

Research Article

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Teacher Competence and Inclusive Education in Rural Education in Peru

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities or background. In rural areas of Peru, the implementation of inclusive practices faces particular challenges related to infrastructure, training, and institutional support. This study aimed to determine the relationship between teaching competence and inclusive education among teachers in rural educational institutions in the district of Calana, Tacna, to identify training needs and generate evidence to improve inclusive practices.

Materials/methods. A quantitative, basic-level, non-experimental, cross-sectional, and correlational approach was employed. Two validated instruments were administered to a census sample of 39 teachers from early childhood, primary, and secondary levels. Data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient to test the relationship between the variables.

Results. Teachers exhibited high levels of cognitive and technical competence, particularly in the “knowing what to do” dimension (87%). In inclusive education, “creating inclusive cultures” also reached 87%, and “developing inclusive policies” 62%; however, only 59% showed high levels in “implementing inclusive practices.” A significant and moderate positive correlation was found between teaching competence and the development of inclusive practices ($r = 0.458$; $p = 0.003$), while no significant correlation was observed with the dimensions of inclusive culture or policy.

Conclusion. The study shows that higher teaching competence is associated with better implementation of inclusive practices ($r = .458$). This provides evidence on the role of pedagogical competencies in rural contexts, which are rarely explored in the literature. Structural limitations, such as limited institutional support and low investment, reduce their impact, highlighting the need for broader institutional strategies to strengthen inclusive cultures and policies.

1. Introduction

In recent years, human diversity has gained increasing recognition, emphasizing the need to foster inclusive education at all levels. Inclusive education aims to ensure that every individual has the right to access education and participate in society without restrictions (Pedraza et al., 2023). It aims to guarantee equitable access to learning while promoting respect, empathy, and acceptance. This requires that each student receive a discrimination-free education (Ayala et al., 2022), supported by public policies, curricular frameworks, and programs that reflect student diversity and facilitate integration into adult life and employment (Bethere et al., 2023). Implementing inclusive education requires a continuous transformation of the educational system and the reorganization of teaching practices to accommodate all students, regardless of their physical, intellectual, or social abilities. However, the effectiveness of this implementation largely depends on teacher training and ongoing professional development.

In the district of Calana, located in Tacna, a city in southern Peru, a rural educational context exists in which the implementation of inclusive education faces significant challenges. Teachers encounter various difficulties in ensuring inclusive education due to limitations in infrastructure, resources, and ongoing training. It is also worth noting that there are no previous studies on this subject in the area, making the present research a pioneering study that enables the identification of specific training needs and the generation of contextualized evidence to improve pedagogical practices and inform educational policies that are sensitive to the realities of rural areas. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between teaching competence and inclusive education among teachers from rural educational institutions in a southern city of Peru, with the goal of understanding their needs and subsequently designing strategies that promote effective inclusive education in this context. Within this framework, the following research questions are posed: Is there a relationship between teaching competence and the creation of inclusive cultures among teachers in educational institutions in this area? Likewise, can a link be established between teaching competence and the design of inclusive policies in this context? Finally, what is the relationship between teaching competence and the development of inclusive practices among teachers in these educational institutions?

2. Literature Review

Several studies have shown that many teachers lack specific preparation in inclusive education during their training, limiting their ability to design pedagogical strategies adapted to diverse student needs (Ayala et al., 2022; Pedraza et al., 2023). Teaching in inclusive classrooms demands that general education teachers possess foundational competencies for personalized support, integrating knowledge of special education, general pedagogy, and discipline-specific didactics (Steinert & Jurkowski, 2024).

At the international level, countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain, and Costa Rica report various obstacles to inclusion, including insufficient teacher competencies, weak support systems, and structural limitations (Bethere et al., 2023; Ferreira et al., 2023; García et al., 2023; Belmonte et al., 2023). In Peru, despite legal frameworks (e.g., Law No. 28044), educational exclusion remains high, and public investment in inclusion is minimal (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2019; MINEDU, 2021).

