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Bridging the Gap: Teacher Self-Efficacy and Inclusive Education Implementation in Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

*This study examined teachers' disability-inclusive education background and its relationship with self-efficacy in instruction, collaboration, and managing behaviour within the Cambodian context. Employing a mixed methods design, quantitative data were collected from 533 teachers (403 general education, 130 special education) across five provinces using an 18-item self-efficacy questionnaire, whilst qualitative secondary data underwent SWOT analysis. Statistical analyses including Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Structural Equation Modelling, and independent samples *t*-tests were conducted using SPSS AMOS Version 29. Results revealed significant positive relationships between teachers' self-efficacy dimensions and both disability-inclusive education background and implementation outcomes. Special education teachers demonstrated significantly higher self-efficacy in instruction ($M = 3.10$ vs 2.54 , $p < .001$) and collaboration ($M = 3.02$ vs 2.59 , $p < .001$) compared to general education teachers. However, 47 per cent of teachers reported no inclusive education training, whilst 35 per cent had no experience teaching children with disabilities. SWOT analysis identified supportive policies and increased awareness as strengths, but revealed critical weaknesses including inadequate training and negative staff attitudes. These findings underscore urgent need for systematic professional development interventions to enhance teacher self-efficacy and advance Cambodia's inclusive education implementation aligned with the Inclusive Education Action Plan 2024-2028.*

Keywords: Cambodia, Disability, Inclusive Education, Self-Efficacy, Teacher Training

INTRODUCTION

Children with disabilities frequently require specialised services and individualised support to master curriculum content effectively. In numerous countries, specialised education services manifest through the segregation of students with disabilities into separate classrooms or schools, thereby eliminating opportunities for engagement with peers without disabilities and frequently denying access to the standard curriculum (Dell'Anna et al., 2022; Hayes & Bulat, 2017). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), particularly Article 24, recognises the right of all children with disabilities both to be included in general education systems and to receive the individualised support they require (United Nations, 2006). Systemic transformation to remove barriers and provide reasonable accommodation alongside support services is essential to ensure that children with disabilities are not excluded from mainstream educational opportunities (UNESCO, 2020).

The objective of educating children with disabilities aligns with that of educating children without disabilities: to support learners in reaching their full potential and leading productive lives as active members of their communities (Aprillia, 2023). The inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in education holds significance for four primary reasons (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024; UNESCO, 2020). Firstly, education contributes substantially to human capital formation and serves as a key determinant of personal wellbeing and welfare (Kannaby, 2025). Secondly, excluding children with disabilities from educational and employment opportunities imposes considerable social and economic costs on societies. Thirdly, countries cannot achieve Education for All or Sustainable Development Goal 4 without ensuring access to education for children with disabilities (United Nations, 2015). Fourthly, countries that are signatories to the CRPD cannot fulfil their responsibilities under Article 24 without implementing inclusive education policies and practices (UNCR, 2016).

Research demonstrates that students with disabilities spend substantially more time engaged in learning and exhibit greater comfort in interacting with peers when included in regular classrooms (Kefallinou et al., 2020; Szumski et al., 2017). Furthermore, students with disabilities benefit from access to more positive role models when involved with their non-disabled peers, which facilitates both academic progress and social development (Dell'Anna et al., 2022; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009). Inclusive education has been found to yield neutral to positive effects on academic achievement for students with mild to moderate learning and behavioural disabilities, whilst simultaneously fostering increased respect, awareness, and acceptance among typically developing students (Beckett, 2009; Tafa & Manolitsis, 2003). Additionally, individuals educated in inclusive settings generally demonstrate higher levels of employment, community involvement, and

independent living compared to those educated in segregated conditions (Moore, 2021).

