qualitative Mixed
	Q6. What is the method?	Descriptive Correlational Comparative-causal Quasi-experimental Case study Ethnographic research Action research Evaluative research
	Q7. What is the sample?	Teachers Counsellors Others
	Q8. What are the educational levels?	Early Childhood Education Primary Education Secondary Education
Perceptions, attitudes and barriers analysed	Q9. What perceptions and attitudes do teachers do have towards inclusive education?	Cultural dimension Political dimension Practical dimension
	Q10. What are the barriers to inclusive education?	Cultural barriers (attitudinal and conceptual) Political (regulatory) barriers Didactic (teaching-learning) barriers

Phase 2: Search process

A systematic search was carried out in the Scopus database and the EBSCO Host interface, using the terms "inclusive education" and "barrier" "Spain" "perception" "attitude", limiting the language of publication of articles to English and Spanish; and the publication period from 2013 to February 2025. Two search equations were used: *inclusive education* AND *barrier* and *inclusive education* AND *barrier* AND *perception* OR *attitude* AND *Spain* in the Scopus database and in the EBSCO Host interface.

The Scopus database was selected because it contains more educational studies articles than the Web of Science database. This trend is reflected in bibliometric studies such as that by Sánchez Gómez et al. (2025). Additionally, Scopus publishes a greater number of articles in English and Spanish than Web of Science. The number of citations is higher in Scopus than in Web of Science for almost all methodologies. Finally, the volume of publications in Spain is higher in Scopus than in Web of Science. The EBSCOhost interface includes the ERIC database, among others.

Phase 3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The following inclusion criteria were taken into account: a) they were articles published in scientific journals; b) the publication period was between January 2013 and February 2025; c) they were open access; d) were carried out on Spanish territory; e) the sample were professionals from early childhood, primary and secondary education; f) the languages of publication were English and Spanish; g) addresses attitudes or perceptions towards inclusive education; h) addresses barriers to inclusive education; and i) meets the quality criteria established through the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool.

Articles were excluded if: a) they included professionals from other educational stages; b) the sample consisted only of students and families; c) were carried out outside Spain; d) they did not belong to the period between January 2013 and February 2025; e) they were not open access; f) the article had a language other than English and Spanish.

Phase 4: Data selection and extraction process

The principles and standards of the PRISMA statement of systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021) were followed for the selection and extraction process.

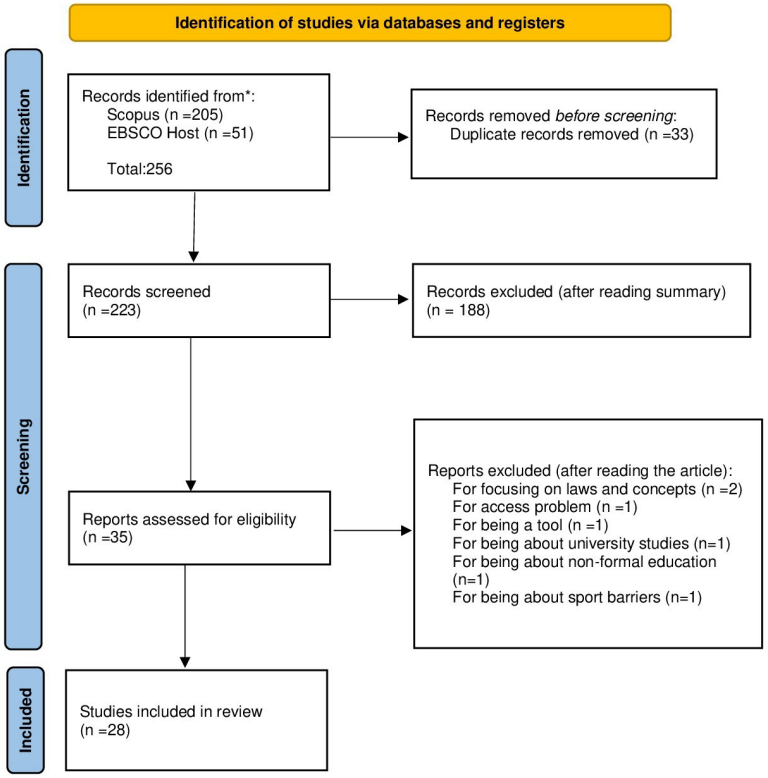
Applying the search criteria, 256 publications were identified between Scopus and EBSCO Host. Comparing the extractions, duplicates were eliminated, giving a total of 223 articles (203 in Scopus and 20 in EBSCO HOST). Taking into account the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 188 papers were excluded because they were not from the field of education, did not belong

to the educational stage under study, were not from education professionals or did not refer to perceptions, attitudes and barriers to inclusive education. Of the 35 articles screened, those referring only to concepts of inclusive education, inclusive education in higher education, inclusive education in non-formal education, technological tools, barriers in sport practices or problems of access to the full document were excluded. Finally, 28 articles were selected (26 in Scopus and 2 in EBSCO Host) which were peer-reviewed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), version 2018.

