



Investigating Pre-service English Language Teachers' Attitudes, Sentiments, and Concerns Towards Inclusive Education in Turkey

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Abstract: Inclusion as an educational practice that has its roots in social justice promotes equal access to educational opportunities for all students irrespective of their special educational needs (SEN). The efficacy of such inclusive education largely depends on teachers, particularly their attitudes and skills for teaching students with SEN in mainstream classrooms. That being the case, teacher education programs play a crucial role in fostering these requisite skills and attitudes. This quantitative cross-sectional correlational study examines the attitudes, sentiments, and concerns of pre-service English language teachers regarding inclusive education. A total of 139 pre-service English teachers from five universities completed the Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education–Revised Scale. Descriptive statistics and correlational analyses were used to analyze the data. The results indicated moderate attitudes towards inclusive education among the pre-service English language teachers. While their sentiments and concerns about inclusive education showed variations based on their prior coursework experience, their attitudes remained stable. Moreover, the attitudes and concerns of the participants did not reveal a significant correlation with their policy knowledge, but the sentiment scores showed statistically significant differences in the two groups. Finally, the amount of previous experience with SEN students did not significantly differ in terms of attitudes, sentiments, or concerns about inclusive education. The findings provide implications for foreign language teachers, teacher educators, and initial teacher education program developers.

Keywords: Pre-service English Teachers, Inclusive Education, Attitudes, Policy Knowledge, Prior Coursework Experience, Previous Experience with SEN Students.

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Introduction

Including students with diverse educational needs in mainstream schools has become a major issue of education policy and planning all over the world, by necessitating a transformation of schools (Lin et al., 2024; Lindsay, 2003). Given that teachers are at the front line of this transformation, an investigation of their inclusive practices, particularly how they are shaped by their attitudes, sentiments, and concerns, as well as their prior experiences with inclusive education, becomes essential. Attitudes towards inclusive practices begin to develop during teacher education programs, therefore, more emphasis should be given to cultivating positive attitudes before teaching practice commences (Goddard & Evans, 2018). However, a significant concern posits that a majority of early career teachers feel unqualified for inclusive education and hold negative attitudes towards teaching students with SEN (Chhetri et al., 2023; Crawford et al., 2012). Previous studies highlight that a large number of pre-service teachers criticized teacher education programs for not providing them with the necessary information and skills for effective inclusive teaching practices (Forlin, 2006). Attitudes can be formed and modified, for which training is crucial (Silva et al., 2023; Solís et al., 2019). Thus, a close examination of the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards inclusive education is a critical first step towards nurturing positive attitudes and fostering informed inclusive practices in the classroom (Miesera et al., 2018).

Literature Review

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education refers to the practice of educating students with and without special needs together in the same educational environment (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). It mainly involves creating a sense of belonging while supporting all students academically and emotionally, irrespective of their differences in terms of race, gender, language, social class, and ability (Kozleski et al., 2007). The adoption of an inclusive teaching pedagogy entails considering student differences in terms of attention span, the pace of completing the tasks, and grasping the task demands (Evans, 1997), as well as social and cultural differences to promote social cohesion, citizenship, and more equitable society (Guðjónsdóttir & Óskarsdóttir, 2019). Such education involves a restructuring of mainstream education components that require adapted curriculum, teaching and assessment methods, and technological assistance or rearrangement of the learning environment (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020).

Teacher Attitudes towards Inclusive Education

As the practice of inclusive education has gained momentum in recent years, the role of the teachers is overemphasized in the successful implementation of inclusive education and in the transformation of schools (Barnard et al., 2008). However, a number of studies reveal highly serious constraints related to the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion: many teachers feel ill-equipped to meet the wide range of learning difficulties in today's classrooms (Ginja & Chen, 2023; Lindner et al., 2023), many have fears about the sufficiency of their ability to deal with students who have "certain" characteristics (Ainscow, 1999), and many others think that education of students with special educational needs (SEN) is "primarily the responsibility of a specialist" (Booth, 1999, p. 13).

