

The Organizational Structure of Teacher Education and Pedagogical Instructors' Professional Identity: The Impact of Structural Separation Between Training Tracks on Conceptions of Inclusion

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ABSTRACT:

Inclusive education is widely framed as a pedagogical and attitudinal challenge situated at the classroom level. Far less attention has been devoted to how the organizational architecture of teacher education itself shapes professional orientations toward inclusion. This study examines how structural separation between regular and special education preparation tracks mediates pedagogical instructors' professional identities and, consequently, their constructions of inclusive responsibility. Employing a mixed-methods design, data were collected from 45 pedagogical instructors affiliated with structurally distinct tracks. Quantitative findings revealed statistically significant differences in perceived responsibility, willingness to engage in multidisciplinary collaboration, and emotional responses to instructional adaptation. Qualitative narrative analysis further demonstrated divergent identity framings: special education instructors constructed inclusion as a normative, relationally embedded professional commitment, whereas regular education instructors more frequently framed inclusion as competence-dependent and structurally supported through external expertise. The convergence of findings suggests that inclusion is not merely an individual disposition but an institutionally patterned construct shaped through track-based professional socialization. Using the Israeli context as an illustrative case of broader dual-track systems internationally, the study advances a structural and identity-oriented perspective on inclusive reform. The findings imply that efforts to bridge the policy–practice gap in inclusive education must address not only teacher competence but also the organizational design of teacher preparation itself.

Keywords: Special education, inclusive education, pedagogical instructors, teacher training.

1. Introduction

Education systems worldwide, including those in the United States, Europe, and Israel, operate under special-education legislation that regulates the rights of students with disabilities and increasingly calls for their inclusion in regular classrooms. Although inclusion has become a normative and policy-driven principle across diverse national contexts, its implementation continues to pose significant challenges for educational systems. A substantial body of research has examined teachers' perceptions of inclusion, consistently revealing a tension between declarative support for equal rights and the practical complexities of implementation (Avisar et al., 2013; Casserly et al., 2019; Cooke, 2004; Done & Andrews, 2020; Li & Ruppar, 2021; McKay, 2016; Meijer & Foster, 1998; Moshe, 2017; Rix, 2017, 2020; Talmor, 2007). While most teachers formally endorse inclusive principles, they frequently report difficulties related to differentiated instruction, emotional and behavioral inclusion, and the lack of pedagogical tools required for heterogeneous classrooms.

Comparative studies further indicate that differences between regular-education and special-education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are often associated with variations in professional preparation and perceived competence. Special-education teachers typically demonstrate a stronger sense of professional efficacy, attributed to their specialized training and exposure to adaptive pedagogies (Krischler et al., 2019; Lindacher, 2020; Vlachou et al., 2014). These findings suggest that professional preparation plays a decisive role in shaping teachers' confidence and orientations toward inclusive practice. However, most of this research focuses on teachers who have already completed their training and are working in inclusive schools. Far less attention has been devoted to those responsible for preparing them: pedagogical instructors who provide theoretical knowledge and accompany pre-service teachers during practicum experiences.

The question therefore arises whether pedagogical instructors who train special-education teachers differ in their perceptions of inclusion

from those who train regular-education teachers. Existing studies attest that appropriate knowledge of special-needs characteristics and the ability to adapt instruction significantly enhance teachers' sense of competence in inclusive settings (Allday et al., 2012; D'Agostino & Douglas, 2021; Kang, 2021; Maddamsetti, 2018; Robinson, 2017). If competence is closely linked to preparation, then the orientations of those who design and supervise teacher training become central to understanding how inclusion is conceptualized and enacted.

Public and academic discourse surrounding inclusion often centers on the capacity of regular-education teachers to integrate students with special needs while maintaining academic standards for all learners. A recurrent theme in this discourse is insufficient preparation in differentiated instruction during teacher education. Teachers frequently report feelings of helplessness and inadequacy when confronted with heterogeneous classrooms, conditions that may contribute to frustration and attrition (Avisar et al., 2013; Cooke, 2004; McKay, 2016; Meijer & Foster, 1998; Moshe, 2017; Talmor, 2007). Despite the global expansion of inclusive policy, most teacher-education systems continue to operate through structurally separate tracks for regular and special education, resulting in limited exposure of regular-education teachers to inclusive frameworks during their preparation (Lautenbach & Heyder, 2019).

