Severity of Factors Resisting Implementation of Inclusive Education: A Survey of Public-School Teachers' Perceptions

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Abstract

Given Pakistan's lagging progress in fulfilling its international commitments to educate children with disabilities, inclusive education emerges as the sole tenable solution. This study, employing a descriptive design and survey methodology, delves into the perspectives of regular public-school teachers, recognized as key stakeholders in this pivotal transition. The findings reveal a constellation of interconnected factors impeding successful implementation: insufficient awareness and training among teachers, inaccessible school environments, entrenched social stigmas, negative attitudes, resource limitations, and inadequacies in inclusive curriculum and instruction. Addressing these challenges necessitates a multifaceted approach encompassing comprehensive awareness campaigns, infrastructural upgrades, targeted teacher training programs, strategic resource mobilization, and proactive community engagement.

Keywords: inclusive education, barriers, public school, Pakistan

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Introduction

Inclusive education is increasingly viewed as a means to achieve a just future for all children (Ackah-jnr, 2020). The Salamanca Statement (1994) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have spurred a paradigm shift towards inclusive education as a human right (Majoko, 2020). This pedagogical concept, enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), aims to eliminate barriers to schooling and ensure that all students, regardless of their differences, are placed in regular classrooms within their local communities (Köpfer & Óskarsdóttir, 2019; Bui et al., 2010; Alquraini & Gut, 2012). At its core, inclusive education is driven by the imperative to make education accessible to every learner (Slee, 2018).

Studies suggest that majority of children with disabilities stay out of school in Pakistan (Hameed & Manzoor, 2016). This situation arises regardless of the country's commitment to bringing out of school children with and without disabilities to the schools. Approximately 60.5% of students with disabilities in the USA receive more than 80% of their instruction within general education classrooms (US Department of Education, 2022). The global discourse on inclusive education has seen increased attention, with many countries, including Pakistan, aligning themselves with major international commitments to cater to students with disabilities. Pakistan, however, faces challenges in actualizing inclusive educational practices, despite its commitment to these international frameworks.

In the Pakistani context, education is provided to students with disabilities through separate or special schools, categorized into four groups: (1) physical disability, (2) intellectual and developmental disability, (3) visual impairment (blindness), and (4) hearing impairment (deafness). Estimates indicate that approximately 15% of the total population in Pakistan, equating to around 27 million individuals, possess disabilities (A.S.E.R, 2015). Of this population, only 4% of children with disabilities have currently gained access to formal schooling (Hameed & Manzoor, 2014). Moreover, according to the DGSE (2006) report, 91% of educational institutions catering to children with disabilities are situated in urban areas, with a mere 9% serving rural areas. This spatial distribution is incongruent with the residence patterns of the majority of children with disabilities, who predominantly reside in rural areas. Despite concerted efforts from both public and private sectors, the existing educational landscape falls significantly short of ensuring comprehensive access to inclusive education, thereby perpetuating a substantial educational divide.

Literature Review

Given the circumstances, the imperative for fostering inclusion emerges as the primary avenue for facilitating educational access for children with disabilities. The Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training (2017) identifies unfriendly school environments as a significant impediment to the realization of the right to education for children with disabilities. Scholarly

discourse underscores that inclusive education centers on the comprehensive education of all children, recognizing their diverse abilities, needs, and learning expectations (Lautenbach & Heyder, 2019). On an international scale, a comprehensive review encompassing 26 studies reveals that most teachers within regular education exhibit non-supportive or negative attitudes toward inclusive education (Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2011). Conversely, Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) assert that teachers who have undergone extensive specialized education on disabilities tend to harbor positive attitudes toward inclusion. Additionally, Ghanizadeh, Bahredar, and Moeini (2006) identify a positive correlation between the level of education and knowledge related to inclusion, noting its impact on teachers' attitudes. Correspondingly, Batsiou et al. (2008) discover a significant association between knowledge levels and teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education.

Problem Statement

Pakistan, as a participant in the global commitment to inclusive education for children with special needs, has encountered challenges in translating these commitments into practical implementation. This study aims to investigate and identify the factors hindering the implementation of inclusive education, as perceived by regular public-school teachers.

