Special Teachers' Competencies and Teachers' Pedagogical Practices in Inclusive Education in Manipur: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract: *This study examined the relationship between special teachers' professional competencies and pedagogical practices within inclusive education settings in Manipur. Using a descriptive census survey, data were collected from all 250 special teachers across 23 special institutions. Two demographic variables—gender and educational qualification—were analysed alongside overall competence and practice levels. Descriptive statistics showed mean scores of 344.52 (SD = 24.15) for competence and 44.13 (SD = 6.73) for practice. Mann-Whitney U tests indicated no significant gender- or qualification-based differences (p > 0.140 and p > 0.353), supporting null hypotheses H€ and H€ , . However, the third null hypothesis (H€ f) was rejected (Z = –13.708, p < 0.000), revealing a significant competence–practice gap. Although teachers possess high professional competence, these skills are not effectively applied in the classroom. The study highlights the need for systemic reform, improved infrastructure, and targeted professional development to strengthen the practical implementation of inclusive education strategies.*

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Special Teachers, Competencies, Pedagogical Practices, Competence–Practice Disparity, Manipur.

1. INTRODUCTION

The shift toward Inclusive Education (IE) represents a major global transformation in educational philosophy, grounded in a rights-based framework that ensures equity and access for all learners. Internationally, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4, 2015) mandate inclusive and quality education for every child. India has institutionalised these commitments through key legislative measures such as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016, which mandate inclusive education for children up to eighteen years. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 further reinforces this vision by mandating inclusive pedagogy and disability awareness as integral components of teacher education.

The success of these policy frameworks fundamentally depends on the professional competence of Special Teachers, who serve as the primary agents bridging policy and classroom implementation. Their responsibilities extend beyond instruction to include diagnostic assessment, development and execution of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs), curriculum adaptation, classroom management, and interdisciplinary collaboration. These professional roles are formally governed by the Rehab-ilitation Council of India (RCI) Act, 1992, which sets the standards for special education practice nationwide.

In Manipur, however, a paradox arises where strong national mandates encounter significant local constraints. Empirical evidence reveals a persistent implementation gap: many inclusive schools enrolling Children with Special Needs (CWSN) neither employ trained special teachers nor prepare IEPs, reflecting systemic non-compliance with the RPWD Act (2016). Contributing factors include inadequate professional training, limited infrastructure, and large class sizes.

This study, therefore, aims to critically evaluate the professional competence and pedagogical practices of special education teachers in Manipur. By analysing their competencies and classroom practices in relation to gender and educational qualification, the research provides evidence essential for addressing the competence–practice gap and guiding effective, context-specific policy interventions.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature review examines research on the

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professional competencies and pedagogical practices required for special teachers to implement inclusive education effectively. It analyses how demographic variables such as gender and qualification influence teacher performance while identifying persistent gaps between policy goals and classroom realities.

Globally, inclusive education is underpinned by frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) and the Incheon Declaration, which supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations, 2015). These initiatives emphasise the preparation of competent educators who can adapt their teaching to meet the diverse needs of learners (UNESCO, 2020). International studies consistently highlight that effective special educators must demonstrate instructional adaptability, diagnostic assessment proficiency, and curriculum modification skills. Holland and Hornby (1992) found that both novice and experienced special educators valued maintaining realistic, positive approaches as essential competencies. Dingle et al. (2004) identified ten fundamental competencies necessary for both general and special educators to operate effectively in inclusive settings, reinforcing that professional excellence depends on combining theoretical expertise with adaptive pedagogical practice.

The transition from theoretical competence to observable classroom practice remains a significant challenge globally. Majoko (2019) observed that Zimbabwean special needs teachers regarded screening, assessment, differentiation, classroom management, and collaboration as critical operational skills. It emphasised the importance of both pre-service and in-service training to ensure teachers can manage diverse classrooms effectively. However, the lack of consistent implementation of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) continues to hinder inclusion globally, underscoring the need to translate conceptual knowledge into actionable teaching practices.

Findings on demographic variables show mixed results. Deku (2002) reported no significant gender difference in teacher competence in Ghana, while Purdukoca (2021, as cited in Ruchika & Sharma, 2025) found similar results in Turkey. However, regional variations suggest contextual factors may shape gender-based differences in teaching domains. Regarding educational qualification, Yusuf and Sari (2017) found that Indonesian special education teachers generally displayed good competencies, though differences existed across specific domains. Conversely, Rodriguez and Abocejo (2018) found that pre-service teachers demonstrated strong teaching performance despite having limited academic mastery, suggesting that practical experience often outweighs formal qualifications.

