INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN ISLAMABAD: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This Mixed-method study aimed to examine the prospects and challenges of inclusive education at secondary level schools. The major objectives were to examine the current status of inclusive education at secondary level and to investigate various prospects, challenges, and possible solutions for the successful implementation of inclusive education. The sample of the study constituted 19 principals, selected through universal sampling method, and 210 teachers through random sampling technique. For data collection, a questionnaire was used for teachers while principals were interviewed. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics while qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The study revealed that teachers view inclusive education positively, seeing it as beneficial for students' academic, social, and personal development while promoting equality and diversity. However, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient availability of essential tools such as ramps, braille, hearing aids elevators, accessible washrooms, etc. limit access for physically disabled students. Principals emphasized the need for teacher training and an inclusive curriculum to support implementation. Although some schools have adopted inclusive practices, most face challenges due to limited resources and infrastructure. Addressing these needs with appropriate funding and training is essential for successful inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive education, secondary level, Islamabad, prospects, challenge.

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Introduction

All children, including those with a disability, can learn together via education. Children with minor disabilities have a fundamental right to an education in a regular classroom alongside their peers of children of the same age. The teaching should consider all students' unique skills and needs to make the children reach their full potential as they all are capable of learning, as acknowledged by Inclusive Education (IE) (Government of Pakistan, 2009). In Pakistan, the concept of inclusive education is gradually gaining ground, but it's not yet fully established. The government, recognizing its importance, has outlined inclusive education goals in policies like the National Education Policy (NEP) and Pakistan Vision 2025. These documents emphasize providing equal educational opportunities to all children, regardless of their background or disabilities. Additionally, the National Economic Council (NEC) under Pakistan Vision 2025 underscores the significance of inclusive education for sustainable economic growth. While there have been initiatives, such as the draft of the Inclusive Education Policy by the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training. However, concrete steps, like implementing the Inclusive Education Policy, are still pending. However, despite these intentions, the translation of policy commitments into practical implementation poses significant challenges for the education system in Pakistan (Muhammad, Bokhari & Anis 2024).

Background of Study

Around the mid-twentieth century, the concept of inclusive education began to gain traction. Around the middle of the 20th century, the idea of inclusive education began to take hold. Scandinavian nations set the bar for this new inclusivity paradigm. However, at the worldwide level, in 1994, after a meeting held by UNESCO, the idea of inclusive education was publicly presented and accepted on a global scale through the Salamanca Declaration.

Usually, in most underdeveloped countries, including Pakistan, children with disabilities or children with special needs get their education and training through distinct curricula and in separate institutions. From all across the world, experts have now realized the adverse outcomes of wholly separating children with disabilities from other children. This exclusion or segregation prevents children with special needs from reaching their full potential and makes integration and mainstreaming difficult for them. This awareness has given birth to inclusive education (Government of Pakistan, 2017).

Inclusion is a concept that revolves around the idea of students being educated together, without substantial separation or differences in their educational experiences compared to their peers. It is widely recognized that inclusion cannot exist in environments where some students are educated separately or in significantly different ways from others. To clarify, inclusion is not:

1. Educating students part-time in special schools and part-time in regular schools.
2. Placing students in mostly segregated settings within regular schools.
3. Having students in regular classes but requiring them to follow substantially different courses of study compared to their peers (Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2010).

Inclusive education is different from integration and mainstreaming because it focuses on the child's right to participate & schools' duty to accept them. It rejects the use of special schools or classrooms that separate students with disabilities from those without disabilities. Inclusion emphasizes the full participation of students with disabilities and respects their social, civil and educational rights. It also equips them with skills that are applicable both inside and outside the classroom (Ranjan, 2014).

Pakistan signed the Convention 2011, Article 24 of UNCRPD, which obliges the state government to guarantee educational opportunities to all disabled children. It also ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all (Mehrukh et al., 2022).

To help children from all groups, not only those with disabilities, Pakistan needs to work toward establishing an inclusive society. Such societies foster tolerance, acceptance, and respect for variety. Children who require special attention can succeed in inclusive schools that offer supportive, context-appropriate learning environments, but separate education systems cannot guarantee success for these kids.

In Pakistan, inclusive education is making progress step by step. Training programs are also focusing on the concept of inclusive education in the field of education research. Experts and researchers are putting forth their recommendations for inclusive education, as it allows special needs students to excel alongside their peers. However, there is still some ambiguity surrounding the idea of inclusive education (Basit, 2022). The perception of principals and teachers regarding inclusive education is not yet clear and there is a diverse range of opinions on the matter.

In Pakistan, a collaborative effort between Sight Saving International, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Special Education Department (SED),

the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), and the Ministry of Education led to the initiation of a pilot project on inclusive education. This project was implemented in 16 mainstream schools, catering to both boys and girls. The primary objectives were to raise awareness, provide inclusive education training to principals and instructors, and organize workshops and seminars for consultation. The pilot project had positive outcomes, including increased stakeholder awareness and motivation, higher participation and enrollment of disabled children, and improved moral sense, social interaction, confidence, and academic performance among students. These experiences demonstrate the feasibility of inclusive education in Pakistan with proper support and resources, as well as the positive impact of training on teachers' acceptance of student diversity (Abbasi, 2012).

But after that in Pakistan, when the pilot project ended no further progress was made regarding inclusive education. Progress is only mentioned in policies & plans but practically no full implementation & resource provision. Based on the analysis of Inclusive practices, Bughti & Kazimi (2022) found that school heads did not take significant initiatives or adopt effective practices to ensure successful inclusion. This indicates a negative attitude towards the inclusion process among school heads. In particular, the heads of public primary-level schools were unwilling to implement inclusive education. Additionally, they mentioned that students with disabilities and their typically developing peers could not learn together due to their differing needs and the requirement for additional support.

Problem Statement

Inclusive education is important and direly needed to provide equal education to all children and to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Inclusive education if not provided, disabled students will suffer the most. They may face exclusion, discrimination and limited opportunities for learning & social interaction. The government of Pakistan has made efforts to implement the process of IE by launching a pilot project to provide inclusive education to children with minor disabilities. The pilot project was launched in 2003 and ended nearly by the year 2012. Still, the need for inclusive education exists. There is the need for a deeper understanding of the specific reasons behind the limited implementation of inclusive education in schools. It is required and is still important to cater for the needs of children having a minor disability. So, this study aimed to analyze the current status of IE and the challenges that

are hampering the successful implementation of IE. Moreover, the study was intended to explore the prospects of inclusive education.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were
1. To examine the current status of inclusive education.
2. To explore the perceptions of teachers regarding the prospects of inclusive education at the secondary level in Islamabad.
3. To explore the perceptions of principals and teachers regarding challenges faced in implementing inclusive education in schools.
4. To find out possible solutions for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Research Questions

Questions answered by this study were
RQ1   What is the current status of inclusive education?
RQ2.   What are the prospects of inclusive education?
RQ3.   What sort of challenges schools are facing in implementing inclusive education?
RQ4.   How challenges of inclusive education can be overcome and inclusive education be implemented successfully?
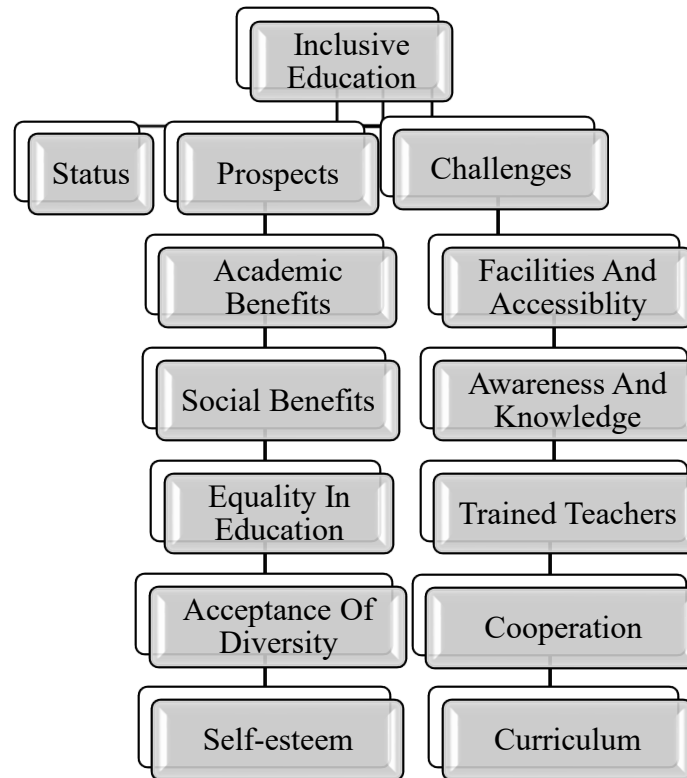
Significance of the Study

This study, concerned with the prospects and challenges of inclusive education at the secondary level, provides necessary information regarding the current status of inclusive education. The study's findings help the Ministry of Education, school authorities, administrators, policymakers, and teachers in mainstream schools.

