Socio-Emotional Competencies and Emotional Intelligence as Predictors of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education

Competencias Socioemocionales e Inteligencia Emocional como Predictoras de las Actitudes Docentes hacia la Educación Inclusiva

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the predictive role of socio-emotional competencies—empathy, prosocial behavior, and emotional autonomy—and emotional intelligence dimensions—attention, clarity, and regulation—in shaping attitudes toward inclusive education among 405 in-service primary school teachers in Spain's Valencian Community. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional design, the research identifies significant associations between these psychological constructs and inclusive attitudes. Empathy and emotional autonomy emerged as the strongest socio-emotional predictors, while emotional attention, regulation, and clarity were robust predictors within the emotional intelligence domain. These findings highlight the relevance of emotional skills in fostering inclusive dispositions and underscore the need for targeted professional development programs to enhance teachers' emotional capacities and promote equity-driven educational practices.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Teacher Attitudes; Emotional Intelligence; Socio-Emotional Competencies; Empathy; Emotional Autonomy; Prosocial Behavior

RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza el papel predictivo de las competencias socioemocionales—empatía,

conducta prosocial y autonomía emocional—y de las dimensiones de la inteligencia emocional—atención, claridad y regulación—en la configuración de actitudes hacia la educación inclusiva en una muestra de 405 docentes de Educación Primaria en activo de la Comunidad Valenciana, España. Mediante un diseño cuantitativo de corte transversal, se identificaron asociaciones significativas entre estos constructos psicológicos y las actitudes inclusivas. La empatía y la autonomía emocional fueron los predictores más relevantes dentro de las competencias socioemocionales, mientras que la atención, la regulación y la claridad emocional destacaron en el ámbito de la inteligencia emocional. Los hallazgos subrayan la importancia de las habilidades emocionales para promover disposiciones inclusivas y señalan la necesidad de implementar programas de formación docente orientados a fortalecer dichas capacidades con miras a una educación más equitativa.

Palabras Clave: Educación Inclusiva; Actitudes del Profesorado; Inteligencia Emocional; Competencias Socioemocionales; Empatía; Autonomía Emocional; Conducta Prosocial

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a key paradigm in international educational policy (Ainscow, 2020), promoted by organizations such as UNESCO (2022) and reaffirmed by Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which advocates for equitable and quality education for all. This global commitment urges national systems to guarantee access and, crucially, the full participation and achievement of all students, which implies a direct mandate to strengthen the competencies of the teaching staff who implement these policies in the classroom. This approach requires not only the integration of diverse students but a profound transformation of educational practices and classroom relationships to build learning communities where every student feels they belong and can thrive. For Ainscow (2020), inclusive education is defined as a process aimed at identifying and removing barriers to learning and participation so that all students, regardless of their characteristics, background, or support needs, can participate meaningfully in shared learning environments. This concept emphasizes equity, responsiveness to diversity, and the shared responsibility of the entire school community in promoting participation and performance (Altes *et al.*, 2025; Lakkala (2024).

Since the success of inclusive reforms largely depends on teachers' willingness to implement them (Lindner *et al.*, 2023), teachers' attitudes (understood as their beliefs, feelings, and behaviors toward inclusion) play a crucial role in their engagement with inclusive practices (Buehl & Beck, 2015; Lautenbach & Heyder, 2019). In this regard, Ainscow (2020) argues that a favorable teacher attitude is both a prerequisite and a cornerstone for

achieving truly inclusive education. Moreover, as these attitudes are intrinsically linked to teachers' professional competencies, they may directly influence teaching practices and, consequently, student learning (Pozas *et al.*, 2020). The significance attributed to attitudes toward inclusion has made them a recurring topic in educational research (Saloviita, 2018).

However, despite their recognized importance, the specific mechanisms through which teachers' internal resources, such as their emotional skills, translate into positive attitudes and effective inclusive practices are not fully understood. While international research has established a general link, there is an empirical need to explore these relationships within specific contexts, considering the joint contribution of different socio-emotional and emotional intelligence facets. This is particularly relevant in Ibero-American contexts, where research highlights a persistent struggle by teachers to implement inclusion policies despite systemic barriers (Gonzales & Arellano, 2023).

Based on the need to better understand teachers' attitudes, educators' self-perception regarding inclusive education emerges as a key factor in implementing strategies adapted to student diversity (Bem, 2022; Yada *et al.*, 2022). By shaping their confidence in their own abilities and their perceived role in inclusive settings, this self-perception may influence their willingness to innovate pedagogical methods and take on educational challenges (Song *et al.*, 2019). This perception includes both their belief in their ability to support students with diverse needs and their valuation of their role in building equitable educational environments.

