

**TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION. A CORRELATIONAL STUDY ON
A SAMPLE OF ITALIAN PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERSONAL
VALUES AND ATTITUDES.**

**VERSO L'EDUCAZIONE INCLUSIVA. UNO STUDIO
CORRELAZIONALE SUI VALORI PERSONALI E GLI
ATTEGGIAMENTI DI UN CAMPIONE DI DOCENTI ITALIANI
PRE-SERVICE.**

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ABSTRACT

The research investigates the hypothesis that teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education may be related to their value priorities. Specifically, it is hypothesized that some teachers' personal values correlate positively with their attitudes toward inclusive education. The study, conducted during a pre-service teacher training course, involved a sample of 647 student teachers. The Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ-RR) (Schwartz, 2012) and the Multidimensional Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES) (Mahat, 2008). A bivariate linear regression analysis was performed to detect the correlation between the two variables examined statistically. The bivariate statistical analysis confirms a significant positive relationship between the values of Self-transcendence and Openness to Change with the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward inclusive education. It emerged that the more a teacher approves of these values, the more she tends to favor of attitudes related to inclusive education. The results of this study suggest that values should be considered in teacher training programs to improve the implementation of inclusive education policies.

La ricerca indaga l'ipotesi che gli atteggiamenti degli insegnanti nei confronti dell'educazione inclusiva possano essere correlati alle loro priorità valoriali. Nello specifico, si ipotizza che alcuni valori personali degli insegnanti si correlino positivamente ai loro atteggiamenti nei riguardi dell'educazione inclusiva. Lo studio, condotto durante un corso di formazione per insegnanti pre-service, ha coinvolto un campione di 647 docenti in formazione. Per indagare i valori degli insegnanti e valutare l'atteggiamento dei docenti nei confronti dell'educazione inclusiva sono stati somministrati il Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ-RR) (Schwartz, 2012) e la Multidimensional Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES) (Mahat, 2008). Per rilevare statisticamente la correlazione tra le due variabili esaminate è stata effettuata un'analisi di Regressione Lineare Bivariata. L'analisi statistica bivariata conferma l'esistenza di una relazione positiva significativa dei valori di Auto-trascendenza e Apertura al Cambiamento con gli atteggiamenti dei docenti pre-service nei riguardi dell'educazione inclusiva. È emerso che più un insegnante approva questi valori, più tende ad essere favorevole agli atteggiamenti correlati all'educazione inclusiva. I risultati di questo studio suggeriscono di considerare i valori nell'ambito dei programmi di formazione dei docenti, al fine di migliorare l'attuazione delle politiche di educazione inclusiva.

KEYWORDS

Values; Attitudes; Pre-service Teachers; Inclusion; Special Pedagogy.
Valori; Atteggiamenti; Docenti Pre-service; Inclusione; Pedagogia Speciale.

Introduction

Promoting Inclusive Education: Challenges, Policies, and Practices.

Education is a fundamental human right. Educating everyone is a moral imperative. Not surprisingly, the international community has pledged to ensure universal access to quality, equitable, and inclusive education by 2030 (UN, 2015). Inclusive education is one dimension of a rights-based quality education that emphasizes equity in access and participation and responds positively to all students' learning needs and competencies (Save the Children, 2014). Inclusive education means all, including students with disabilities, are welcomed by their schools, and supported to reach their full potential. Inclusive education is child-centered and places the responsibility of adaptation on the education system rather than the individual student. Inclusive schools nurture professional learning communities that enable teachers to create optimal learning outcomes, including for students with disabilities,

through best practice approaches and current evidence-based strategies (Save the Children, 2014). Currently, inclusive education has yet to be a consolidated reality. It is, instead, a process that still needs to be faster for many nations, in which all countries are involved at different stages, to respond to the multiple needs of learners, increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion rates from education (Corona, 2019).