The study's findings advise and enlighten competent authorities, administrators, and policymakers for improved planning and decision-making about the successful implementation of IE in Pakistan. The study also aids in establishing curriculum development, objectives, and techniques in the schools that are consistent with their inclusive vision and core values. It is helpful to readers of publications on education and those in need of inclusive education. Furthermore, the teachers are prepared with the information and approaches to handling and addressing the various learner needs in their classroom and the institutional setting.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1
Indicators of inclusive education taken from (Fareo, 2020)

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                    ┌─────────────┐
                    │  Inclusive  │
                    │  Education  │
                    └─────────────┘
        ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐
        │  Status  │  │ Prospects│  │Challenges│
        └──────────┘  └──────────┘  └──────────┘
                   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
                   │ Academic │   │Facilities And│
                   │ Benefits │   │ Accessiblity │
                   └──────────┘   └──────────────┘
                   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
                   │  Social  │   │ Awareness And│
                   │ Benefits │   │  Knowledge   │
                   └──────────┘   └──────────────┘
                   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
                   │Equality In│  │Trained Teachers│
                   │ Education │  │              │
                   └──────────┘   └──────────────┘
                   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
                   │Acceptance│   │ Cooperation  │
                   │Of Diversity│ │              │
                   └──────────┘   └──────────────┘
                   ┌──────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
                   │Self-esteem│  │  Curriculum  │
                   └──────────┘   └──────────────┘
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Literature Review

IE is a creative method to teach children with minor disabilities and learning issues alongside their classmates under the same roof. It gathers all students into one classroom and society, no matter what skills or deficiencies in any area they have, and aims to maximize all students' potential (Singh, 2016).

Inclusive Education (IE)

As an approach, IE attempts to fulfil the learning requirements of all

children, teens, and adults, with particular attention on the neglected. It implies that all learners, either disabled or not, may study together through having access to shared preschool programs, schools, and community educational environments, as well as a good range of services and support. This is only possible and achievable in an adaptable education system that acknowledges and adjusts to the demands of a diverse group of students. It seeks for all system stakeholders to be at ease with diversity and regard it as an opportunity, not a problem. It is about all learners studying together, even if their learning styles and speeds differ. It is an active process since it targets all elements of child growth, including psychological, physical, cognitive, imaginative, and interpersonal development (Abbasi, 2012).

What is Inclusive Education

It is important to understand what is and is not inclusive education

- **Exclusion:** This occurs when students with disabilities are completely denied access to any form of education.
- **Segregation:** In this approach, students with disabilities are educated in separate environments that are specifically designed for them, isolating them from students without disabilities
- **Integration:** Integration involves placing students with disabilities in mainstream educational institutions without making necessary adaptations, expecting them to fit in without proper support.
- **Inclusion:** True inclusion involves creating education environments that adapt the design, physical structures, teaching methods, curriculum, culture, policies, and practices to ensure accessibility for all students without discrimination. Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without these adaptations does not constitute true inclusion.

Inclusion goes beyond mere placement and emphasizes creating an inclusive culture and providing the necessary support and accommodations to ensure that all students can fully participate and succeed in their educational journey (UNICEF, 2017).

Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is to include all children in classroom activities without regard to their physical, social, linguistic, emotional, or intellectual ability. The goal of inclusive education is to respond positively to the various needs of all persons in the learning process via involvement in communities, cultures, and learning activities, as well as to stop the exclusion of some groups from education. This process comprises changes

in content, tactics, and approaches intending to include all children in the educational process with the notion that states are responsible for providing education to all children (Ahmad et al., 2020).

Inclusion is not the same as mainstreaming or integrating. Mainstreaming and integration need the placement of two independent educational systems, and students spend just a portion of their time in normal education classrooms, most commonly in non-academic subjects.

Furthermore, with the integration of students with learning disabilities, another component of inclusion should be the planning and programming of classroom activities and assignments to maximize advantages and learning opportunities for learning-disabled students. The true success of inclusion is dependent on many factors. During school hours, all responsible people, including instructors and administration staff, should take care of the pupils' educational, social, and individual needs. The schools should provide proper training, facilities, and support to teachers so that the genuine spirit of inclusion may be shown in the achievement of children with learning disabilities (Ahmed, 2012).

Importance of Inclusive Education (IE)

Inclusive education prescribes that efforts should be made to create an inclusive learning environment where all children should have sufficient opportunities to interact and learn together rather than creating completely separate institutions for all children with disabilities. Inclusion is advantageous to children with different needs and all children, regardless of gender, race, personality traits, or parental economic situation. Experts have identified the benefits of inclusive education for mildly disabled children and society through research. By learning together, disabled children can form friendly relationships with other children, and their confidence level, learning outcomes improve as well (Government of Pakistan, 2017).

Need for Inclusive Education (IE)

International efforts have been undertaken to integrate children who are disabled into the educational mainstream. To achieve full IE, children with mild disabilities must be considered and included in regular classrooms. IE is a more practical approach for ensuring the success of all pupils. According to research, most children learn and perform better. An increasing body of evidence indicates that students academically perform well in inclusive environments, and Inclusion allows for forming relationships. Social connections, skills, personal beliefs, a sense of ease

with people with special needs, and compassionate educational environments are just a few of the benefits. Students come into the classroom with diverse needs and unique contributions, which IE values. In a truly inclusive atmosphere, every student feels comfortable and has a sensation of ownership. School workers are prepared, educated, adaptive, and well-prepared to educate, support, and react to the demands and needs of all children. Inclusive systems provide higher education for all learners while also assisting in the abolition of discriminatory mindsets (Niti & Singh, 2021).

In Pakistan, an inclusive education system is required because it benefits students from all social groups, not only those with disabilities but other children, by instilling tolerance, acceptance, and respect for variety. Inclusive education not only improves educational quality but also reduces disparities and unfairness. The concept of IE is completely consistent with the teachings of Islam and other religions, and it is a cost-efficient method of minimizing the dropout rate (Government of Pakistan, 2006).

Disability

Disability is when someone faces challenges in their body or mind, which can be physical, mental, sensory, emotional, or a mix of these. These challenges can be there from birth or happen later in life. Disability is a broad term that includes impairments (problems in the body's function or structure), limitations in doing certain tasks, and difficulties in taking part in daily life situations. Disability is complex and depends on both a person's body and the society they live in (Grover, 2007).

Types of Disability

Disabilities come in different forms and can vary in how much they affect a person. Some disabilities are caused by genes or are inherited, some happen when a mother has an infection or other issues during pregnancy, and others occur due to injuries or illnesses.
Disabilities can be grouped in various ways:

Vision Impairment

This means having trouble seeing to a significant degree, which may require extra support.

Hearing Impairment

Hearing plays a crucial role in academic learning. It interferes with the

student's achievement. Therefore, it is desirable to take steps to meet their educational needs.

Physically Handicapped

This refers to someone with a physical problem that limits their ability to do regular activities. It could be a severe or mild issue, affecting body structure or function.

Physically handicapped children can be classified as:

- Deaf or hard of hearing (partially deaf)
- Partially blind or having low vision (partially blind)
- Language handicapped, which means having speech or communication difficulties (Grover, 2007).