Recent studies highlight that teachers' perceptions of inclusive education are critical, leading to attitudes that may be either positive or negative, depending on variables such as age, gender, and years of experience (Kotsou *et al.*, 2019; Santana-Monagas *et al.*, 2025). A positive self-perception is associated with greater openness to innovation and methodological adaptation. However, it is crucial to consider that an excessively positive self-perception may paradoxically become a barrier to ongoing professional development.

An inaccurate self-perception, whether overly confident or unduly negative can undermine teachers' engagement with inclusive education. Overconfidence, when not supported by adequate training or real experience in diverse classrooms, may foster complacency and reluctance to pursue further professional development or adopt new inclusive teaching strategies (MacCann *et al.*, 2020; Desombre *et al.*, 2019). Conversely, low self-efficacy, often stemming from insufficient preparation or limited access to resources, can lead to disengagement and resistance to inclusive practices (Zembylas, 2012). In both cases, misaligned self-perceptions can result into negative attitudes that hinder the implementation of inclusive pedagogical practices and weaken the foundation of ongoing professional growth.

In this regard, a growing area of interest in educational research focuses on the role of socio-emotional dimensions such as empathy (Kotsou *et al.*, 2019; Santana-Monagas *et al.*,

2025), prosocial behavior (Poulou & Garner, 2023), and emotional autonomy (Mikulic *et al.*, 2015) in shaping teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. These dimensions may promote greater emotional understanding, active collaboration, and self-regulation (Wang *et al.*, 2023).

Therefore, analyzing how these constructs relate to teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education will help identify the socio-emotional resources that either facilitate or hinder the adoption of positive attitudes conducive to genuinely inclusive practices.

It is important to acknowledge that teachers' attitudes and competencies do not operate in a vacuum. Contextual factors such as school climate, the level of institutional support, and the quality of prior teacher training (Schnepel *et al.*, 2025) are critical in shaping the conditions for inclusion. While this study focuses on the teacher's internal psychological resources, these contextual variables constitute an essential framework that can either enable or hinder the translation of positive attitudes into effective inclusive practices.

1. TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH EMPATHY, PROSOCIALITY, AND EMOTIONAL AUTONOMY

The relationship between attitudes toward inclusion and socio-emotional dimensions such as empathy, prosociality, and emotional autonomy is an area of increasing interest in educational research. Empathy, understood as the ability to understand and share others' feelings (Kotsou *et al.*, 2019; Makoelle, 2022), plays a key role in shaping inclusive attitude. Teachers who are more empathetic are more likely to recognize and value student diversity, understand their challenges, and respond to their needs in a sensitive and effective manner (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Santana-Monagas *et al.*, 2025). This emotional connection fosters a positive bond with students, which is essential for their well-being and academic success in an inclusive environment. In contrast, a lack of empathy can lead to misunderstanding, frustration, and a diminished willingness to address individual student needs (Kudrnáč *et al.*, 2024).

Prosociality, defined as the tendency to engage in behaviors that benefit others without expecting external rewards (Eisenberg *et al.*, 2010; Poulou & Garner, 2023), is also strongly associated with inclusive attitudes. Teachers who demonstrate prosocial behavior are concerned with both students' academic success and their social and emotional development. They promote cooperation, mutual respect, and peer support within the classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This commitment to collective well-being reflects the core values of inclusive education, which seeks to create learning environments where all individuals feel valued and supported. By fostering prosocial behavior, teachers can model

positive attitudes toward diversity and inclusion, generating a ripple effect that enhances the overall school climate (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Finally, emotional autonomy, understood as the ability to manage one's own emotions constructively while maintaining a positive and resilient outlook in the face of challenges (Santana-Monagas *et al.*, 2025), is a key competency in the context of inclusive education, as teachers frequently encounter complex and emotionally demanding situations (Wang *et al.*, 2023). Educators with high emotional autonomy are better equipped to cope with stress, frustration, and uncertainty that may arise from working with diverse student populations, preventing these negative emotions from influencing their teaching practices.

This capacity for emotional self-regulation allows teachers to remain open and flexible, adapt to new situations, and persevere in seeking inclusive solutions (Chang & Taxer, 2020). In contrast, a lack of emotional autonomy can lead to professional burnout, pedagogical rigidity, and a reduced willingness to embrace the principles of inclusive education (Etchebehere *et al.*, 2024).