According to the *Global Education Monitoring Report* (UNESCO, 2021), 258 million children and young people worldwide are excluded from the school system (17% overall, but 31% in Africa and 21% in Central and South Asia). In all countries (except the wealthy nations of Europe and North America), only 18% of the poorest young people complete secondary school, unlike to their peers born into wealthy families, who succeed 100%. For disabled children, a quarter of countries provide education in separate special schools, 10% opt for integration in standard schools, and only 17% move towards full inclusion. Almost half instead adopt mixed systems (UNESCO, 2021). Nevertheless, training in differentiated environments with *special curricula* contributes to the isolation rather than the social inclusion of people with disabilities. The inclusive environment, on the other hand, stimulates the acquisition of qualifications and skills that increase the opportunities for an independent life, generating well-being and improving the *Quality of Life* for everyone (Giaconi, 2015). Furthermore, a global conception of inclusion emerges from the last twenty years' European and Italian legislative framework, which concerns the school as part of society. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2018) suggests a link between inclusive education and social inclusion in education, employment, and life in the community. In this regard, the international declarations, and statements about inclusive education, such as Education for All (1990), The Salamanca Statement (1994), and The Dakar Framework for Action (2000), have been translated into domestic education statements and policies (Berlach & Chambers, 2011). In Italy, the Ministry of Education, University and Research directive of 27 December 2012 forms the basis of the nation's inclusive policy, adding the legislative decree n. 96 of 7 August 2019, which innovated the legislative decree n. 66 of 2017.

Although scholastic inclusion in the Italian context represents an element inherent in the system at all levels of education and across the board, "*its implementation remains difficult even today*" (Canevaro, 2013). This condition is attributable to the numerous factors influencing its full realization. One of the most significant is teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education (Aiello, 2019; De Boer et al., 2011; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

Policies offer a starting point for providing inclusive education. However, the enactment of a policy does not guarantee its implementation. Even when The

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 mapped out the elements required for meeting special education needs, it did not establish a common understanding of these elements and how these can create an inclusive education environment (Charitaki, 2022, p. 1). As such, even if policies are enacted for the educational support of people with disabilities, they cannot be implemented without the will of social actors (Charitaki, 2022).

A growing body of literature suggests that attitudes toward inclusive education are related to various personal and contextual factors. In this regard, the article investigates the hypothesis that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education may be related to their value priorities (Perrin, Jury & Desembre, 2021). This study aims to analyse the link between these two constructs, in the belief that people need to be trained before becoming in-service teachers to promote inclusion in education (Aiello & Sharma, 2018).

1.1. Pre-service Teacher Values and Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education: Meanings, Definitions, and Explanations.

Teachers are the most essential component of the education system. They can influence students and shape their behavior more than other actors involved in the school and social context. Teachers are also the primary bearers of values (Schwartz, 1992), transmitting them to future generations through a hidden curriculum. Bakioğlu and Tokmak (2009) argued that teachers' values influence their students and affect educational processes. This is because behaviors are shaped mainly by individual value priorities. Values are abstract concepts that cannot be considered fleeting feelings or impromptu choices. They involve always understanding and are not necessarily visible. Values affect individuals' level of cooperation, selective perception, and the ability to interpret information; determine their field of vision; and play an important role when choosing between alternatives, making judgments, and resolving conflicts (Russel, 2001, p.1).

It is possible to act on your values without being aware of them; they guide people's lives regardless of circumstances (Schwartz, 2012). Booth (2011) describes values as essential guides that give a sense of direction and underpin actions toward others. The *Theory of the Universal Structure of Human Values* elaborated by S. H. Schwartz (2012), tested in 75 countries around the world, confirmed that values are correlated to the behavior that corresponds to them, offering scientific proof of the validity of the refined theory (Schwartz & Butenko, 2014). The author identifies four areas of higher order values (Higher Order Values) from which 19 overall values are articulated, divided, and conceptually defined (Fig. 1).