Learning Disabilities and Other Disorders

Learning disabilities are different from disabilities like paralysis or blindness because they are not visible. These hidden challenges can affect a person's learning or skills like reading and math. Learning disabilities can impact various parts of life, including school, work, daily routines, family, friendships, and play. Some people may have multiple overlapping learning disabilities, while others may have a single issue that doesn't affect other parts of their life (Grover, 2007).

- **Dyslexia**

This difficulty makes it hard to learn to read, even with proper teaching, intelligence, and opportunities. The main signs are having trouble with reading accuracy, speed, comprehension, spelling, delayed spoken language, slow writing, remembering words, and finding the right words when speaking (Grover, 2007).

- **Dyscalculia**

It involves problems understanding numbers, math operations, and estimation. While many students find math challenging for various reasons, dyscalculia is more persistent and can lead to math anxiety (Grover, 2007).

- **Dysgraphia**

This learning disorder affects a person's ability to write. It can lead to difficulties with handwriting, spelling, and organizing thoughts on paper. People with dysgraphia may struggle with letter formation, spacing, and the overall legibility of their writing (Grover, 2007).

Essential Resources for Inclusive Education

While once seen as a way to boost academic achievement, and cut costs, full inclusion doesn't save money, decrease student requirements, or enhance academic results. In most situations, it simply relocates special education professionals from their classrooms to a corner of the regular classroom. To prevent any harm to the academic progress of students with disabilities, a comprehensive array of services and resources are necessary, including:

1. Satisfactory support and services tailored to each student's needs.
2. Well-crafted individualized education plans (IEPs) and continuous professional development for all educators, encompassing both general and special education teachers.
3. Adequate time for teachers to collaborate, plan, create instructional materials, and assess student progress collectively.
4. Smaller class sizes based on the severity of students' needs.
5. Enhancement of professional skills in areas like cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and adaptive curriculum.
6. Effective cooperation among parents or guardians, teachers, specialists, school administrators, and external agencies.
7. Sufficient funding to enable schools to design programs based on student needs rather than budget constraints (Ranjan, 2014).

Approaches to Teaching for Diversity at the Secondary level

Secondary teachers have a responsibility to ensure they reach all students effectively in their classrooms. To achieve this, they can use various teaching strategies that are well-suited to the secondary school environment.

- **Universal Design for Learning**

The main idea behind teaching strategies for diverse needs is based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Instead of adjusting teaching methods and materials later on, UDL involves incorporating support and accommodations directly into the original teaching plan. It's like designing buildings with ramps to provide access for everyone, whether they use wheelchairs or delivery trolleys. In the classroom, teachers can improve their instruction for all students by including universally designed techniques in their lesson plans. For example, they can start each lesson with a clear graphic organizer showing the main points of the content. Additionally, providing guided notes with these key

points spaced out helps all students follow along with the lesson (King-Sears, 2017).

- **Explicit Teaching and Direct Instruction (EDI)**

Explicit Teaching and Direct Instruction (EDI) are very similar approaches that involve teacher behaviors and curricular materials. They are applied through a sequence of guided activities to teach specific knowledge, skills, and practices. Major topics are broken down into smaller steps and taught by the teacher through explaining, demonstrating guided practice, and independent practice. This approach helps students build confidence and ultimately complete the entire skill or task. Teachers should ensure that activities align with lesson goals and allow all students to participate successfully (King-Sears, 2017).

- **Cooperative Learning**

Cooperative learning in secondary schools emphasizes social processes and has advantages for diverse students. In groups, students work together to achieve group goals while also achieving their individual learning and social goals. They practice social skills like turn-taking, cooperative skills like helping and encouraging, and leadership skills like providing direction. Students are accountable for their learning and their contribution to the group. Peer tutoring, jigsaw, and student teaming are commonly used strategies (King-Sears, 2017).

- **Information and Communication Technologies**

Information and communication technologies in the classroom have distinct advantages for engaging students with diverse needs. Interactive software packages with graphics and animations can enhance information representation and challenge learners across multiple literacies. Assistive technologies provide tools for students with specific disabilities to be independent in mainstream classes. Age-appropriate programs for secondary settings are available, but teachers should consider how they align with learning goals (Foreman, 2011).

Collaborative Teaching and Teaming in Secondary Schools

It involves working together, cooperating, sharing goals, problem-solving, and achievements. Teachers need to collaborate more with professionals and parents due to increased demands and student diversity. Collaboration with stakeholders needs to be applied with the following characteristics in mind;
- Collaboration should be based on equal input, mutual goals, shared decision-making, and accountability.

- Collaborators should share resources and expertise, value the process, trust and respect each other, and build a sense of community.
- Collaboration can take different forms collaborative teams, consultation, co-teaching, and working with parents (Friend & Cook, 2007).

Collaborative teams

Collaborative planning plays a crucial role in enhancing the learning and teaching experience. It involves a collective effort where each team member supports one another in developing suitable instructional plans and creating tailored learning activities for students with additional needs. The primary goal is to actively engage these students in the classroom learning environment (O'Rourke and Houghton, 2009).

In secondary schools, there are teams of professionals who work together to support inclusion programs, individual education plans (IEPs), and behavior management. These teams might include regular teachers, special educators, learning support teachers, guidance counselors, or teacher's aides. They collaborate to address issues like a student's specific learning needs or classroom management. This collaboration helps in understanding what's happening and finding solutions (Foreman, 2011).

Learning support teachers, visiting teachers, and guidance counselors can offer advice and coordinate services both within the school and in the community. However, the primary responsibility for teaching still lies with the classroom teacher.

When it comes to collaborative teaching, many regular teachers rely on teacher's aides to assist students with additional needs in their classrooms. While some teacher's aides have experience with such students, they typically don't have the same training as teachers. Therefore, classroom teachers need to provide clear instructions to teacher's aides regarding their roles, and preferred teaching methods, and give them feedback on their interactions with students. Teacher's aides should also have the flexibility to work with various students, not just one, to support the teacher effectively (Foreman, 2011).

Collaboration, in this context, is more about how teachers work together rather than what specific tasks they perform. It's an intangible process that relies on the interaction styles and teamwork of professionals to achieve common goals. Successful collaboration is a long-term endeavour that builds upon a shared understanding of both student and teacher needs. To implement collaborative planning effectively, schools need strong support from their leadership to develop team interaction skills

and allocate time for the implementation of these skills in catering to specific student requirements (O'Rourke and Houghton, 2009).

Deppeler et al. (2005) argue that principals should be trained to facilitate school improvement through collaboration, emphasizing its importance in creating supportive learning communities within schools.

Interestingly, the processes and procedures for students who are both gifted and have learning difficulties in regular classrooms are similar to those for all students with additional needs. Additionally, there are adaptable pro forma that can be used for students with varying levels of additional needs. The discussions mentioned earlier, especially when addressing students with high support needs like Stephanie, underscore the significance of collaborative planning and execution.

In a co-planning approach to teaching in secondary schools in Western Australia, three key considerations were identified;
1. The focus should be on providing support for mixed-ability teaching.
2. Adequate training is necessary to develop skills that align with both the curriculum and the mixed-ability classroom's needs.
3. The establishment of suitable structures and allocation of resources is essential for mixed-ability classrooms to thrive (O'Rourke and Houghton, 2009).

Co-teaching

Co-teaching is becoming more common in secondary education as an inclusive teaching method. It's also known as collaborative or team teaching. In co-teaching, regular and special education teachers work together to provide instruction to a diverse group of students in the same classroom. This approach has many benefits for both students and teachers (Foreman, 2016).

In a co-teaching environment, regular and special educators collaborate and share their expertise. Regular teachers can learn more about adapting instruction, while special educators can improve their skills in teaching standard curriculum content. This model is gaining recognition in both primary and secondary schools.

In inclusive classrooms, a common form of co-teaching observed is "one teach, one assist." In this approach, the class teacher takes the lead in teaching the entire class, while the support or special education teacher assists students with diverse needs. However, it's important to note that this model is not highly recommended in co-teaching literature (Foreman, 2016).