In summary, empathy, prosocial behavior, and emotional autonomy are key components of emotional intelligence that, when developed among educators, strengthen their attitudes toward inclusive education and contribute to the creation of more equitable and enriching educational environments for all students (Richaud & Mesurado, 2016).

2. THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND ITS DIMENSIONS IN ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The emotional intelligence (EI) has been recognized as a key factor in education, particularly in relation to teacher training and performance (Fernández-Berrocal *et al.*, 2004; Sanchez Pujalte *et al.*, 2021). In the context of inclusive education, EI becomes specially important, as teachers' attitudes toward diversity and inclusion are closely tied to their ability to understand and regulate their own emotions as well as those of their students (Arias-Pastor *et al.*, 2023; Llamas Diaz *et al.*, 2022; Mérida-López & Extremera, 2023). Recent research has demonstrated that EI can act as a mediator between teachers' attitudes and their coping strategies, highlighting its critical role in effective inclusion practices (Ghanamah & Masri, 2025).

EI refers to a set of competencies related to the processing of emotional and affective information (Mayer *et al.*, 2016; Mayer & Salovey, 1997) and is composed of three dimensions: Emotional Attention, Emotional Clarity, and Emotional Repair. These dimensions, being part of teachers' emotional self-perception, significantly influence their attitudes toward inclusive education (Pérez Pedregosa, 2023; Sánchez Pujante *et al.*, 2021).

Emotional Attention refers to the tendency to observe and reflect on one's own feelings and moods. A high level of emotional attention implies a deep awareness of one's emotions, which can be both a strength and a vulnerability in inclusive education settings. Teachers with high emotional attention are more likely to recognize their students' emotional cues (such as signs of frustration, anxiety, or joy) enabling them to respond more sensitively and appropriately to their needs (Savina *et al.*, 2025). This emotional sensitivity can foster more empathetic and proactive attitudes toward diversity, as the teacher is capable of perceiving and understanding the emotional experiences of students with specific needs. However, excessive emotional attention without sufficient clarity or repair may lead to emotional rumination, burnout, or overload (Sanchez Pujalte *et al.*, 2021), which can result in avoidance behaviors or stress when faced with emotionally demanding situations in the inclusive classroom. Conversely, a low level of emotional attention may lead to a lack of sensitivity toward students' emotional needs, making it difficult to build a supportive and inclusive classroom environment.

Regarding Emotional Clarity, this refers to the understanding of one's own emotional states, including the ability to identify and differentiate emotions, as well as to comprehend their causes and consequences (Sánchez-Pujalte *et al.*, 2021). A high level of emotional clarity allows teachers to accurately interpret their emotional reactions to the challenges of inclusive education (Maftei & Ghinies, 2025). For example, a teacher who feels frustrated by a student's difficulty in learning but is able to recognize that frustration as a natural response rather than a sign of the student's incompetence, can address the situation constructively. This internal understanding fosters the development of more rational and less reactive attitudes, encouraging patience, flexibility, and the pursuit of innovative pedagogical solutions. On the other hand, a lack of emotional clarity can lead to confusion, emotional ambivalence, and the inability to understand the reasons behind one's feelings, which may result in inconsistent or contradictory attitudes toward inclusion, creating uncertainty and mistrust in the classroom (Tsegaye *et al.*, 2025).

Finally, Emotional Repair refers to the ability to regulate and manage one's emotional states (both positive and negative) in order to maintain emotional balance (Mayer, 2016). A high level of emotional repair is crucial for teachers in inclusive environments, where emotional demands can be high. Teachers with strong emotional repair abilities can recover quickly from stressful situations, manage frustration and discouragement, and maintain a positive and resilient attitude (Sánchez-Pujalte *et al.*, 2021). This skill enables them to face the challenges of diversity with optimism and perseverance, preventing negative emotions from affecting their openness to inclusion. Additionally, appropriate emotional repair allows them to model healthy coping strategies for their students. Conversely, low emotional repair capacity may lead to accumulated stress, professional burnout, and the adoption of negative attitudes or learned helplessness in the face of challenges, directly

impacting their commitment to and effectiveness in implementing inclusive practices (Meihami & Esmaili, 2024).

3. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE VALENCIAN COMMUNITY

In the Valencian Community, inclusive education has been a central axis of educational policy, materialized through initiatives and strategic plans such as the Improvement Action Plan (Plan de Actuación para la Mejora, PAM), promoted by the Generalitat Valenciana (2022). These efforts aim to ensure equitable and quality education for all students by addressing the diversity of their needs. Achieving these goals requires more than the allocation of pedagogical resources and the establishment of strong regulatory frameworks it also relies on the commitment and competence of educational professionals (Wang *et al.*, 2023). Meeting the challenges posed by classroom diversity calls for a teaching workforce that is open, collaborative, and, above all, emotionally competent (Kotsou *et al.*, 2019).