In India, implementation gaps persist due to systemic, not individual, deficiencies. Das, Kuyini, and Desai (2013) revealed that nearly 70% of regular teachers lacked special education training, while Bhatnagar and Das (2013) noted that 95% of Delhi teachers had no specialised preparation. In Manipur, Wangkheirakpam and Singh (2017) identified a critical absence of IEPs and trained personnel, despite legal mandates under the RPWD Act (Government of India, 2016). Such findings emphasise that bridging the competence–practice divide requires addressing systemic barriers—insufficient infrastructure, limited professional development, and inadequate institutional support—rather than teacher inadequacy alone.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study employed a descriptive survey method to examine the professional competence and pedagogical practices of special teachers in Manipur. Using a census survey approach, all 250 special teachers from 23 recognised special institutions across 11 districts (38 males, 15.2%; 212 females, 84.8%) were included, ensuring complete population coverage. Data were collected using two self-developed instruments: the Special Teachers' Competence Scale (STCS), which measures nine competency dimensions, and the Special Teachers' Practice Test (STPT), assessing ten pedagogical practice domains. Since the data were non-normally distributed (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk, $p = 0.000$), non-parametric methods were applied. Analysis was conducted using SPSS (version 2021), employing descriptive statistics (Mean, SD), the Mann-Whitney U test for comparing independent groups (gender, qualification), and the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test to compare dependent variables (competence vs. practice). This approach enabled a comprehensive and statistically robust evaluation of the interrelationship between professional competence and teaching practices.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives guided the present study:

1. To analyse the competencies and Pedagogical Practices of special teachers in inclusive education in Manipur by gender

2. To examine the competencies and Pedagogical Practices of special teachers in inclusive education in Manipur by educational qualification.

3. To compare the overall level of competencies and practices of special teachers in inclusive education.

4. To suggest evidence-based recommendations to improve quality teaching and learning in inclusive education in the state.

5. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the above objectives, the following null hypotheses were formulated for statistical testing:

1. H€: There is no significant difference in the competencies and Pedagogical Practices of special teachers in inclusive education in Manipur based on gender.

2. H€ , : There is no significant difference in the competencies and Pedagogical Practices of special teachers in inclusive education in Manipur based on educational qualification.

3. H€ *f* : There is no significant difference in the overall level of competencies and pedagogical practices of special teachers in inclusive classroom settings.

6. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

6.1 Objective 1: To analyse the competencies of special teachers in inclusive education in Manipur by gender

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
Overall	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Teachers' Pedagogical Practices	250	44.13	6.728	26	57
Competency of Teachers	250	344.5240	24.14534	298.00	382.00
Gender	250	1.85	.360	1	2

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for special teachers' competencies and pedagogical practices in inclusive education. The data from 250 teachers show a mean score of **44.13** (SD = 6.73) for pedagogical practices, indicating a moderate to high level of engagement in inclusive teaching practices. The competency score (M = 344.52, SD = 24.15) also reflects a generally high degree of professional competence among teachers. The gender variable (M = 1.85, SD = 0.36) suggests a sample predominantly composed of females. Overall, these results depict a relatively competent teaching workforce actively engaged in inclusive education across Manipur.

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U Test

Ranks				
Overall	**Gender**	**N**	**Mean Rank**	**Sum of Ranks**
Teachers' Pedagogical Practices	Male	38	109.61	4165.00
	Female	212	128.35	27210.00
	Total	250		
Competency of Teachers	Male	38	136.18	5175.00
	Female	212	123.58	26200.00
	Total	250		

Table 2 presents the mean ranks of teachers' pedagogical practices and competencies by gender. Female teachers scored higher in pedagogical practices (Mean Rank = 128.35) than males (Mean Rank = 109.61), indicating slightly stronger inclusive teaching practices. Conversely, males ranked higher in professional competency (Mean Rank = 136.18) than females (Mean Rank = 123.58). These variations suggest minor gender-based differences in both domains; however, mean ranks alone cannot establish statistical significance. Overall, while male teachers exhibit marginally higher professional competence, female teachers appear to demonstrate more effective and inclusive pedagogical practices within classroom settings, reflecting nuanced gender tendencies.