In the Southeast Asian context, Cambodia has made considerable progress in advancing inclusive education over the past decade, driven by commitments to the CRPD and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Oo et al., 2025). The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) launched the Inclusive Education Action Plan 2024-2028, marking a significant milestone in Cambodia's educational landscape and demonstrating governmental commitment to providing quality education for all children (UNICEF, 2024). However, substantial challenges persist in fully achieving inclusive education across Cambodia, including limited resources, teacher shortages, infrastructure barriers, insufficient training opportunities, and prevailing negative societal attitudes towards disability (Pov et al., 2026; UNICEF, 2024). Over 57 per cent of Cambodian children with disabilities remain denied access to education, compared to merely 7 per cent of their peers without disabilities, underscoring the pressing need for more expansive implementation of inclusive education policies (UNICEF, 2024).

Research in Cambodia has revealed that teachers face significant challenges in implementing inclusive practices, stemming from geographical and seasonal issues, lack of funding, inadequate teaching and learning resources, and limited parental engagement (Ravet & Mtika, 2024). Most critically, teachers demonstrate considerable knowledge gaps related to inclusive instruction and pedagogy, resulting from limited professional development opportunities and absence of local experts to support continuous professional development at the classroom level (Kuroda et al., 2017; Pov & Kawai, 2025). Furthermore, Cambodian principals have expressed significant concerns regarding inclusive education implementation, including lack of paraprofessionals, limited knowledge and skills, increased workloads, and challenges in managing students with low self-care abilities (Pov et al., 2026). Studies indicate that principals with training demonstrate significantly fewer concerns, highlighting the critical need for enhanced policy support and comprehensive professional development programmes.

Despite these challenges, opportunities exist for advancing inclusive education in Cambodia through successful programme implementations and increasing international support. Teacher self-efficacy has emerged as a pivotal factor influencing the implementation of inclusive education practices globally (Sharma et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2020; Yada et al., 2022). Teachers' belief systems regarding the inclusion of students with special needs substantially explain gaps between policy and practice (Charitaki et al., 2025; Muhammad, 2025). Meta-analytical research involving 40,898 teachers across 40 countries revealed that teachers' cognitive appraisals, emotional appraisals, and self-efficacy regarding inclusion averaged mid-range on measurement scales, indicating substantial room for improvement (Dignath et al., 2022). Self-efficacy beliefs were found to be higher for pre-service teachers compared to in-service teachers, whilst teachers with

special education training maintained more positive views about inclusion than regular education teachers (Sharma et al., 2021). Significantly, professional development interventions demonstrated positive effects on cognitive appraisal, emotional appraisal, and self-efficacy towards inclusive practices, with training proving particularly effective when incorporating practical experience in inclusive classrooms (Donath et al., 2023).

The literature reveals several critical gaps requiring investigation. Firstly, whilst international research extensively examines teacher self-efficacy in inclusive education, limited empirical studies explore these factors specifically within the Cambodian context, particularly concerning both general and special education teachers across primary and secondary levels. Secondly, although studies have examined teacher attitudes and concerns about inclusion in Cambodia, insufficient research investigates the relationship between teachers' disability-inclusive education background and their self-efficacy in instructional and collaborative practices. Thirdly, whilst challenges in inclusive education implementation have been documented, comprehensive analysis utilising both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats remains limited. Addressing these research gaps, the present study investigates three fundamental questions. Firstly, what are the existing problems and prospects of inclusive education implementation in Cambodia? Secondly, how do different levels of teachers' self-efficacy in instruction and collaboration manifest? Thirdly, why does the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their effectiveness in inclusive education implementation warrant exploration? This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by examining teachers' disability-inclusive education background and implementation, with particular emphasis on self-efficacy in instruction and collaboration. The research offers several distinctive contributions: (1) it provides empirical evidence from a substantial sample of 533 teachers, encompassing both general education ($n=403$) and special education ($n=130$) teachers across primary and secondary levels in Cambodia; (2) it employs sophisticated statistical analyses, including Structural Equation Modelling, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, and Simple Linear Regression to investigate relationships between variables; and (3) it utilises SWOT analysis to comprehensively examine existing challenges and opportunities in inclusive education implementation, thereby offering insights for policymakers and educational practitioners seeking to enhance inclusive education delivery in Cambodia and similar contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualising Disability: Models and Definitions