Nevertheless, despite the importance of these policies and the investment in resources, empirical research examining the influence of teachers' emotional intelligence on their attitudes toward inclusive education in the Valencian context remains at an early stage of development (Monzó Martínez & Gracía-Raga, 2024a; Monzó Martínez & Gracía-Raga, 2024b). To date, only a handful of studies have addressed this relationship, and those that exist offer preliminary insights rather than a consolidated body of evidence. The limited scope and scale for current research constrain a deeper understanding of how emotional competencies shape inclusive practices in this specific regional context. As a result, there is a pressing need to expand the empirical base to inform teacher education and policy. This study seeks to contribute to this nascent line of inquiry, offering new data and perspectives that help clarify the emotional dimensions involved in fostering inclusive classrooms.

In this regard, the present study aims to analyze the relationship between emotional intelligence, socioemotional competencies (prosociality, emotional autonomy, and empathy), and attitudes toward inclusive education in a sample of in-service primary school teachers. The goal is to contribute relevant knowledge that may inform both initial and ongoing teacher training as well as the design of more integrative and effective educational policies. From the general objective, three specific objectives are derived: 1) To describe teachers' self-perception of their preparedness for inclusive education. 2) To examine the correlation between teachers' socio-emotional competencies (empathy, prosocial behavior, emotional autonomy) and their attitudes toward inclusion. 3) To determine the predictive capacity of the dimensions of emotional intelligence (attention, clarity, regulation) on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion.

Based on this aim of our study and the previous evidence, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Teachers' self-perceived levels regarding inclusive education will be medium to high.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Attitudes toward inclusive education are directly related to teachers' levels of empathy, prosociality, and emotional autonomy.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The dimensions of emotional intelligence (Attention, Clarity, and Emotional Repair) influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education.

METHOD

Study Design

A descriptive, correlational, and predictive ex post facto design was used, with a quantitative methodology and a cross-sectional approach. The study was conducted in the Valencian Community (Spain) during the 2023-2024 academic year.

Participants

A total of 405 primary school teachers from the Valencian Community participated in the study. Of these, 334 identified as women (82.46%), with ages ranging from 25 to 63 years and an average age of 44.5 years (*SD* = 5.19). Additionally, participants were distributed between public institutions (281 teachers, 69.38%) and semi-private or "concerted" institutions (124 teachers, 30.62%). The inclusion criteria for participation were a) being an active primary education teacher in a public or semi-private school in the Valencian Community, and b) having at least one year of teaching experience. The exclusion criteria were a) being a teacher in training or on leave, and b) not providing informed consent.

Instruments and Procedures

The assessment instrument used this research was composed of the variables detailed below:

Teachers' perception of their attitudes and competencies regarding inclusive education. A closed-ended question was asked: "I consider myself prepared to adequately address the diversity of student needs in an inclusive classroom." The response format was a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 meant "Totally disagree" and 10 meant "Totally agree."

Attitudes towards inclusive education. This variable was measured using the inventory developed by Alfonso Adam *et al.* (2022) for the Spanish context, which evaluates two dimensions of attitudes (Inclusion of Special Educational Needs and Negativity towards Special Educational Needs) across 17 items. For this study, only the "Inclusion of Special

Educational Needs" dimension was used, comprising 10 items (e.g., "Most students with Special Educational Needs make the necessary effort to complete their school tasks", "The inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs requires significant changes in the general classroom methodology", "General education teachers have sufficient professional competence to work with students with Special Educational Needs"). The original version showed adequate internal consistency (α = .820), similar to that obtained in the present study (α = .801). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree"). Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes towards inclusive education.