Phase 5: data synthesis

Data synthesis was carried out by categorising the following variables: type of sample (teachers and different education professionals), educational stage (early childhood, primary and secondary education), types of articles (methodology, empirical nature) and attitudes, perceptions and barriers under study (according to the dimensions of inclusive education).

Figure 1. Flow diagram according to PRISMA. *Source: authors' own concept*



Results

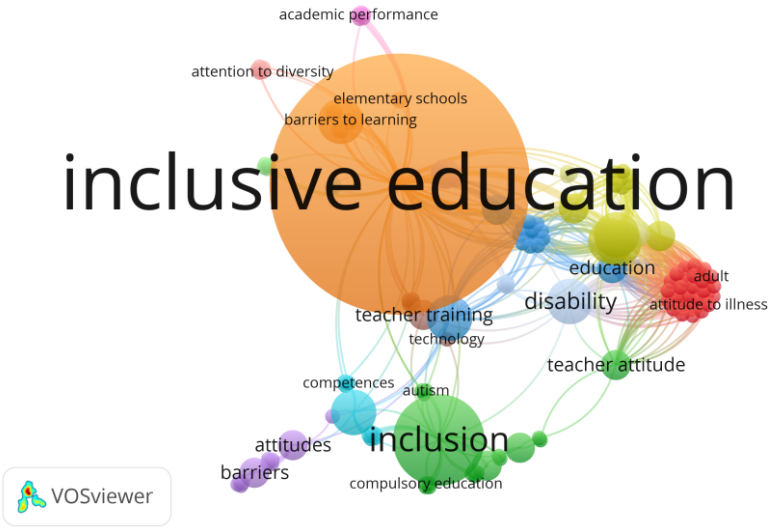
The results were grouped into three thematic areas described in Table 1 and their corresponding research questions.

Q1. What are the keywords and how are they related?

In the Semantic keyword map (Figure 2), four thematic trends can be observed. Based on the most repeated words within the clusters, the following are identified: *inclusive education, inclusion, disability and teacher attitude.* Some of these words were used in the search equation.

The topics inside the network refer to topics that have been widely studied, but the topics outside the network are part of new topics that emerge within this type of research. The closer the circles are, the more related the topics are, and the wider the circles are, the greater the significance of the topic within the area of study.

Figure 2. Semantic keyword map (VOSviewer version 1.6.20)



Source: authors' own concept, using VOSviewer, version 1.6.20

Q2. In which year have the studies been published and in which year are there more publications?

The period of publication of the articles spans from January 2013, with the publication of the Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality 8/2013 (LOMCE) to February 2025. More than 60 % of the studies analysed have been published in the last five years, which seems to show a

gradual interest and concern in researching perceptions, attitudes and barriers to inclusive education. Determining teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards inclusive education, as well as the barriers they perceive, influences their educational practices, either favouring or hindering the full inclusion of learners.

Table 2. Year of publication of the studies

Year	Frequency	Percentage
2013	0	0
2014	0	0
2015	0	0
2016	1	3.57%
2017	0	0
2018	3	10.71%
2019	3	10.71%
2020	3	10.71%
2021	4	14.28%
2022	3	10.71%
2023	6	21.42%
2024	4	14.28%
2025	1	3.57%

