

A study on Italian teachers' sentiments, attitudes and concerns towards inclusive education¹

Uno studio sui sentimenti, gli atteggiamenti e le preoccupazioni degli insegnanti italiani verso l'inclusione scolastica

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Over the past few decades, with the adoption of an inclusive approach to education, the teacher's role in ensuring the educational success of each and every pupil has become a central theme. Literature on this specific issue highlights that there is a positive correlation between the quality of the teaching offered and students' performance. Research on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education suggests that the success of this approach is strongly related to the teachers' sentiments, attitudes and concerns toward inclusive education that orient the daily action of each teacher. The SACIE-R scale was translated and administered to 437 teachers during a training course organised by the Regional Department for Schools in the Campania Region and delivered by the University of Salerno in the provinces of Salerno, Caserta, Avellino and Benevento. The aim was to explore the attitudes, sentiments and concerns among those teachers who will be directly involved in promoting the implementation of inclusive practices, as this could be a predictive element of the success of inclusion, notwithstanding the complexity such an approach brings about. Further, this study provided the opportunity to translate and validate the SACIE-R scale in Italy.

KEYWORDS: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, TEACHER EDUCATION, SACIE-R, ATTITUDES, CONCERNS.

Introduction

In recent years, the pedagogical and didactic scenario, required to embrace and implement an inclusive approach in school contexts, stimulates a reflection on the need for a new and more complex teaching profession able to face the challenge of full inclusion². Indeed, an inclusive approach requires a restructuring of the educational systems that not only takes into account both the physical contexts and the individual teaching-learning processes but has to be able to rethink teacher education in an inclusive perspective³, by identifying new ways to make the coexistence of different teacher profiles feasible; namely the learning support teacher (fully-qualified teacher specialised in special education) and the generalist teacher (in primary school) or specific subject teacher (in lower

and upper secondary schools), hereafter referred to as the teacher, whose collaboration is indispensable.

In this period of transition, where teachers are requested by law to manage the heterogeneity of the pupils' educational needs, it has become clear that, in most cases, teachers have been left alone to face the difficult task of making pedagogical and didactic choices to meet the pressing demands of providing individualised and personalised learning opportunities without sufficient training. This led to a reflection on the role of the learning support teachers, to give value and recapitalise their methodological and didactic competencies and place them at the service of the wider teaching community in order to achieve truly inclusive contexts. In other words, learning support teachers would not only put to use their expertise in facilitating student learning but also offer their support

to the teachers to guarantee high-quality inclusive practices for all students⁴.

The realisation of inclusive schools thus requires a renewed didactic culture which could recognise not only the implications deriving from scientific research, educational policies, and statements made by national and international documents, but also able to acknowledge the centrality of the teachers' role as strategic agents of social and educational processes of inclusive practices⁵. Therefore, it is important to help teachers develop attitudes that will make them «confident and competent in teaching children with diverse educational needs»⁶.

To this aim, the research on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion⁷ suggests that the success of inclusive education requires both the acquisition of competencies as well as instilling values of diversity and human rights. Avramidis and Norwich⁸ that although 65% of more than 10,000 teachers interviewed in various countries around the world have declared that they share inclusive values, only about 30% believe to have received an adequate training or have the skills or resources necessary and appropriate to achieve it. They concluded that resistance to inclusion reduces when teachers have received special training⁹. Many teachers begin their profession with little understanding of the concept of inclusion and without having had a real opportunity to interact with people with disabilities or special needs during the training courses¹⁰.

Therefore, the inclusive approach requires a rethinking of teacher training that takes into account the founding principles of an inclusive perspective¹¹. The development of effective inclusive practices doesn't concern only the development of teachers' skills and knowledge, but it should also consider teachers' opinions, attitudes, beliefs and values towards individual differences and disability¹².

In light of such reflections and starting from the assumption that there are practical and conceptual difficulties in singling out the teacher competencies needed in inclusive schools, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE)¹³ delineated the *Profile of Inclusive Teachers*. This document aims to identify the essential competencies, the educational and cultural background, the values and behaviours necessary for inclusive teachers regardless the subject taught, the learners' age or the type of school while taking into consideration all forms of diversity. The *Profile* identifies

four essential values which represent the basis for the realisation of inclusive schools. These values are associated with different competencies which in turn are constituted by three elements: the attitudes and beliefs, the knowledge and understanding, and the skills and abilities.