The effectiveness of inclusive education mainly depends on teachers' attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and empathy towards students with disabilities (Esteban et al., 2017; Williams-Brown & Hodkinson, 2021). These elements can either obstruct or promote the processes of integration, learning, and participation. A multitude of factors, such as qualifications and teaching experience, shape these attitudes and perceptions. The effects of these factors can ultimately dictate the success or failure of an inclusive education process (Castro-Villarreal & Nichols, 2016). Studies particularly examining the perceptions of teachers who were not participating in inclusive education indicated strong negative feelings (Schmidt & Vrhovnik, 2015; Vera & Prošić-Santovac, 2017) about inclusion as they felt that decision makers were out of touch with classroom realities (Vaughn et al., 1996). Participants identified several factors that would influence effective implementations of inclusion, such as class size, inadequate resources, and lack of adequate teacher preparation. However, teachers who had active experiences of inclusion held more positive attitudes, though they perceived inclusive education as a challenge. Kraska and Boyle's (2014) study revealed that participants who studied a module on inclusive education developed more positive attitudes toward inclusive education.

Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education

Studies exploring pre-service teachers' (PTs hereafter) concerns about and attitudes towards inclusive education (Jacob & Pillay, 2022; Subban & Sharma, 2005) and their readiness for teaching diverse learner groups (Forlin et al., 2001) yielded contradictory findings (Hastings & Oakford, 2003; Thaver & Lim, 2014; Tuncay & Kizilaslan, 2022). A major concern is that a high number of early career teachers felt unprepared for inclusive education and had negative attitudes towards teaching in a class of students with SEN. In a similar vein, many

PTs blamed initial teacher education programs for not equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills for inclusive education (Forlin, 2006; Tuncay & Kizilaslan, 2022).

On the other hand, PTs who had received formal inclusive education lessons were found to display positive attitudes (Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Carroll et al., 2003; Tangen & Beutel, 2017; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014). In addition to previous course experience, knowledge of local policy was associated with positive attitudes and lower concerns regarding the implementation of inclusive practices (Beattie et al., 1997; Forlin et al., 2009; Sharma & Nuttal, 2016).

A study, on the other hand, examined differences in PTs' knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes toward inclusive education, with an emphasis on variations across gender and program (Jacob & Pillay, 2022). The results demonstrated significant differences in these aspects depending on gender and programs. Similarly, another study in the North Malaysian context reported that male pre-service teachers had more pedagogical knowledge about inclusive education practices (Abdullah et al., 2022).

In the Turkish context, a study similar to ours—but conducted with pre-service teachers specializing in pre-school, social science, science, elementary mathematics, classroom teaching, and the Turkish language—found an overall moderately favorable perception towards inclusive education. Gender, level of interaction with students, academic department, special education coursework, knowledge of legislation, self-confidence, and experience emerged as influential variables. Pre-service teachers' perceptions of inclusion are linked to interaction levels, coursework, knowledge of legislation, self-confidence, and experience (Tuncay & Kizilaslan, 2022).

Inclusion in Teacher Education and the Need for Change

Teacher education programs offer the inclusive education course as a one-term course, which covers national and international policies regarding students with SEN, curriculum and materials for inclusive education are introduced. However, many PTs are not aware of the importance of inclusive education (Baguisa & Ang-Manaig, 2021). As a consequence, they do not take it as an elective course, and they graduate without sufficient knowledge about inclusive education. Apart from special education teachers, subject teachers such as math, social sciences, and languages often lack the training that is needed to implement practices for inclusive education in mainstream classrooms (Horzum & İzci, 2018). PTs were found to have moderate to negative attitudes towards inclusive education (Aysina et al., 2020). The participating PTs mentioned the lack of academic support to gain experience and knowledge

regarding material and activity design to address the needs of students with SEN (Vianney & Olivier, 2022), and the opportunity to observe and interact with these students (Casler-Failing et al., 2021; Mertoğlu, 2018). Despite the critical role pre-service EFL teachers will play in shaping inclusive classrooms from the earliest grades through tertiary education, existing research has, to our best knowledge, not adequately focused on their attitudes, sentiments, and concerns towards inclusive education. This gap is particularly concerning given the swift transition these educators will soon make into teaching roles within K12 and higher education settings. To address this gap in the literature, we posed the following three research questions:

1. What are the attitudes, sentiments, and concerns of PTs of English towards inclusive education?
2. Are there significant differences in the attitudes, sentiments, and concerns of pre-service English teachers towards inclusive education based on:
 - a. their previous experience with Inclusive Education coursework
 - b. their knowledge of national policies
 - c. their experience with children with special educational needs
3. Is there a correlation among attitudes, sentiments, and concerns towards inclusive education among pre-service English teachers?