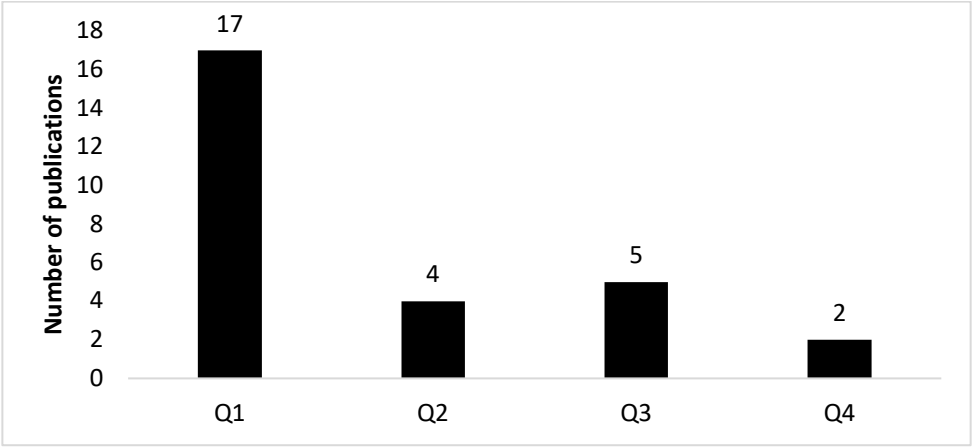
Source: authors' own concept

Q3. Which journals have published the most on this topic, what is the quartile and how many citations have they received?

The publication of research is widely spread across different journals. The journal with the most publications (n=6) among the articles included in this review is *International Journal of Inclusi Education.* This journal is located (ranking 2023) at Q1 in SJR (Scopus) and Q2 in Web of Science (WoS). Regardless of the number of publications, this is not an impressive result, as this is a journal specialising in inclusive education and, consequently, with an editorial policy fully related to the subject.

As can be seen in Figure 3, after analysing the quartile, the journals are mostly located in quartile 1 (n=17).

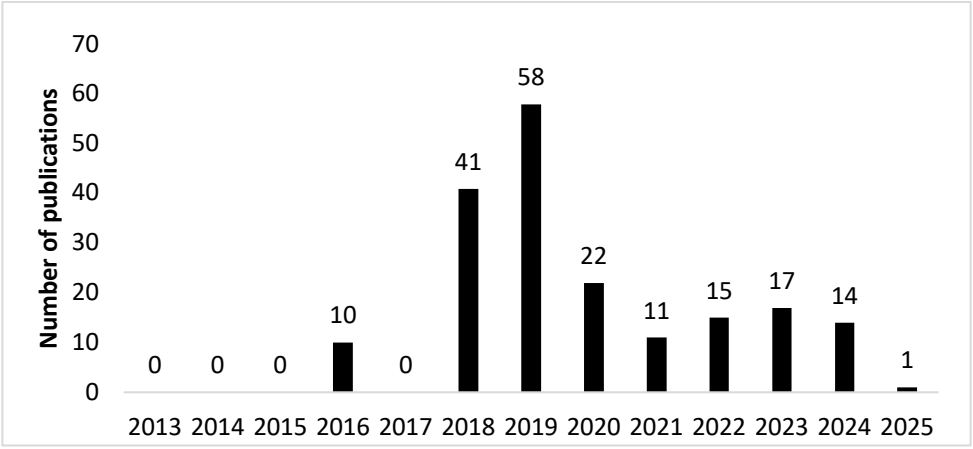
Figure 3. Quartiles of journals



Source: authors' own concept

According to the number of citations, the journal with the most citations is the *Revista Electrónica Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado,* with 41 citations in 2019. The research with the most citations belongs to the year 2019 (n=58), followed by the year 2018 (n=41). The years with no citations are 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2017, as there are no articles included in this review in those years (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Number of citations and year of publication of studies



Source: authors' own concept

Q4. What is the affiliation of the authors?

An analysis of the first author of each selected study was carried out to identify where teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education are most studied. The results show that there are fourteen Spanish universities with the highest number of publications on this topic. Those with the most publications are the University of Murcia (n=9), followed by the Universities of Madrid (n=5) (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Universidad de Alcalá and Universidad Complutense de Madrid).

Q5. What type of methodology is used?

After analysing the methodological characteristics of each study. Table 3 shows that the most commonly used methodology is qualitative studies (50%), followed by quantitative studies (39.28%) and finally mixed studies with only 3 publications (10.71%).

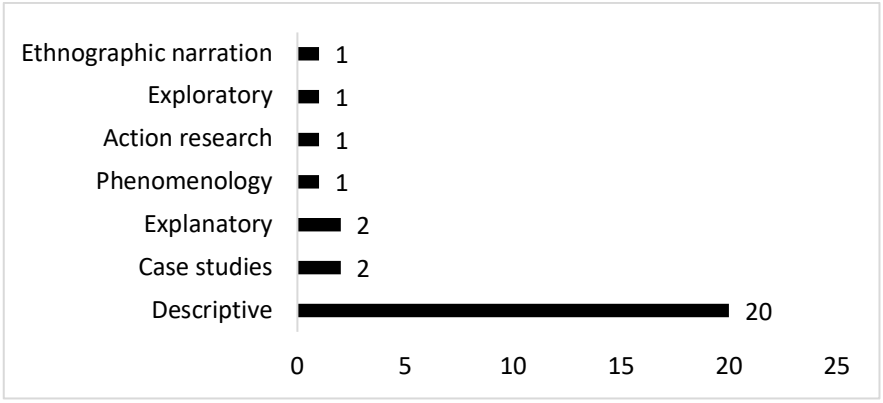
Table 3. Types of article methodologies

Methodology	Frequency	Percentage
Qualitative	14	50.00
Quantitative	11	39.28
Mixed	3	10.71

Source: authors' own concept Q6. What is the research method or design?