As outlined in the document, the work is based on Shulman's methodological approach «who describes professional learning in terms of the apprenticeships of the head (knowledge), hand (skill, or doing), and heart (attitudes and beliefs)»¹⁴. This triadic approach proposed also by Florian & Rouse¹⁵ has highlighted that the professional development might be based on the reciprocal triangular relationship between: *knowing, believing and doing*. It inspired the integrated programme of Triad of Inclusive Experiences (TIE)¹⁶, which reflects the need to link the research on teachers' perceptions about inclusion to the real experience within inclusive practices.

The TIE programme describes the testing of a theory on inclusive education implemented among Australian pre-service teachers for more than eight years and culminated in the delineation of practices that can be shared to examine teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward inclusive education and to implement a series of concrete experiences. Throughout this programme people with disabilities are involved with pre-service teachers in a number of different activities. The integrated programme had a positive impact in terms of interaction and relationship between teachers and pupils improving the willingness of teachers to work in inclusive classrooms¹⁷.

The Italian Context

After the ratification by the Italian Parliament of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Italian Ministry of Education issued a series of regulations and legislative measures aimed at sustaining the inclusive practice in accordance with international standards. The inclusive approach to education, in particular, has required a new professional profile of the agents involved in the school system. This Convention led to a series of educational and training activities aimed at increasing teachers' knowledge and competencies for the realisation of educational paths which could promote the academic achievement of all students.

To this aim, the aforementioned Convention introduced the idea that, through specific in-service training, teachers and administrative staff have to acquire a «preparation that must also cover the knowledge on the issue of disability and the use of innovative measures and alternatives, resources and models of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities»¹⁸. In particular, the Convention has reaffirmed the principle expressed by the work of the World Conference on Inclusive Education held in Salamanca in 1994 «in the context of the systemic change, teacher education programmes, both pre-service and in-service, address the provision of special needs education in inclusive schools»¹⁹.

In line with this re-organisation of the educational training models, Italy has proposed a series of training courses and activities aimed at creating the conditions for sharing the meanings of inclusion at different professional levels. This triggered the need to prepare all teachers for using inclusive approaches, by making them able to elaborate and implement educational projects for students with special educational needs. In response to this need, Italian school policies have promoted the acquisition of teaching skills aiming at breaking down all barriers to learning for all students, by involving in-service teachers and learning support teachers in a series of training activities that are oriented to foster collegiality and co-responsibility for the achievement of full inclusion.

Starting from the academic year 2011/2012, the Ministry of Education, through a Memorandum of Understanding with all the Faculties of Education, promoted advanced training through the implementation of professional development courses and post-graduate courses in “Didactics and educational psychology for Specific Learning Difficulties”, aimed at heads of school and teachers teaching at any level.

The Ministerial Directive of 27th December 2012, “Intervention tools for pupils with special educational needs and the territorial organisation for school inclusion”²⁰, makes reference to a training offer activated in 2012/2013 on specific themes in the field of disability: undergraduate and postgraduate courses concentrated on didactics and educational psychology for children with autism, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, and for inclusive psychomotor education as well as sensory disabilities.

Since year 2011, even in the case of specialisation courses for support teachers, the scenario has changed. Universities were asked to take the full responsibility of this training without having other entities involved. The course comprises of 60 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) and it is focused on Didactics and Special Pedagogy. In November 2011, a one-year post-graduate teacher training course for teachers in initial training was introduced through the Ministerial Directive 27th December, 2012. This programme is set up by universities and activated for all graduates in different professions and academic sectors and provides course participants with a teaching qualification to teach specific subjects in secondary schools. The change from the past concerns the presence of special didactics and pedagogy together with teaching of specific subjects. This creates conditions for the sharing of issues related to inclusive dynamics between curricular teachers and support teachers, within a process that realises circularity between theory and practice in the proposed activities.

These training courses are undoubtedly a first step towards the development of teachers’ competencies that, when supported by knowledge of the educational policies, are effective for promoting the individual and collective commitment to achieve inclusive practices.

However, this training, which aims at increasing the levels of competencies would be only partial if it does not create the conditions for a change of teachers’ opinions and attitudes towards inclusion, where there are concerns and difficulties that affect the didactic action.