Methods

This study adopted a cross-sectional correlational design (Creswell, 2014). The convenience sampling technique was used (Makwana et al., 2023) as participants who represented different groups were compared based on independent variables such as having previous experience with students with different needs, taking an inclusive education course before, and having policy knowledge to display their effects on the dependent variable of attitude towards inclusive education.

Participants and Setting

The research sample consisted of 34 (24.5%) male and 105 Female (75.5%) pre-service EFL teachers, totaling 139 participants, with an average age of 21.5 from English Language Teaching programs at two state and three foundation universities in Istanbul. Among them, 54% reported not having taken any courses on inclusive education before, 44% indicated a lack of knowledge regarding inclusive education policies, and 52% stated that they had no experience with students with SEN.

Data Collection Instrument

The Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education–Revised Scale.

After receiving Ethical Board Approval, data was collected through the Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education–Revised Scale with three subscales and a total number of 23 items (AlMahdi & Bukamal, 2019). The subscales, namely sentiments, attitudes, and concerns about inclusive education, have 10, 7, and 6 items respectively. The first subscale concerning teacher sentiments measures how comfortable and ready a participant feels about engaging with students with SEN. The second subscale on teacher attitudes measures the level of acceptance of students with SEN in regular classes. Finally, teachers' concerns are related to the concerns of a PT about being able to cater to the needs of students with SEN. Sample items for each subscale are given in Table 1.

This instrument, adapted by AlMahdi and Bukamal (2019) from the original scale and developed by Forlin and Chambers (2011) for in-service teachers, was tailored to suit pre-service teachers. The respondents rated the 23 statements on a 4-point Likert-type scale with answers ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (4). While the revised scale demonstrated an overall Cronbach’s alpha reliability of .71 in the original research, our study found a Cronbach’s alpha reliability of .73 for the total scale, with specific reliability coefficients of .59 for the Sentiments subscale, .82 for the Attitudes subscale, and .69 for the Concerns subscale. The scale also included a demographic information part where the participants provided information related to their age, gender, year of study, previous experience with students with SEN, knowledge of national policies for children with SEN, and prior enrolment in inclusive education coursework.

Table 1. Subscales and Sample Items of the SACIE Scale

Subscales	Sample Item
Sentiment	“It is rewarding when I am able to help people with disabilities.”
	“I find it difficult to overcome my initial shock when meeting people with severe physical disabilities.”
Attitude	“Students who need assistance with personal care should be in regular classes.”
	“Students who are physically aggressive toward others should be in regular classes.”
Concern	“I am concerned that it will be difficult to give appropriate attention to all students in an inclusive classroom.”
	“I am concerned that I do not have the knowledge and skills required to teach students with disabilities.”

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection commenced with the identification of research sites and potential participants, followed by the determination of the minimum sample size using GPower and the selection of a sampling method. Initially, we obtained permission to use the scale from its developers, subsequently receiving ethics committee approval from the university. The collection process spanned approximately 2 months. Researchers distributed a Google Forms link of the English questionnaire to English Language Teaching Departments of five different universities, ensuring participation was entirely voluntary. Throughout the data collection procedure, the participants were fully informed about the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Data was kept in confidentiality in password-secured folders.

Data Analysis

In response to the RQ1, the descriptive data such as means, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations were analyzed through the JASP software. Assumptions tests were conducted, and normality and equality of variances assumptions were met. Accordingly, a one-sample t-test was conducted to compare the means of the sentiments, attitudes, and concerns of the group to the standard values determined previously. In response to the RQ2, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference between PTs in terms of their sentiments, attitudes and concerns towards inclusion based on the variables of previous course experience, previous interaction with students with SEN and having policy knowledge. To answer the RQ3, Pearson's correlation coefficient test was run to calculate the correlation between dependent variables.

Results

RQ1: What are the sentiments, attitudes, and concerns of PTs toward students with special educational needs?

A four-point Likert scale was utilized in this study, and the interpretations of findings should be considered accordingly. The findings reveal that the participants hold moderate sentiments ($M= 2.63$, $SD= .26$), attitudes ($M= 2.67$, $SD= .52$), and concerns ($M= 2.78$, $SD= .42$) towards inclusive education (Table 2). Table 2 below provides a detailed breakdown of participants' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns, illustrating that the mean scores for each category fall within a moderate range.

