

of Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Schools: Teachers and Management's Perspective

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Abstract

This descriptive study, conducted on 88 participants- including the members of the management and senior teachers of public sector mainstream schools from different cities of the Punjab, Pakistan - is aimed to analyze the provision, practices and state of their readiness for inclusive education. The study believes that the members of school management and senior teachers of the mainstream educational institutions of school side can implement inclusive education in their schools if their recommendations are considered seriously. The study reveals that the members of the management and senior teachers of mainstream schools in Punjab are not fully prepared for the education of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. The recent political government of Punjab (Pakistan) has shown keen interest to implement inclusive education in public mainstream schools. Apart from low readiness ratio, the participants demonstrated a positive attitude towards inclusive education and made several recommendations to improve the prevailing situation. A successful inclusion demands for many changes in the existing policies and practices, including admission policy, teaching stratifies, assessment policies, in-service training, and school infrastructure. The participants' readiness ratio for inclusive education (IE) varies from 02% to 44%.

Keywords: inclusive education; readiness for inclusion; inclusion of children with disabilities, mainstream schools

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Introduction

In 1990s, the global community lays down a general principle for inclusive education through declaring equal access to schools for every child (UNESCO, 1990). Many efforts have been reported in literature for teaching children with disabilities in mainstream educational institutions of school's side (USAID, 2010; UNICEF, 2011); but the task appears to be challenging and demanding (Suleymanov, 2015). Inclusive education is an effective approach for the teaching of exceptional children in mainstream schools (UNESCO, 2000b), but its success depends on the provisions, practices and state of readiness of teachers and school management (Odom et al., 2011; Friend & Bursuck, 2011; Alur & Timmons, 2009; UNICEF, 2011; Pasha, 2012). The recent political government of Punjab (Pakistan) has shown keen interest to achieve the target of equal access to schools for every child. However, this goal could not be achieved unless the school management, teachers, and other stakeholders are ready for inclusive education. This study is an attempt to explore this aspect through surveying the school management and senior teachers as 88 participants of mainstream schools.

Literature Review

The education of exceptional learners has been a hot topic of debate since 10 December 1948 when the global community proclaims, "education considered as a basic human right" (UN, 1948). Since then the global community has put its serious efforts to make the education of exceptional learners more effective and productive. These efforts have emerged in the form of various instruments which maintain the right to education for all (UN, 1948; UNESCO, 1960; OHCHR, 1989; UNESCO, 1990; UN, 1993; UNESCO, 1994; UNESCO, 1995; UNESCO, 2000; UNICEF, 2003; UN, 2006). In addition, the global community also issue policy recommendations on Inclusive Education (UNESCO, 2009) and priorities for inclusive education (UNESCO, 2014). These efforts made the global community to acknowledge that the children with disabilities should be educated in mainstream

educational institutions; these educational institutions should act as facilitators and facilitate all students with equal opportunities irrespective of their disabilities (UNESCO, 2003; UNESCO, 2005; UNESCO, 2014).

Since 1990s, it has been advocated that the children with disabilities should be educated in mainstream schools (Sharma et al., 2015; Cummings et al., 2003) to maximize their participation and potential (Booth & Ainscow, 1998). But, Strømstad (2003, p. 34) does not limit inclusion to just participation; rather consider 'inclusion' as "human diversity living and cooperating ... being together isn't really adequate; rather every one, understudies, just as staff, must understand that their words and activities are critical to others since they affect others' lives, emotions, and mental self-view." (Strømstad, 2003). Similarly, Witherell (1991) also not limit inclusion to curricular activities, rather includes ethical aspects and social relations, like "nature and relation to self to other and to culture, and commencements of knowing, connotation, and determination" (p. 84). She argues that relations are fundamental to human experience. The meanings of these relations depend on other actions and intentions (Strømstad, 2003).

Falvey and Givner (2005) consider inclusion as a system of belief. The society must develop a belief that all students have strengths and needs. They can learn from each other and can be valuable to each other. Services and supports should be provided with a common belief that all students having the capability to learn and succeed. Some people refer inclusion to a policy approach which advocates that exceptional children have the equal rights and should be taught in mainstream schools instead of special schools. Lipsky & Gartner (1999) have considered the inclusive education as an integral part of a democratic society. Many authors have argued that inclusion must regard the needs of all learners regardless of their social, cultural, and religious backgrounds and medical conditions (Singh, 2009). Researchers like Lipsky & Gartner (1999) have argued that inclusion does not mean just educating exceptional children in mainstream educational institutions. Inclusion also removes all barriers which children are facing due to gender, class, caste, and religion. Booth et al, (2000) have suggested that children must not be categorized into 'special' and 'general' categories; rather learning barriers

should be removed for all children without creating any kind of divisions among them. Similarly, the global community reaffirm that “Schools ought to oblige all youngsters, paying accommodation to their physical, scholarly, passionate, social, semantic or different conditions.” (Barton, 1997). He has additionally clarified this point “[inclusion] isn't simply about setting crippled understudies in homerooms with their non-impaired companions ... Or maybe, it is about how, where and why, and with what results, we teach all students” (UNESCO,1994, p. 234).