Disability constitutes a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has been conceptualised through various theoretical frameworks over time. The World Health Organisation defines disability as an umbrella term encompassing

impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, recognising disability as the product of interaction between an individual with a health condition and that individual's contextual factors, both environmental and personal (WHO, 2011). This bio-psychosocial definition, articulated in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, represents a synthesis of medical and social perspectives and has been formally adopted by Cambodia as its operational framework for understanding disability (WHO, 2011). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities further elaborates this understanding, stating that persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (United Nations, 2006).

Scholarly discourse has identified multiple theoretical models through which disability has been understood and addressed across different societal contexts (Retief & Letšosa, 2018; Shakespeare, 2018). The medical model conceptualises disability as an individual impairment requiring clinical intervention and rehabilitation, viewing persons with disabilities primarily as patients whose conditions necessitate cure or management (Bunbury, 2019). Conversely, the social model positions disability not as an inherent deficit within individuals, but as a socially constructed disadvantage created by environmental barriers, discriminatory attitudes, and institutional structures that systematically exclude persons with impairments from full societal participation (Goodley, 2020; Shakespeare, 2018). The rights-based model, which emerged from disability rights movements and underpins the CRPD, conceptualises disability through the framework of human rights, asserting that persons with disabilities possess inherent dignity and equal rights to participate fully in all aspects of society (Degener, 2016; Lawson & Beckett, 2021). Contemporary disability scholarship increasingly recognises the complementarity of these perspectives, acknowledging that whilst the social model effectively identifies systemic barriers requiring societal change, the lived experiences of impairment and the role of support services cannot be entirely separated from disability discourse (Lawson & Beckett, 2021).

Disability and Inclusive Education in Cambodia

Cambodia faces substantial challenges in accurately documenting the prevalence of disability within its population, as multiple data collection mechanisms employ divergent definitions and classification systems (NIS, 2020). The 2019 General Population Census enumerated 689,532 individuals aged five years and above with disabilities, representing approximately 4.9 per cent of the population in this age bracket, with approximately 37,500 children aged five to fourteen years having disabilities (NIS, 2020). However, disability prevalence estimates vary considerably across different surveys and administrative systems due to methodological inconsistencies and definitional variations (EK, 2023). The

predominant disability types identified include visual impairments affecting 34.8 per cent of persons with disabilities, mobility difficulties affecting 33.4 per cent, and hearing impairments affecting 9.0 per cent, with notable gender disparities observed across disability categories (ACCESS, 2024; NIS, 2013).

Following Cambodia's ratification of the CRPD in 2012 and its longstanding commitment to international frameworks including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992) and Education for All (2000), the government has progressively developed policy infrastructure to advance inclusive education (Oo et al., 2025). The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport established the Special Education Office in 2000 and subsequently implemented pilot inclusive education programmes in collaboration with UNICEF and the Disability Action Council, initially in Svay Rieng province before expanding to 15 provinces by 2008 (Ravet & Mtika, 2024). Most significantly, the Ministry launched the Inclusive Education Action Plan 2024-2028 in July 2024, marking a watershed moment in Cambodia's commitment to providing quality education for all children, including those with disabilities (UNICEF, 2024). Nevertheless, substantial implementation gaps persist, with over 57 per cent of Cambodian children with disabilities remaining excluded from education compared to merely 7 per cent of their peers without disabilities, representing one of the largest disparity gaps globally (UNICEF, 2024; World Bank, 2024). Persistent barriers include inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, limited resources, geographical isolation, and prevailing negative societal attitudes towards disability (EK, 2023; Pov & Kawai, 2025).