Table 2. Participants' Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns

Category	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Sentiments	139	1.90	3.30	2.63	.26
Attitudes	139	1.00	3.86	2.67	.52
Concerns	139	1.50	3.50	2.78	.42

An interesting observation from Table 2 is the similarity in mean sentiment scores between participants who have and have not had experience with students with SEN, indicating a consistent perception across experience.

Building upon the general insights gained from Table 2, Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for participants' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns in relation to their previous course experience, previous experience with students with SEN, and knowledge of national policy. It highlights variations in mean scores based on these factors, offering insights into how course and direct experiences as well as knowledge may influence PTs' perspectives.

Table 3. Participants' Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns Means

Variables		Sentiments	Attitudes	Concerns	Total
		M	M	M	M
Previous Course Experience	Yes	2.58	2.65	2.70	2.64
	No	2.69	2.70	2.87	2.75
Experience with Students with SEN	Yes	2.64	2.68	2.74	2.69
	No	2.64	2.66	2.85	2.72
Knowledge of National Policy	Yes	2.57	2.62	2.72	2.64
	No	2.70	2.72	2.85	2.76

RQ2: Are there any significant differences among the PTs in their attitudes toward inclusive education based on their

a) Previous course experience

The independent samples t-test comparing students who took the inclusive education course to those who did not, in terms of sentiments, attitudes, and concerns, revealed statistically significant differences in sentiments ($t = -2.20$; $p < 0.05$) and concerns ($t = -2.242$; $p < 0.05$). However, no significant difference was found in attitudes ($t = -0.600$; $p > 0.05$) between the two groups. The results suggest that students who did not take the course exhibited higher levels of concern and more positive sentiments towards inclusive education.

Table 4. T-test Results Comparing Previous Course Experience and Sub-Scales

Previous Course Experience	N	M	SD	t	Df	p
Sentiments						
Yes	63	2.57	.218	-2.20	137	0.012*
No	75	2.69	.291			
Attitudes						
Yes	63	2.64	.416	-.600	137	.550
No	75	2.69	.601			
Concerns						
Yes	63	2.66	.496	-2.242	137	0.021*
No	75	2.86	.396			

**p<0,001 *p<0,05

b) Knowledge of national policies

The independent samples t-test results indicated no significant difference in attitudes ($t = 1.064$; $p > 0.05$) or concerns ($t = 1.906$; $p > 0.05$) between students with and without policy knowledge. However, a significant difference was observed in sentiments between the two groups ($t = 0.285$; $p < 0.05$).

Table 5. T-test Results Comparing Policy Knowledge and Sub-Scales

Policy Knowledge	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Sentiments						
Yes	66	2.57	.285	.285	137	.005*
No	73	2.69	.231			
Attitudes						
Yes	66	2.62	.500	1.064	137	.288
No	73	2.71	.542			
Concerns						
Yes	66	2.71	.431	1.906	137	.059
No	73	2.85	.413			

**p<0,001 *p<0,05

c) Previous experience with children with special educational needs

Results of the independent samples t-test showed that there is not a significant difference between the students who have policy knowledge and the students who did not have policy

knowledge in terms of sentiments ($t=.009$; $p>,05$), attitudes ($t=.207$; $p>,05$) and concerns ($t=-1.608$; $p>,05$).

Table 6. T-test Results for Experience with Children with different needs and Sub-Scales

Experience with Kids	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Sentiments						
Yes	78	2.63	.293	.009	137	.993
No	61	2.63	.229			
Attitudes						
Yes	78	2.68	.574	.207	137	.836
No	61	2.66	.453			
Concerns						
Yes	78	2.73	.489	-1.608	137	.109
No	61	2.85	.322			

** $p<0,001$ * $p<0,05$

RQ 3: Is there any correlation between attitudes, sentiments, and concerns towards inclusive education?

To examine the relationship between the sentiments, attitudes, and concerns of the participants, a series of Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted. The reference points for correlation strength, as defined by Cohen (1988), are as follows: <0.3 indicates a weak relationship, $0.3 \leq |r| < 0.5$ is a moderate one, and ≥ 0.5 is a strong one. The analysis revealed a weak and non-significant linear relationship between concerns and attitudes ($r= .006$; $p>,005$). In contrast, a significant and moderate linear relationship was observed between the concerns and sentiments ($r= .389$; $p<,001$). Similarly, a non-significant weak linear relationship was found between sentiments and attitudes ($r= .053$; $p>,005$).