Some researchers have considered inclusive education as a policy matter. The policy approach has not only considered inclusion as educating all children in mainstream schools, but also demands the removal of all policies and practices which promote the exclusion of children with disabilities from mainstream schools. Researchers from the policy approach demand that inclusion must fulfill the requirements of all students, offers different learning styles, and “guarantee quality instruction to all through suitable educational plans, hierarchical courses of action, showing systems, asset use and organization with their networks” (Lipsky and Gartner, 1999).

The importance of inclusive education is growing globally, which appears in the form of a large number of definitions and interpretations. Due to this popularity, inclusive education has been accepted as an over-guiding principle of the 2030 Education Agenda embodied in the ‘Sustainable Development Goal 4’ and is at the core of the transformation of education and of education systems (UNESCO, 2014). The inclusive education has also been considered as “a procedure of reinforcing the limit of training framework to contact all students. It is, along these lines, a general rule that should direct all instructive strategies and works on, beginning from the conviction that training is a principal human right and the establishment for an all the more just society” (Acedo, et al., 2008). Yet, one of the most important key factors which directly affect the success of inclusive education is the level of school management, teachers, and other stakeholders’ awareness, readiness, and professional competence to work with children with disabilities in mainstream formation. This paper reports the finding of a study conducted during three workshop

sessions conducted at the Directorate of Staff Development (Lahore) to find the level of school management and senior teachers' readiness & routing practices for inclusive education in mainstream schools.

Methodology

This research study aimed to instigate the level of school management and senior teachers' readiness & routing practices to work with exceptional learners in government mainstream educational institutions. It is a mixed method research which exploits the potential of mix research methods to address the issue. The qualitative data were collected by audio recording carried out during the three workshop sessions and class discussions. Both deductive and inductive procedures were used for the analysis of verbatim transcripts. For quantitative data collection, a questionnaire was adapted from Pasha (2012) focused on eleven (11) quality education indicators for inclusion in education of children with disabilities (NJCIE, 2010).

Table 1

Quality indicator for inclusive education adopted from (NJCIE, 2010)

S. No	Indicator
1	Admission Policy
2	Management
3	School Climate
4	Participation
5	Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
6	IEPs Development
7	Program Implementation
8	Individual Supports
9	Infrastructure
10	Family-School Partnerships
11	Professional Development

The questions were customized to meet the needs of the local context. A four-point Likert-scale (Likert, 1932), shown in Table 2, is used for scaling the participants' responses.

Table 2

Four-point likert-scale responses detail adapted from pasha (2012)

Sr. No	Likert-scale	Response
1	Fully	There is a lot of proof that the announcement is valid; it is hard to track down approaches to improve
2	Substantially	There is a lot of proof that the announcement is valid, however there are a couple of practices that could be fortified
3	Partially	Some proof can be given that the announcement is valid, however there are various works on requiring improvement or open doors for fortifying
4	Not yet	There is next to no or no proof that the training by and by exists

The survey technique was used to collect the data of participants' responses. For analysis, the responses were grouped, tabled, processed using descriptive statistics in the form of percentages.

Procedure of the Study

The population of research consists of Eighty-Eight (88) senior teachers and members of school management (administrators and head teachers) from 88 public sector mainstream schools situated at different districts of the Punjab. The participants attended a one-day long workshop in three different sessions: Twenty-three (23), Twenty-Five (25) and Forty (40) respectively. These workshops were conducted by the researcher at the Directorate of Special Education, teachers training center, Lahore. None of the participant was holding any degree in special education or employed as 'special education teacher'. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants at the end of each workshop. The response rate of the filled questionnaire was 100%.