Higher-Order Values	Definition
Self-enhancement	Enhancing one's own personal interests
Openness to change	Pursuing whatever intellectual or emotional directions one wishes, however unpredictable or uncertain the outcomes
Self-transcendence	Transcending one's selfish concerns and promoting the welfare of others, and caring for nature
Conservatism	Preserving the status quo and its certainty in relationships with close others, institutions, and traditions.

Fig. 1 Higher-order value and description (Schwartz, 2012).

The 19 identified values, distinguishable in terms of conceptually distinct motivational objectives, are ordered according to the compatibility/similarity of the type of motivational objective they express (Fig. 2). For S.H. Schwartz, the motivational content of a value refers to the direction in which the value orients people's perceptions, behaviors, and decisions. Therefore, if values act as guiding principles, their detection can help predict and understand an individual's behavior. In this sense, studying future teachers' value priorities allows us to predict their future classroom behavior. For these reasons, pre-service teacher value systems have attracted increasing scholarly interest. Furthermore, Rokeach (1973) notably argued that every manipulation that puts a specific value forth significantly affects the assigned attitude.

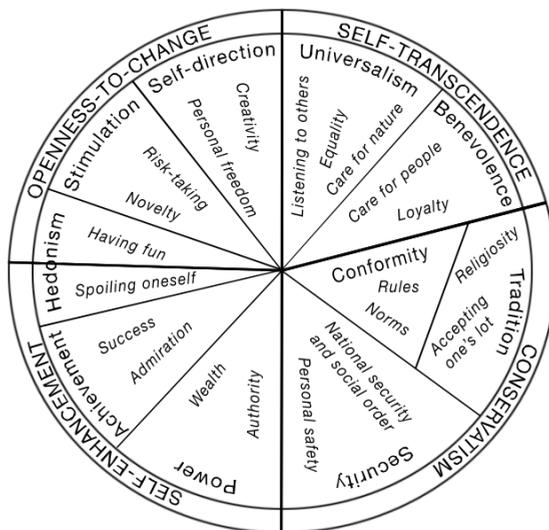
The term “attitudes” refers to “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1), contributing to the prediction of behavioral intentions (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). Research has also demonstrated that teachers with open, positive attitudes toward inclusive education experience greater success in implementing inclusive education (Schmidt & Vrhovnik, 2015; Vogiatzi et al., 2022). Moreover, the European Agency for Development in Special Education and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization both identify that a teacher's attitude toward the inclusion of students with special education needs is one of the most important elements towards the success of an inclusive education program (Charitaki et al., 2022).

According to Smith (1968), attitude is an orientation attributed to an individual, which shapes his thoughts, feelings and behaviors towards objects, people, places, events, and ideas (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). Balcı (2008) argues that the concepts of value and attitude are co-dependent and coexistent. Studies conducted by Th'gersen & Grunert-Beckmann (1997) have confirmed the importance of values in forming and shaping attitudes. For Lussier (1996), we develop positive attitudes when something has value and negative attitudes when it lacks value. Similarly, for McDonald (1993), values are essential to attitudes and behaviors.

Some authors even assume that values cause attitudes (Perrin, Jury & Desombre, 2021). Values could, therefore, be linked to different attitudes (Kristiansen & Zanna, 1988; Rokeach, 1973). Conversely, attitudes could be linked to different values. Consequently, some personal values may support inclusive education practices while others have the opposite effect (Perrin, Jury & Desombre, 2021, p. 2).

The inclusive school transmits and promotes ideas of tolerance, universality, benevolence, recognizing others as *equal in their differences* and in their access to *health and well-being*. Such principles fit Schwartz's definition of self-transcendence values (Boer & Fischer, 2013). Furthermore, it presupposes a predisposition of Openness to Change, another category of values defined by the Israeli author, for implementing practices supporting inclusive innovation. In this sense, it implies a break from traditional practices regarding the education of students with disabilities rooted in the values of conservatism (Plaisance, 2010). The pursuit of personal interests alone, and the relative success and dominance over others, defined by the values of Self-enhancement, represent a barrier to the full implementation of inclusive education.