The preferred co-teaching models, although not frequently used, offer more collaborative and effective strategies. These models include:

- **Parallel teaching:** Both teachers jointly teach the same or similar content to different groups of students.
- **Station teaching:** The two teachers work together to support group learning activities throughout the classroom.
- **Alternate teaching:** One teacher provides intensive or individual instruction to a small group of students for a brief period during the class.
- **Team teaching:** Both teachers share equal responsibility for leading instruction.

To enhance collaboration and move towards more effective co-teaching, a shift in the teacher relationship dynamics is necessary. This change should be led by school principals and senior staff members (Foreman, 2016).

However, there are some concerns about co-teaching at the secondary level. These include:

1. Teachers may not fully understand the different aspects of co-teaching, with the classroom teacher focusing on curriculum expertise and the special education teacher on special education methods.
2. Students may lack fundamental academic and social skills, which can require remedial work not always aligned with the secondary-level curriculum.
3. There's often insufficient planning time for special educators to discuss students' needs and IEPs and for regular educators to plan content and instruction collaboratively (Dieker & Murawski, 2003).

To address these challenges, teachers can:

4. Seek professional development opportunities where regular and special teachers can review co-teaching models and plan together.
5. Carefully choose co-teaching partners and create common planning periods to collaborate effectively.
6. Schedule students into co-taught classrooms early in the scheduling process.
7. Explore various instructional practices together.
8. Use block scheduling to have extended time for different teaching techniques.
9. Adapt co-teaching methods to meet students' diverse needs and consider alternative assessment methods.
10. Expect some initial challenges in the working relationship and address any issues that arise.
11. Foster increased communication among subject teachers regarding adaptive strategies with special educators (Dieker & Murawski, 2003).

Challenges and Prospects of Inclusive Education

Providing equal educational opportunities is a global problem that every country faces, whether developed or under development. Inclusive education is a cornerstone of educational policy and has become a global requirement. As a developing country, Pakistan must tackle this effort because of budget restrictions, uncertain societal behaviour toward education, particularly among girls, and the country's poor state of education (Thakur & Abbas, 2017).

The Pacific region's obstacles and challenges to inclusive education included a need for teacher capacity, insufficient resources, and unfavourable attitudes (Sharma, et al., 2019).

In Pakistan, challenges, and Prospects of inclusive education include
1. Infrastructure
2. Execution of policies
3. Trained and skilful teachers,
4. Appropriate assessment techniques and practices,
5. Curricula and
6. Need more financial resources.

Moreover, Pakistan needs a defined strategy, clear policy, and road plan for promoting inclusive education (Government of Pakistan, 2017). According to Bhat (2018), the challenges of Inclusive education include the following.
1. Lack of assistive tools and devices
2. Social attitude towards disability
3. Inadequate pre-service training and professional development
4. Expense or funding is another challenge to the practice of Inclusion.
5. Lack of coordination and communication among administrators, teachers, staff, and other concerned authorities.

Inclusive education is about ensuring that all students, including those with disabilities, are included and valued in mainstream schools. It promotes equal participation and opposes exclusion. It advocates for a culture and curriculum that doesn't label students and instead embraces their diversity. The focus is on reducing challenges and providing support to make education accessible for all. Inclusion sees diversity as a strength, not a hindrance. It emphasizes capacity building for schools, staff, and students. Schools play a vital role in shaping a new educational culture that values and supports every student (Tariq, 2016).

Inclusive education calls for schools to change their culture and enhance their methods. Inclusive education isn't just about special

teachers meeting the needs of special children in regular schools. It's about understanding how, why, and where we can educate all students and the impact it can have. It's about creating an inclusive environment for everyone to learn and thrive.

Environmental Challenges

Students face a lot of environmental barriers in schools. There are several environmental challenges that students are facing in their school. These include issues with doors passageways, elevators, washrooms, stairs, ramps, lockers and recreational areas. Physically getting into school and navigating passageways & pathways seem to be major concerns. In one of the studies, students also mentioned challenges with crowded hallways and narrow spaces within classrooms & libraries which make it difficult for students to navigate. (Fareo, 2020).

A major challenge in implementing inclusive education in Pakistan is the widespread attitudinal barriers. Societal stigma and discrimination against individuals with disabilities hinder the progress of inclusive education (Faizefu & Busi Ernest, 2024).

Intentional Attitudinal Challenges

The students in the focus groups are experiencing intentional attitudinal barriers. Isolation, physical bullying, and emotional bullying can have a significant impact on their well-being. Being ignored or struggling to form friendships can be incredibly isolating. Physical bullying, like having their wheelchair pushed without permission or being purposely knocked out of it, is completely unacceptable. Emotional bullying, such as name-calling, mocking, and being treated differently, is deeply hurtful. (Tariq, 2016).

Unintentional Attitudinal Challenges

Unintentional attitudinal barriers arise from a lack of knowledge, understanding, or effort within the educational system or staff. Unfortunately, many studies have found a frequent barrier to be the lack of understanding by teachers and support staff. This can manifest in various ways, such as giving inappropriate substitute work instead of adapting the curriculum, assigning students as teacher's helpers in physical education classes instead of providing equal opportunities, or excluding children with special needs from certain classes without valid

reasons. Educators need to be more aware and informed to ensure an inclusive learning environment for all students (Tariq, 2016).

Physical Challenges

These students also face physical challenges related to their condition or disability. For instance, many of them require personal assistants or teaching assistants for tasks like getting dressed, personal care, or additional educational support. Another significant barrier they mentioned is the need for extra time to navigate the school, have lunch, or complete their schoolwork. These physical requirements are important for school staff to understand, along with information about their disability or condition (Tariq, 2016).

Essential Tips for the Inclusive Secondary Classroom

By implementing these strategies, you can create an inclusive classroom that caters to the diverse needs of your students.

1. **Utilize Visual Aids**: To help learners with learning, attention, or memory difficulties work independently, consider creating short video clips that demonstrate the target skills. These clips can be replayed during the lesson, reducing the need for constant assistance.
2. **Consider Seating for Visual Impairments**: Ensure that visually impaired students have appropriate seating arrangements that allow them to see both you and the board. Don't assume they will always communicate their visual challenges (Whittaker & Hayes, 2018).
3. **Use Written and Pictorial Instructions**: Instead of relying solely on verbal instructions, provide written and pictorial instructions. This benefits all learners and is particularly helpful for those with memory difficulties.
4. **Consider Dyslexic Learners**: Approximately 20% of dyslexic learners find it easier to read from pastel-coloured paper or with coloured overlays, which reduces visual glare. Discover their preferred colours and consistently provide them.
5. **Effective Communication for Hearing Impairments**: When communicating with learners with hearing loss, always face them directly to facilitate lip-reading, even if they use hearing aids. Speak clearly and naturally without exaggerating sounds.
6. **Tailor Reading Strategies**: Recognize that students have varying reading abilities. Tailor strategies to their needs, such as pre-teaching keywords and using visuals for those with poor comprehension (Whittaker & Hayes, 2018).

7. **Accessible Printed Resources**: Ensure that printed resources are clear and well-laid out for students with visual impairments. Consider using uncluttered text, clear fonts like Comic Sans or Arial, and possible enlargements as needed (Whittaker & Hayes, 2018).
8. **Support for Dyscalculia**: Break down mathematical processes into small steps for learners with dyscalculia. Encourage a graduated approach, showing all steps, and adjust the number of problems to reduce anxiety.
9. **Minimize Background Noise**: For learners with hearing aids, minimize background noise to enhance focus.
10. **Consider Seating Placement**: If students have physical disabilities or visual impairments, seat them where they can easily see learning resources and displays. Ensure they have equal access to information (Whittaker & Hayes, 2018).
11. **Use Respectful Language**: Be mindful of the language you use when referring to students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Avoid derogatory terms and challenge their use by others when necessary.
12. **Teach Concept Mapping**: Introduce learners to concept mapping as an effective way to understand complex information and visualize connections between topics.
13. **Prioritize Hearing-Impaired Learners in Seating Plans**: When creating seating plans, consider the needs of hearing-impaired students. They may require seating near the teacher or facing the class for optimal communication.
14. **Utilize Practical Learning Materials**: Explore departmental resources like games, costumes, models, and artefacts to enhance lessons. These concrete materials can make learning more engaging and memorable (Whittaker & Hayes, 2018).