Table 3: Test Statistics[a]

Test Statistics[a]		
	Overall Teachers' Practices	**Overall Competency of Teachers**
Mann-Whitney U	3424.000	3622.000
Wilcoxon W	4165.000	26200.000
Z	-1.476	-.996
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.140	.319
a. Grouping Variable: Gender		

Table 3 presents the Mann–Whitney U results comparing gender differences in teachers' competencies and pedagogical practices. For practices (U = 3424.000, Z = –1.476, p = 0.140) and competencies (U = 3622.000, Z = –0.996, p = 0.319), both p-values exceed 0.05, indicating no significant gender-based differences. Thus, the null hypothesis (H€) is retained, confirming that gender does not significantly influence professional competence or inclusive teaching practices. Overall, both male and female special teachers in Manipur demonstrate comparable competency levels and pedagogical engagement, reflecting equitable professional preparedness and inclusive classroom practices across genders.

6.2 Objective 2.To analyse the competencies of special teachers in inclusive education in Manipur by educational qualification.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

Overall	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Teachers' Pedagogical Practices	250	44.13	6.728	26	57
Competency of Teachers	250	344.5240	24.14534	298.00	382.00
Educational Qualification	250	1.87	.339	1	2

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for teachers' pedagogical practices and competencies in inclusive education, categorised by educational qualification. The results show that, on average, teachers scored **44.13 (SD = 6.73)** on pedagogical practices and **344.52 (SD = 24.15)** on competencies, suggesting consistently high levels of professional skill and inclusive classroom engagement across all respondents. The mean value for educational qualification **(M = 1.87, SD = 0.34)** indicates that most teachers in the sample were **graduates,** with a smaller proportion holding **postgraduate degrees.** Overall, the data suggest a generally competent teaching population, regardless of qualification level.

Table 5: Mann-Whitney U Test

Ranks				
Overall	**Educational Qualification**	**N**	**Mean Rank**	**Sum of Ranks**
Teachers' Pedagogical Practices	Post Graduate	33	136.36	4500.00
	Graduate	217	123.85	26875.00
	Total	250		
Competency of Teachers	Post Graduate	33	123.15	4064.00
	Graduate	217	125.86	27311.00
	Total	250		

Table 5 displays the mean ranks of teachers' pedagogical practices and competencies by educational qualification. Postgraduates scored higher in pedagogical practices (Mean Rank = 136.36) than graduates (Mean Rank = 123.85), indicating slightly greater engagement in inclusive teaching. Conversely, graduates showed a marginally higher competency rank (125.86) than postgraduates (123.15). These minor differences suggest that educational

qualification has little impact on overall competence or practice. The variations likely stem from individual experience or contextual factors rather than degree level. Overall, both groups exhibit comparable professional competence, with postgraduates showing slightly stronger tendencies towards inclusive teaching.

Table 6: Test Statistics[a]

Test Statistics[a]		
	Overall Teachers' Pedagogical Practices	Overall Competency of Teachers
Mann-Whitney U	3222.000	3503.000
Wilcoxon W	26875.000	4064.000
Z	-.929	-.202
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.353	.840
a. Grouping Variable: Educational Qualification		

Table 6 shows the Mann–Whitney U results comparing competencies and pedagogical practices by educational qualification. For practices (U = 3222.000, Z = –0.929, p = 0.353) and competencies (U = 3503.000, Z = –0.202, p = 0.840), both p-values exceed 0.05, indicating no significant differences between graduate and postgraduate teachers. Thus, the null hypothesis (H€ ,) is retained, confirming that educational qualification does not significantly influence professional competence or inclusive teaching practices. These findings highlight that both groups demonstrate similar preparedness, suggesting that professional experience and in-service training are more influential in shaping effective teaching competencies and practices.

6.3 Objective 3: To compare the overall level of competencies and practices of special teachers in inclusive education.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
Overall	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Teachers' Pedagogical Practices	250	44.13	6.728	26	57
Competency of Teachers	250	344.5240	24.14534	298.00	382.00

Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics for the competencies and pedagogical practices of special teachers in inclusive education. The mean score for teachers' pedagogical practices is 44.13 (SD = 6.73), while the mean score for competency is substantially higher at 344.52 (SD = 24.15). These results suggest that teachers exhibit a high level of professional competency but a moderate level of pedagogical practice in inclusive settings. The variation in standard deviations suggests some inconsistency among teachers in both competencies and practices. Overall, the data indicate that while teachers possess adequate professional knowledge, the extent to which they apply this knowledge in actual inclusive teaching practices may vary.