The method or design of each article is significantly linked to the type of methodology. In the studies, the descriptive method (surveys, interviews and focus groups) has been identified as the most widely used in the articles analysed (Figure 5). This is followed by explanatory studies and case studies. The least used methods are phenomenology, action research, exploratory and ethnographic narrative.

Figure 5. Method of studies analysed



Q7. What is the sample?

In order to determine the type of population of the studies analysed, categories have been established according to the sample used: teachers, specialist professionals (early childhood teams, counsellors, therapeutic pedagogy teachers...), management team and others (management teams). The studies using teachers as a sample stand out (Table 4), as the studies analysed are more focused on the perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education than on the rest of the educational agents. On the other hand, it can be observed that the population sample of specialist professionals is significant, as it appears in ten of the studies analysed.

Table 4. Sample type of the studies analysed

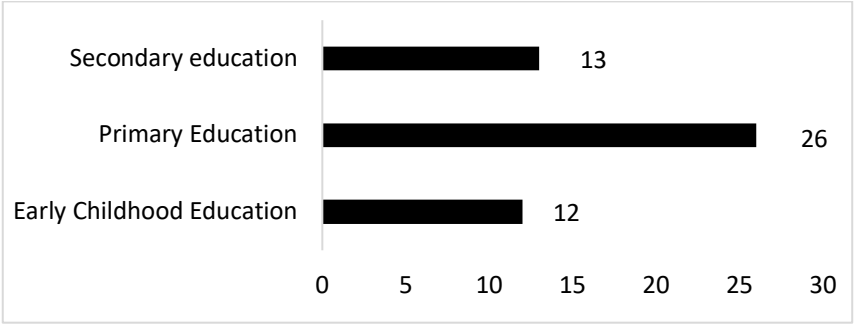
Methodology	Frequency	Percentage
Teachers	11	39.28%
Teachers and others (administrative staff)	7	25%
Teachers and specialist professionals	6	21.42%
Teachers, specialist professionals and others	3	10.71%
Specialist professionals	1	3.57%
Total	**28**	**100%**

Source: authors' own concept

Q8. What are the levels of education analysed?

The following educational stages have been taken into account: Early Childhood Education, Primary Education and Secondary Education. Studies analysing two or more levels have been computed in each of the respective categories. In Figure 6, it can be seen that the educational stage of Primary Education stands out.

Figure 6: Educational stages



Source: authors' own concept

Of the 28 articles analysed, several studies are carried out at different levels at the same time. Thus, five studies analyse the Infant and Primary Education stages simultaneously (17.24%), four articles analyse the Primary and Secondary Education stages together (13.79%) and seven studies do so at all three educational stages (25%).

Q 9. What attitudes and perceptions do teachers have towards inclusive education?

To analyse and summarise the attitudes, perceptions and barriers identified in the selected studies, a qualitative thematic analysis was carried out by the two authors of the study. These were then coded and categorised deductively, taking into account the barriers (cultural, political and educational) proposed in the study by López-Melero (2011) and the dimensions of inclusive education (cultural, political and practical) formulated by Echeita (2024). For each theme, a set of characteristics that coincide in several studies was identified (Table 5). On the other hand, each study can be part of several characteristics within the same theme.