Findings and Discussion

Table 3

The participants' responses to quality indicators for inclusive education

Sr. No	Indicators	Frequency				Total	Readiness Ratio in %
		Fully	Substantially	Partially	Not Yet		
1	Philosophy of inclusive education is part of the policy for admission in school.	0 (0%)	4(5%)	13 (15%)	71(81%)	88 (100%)	19%
2	The information on school the board (head instructor and organization) about comprehensive training is cutting-edge.	0(0%)	4 (5%)	10 (11%)	74 (84%)	88 (100%)	16%
3	The school the executives including head instructor, overseers, staff, educators and guardians know about various handicaps and related uncommon needs.	2(2%)	13(15%)	24 (27%)	49(56%)	88 (100%)	44%
4	Understudies with inabilities have equivalent chances to take an interest in both scholastic and socialization exercises	2(2%)	3 (3%)	16*18%)	67(76%)	88 (100%)	24%
5	Educators utilize separated educational program, instructional materials, exercises, and tasks to address an assortment of students' issues.	3(3%)	15(17%)	18(20%)	52(59%)	88 (100%)	41%
6	The administration request that educators get ready Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) for understudies with inabilities.	0(0%)	3(3%)	8(9%)	77(88%)	88 (100%)	13%
7	Diverse appraisal procedures are utilized to survey understudies' advancement in the educational program.	0(0%)	1(1%)	1(1%)	86(98%)	88 (100%)	2%
8	To meet the instructive needs of youngsters with handicaps, instructors give coordinated help to all	0(0%)	0(0%)	2(2%)	86(98%)	88 (100%)	2%

9	understudies. School structures and study halls are developed to address the issues of youngsters with inabilities.	0(0%)	0(0%)	12(14%)	76(86%)	88(100%)	14%
10	Guardians are effectively engaged with school arranging and incorporation activities.	3(3%)	0(0%)	11(13%)	74(84%)	88(100%)	16%
11	Instructors are prepared through in-administration educator preparing to improve their insight into comprehensive training.	3(3%)	2(2%)	7(8%)	76(86%)	88(100%)	14%

Table 3 show the frequency distribution of responses to the statements formulated to assess the readiness for inclusive education through eleven quality indicators for inclusive education.

Table 1 shows the participants' responses about the best practices related to the quality indicators. Through statement #1, 81% of the participants have confirmed that inclusion philosophy is not part of the school's admission policy; illustrating 19% readiness ratio which is less than 50%. The high response rate of 'Not Yet' (81%) shows that the school management and other relevant authorities need to take immediate measures to integrate inclusive philosophy to the admission policy and encourage admitting children with disabilities. The statement# 2 is related to the knowledge of school management about inclusive education. The frequency of participants' responses of the statement varies: 0% ('Fully'), 5% ('Substantially'), 11% ('Partially') and 84% ('Not Yet'); illustrating 19% readiness ratio which is again less than 50%. The high response rate of 'Not Yet' (84%) shows that the school management needs further education/training to update their knowledge about inclusive education. This lack of knowledge may affect their attitude and professional practices towards the teaching of children with disabilities.

The responses' frequency to statement# 3 (2% (fully), 15% (substantially), 27% (partially), and 56% ('not yet')) indicates 44% readiness ratio. It could not be considered encouraging; however, it reflects the 'partial readiness' of the school management and teacher; and could be improved through further training opportunities. The frequency of responses to statement# 4 (2%

(fully), 3% (substantially), 18% (partially), and 76% ('not yet')) indicates 24% readiness ratio. It clearly shows that the students with disabilities do not have equal opportunities to participate in both academic and socialization activities. The response rate of 76% ('not yet') may be due to the non-availability of provisions or funds or due to the admission policy which does not support inclusive education in mainstream schools.

For effective teaching and to enhance students' learning, teachers need to use appropriate pedagogy which could meet a variety of learners need and various learning styles. An adaptation of pedagogical practices according to the individual's need' is viewed as an integral part of developing inclusive practices in mainstream schools (Lewis and Norwich, 2001). The response rate (3% (fully), 17% (substantially), 20% (partially), and 59% ('not yet')) indicates 41% readiness ratio. There are many aspects which can be the reasons of this response. For example, the conventional lecturing method is the most common method used in public sector schools. During the discussion session one participant comments, "Madam, we cannot afford such luxuries [differentiated curriculum, instructional materials, activities, and assignments to meet a variety of learners' needs], I have to cover the course contents, otherwise, I will face an enquiry". This shows that the teachers do not have enough time to offer differentiated curriculum, instructional materials, activities, and assignments to meet a variety of learners' needs.

The response rate of 88% ('not yet') to statements # 6 could be due to the non-availability of children with disabilities in their classrooms as their schools' admission policy does not support inclusive education. The responses of 3% ('Substantially') and 9% ('Partially') to statement# 6 supposed to be from the teachers of those schools in which children with any physical disability are studying. However, the overall readiness ratio of 13% shows that the school management and teachers are not ready for inclusive education.

The responses (0% (fully), 1% (substantially), 1% (partially), and 98% ('not yet')) to the statement# 7 and (0% (fully), 0% (substantially), 2% (partially), and 98% ('not yet')) to the statement# 8 are very obvious as the schools do not support inclusive education admission policy. All the students are taught

and assessed as normal students. The overall readiness ratios of 2% in the both statements clearly demonstrate that the school management and teachers of mainstream schools are not ready for inclusive education.