Teacher education literature emphasizes that effective preparation for inclusive practice requires a meaningful integration of theoretical knowledge and experiential learning (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Tatto et al., 2012). Studies have demonstrated that appropriate training can positively influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (Abu El-Haj & Rubin, 2009; Fisher et al., 2003; Kershner, 2007; Koster et al., 2005; Pugach, 2005; Stayton & McCollum, 2002). Nevertheless, research indicates that teacher education for inclusion often remains insufficient, with theoretical coursework outweighing practical engagement (Singh et al., 2020; UNESCO GEM Report, 2020). Scholars argue that greater emphasis on experiential components and supervised practice is necessary for

optimal preparation (Ferguson, 2008; Ofsted, 2008; Thomas & Vaughn, 2004).

Within this framework, pedagogical guidance constitutes a pivotal dimension of teacher preparation. Pedagogical instructors function as intermediaries between academic study and classroom practice, supporting pre-service teachers through observation, feedback, reflection, and socio-psychological guidance (Fairstein, 2015; Dvir, 2010; Koster et al., 2005; Koster et al., 2008). They contribute not only to the development of pedagogical knowledge but also to the construction of professional identity by modeling norms, judgments, and expectations. Reichenberg and Wertheim (2002) emphasized that pedagogical instructors must cultivate teaching capacity grounded in professional judgment and deep knowledge of differentiated instruction. Similarly, Parker et al. (2021) highlight the mediating role of mentor and supervisory figures in shaping professional growth. The practical component of training has been shown to foster professional skills, relationships, and identity formation among pre-service teachers (Florian & Linklater, 2010; Tzabar, 2016; Tzabar & Galili, 2011). When pedagogical guidance lacks expertise in inclusive practice, however, pre-service teachers may observe experienced classroom teachers who themselves are insufficiently equipped with adaptive strategies.

The structural separation between regular and special education training tracks may therefore have implications that extend beyond curriculum organization. In regular-education tracks, inclusive pedagogy may receive limited attention, and pedagogical instructors may not possess specialized preparation in special education. Didactic courses frequently focus on disciplinary content without systematically addressing inclusion. Consequently, pre-service teachers in regular tracks often conduct practicum experiences in heterogeneous classrooms while lacking adequate tools for differentiation, mapping, and adaptation. They are expected to accommodate all learners, yet their preparation may not equip them with the necessary strategies to do so effectively.

The Israeli case offers a salient illustration of these structural dynamics. The 1988 Special

Education Law and subsequent amendments particularly Amendment No. 7 (2002), which introduced integration provisions, and Amendment No. 11 (2018), which expanded parental choice and resource allocation reflect a policy trajectory toward greater inclusion (Ministry of Education, 2000; 2002; 2018). These reforms conceptualize special education as a service rather than a separate placement and have increased the number of students with complex needs in regular classrooms. Public debate has intensified regarding the system's ability to realize the promise of inclusion, with criticism directed at resource disparities and insufficient support in regular frameworks. Although policy reforms redefine educational responsibilities within schools, teacher education programs in Israel similar to those in other countries continue to operate under separate training tracks. As a result, many regular-education teachers enter the profession without systematic preparation in inclusion processes or knowledge of the rights-based mechanisms that underpin contemporary legislation.

Despite extensive scholarship on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, significantly less research has examined how the organizational structure of teacher education shapes the professional identities of pedagogical instructors themselves. When teacher preparation remains institutionally divided between regular and special education tracks, inclusion may be mediated through distinct epistemological traditions and professional norms. Structural fragmentation has the potential to influence how responsibility, competence, and collaboration are conceptualized within teacher education. Using Israel as a case that illuminates broader global dynamics, the present study conceptualizes inclusion as a structurally mediated phenomenon within teacher education. Specifically, it asks: How does affiliation with structurally distinct teacher education tracks mediate pedagogical instructors' professional identities and, consequently, their perceptions and enactment of inclusion? By shifting the analytical focus from classroom teachers to pedagogical instructors, the study contributes a structural and identity-oriented

perspective to the international discourse on inclusive reform.