Objectives of the Study

The present study was aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the perceptions of regular public-school teachers about the factors impeding the successful implementation of inclusive education policy in Pakistan.
2. To evaluate the severity, as perceived by regular public-school teachers, of the identified factors that hinder the implementation of inclusive education policy in Pakistan.

Methodology

The present study was quantitative in nature. Descriptive research design was utilized, and survey methods were employed to collect the data. The survey instrument comprised eight sections, each with ten closed-ended statements assessing teachers' awareness of inclusive education, school accessibility, attitudes towards it, resource availability, personal perceptions, social views, impact on teaching and curriculum, and perspectives on policy implementation. The researcher conducted a pilot test with 100 respondents in Bahawalnagar, Pakistan, collecting data directly from them. Analyzed through SPSS, the instrument's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a high value of .93, indicating strong internal consistency. The study employed a simple random sampling technique to select 383 teachers from the Punjab Education Department's official teacher database (http://schoolportal.punjab.gov.pk/sed_census/). This database provided a

comprehensive and unbiased representation of all teachers in the province, ensuring the sample accurately reflected the population of regular public high school teachers in Punjab. The required sample was selected from Bahawalnagar, Rawalpindi, and Sialkot districts. After data collection, responses to closed-ended questions were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The frequency and percentage were calculated for each response on a dichotomous scale and average mean was calculated for each of the eight factors to assess the severity of the factor.

Results

Results of the study are presented below:

Table 1
Perceptions of the teachers about factors resisting implementation of inclusive education

Sr. No.	Statements	Mean	St. Deviation	Min	Max
	Awareness of teachers about inclusive education				
1	Children with special needs can be included in regular schools/class rooms	1.29	.455	1	2
2	Inclusive classroom can enhance the learning of a student with special needs as well as ordinary students	1.49	0501	1	2
3	Children with special needs can learn in regular classroom with normal children	1.29	.453	1	2
4	Learning opportunities can be provided to children with special needs in regular classroom with special instructional support	1.63	.484	1	2
5	Inclusion is the better solution of educational problems of children with special needs as compared to segregated special education centers	1.32	.467	1	2
6	Achievement of goal of EDUCATION FOR ALL can only be achieved by including children with special needs in regular schools	1.42	.494	1	2
7	Educational needs of children with special needs can be fulfilled in regular classroom	1.28	.452	1	2
8	Regular school curriculum can be taught to children with special needs	1.43	.495	1	2
9	Inclusive educational system can play a better role in the lives of children with special needs to make them active participant of a society	1.63	.484	1	2

10	Inclusive education will also teach ordinary children to take the social responsibility of ownership for their special peers.	1.70	.460	1	2
	Average Mean	**1.45**			
	Access to School				
11	This school is accessible for ALL children in the community	1.63	.484	1	2
12	Main gate of this school is wider and proper enough for children with special needs to get inside of the school (wheelchair users, white can users)	1.84	.371	1	2
13	Classrooms are accessible for ALL children (including children with special needs)	1.43	.495	1	2
14	Classrooms are wider and have enough space to freely mobile for children with special needs.	1.62	.487	1	2
15	Classroom setting and seating arrangement allows children with special needs to learn effectively	1.57	.496	1	2
16	Toilets are accessible and usable for children with special needs	1.51	.501	1	2
17	Playgrounds, assembly and rest area are accessible for children with special needs	1.52	.500	1	2
18	Canteen is there in the school and it is accessible for children with special needs	1.48	.500	1	2
19	Ramps are there in the school for children with special needs to approach the higher places (classrooms etc.)	1.25	.431	1	2
20	Upper stories of the school are accessible for children with special needs	1.17	.376	1	2
	Average Mean	**1.50**			
	Attitude of the teachers towards inclusive education				
21	Ordinary schoolteacher can cater the needs of both students with special needs and ordinary students in inclusive classroom	1.25	.434	1	2
22	An ordinary teacher can adapt alternative teaching strategies after training	1.69	.463	1	2
23	Ordinary schoolteacher can work comfortably with the shadow teacher to	1.58	.494	1	2