Table 1 Disability Prevalence by Type and Gender in Cambodia

Percentage of Disabled Population by Type of Disability	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Difficulty in seeing	34.8	31.4	38.6
Difficulty in speech	5.4	4.4	6.5
Difficulty in hearing	9.0	7.4	10.8
Difficulty in movement	33.4	41.4	24.7
Mental	12.2	9.8	14.7
Mental retardation	5.2	3.6	6.8
Mental illness	7.0	6.2	7.9
Any other	3.5	3.9	3.1
Multiple disabilities	1.6	1.7	1.0

Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Teacher Self-Efficacy in Inclusive Education

Teacher self-efficacy, conceptualised as educators' beliefs in their capacity to successfully plan for and deliver teaching tasks within specific contexts, has emerged as a critical determinant of inclusive education implementation globally

(Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Grounded in Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, teacher self-efficacy develops through four principal sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Contemporary meta-analytical research synthesising data from 40,898 teachers across 40 countries revealed that teachers' self-efficacy regarding inclusive education averaged at mid-range levels on measurement scales, indicating substantial potential for enhancement (Dignath et al., 2022). Significantly, research demonstrates robust positive correlations between teacher self-efficacy and favourable attitudes towards inclusion ($r = 0.35$), suggesting that teachers with stronger self-efficacy beliefs maintain more positive cognitive and emotional appraisals regarding the inclusion of students with special educational needs (Long et al., 2025; Yada et al., 2022).

Professional development interventions have demonstrated efficacy in enhancing teacher self-efficacy for inclusive practices, with meta-analytical evidence revealing moderate positive effects ($g = 0.52$) on teachers' perceived capability to implement inclusive education (Donath et al., 2023). Training programmes incorporating practical experience in inclusive classroom settings produce particularly robust outcomes, as mastery experiences constitute the most influential source of self-efficacy development (Bandura, 1977; Sharma et al., 2021). Research in Cambodia specifically indicates that teachers express substantial need for enhanced training in educating children with disabilities, whilst simultaneously reporting considerable knowledge gaps regarding inclusive pedagogy due to limited professional development opportunities and absence of local expertise to support continuous professional growth (Kuroda et al., 2017; Pov & Kawai, 2025). Building upon Bandura's theoretical framework and recognising the Cambodian context, this study hypothesises that increased exposure to inclusive education training would provide enhanced opportunities to observe and model successful inclusive teaching practices, thereby strengthening participants' self-efficacy through both vicarious learning and verbal persuasion. Given the paucity of systematic research examining self-efficacy amongst both general and special education teachers regarding inclusive education implementation in Cambodia, the present investigation addresses this critical gap in the scholarly literature.