Teachers’ Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns Towards Inclusive Education - a literature review

An array of studies have explored and analysed teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education²¹. These studies showed that attitudes influence the daily teachers’ educational practices. If teachers show a negative attitude towards inclusive education, they are less likely to implement inclusive teaching strategies. On the other hand, if they have positive attitudes towards inclusion, they are more likely to engage in behaviour that would facilitate inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms²². In fact, teachers’ attitudes and

beliefs about inclusion represent one of the strongest predictors of the success of inclusive culture²³.

Previous research highlights that the efficacy of inclusive practices seem to depend on teachers' sentiments about the nature of disability and their perceived roles in supporting students with special educational needs²⁴. Prior experience and knowledge about students with disabilities could effectively influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion²⁵. Teachers with apprehensive attitudes tend to exclude students with disabilities more often compared to teachers who have positive attitudes²⁶. On the contrary, teachers who show positive attitudes towards inclusion tend to use teaching strategies that are responsive to different learning styles and accommodate individual differences²⁷. It therefore, safely be assumed that a greater exploration of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion could enhance the structuring of inclusive learning environments²⁸.

With regards to teachers' concerns, research shows that they are negatively correlated with their efficacy in the processes of inclusion. Specifically, studies conducted on this issue highlight a greater willingness of teachers in creating inclusive curricula for students with disabilities or special educational needs in relation to their perceived competence and/or opinions and positive attitudes towards disability²⁹. International research has highlighted that most of the teachers' concerns are related to their lack of competencies to create a truly inclusive learning environment and to the lack of resources and tools that could meet and accommodate individual differences³⁰. Furthermore, scientific literature shows that there is a negative correlation between the teachers' attitudes and their concerns, because teachers who show positive attitudes towards inclusion also show lower degree of concerns about it or vice versa³¹.

In a recent study, Forlin and Chambers³² have further analysed these aspects, by investigating how direct experience with disability and knowledge of local educational policies might affect the attitudes and concerns of teachers in initial training. Research conducted in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong and Singapore showed indeed that, in light of the growing number of students with disabilities who attend regular schools, the lack of adequate training is considered by teachers a significant barrier to the realisation of inclusion, thus generating a

strong sense of inadequacy³³. This study also showed that teachers had a high degree of discomfort towards people with disabilities, as well as a high degree of anxiety and concerns related to the implementation of inclusive practices. Interestingly, these levels of discomfort and concern were higher in Asian territories, where inclusive practices are a relatively new phenomenon, while they were lower in Canada and Australia, where the process of inclusion of people with disabilities within mainstream classes had been implemented for more than two decades and was, and still is, supported and promoted by specific educational policies. Thus, it can be posited that during their training, novice teachers need to be equipped with the competencies necessary to create inclusive contexts³⁴. To highlight this point, Sharma et al.³⁵ emphasise the close relationship between teachers' knowledge about the educational policies of their country and their opinions and attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive practices.

Purpose of the Study

In light of the above reflections and on the basis of international research on inclusive education the present study, conducted during an in-service teacher training course carried out by the Regional Office for Schools in Campania in cooperation with the University of Salerno, aimed at:

- determining the validity of the SACIE-R scale for the Italian context;
- examining attitudes, sentiments and concerns of in-service and learning support teachers in Salerno, Caserta, Benevento and Avellino;
- determining what factors influence their attitudes, sentiments and concerns towards inclusion.

Method

Participants

The study was conducted during an in-service training course aimed at providing teachers and learning support teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to guide colleagues in their respective schools on inclusive

practices. The course participants were employed in four of the provinces of the Region of Campania and involved 450 teachers from different schools at different levels ranging from nursery to higher secondary schools. The participants were divided into 17 groups of 20 to 30 participants in each group, according to the geographical area in which they taught. The course used a blended approach and included a series of audio, visual and written material made available on a specific online platform and three four-hour workshops over the span of three months. The data were collected during the first workshop organised with every group and all teachers who were present were invited to participate.

Instrument: the SACIE-R Scale (Italian Version)

As outlined by Fiorucci³⁶, studies on attitudes principally avail of scales, in other words, procedures aiming at measuring complex and not directly observable concepts. Among the wide range of instruments used to measure teachers' attitudes towards disability and inclusion, the scales most commonly used are the multidimensional ones.

As previously outlined, the Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education Revised (SACIE-R) scale was used for the research. This scale was designed with the aim of measuring pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education, concerns about inclusive education, and sentiments towards persons with disabilities³⁷.

