

## Perceptions of Gender and Disability in Special Education: Insights from Teachers in Punjab, Pakistan

Hafiz Rukhsar Ahmed<sup>1</sup>

Madiha Ashraf<sup>2</sup>

Muhammad Zubair<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

This study sought to understand how teachers perceive gender differences in relation to exceptionalities. In particular, it aimed to shed light on the current state of knowledge, attitudes, and pedagogical methods among educators involved in dealing with children with exceptionalities in special education settings. Special education teachers from Gujranwala division institutions made up the participation pool. The study employed a cross-sectional design and collected data from 60 educators, comprising both male and female instructors with the designations of Junior Special Education Teacher (JSET) and Senior Special Education Teacher (SSET). The convenience sampling technique is used to select the sample of the study. In order to gather information, a researcher created a questionnaire with 33 questions. Experts from both the special education and non-special education fields validated the instrument, and it showed strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89). The results showed that instructors had a basic grasp of how impairments are classified according to gender, but they were less knowledgeable about how gender plays a more complex role in shaping students' educational experiences and their final grades. It is concluded that in order to better prepare teachers for the future, programs should include a gender-responsive curriculum. Students with disabilities who exhibit gender-related disparities would benefit from more evidence-based educational practices and more informed cognitive frameworks if they were a part of this inclusive classroom.

**Keywords:** *Perception, Teacher, Gender, exceptionalities, sex ratio, special education*

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1. PhD Scholar, AIOU Islamabad, [hafizrukhsarahmad@gmail.com](mailto:hafizrukhsarahmad@gmail.com)
  2. University of Sialkot, [ahmadrkhsar6@gmail.com](mailto:ahmadrkhsar6@gmail.com)
  3. Ayan Law Associates, Kot Adu, [shahsons83@gmail.com](mailto:shahsons83@gmail.com)

## **Introduction**

It is possible to identify gender and exceptionality through systematic and organized evaluation processes, and these factors show substantial variation across various types of impairment (Arms et al., 2008). There has been a recent shift in the area of special education toward a more individualistic approach to disability diagnosis, with an increasing focus on adapting services to meet the unique requirements of each student. Gender has arisen as a crucial axis of inequality, a problem that has been acknowledged in academic debate for some time, and it connects with many other social variables, including identity (e.g., Oswald et al., 2003). Stigmatization and unequal access to essential support services are some of the negative repercussions that can result from female students being marginalized in educational settings (Arms et al., 2008).

Despite the acknowledgment of basic and educational rights of children with disabilities, there is still a lack of data on gender differences in disability, especially in Pakistan. Any citizen of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan between the ages of six and twenty-five is required by law to complete a free and mandatory secondary education program (Article 26). There is an absolute necessity for inclusive education for disabled male and female students, as well as other marginalized groups, according to supplementary policy frameworks such as the National Education Policy (2009), the National Plan of Action (2006), and the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2002). In its most current iteration, the National Education Policy Framework (2018) seeks to bring national objectives in line with the 2030 agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among these objectives are the following: the elimination of gender and ability bias in education; the promotion of inclusive classrooms; and the guarantee of a free and appropriate public education for all students (UNICEF, 2021).

The current research set out to use aggregated data from throughout the country to look at how different genders are categorized when it comes to special education needs (SEN). Explicitly, there is a need to pay attention to identify the different types of disabilities and how these disabilities vary in terms of gender differences. The role of a special education teacher is very important to preserve and protect the rights of children with disabilities, adaptation of practices, and enhance the process of inclusion. The policy of general instructions and instructional strategies for each gender must be tailored to address the unique needs of each gender, despite the similar nature of disability. The Prevailing research highlights that there is a very high difference across different disabilities.

The difference among disabilities is either in terms of nature and severity level, or in having different frameworks and predominant socio-cultural presumptions. (Karbasi et al., 2011).

## **Literature Review**

Different theoretical backgrounds offer various ways of observing gender-based susceptibility as it relates to individuals with special needs. Disengagement from disabilities that are more prevalent and those that are less prevalent is a significant initial step in realizing their educational needs. Another approach to emphasizing classification is based on the exclusive etiological and applied features of each disability or disorder (Kimball et al., 2018). The nature of disabilities that have a high prevalence rate are those types of disorders or disadvantages that are usually common and comprise the major portion of the school population of special education institutions. They include communication disorders, learning disabilities like dyslexia, dysgraphia, and other types of specialized educational difficulties. The Socio-emotional disorders, mental health challenges, and communal security concerns are the general examples of higher-incidence disabilities (Trainor et al., 2017). Those disorders or disabilities that have a lower rate of incidence rate are additionally complex and challenging, regardless of being very rare. The sensory impairment, such as hearing impairments, visual impairments, and intellectual disabilities like intellectual disability, Autism spectrum disorder, and degenerative disorders or disabilities like muscular dystrophy or dementia, are all part of this category (Kurth et al., 2014). The growth of gender-wise specific challenges that a disability imposes on one gender more and less on the other. The special educational and rehabilitation support systems and interventions needed for each disability that which challenge they have for a specific population of a gender, depend on the capacity to distinguish and explanation for the variances.