Discussion of Results and Conclusion

Language teachers will likely interact with students with SEN due to the rising number of students with SEN (Dinçer & Şahin, 2022). Within the scope of pre-service teacher education programs, fostering a positive perspective on inclusive education emerges as a critical factor, potentially laying a robust foundation for the successful integration of all learners (Hobbs & Westling, 1998). The absence of these positive attitudes in the initial training period can complicate the path of future teachers wishing to reorient their perspectives (Murphy, 1996).

Moreover, teachers' attitudes are known to influence their everyday teaching practices (Hobbs & Westling, 1998), a notion corroborated by the research of Li and Cheung (2021). They discovered a link between pre-service teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusive education and increased self-efficacy in delivering inclusive lessons and managing student behavior.

RQ1: What are the pre-service English teachers' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns toward students with special educational needs?

In comparison with the findings of RQ1, the existing research on attitudes towards students with SEN and inclusive education among pre-service teachers presents mixed results. Though Issaka et al. (2022) found that pre-service teachers in Ghana held positive attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education, the participants in the current study portrayed neutral attitudes, sentiments, and concerns towards students with SEN. Similarly, this neutral attitude was evident in the Iranian EFL context, where a study of 254 PTs found neutral-to-positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Rezai et al., 2018). In the Turkish context, Tuncay and Kizilaslan (2022) found neutral perceptions towards inclusion. However, the neutrality or positivity of these attitudes might be influenced by various factors.

One of these factors might be resulting from PTs' teaching experience in school placement or private institutions. Furthermore, the prevalence and the duration of inclusive education practice are influential factors in creating positive attitudes (Sharma et al., 2006). For instance, participants from Canada and Estonia, where inclusive education has long been common, reported more positive attitudes compared to those from Finland, where relatively negative attitudes were revealed. In line with these findings, a recent study conducted in North Malaysia also reported high levels of positive attitudes towards students with SEN (Abdullah et al., 2022). However, such neutral or negative attitudes among teachers might stem from individual negative experiences with integrating students with SEN into mainstream education.

On the other hand, the context plays a significant role. In Scotland, pre-service secondary school teachers showed relatively negative attitudes towards inclusive education when compared to pre-service primary education teachers (Beacham & Rouse, 2012). These attitudes were influenced by negative feedback from fellow teachers and the witnessed hardships of academic and social integration in the absence of necessary support.

The level of understanding of inclusion among teachers can also influence their attitudes. For example, a study by Sakız and Woods (2014) revealed that teachers without a

comprehensive understanding of inclusion tend to group students with SEN based on their abilities rather than pursuing a full-inclusion policy. This practice, which can be attributed to a lack of well-established inclusion policy and effective knowledge dissemination, often results in negative attitudes during their initial interactions with students with SEN.

Furthermore, there seems to be a trend among teachers to focus on mainstream students instead of putting extra effort into ensuring the academic integration of students with SEN (Sucuoğlu et al., 2010). This finding corroborates the notion that negative attitudes might stem from prior negative experiences and the associated narratives regarding the integration of students with SEN. These studies suggest that teachers' attitudes are a complex interplay of their understanding, experiences, external inputs, and the wider education context. This aligns with the findings of Massé et al. (2022), who reported associations between pre-service teachers' attitudes toward students with behavioural difficulties, their individual characteristics such as self-efficacy beliefs, and the characteristics of the education programs that they studied.

RQ2: Are there any significant differences among the participants in their attitudes toward inclusive education based on previous course experience, knowledge of policy, and previous experience with students with SEN?

A) Previous Course Experience

Our findings revealed a statistically significant difference in both sentiments and concerns between the groups who have taken the inclusive education course and those who have not. However, there was not a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of the groups.

The group of students with previous course experience was found to have slightly lower sentiment scores when compared to the group with no previous course experience. This implies that the course structure with emphasis on application is crucial for creating positive sentiments, as evidenced by Carroll et al. (2003). On the other hand, In the Turkish context, previous course experience was a significant factor in pre-service teachers' general perceptions towards inclusion (Tuncay & Kizilaslan, 2022). With the recruitment of 220 pre-service teachers studying at South Queensland University in Australia, the study indicated that an inclusive education course adequately addressing the need to contact students with SEN promoted positive sentiments. The course offered by the university contains opportunities to observe and participate in inclusive practices in a regular school, have individual contact with disabled students and their parents, and closely examine the cases of students with SEN through reflective video-watching sessions.