Reports also highlight the discrepancy between the physical presence of students with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms and the lack of differentiated pedagogical practices (Rojas-Salgado, 2023). Competent teaching emerges as a cross-cutting factor for the inclusive implementation of education. Studies in Ecuador and other Latin American contexts reveal a training gap, especially in attitudes and strategies for managing diversity (Vélez et al., 2024; Pallares & Padilla, 2022). Additionally, socio-economic, cultural, and health-related barriers continue to hinder the

development of inclusive school cultures (Sosa & Villafuerte, 2022). Effective inclusion thus requires not only technical skills, but also attitudinal and relational competencies, which must be cultivated through continuous and context-sensitive teacher education (Palomino et al., 2023; Nimante & Kokare, 2022).

Despite this growing body of literature, there is still a lack of empirical evidence examining how teaching competence is specifically related to the creation of inclusive cultures, the design of inclusive policies, and the development of inclusive practices in rural educational contexts such as Calana, in southern Peru. In this regard, the present study fills this gap by providing pioneering and context-sensitive evidence that can guide both teacher training and educational policies aimed at strengthening inclusion in under-researched rural areas.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach, utilizing data collection for subsequent analysis through measurements and statistical tests. Additionally, according to its purpose, it was classified as basic research, as its objective was to gain a better understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Likewise, its aim was to enrich theoretical and scientific knowledge. Regarding the design, this was a non-experimental descriptive-correlational study, which allows for the establishment of associations between two or more variables using statistical tools, providing empirical evidence to support the interpretation of results (Ramos-Galarza, 2020). Specifically, it followed a cross-sectional non-experimental design, which is appropriate for analyzing phenomena as they occur in their natural context, especially when the goal is to establish relationships without manipulating the variables (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2018).

The study population consisted of teachers from Educational Institutions in the District of Calana, Tacna, of both sexes, aged between 30 and 64 years, with an average age of 49.79 years. Their employment conditions included both contracted and tenured positions, and they worked at the early childhood, primary, and secondary education levels. A census sampling method was used, as the entire population of teachers was included in the study.

Regarding the data collection instruments, the Teacher Competency Questionnaire by Rojas (2019) was employed, consisting of 32 items with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.967. Additionally, the Inclusive Education Questionnaire by Vásquez (2018) was used, comprising 52 items with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.936. Both instruments were validated by subject-matter experts and were deemed suitable for application. The administration of the instruments was carried out in accordance with ethical principles: first, teachers were informed about the objectives of the study, the confidentiality and anonymity of the collected information, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Once written informed consent was obtained, the teachers proceeded to complete the corresponding questionnaire.

4. Results

Table 1 shows that teachers exhibit a high level of mastery in the cognitive and procedural dimensions, especially in "knowing what to do" (87% at a high level) and "knowing" (82%). Likewise, "knowing how to do" also shows strong results (74% at a high level). However, the attitudinal and relational dimensions, such as "knowing how to be" and "knowing how to be present," while mostly at medium and high levels, show areas for improvement, with 10% and 5% at a low level, respectively. This suggests the need to strengthen these aspects in teacher training.

Table 1. Teaching competence

Dimension	Low		Medium		High	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Knowing	0	0%	7	18%	32	82%
Knowing how to be	4	10%	15	38%	20	51%
Knowing what to do	0	0%	5	13%	34	87%
Knowing how to do it	0	0%	10	26%	29	74%
Knowing how to behave	2	5%	17	44%	20	51%

Table 2. Inclusive Education

Dimension	Low		Medium		High	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Creating inclusive cultures	1	3%	4	10%	34	87%
Implementing inclusive policies	0	0%	15	38%	24	62%
Developing inclusive practices	0	0%	16	41%	23	59%

In relation to the inclusive education variable, as shown in Table 2, the results reflect a positive outlook regarding the development of inclusive education in three key dimensions. The strongest dimension is “Creating inclusive cultures,” with 87% of teachers at a high level, indicating a strong willingness to promote values, beliefs, and attitudes that support inclusion. This is followed by “Implementing inclusive policies” (62% at a high level) and “Developing inclusive practices” (59%), which, although at good levels, also show 38% and 41% at the medium level respectively. This suggests that, while there has been significant progress in inclusive culture and policy, more work is needed to strengthen the actual implementation of inclusive practices in the classroom.