Table 5. Themes and characteristics of the selected studies

Themes	Characteristics	Studies
Cultural Dimension	Inadequate understanding of inclusive education	Arnaiz-Sánchez et al. (2024); González-Gil et al. (2019); Álvarez-Valdivia and González-Montoto (2018)
	Medical model-based vision	Latorre-Cosculluela et al. (2024); Palomo et al. (2024); Tsvintarnaia et al. (2020). Simón et al. (2021)
	Positive attitude towards inclusive education	Muñoz-Martínez et al. (2023); Arnaiz-Sánchez et al.(2023b)
	Use of segregating terms	Belmonte Pérez et al. (2023); Álvarez-Valdivia and González-Montoto (2018)
	Lack of collaborative culture	Sánchez et al. (2019); Simón et al. (2018); Moliner García et al. (2016)
	Lack of acceptance of students' educational needs	González-Gil et al. (2019); De Haro Rodríguez et al. (2020)
	Inappropriate attitudes	Muñoz-Cantero and Losada-Puente (2018); Moliner García et al. (2016)
Political Dimension	Excess ratio	Saiz-González et al. (2025); Belmonte Pérez et al. (2023);

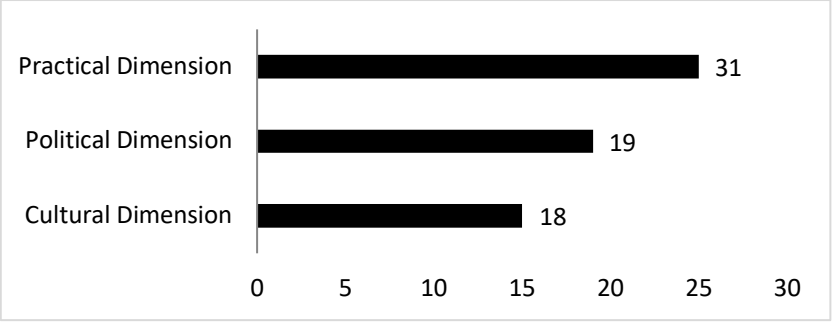
	Lack of resources	Saiz-González et al. (2025); Alcaraz et al. (2024); Latorre-Cosculluela et al. (2024); Belmonte Pérez et al. (2023); Arnaiz-Sánchez et al. (2022); Sisto et al. (2021); López-Azuaga and Suarez Riveiro (2020); González-Gil et al. (2019); Rojo-Ramos et al. (2022)
	Lack of or inadequate educational programmes in schools	Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022); Tsvintarnaia et al. (2020); De Haro Rodríguez et al. (2020); Sabando Rojas et al. (2019); Rodríguez Gudiño et al. (2023); Ayala de la Peña et al. (2023)
	Strengthening educational programmes	Sabando Rojas et al. (2021); Arnaiz-Sánchez et al.(2023b); Arnaiz Sánchez et al. (2021); Sánchez et al. (2019)
Practical Dimension	Insufficient training	Saiz-González et al. (2025); Latorre-Cosculluela et al. (2024); Arnaiz-Sánchez et al. (2023a); Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022); Arnaiz-Sánchez et al. (2022); Rojo-Ramos et al. (2022); López-Azuaga and Suarez Riveiro (2020); González-Gil et al. (2019); Sabando Rojas et al. (2019); Álvarez-Valdivia and González-Montoto (2018); Muñoz-Cantero and Losada-Puente (2018); Rodríguez Gudiño et al. (2023)
	Discriminatory educational practices	Sabando Rojas et al. (2021); Simón et al. (2021); Palomo et al. (2024); Arnaiz-Sánchez et al. (2022); Rojo-Ramos et al. (2022); Arnaiz Sánchez et al. (2021); Sisto et al. (2021); López-Azuaga and Suarez Riveiro (2020); Tsvintarnaia et al. (2020); González-Gil et al. (2019);
	Reification of pupils	Arnaiz-Sánchez et al. (2024)
	Use of inclusive practices	Muñoz-Martínez et al. (2023); Arnaiz-Sánchez et al.(2023b); Belmonte Pérez et al. (2023); Arnaiz Sánchez et al. (2021); Sisto et al. (2021); Sánchez et al. (2019); Simón et al. (2018); Moliner García et al. (2016)

Source: authors' own concept

It is necessary to clarify which aspects are included in each dimension. The cultural dimension refers to the beliefs, values and principles shared by the educational agents belonging to a school; the political dimension refers to the school's plans and programmes; and practices refer to the actions carried out by the teacher in the classroom (Echeita, 2024).

As can be seen in Figure 7, the dimension with the most presence in the selected articles is the practical dimension.

Figure 7. Dimensions of inclusive education



Source: authors' own concept

The relationship of teachers' favourable attitudes towards inclusive practices and the use of inclusive strategies has been highlighted as a key element in different studies (Arnaiz-Sánchez et al., 2023b; Arnaiz-Sánchez et al., 2022; Sisto et al., 2021), as well as the contribution of the use of inclusive strategies to the increase in teachers' positive attitudes (Muñoz-Martínez et al., 2023). Other studies find that teachers' attitudes towards their practices are contingent on training and experience (Latorre-Cosculluela et al., 2024).