Socioemotional competencies. These were measured using the Inventory of Socioemotional Competencies (ICSE, by its Spanish acronym) developed by Mikulic *et al.* (2015) and adapted to the Spanish version by Sánchez-Pujalte *et al.* (2021). The instrument was initially piloted with a sample of 446 participants to analyze item descriptiveness and preliminary internal coherence of the dimensions. It was later validated with a broader sample of 509 individuals to assess its psychometric characteristics more accurately. In this second phase, internal reliability (.60 $\leq \alpha \leq$ .87) and construct validity were examined. Concurrent validity was confirmed through significant correlations with the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), with correlation coefficients ranging from .32 to .78, supporting the instrument's suitability for measuring emotional competencies. In this study, three ICSE dimensions were specifically used: *Empathy*, consisting of five items (e.g., "When I am arguing, I try to put myself in the other person's shoes before saying something", "Before criticizing someone, I try to think about how I would feel in their place") (α = .720); *Prosocial behavior*, with six items (e.g., "I help others even when they don't ask for it", "When I know something only benefits others, I hesitate to do it") (α = .809); *Emotional autonomy*, with five items (e.g., "If I am determined about something, I don't let others influence me", "I depend on others to make decisions") (α = .713). Each item was answered on a five-point Likert scale from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree"), allowing for a precise assessment of key emotional and social skills in educational settings.

Emotional intelligence. This construct was assessed using the Spanish version of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale-24 (TMMS-24), originally developed by Mayer and Salovey (1997) and validated to Spanish context by Górriz *et al.* (2021). The instrument includes 24 items distributed across three dimensions with eight items each: Emotional Attention (e.g., "I pay much attention to my feelings", "I often think about my feelings"), Emotional Clarity (e.g., "I am usually very clear about my feelings", "I almost always know exactly how I am feeling"), and Emotional Repair (e.g., "No matter how badly I feel, I try to think about pleasant things", "I try to think good thoughts no matter how badly I feel").

Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree"). The original Spanish version demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties,

with acceptable internal consistency across the three subscales (.60 ≤ α ≤ .83) and construct and external validity, as evidenced by significant correlations with criterion variables such as the Beck Depression Inventory and the Life Satisfaction Scale. In the present study, internal consistency was adequate for each dimension: Emotional Attention (α = .800), Emotional Clarity (α = .758), and Emotional Repair (α = .812), supporting the instrument's reliability in our sample.

Sociodemographic variables. Questions were included to collect data on gender, age, and years of teaching experience.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through an institutional call managed in collaboration with school leadership teams from various educational centers in the Valencian Community, who facilitated the dissemination of the study to their teaching staff. The invitation was distributed via institutional email and printed announcements delivered by hand to maximize outreach and ensure broad participation. In all cases, it was ensured that participation was completely voluntary, free of coercion, and preceded by a clear explanation of the study's objectives and procedures. Data collection took place between October 2024 and January 2025, spanning approximately four months. During this time, participants were informed about the study's confidentiality, the protection of their personal data, and were asked to provide informed consent in accordance with ethical principles for research in Social Sciences and Humanities. The study complied with the Spanish Organic Law 3/2018 on the Protection of Personal Data and Guarantee of Digital Rights, ensuring anonymization of responses and exclusive use of the data for scientific purposes. The study was conducted following the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and received the approval of the institutional ethics committee -Comisión de Ética para la Investigación y la Docencia- (CEID2024_09).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were first applied to characterize the sample and main variables, as well as to examine Hypothesis 1. After confirming that the assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variances, and linearity were met, parametric techniques were used to ensure greater precision in effect estimation. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to verify the internal reliability of the scales. Differences in attitudes toward inclusive education by gender were analyzed using an independent samples t-test, while relationships between these attitudes and emotional competencies (Hypothesis 2) were examined through Pearson correlation coefficients. A multiple linear regression analysis was then conducted to assess the predictive contribution of each emotional intelligence dimension, using standardized beta coefficients

and the coefficient of determination (R^2) to estimate explained variance. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d and partial eta-squared, and a post hoc power analysis indicated statistical power above .80 for the main analyses. All statistical procedures were carried out using SPSS version 26.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis of Attitudes and Competencies

To examine Hypothesis 1, which proposed that teachers' self-perceived levels regarding their attitudes and competencies toward inclusive education would fall within the medium to high range, an initial exploratory analysis was conducted using a single self-report item. The item was phrased as follows: "I consider myself prepared to adequately address the diverse needs of students in an inclusive classroom", with responses recorded on a scale from 0 ("Strongly disagree") to 10 ("Strongly agree"). The results showed an overall mean score of 7.3 points, indicating a relatively high self-assessment of preparedness to face the challenges involved in attending to diversity (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics and gender differences for Self-Perceived Preparedness Toward Inclusive Education

Variable	Result	Interpretation
Overall self-perceived preparedness	M = 7.3 (scale 0–10)	Indicates a relatively high perceived preparedness
Gender difference (female vs. male teachers)	t (df) = 5.429; p < .001	Women reported significantly higher levels of perceived preparedness

Note. Higher scores represent stronger agreement with the statement "I consider myself prepared to adequately address the diverse needs of students in an inclusive classroom."