4.1. Hypothesis Testing

Table 3. Normality Test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		Shapiro-Wilk	
	Statistic	gl	Statistic	gl
Teaching competence	,069	39	,200*	,971 39,411
Inclusive Education	,082	39	,200*	,976 39,564

The significance value is $p = 0.200$, i.e., greater than 0.05, confirming a normal distribution. Therefore, parametric tests were used, and Pearson correlation was applied for hypothesis testing.

4.1.1. General Hypothesis Testing

Is there a relationship between teaching competence and inclusive education in teachers from Educational Institutions in the District of Calana, Tacna, 2023?

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Coefficient for Teaching Competence and Inclusive Education

		Teaching Competence	Inclusive Education
Teaching Competence	Pearson Correlation	1	,364*
	Sig. (bilateral)		,023
	N	39	39

According to Table 4, a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.364 was obtained, indicating a low to moderate positive relationship between the variables. The result is statistically significant (Sig. = 0.023), being lower than the threshold of 0.05.

4.1.2. Specific Hypothesis 1

To determine whether there is a relationship between teaching competence and the creation of inclusive cultures among teachers in Calana, Tacna, 2023.

Table 5. Teaching Competence and Inclusive Culture

		Inclusive Culture
Teaching Competence	Pearson Correlation	,267
	Sig. (bilateral)	,100
	N	39

Table 5 shows that there is no significant relationship between teaching competence and the creation of inclusive cultures among teachers in Calana, Tacna, during 2023. The correlation is also low.

4.1.3. Specific Hypothesis 2

To determine whether there is a relationship between teaching competence and the design of inclusive policies among teachers in Calana, Tacna, 2023.

Table 6. Teaching Competence and Inclusive Policy Design

		Inclusive Policy Design
Teaching Competence	Pearson Correlation	,167
	Sig. (bilateral)	,310
	N	39

Table 6 shows that there is no significant relationship between teaching competence and the design of inclusive policies. The correlation is very low and statistically non-significant, indicating that the level of teaching competence does not appear to be clearly associated with involvement or influence in policy design.

4.1.4. Specific Hypothesis 3

To determine whether there is a relationship between teaching competence and the development of inclusive practices among teachers in Calana, Tacna, 2023.

Table 7. Teaching Competence and Inclusive Practices Development

		Practices Development
Teaching Competence	Pearson Correlation	,458**
	Sig. (bilateral)	,003
	N	39

Table 7 shows that there is indeed a significant and moderate relationship between teaching competence and the development of inclusive practices among teachers in Calana, Tacna, in 2023. This suggests that strengthening teaching competencies may directly contribute to greater implementation of inclusive practices.

5. Discussion

The results obtained reveal a significant relationship between teaching competence and the development of inclusive practices, reaffirming the central role of teachers in the effective implementation of educational inclusion in the classroom. The moderate and statistically significant correlation ($r = .458$; $p = .003$) indicates that the greater the development of professional competencies, the greater the teacher’s ability to apply strategies that promote participation and learning for all students. This finding supports the importance of strengthening teachers’ professional competencies, as their knowledge, beliefs, and values directly influence the quality of learning and the construction of equitable school environments (Ferreira, 2022). This aligns with Canese and Mereles (2024), who emphasize that solid teacher training, both professional and ethical-cultural, is essential to building more inclusive educational environments.