Therefore, starting from this enriching *theoretical framework*, the research design of the present study will be outlined below.



Self-Direction—Action	Freedom to determine one's own actions
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and change
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification
Achievement	Success according to social standards
Power—Dominance	Power through exercising control over people
Power—Resources	Power through control of material and social resources
Face	Maintaining one's public image and avoiding humiliation
Security—Personal	Safety in one's immediate environment
Security—Societal	Safety and stability in the wider society
Tradition	Maintaining and preserving cultural, family or religious traditions
Conformity—Rules	Compliance with rules, laws, and formal obligations
Conformity—Interpersonal	Avoidance of upsetting or harming other people
Humility	Recognizing one's insignificance in the larger scheme of things
Benevolence—Dependability	Being a reliable and trustworthy member of the ingroup
Benevolence—Caring	Devotion to the welfare of ingroup members
Universalism—Concern	Commitment to equality, justice and protection for all people
Universalism—Nature	Preservation of the natural environment
Universalism—Tolerance	Acceptance and understanding of those who are different from oneself

Fig. 2 Circular Motivational of 19 Values and Value Types in Schwartz's Values Theory (Schwartz, 2012).

2. Materials and Methods

This study investigates the hypothesis that teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education may be related to their value priorities. In line with the studies of Perrin, Jury & Desombre (2021), given these suggested congruences between inclusive education and personal values (Boer & Fischer, 2013; Verplanken & Holland, 2002), it is hypothesized that the values of Self-transcendence and Openness to Change can be positively correlated with teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Conversely, the values of Self-enhancement and Conservatism correlate negatively. Given the objective, bivariate linear regression analysis was adopted, a statistical technique that calculates the estimated relationship between a dependent and an explanatory variable, used to predict the value of one variable based on the value of another variable.

The sample size includes a group of 647 pre-service teachers (=56 males/=591 females) participating in the TFA Sostegno training course, aged 21 to 60 or more. Of the 647 participants, only 620 participants completed both questionnaires. All the participants signed the informed consent form and were assured of respect for their privacy. Each participant provided socio-demographic information: gender, age, province of origin, and school order. The sample's demographic characteristics are shown below (Fig.3). Data collection for the present study took three weeks.

2.1 Tools – PVQ-RR/MATIES

The tools used for data collection were the Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ-RR) (Schwartz, 2012) and the Multidimensional Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES) (Mahat, 2008).

The Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ-RR), designed by S.H. Schwartz based on the Theory of the Universal Structure of Human Values (2012), comprises 57 multiple-choice items. The tool was developed to measure, describe, and detect the 19 value profiles, included within the four higher-order values theorized by the author. Participants ticked a 6-point Likert scale (1= not at all like me / 6= very like me). The tool was administered in the already validated Italian version; therefore, the process of linguistic validation, translation, and back-translation from the original language (forward/backward translation) was not carried out, nor was the

evaluation of the reliability of the internal consistency of each dimension identified with the alpha of Cronbach (coefficient α).

Variable	Subcategory	Percentage	N.
Gender	Male	91,03%	591
	Female	8,07%	56
Age Group	21-29	12,08%	83
	30-39	29,09%	194
	40-49	45,09%	297
	50-59	11,02%	72
	60 e più	0,2%	1
Marital Status	Married	75,08%	490
	Single	24,02%	157
Province	Napoli	37,06%	253
	Avellino	13,03%	88
	Benevento	3,01%	23
	Caserta	9,09%	66
	Salerno	36,01%	217
Educational Stage/Grade Level	Preschool	27,03%	133
	Primary School	50,03%	266
	Lower Secondary School	10,06%	54
	Upper Secondary School	12,88%	102
Education Level	High school diploma	4,03%	26
	Bachelor's /Master's degree	95,67%	619

	PhD	0,3%	2
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Fig. 3 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample.