Best Practice

Since STEP's establishment in 1997 by individuals with disabilities, the Special Talent Exchange Program (STEP) has significantly advanced inclusive education in Pakistan. STEP is dedicated to empowering individuals with disabilities and raising awareness among the wider community. One of STEP's notable initiatives is the Girls with Disabilities in Mainstream Schools Project, which has successfully enrolled many girls with disabilities, including those with physical, intellectual, and visual impairments, in schools in Nowshera and Charsadda. To prepare these schools, STEP provided training on the inclusive education model to hundreds of teachers, school administrators, and community members.

This training not only benefited the girls by facilitating their education but also gave teachers new perspectives on their roles and the impact they can have on their students (Muhammad, Bokhari & Anis, 2024).

Methodology

Mixed method research (Quantitative and Qualitative methods) was used to conduct this study. Using a mixed method approach combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, leading to more reliable results. The objectives of the study are achieved by gathering insights from principals and teachers from different. Schools in Islamabad.

Population

The population of the study was secondary-level school 466 teachers and 19 principals in Islamabad. The researcher personally visited the Federal Directorate of Education to collect information on the population. From targeted population, sample of 19 school principals and 210 teachers were selected according to Gay's (2005) population table. Universal sampling technique was used for principals and simple random sampling technique was used to select the teachers. Moreover, the number generator method was used to draw a sample of the teachers.

Instruments

A self-developed close-ended questionnaire, consisting of 49 items was used for this proposed study. The other one was a semi-structured interview consisting of six questions. A questionnaire was used to explore the prospects and challenges of inclusive education by taking the perception of 210 secondary school teachers and an interview was used to explore challenges, and status and to find out the possible solutions for the successful implementation of inclusive education from school principals. Indicators of the quantitative tool include prospects, academic benefit (6), social benefits (5), equality of education (4), acceptance of diversity (4), self-esteem of students (4), challenges, facilities (7), suitable curriculum (4), trained teachers (5), knowledge & awareness (5) and cooperation (5). Qualitative tool parameters were teaching methods and strategies, current status, adjustment for schools' infrastructure, teaching-learning resources, teachers training, and lastly the possible solutions for the successful implementation of inclusive education. The research tools were constructed by keeping the objectives and literature review in mind. To ensure the validity of the tool, the questionnaire was circulated among 7

teachers to be checked comprehensively. validation of the instruments is done through experts in the relevant field. After validation of the instruments, the suggestions given by experts were incorporated and refined in the light of their recommendations. According to Treece and Treece (1982), 10% sample is used for pilot testing. Therefore, a pilot test was conducted on 2 principals and 41 school teachers to ensure that the instruments were appropriate to be administered. Furthermore, to check the reliability of the teachers' instrument, data gathered from the pilot test was analyzed through SPSS by applying Cronbach Alpha. Cronbach Alpha value of instrument used for teachers was .816 which indicates that all the statements of questionnaires are reliable. The reliability of sub-scales was also checked.

Data Analysis

Data obtained from teachers were analyzed through descriptive statistics (mean score) and data obtained through interviews with school principals were analyzed in the form of thematic analysis.

Analysis of Quantitative Data (Teacher's Questionnaire)
Part I: Prospects
Table 1
Academic benefit

Items	N	Mean
Students benefit academically from being placed in inclusive settings.	210	4.29
Disabled students benefit academically from being placed in inclusive settings.	210	3.99
Students with mild disabilities learn better with their peers in inclusive classes.	210	4.35
The inclusion of students with minor disabilities in the mainstream classroom is beneficial to other students	210	3.98
Secondary-level children with varying abilities are often better motivated when they learn in an inclusive setting.	210	4.36
Students learn new skills through imitation that equips them to live in their communities.	210	4.41

Table 1 depicts the perception of teachers regarding the academic benefits of inclusive education perceived by secondary school teachers. The highest mean score of 4.41 indicates majority of the teachers agreed that students acquire practical life skills through imitation in inclusive classrooms. Furthermore, a mean score of 4.35 suggests that teachers

agreed that students with mild disabilities learn better alongside their peers in inclusive classes. This positive view extends to the belief that secondary-level children with varying abilities are often better motivated in inclusive settings, as indicated by a mean score of 4.36. Moreover, there is a notable agreement that all students, regardless of their abilities, benefit academically from inclusive education with a mean score of 4.29. However, it's worth noting that while still positive, there is a slightly lower mean score of 3.99 for the belief that disabled students benefit academically from inclusion and a similar score of 3.98 for the perceived benefit of inclusion to other non-disabled students.

Table 2
Equality in Education

Items	N	Mean
Disabled students perform equally with other students in an inclusive environment.	210	3.80
The best way to ensure equality in education is to make all students learn in inclusive classes.	210	4.29
Inclusive education allows all students equal access to general education, regardless of their abilities and disabilities.	210	4.28
Students are treated equally when conducting any activity inside or outside the class.	210	3.91

Table 2 indicates the idea that inclusive education promotes equality, with the highest mean scores of 4.29 and 4.28 for the effectiveness of inclusion and equal access. However, while generally positive, there's room for improvement in treating students equally during activities, with a mean score of 3.91. Moreover, there is some concern about disabled students' performance, as indicated by a mean score of 3.80.

Table 3

Social benefit

Items	N	Mean
Inclusive education provides opportunities for students to participate in work and programs which helps to prepare for their future.	210	4.29
An inclusive setting helps in social growth as students interact with other children of similar age groups and levels.	210	4.32
Students are supported not to be separated from their peers based on disability.	210	4.13
Inclusive education supports students to develop friendships with their peers.	210	4.23
Disabled students are encouraged to participate in different school activities.	210	4.08

Table 3 indicates the perception of schoolteachers regarding the social benefits of inclusive education. The highest mean score of 4.32 revealed majority of the teachers agreed that inclusive settings foster social growth through interaction with peers. Close behind, a mean score of 4.29 indicates teachers' support for the belief that inclusive education prepares students for their future. Additionally, inclusive education is seen as promoting friendships (m= 4.23), discouraging separation based on disability (m= 4.13), and encouraging disabled students' participation in school activities (m= 4.08).

Table 4

Acceptance of diversity

Items	N	Mean
Mainstream schools benefit students in terms of acceptance of diversity.	210	4.23
Inclusive education allows students to value other's perspectives.	210	4.34
Students learn to accept each other for who they are & treat each other with respect.	210	4.43
Students learn to help & cooperate.	210	4.45

Table 4 indicates the view of school teachers on the acceptance of diversity within inclusive education. The highest mean score of 4.45 depicts that students in inclusive settings learn to help and cooperate effectively. Close

behind, mean scores of 4.43 and 4.34 suggest that students also learn to accept each other for who they are, treat each other with respect, and value diverse perspectives. Furthermore, a mean score of 4.23 highlights that attending mainstream schools benefits students in accepting diversity.

Table 5
Self-Esteem

Items	N	Mean
Students who are accepted by their peers feel better about themselves and have high self-esteem.	210	4.37
Inclusive education helps to create and reinforce the positive behaviour of students.	210	4.26
Students in an inclusive setting become more confident.	210	4.10
In an inclusive setting, student believe in their abilities to learn, achieve & contribute to the world around them.	210	4.20

Table 5 depicts the idea that inclusive education significantly boosts students' self-esteem. The highest mean score of 4.37 shows the majority of the teachers agreed that students who are accepted by their peers tend to feel better about themselves. Moreover, they see inclusive education as a way to foster positive behaviour (m= 4.26). Furthermore, teachers agreed that in an inclusive setting, students believe in their abilities to learn, achieve, and contribute with a mean score of 4.20. The mean score of 4.10 indicates all the teachers perceived that students in inclusive settings become more confident.