The most prominent and common group of disorders is the communication disorders, the impairments of speech and language impediments which excessively influence male children as compared to female children. The data from diverse national backgrounds provides support to this notion that gender-wise empirical data is different. The survey has been conducted in Iran with nearly 8,000 Iranian students at the elementary level. Karbasi (2011) highlights that 16.7% of male students, while the ratio of female students is 12.7% had speech and language impairments. Jessup et al. (2008) report an analogous ratio of both genders, 1.7:1, for communication disorders in a sample of about 300

children in Australia. This inclination can be shown by the study of McKinnon et al. (2007) examined statistics of almost 10,000 primary and elementary school students in Australia and revealed that 2.29% of male children with speech impediments and 0.77% of female students have speech and language barriers. Likewise, Tseng et al. (2015) stated the division between boys and girls in Taiwanese longitudinal data. They reported that with boy-to-girl ratio of diagnoses was keeping in view the communication challenges, stresses rising from 1.63:1 in 2004 to 1.99:1 by 2010. These tendencies indicate the absolute need for the early diagnosis of speech and language disorders and therapeutic interventions clearly planned, keeping in view the unique needs of each gender.

Behavioral and emotional disorders, which incorporate societal, affective, and intellectual well-being problems, demonstrate considerable gender differences transversely subtypes of diagnosis. The review of literature scrutiny made by Beesdo et al. (2009) highlights that generalized anxiety disorders (GAD) are reported more among girls and young women. The ratio of anxious behavior is very less among male children and young men. The ratio of girls and boys is 2:1 in early years of life, rises to 3:1 at the age of adolescence, stressing the statistic that this gender-wise difference becomes more noticeable with growing age. Likewise, Ohayon and Schatzberg (2010) report that among girls aged 15 to 25, the prevalence of mood disorders like major depressive episodes was 3.3% and phobia was 6.2%, as compared to 1.6% and 4.4%, respectively, among males' gender. Deighton et al. (2019) highlight that the symptoms of mental health issues, such as generalized anxiety disorder, fear, and specific phobias, are higher three percent were three percent higher in the girls compared to the boys. A survey study was conducted on a large scale, including 28,000 English adolescents, which reported similar findings that the ratio of gender is 1.58:1. Male youth have a higher propensity towards violent behavior and other expressing predispositions. Additionally, the possibility of detecting ADHD among male children is considerably higher, 1.25:1, as compared to female children. The prerequisite is to focusing on gender differences is to notice while assessing, giving intervention, and developing an individualized education and rehabilitation plan to address the differences in behavioral and emotional disorders.

The disparity towards gender is evident in the special education institutions where girls with mental and health issues face bias from the teachers and professionals of the institutions, as compared to boys who are with mental and health issues (Rice et al., 2008). It has been revealed that the behavior and interaction of teachers and other related health

professionals are different for male children, while deviating towards the girls with a similar nature of challenges. Teachers feel at ease to educate and engage in rehabilitation services towards the male children, and prefer female children, as teachers feel difficulty in controlling and predicting the behavior of female children. The disparities in the institutions of special education in terms of provisions are strengthened by their bias, which ultimately adversely affects the quality of education and availability of rehabilitation services presented to female children with disabilities (Al Dahhan et al., 2021).