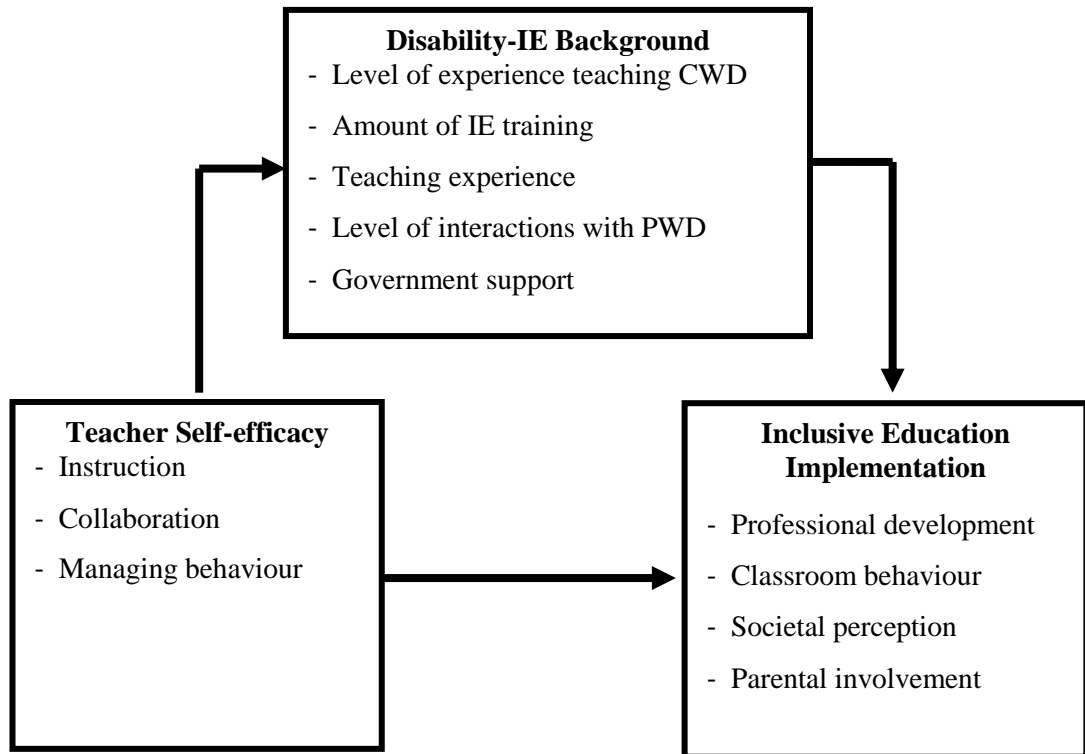


Figure 1 Proposed Model of Teachers' Self-Efficacy for Inclusive Education Implementation in Cambodia

Source: Author's Proposed Analysis (2025)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively examine teachers' self-efficacy and inclusive education implementation in Cambodia. Mixed methods research allows researchers to combine elements of qualitative and quantitative approaches for the purposes of achieving breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (Creswell & Guetterman, 2024; Creswell & Inoue, 2025). Quantitative data were collected from 533 participants, comprising 403 general education teachers (115 primary, 288 secondary) and 130 special education teachers (83 primary, 47 secondary), all teaching in target special education high schools and mainstream schools across five provinces. Primary data were gathered through a structured questionnaire consisting of 18 items measuring teachers' self-efficacy for inclusive practices across three dimensions: instruction, collaboration, and managing behaviour. Secondary qualitative data were obtained from existing documents, including school planning reports, disability-inclusion legislation, congressional reports, technical department compilations, relevant research findings, and respondent comments provided in survey text boxes.

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS AMOS Version 29, employing both descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, standard deviation) and

inferential statistics (*t*-test, simple linear regression) to determine significant differences between general and special education teachers' self-efficacy and perceptions regarding professional development, classroom behaviour, societal perception, and parental involvement concerning inclusive education implementation. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling were utilised to examine and develop a model of the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy dimensions and their perceptions regarding inclusive education implementation in Cambodia. For qualitative data analysis, SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) was employed to investigate existing problems and perspectives regarding inclusive education implementation.

To establish the reliability of the research instrument, scale reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which quantifies the internal consistency of measurement instruments and represents the average value of reliability coefficients obtained for all possible combinations of items when split into two half-tests (Taber, 2018; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Cronbach's alpha is calculated using the formula:

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{c}}{v + (N-1) \cdot \bar{c}}$$

Where *N* represents the number of items, \bar{c} denotes the average covariance between item pairs, and \bar{v} indicates the average variance (Cronbach, 1951). The reliability of the instrument was evaluated using established criteria (Taber, 2018), as presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Reliability Evaluation Criteria for Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha	Internal Consistency
$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellent
$0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$	Good
$0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$	Acceptable
$0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$	Questionable
$0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$	Poor
$0.5 > \alpha$	Unacceptable

Source: Adapted from Taber (2018)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teacher Background Characteristics in Inclusive Education

Analysis of teachers' disability-inclusive education background revealed substantial variations in experience, training, and support across the sample. Table 3 presents the distribution of sample respondents across four critical dimensions of inclusive education preparedness.