Structural Mediation and Professional Identity in Teacher Education

Professional identity in teacher education is widely understood not as a fixed personal attribute but as a socially constructed and institutionally mediated process shaped through professional socialization, normative expectations, and organizational contexts. Beijard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) conceptualize teachers' professional identity as continuously formed through interaction between personal experience and institutional environments, emphasizing that identity is constructed within specific professional cultures rather than developed in isolation. Similarly, Sachs (2001) argues that teacher identity is shaped by policy discourses and institutional arrangements that define what counts as legitimate professional knowledge and responsibility. Within teacher education, Lunenberg, Dengerink, and Korthagen (2014) highlight that teacher educators themselves operate within distinct professional subcultures that influence how they conceptualize teaching, learning, and responsibility. From an organizational perspective, institutional structures create epistemic boundaries that regulate access to knowledge domains and define jurisdiction over particular forms of expertise, thereby shaping professional norms and role expectations. When teacher education is structurally divided into separate tracks for regular and special education, such differentiation may function not merely as administrative organization but as a mechanism of identity mediation, influencing how inclusive responsibility is internalized and enacted. Inclusion, in this sense, becomes institutionally patterned through structurally differentiated professional

socialization processes rather than uniformly distributed across preparation contexts.

Research Aim and Question

The present study investigates how structural separation within teacher education is associated with divergent constructions of inclusion among pedagogical instructors. Specifically, it asks:

How does affiliation with structurally distinct teacher education tracks mediate pedagogical instructors' professional identities and, consequently, their perceptions and enactment of inclusion?

2. Methodology

Research Design

To examine how structural affiliation within teacher education mediates pedagogical instructors' professional identities and orientations toward inclusion, the study employed a mixed-methods design (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The integration of quantitative and qualitative data enabled the identification of systematic differences between institutional tracks while illuminating the professional meanings underlying those differences.

Participants

The study included 45 pedagogical instructors employed at teacher training colleges. Participants were affiliated with either special education tracks ($n = 24$) or regular education tracks ($n = 21$). The questionnaire was distributed to approximately 60 instructors via department heads and yielded a 75% response rate. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Demographic characteristics are presented below.

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 45)

Variable	N	%
Gender		
Male	5	11.1
Female	40	88.9

Variable	N	%
Age		
30–40	4	8.9
40–50	19	42.2
50–60	13	28.9
60+	9	20.0
Area of Practice		
Special Education	24	53.3
Regular Education	21	46.7
Additional Position in Ministry of Education		
Yes	22	48.9
No	23	51.1
Seniority in Pedagogical Training		
1–2 years	5	11.1
2–5 years	9	20.0
5–10 years	8	17.8
10+ years	23	51.1

The substantial seniority of participants and their distribution across structurally distinct tracks enabled meaningful comparison between institutional affiliations.

Although the study did not conduct multivariate modeling to isolate the independent contribution of supervisory seniority, the demographic distribution across tracks does not indicate systematic disparities in years of experience or additional professional roles that would plausibly account for the observed identity patterns. The relatively balanced composition of participants across seniority categories reduces the likelihood that experience alone explains the divergence. Nevertheless, future research should explicitly test the interaction between structural affiliation and professional seniority using regression or hierarchical modeling techniques.

Instruments

Quantitative Component

The quantitative instrument consisted of 23 Likert-scale statements (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) adapted from Mahat's (2008) multidimensional scale measuring attitudes toward

inclusive education. The original instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$) and established construct validity.

Items were reworded to reflect the supervisory role of pedagogical instructors rather than classroom teachers. The adapted instrument examined instructors' perceptions of responsibility, collaboration, and instructional adaptation within the practicum context.

Qualitative Component

Participants were asked to describe one positive and one non-positive inclusion experience encountered during supervision. These narratives provided insight into identity-based interpretations of inclusion and supervisory framing.

Data Analysis

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare instructors affiliated with regular and special education tracks. Qualitative narratives were analyzed using categorical narrative analysis to identify recurring themes related to responsibility, collaboration, competence, and relational engagement.

In interpreting the quantitative findings, it is important to acknowledge the scale and scope of the statistical analysis. Given the sample size and the exploratory nature of the study, independent samples t-tests were employed to identify patterned differences between structurally affiliated groups rather than to establish predictive or causal relationships. While formal effect size indices were not calculated, the consistency of statistically significant differences across multiple conceptually related items strengthens the interpretive credibility of the identified orientations. Future research employing larger samples and multivariate modeling could further estimate the magnitude and stability of these differences.