Table 8: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

Ranks				
Overall		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Competency of Teachers – Teachers' Pedagogical Practices	Negative Ranks	0[a]	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	250[b]	125.50	31375.00
	Ties	0[c]		
	Total	250		
a. Overall Competency of Teachers < Overall Teachers' Pedagogical Practices				
b. Overall Competency of Teachers > Overall Teachers' Pedagogical Practices				
c. Overall Competency of Teachers = Overall Teachers' Pedagogical Practices				

Table 8 presents the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test results comparing overall competencies and pedagogical practices of special education teachers. All 250 teachers scored higher on competencies than on practices, with no negative ranks and a mean rank of 125.50 (sum = 31,375.00). This indicates that teachers possess stronger theoretical and professional knowledge than practical classroom application. The evident competence–practice gap likely arises from systemic challenges such as limited resources, large class sizes, and inadequate institutional support. Thus, while teachers are well-trained in inclusive principles, greater emphasis on practical implementation is crucial to enhance classroom effectiveness and promote genuine inclusion.

Table 9: Test Statistics[a]

Test Statistics[a]	
	Competency of Teachers - Teachers' Pedagogical Practices
Z	-13.708[b]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	
b. Based on negative ranks.	

Table 9 reports the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test results comparing competencies and pedagogical practices. The computed value, Z = –13.708, with p = 0.000, indicates a statistically significant difference at the 0.01 level of significance. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H€ *f*) is rejected. It means a substantial distinction between teachers' competencies and their pedagogical practices, with competency levels being notably higher. The result highlights that while teachers are professionally skilled and knowledgeable, their actual teaching practices do not fully reflect this competence, emphasising the need for continuous professional development and practical implementation training in inclusive education.

7. DISCUSSION

The study offers a critical evaluation of the professional landscape of special teachers in Manipur, examining their competencies and pedagogical practices within the framework of inclusive education policies. The retention of null hypotheses H€ and H€ , reveals no

significant differences in overall competencies or teaching practices based on gender ($p > 0.140$) or qualification ($p > 0.353$), indicating equitable professional preparedness across these groups. However, domain-specific variations emerged: female teachers outperformed males in Student Assessment and Evaluation ($p = 0.017$) and in collaborative and assessment practices ($p = 0.016$, $p = 0.031$), reflecting their strengths in reflective and relational teaching dimensions. Male teachers, though descriptively higher in overall competence, lacked statistically significant domain advantages.

Regarding educational qualification, the non-significant results suggest that professional experience and training rigour influence teaching competence more strongly than academic degrees, aligning with prior research (Rodriguez &Abocejo, 2018). The most striking result is the highly significant difference between teachers' competencies ($M = 344.52$) and their pedagogical practices ($M = 44.13$) ($Z = –13.708$, $p < 0.000$), confirming a pervasive Competence–Practice Gap. Teachers demonstrate strong theoretical knowledge but limited classroom application, a phenomenon linked to systemic deficiencies such as the lack of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) and resource constraints (Wangkheirakpam& Singh, 2017).

Competency rankings reveal high proficiency in Professional Ethics and Pedagogical Knowledge, but weaknesses in Effective Communication and Instructional Adaptability—key competencies for inclusion in multilingual classrooms. The study concludes that bridging the competence–practice divide requires systemic reform, resource equity, and targeted professional development focused on communicative and adaptive skills to actualise inclusive education goals.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The study provides a definitive empirical assessment of the professional landscape of special teachers in Manipur. The analysis confirms that the state possesses a workforce that is both technically competent ($M = 344.52$) and ethically dedicated, achieving a commendable baseline of equitable preparedness across gender and educational qualifications.

However, the rejection of the core hypothesis (H€ f : $Z = –13.708$, p=0.000) reveals a pervasive and highly significant Competence–Practice disparity. This finding presents a defining paradox: teachers possess the requisite skills, but systemic constraints, institutional inequality between the public and private sectors, and a lack of infrastructural support prevent these competencies from being fully and consistently applied in the classroom. This systemic failure undermines the effective implementation of legal mandates, such as the RPWD Act (2016). Furthermore, while core competencies like Professional Ethics and Pedagogical Knowledge are strong, crucial skills for inclusion, namely Effective Communication and Instructional Adaptability, are comparatively weak.

In conclusion, achieving authentic inclusive education in Manipur necessitates a transformation of the entire system—not just the teacher training programs. Reform must focus on operationalising inclusive ideals by enforcing policy compliance (especially IEP implementation), investing in equitable resources for public schools, and strengthening the deficient skills of communication and adaptability through recurrent, context-sensitive professional development. By aligning teacher capability with a supportive systemic infrastructure, Manipur can fulfil its national policy commitments and ensure equitable outcomes for all learners.

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