Table 3 Distribution of Sample Respondents by Inclusive Education Background Characteristics (N = 533)

Background Characteristic	None (%)	Some (%)	High (%)
Experience teaching children with disabilities	35	44	21
Training related to inclusive education	47	38	15
Interactions with persons with disabilities	24	54	22
Perception of government support	18	43	39

Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

The data reveal critical gaps in teacher preparation for inclusive education implementation in Cambodia. Nearly half of all teachers (47 per cent) reported receiving no training related to inclusive education, whilst only 15 per cent indicated high levels of training exposure. This finding corroborates previous research indicating that Cambodian teachers demonstrate considerable knowledge gaps regarding inclusive instruction and pedagogy due to limited professional development opportunities (Pov, 2024; Kartika & Kuroda, 2019). Similarly, 35 per cent of teachers reported no experience teaching children with disabilities, suggesting that a substantial proportion of the teaching workforce lacks practical exposure to inclusive classroom contexts. These findings align with Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, which identifies mastery experiences as the most influential source of self-efficacy development, suggesting that the absence of direct teaching experience with students with disabilities may significantly constrain teachers' confidence in implementing inclusive practices.

Teacher' Self-Efficacy in Inclusive Practices

Table 4 presents weighted arithmetic means for teachers' self-efficacy across three dimensions (instruction, collaboration, managing behaviour) and four contextual factors (professional development, classroom behaviour, societal perception, parental involvement). The Likert scale interpretation ranges were established using standard interval calculation methods (Range = 4; Interval = 0.80).

Table 4 Mean Range of 5-Point Likert Scale Interpretation

Scale	Mean Range	Interpretation (Satisfaction)	Interpretation (Agreement)
1	0.80 – 1.80	Strongly Dissatisfied	Strongly Disagree
2	1.81 – 2.60	Dissatisfied	Disagree
3	2.61 – 3.40	Neutral	Undecided
4	3.41 – 4.20	Satisfied	Agree

Scale	Mean Range	Interpretation (Satisfaction)	Interpretation (Agreement)
5	4.21 – 5.00	Strongly Satisfied	Strongly Agree

Source: Author’s Analysis (2025)

Note: Range = Largest – Smallest (5 – 1 = 4); Interval = Range / Largest (4 / 5 = 0.80)

Overall, teachers demonstrated moderate levels of self-efficacy across all three dimensions, with mean scores indicating uncertainty rather than confidence. Teachers' self-efficacy in instruction ($M = 2.68, SD = 0.90$), collaboration ($M = 2.69, SD = 0.82$), and managing behaviour ($M = 2.83, SD = 0.71$) all fell within the 'undecided' range (2.61–3.40), suggesting neither strong confidence nor clear inadequacy in implementing inclusive practices. These findings closely align with meta-analytical research by Baier et al. (2021), who reported that teachers' self-efficacy regarding inclusive education averaged at mid-range levels globally, indicating substantial room for improvement across international contexts. The relatively higher self-efficacy for managing behaviour compared to instruction and collaboration suggests that whilst teachers feel moderately capable of maintaining classroom order, they remain uncertain about their pedagogical and collaborative capacity to effectively support students with disabilities.

Comparative Analysis: General Education vs Special Education Teachers

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare self-efficacy across three dimensions for general education teachers and special education teachers. Results are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5 Independent Samples *t*-Test Results for Teachers' Self-Efficacy in Instruction

Variable	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean Difference	95% CI
Instruction	-10.70	471.93	<.001	-0.554	[-0.656, -0.452]

Source: Author’s Analysis (2025)

Note: GET M = 2.54, SD = 0.81; SET M = 3.10, SD = 0.37

Table 6 Independent Samples *t*-Test Results for Teachers' Self-Efficacy in Collaboration

Variable	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean Difference	95% CI
Collaboration	-8.43	363.82	<.001	-0.438	[-0.540, -0.336]

Source: Author’s Analysis (2025)