In this regard, Silva-Laguardia and Alba-Pastor (2025) evaluated preschool and primary school teachers in Uruguay and concluded that perceptions of inclusive barriers are mediated by the level of training and institutional context. This suggests the need for training programs contextualized to the specific realities of each region. Sigstad et al. (2021) argue that the implementation of inclusive practices fosters a sense of belonging and represents tangible progress toward education without exclusion. Moreover, training in inclusive competencies has become essential, given that teaching in heterogeneous classrooms requires specific skills that integrate knowledge of inclusion, pedagogy, and attention to diversity (Nistal et al., 2024; Steinert & Jurkowski, 2024).

It is also worth highlighting that the finding of a significant correlation in the dimension of inclusive practice suggests that both initial and ongoing training programs are focusing their efforts primarily on direct pedagogical action, but not necessarily on the creation of inclusive institutional environments. This supports what Oyarzún (2024) notes: structural and curricular limitations persist that hinder the full implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate components focused on leadership, inclusive management, and policy design into teacher training plans. In this regard, Arias-Ortega and Muñoz (2025) question the actual effectiveness of current educational policies, while Codina and Robinson (2024) highlight a gap between inclusive discourse and real school practices. Indeed, the regulatory framework alone does not guarantee inclusion; laws and guidelines lack impact if they are not translated into sustained and structural pedagogical actions (Gardesten, 2023). Similarly, Araújo et al. (2024) stress the need to overcome the gap between legal discourse and its concrete implementation, emphasizing the importance of transforming the actual conditions that affect students with disabilities.

On the other hand, the non-significant correlations between teaching competence and the dimensions of inclusive culture and inclusive policy ($r = .267$ and $r = .167$, respectively) suggest that

although teachers may have a direct influence on their pedagogical practice, the creation of inclusive cultures and policies requires broader institutional action. As Chuchon (2024) and Oyarzún (2024) indicate, exclusion persists particularly in rural or vulnerable contexts due to ineffective public policies and limited family and community participation. Therefore, school governance that promotes a shared inclusive vision is recommended. This implies rethinking not only teacher training but also school structures, educational management, and collective commitment to consolidate a comprehensive, inclusive approach (Gordillo & Prado, 2024).

Along these lines, Delgado-Muñoz et al. (2024) identify nine key categories that define teacher competencies in inclusive contexts, including the use of assistive technologies, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), digital literacy, and teachers' personal attitudes. They also emphasize that the success of inclusive processes depends on comprehensive training that combines the technical and human components, enabling teachers to develop skills to manage diversity appropriately without compromising educational quality. In line with the above, it is essential to renew pedagogical perspectives and adapt institutional practices to the contemporary challenges of inclusion (Morgado et al., 2024). This implies strengthening professional development by considering both general competencies and those specific to inclusive education (Nimante & Kokare, 2022).

In this regard, Manrique (2025) found that systematic training in inclusion has a positive and significant impact on teaching performance. Through a program implemented in public institutions in Chimbote, it was shown that teachers significantly improved their ability to adapt planning and methodologies to diverse contexts. This finding provides concrete evidence of the effectiveness of well-designed training interventions.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary collaboration also emerges as a key component for strengthening inclusive education. Arteaga-Alcívar and Ilbay-Guaña (2024) argue that interaction between psychologists and educators allows for a comprehensive approach to inclusion challenges, facilitating the development of more equitable school environments. This professional synergy promotes not only more personalized support but also a shared vision of inclusion among educational actors and families. Additionally, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is presented as a key tool to support assessment, learning monitoring, and the creation of personalized educational materials (Ferede et al., 2022). However, Torán and Sendra (2022) warn that digital divides still limit the access and participation of students with disabilities, showing that although technology is promising, it cannot replace structural efforts toward equity. The lack of resources and specialized technological training deepens the exclusion of the most vulnerable (González et al., 2023; McNicholl et al., 2023). Therefore, the implementation of inclusion policies must go beyond regulatory frameworks and include concrete measures for teacher training, technological provision, and institutional restructuring. Only then will it be possible to consolidate inclusive education that responds not only to the legal ideal but also to the actual classroom conditions.