The SACIE-R scale is the result of a validated selection of items from three original scales, namely: the *Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education* scale (ATIES)³⁸; a modified version of the *Interaction with Disabled Persons* (IDP) scale³⁹ (Gething, 1991, 1994); and the *Concerns about Inclusive Education Scale* (CIES)⁴⁰. From the 60 items included in these three pre-existing scales, the first version of the SACIE scale was composed of 19 items⁴¹, while the latest revised version, SACIE-R, includes 15 items. This latter scale was then validated after administering it to 542 pre-service teachers from four countries including Hong Kong, Canada, India and the United States⁴².

The three psychometric constructs identified in this final SACIE-R version underpin aspects of inclusive education which are «considered as central to the rationale underlying a teacher's beliefs and support for and

engagement with inclusive practices»⁴³. The three factors identified as necessary components to this construct were:

- *Sentiments about engaging with people with disabilities* (Factor 1 Sentiments) (SEPD)
- *Acceptance of learners with different support needs* (Factor 2 Attitudes) (ALSN)
- *Concerns about inclusive education* (Factor 3 Concerns) (CIE)

Five items are used as indicators of each of the above three factors. Appendix 1 presents the items and their respective translations into Italian, grouped according to the three factors. The Italian version of the SACIE-R scale included all 15 items but scored on a 6-point Likert scale rather than on a 4-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Items in factors 1 (Sentiments) and 3 (Concerns) were negatively geared and required reverse coding, as in the English version. The demographic data requested with the SACIE-R included gender, age, type of and number of years in service, type of school and subjects taught, participation in school committees related to disability and/or special educational needs, as well as detail on education and other training undertaken.

Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis carried out in this study relate to (a) examining the factor structure of the SACIE-R scale with the study data, (b) testing for effect of teacher's background variables on their scores on the latent factors found to underlie the SACIE-R scale data, and (c) examining the level of teachers' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns about inclusive education on the original metric of the SACIE-R scale. First, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test for data fit of the expected factor structure of the SACIE-R scale. The CFA was performed through the use of the computer programme Mplus⁴⁴. Second, tests for the effects of teachers' background variables on their scores on SACIE-R factors were conducted in the framework of the CFA using MIMIC modelling⁴⁵. Third, descriptive analyses were conducted to examine the level of teachers' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns about inclusive education on the original metric of the SACIE-R scale, using the statistical package SPSS.

Results

Part 1: Demographic Information

The number of questionnaires administered to participants were 437. A large majority of participants in the study (86%) were females and 12% males, while 2% did not provide information on gender. The average age of the participants was 44 years, with 88% of them being between 40 and 59 years old. The participants were evenly distributed among those teaching in higher secondary schools (32%) and elementary schools (32%), while 27% taught in lower secondary schools. Another 7% taught at both elementary and lower secondary schools and only 2% represented the nursery school level. The learning support teachers employed in all levels of schooling accounted for 51% ($n=405$) of the sample, while the remaining 49% were generalist teachers teaching in primary schools (8.5%) or teachers teaching a specific subject (39.5%). A significant majority of the respondents (88%, $n=332$) possessed a graduate or post graduate qualification. The number of years of service, including the current year, ranged from 1 to 40 years, with an average of 20 years ($n = 429$). Most of the participants (75%) took part in groups supporting students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, 21% did not answer the question, while 4% was not involved in such groups.

Factor Structure of the SACIE-R Data

As described earlier, this study used the SACIE-R scale⁴⁶ which was developed to tap on three latent factors (constructs). Following the order of the 15 SACIE-R items presented above, these factors are *Sentiments about engaging with people with disabilities* (SEPD: items 1-5), *Acceptance of learners with different support needs* (ALSN: items 6-10), and *Concerns about Inclusive Education* (CIE: items 11-15). Therefore, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used first to test the fit of these three factors to the sample data of the target population for this study (in-service teachers and learning support teachers (LSTs) in the region of Campania, Italy) using the computer programme Mplus⁴⁷.