This finding suggests a positive perception of professional confidence toward implementing inclusive practices, although it also highlights the need to reflect on strengthening teacher training in this area through specific continuous professional development strategies. However, as this conclusion is based on a single-item measure, it should be interpreted with caution, given the limited ability of such items to capture the complexity of the construct or ensure measurement reliability.

In addition, gender differences in self-perceived preparedness were examined (see Table 1). Results from an independent samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference

between female and male teachers (t = 5.429; $p < .001$), with women reporting significantly higher scores. This suggests that within the teaching community, women display a greater positive predisposition toward the principles and practices of inclusive education

Relations between teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education and socioemotional competencies

Subsequently, the relationships between teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education and various socioemotional competencies (empathy, prosociality, and emotional autonomy) were analyzed (see Table 2), with the aim of testing Hypothesis 2 of the study. The selected competencies are considered key dimensions in the development of an inclusive and diversity-sensitive teaching practice.

Table 2.

Relationships between attitudes toward inclusive education, emotional regulation, empathy, prosociality, and autonomy in teacher.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Attitudes toward inclusive education	3.07	0.714	.801			
2. Empathy	3.80	0.917	0.313***	.720		
3. Prosociality	1.90	0.691	0.166*	0.240***	.809	
4. Emotional autonomy	2.24	0.946	0.268***	0.004	0.109	.713

Note. Cronbach's alpha on the diagonal.

The results presented in Table 2 highlight the importance of these dimensions in shaping positive attitudes toward inclusion. Specifically, empathy and emotional autonomy stand out, while prosociality plays a lesser but still notable role. Although the correlations were statistically significant, their effect sizes were generally low to moderate, with empathy showing the strongest association, followed by emotional autonomy and prosociality. According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, these modest effect sizes suggest that while socioemotional competencies contribute to the development of inclusive attitudes, they are unlikely to function as the sole or primary drivers. This underscores the importance of addressing additional contextual, professional, and institutional factors that may shape teachers' dispositions toward inclusive practices. Nonetheless, the identification of these relationships reinforces the need to strengthen teachers' socioemotional competencies as a fundamental part of their initial and ongoing training, with the aim of promoting more equitable, understanding, and accessible educational environments for all students.

Predictive Model of Emotional Intelligence on teachers' attitudinal dispositions toward educational inclusion

Finally, the degree of influence exerted by the different dimensions of emotional intelligence on attitudes toward inclusive education was examined in the group of teachers who comprised the sample of this study, aiming to provide evidence for Hypothesis 3. This analysis identified significant relationships between emotional variables and teachers' attitudinal dispositions toward educational inclusion. As shown in Table 3, the study analyzed how each of the evaluated dimensions (emotional attention, emotional clarity, and emotional regulation) relates to attitudes toward inclusive education.

Table 3.

Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence and Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	B (95% CI)	S.E.	β	t	ΔR2
Attitudes toward inclusive education	TMMS Attention	.531 [.430, .640]	.092	.412	5.902***	
	TMMS Clarity	.312 [.116, .501]	.099	.311	3.855***	.342
	TMMS Regulation	.351 [.134, .571]	.112	.313	5.803***	

Note. B: Unstandardized coefficient; S.E.: Standard error; β: Standardized coefficient.
***. p < .001.

As shown in Table 3, the results of the statistical analysis indicate that the three evaluated dimensions of emotional intelligence exert a significant influence on teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. This relationship highlights the importance of teachers' levels of emotional intelligence when it comes to understanding and promoting inclusive practices in diverse school settings. In particular, the dimension of "Emotional Attention" carries the greatest explanatory weight, suggesting that teachers' ability to perceive and pay attention to their own emotions and those of others plays a central role in shaping their attitudes toward students with special educational needs. Secondly, the "Emotional Regulation" dimension also shows a significant influence, indicating that the ability to properly manage emotional states contributes to maintaining a positive and flexible disposition in the face of the challenges involved in inclusive education. Finally, the "Emotional Clarity" dimension — related to understanding and differentiating emotions — is also significantly linked to attitudes toward inclusive education. Together, these findings emphasize that teachers' emotional intelligence not only promotes their personal well-being but also directly impacts

their stance toward diversity, reinforcing their role as key agents in fostering more equitable and sensitive school environments.