Note: GET M = 2.59, SD = 0.71; SET M = 3.02, SD = 0.43

Statistical analyses revealed significant differences between general and special education teachers across both self-efficacy dimensions. For instruction,

special education teachers demonstrated significantly higher self-efficacy ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.37$) compared to general education teachers ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 0.81$), $t(471.93) = -10.70$, $p < .001$, representing a substantial mean difference of 0.554 scale points. Similarly, for collaboration, special education teachers reported significantly higher self-efficacy ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.43$) than general education teachers ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.71$), $t(363.82) = -8.43$, $p < .001$, with a mean difference of 0.438 scale points. These findings strongly support the research hypotheses (H1a and H1b), demonstrating that teacher role significantly influences self-efficacy for inclusive practices. These results align closely with recent research by Zedalis (2025), who found that special education teachers exhibited significantly higher self-efficacy than general education teachers in implementing inclusive practices, attributing this disparity to specialised training and targeted professional development experiences.

The present study's findings both corroborate and extend existing international research on teacher self-efficacy in inclusive education whilst simultaneously revealing Cambodia-specific patterns that contribute novel insights to the global literature. The observed mid-range self-efficacy levels amongst Cambodian teachers ($M = 2.68$ – 2.83) closely mirror the meta-analytical findings of Dignath et al. (2022), who reported that teachers' self-efficacy regarding inclusion averaged at mid-range levels globally across 40 countries, indicating substantial room for improvement internationally. This convergence suggests that challenges in developing teacher confidence for inclusive practices transcend national boundaries and reflect universal implementation barriers. However, the Cambodian context presents distinctive features, particularly the substantial training deficit, with 47 per cent of teachers reporting no inclusive education training whatsoever. This figure considerably exceeds training gaps reported in comparable meta-analyses, suggesting that systemic underinvestment in professional development may be particularly acute in Cambodia despite recent policy advances including the Inclusive Education Action Plan 2024-2028 (Donath et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2021).

The significant self-efficacy disparities between special and general education teachers observed in this study directly support and extend findings from multiple recent investigations. Woodcock and Hardy (2025) demonstrated that teachers with specialised training in inclusive education maintained substantially higher self-efficacy than those without such preparation, whilst Long et al. (2025) meta-analysis of Chinese teachers revealed that special education teachers consistently outperformed general education teachers across all self-efficacy dimensions. The magnitude of differences observed in the present study (mean differences of 0.554 for instruction and 0.438 for collaboration) suggests that specialised training produces meaningful practical effects beyond statistical significance. These findings align with Bandura's (1997) theoretical framework, which identifies mastery experiences and targeted professional development as the

most influential sources of self-efficacy development. The relatively lower standard deviation amongst special education teachers ($SD = 0.37$ for instruction) compared to general education teachers ($SD = 0.81$) suggests that specialised training not only elevates average self-efficacy but also produces more consistent confidence levels across practitioners, reducing variability in preparedness for inclusive practice.

The finding that 35 per cent of Cambodian teachers reported no experience teaching children with disabilities whilst simultaneously attempting to implement inclusive education policies represents a critical implementation gap that contradicts fundamental principles of effective professional development articulated in recent literature. Fairbrother et al. (2025) emphasised that mastery experiences through applying knowledge in authentic classroom contexts constitute the most important contributor to pre-service teachers' self-efficacy for inclusive practices, significantly outweighing theoretical professional development in isolation. Similarly, Woodcock and Hardy (2025) demonstrated that teachers with high self-efficacy consistently engaged in reflective professional development practices characterised by ongoing practical experimentation in inclusive classrooms, suggesting that self-efficacy development requires iterative cycles of practice, reflection, and refinement rather than one-off training interventions. The Cambodian context, where nearly half of teachers lack both formal training and practical experience, creates a compounding deficit that may substantially impede inclusive education implementation regardless of policy commitments. This pattern extends findings from Kuroda et al. (2017) and Pov and Kawai (2025) regarding knowledge gaps amongst Cambodian teachers, suggesting that the absence of systematic professional development infrastructure produces cascading effects on teacher confidence, pedagogical capacity, and ultimately, student outcomes in inclusive settings.