3. Results

Quantitative Findings: Structural Affiliation and Differentiated Professional Orientations

The quantitative analysis revealed statistically significant differences between pedagogical instructors affiliated with regular education and special education tracks (see Table 2). Although both groups expressed general support for inclusive principles, the pattern of responses suggests differentiated professional orientations aligned with structural affiliation.

Table 2.
Independent Samples t-Test Results Comparing Regular and Special Education Instructors

Statement	Regular Education (n = 21) M (SD)	Special Education (n = 24) M (SD)	t	p
Special-needs pupils should be taught in separate classes because they take up a lot of the teacher's time	1.67 (.93)	1.30 (.56)	2.65	.009
Educating special-needs pupils should be the joint responsibility of regular and special education teachers	4.31 (.90)	4.63 (.49)	2.55	.014
I would like to participate in a multidisciplinary group to solve problems related to inclusion	4.02 (1.25)	4.58 (.65)	3.47	.001
I get frustrated when required to teach curriculum adaptation	1.49 (.69)	1.29 (.55)	2.11	.040

The first significant difference concerns perceptions of time burden. Although mean scores are relatively low overall, regular education instructors were significantly more likely to agree that special-needs students should be taught separately because of the time demands inclusion places on teachers. This does not indicate outright rejection of inclusion; rather, it signals a different framing of responsibility. Inclusion appears to be interpreted as an additional demand layered onto existing instructional expectations.

In contrast, special education instructors expressed stronger endorsement of shared responsibility and demonstrated significantly greater willingness to engage in multidisciplinary collaboration. The higher agreement with joint responsibility and participation in multidisciplinary groups suggests that collaborative inclusion is internalized as a normative professional stance within the special education track.

The difference in reported frustration regarding curriculum adaptation further reinforces this pattern. Regular education instructors reported significantly higher frustration when required to

guide pre-service teachers in adapting curricula. Although frustration levels were not high in absolute terms, the statistical divergence indicates differentiated emotional positioning toward inclusive demands.

Taken together, the quantitative findings suggest that structural affiliation is associated not merely with variation in attitudes, but with distinct professional orientations. Inclusion appears to be framed either as an embedded professional norm (special education track) or as an additional domain requiring adjustment and effortful integration (regular education track). These patterns point toward processes of identity-based mediation shaped by institutional organization.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative narratives deepened the quantitative patterns by revealing how inclusion is interpreted and enacted within supervisory practice. Four central themes emerged: multidisciplinary collaboration, instructional accommodations, relational engagement, and sense of competence (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Themes Identified in Narrative Accounts

Theme	Special Education (Optimal)	Special Education (Non-optimal)	Regular Education (Optimal)	Regular Education (Non-optimal)
Multidisciplinary collaboration	✓		✓	
Instructional accommodations	✓	✓	✓	✓
Personal contact with student	✓	✓		
Sense of competence				✓

Multidisciplinary Collaboration: Internalized Obligation vs. External Support

Both groups acknowledged that collaboration is essential for successful inclusion.

However, the narratives revealed divergent constructions of collaborative responsibility.

Special education instructors described collaboration as structurally embedded within routine practice:

“A hearing-impaired student was introduced into a regular classroom. We held regular training sessions that included an educator, professional teachers, a counselor, the principal, and the parents and planned differentiated instruction.” (S-E3)

The collective framing (“we held regular training sessions”) reflects what can be conceptualized as professional norm internalization. Collaboration is not depicted as reactive assistance but as a built-in component of pedagogical responsibility.

Regular education instructors also described collaboration positively, yet their accounts suggest boundary construction between domains of expertise:

“We had a special needs student who behaved impatiently and aggressively... In collaboration with the professionals at the school, we assigned him a suitable pre-service teacher and planned an enrichment program.” (R-E5)

“Such preparation takes place when discussions and consultations are held together with the special-education staff.” (R-E8)

Here, inclusion is supported through access to specialized knowledge. Responsibility is partially distributed across professional boundaries, indicating that inclusion is not fully internalized within the regular education track but mediated through external expertise.