The Multidimensional Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES), devised by Mahat (2008), assessed teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. The scale aims to effectively measure the affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of teachers' attitudes regarding physical, social, and curricular inclusion. It consists of 18 items on a 6-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The

pilot study analysis indicates that the final three subscales of eighteen items successfully met standards for internal reliability, content validity, construct validity, criterion validity, and convergent validity (Mahat, 2008).

3. Scoring and Data Analysis

To analyze the data obtained from the administration of the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ-RR), the Scoring and Analysis Instructions elaborated by S.H. Schwartz (2012) were provided to us (by mail) directly from the author. The 10 Original Values were analyzed, and subsequently, the scores were computed to get these higher-order values. For Self-transcendence, the score combined the means of 18 items, while for openness to change, the score combined the means of 12 items. For Self-enhancement, the score combined the means of 12 items, while Conservatism combined the means of 15 items. Data analysis on the Multidimensional Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES) indicated a reliability analysis was satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.93$), and a mean score was computed ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.82$). A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to answer the study's questions.

The bivariate statistic was used to establish whether, given two variables, X (personal values) and Y (attitudes towards inclusive education), there is an independent or association relationship between them, i.e., whether there is a concomitant variation between values of the variables taken into consideration $X \rightarrow Y$. Therefore, the statistical and therefore probabilistic relationships were studied, such as covariation and causality (Fig. 4). To examine whether the hypothesized links between values and attitudes could be confirmed for each component of the attitude score, a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted, with attitudes as a factor at three levels (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) and values as predictors (Fig. 5).

Original Values	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation	Range	Coefficient of Variation
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Self-Direction	4,4582 58258	4,5	2,6666 66667	5	0,45737 85256	2,333 3333 3	0,10259 13034
Stimulation	4,5471 47147	214	3	5	0,42050 50272	2	0,09247 667023
Hedonism	4,0168 16817	4	2	5	0,60955 54441	3	0,15175 08694
Achievement	4,0168 16817	4	2	5	0,60955 54441	3	0,15175 08694
Power	2,6783 78378	2,6666 66667	1,3333 33333	5	0,67564 12866	3,666 6666 7	0,25225 75944
Security	4,5753 75375	4,6666 66667	2,3333 33333	5	0,46999 227	2,666 6666 7	0,10272 21226
Conformity	4,4906 90691	4,6666 66667	2,6666 66667	5	0,47401 74708	2,333 3333 3	0,10555 55823
Tradition	3,8642 64264	3,8333 33333	2	5	0,58201 6077	3	0,15061 49779
Benevolence	4,7132 13213	4,8333 33333	3	5	0,34557 19339	2	0,07331 981776
Universalism	4,6616 61662	4,7777 77778	3	5	0,35808 22363	2	0,07681 429119

Fig. 5 Data analysis of the 10 Original Values.

^t $p < .10$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Attitudes toward Inclusive Education	4,43 (0,82)						
Self-transcendence Values	5,01 (0,50)	- 0,40***					
Self-enhancement Values	3,34 (0,80)	-0,07	-0,17**				
Conservatism Values	4,23 (0,73)	-0,02	-	-			
			0,36***	0,53***			
Openness to Change Values	4,51 (0,62)	- 0,21***	- 0,46***	- 0,41***	- 0,17***		
Teaching Experience	-	-0,13	-0,02	-0,02	-0,008 ^t	- 0,00	- 0- 00

Fig. 6 Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between main variables.

	1	2	3	4
Self-Transcendence values				
Openness to Change values	0.46** *			
Cognitive component of the attitude	0.36** *	0.18** *		
Affective component of the attitude	0.21** *	0.19** *	0.51***	
Behavioral component of the attitude	0.44** *	0.22***	0.67 ***	0.53***

Fig. 7 Bivariate correlations between values and the components of the attitude score.