CONCLUSION

This study examined teachers' disability-inclusive education background and implementation in Cambodia, with particular emphasis on self-efficacy in instruction, collaboration, and managing behaviour. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between teachers' self-efficacy dimensions and both their disability-inclusive education background and inclusive education implementation outcomes. Statistical analyses confirmed substantial differences between general and special education teachers' self-efficacy across all three dimensions, with special education teachers consistently demonstrating higher confidence levels. An unexpected negative correlation emerged between self-efficacy in managing behaviour and disability-inclusive education background, warranting further investigation into contextual factors contributing to this inverse relationship.

The SWOT analysis revealed critical implementation challenges alongside promising opportunities for advancing inclusive education in Cambodia. Identified strengths included supportive policies and legislation, established leadership structures, developing physical infrastructure, and increased awareness of inclusive practices. However, substantial weaknesses persist, including inadequate implementation of existing policies, insufficient teacher training and professional development, lack of resources and support services, and negative attitudes amongst staff. Significant opportunities exist through capacity building initiatives, funding for training and resources, partnerships with community organisations and disability advocacy groups, and advancements in assistive technologies. Nevertheless, threats include potential funding constraints, policy barriers, persistent negative community attitudes, and inequitable access to educational opportunities.

The study provides valuable insights for policymakers, teacher training institutions, school leaders, and development partners in Cambodia seeking to enhance inclusive education delivery. The substantial gap between general and special education teachers' self-efficacy levels, with 47 per cent of teachers reporting no inclusive education training whatsoever, indicates urgent need for comprehensive capacity-building initiatives. Addressing identified weaknesses whilst capitalising on emerging opportunities could facilitate development of a more inclusive and equitable education system. Future research should investigate contextual factors underlying the negative correlation between managing behaviour self-efficacy and disability-inclusive education background, whilst longitudinal studies examining sustained effects of professional development interventions would provide valuable evidence for policy refinement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the policy level, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of general and special education teachers in inclusive settings to improve collaboration and reduce misunderstandings. Policymakers should mandate ongoing training in inclusive education practices for both teacher groups as part of certification and licensure requirements, ensuring systematic rather than sporadic professional development. Advocacy for increased funding to support professional development, instructional resources, and collaborative planning time represents a critical priority. Establishing dedicated budget allocations within the national education framework would ensure sustainable financing for inclusive education infrastructure, assistive technologies, and ongoing teacher support mechanisms.

At the practical level, targeted professional development workshops should be developed for general education teachers to enhance their skills in collaboration, behaviour management, and instructional strategies tailored to diverse learners.

These workshops should incorporate mastery experiences through practical application in inclusive classroom settings. Advanced training for special education teachers should refine their specialised skills and maintain currency with evolving evidence-based practices. Joint training sessions where both teacher groups collaboratively learn and practice co-teaching strategies would facilitate knowledge transfer and build collaborative capacity. Peer mentoring programmes whereby experienced special education teachers mentor general education colleagues should be established to leverage existing expertise. Schools should establish behaviour support teams to provide consistent and tailored support across classrooms, whilst provision of differentiated instructional materials and assistive technologies would enable appropriate accommodations for students with special needs.

At the school level, educational leaders should schedule regular collaborative planning sessions between general and special education teachers to co-design inclusive lesson plans and address classroom challenges collectively. School principals should actively foster collaborative cultures that value contributions from both teacher groups equally, moving beyond hierarchical structures that may inadvertently marginalise special education expertise. Establishment of school-wide behavioural frameworks that integrate input from both teacher groups would ensure consistency in expectations and interventions. Schools should develop systematic mechanisms for ongoing professional learning communities where teachers engage in reflective practice and collaboratively problem-solve implementation challenges. These school-level initiatives should be complemented by partnerships with community organisations, disability advocacy groups, and development partners to access additional expertise and resources that have demonstrated effectiveness in comparable contexts.

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