Instructional Accommodations: Normative Practice vs. Structural Constraint

Instructional adaptation was central across both groups. Successful inclusion was consistently associated with differentiated planning:

“A pre-service teacher invested considerable time in planning lessons that included teaching accommodations. This was a key component of the lesson plan.” (S-E6)

“Each student was given a task adapted to his or her abilities.” (S-E2)

In these accounts, differentiation is portrayed as inherent to professional practice. Regular education instructors similarly recognized the importance of adaptation: “She adapted the worksheets so that the special-needs student was able to work in a group with his classmates.” (R-E4)

However, when describing non-optimal inclusion, regular education instructors frequently attributed challenges to structural gaps in preparation: “Both the pre-service and classroom teacher lacked the tools required to adapt teaching methods [because this was not taught as part of their training].” (R-E9)

“The whole lesson was fraught with behavioral problems because the teacher did not have the proper tools.” (R-E11)

These narratives position inclusion as constrained by institutional under-preparation. The contrast suggests that adaptation is either internalized as normative (special education track) or experienced as structurally insufficiently supported (regular education track).

Relational Engagement: Identity-Embedded Responsiveness

Relational engagement emerged exclusively in the narratives of special education instructors. These accounts foregrounded attentiveness to individual students’ experiences:

“The pre-service teacher planned a lesson that did not include reading or writing... It was clear that the student who could not read enjoyed the lesson very much.” (S-E1)

Here, inclusion is framed as relational attunement rather than merely technical differentiation. The student’s participation and emotional engagement become central evaluative criteria. This reflects an identity orientation in which responsiveness to learner variability is internalized as foundational. The absence of this theme in regular education narratives is analytically significant. It suggests differentiated conceptions of what constitutes successful inclusion.

Sense of Competence: Inclusion as Psychological Threshold

In contrast, only regular education instructors foregrounded pre-service teachers' sense of competence:

"The pre-service teacher... was very apprehensive about teaching the special-needs students. It seemed that she did not believe in her ability to teach them." (R-E2)

"When the pre-service teacher felt rejected... her self-confidence was damaged." (R-E6)

"If a pre-service teacher does not have faith in her abilities and blames the 'outsider' for her failures, it becomes a very problematic situation." (R-E10)

These narratives construct inclusion as contingent upon psychological readiness. Inclusion is experienced as emotionally demanding and potentially destabilizing, rather than as an assumed professional norm.

Notably, special education instructors did not attribute integration challenges to competence anxiety. This absence reinforces the interpretation that inclusive responsibility may be more fully internalized within the special education track.

A closer linguistic reading of the narratives further illustrates how professional identity is enacted through discourse rather than merely inferred from content. In the accounts of special education instructors, inclusion is frequently framed through collective pronouns such as "we," signaling internalized ownership and shared jurisdiction over inclusive practice. Collaboration is described as routine and embedded within ongoing professional work ("we held regular training sessions," "we planned differentiated instruction"), suggesting that interdisciplinary engagement constitutes a normative dimension of their role. In contrast, regular education instructors more often refer implicitly or explicitly to "they" when describing special education staff, positioning inclusion as a domain supported by external expertise rather than fully internalized responsibility. Within these accounts, collaboration is framed as assistance or

support mobilized when needed, rather than as an inherent structural expectation. A similar divergence appears in the framing of competence. In special education narratives, adaptive expertise is treated as a taken-for-granted professional norm, whereas in regular education narratives, competence is frequently depicted as fragile or threatened, particularly when pre-service teachers encounter heterogeneous classrooms. This discursive patterning suggests that identity differences are embedded not only in declared attitudes but also in the linguistic framing through which professional roles, responsibilities, and boundaries of expertise are constructed.

Integrated Interpretation

Across both quantitative and qualitative findings, instructors across tracks endorsed inclusive principles at a declarative level. However, structural affiliation corresponded with differentiated identity constructions.

Special education instructors constructed inclusion as:

- collaboratively embedded
- relationally grounded
- professionally normative

Regular education instructors constructed inclusion as:

- competence-dependent
- emotionally demanding
- structurally mediated through external support

The convergence between statistical differences and narrative framings supports the study's central claim: structural separation within teacher education mediates professional identity construction. Inclusion is not only a policy mandate or pedagogical technique, but a professional norm that is either internalized as foundational or negotiated as an additional domain of expertise within the organizational architecture of teacher preparation.