Even though positive attitudes towards inclusion were found to be developed with courses (Bayar & Üstün, 2017; Hobbs & Westling, 1998; Killoran et al., 2014; Sharma & Nuttal, 2016; Shippen et al., 2005; Tuncay & Kizilaslan, 2022; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014), attitudes towards inclusive education, in the context of our study, did not significantly differ in relation to previous course experience. This implies that participants hold similar attitudes towards inclusive education regardless of their previous inclusive education course experience. Similarly, in a one-year inclusive education course, the primary and secondary PTs maintained their positive attitudes and the practicum experience did not relatively diminish these positive attitudes (Beacham & Rouse, 2012).

Another significant aspect of nurturing positive attitudes in PTs is helping them gain an “insider perspective” through inclusive education courses offered by universities (Sharma & Nuttal, 2016, p. 145). To specify, following a nine-week university course that focused on inclusive practices and experience of students with SEN, pre-service teachers without previous experience with students with SEN showed the greatest improvement in attitudes (Sharma & Nuttal, 2016). During the course, the students were given a chance to listen to stories of students with SEN regarding the influence of various educational practices. Given the significance of gaining an insider perspective, it is advisable to add additional components to the elective course to help students gain an understanding of the schooling experience of students with SEN and acknowledging the significance of inclusion strategies. Thus, it would be possible to form more positive attitudes and seek ways to integrate students with SEN into mainstream education.

Incongruent with the findings of previous research (Sharma et al., 2008; Sharma & Nuttal, 2016), our study found that the group of students with previous course experience had significantly lower concerns when compared to those who had not taken the course. This implies that familiarity with inclusive education courses might be a diminishing factor for concerns. By the same token, pre-service teachers without an inclusive education course experience might have higher concerns. Major areas of concern that are explored in the current study and in the relevant studies are the inefficiency of resources, lack of necessary skills, and strategies to practice inclusive education and the possibility of excessive workload. Similar to the current study, other studies indicated that addressing specific classroom management strategies, individualized practices, differentiated assessment, and curriculum helped PTs to see that inclusive education is applicable and feasible and these can reduce the level of concern regarding the workload, necessary competencies and lack of necessary resources (Sharma et al., 2008; Sharma & Nuttal, 2016).

B) Knowledge of policy

It is significant for PTs to be familiar with the inclusive policies that involve the diagnosis, placement, policy, and educational needs of students with SEN due to the prevalence of inclusive education practices in regular schools (Çitil & Karakoç, 2018). We found that the attitudes and concerns of pre-service English teachers did not significantly differ in relation to their policy knowledge regarding inclusive education. However, the pre-service English teachers with no policy knowledge had considerably higher sentiment scores towards inclusive education, which means that they are more sympathetic and caring towards such students and inclusive practices. This finding is in line with the results of the research by Sharma and Nuttal (2016), as the knowledge of local policy (legal issues regarding diagnosis, placement, and individual rights of students with SEN) did not have a significant influence on the attitudes and concerns of the PTs. Another study conducted in a similar context found a high correlation between policy knowledge and positive perceptions (Tuncay & Kizilaslan, 2022).

Local policy knowledge was deemed as a significant demographic variable along with other variables leading to positive changes in attitudes, sentiments and concerns of the students (Beattie et al., 1997; Forlin et al., 2009; Sharma & Nuttal, 2016). However, the current literature indicates that knowledge of local policy does not always emerge as a crucial demographic variable that will lead learners to form positive attitudes, sentiments, and have fewer concerns towards inclusive education.

C) Experience with students with SEN

This study found that sentiments, attitudes, and concerns of participants did not significantly differ in regards to previous experience with students with SEN, even though positive attitudes towards inclusive education are also said to be cultivated through previous experiences with students with SEN (Hobbs & Westling, 1998). A study argued that previous contact with such students was not found to lead necessarily to desirable attitudes and furthermore, it found no correlation between previous experience and teachers' attitudes (Stephens & Braun, 1980). However, in the related literature, pre-service teachers with previous experience with students with SEN were found to have more positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Leyser & Lessen, 1985; Sharma et al., 2006; Stainback et al., 1983). This also applies to the Turkish context where Tuncay and Kizilaslan (2022) found more positive attitudes in those who had previous interaction with students with SEN. This

might stem from the finding that previous contact with such students might reduce the discomfort levels of pre-service teachers (Gething et al., 1997).