The diagnostic standards in clinics and in the field of research mix gender disparity for the assessment of dyslexia (Daniel et al., 2023; Fletcher et al., 2019). Despite long-held beliefs about the divergent, previous research has failed to find any statistically significant disparities in prevalence rates between the genders when it comes to dyslexia (Flynn & Rahbar, 1994; Shaywitz et al., 1990). A more recent empirical study by Quinn and Wagner (2015) found that among children scoring at or below the third percentile on standardized academic assessments. There is a male-to-female ratio of 2.4:1, suggesting that a higher prevalence of males is associated with a more severe academic impairment. Reading comprehension impairments are more common in males than in girls, according to longitudinal twin research (Willcutt, 1999; 2014). Contrarily, there appears to be little to no gender discrepancy in the research on mathematics learning challenges. According to Spelke (2005), who examined research on cognitive development and came to the same conclusion that there is no consistent evidence of gender-based differences in mathematical or broader cognitive abilities. The prevalence rates among boys and girls are comparable (Fletcher et al., 2019; Devine et al., 2013). There is significant evidence in the literature that spelling difficulties or dysgraphia are more common in males than in females. In fact, the male-to-female ratio has been recorded as high as 1.5:1 (Berninger et al., 2008; Hooper et al., 1993).

Women regularly score higher than men on a variety of literacy assessments, according to empirical research that compares literacy results across genders at the same level and conditions (Olson et al., 2013). In a study, Olson et al. (2013) Diagnostic data from the American Psychiatric Association (2013) show that, when it comes to autism spectrum disorder (ASD), boys are diagnosed at a rate that is approximately four times higher than girls. Diagnosis criteria and gender-specific symptomatology have been the subject of ongoing investigation due to this substantial gender discrepancy. Among Hispanic people between the ages of 16 and 24,

researchers looked at the gender gap in self-reported visual impairment as it relates to physical and sensory impairments (Ulldemolins et al., 2018).

In comparison to women, a higher percentage of men reported having visual impairments (1.6 percent) and being blind (3.85 percent) in their study (0.8 percent and 1 percent, respectively). The frequency of auditory abnormalities was also shown to vary by gender. A nationally representative sample of American students diagnosed with deafness or hard of hearing had a higher proportion of males (57 percent) than females (43 percent), according to Cawthon et al. (2022). This could be due to gender-based differences in how people identify themselves, how they report their condition, or whether they have access to diagnostic services.

### **Significance of the study**

The purpose of this study is to compare genders to identify situations where one gender is more likely to have a higher prevalence of specific exceptionalities, and to shed light on gender-specific patterns among different types of disability. Highlighting the interconnected nature of gender and disability, it probes into the complex difficulties faced by disabled students due to gender inequalities. Educators' perspectives on their responsibilities in raising awareness and promoting inclusion are also important to the study's overarching goal of understanding the intersection of gender and disability. The research hopes to inform methods that lessen gender-related barriers in the rehabilitation and education of disabled pupils by increasing teachers' awareness and response to these issues.

### **Objective of the Study**

This research was conducted to attain the following objectives

1. To identify the perception of teachers about gender and exceptionalities.
2. To determine the attitude of teachers about the exceptionalities of gender differences.
3. To find out the practices of teachers while educating the students with exceptionalities, keeping in view the gender differences.

### **Methodology**

The present study is descriptive, while a quantitative approach was used. A survey method was applied to collect the data.

## **Population**

Teachers working in the special education department of Punjab were the population of this study. Teachers of both genders, male and female, Senior and junior teachers of different categories were the population for this study. This study was conducted in the Gujranwala division. Different special education centers and schools were part of the study.

## **Sampling**

The data for this investigation were collected using a convenience sampling strategy. In this study, sixty educators made up the sample. There are 19 male teachers who comprise 32% of the sample, and there are 41 female teachers who comprise 68% of the whole sample. Based on their academic qualifications, these instructors were categorized into three groups: 15% were graduates, 78% had a Master's degree in special education, and 10% had an M.Phil. in special education. They were categorized into six distinct categories according to their level of experience: Among the participants, 49% had 1-4 years of experience, 21% had 6-11 years, 19% had 11-15 years, 8% had 21-25 years, and 2% had 26-30 years. Not a single person had 16-20 years of experience.

## **Procedure of Data Collection**

In order to gather information for this study, a closed-ended questionnaire was used. A total of thirty-three statements make up this survey. Three choices are provided against each statement for the respondents. There are five specialists from Punjab's special education department and two professors, doctors of special education from AIU Islamabad, who validated this questionnaire after it was designed based on a literature review. The researcher used Cronbach's coefficient alpha to examine the internal consistency of the instrument, which measures the correlation between the items of the questionnaire and the teacher's opinion on gender and exceptionalities. The instrument's internal reliability was determined to be 0.89.