	meet the needs of all learners (ordinary & Special)				
24	Different ways of assessment and evaluation can easily be adopted to address the individual needs of learners (ordinary and special)	1.67	.472	1	2
25	Flexible classroom settings will be helpful to cater the needs of all students (ordinary & Special)	1.81	.393	1	2
26	Specialized learning material can be prepared and provided to all learners according to their needs (special educational need)	1.68	.465	1	2
27	Inclusive classroom setting will create better learning environment for all kinds of learners	1.64	.480	1	2
28	Inclusion of special need learners in extra & co curricular activities will create a better social environment in school	169	.461	1	2
29	Inclusive institutes can provide better opportunities for development of balanced personalities of all learners	1.70	.459	1	2
30	Inclusive institutes will lay down the foundation for the better society which will include all members on equal basis in every aspect of life	1.74	.437	1	2
	Average Mean	**1.65**			
	Resources				
31	Schools can work easily for learners with special needs with available resources	1.46	.499	1	2
32	Specialized teaching staff will be required to run inclusive institute successfully	1.81	.395	1	2
33	Working teachers can handle the students with special needs after having some special training	1.61	.488	1	2
34	Current building is appropriate to cater the learners with special needs	1.23	.421	1	2
35	Current building structure can be re-designed to cater the needs of learners with special needs	1.70	.457	1	2
36	Specially designed and equipped buildings would be needed to cater the students with special needs	1.77	.420	1	2
37	Specially designed teaching material would be required to enhance the	1.89	.313	1	2

	learning of the students with special needs				
38	More resources would be required to exercise the alternative ways of evaluation and assessment	1.86	.351	1	2
39	All stake holders can be motivated to create and run an inclusive setup	1.74	.440	1	2
40	A resource center will be required to meet the special needs of diversified learners	1.82	.383	1	2
	Average Mean	**1.69**			

	Personal views, beliefs and abilities about inclusive education				
41	If government assigns the task of teaching children with special needs to me, I will be able to teach them with minimal training	1.58	.493	1	2
42	If government assigns the task of teaching children with special needs to me, I will be able to teach them after a detailed training	1.61	.488	1	2
43	Students who are two or more grades blow their age level should be in special school	1.45	.498	1	2
44	Students with Mental Retardation, Hearing Impairment & Visual Impairment can be included in regular classroom	1.23	.421	1	2
45	Students with emotional and behavioral disorders can be included in regular classroom	1.37	.484	1	2
46	My educational and professional background helps me to teach children with special needs	1.46	.499	1	2
47	I have ability to adapt the curriculum, instruction and learning environment according to needs of all learners (Normal & Special)	1.61	.488	1	2
48	I feel supported by administrators and government to cater children with disabilities in regular school	1.42	.494	1	2
49	Special education teachers may lose their jobs if children with special needs will be included in regular school	1.45	.499	1	2
50	Regular school will need the help of special education teachers to successfully include the children with special needs	1.85	.359	1	2

	Average Mean	**1.50**			
	Social barriers resisting implementation of inclusive education				
51	Parents of ordinary children will welcome the children with special needs when children with special needs will be taught along with their normal children	1.44	.497	1	2
52	Parents of ordinary children will resist the inclusion of children with special needs with their ordinary children	1.61	.489	1	2
53	The community will support the idea of inclusion of children with special needs in regular classrooms.	1.33	.469	1	2
54	School can get help from society stake holders to include the children with special needs in regular classroom (such as politically effective persons)	1.52	.500	1	2
55	School can get technical help from society (such as assessment by community doctor & psychologist)	1.59	.493	1	2
56	Needs of children with disabilities can be fulfilled by utilizing locally available resources	1.42	.494	1	2
57	A sense of respect for diversity can be created in society through inclusive education	1.65	.478	1	2
58	It is good for society to accept persons with disabilities as active participants of society	1.89	.316	1	2
59	It is our religious obligation to treat all types of persons on the basis of equality	1.86	.385	1	2
60	Inclusive education will create the sense of being important and active participants of society in children with special needs	1.75	.431	1	2
	Average Mean	**1.60**			
	Efficiency of teachers in teaching, curriculum and instruction				
61	Learners who require specialized academic support gain in confidence and emotional security in regular classroom.	1.44	.497	1	2
62	Learners who require specialized academic support are demanding and require greater teacher's input.	1.77	.421	1	2
63	Learners should be removed from the class to receive any specialized academic support.	1.69	.462	1	2