The main goodness-of-fit indexes, reported in Mplus for data fit of CFA models, are (a) *chi-square*, χ^2 , test, (b) *Comparative fit index* (CFI); (c) *Tucker-Lewis Index*

(TLI); (d) *Square root mean square residual* (SRMR), and (e) *Root mean square error of approximation* (RMSEA), with a 90% confidence interval (90% CI). A statistically non significant χ^2 ($p > .05$) indicates a good data fit, but this rule is usually not taken into account as the χ^2 test is very sensitive to sample size. As recommended in the literature, the assessment of model fit is based on the joint evaluation of the fit indexes, with cutting scores as follows: (a) CFI > 0.95 for an excellent fit and CFI > 0.90 for an adequate fit; (b) TLI > 0.95 for an excellent fit and TLI > 0.90 for an adequate fit; (c) SRMR = 0.00 indicates a perfect data fit, but in practice SRMR < 0.06 is used to indicate an adequate fit; and (d) RMSEA = 0.00 indicates a perfect fit, but in practice RMSEA < 0.05 is used to indicate an adequate data fit; using the 90% confidence interval for RMSEA, an excellent data fit is indicated when the lower value of this interval is close to (or includes) zero and its upper value is smaller than .08⁴⁸.

The results for the initial CFA model, with three SACIE-R factors (SEPD, ALSN, and CIES), indicated that this model does *not* fit the data at an acceptable level according to the fit criteria presented here above (see Table 1). An examination of the modification indices, reported with Mplus for possible model improvement, led to splitting the items related to the SEPD factor into two sets of items that represent two factors labelled here as *Discomfort in interacting with disabled people* (SEPD: items 1, 2, and 3) and *Fear of having disability* (FHD: items 4 and 5). The resulting CFA model with four factors (SEPD, FHD, ALSN, and CIE) was then tested for data fit. The values of the goodness-of-fit indexes for this four-factor CFA model indicated a very good data fit (see Table 1). Thus, the four-factor structure of the SACIE-R is more suitable for the sample data from the target population in this study (Italian teachers in the region of Campania). Provided in Table 2 are the standardised factor loadings of all items, which indicate the correlation between the items and the respective latent factors. For each factor loading (λ), provided also are the standard error of that loading, $SE(\lambda)$, and the p -value for its statistical significance. As can be seen, all factor loadings are statistically significant ($p < .001$) and substantial in magnitude, thus providing evidence of the stability of the four-factor structure of the SACIE-R scale for the data in this study.

The CFA-based estimates of the correlations among the four latent factors of the SACIE-R scale (SEPD, FHD, ALSN, and CIE) are provided in Table 3. It is interesting to note that there is *no* relationship between the attitude toward inclusive education (ALSN) and the other three factors (SEPD, FHD, and CIE). The largest statistically significant correlation coefficient is between the factors FHD and CIE ($r = .446$), followed by the correlation between SEPD and CIE ($r = .444$) and the correlation between SEPD and FHD ($r = .284$).

Teachers' Response Scores by SACIE-R Factors on the Original Scale Metric

Descriptive statistics (range, mean, and standard deviation) for the teachers' response scores by factors of the SACIE-R scale on the original scale are provided in Table 5. These statistics are given by factors of the SACIE-R scale to provide more refined information about the level of teachers' responses on each aspect of their sentiments, attitudes, and concerns about inclusive education. Such statistics are not provided for the response scores on all 15 items because this would require (a) unidimensionality of the SACIE-R scale, which is not the case in the presence of four distinct factors, and (b) reversing of the scale scores for the items associated with the SEPD, FHD, and CIE factors, in order to align them with the direction of scaling for items associated with the ALSN factor. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency reliability of the scores by factors of the SACIE-R scale was found to be sufficiently high for the purpose of the analysis in this section, namely: (a) 0.854 for SEPD (3 items), (b) 0.871 for FHD (2 items), (c) 0.874 for ALSN (5 items), and (d) 0.805 for CIE (5 items).

The results in Table 5 indicate that the highest level of teachers' response scores (on a scale from 1 to 6) is on the factor ALSN ($Mean = 5.36$) and that these are also the most homogeneous responses ($SD = 0.87$). That is, the teachers consistently demonstrate a high level of positive attitude toward inclusive education. On the negative dimensions (discomfort, fear, and concerns), the highest level of teachers' responses is on their fear of having disability (FHD: $Mean = 3.16$), followed by their level of concerns about inclusive education (CIE: $Mean = 2.55$) and level of discomfort in interacting with disabled people (SEPD: $Mean = 1.78$). These findings are visualised with

the histograms for the distributions of teachers' response scores on the original metric for the scale of each factor (see Figure 1).