The patterns identified should not be interpreted as deterministic or universal, but as contextually situated manifestations of structurally differentiated professional socialization. The

findings indicate patterned divergence rather than fixed dispositions, and structural mediation is best understood as shaping probabilities of orientation rather than prescribing uniform professional identities.

4. Discussion

The present study set out to examine how the structural separation embedded within teacher education programs mediates pedagogical instructors' professional identities and shapes their orientations toward inclusion.

Importantly, the divergences identified in this study should not be attributed to individual personality traits, gender composition, or differences in seniority. The demographic distribution of participants across tracks—including years of supervisory experience and additional professional appointments—does not reveal systematic disparities that would plausibly account for the observed patterns. Rather, the findings align with theoretical perspectives that conceptualize professional identity as institutionally situated and socially produced. Affiliation with a structurally differentiated preparation track constitutes an ongoing process of professional socialization, through which particular knowledge hierarchies, normative expectations, and jurisdictional boundaries become internalized. Over time, these organizational arrangements cultivate distinct institutional logics that define what counts as legitimate expertise and who bears responsibility for inclusion. Structural separation therefore operates not merely as a curricular or administrative distinction but as a mechanism that shapes identity formation itself, patterning orientations toward collaboration, competence, and inclusive responsibility. The differences documented here are thus best understood as institutionally mediated outcomes of track-based professional formation rather than as expressions of individual-level dispositions.

By shifting the analytical focus from classroom teachers to those responsible for preparing them, the study sought to illuminate inclusion not merely as an attitudinal phenomenon, but as one structured and filtered through

institutional design. The findings demonstrate that inclusion is mediated within teacher education itself, where organizational arrangements contribute to the formation of distinct professional identity orientations that influence how responsibility, competence, and collaboration are conceptualized.

The quantitative results revealed systematic and statistically significant differences between pedagogical instructors affiliated with regular and special education tracks. These differences were most pronounced in perceptions of responsibility, willingness to engage in multidisciplinary collaboration, and emotional responses related to instructional adaptation. Regular education instructors reported greater frustration and lower inclination toward interdisciplinary engagement, whereas special education instructors expressed stronger endorsement of shared responsibility and collaborative frameworks. Importantly, these differences were not confined to abstract positions but reflected deeper divergences in how inclusion is understood and enacted.

The qualitative narratives enriched these findings by revealing the identity-based dimensions underlying the statistical contrasts. While both groups endorsed inclusion at a declarative level, their practical framings diverged. Regular education instructors frequently interpreted inclusion through the lens of competence challenges, emotional strain, and workload concerns experienced by pre-service teachers. In contrast, special education instructors emphasized relational engagement, personalized contact with students, and collaborative planning as integral and normative aspects of professional practice. These patterns suggest that the divergence is not merely attitudinal but rooted in distinct constructions of professional identity shaped within structurally differentiated training environments.

These findings align with and extend existing scholarship on inclusive education. Internationally, special education legislation reflects evolving commitments to rights-based participation and equitable access. Yet, despite policy reforms, a persistent gap remains between inclusive declarations and classroom practice (Rix et al., 2013; Rix, 2020). The present study contributes to this discourse by locating part of that policy–practice

gap within teacher education itself. If inclusion is conceptualized differently across structurally separated preparation tracks, then the translation of policy into practice may already be uneven before teachers enter the profession.

Mitchell (2014) identified diverse theoretical foundations for inclusive practice, ranging from behaviorist to constructivist and social models. Similarly, international professional standards emphasize teachers' responsibility for all learners while simultaneously holding them accountable to standardized curricular benchmarks (AITSL, 2011; EADSNE, 2012; Jøsendal, 2016; Skolinspektionen, 2016). These dual demands generate structural tensions in schools, where teachers must balance differentiation with performance expectations. The present findings suggest that such tensions are prefigured during pre-service preparation. When teacher education remains institutionally divided, inclusive responsibility may become differentially distributed across professional domains, shaping how pedagogical instructors frame adaptation either as an inherent professional norm or as an additional demand.