64	Teaching methods can be adapted according to specialized instructional needs of learners with disabilities.	1.78	.418	1	2
65	Content of teaching can also be adapted according to the specialized instructional needs of learners with disabilities.	1.74	.441	1	2
66	Physical facilities can also be adapted according to specialized needs of children with disabilities	1.82	.387	1	2
67	I think, curriculum of difficult subjects (such as mathematics, science, computer science) should be reduced for children with special needs	1.64	.479	1	2
68	Science and mathematics can be taught to children with visual impairment, hearing impairment & intellectual disabilities	1.39	.488	1	2
69	Individualized educational program (IEP) can help teachers to cater the needs of children with special needs in regular classroom	1.77	.420	1	2
70	Specialized training of teaching learners with special needs will be required for me to teach children with special needs effectively	1.83	.380	1	2
	Average Mean	**1.69**			

Table 1. presents a descriptive analysis of regular public high school teachers' perceptions regarding factors hindering the implementation of inclusive education policy based on mean and standard deviation. The table reveals that lack of awareness about inclusive education (Mean = 1.45) is perceived as the most significant factor impeding implementation. This is closely followed by inaccessibility to school (Mean = 1.50) and personal views, beliefs, and abilities of teachers (Mean = 1.50), both of which are perceived as equally impactful. Social barriers (Mean = 1.60) emerge as the third major factor, followed by negative teacher attitudes (Mean = 1.65). Finally, both efficiency of available resources & lack of required resources (Mean = 1.69) and teaching curriculum and instruction issues (Mean = 1.69) are seen as the least impactful factors hindering implementation.

Conclusion

Implementing inclusive education in Pakistan requires overcoming significant challenges, each demanding specific intervention. The most critical hurdle is the lack of awareness among teachers, who need comprehensive campaigns to dispel misconceptions and build acceptance. Equally crucial are infrastructure upgrades to make schools accessible for all students, eliminating

physical barriers that currently hinder inclusion. Addressing teacher apprehension through targeted training on inclusive practices, disability awareness, and support systems is vital to build their confidence and skills. Furthermore, improving teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education necessitates practical awareness programs to challenge existing biases and foster positive perspectives. Proactive community engagement through partnerships and collaborations is essential to address potential social resistance fueled by negative perceptions about children with special needs. Additionally, resource constraints require strategic allocation and increased efficiency, coupled with community-based resource mobilization through the CBR approach, to bridge the gap and support inclusive education initiatives. While less severe, curriculum and instruction challenge still demand specialized training and resources to ensure successful implementation, achievable through in-service teacher training programs focused on inclusive practices. By prioritizing and addressing these interconnected challenges, Pakistan can pave the way for a successful inclusive education system, guaranteeing quality education for every child.

Discussion

Teacher attitudes and knowledge also play a crucial role in facilitating inclusive education. Unfortunately, research like that of Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2011) reveals that many regular education teachers hold negative or non-supportive attitudes towards inclusion. This highlights the need for targeted training programs focused on disability awareness, inclusive practices, and support systems. In the context of Pakistan, despite the country's commitment to international frameworks, studies like those by Hameed and Manzoor (2016) reveal a substantial gap between policy and practice, with the majority of children with disabilities remaining out of school. This stark reality contrasts with the situation in countries like the USA, where data indicates that 60.5% of students with disabilities receive a significant portion of their instruction within general education classrooms (US Department of Education, 2022).

Recommendations

Following recommendations are made on the basis of recommendations:

1. Develop and implement comprehensive training programs for regular education teachers. These programs should focus on disability awareness, inclusive teaching practices, and the use of support systems. This will equip teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively support students with disabilities in their classrooms.
2. Address inaccessible school environments by allocating resources for modifications to buildings and facilities. This includes installing ramps,

3. elevators, accessible restrooms, and specialized equipment. This will ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities.

4. Foster collaborative efforts with communities to build awareness and support for inclusive education. This can involve outreach programs, awareness campaigns, and initiatives to involve parents and community members in the development and implementation of inclusive practices. By addressing misconceptions and building a supportive environment, communities can play a vital role in promoting inclusive education.

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