Effects of Teachers' Background Variables on their Factor Scores

In the framework of the CFA model for the SACIE-R scale, each of the four latent factors was regressed on the following background variables of teachers that were considered as potentially relevant to their scores on these factors: sex (1 = female, 2 = male), LSTs (0 = No, 1 = Yes), covering a role related to school committees on disability/inclusion or similar responsibilities (0 = No, 1 = Yes), and years of service. It should be emphasised that the resulting regression coefficients are statistical effects, which do not necessarily imply causality. The results, summarised in Table 4, indicated that *none* of these four background variables of teachers provide statistically significant effects on their scores on the factors of the SACIE-R scale, DIPD, FHD, ALSN, and CIE.

Discussion and Conclusions

The present study highlighted an overall positive positioning towards the inclusion of students regardless of their disability or difficulty. Indeed, the majority of the participants show a positive attitude and inclusive sentiments towards disability and special educational needs. This may not seem so surprising when considering that the sample included learning support teachers and general teachers who form part of school committees and working groups responsible for inclusion or disability.

Moreover, the results also show very low levels of the three "negative" dimensions which were discomfort, fear and concerns. In particular, teachers do not fear the possibility of having a disability (FHD item 4: *I would feel terrible if I had a disability*; item 5: *I dread the thought that I could eventually end up with a disability*) and do not find it difficult to interact with disabled people (SEPD items 1, 2, 3), showing at the same time little concern about the direct contact with disability (CIE items 11-15: for example *I find it difficult to overcome my initial shock when meeting people with severe physical disabilities*).

These results could have been influenced, in part, by the fact that the scale was administered to a convenience sample of teachers who took part in a training course

specifically on Special Educational Needs and who were either learning support teachers with years of experience working with children with disability and learning difficulties or mainstream teachers who are the school referees on inclusion and special educational needs provision. In fact, none of the four variables taken individually (sex, being a learning support teachers, participating in school committees related to disability and/or special educational needs, years of service) produced a significant effect on the participants' scores on the four dimensions of the scale.

These findings are also in line with previous research which highlighted that teachers who show positive attitudes towards inclusion also show lower degree of concerns about it or vice versa⁴⁹. These results may also be attributed to the Italian educational policies which, over the past few decades, have gone through a gradual shift from the perspective of integration to an inclusive approach by promoting the integration of children with special needs into mainstream schools.

In light of this approach, Italian legislation provided training courses for learning support teachers and professional development courses aiming at sustaining and implementing the full inclusion. Within this perspective teacher education represents a fundamental factor which influences teachers' attitudes, sentiments and concerns towards inclusion thus sustaining research which highlights the close relationship between teachers' knowledge about educational policies of their respective countries and their opinions and attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive practices⁵⁰.

The openness to inclusive education shown by the study participants is comforting because the teachers involved are at the core of the school able to serve as promoting agents of the educational system. This is because they are teachers whose role is crucial in directing the actions and

planning the interventions necessary for the implementation of inclusive practices. On the other hand, their participation in the training course shows that the presence of positive attitudes towards inclusion does not necessarily reduce the levels of concern which are still present, even though to a lesser extent. This calls for the need to provide continuous professional development aimed at increasing inclusive competencies.

As highlighted in scientific literature, the beliefs, values, habits and the choice of daily actions within the school community form one's teaching culture, which help give meaning, support and identity to teachers and their work⁵¹. Teachers' beliefs about teaching students with disabilities or different learning needs and beliefs about their roles and responsibilities in meeting and facing up these needs may influence the progress of inclusive education. This is in line with claims in the scientific literature on this specific issue that the culture of inclusion cannot be solved only in the internalisation of inclusive values and principles but it requires the acquisition of methodological and didactic competencies that can make teachers strategic agents within the processes of school inclusion.

Based on these findings, the present study offers a reflection on the profile of the teacher that is required in the current context of inclusive education. Indeed, within the framework of an inclusive approach, teachers take the role of professional figures who are aware of their potential and their competencies and, without denying the objective difficulties that disability and educational needs of each student imply, are able to deal successfully with the challenges of full inclusion. However, further research needs to be conducted with novice and in-service teachers to provide a more detailed and comprehensive framework with respect to sentiments, attitudes and concerns towards inclusive education of teachers in Campania and Italy.