The shared acknowledgment by both groups of the importance of instructional accommodations underscores that inclusion is not rejected in principle. However, the framing of adaptation differed meaningfully. For special education instructors, adaptation appeared embedded within routine professional responsibility and relational responsiveness. For regular education instructors, adaptation was more often associated with uncertainty, external support, and perceived burden. This distinction reinforces the central argument of the study: structural separation in teacher education contributes to differentiated identity constructions, which in turn mediate how inclusive responsibility is interpreted and enacted.

The Israeli case examined in this study reflects broader structural dynamics documented internationally in contexts where teacher education operates through dual or parallel preparation tracks. Comparative reviews indicate that preservice programs often remain institutionally separated between general and special education, limiting

opportunities for shared epistemic formation and collaborative responsibility (Lautenbach & Heyder, 2019). Research on the persistent divide between general and special education has similarly described the "siloed" organization of preparation programs as a structural barrier to inclusive reform, reinforcing differentiated jurisdictions of expertise rather than integrated professional responsibility (Pugach & Blanton, 2009; Florian & Pantić, 2017). Such fragmentation has been shown to shape how inclusion is conceptualized, either as a shared professional norm or as a specialized domain requiring external support. Viewed within this international scholarship, the findings from Israel do not represent an isolated national phenomenon but rather exemplify a wider pattern in which organizational separation within teacher education contributes to differentiated identity formations and uneven internalization of inclusive responsibility. The present findings invite a reconceptualization of inclusive reform within teacher education. Rather than viewing inclusion primarily as an attitudinal or competence-based issue located at the classroom level, the study suggests that inclusion is institutionally patterned through the organizational architecture of preparation itself. Structural dualism in teacher education may inadvertently reproduce differentiated jurisdictions of inclusive responsibility, shaping whether adaptation is internalized as a normative professional commitment or framed as an additional domain requiring external expertise. In this sense, inclusive reform is not only implemented through policy mandates but prefigured within the structural design of teacher preparation.

Contribution and Implications

The study advances the international discourse on inclusive reform in three principal ways. First, it shifts attention from classroom-level attitudes to the institutional architecture of teacher preparation, conceptualizing inclusion as structurally mediated rather than solely individually determined. Second, it highlights the formative role of pedagogical instructors as key agents in professional identity construction. Third, it provides empirical evidence that organizational arrangements within teacher education may

contribute to epistemological silos that shape normative expectations regarding inclusion.

Practically, the findings suggest that bridging the gap between inclusive policy commitments and classroom practice requires structural reconsideration within teacher education programs. Greater integration between regular and special education tracks—through shared coursework, collaborative supervision models, and joint professional development—may reduce fragmentation and foster more unified professional orientations. Strengthening the inclusive competence of pedagogical instructors in regular education tracks may also enhance their confidence and reduce the perception of adaptation as an external burden. Addressing structural fragmentation may therefore constitute a critical step toward more coherent implementation of inclusive reform.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations warrant consideration. The study was conducted within a single national context and involved a relatively small sample of pedagogical instructors. Although the mixed-methods design enriched interpretive depth, reliance on self-report data may introduce social desirability bias. The research did not examine longitudinal effects on pre-service teachers nor explore how supervisory seniority might moderate orientations toward inclusion. Future research should incorporate cross-national comparisons, larger samples, and longitudinal designs to examine how structural mediation operates across diverse

institutional contexts. In-depth qualitative interviews could further illuminate how professional identity is negotiated within structurally differentiated preparation tracks.

The study was conducted with a modest sample of 45 pedagogical instructors, which limits the statistical power to detect small effects and constrains broad generalization. However, the balanced distribution between structurally distinct tracks and the convergence between quantitative and qualitative findings enhance internal interpretive coherence. Replication with larger and cross-national samples would allow for more precise estimation of effect magnitudes and strengthen external validity.

5. Conclusion

Inclusive education occupies a central position in contemporary educational policy, yet its enactment remains uneven and contested. The present study suggests that part of this unevenness may originate within teacher education itself. When preparation programs remain structurally divided, professional identities may develop along parallel trajectories that frame inclusion differently. Inclusion thus emerges not only as a pedagogical practice but also as an institutional construct shaped by the organizational architecture of teacher training. Efforts to narrow the policy–practice gap must therefore attend not only to teacher competence but also to the structural conditions under which professional identities are formed and mediated.

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