Part II: Challenges
Table 6
Facilities and Accessibility

Items	N	Mean
School compound meet requiremets of children with special needs.	210	2.88
Classrooms meet the requirements of disabled students.	210	2.77
Washrooms are accessible to children with special needs.	210	2.48
Elevators are available for disabled students.	210	1.68
Availability of Ramps for wheelchairs for disabled students.	210	2.21
The library is accessible.	210	2.38
Computer Labs are accessible.	210	2.72

Table 6 indicates that, in the context of challenges within inclusive education, school facilities and accessibility present major concerns. The mean score of 2.88 indicates that the school compound is not comfortable for children with special needs. Following closely is the mean score of 2.77, suggesting that classrooms need further adjustments to meet the requirements of disabled students. Accessibility to computer labs (m= 2.72) and libraries (m= 2.38) also falls short of ideal standards. Additionally, there's a substantial need for improvement in providing ramps for wheelchairs (m= 2.21) and washrooms accessible to children with special needs (m= 2.48). The most critical concern is the availability of elevators for disabled students, with the lowest mean score of 1.68.

Table 7

Trained Teachers

Items	N	Mean
Teachers are provided in-service teacher training to learn about inclusive education.	210	3.01
Teachers are given training regarding different teaching & learning strategies for teaching in an inclusive environment.	210	3.00
Teachers are given training for their professional development that supports the teaching of students with disabilities.	210	3.01
Teachers address Individualized lesson plans for helping special needs students in an inclusive environment.	210	2.86
Teachers create activities for all students.	210	3.17

Table 7 highlights the perception of teachers regarding teacher training. Notably, teachers agreed they create activities that cater for all students, as evidenced by the mean score of 3.17. This indicates a proactive attitude in promoting inclusivity within the classroom. Additionally, teachers are provided with in-service training to learn about inclusive education (m= 3.01) and receive training for professional development to support teaching students with disabilities (m= 3.01), representing a devotion to improving their skills in inclusive teaching. However, there is room for enhancement, particularly in the aspect of addressing individualized lesson plans to aid special needs students in succeeding within inclusive environments, as indicated by a slightly lower mean score of 2.86.

Table 8
Cooperation & Collaboration

Items	N	Mean
An inclusive setting requires collaboration & cooperation among teachers and school administrators.	210	4.59
An inclusive setting requires cooperation among teachers and parents.	210	4.59
The school provides a platform for regular meetings to discuss learning problems & issues of the students with the principals.	210	4.53
Teachers coordinate with the disabled children's parents about their learning problems, strengths & weaknesses.	210	4.46
Parents of children with disabilities cooperate with teachers & principals in terms of their child's progress.	210	4.40

Table 8 depicts the pivotal role of collaboration and cooperation within inclusive education. The highest mean score of 4.59 underscores the majority of the teacher's agreement that an inclusive setting necessitates collaboration among teachers and school administrators, as well as cooperation between teachers and parents. Additionally, with a mean score of 4.53, the table emphasizes that schools are providing platforms for regular meetings to address students' learning problems and issues with principals, fostering ongoing communication. Furthermore, teachers actively coordinate with parents of disabled children to address their learning needs, strengths, and weaknesses, as indicated by a mean score of 4.46. This reflects a strong commitment to collaborative efforts in supporting students with disabilities. Similarly, parents of children with disabilities are perceived as cooperative partners with teachers and principals concerning their child's progress, with a mean score of 4.40.

Table 9
Knowledge and Awareness

Items	Ns	Mean
Teachers' knowledge & awareness about the concept of Inclusive education.	210	3.54
Teachers know how to address diverse learners' needs inside the class.	210	3.54
Teachers' awareness regarding dealing with special students in classrooms.	210	3.56
Teachers' knowledge about different teaching strategies to be used in an inclusive classroom.	210	3.42
Teachers acquire a full medical history of disabled children at the time of admission.	210	3.33

Table 9 reveals that most of the teachers exhibit adequate knowledge and awareness in the context of inclusive education. They possess a reasonable understanding of the concept of inclusive education (m= 3.54) and are aware of how to address diverse learners' needs (m= 3.54) and deal with students with special needs (m= 3.56) within the classroom. However, their knowledge of different teaching strategies for an inclusive classroom slightly lags (m= 3.42). Moreover, there's room for improvement in the practice of acquiring complete medical history for disabled children upon admission, as indicated by a mean score of 3.33.

Table 10

Curriculum

Items	N	Mean
Curriculum is suitable according to the needs of students with disabilities.	210	2.94
The curriculum accommodates children's special needs.	210	2.98
The use of a diverse range of resources is part of an inclusive curriculum.	210	3.39
The curriculum reflects the diversity found in the society.	210	3.09

Table 10, reflects on how well the curriculum caters to the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive education. Mean scores range from 2.94 to 3.39, suggesting room for improvement. However, there's a more positive perception regarding the incorporation of diverse resources into the curriculum (m= 3.39), indicating efforts to include a variety of teaching materials. Furthermore, the curriculum reflects the diversity found in society (m= 3.09), which is a positive aspect. The curriculum has deficiencies regarding its suitability for students with disabilities as indicated by the mean score of 2.98.

Table 11

Prospects

Indicators of Prospects	Cumulative Mean
Academic benefit	4.23
Equality in Education	4.07
Social benefit	4.21
Acceptance of diversity	4.36
Self-Esteem	4.23

Table 11 provides a comprehensive view of the prospects associated with inclusive education, encompassing multiple dimensions and are indicated by cumulative mean scores. Firstly, in terms of academic benefit (Cumulative Mean= 4.23), teachers express a positive belief that inclusive education provides all students with valuable academic advantages, underlining the potential for learning and growth within these settings. Secondly, the aspect of equality in education with a cumulative mean of 4.07 also garners a favourable perspective. This suggests that teachers see inclusive education as a means to foster equality in educational opportunities. Thirdly, social benefit having a cumulative mean of 4.21, indicates that teachers perceive inclusive education as a platform for students to interact and grow socially, aligning with the broader goals of inclusivity. Moreover, acceptance of diversity receives the highest cumulative mean score of 4.36, indicating that the teachers support the acceptance of diversity within inclusive education. Lastly, self-esteem with a 4.23 cumulative mean promotes the idea that inclusive education boosts students' self-esteem and overall well-being.

Table 12

Challenges

Indicators of Challenges	Cumulative Mean
Facilities and Accessibility	2.44
Trained Teachers	3.01
Cooperation	5.56
Knowledge and Awareness	3.47
Curriculum	3.1

Table 12 shows a comprehensive perspective on the challenges inherent in inclusive education, aggregating various dimensions and denoting them through cumulative mean scores. Firstly, facilities and accessibility (Cumulative Mean= 2.44) emerge as a prominent challenge, indicating that issues related to school infrastructure and resource accessibility for students with disabilities are substantial hurdles that require immediate attention and improvement. Secondly, the teachers signify that, while challenges exist, there are ongoing efforts to equip teachers with the necessary training and support for inclusive practices as indicated by a cumulative mean of 3.01. Thirdly, the aspect of cooperation (Cumulative Mean=5.56) shines as a strength in inclusive education, with the highest cumulative mean score. This suggests that cooperation among teachers and stakeholders is not a significant challenge; instead, it thrives within inclusive educational settings. Fourthly, knowledge and awareness

(Cumulative Mean= 3.47) present challenges, signifying that teachers exhibit a reasonable understanding and awareness in the context of inclusive education, with room for improvement. Lastly, curriculum (Cumulative Mean=3.10) reflects challenges, indicating that there are obstacles to aligning the curriculum with the needs of students with disabilities.

Table 13
Prospects and Challenges

Indicators	Cumulative Mean
Prospects	4.22
Challenges	3.53

Table 13 provides an overview by combining the cumulative mean scores of both prospects and challenges in the context of inclusive education. Prospects with a cumulative mean of 4.22 represent the positive viewpoints and potential benefits of inclusive education. On the other hand, challenges with a cumulative mean of 3.53 encompass the obstacles and difficulties associated with inclusive education.