Most studies analyse all three dimensions, which may be because the three dimensions are intrinsically linked, so practices need policies to support and reinforce them, and policies need cultures to specify and represent values and principles (Echeita, 2024).

On the other hand, with regard to the political dimension, Arnaiz Sánchez et al. (2021) identify teachers' perceptions of the development of innovative programmes carried out in schools to improve inclusion, social cohesion and the promotion of fundamental values for the development of inclusive education. Sánchez et al. (2019) analyse teachers' perceptions of a project implemented on inclusive practices, which incorporates the three dimensions of inclusive education, through heterogeneous groupings with reorganisation of resources, the extension of learning time, increased

interaction between students, or community participation in learning activities to ensure educational inclusion.

Teachers' perspectives on the cultural dimension have also been analysed; they consider collaborative culture and change in values, behaviours and attitudes to be essential for the development of a fully inclusive school (Tsvintarnaia et al., 2020). Other studies such as Simón et al. (2018) point to the importance of distributed leadership to promote a collaborative culture, creating spaces and time for reflection.

Q11. What are the barriers to inclusive education?

In order to answer this question, the types of barriers proposed by López-Melero (2012) have been taken into consideration, which establishes: cultural barriers, political barriers and didactic barriers.

Cultural barriers

Some studies show that teachers' conceptualisation of inclusive education can be a barrier to inclusive education, as this concept is linked to thinking about how schools should be and function. Most teachers link it to students with special educational needs and to normalising and integrating the educational conditions of these students, positioning the rest of the students as welcoming "different" students (Arnaiz-Sánchez et al., 2024; González-Gil et al., 2019).

Likewise, the studies by Palomo et al. (2024), Tsvintarnaia et al. (2020) and Latorre-Cosculluela et al. (2024) conclude that schools continue to have a vision based on the medical model, which bases learning difficulties on the individual and on the labelling of the individual.

On the other hand, attitudes are also a cultural barrier. In fact, teachers' attitudes of conformism or passivity towards inclusive education (Muñoz-Cantero & Losada-Puente, 2018), attitudes of resistance to change (Moliner García et al., 2016) or the lack of acceptance of families with children with special educational needs (De Haro Rodríguez et al., 2020; González-Gil et al., 2019) impede the development of quality inclusive education.

Political barriers

Two types can be distinguished. On the one hand, those referring to educational administration, such as high ratios and lack of human resources (Saiz-Gónzalez et al., 2025; Belmonte Pérez et al., 2023; Rojo-Ramos et al., 2022; Sisto et al., 2021) that generate an attitude of frustration among teachers (Saiz-Gónzalez et al., 2025). On the other hand, those related to school

policies, such as the lack of plans and programmes that hinder the implementation of quality inclusive education (Ayala de la Peña et al., 2023; Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022; De Haro Rodríguez et al., 2020) are influenced by a lack of attitude on the part of teachers (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022).

Didactic barriers

The barrier that most affects teachers in their classrooms is the lack of training, as it has an impact on their daily teaching work, causing attitudes of frustration and concern about achieving quality inclusive education (Saiz-González et al., 2025; Latorre-Cosculluela et al., 2024). Other studies such as that of Tsvintarnaia et al. (2020) state that individualised curricular adaptations encourage segregation, or that of Sisto et al. (2021) in which they state that support continues to be provided outside the regular classroom, and that this may be related to the attitude of teachers, as they believe that students with needs require extra attention outside the classroom and harm the academic performance of the rest of the students.

Discussion and conclusions

The main objective of this systematic review was to identify and analyse the attitudes and perceptions of pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers about inclusive education in Spain, as well as to identify the barriers perceived by these teachers in the Spanish education system.

Firstly, there has been a significant increase in interest in recent years in research on teachers' attitudes and perceptions of inclusive education and the barriers to its implementation. This is reflected in the number of publications, especially from 2021 onwards. This result coincides with the entry into force in Spain of Organic Law 3/2020 amending the Organic Law of Education 2/2006 (LOMLOE) which gives inclusive education an essential role, making it a basic principle of the Spanish school system.

Based on the analysis of the journals, it shows that studies focusing on this topic are published in high impact journals, which may also point to an interest of well-placed publishers in giving greater visibility to research on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and perceived barriers.