DISCUSSION

The results confirm the study's main hypotheses. The significant positive association between socio-emotional competencies (empathy, prosocial behavior, and emotional autonomy) and attitudes toward inclusion aligns with previous research (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Kotsou *et al.*, 2019) and suggests that these skills are fundamental psychological resources for teachers in inclusive environments. This link is relevant in the current context, where competencies are required that include, in addition to pedagogical knowledge, the ability to emotionally manage situations arising from diversity in the classroom (Ainscow, 2020; Booth & Ainscow, 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Significant differences were identified based on gender, with more favorable attitudes toward inclusive education among female teachers. This finding aligns with previous research indicating a greater orientation toward the emotional component of teaching among women (Rochat, 2023), suggesting that gender could act as a moderating factor in teachers' attitudes (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Pegalajar & Colmenero, 2017). This difference may be related to sociocultural constructs that have historically linked women to caregiving roles and emotional sensitivity (Kotsou *et al.*, 2019; Pena *et al.*, 2012).

With respect to teachers' self-perception of their ability to address diversity in inclusive settings, the results support the assertion that these levels are medium to high, indicating a relatively elevated perception of self-efficacy and disposition toward inclusion. This subjective assessment suggests that most teachers feel sufficiently capable of facing the challenges of inclusive education, which constitutes an important starting point for the implementation of inclusive practices. However, this finding also calls for reflection: a positive perception of competence does not necessarily guarantee the presence of actual or updated competencies and may even lead to a false sense of sufficiency if not accompanied by systematic training processes (Desombre *et al.*, 2019; MacCann *et al.*, 2020). From a critical perspective, as noted by Bem (2022) and Yada *et al.* (2022), a high self-perception can promote openness and confidence, but there is also a risk that it becomes a barrier to continuous improvement if not grounded in a realistic evaluation of one's own capabilities. Therefore, the results partially support the hypothesis in quantitative terms, while also highlighting the need to further promote ongoing training strategies that align professional self-perception with evidence-based inclusive practices.

In relation to socioemotional competences, empathy shows a significant positive association with attitudes toward inclusive education, consistent with studies highlighting its role as a facilitator of pedagogical bonds and sensitivity toward student diversity (Kotsou

et al., 2019; Singer & Klimecki, 2014). This affective competence allows teachers to emotionally connect with students' experiences, which can promote pedagogical responses more aligned and coherent with an inclusive approach (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Positive relationships were also observed between attitudes toward inclusion and the dimensions of emotional autonomy and prosociality. In the case of emotional autonomy, these results suggest that the ability to maintain emotional balance and act with affective independence may contribute to greater stability in diverse educational contexts. This emotional stability can facilitate more reflective and less reactive responses to complex situations, enabling teachers to sustain their commitment to inclusion without becoming overwhelmed (Sánchez-Pujalte *et al.*, 2021). Far from implying rigidity, well-developed emotional autonomy can foster the self-confidence needed to take on the challenge of adapting teaching to student needs. Prosociality also showed a positive relationship with inclusive attitudes, which is consistent with studies linking this orientation to the willingness to cooperate, help, and contribute to the common good within the classroom (Caprara *et al.*, 2000). When this prosocial tendency is based on recognizing others as rights-bearing subjects and not merely as recipients of aid, it can translate into authentic inclusive practices sensitive to educational justice and respect for diversity.

Regarding emotional intelligence (EI), emotional attention was the most relevant predictor of attitudes toward inclusion. This finding aligns with the views of Salovey and Mayer (1990) and Mayer *et al.* (2016), who consider attention as the gateway to emotional processing. According to Boden and Thompson (2017), the ability to identify and monitor one's own emotional states favors more appropriate responses in complex situations, such as those posed by addressing diversity. In this sense, teachers with higher emotional attention might show greater sensitivity to the emotional dynamics of the classroom, adjusting their practice to students' needs. However, as Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2005) point out, high levels of emotional attention, without adequate accompaniment by clarity or regulation, may foster rumination and emotional discomfort. Therefore, the positive effect of this dimension would depend on a functional balance with other emotional competencies. Emotional clarity also showed a positive relationship with inclusive attitudes. This dimension, linked to the differentiated understanding of affective states (Sánchez-Pujalte *et al.*, 2021; Maftei & Ghinies, 2025), allows for more precise interpretation of one's emotional reactions in challenging educational situations. A teacher with high clarity could distinguish between an emotion arising from structural obstacles—such as a lack of support—and a personal reaction, avoiding erroneous attributions that could compromise their inclusive stance (Weiner, 2010). This capacity for emotional differentiation can facilitate more rational responses, grounded in empathy and the recognition of diversity as a right. Emotional regulation was also significantly associated with inclusive attitudes, acting as a resource to sustain commitment in demanding educational scenarios. As proposed by Gross (2015) and Webb *et al.* (2012), regulation strategies focused on antecedents—such

as cognitive reappraisal—are more effective than those aimed at suppressing emotional responses. In the context of inclusion, this ability would allow reinterpretation of difficult situations as learning opportunities, which can promote teacher persistence and a positive disposition. The results also show that the three dimensions of emotional intelligence have a joint impact and contribute significantly to explaining teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. This suggests that these competencies do not operate in isolation but are interrelated, forming an integrated emotional system that can facilitate more favorable attitudes toward diversity.