Analysis of Qualitative Data (Responses to Interview Questions)

A semi-structured interview was conducted among 19 secondary school principals. The responses were received from all 19 principals. The researcher approached all the principals by visiting their offices. Before the interview, a brief description was provided to principals to the principals about the study. Thematic analysis technique was used to analyze "Qualitative Data". The thematic analysis of interviews with principal's sheds light on various aspects, challenges & recommendations related to inclusive education in mainstream schools. For the analysis of qualitative data following steps were followed which are:
➢ Become familiar with the data
➢ Generate initial codes,
➢ Search for themes,
➢ Review and define themes,
➢ Write-up (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).
The following themes were generated:
1. Infrastructure and Accessibility
2. Teaching and Learning Resources
3. Teacher Training and Awareness

4. Teaching Methods & Strategies
5. Practice of Inclusive Education
6. Solutions for Improvement

Theme 1: Infrastructure and Accessibility

All of the principals said that there is a need for improved infrastructure in schools. Participants highlighted the lack of ramps, elevators, and wheelchair-accessible pathways, making it difficult for physically disabled students to navigate the school environment. Inadequate restroom facilities for disabled students were noted, emphasizing the necessity for accessible washrooms. Specialized equipment such as braille materials, spectacles, hearing aids, and wheelchairs are often lacking but considered essential for inclusive education It became evident that proper lighting and well-lit classrooms are crucial in accommodating students with visual impairments. As one participant responded:

"Proper ramps and elevators for wheelchair accessibility, and accessible restrooms are needed. Braille should be available for students with low vision. It's important to create an environment that promotes inclusivity and ensures that all students can access education without barriers."

Another participant responded as:

"Sufficient budget be allocated for improving infrastructure like conducting pathways for wheelchairs, washrooms should be according to the needs of differently-abled students. These changes will help ensure that all students can fully participate and thrive in our school environment."

One participant responded as:

"We do have 1 to 2 ramps which are built on my own but need more ramps. ramps and elevators for wheelchair accessibility, and accessible restrooms are needed. Braille should be available for students with low vision. Moreover, assistive technology like hearing aids, spectacles, magnifiers, and appropriate lighting is required in classrooms. It's important to create an environment that promotes inclusivity and ensures that all students can access education without barriers."

Theme 2:Teaching and Learning Resources
Participants expressed concern over the limited availability of specialized teaching materials and equipment for disabled students. The majority (89.5%) of the respondents stated that teaching-learning resources and

equipment are not available for disabled students. They have adequate teaching-learning resources and equipment specifically designed for disabled students. Educators often rely on basic resources such as large prints, audio, and videos to facilitate learning. Items such as braille resources, spectacles, and hearing aids were lacking. The use of technology and multimedia resources was not widespread among the respondents. Few (10.5%) respondents said that they used to manage resources on their own like hearing aids, spectacles, charts, models & wheelchairs, which could potentially limit the variety of teaching and learning methods available. As one participant responded:

"No special resources and equipment are available. In our school, the concept of inclusive education is not popularized. Therefore, teaching-learning resources are not enough and are even not provided. So, we usually use large prints, audios or tape recorders to facilitate such students."

Another participant responded as:

"Audios, large prints or digital texts are provided accordingly to the students by the teachers. Other than that, no such resources & equipment are available like brails, spectacles & hearing aids."

One participant responded as:
"No such resources provided by the government. We cater for students on our own. We normally have charts, models, audio and videos."

Theme 3:Teacher Training

 In response majority (68.4%) of the principals said that their school teachers have received training but there are limitations in providing training to all teachers due to scheduling constraints. This inconsistent teacher training in inclusive education is a significant challenge, leading to disparities in effectively supporting disabled students. They said that not all teachers were aware of the concept of inclusive education due to a lack of knowledge because of not receiving proper training. The lack of awareness and knowledge about inclusive education among teachers was identified as an obstacle to its successful implementation according to the response given by the school principals. Few (31.6%) principals said that their teachers have received the necessary training. As one participant responded:

"Yes, training is provided to a few teachers. As all of them are not able to go to classes & we can't give leave to students during work hours. After receiving training, the teachers who attended discussed with the rest of the teachers who didn't attend that training session. But still, they don't have much awareness and knowledge about the concept of inclusive education."

Another respondent said:

"Yes, training is given to teachers but only a few teachers have received that training. I also have attended a workshop recently related to dyslexia and dysgraphia."

One participant responded as:

"Yes, training regarding inclusive education is provided to my school teachers but not all teachers attended that training session because it is not possible to give leave to all students during working hours I mean to say on weekdays. I have also attended a workshop related to dyslexia and dysgraphia recently."

Theme 4:Teaching methods & strategies
In response majority (78.9%) of respondents responded that they provide individual attention to address the needs of disabled students. They also mentioned that they create remedial classes & individualized lesson plans, as well as use of visual aids to support these students. Few (21.1%) respondents mentioned that they adapt tests and assessments to accommodate students with speech difficulties. As one participant responded:

"At our school, we prioritize individual attention for disabled students to meet their specific needs. We adopt written tests for students with speech difficulties. Additionally, we utilize parallel teaching to provide extra support and reinforcement. Our approach is student-centred, focusing on the unique learning needs of disabled students."

Another participant responded as:
"We work with students with learning disabilities by repeating the syllabus again and again. Moreover, Individualized lesson plans are used to help students with special needs. Lastly, low-vision students are made

to sit in front of the class. Sometimes we utilize parallel teaching to cater to differently-abled students. Sometimes we employ Differentiated instruction to effectively teach and address the needs of disabled students."

Another participant responded as:

"At our school, we prioritize individual attention for disabled students to meet their specific needs. We adopt written tests for students with speech difficulties to avoid the embracement that students face while speaking. Additionally, we utilize parallel teaching to provide extra support and reinforcement. Our approach is student-centred, focusing on the unique learning needs of disabled students. Low vision and partially deaf students are made to sit in front of class."

Theme 5: Practice of Inclusive Education

The majority (62.63%) of the principals said that inclusive education is not being practised in schools in its true sense. It is being practised only in policies, programs & words. In response few (37.37%) respondents said that inclusive education is being practised in schools but there are challenges in its practical implementation like limited resources, infrastructure, and well-trained staff which hinder the successful practice of inclusive education in some schools. As one of the participants responded:

"In Pakistan, we can say that inclusive education is practised in legal and policy frameworks, in different meetings, collaborations & awareness but practically it is not."

Another participant responded as:

"Partially inclusive, as for a successful implementation of inclusive education appropriate resources, infrastructure, and trained staff is needed. Without them, we can't practice inclusive education. By only making policies and plans we can't achieve our objectives."

One of the participants responded as:

"Inclusive education is practised in schools but not in the true sense. It is only in practice in policies, plans & words. Without proper resources, budget, infrastructure & trained teachers we can't successfully practice inclusive education."

Another participant responded as:

"Not inclusive at all. As because for a successful implementation of

inclusive education appropriate resources, infrastructure, and trained staff are needed. Without them, we can't practice inclusive education."
One more participant responded as:
"In a real sense in the majority, inclusive education is not practised in schools. As teachers are not well trained as well as physical facilities are not available. Moreover, the school compound is not appropriate for inclusive education."

Theme 6:Solutions for Improvement

In response, 100% of the respondents said that for the proper implementation of inclusive education, the allocation of resources, budgeting, and the provision of facilities are required. They emphasized the need for teacher training and the development of an inclusive curriculum. Further, awareness campaigns, engagement with parents and communities, and addressing attitudinal barriers are considered crucial for promoting inclusivity. Respondents also suggested that there is a need for consistent policy enforcement and support. As one participant responded:
"To create an inclusive and supportive learning environment, it is imperative that we prioritize the provision of proper facilities, budgeting, teacher training, infrastructure for disabled students, and the appointment of psychologists in our schools."