In relation to the methodology of the studies analysed, half of the studies are qualitative, mainly using descriptive methods, with focus groups prevailing (Palomo et al., 2024; Simón et al., 2021; González-Gil et al, 2019; Moliner García et al., 2016), interviews (Belmonte Pérez et al., 2023; Muñoz-Cantero and Losada-Puente, 2018) or a combination of both (Arnaiz-Sánchez

et al., 2024; Arnaiz Sánchez et al., 2021; Arnaiz-Sánchez et al., 2023b). This result may indicate that the current inclination in this field is to dig deeper into the data to understand teachers' experiences, attitudes and behaviours.

With regard to the analysis of educational stages, it is worth noting that most of the articles focus on the Primary Education stage. This may be linked to the fact that the foundations are laid at the Primary Education stage, allowing for the maximum development of pupils' cognitive and social skills and abilities (Urquizo Esparza et al., 2024).

Most studies on attitudes and perceptions refer to the dimension of educational practices. This may be due to the fact that researchers possibly consider the teaching practices that end up being implemented in classrooms to be more important, as they are the synthesis of what an educational institution and the teachers who belong to it want to be and do (Echeita, 2024). Some studies such as Belmonte Pérez et al. (2023) and Arnaiz Sánchez et al. (2021) reflect the practice of specialised open classrooms in schools, which seems to indicate that schools are aware of the importance of using inclusive practices to ensure inclusive quality education for all students. However, other studies state that practices that may segregate students are still used, such as the application of support for students with special educational needs outside the classroom (Sisto et al., 2021; González-Gil et al., 2019), coinciding with previous studies such as that of Díez Gutiérrez (1999), which indicates that this segregative practice has not changed, despite the years and the advances in inclusive education. Along the same lines, Latorre-Cosculluela et al. (2024) conclude that attitudes towards teachers' educational practices are influenced by training and experience; therefore, teachers must be trained through theoretical and practical foundations that enable them to deal with student diversity (Román et al., 2021).

Focusing attention on the barriers that hinder the development of inclusive education, in the cultural dimension it can be observed that teachers define inclusive education from an individualistic approach (Arnaiz-Sánchez et al., 2024; González-Gil et al., 2019). These results may reveal teachers' true beliefs and attitudes towards inclusive education and towards students with educational needs (Krischler et al., 2019). Also, the medical approach used in the 'diagnosis' of learners with special educational needs is a barrier to inclusive education (Palomo et al., 2024; Simón et al., 2021), as this type of assessment emphasizes that special educational needs are individual, stable and permanent and are a barrier to learning (Shevlin et al. 2012). Therefore, it focuses the problem of learning on the individual, i.e. the student with special educational needs, when in reality the barriers to learning come from the social interaction with the environment (Guajardo-Ramos, 2018).

On the other hand, it is worth highlighting the political barriers, which are reflected in the lack of school plans and programmes that promote and guarantee inclusive education, and which in turn have an impact on the participation of families (De Haro Rodríguez et al., 2020; Ayala de la Peña et al., 2023; Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). As Fernández de la Iglesia et al. (2013) point out in their study, this may be due to the difficulty teachers have in coordinating their schedules to enable them to work together and collaborate.

In relation to the didactic barriers investigated, individualised adaptations stand out as a common practice (Tsvintarnaia et al., 2020; Rojo-Ramos et al., 2022; López-Azuaga and Suárez Riveiro, 2020). However, this type of adaptations entails inequality that takes the form of different access to learning and unequal participation of learners (Muñoz-Cantero et al., 2019). This result may be due to a lack of teacher training that impacts on their teaching-learning methods in the classroom (Latorre-Cosculluela et al., 2024; Arnaiz-Sánchez et al., 2023a; Belmonte Pérez et al., 2023; Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022; Rojo-Ramos et al., 2022; López-Azuaga and Suarez Riveiro, 2020; González-Gil, 2019; Álvarez-Valdivia and González-Montoto, 2018; Muñoz-Cantero and Losada-Puente, 2018; Rodríguez Gudiño et al., 2023; Sabando Rojas et al., 2019; Sabando Rojas et al., 2021), which is similar to the study by García-Domingo et al. (2019) who also state that initial training in inclusive education is inadequate, notably theoretical and lacks practical content. It would therefore be advisable to include the pedagogical approach of universal design for learning in the curricula, as it is a very effective strategy that promotes accessibility and equity for all students by providing various means of representation, action and expression (Pastor, 2019) and could solve the didactic barriers present in this review.

Comparing this review with other international reviews, it can be seen that, in general, teachers have a negative attitude towards inclusive education (Boer et al., 2011). This is in contrast to the studies included in this review, such as those by Arnaiz-Sánchez et al. (2023b; 2022) and Sisto et al. (2021), which report a positive attitude among teachers who apply inclusive practices in the classroom.