4. Results and Discussion

The bivariate statistical analysis results indicated a significant positive relationship between Self-Transcendence values and pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. It turns out that the more a teacher approves of Self-Transcendence values, the more she tends to be in favor of attitudes related to inclusive education, $B = 0,63$, $SE = 0,08$, $t(620) = 6,34$, $p < 0,001$, $\eta^2 = 0,12$, 95% CI [0,44, 0,80]. Furthermore, the results show that Openness to Change values also tend to be favorable to attitudes related to inclusive education, $B = 0,18$, $SE = 0,07$, $t(620) = 2,36$, $p = 0,024$, $\eta^2 = 0,01$, 95% CI [0,04, 0,34]. On the other hand, the results show a significant negative relationship between Self-enhancement values with teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, $B = -0,22$, $SE = 0,06$, $t(620) = -3,15$, $p = 0,002$, $\eta^2 = 0,02$, 95% CI [-0,39, -0,06]. Finally, in contradiction to our hypothesis and line with the study carried out by Perrin, Jury & Desombre (2021), Conservatism values do not appear to correlate with teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, $B = -0,02$, $SE = 0,06$, $t(620) = -0,32$, $p = 0,74$, $\eta^2 = 0,00$, IC 95% [-0,18, 0,16]. We also found that participants' teaching experience, when present, was significantly related to their attitudes, $B = -0,23$, $SE = 0,09$, $t(620) = -3,06$, $p = 0,004$, $\eta^2 = 0,02$, 95% CI [-0,45, -0,09]. These results show that the more teachers adhere to the values of Self-Transcendence and Openness to Change, the more their attitudes are positive toward inclusive education. Conversely, the more they pursued self-affirming values, the more they expressed negative attitudes toward inclusive education.

Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA), designed to examine whether hypothesized links between values and attitudes can be confirmed for each component of the attitude score, suggests that participants express more positive attitudes on the behavioral component ($M = 4.82$, $SE = .05$) with respect to the cognitive component ($M = 4.31$, $SE = .05$) and affective ($M = 3.70$, $SE = .05$, all $ps < .001$).

The study has some limitations. It is not excluded that these results may have been invalidated by potential social desirability biases that reside mainly in the willingness of future teachers to adhere to the most accredited theoretical frameworks. In this sense, further exploratory and confirmatory research will be needed in the future. These findings suggest that teachers' personal values may be factors influencing teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. For teachers to uphold the ideals that underpin inclusive education, their values should align with the values of Self-Transcendence and Openness to Change. On the contrary, they should not coincide with the values of Self-enhancement (in support of actions aimed at pursuing one's own interests, the search for personal success and domination over others), obstacles to the transformation and inclusive development of educational systems. Nor, least

of all, with the values of Conservatism which, while not related to the teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education, imply the preference for maintaining the status quo, in a perspective of immobility.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Values refer to what is essential to each person, reflect human motivations, and can influence choices (Schwartz, 2012).

The research findings support scientific evidence on the impact of values on attitudes toward inclusive education. Pre-service Teachers find inclusive education challenging, and they have indicated in previous research that they feel they need to be adequately trained during their undergraduate degree to successfully support the diverse needs of all students (Hemmings & Weaven, 2005; Winter, 2006). In this regard, to train teachers, education professionals should also consider values to improve the implementation of inclusive education policies, designing educational activities that support the values of Self-transcendence (Universalism and Benevolence) and Openness to Change (Stimulation and Self-direction) (Carrington et al., 2012). Within the framework of training programs, teacher educators should establish awareness processes: 1. of personal values; 2. their influence on learners; 3. the sense of responsibility relating to "*transferring*" these values to future generations (Ianniello, 2023). As the value priorities of some pre-service teachers may address Self-enhancement values, it should be made explicit in preparation courses that personal value priorities may create resistance to an inclusive educational framework to allow them to rethink and reallocate their priorities' worth. In this sense, teacher educators should use training models, such as Flipped Inclusion, to modify or enhance, even in progress, the *compass* of teachers' reference values (Corona, De Giuseppe & Ianniello, 2020). Moreover, in this way, it influences positive attitudes towards inclusive education, aimed at satisfying the needs of *all students* and valuing each one's *differences* without distinction (Corona, 2014; Sibilio, 2023).

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