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Appendix 1 – The Italian Version of The SACIE-R scale

Citation of SACIE-R English Version: C. Forlin, C. Earle, T. Loreman, U. Sharma, The sentiments, attitudes, and concerns about inclusive education revised (SACIE-R) scale for measuring pre-service teachers’ perceptions about inclusion, «Exceptionality Education International», vol. 21, n. 3, 2011, pp. 50-65.

Table 1

Testing for Data Fit of the Three-Factor and Four-Factor CFA Model of the Study Data of the SACIE-R Scale

CFA Model	χ^2	df	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA	90% CI, RMSEA	
							LL	UL
Three factors ^a	575.926*	87	0.834	0.799	0.083	0.1150.106		0.124
Four factors ^b	200.010*	84	0.961	0.951	0.038	0.057	0.047	0.067

Note. LL = Lower limit, UL = upper

limit (of the 90% CI)

^aSEPD, ALSN, CIES.

^bSEPD, FHD, ALSN, CIES.

* $p < .001$.

Table 2: *Factor Loadings. With Their Standard Errors and p-values under the Four-Factor CFA Model of the SACIE-R Scale*

Factor/Item	λ	SE(λ)	p-value
SEPD			
Item 1	0.876	0.020	< .001
Item 2	0.799	0.023	< .001
Item 3	0.790	0.024	< .001
FHD			
Item 4	0.894	0.038	< .001
Item 5	0.862	0.038	< .001
ALSN			
Item 6	0.866	0.017	< .001
Item 7	0.856	0.017	< .001
Item 8	0.745	0.025	< .001
Item 9	0.634	0.032	< .001
Item 10	0.734	0.026	< .001
CIES			
Item 11	0.842	0.022	< .001
Item 12	0.746	0.027	< .001
Item 13	0.743	0.028	< .001
Item 14	0.555	0.038	< .001
Item 15	0.469	0.043	< .001

Table 3: *Correlations Among the Four Latent Factors of the SACIE-R Scale*

Factor	SEPD	FHD	ALSN	CIES
SEPD	1.000	0.284*	-0.099	0.444*
FHD		1.000	0.025	0.446*
ALSN			1.000	-0.026
CIES				1.000

Note. The statistically significant correlation coefficients are in bold.

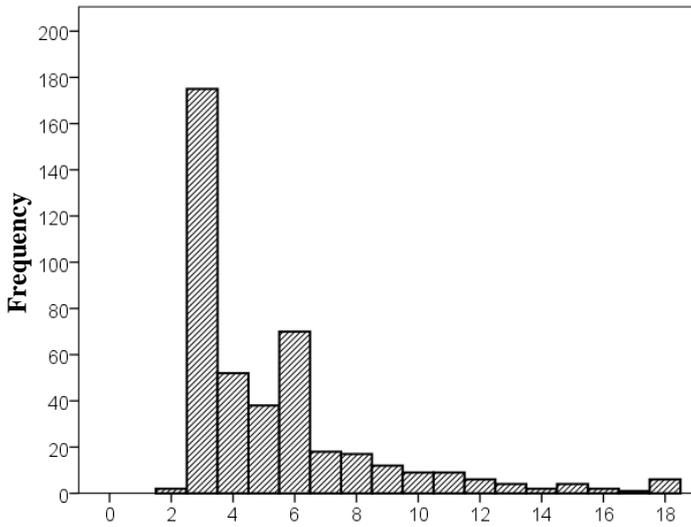
* $p < .001$.

Table 4: Standardised Regressions of the Four Latent Factors of the SACIE-R Scale on Four Teachers' Background Variables