On the other hand, in the review by Laspina-Olmedo & Montero (2023), teachers emphasize the need for training aimed primarily at promoting an inclusive culture. However, in the studies included in this review (Latorre-Cosculluela et al., 2024; Arnaiz-Sánchez et al., 2023; Belmonte Pérez et al., 2023; Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022; Rojo-Ramos et al., 2022; López-Azuaga and Suarez Riveiro, 2020; González-Gil., 2019; Álvarez-Valdivia and González-Montoto (2018); Muñoz-Cantero and Losada-Puente, 2018;

Rodríguez Gudiño et al., 2023; Sabando Rojas et al., 2019; Sabando Rojas et al., 2021), training focuses on educational practices.

The study by Bani Odeh & Lach (2024) analyses inclusive education in 21 countries, stating that in low-income countries there is a lack of professionalism on the part of teachers, there is no adaptive curriculum for students with special educational needs, and the lack of reception plans or free schools makes it difficult for parents to enroll their children with special educational needs. However, the studies included in this review do not find such barriers.

Compared to other international reviews, this study identifies positive developments, especially in recent years, in teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in Spain, as well as progress towards training in specific teaching practices and not just in cultural aspects that promote measures to raise awareness of the right to inclusive education. This fact allows us to reflect on the impact that current legislation may be having on this progress towards a more inclusive education, as well as the greater commitment shown by teachers to achieving it through their practices.

This reality reinforces the international relevance of this review and its results, as it can serve as a roadmap in other contexts that are less advanced in terms of state education policies. However, the results reflect that other significant barriers related to culture, policies and educational practices remain, which are the starting point for continuing the slow progress towards inclusive, equitable and quality education systems for all, promoting lifelong learning opportunities, as prioritized in the Sustainable Development Goals developed by the United Nations (United Nations, 2023).

Limitation of the study

With regard to the homogeneity of the sample, it focuses only on teachers and not on other agents involved, such as students and/or families, who could be considered and addressed as a future line of research in light of the results obtained in this review. However, this study allows for a detailed analysis of the attitudes and barriers currently perceived by teachers, as they play a fundamental role in the learning process of students. Through their teaching practices, they must develop cognitive and social competencies, as well as skills, to achieve meaningful learning in all students without distinction. In fact, they should be agents of change, modifying the traditional model of education (González-Rojas & Triana-Fierro, 2018).

On the other hand, the fact that the selection of studies focused on open access studies may overlook relevant studies in other types of paid journals. However, this selection criterion allows all included studies to be

accessible to the general public, facilitating transparency and replicability (Freese et al., 2022). On the other hand, limiting the search to English and Spanish may be a limitation, as it could overlook relevant research, especially from regional Spanish journals. However, regional languages were not included, as the Scopus database and the EBSCOHost interface do not include Spanish regional languages in their language filters. It is important to note that, although limiting the selection to these two languages may be a limitation, English is the language of choice for high-impact books and journals (Carrillo-Beltrán, et al., 2021).

On the other hand, Spanish has been included, as this research focuses on Spain, which will allow interested parties to easily access the results of the study. Finally, the geographical limitation established for the review to exclusively cover Spain may be a limitation, as it excludes other contexts from the study. Nevertheless, it is important to investigate this local context, as current Spanish education legislation, Organic Law 3/2020 of 29 December, amending Organic Law 2/2006 of 3 May on Education (LOMLOE), establishes inclusive education as a fundamental principle guaranteeing the presence, participation and learning of all students. Previous Spanish education laws mentioned educational inclusion but did not give this principle the weight it deserves.

Therefore, limiting the search to articles written in Spain allows us to delve deeper into the reality of the culture, policies, and practices towards inclusive education in Spain, while also identifying progress made in implementing more inclusive policy reforms that can be generalized to other contexts.

Finally, although conducting a meta-analysis could have added depth to the research, the authors consider that it would have been an appropriate method if only studies with quantitative methodology had been selected, since meta-analysis is not suitable when qualitative methods are included (Sandelowski et al., 2006), since qualitative studies use different objectives, methods, and data from quantitative studies, which, if combined statistically, can distort or mask fundamental findings (Dixon et al., 2005; Thorne, 2022).

In conclusion, this systematic review reveals a collage of realities and unfinished challenges around inclusive education, which opens up important future lines of research such as, for example, introducing the view of families and pupils or extending the sample to the university stage, which would allow us to delve deeper into teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards inclusive education.

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