Teacher training today faces the challenge of responding to growing cultural and social diversity from an inclusive and intercultural perspective. Canese and Mereles (2024) state that it is not enough to make curricular adjustments; a profound transformation is needed that strengthens both the professional and cultural competencies of teachers. Similarly, Fabregat et al. (2024) note that in contexts characterized by social exclusion, the development of communicative competencies and the application of active methodologies are crucial for promoting learning and inclusion. However, Oyarzún (2024) warns that structural barriers persist, such as rigid curricula and insufficient teacher preparation, highlighting the urgency of incorporating intercultural approaches into initial and ongoing training to overcome monocultural educational practices.

The findings presented provide empirical evidence to the debate on the teacher's role in inclusion processes, in line with previous research identifying pedagogical practice as the area most

influenced by individual competencies (Gordillo & Prado, 2024). Nevertheless, it remains necessary to delve deeper into the study of institutional and contextual variables that most strongly influence the construction of inclusive cultures, policies, and practices.

6. Conclusion

The results obtained show that teachers from the evaluated rural institutions present a solid professional profile, with high levels of competence in technical and cognitive dimensions, especially in “knowing what to do” (87%). However, this preparation does not always translate into effective inclusive practices in the classroom. Although high levels are reported in the creation of inclusive cultures (87%) and the implementation of inclusive policies (62%), only 59% of teachers reach a high level in the dimension of “developing inclusive practices,” revealing a gap between institutional discourse and its pedagogical realization.

The correlation analysis confirms this tension, showing that there is only a positive and significant relationship between teaching competence and the development of inclusive practices ($r = .458$; $p = .003$), while the correlations with the dimensions of inclusive culture and inclusive policy were not significant. This suggests that the ability to implement inclusion in the classroom is directly linked to the teacher’s level of professional competence, but that institutional or contextual factors more strongly influence the construction of inclusive environments. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen teacher training in inclusive strategies, as well as to promote school policies and cultures that support such practices in rural contexts.

7. Limitations

This study presents certain limitations that should be acknowledged. Since it was applied only in one district, the results reflect the local reality but cannot be generalized to other contexts. The relatively small sample size restricts broader comparisons and the identification of variations among subgroups of teachers. Moreover, the non-experimental and cross-sectional design allows for the identification of associations but not causal relationships, which limits the interpretative scope of the findings. Therefore, the results should be considered as a preliminary approach that requires further research with larger and more diverse samples, as well as more robust methodologies, in order to strengthen the external validity of the conclusions.

8. Suggestion

The study recommends reinforcing continuous teacher training programs focused on inclusive pedagogical strategies that integrate cognitive, technical, attitudinal, and relational competencies. It is also essential to implement institutional policies that ensure inclusive practices are effectively applied, particularly in rural areas where infrastructure and resources are limited.

Promoting a school-wide culture of inclusion through leadership and community involvement can help align educational practices with inclusive goals. Future research should investigate institutional and cultural factors that affect the long-term sustainability of inclusive education, especially in vulnerable contexts.

Declarations

Author Contributions. A.E.H.C.: Conceptualization, literature review, project administration, fieldwork coordination, data collection. C.B.F.R.: Writing – original draft preparation, methodology design, instrument validation, data analysis, discussion writing. M.L.V.C.: Literature review, data curation, manuscript editing, data collection. Y.M.M.A.: Data curation, statistical analysis, results interpretation. J.L.G.A.: Statistical analysis, results interpretation. J.J.M.Q.: Data curation, bibliographic support, conclusions. All authors have read and approved the final version of the article.

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Approval. The research was conducted in accordance with international ethical standards for studies involving human subjects, in line with the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study, and their participation was entirely voluntary, with informed consent obtained prior to data collection. Measures were implemented to safeguard the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of the collected information.

Data Availability Statement. The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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