The responses (0% (fully), 0% (substantially), 14% (partially), and 86% ('not yet')) with a readiness ratio of 14% to the statement# 9 shows that their school's buildings and classrooms are not constructed to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Though such responses could not be said encouraging but seem obvious as mainstream schools are built for normal children. The modification of school buildings and classrooms to accommodate children with disabilities requires special funds which may not be available.

The frequency of responses (3% (fully), 0% (substantially), 13% (partially), and 84% ('not yet')) to the statement# 10 in above table clearly indicate that the majority of schools do not allow parents to get involved in educational planning; indicating lack of collaborative planning practices which is very essential for inclusive education. For effective inclusive education factors like openness, trust and collaboration among teachers, parents, and school management are very essential (Nevin et al. 1994; Singh, 2004). The school management and teachers need to show positive tendency towards inclusive education. Lack of training opportunities is very evident from the frequency of responses (3% (fully), 2% (substantially), 8% (partially), and 86% ('not yet')) with a readiness ratio of 14% to the statement# 11. For implementing inclusive education policy in mainstream schools, in-service trainings are very essential for school management and teachers.

Conclusions

Implementation of inclusion in education in mainstream schools is an important agenda of the Govt. of Punjab, Pakistan. In its "Punjab School Education Sector Plan 2013-2017", the Government has reaffirmed to achieve the goal "Education for All". Recently, the Special Education Department has completed the "Punjab Inclusive Education Project." As discussed in the literature review section, inclusive education is not just teaching of exceptional children in mainstream schools; rather, it is an overall

principle that eliminates all such educational policies, practices, and belief that prevent children with disabilities from mainstream schools. However, the achievement of inclusive education depends on the level of school management and teachers' awareness, readiness, and professional competence to work with children with disabilities in mainstream formation. In the light of eleven indicators for effective inclusive education (NJCIE, 2010) shown in Table 2, the study found that the school management and teachers' readiness ratio vary from 02% to 44%. These findings reveal that the school management and teachers of mainstream schools are not ready yet to implement inclusive education in their schools.

A utmost response rate of 'Not Ready' to all indicators is very obvious, for example admission policy having Inclusion philosophy (81% 'Not Ready'), knowledge about inclusive education (84% 'Not Ready'), awareness of students with different disabilities and related special needs of children (56% 'Not Ready'), opportunities for equal participate in both socialization and academic activities (76%, 'Not Ready'), use of differentiated curriculum, instructional materials, activities, and assignments to encounter a variety of learners' educational needs, (59%'Not Ready'), use of Individual Educational Plans(IEPs) for students with disabilities (88% 'Not Ready'), use of different assessment strategies for students' progress (98%, 'Not Ready'), one-to-one teacher students support to cater the educational needs of children with disabilities (98%'Not Ready') school buildings and classrooms meet the needs of children with disabilities (86% 'Not Ready'), parents involvement in school planning and inclusion initiatives (84%'Not Ready'), availability of in-service training of teachers to acquire knowledge about inclusive education system (86%'Not Ready'). Such responses allow us to conclude that the prevailing situation demands more serious efforts and more in-service training to improve the prevailing situation and make the implement of inclusive education policy successful in mainstream Public sector schools of the Punjab.

The study supports the findings of some other studies, like lack of inclusive educational support in policy of admission (Jha, 2002), lack of information and knowledge about inclusive education system (Pijl, 2010), lack of in- service training opportunities for

school management and teachers (Bourke, 2009), lack of collaborative planning practices, unfriendly infrastructure of schools for children with disabilities (UNICEF, 2003a; 2003b).

Although the study reveals some discouraging results, but it does not mean that the school management and teachers of mainstream schools are against the inclusive education. During the discussion sessions, almost all the participants demonstrated a positive attitude towards inclusive education. However, they demanded that the government must provide more in-service trainings. They also recommended that these trainings should be provided at their schools where the whole staff can learn. This approach will develop a common platform for the school management and teachers. The experts should also practically demonstrate how to work with children with disabilities. Such training will develop their confidence. Giving training to just one person from each school could not produce the required results as one person cannot bring change. Giving training to the whole school will bring them on one pace. Most of the participants argued that teachers have the capability and strength for the implementation of inclusive education if the opportunity of inclusion is provided in an effective way.

Recommendations

The participants have made the following recommendations for the successful implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools:

- Ensure that educational policies and practices must facilitate inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. It may require changes in admission and management policies, school infrastructure, curriculum, evaluation and assessment procedures.
- Special support services must be established to provide necessary support.
- Regular in-service training for the management and teachers should be arranged at their own schools.
- Special advocacy and awareness campaign should be launched to increase the awareness of parents and other family members

having children with disabilities.

- Incentives for teachers and staff should be offered working with children with disabilities.
- An echo system should be launched to develop a positive attitude of the all stakeholders towards educational inclusion for the students with disabilities.

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