Pre-service teachers in some cases are given the chance to interact with students with different needs in regular settings to ensure inclusive experiences (Richards & Clough, 2004). A study with 120 pre-service teachers revealed that such experiences could build up positive attitudes. On the other hand, applied experiences regarding inclusive education might yield negative results. Previous experience with students with SEN might unfold necessary things teachers need to do for inclusion, which leads to more concerns (Lancaster & Bain, 2010).

Even though it is not statistically significant, the participants without such experiences were found to hold minimally higher concerns regarding inclusive education. This is supported by a study that revealed that pre-service teachers without such experiences had greater decreases in concerns after experiencing inclusive classroom practices (Sharma & Nuttal, 2016). This implies that previous experience with students with SEN can be a rather diminishing factor for concern. Another possible reason for the inefficiency of previous experience in building up positive attitudes is the context of contact. The level of concern regarding inclusive practices might increase, if in the context of contact, segregation is the norm (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). PTs with previous experience with SEN students likely maintain their concerns and lack of positive attitudes due to ineffective prior interactions, which fail to eliminate a segregation mindset (Sharma & Nuttal, 2016).

RQ3: Is there any correlation between attitudes, sentiments, and concerns towards inclusive education?

The results revealed a significant positive correlation between concerns and sentiments at a moderate level. This means that the more sentimental participants are, the more concerns they have regarding inclusive education. This also shows our participants' awareness of students with SEN, in the sense that they build empathy with them and attach importance to their needs. Furthermore, the participants' concerns might be diminished with applied practices, which were observed in previous research (Carroll et al., 2003).

On the other hand, our study reported no statistically significant correlation between sentiments and attitudes, as well as attitudes and concerns although there are studies in the related literature that indicated positive attitudes towards inclusive education along with high concerns; thus, reporting a positive correlation (Hoskin et al., 2015). This implies a weak correlation between how sentimental they approach students with SEN and their attitudes. Similarly, our findings imply a weak relationship between participants' attitudes and their

concerns. The level of concern to receive support, implementation of inclusive strategies, and discomfort regarding other issues are hoped to be reduced while sentiments and attitudes are aimed to be promoted with the use of applied experiences and training (Sharma et al., 2008; Sharma & Nuttal, 2016). In this respect, it is expected to observe a negative correlation between the concerns and the other two subscales used in the study. However, as it is the case in the current study, past research indicates some instances with high levels of concern accompanied by high levels of attitudes (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Richards & Clough, 2004). It was not possible to ascertain the interaction between the variables of sentiments, attitudes, and concerns as no large correlation exists between variables. In light of the current findings, it is advisable to create an action plan that will address the sentiments, attitudes, and concerns of the student teachers separately due to the emergence of a weak correlation among dependent variables.

Conclusively, pre-service teacher education programs are the professional development procedures that should effectively "address educators' concerns and alter any negative attitudes about inclusive education" (Sharma et al., 2006 p. 80). Attitudes, sentiments, and concerns of pre-service teachers should be explored to ensure the most proper preparation that can develop them for inclusive education practices (Sharma et al., 2006). Our findings suggest that previous course experience might change pre-service English teachers' sentiments and concerns but not their attitudes. At the same time, previous experience with students with SEN and knowledge of national policy does not seem to shape participants' attitudes. It is noteworthy that exposing pre-service teachers to students with SEN is insufficient; instead, a systematic approach to these interactions is essential for building meaningful relationships and fostering positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Sharma et al., 2008). Additionally, rather than treating inclusive education as an isolated, single-semester course, pre-service teachers should engage in continuous professional development to nurture these positive attitudes effectively (Copfer & Specht, 2014).

Implications, Limitations, and Suggestions for Further Research

The findings highlight the necessity for teacher education programs to integrate inclusive education principles across the curriculum, rather than isolating them within single courses, to effectively shape pre-service language teachers' attitudes, sentiments, and concerns. Additionally, hands-on experiences with SEN students should be systematically designed so that more positive and informed attitudes towards inclusive education can be cultivated.

The participants of the present study were all Turkish citizens; thus, it would be wiser to draw context-related conclusions. As stated before, the findings of such studies might highly depend on the context and the national policy; thus, the generalizability of our results is limited to Turkish EFL pre-service teachers.

Future studies can explore pre-service teachers in other majors and the relationship between attitudes towards inclusive education and the type of experience participants have had before, what level of policy knowledge is available to them, and the structure of courses taken.

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