From a process perspective, emotional attention functions as the starting point for identifying affective states; emotional clarity allows their understanding and differentiation; and emotional regulation enables adaptive management of emotions based on pedagogical goals and professional values, such as commitment to inclusion (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, the data suggests possible moderation effects among these dimensions. For example, high emotional attention could be beneficial when combined with emotional clarity, but unfavorable when the latter is low, potentially leading to confusion or rumination (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2005). Overall, the model explained 34.2% of the variance in attitudes toward inclusion, reinforcing the relevance of emotional intelligence as a factor associated with these dispositions.

While previous studies have explored these variables separately, this study's original contribution lies in its integrated analysis of socio-emotional competencies and the three dimensions of emotional intelligence as joint predictors of inclusive attitudes within the Spanish context. The findings not only confirm the relevance of these constructs but also provide a more nuanced understanding of their interplay. For instance, the finding that emotional clarity is the strongest predictor suggests that the ability to understand one's own emotional states is a key mechanism through which emotional intelligence influences attitudes. This goes beyond a mere correlational link and points towards a specific causal pathway that warrants further investigation (Ghanamah & Masri, 2025). Furthermore, the inclusion of literature from the Global South (e.g., Gonzales & Arellano, 2023) allows for a broader contextualization of the findings, acknowledging that while the underlying psychological mechanisms may be universal, their expression and the barriers to their development can be culturally specific.

These findings have both theoretical and applied implications. Conceptually, the results support the usefulness of Salovey and Mayer's emotional intelligence model within the scope of inclusive education. Practically, they support the systematic incorporation of emotional development in both initial and ongoing teacher training. In particular, it is recommended to strengthen competencies in emotional attention, clarity, and regulation through specific programs that integrate an emotional approach with a rights-based perspective. Such

programs could be implemented at different stages of the teaching career and adapted to the characteristics and needs of the educational context.

The findings have significant practical implications for teacher training and professional development. From the teacher's perspective, these results highlight the importance of self-reflection on one's own emotional skills as a key element for professional growth in the context of inclusion. The results strongly suggest that teacher training programs, both initial and ongoing, should explicitly include modules focused on the development of socio-emotional competencies and emotional intelligence. This could involve workshops on empathy, emotional regulation, and mindfulness, as well as the creation of supportive school climates that foster collaboration and emotional well-being among teachers (Schnepel *et al.*, 2025). Concrete recommendations include the implementation of mentoring programs where experienced teachers can guide novice teachers in managing the emotional challenges of inclusive classrooms, and the allocation of institutional resources to support teachers' mental health and well-being.

However, this study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design does not allow for the establishment of causal relationships, and the reliance on self-report measures may be subject to social desirability bias. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings is limited and caution should be exercised when extrapolating to other educational levels or regions with different inclusion policies. Future research should employ mixed-methods and longitudinal designs to explore the causal mechanisms and the developmental trajectory of these competencies and attitudes over time (Han *et al.*, 2025). It would also be valuable to expand the research to other educational profiles (e.g., secondary school teachers) and other cultural contexts to examine the robustness of these findings. Likewise, the exclusive use of self-reports may involve social desirability biases or subjective perception, suggesting the convenience of incorporating mixed methods or external assessments in future research.

Finally, several research lines are proposed. First, the design and evaluation of intervention programs that integrate emotional training and inclusive education and analyze their effects on teacher attitudes and practices. Another line would be to study the evolution of emotional intelligence and inclusive attitudes throughout professional development, identifying key moments of change. It would also be pertinent to explore more complex models with mediating or moderating variables (such as personal values, self-efficacy, or perceived social support) that could explain these relationships. Lastly, expanding the study to other educational profiles, such as management teams or guidance professionals, would allow for a better understanding of the role of emotional intelligence at different levels of the educational system and in the face of various inclusive challenges, such as addressing specific educational needs or cultural and linguistic diversity.

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