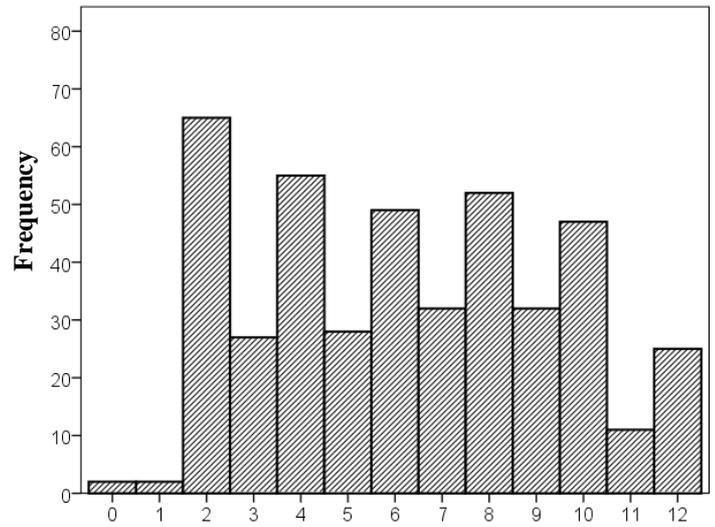
Factor/ Background variables	β	SE(β)	p-value
SEPD			
Sex	-0.029	0.053	0.587
LSA	-0.084	0.054	0.119
Responsibility	-0.017	0.058	0.775
Years of service	-0.009	0.053	0.863
FHD			
Sex	0.093	0.054	0.084
LSA	-0.046	0.054	0.398
Responsibility	0.058	0.057	0.316
Years of service	-0.066	0.054	0.219
ALSN			
Sex	0.045	0.051	0.379
LSA	-0.003	0.053	0.961
Responsibility	-0.068	0.057	0.239
Years of service	-0.069	0.051	0.178
CIE			
Sex	0.039	0.054	0.465
LSA	-0.102	0.054	0.058
Responsibility	0.058	0.058	0.316
Years of service	0.023	0.053	0.667

Table 5: Means and Standard Deviations of the Teachers' Response Scores on the Four Factors or the SACIE-R on the Original Scale Metric

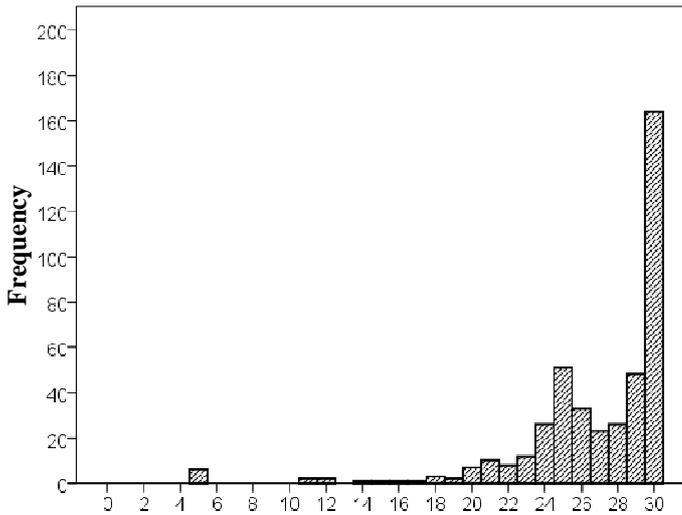
Factor	min	max	Mean	SD
SEPD	0.67	6.00	1.78	1.06
FHD	0.50	6.00	3.16	1.53
ALSN	1.00	6.00	5.36	0.87
CIE	0.20	6.00	2.55	1.12



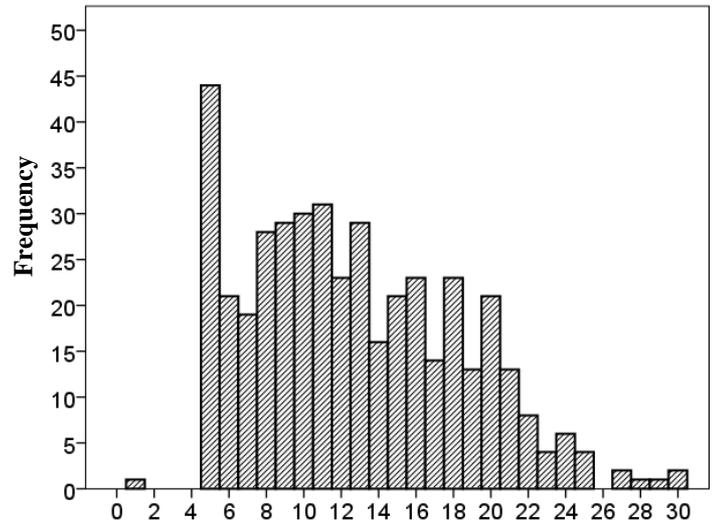
SEP D: Sentiments about engaging with people with disabilities



FHD: Fear of Having a Disability



ALSN: Acceptance of Learners with different Support Needs



CIE: Concerns about Inclusive Education

Figure 1. Histograms of teachers' response scores on the four factors of the SACIE-R on the original scale metric: max = 18 for SEP D, max = 12 for FHD, max = 30 for ALSN, and max = 30 for CIE.

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