Another participant responded as:
"*To create a truly inclusive educational environment that supports the success of all students, we must ensure the provision of proper facilities, allocate adequate budgeting, enhance teacher training and skills, and actively engage parents and the community through awareness and advocacy programs related to inclusive education."*

One participant responded as:
"*It is recommended to establish and consistently enforce clear minimum standards, allocate sufficient resources and infrastructure, ensure the availability of well-trained and skilled teachers through regular training and workshops, and prioritize the provision of appropriate facilities while maintaining responsible budgeting practices, including the construction of new infrastructure to cater to the needs of disabled students, to foster excellence and inclusivity within our school system."*

Discussion

The study aimed to explore the prospects and challenges of inclusive

education at the secondary level in Islamabad. Based on the findings of the study, results indicate the challenges that comprehend obstacles and difficulties related to inclusive education, including facility and accessibility issues, the need for trained teachers, cooperation, and curriculum alignment challenges. This finding is consistent with the finding of the study conducted by Lakshmi (2018) where he concluded that inclusive education is ineffective without proper training of teachers, infrastructural facilities, curriculum modification and educational materials. This result is also supported by Chaudhary (2018) who revealed in his study that proper school buildings, provision of adequate human resources and material resources, suitable curriculum & skilled educators are necessary implementation of inclusive education.

The study revealed limited availability of specialized teaching materials and equipment tailored to the needs of disabled students. Critical items such as braille resources, spectacles, and hearing aids were reported to be in short supply. The findings of the study were supported by Ludago (2020) that there are inadequate educational facilities, equipment and services for children with special needs including those with disabilities.

The qualitative findings revealed that there is a need for a greater budget for infrastructure, societal awareness and attitudinal changes. These findings are similar to the results of the study conducted by Ludago (2020) who concluded the challenges for the implementation of inclusive education which include lack of budget, negative attitude of teachers and community awareness.

The study revealed that inclusive education has a significant positive impact on students' self-esteem and positive behaviour among students. It is supported by Fareo (2020) who concluded that children who are placed in a general classroom environment have higher self-esteem and positive behaviour.

The study conducted by Fareo (2020) concluded that students with disabilities & without disabilities benefit academically and socially when placed in normal schools where inclusive education promotes equality and helps students in acceptance of diversity by developing friendly relationships. The findings of the current study indicated that teachers generally have a positive outlook on the prospects of inclusive education, emphasizing its potential benefits in academic, social, and personal development, as well as its role in promoting equality and acceptance of diversity within educational settings. These findings are consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Fareo (2020). Moreover, a new theme emerged from the current study and that was solutions for improvement where majority of the respondents said that for the proper

implementation of inclusive education, the allocation of resources, budgeting, and the provision of facilities are required and emphasized the need for teacher training and the development of an inclusive curriculum. Further, awareness campaigns, engagement with parents and communities, and addressing attitudinal barriers are considered crucial for promoting inclusivity. Respondents also suggested that there is a need for consistent policy enforcement and support to implement inclusive education successfully.

Conclusion

1. It is concluded that teachers have an overall positive outlook on the prospects of inclusive education. They see it as a platform for academic, social, and personal development, as well as a means to promote equality and acceptance of diversity within educational settings. Moreover, findings revealed that inclusive education is strongly associated with enhancing students' self-esteem and promoting positive behaviour, as perceived by teachers.
2. It is concluded that both groups identified significant shortcomings in school infrastructure and resources. Teachers highlight inadequate inaccessible facilities, such as ramps, elevators, wheelchair-accessible pathways, and restroom facilities. Principals reinforced these concerns and also highlighted the scarcity of specialized equipment like braille materials and hearing aids, noting the need for proper lighting and well-equipped classrooms to support visually impaired students. The limited availability of teaching and learning resources for disabled students remains a significant barrier.
3. It is further concluded that there is a consensus on the need for improved teacher training. Teachers report a proactive attitude towards inclusivity but indicate that more comprehensive training is required, particularly for developing individualized lesson plans. Principals acknowledged the constraints in providing consistent training to all teachers and identified a general lack of awareness about inclusive education among staff. This gap in training and knowledge is seen as a major obstacle to effective implementation.
4. Based on the findings it is concluded that teachers expressed a favorable view of inclusive education's role in promoting equality and acceptance of diversity. They believe it helps students learn to cooperate and respect diverse perspectives. However, both teachers and principals noted that the current curriculum often fails to

    adequately cater to the needs of students with disabilities, suggesting a need for further development to ensure inclusivity.

5. It is concluded that teachers and principals emphasized the importance of cooperation among educators, administrators, and parents. Regular meetings and active coordination with parents are seen as essential for addressing students' learning needs and fostering an inclusive environment.

6. Based on the responses it is concluded that there are mixed perspectives on the current status of inclusive education. Few principals said that it is being practised in schools, while the majority believe challenges are hindering\ its true implementation. So, to ensure successful inclusive education, it is crucial to address these challenges by providing proper resources, budget, infrastructure, and trained teachers (Objective # 1).

7. Based on the solutions given by the principals it is concluded that principals unanimously recommend government intervention to allocate resources, budget, and facilities to support inclusive education. They stressed the importance of ongoing teacher training, developing an inclusive curriculum, and conducting awareness campaigns. Engaging parents and communities, addressing attitudinal barriers, and enforcing consistent policies are also crucial steps for promoting inclusivity.

8. It is concluded that the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative data provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced in implementing inclusive education in mainstream schools. The findings of the study showed the majority of principals acknowledged that some teachers had received training in inclusive education, but scheduling constraints hindered comprehensive training for all teachers, resulting in inconsistent teacher preparation. Additionally, the lack of ramps, elevators, wheelchair-accessible pathways, and accessible washrooms in schools was identified as a significant barrier to the mobility of physically disabled students. Furthermore, the scarcity of specialized equipment such as braille materials, spectacles, hearing aids, and wheelchairs posed additional challenges in meeting the diverse needs of disabled students.

Limitation of the study

    The study aimed to include schools where the pilot project on inclusive education was initially implemented. To achieve this, a comprehensive list of these schools was required. However, upon visiting the Federal Directorate of Education, the researcher was informed that the

pilot project had ended 10 to 12 years ago, and they no longer had the list of the participating schools. Consequently, the researcher was unable to specifically target these schools for inclusion in the study. If the list had been available, it could have potentially provided more accurate and relevant data regarding the current status of inclusive education. Thus, while the researcher encountered challenges in accessing relevant data, the researcher unexpectedly identified a school with prior involvement in a pilot project during the data collection process, offering valuable insight into the research.

Recommendations

1. As the findings highlighted the significant challenges in school infrastructure and accessibility, it is recommended that educational authorities allocate resources to improve facilities. This includes constructing ramps, installing elevators, creating wheelchair-accessible pathways, and ensuring well-lit classrooms. Adequate restroom facilities for disabled students should also be a priority.
2. Findings highlighted the limited availability of specialized teaching materials and equipment, so it is recommended that school administration and principals invest in acquiring braille materials, spectacles, hearing aids, and wheelchairs. Additionally, technology and multimedia resources may be integrated into teaching practices to enhance the variety of learning methods.
3. The findings indicated the disparities in teacher training, so to overcome the disparities the Ministry of Education may establish comprehensive programs for inclusive education training. This may be accessible to all teachers, addressing scheduling constraints.
4. The findings reflect that teachers are dedicated to promoting inclusivity through activities, in-service training, and professional development. To further enhance their inclusive teaching skills, it is recommended that schools may encourage the adoption of effective teaching methods and strategies in inclusive classrooms. This includes developing individualized lesson plans. Teachers may also be trained in adapting tests and assessments to accommodate differently abled students.
5. The research findings indicate teachers' views on inclusive education, including its academic benefits, promoting equality, social interaction, embracing diversity, and students' self-esteem. To enrich inclusive education practice, it is recommended that policymakers implement a diverse curriculum, provide teacher training, and encourage

community and parental involvement to create a supportive and equitable learning environment.

6. The practice of inclusive education brings forth mixed viewpoints, with some recognizing its presence but emphasizing challenges like limited resources, budget, infrastructure and insufficiently trained staff. To enhance inclusive education, it is recommended that the government prioritize the allocation of necessary resources, budget, infrastructure, and teacher training to ensure its effective implementation and success (Objective # 1).

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