## **Presentation of Data Results: Quantitative Analysis**

The data was analyzed by using SPSS. The percentage of each item was calculated. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

**Table 1**  
*Percentage distribution of awareness of teachers*

Item No	Item/Statement	Yes	No	To Some Extent
1	Do you know the term “High incidence disabilities” for gender differences?	91.7	3.3	5
2	Do you know the term “low-incidence disabilities” for gender differences?	35%	20	45
3	Do boys or girls with impairments have equal capabilities for learning?	41.7	20	38.3
4	Do physically handicapped children, boys, and girls have the capabilities to perform their daily life activities by using physical assistance?	56.7	1.7	41.7
5	Can blind students, boy or girl, get an education by using their auditory skills at a similar rate?	100	0	0
6	Do students, boys or girls, with a learning disability face a similar level of difficulties in reading and writing?	60	8.3	31.7
7	Do you have awareness about “Autism” from a gender perspective?	28.3	60	11.7
8	Do Autism and intellectual disability have a similar rate of gender differences?	91.7%	5	3.3
9	Is the number of special schools enough, according to the prevalence of disability, considering gender?	5	86.7	8.3
10	Do students with exceptionalities, with gender differences, have equal access to education?	23.3	46.7	30
11	Can persons with disabilities, boys or girls, become responsible citizens like normal citizens?	76.7	16.7	6.7
12	Do you think the role of the media is important in reducing discrimination among boys or girls’ students with disability?	98.3	-	1.7

13	Do you think children with special needs, boys or girls, can understand and maintain relations with other community members?	66.7	21.7	11.7
14	Do you think children with special needs, boys or girls, have an equal level of ability to understand the feelings and emotions of others?	83.3	3.3	13.3
15	Do people with disabilities, boys or girls, understand the social values, rules, and regulations of a society?	80	5	15
16	Are basic health services being provided to students with special needs without any discrimination between boys and girls?	26.7	68.3	5
17	Do persons with disabilities, boys or girls, have an equal level of abilities to learn vocational skills like tailoring or carpentering, etc?	63.3	23.3	13.3
18	Can students with disabilities, including boys and girls, receive a technical education under the given conditions?	58.3	8.3	33.3
19	Can students with disabilities, boys or girls, show their full potential in the field of sports while removing the barriers they may face due to gender differences?	80	18.3	1.7
20	the students with disabilities, boys or girls can become capable of making decisions about their future?	16.7	31.7	51.7
21	Do students with disabilities, boys or girls, have equal opportunities to get jobs according to their abilities or skills without any discrimination?	13.3	60.0	26.7

Besides gender disparities, autism, and the complicated nature of autism spectrum disorder, the table's data show that teachers have a general awareness of autism spectrum disorders (ASD). But the fact is that 60% of teachers surveyed did not know what the word "autism" meant, which indicates a serious lack of understanding in this field. In addition, there is a lack of deep knowledge of gender-related aspects of disability, and more than 90% of teachers confuse intellectual impairment

with autism. Teachers who took part in the study, on the other hand, were well familiar with the fact that visually impaired pupils of either sex can still benefit from traditional audio learning methods. Effective teaching has played a significant role in ending gender discrimination against students with impairments, according to most respondents. Regardless of gender, over 80% of teachers think that students with impairments have high levels of emotional intelligence and do great things in areas like athletics. Not only that, but 86.7% of educators have acknowledged that there aren't enough special education schools to meet the demand, particularly when considering gender gaps. Furthermore, more than 65% of educators have noted that, regardless of gender, essential healthcare services for people with disabilities are still insufficient.

Table 2  
*Percentage distribution of the attitude of teachers*

Item No	Item/Statement	Yes	No	To Some Extent
22	Do you think the attitude of teachers towards persons with disability, boys or girls, is sympathetic without any gender discrimination?	55	25	20
23	Do the teachers have a positive attitude towards students with disability, whether boys or girls, to educate them?	66.7	15	18.3
24	Do you feel empathy when you engage students with disability, either boys or girls, in the process of education and rehabilitation?	98.3	-	1.7
25	Do you like to address the issues and the challenges they may face without any gender discrimination for students with disability?	76.7	5	18.3
26	Do you think you need further knowledge or training on gender and exceptionalities while serving in special education?	61.7	33.3	5

Table 2 shows the results of an investigation of the attitudes of teachers toward students with disabilities, broken down by gender and exceptionalities.

Teachers usually have a good attitude toward kids with impairments, regardless of gender, according to the data. Regardless of the gender of the student, a staggering 98.3% of participants said they feel empathy when they work with disabled kids. In addition, teachers show they care for these students' academic and rehabilitation needs regardless of gender. It is worth mentioning that although more than 60% of teachers depend on their prior knowledge. It indicates that a considerable number acknowledge the necessity for additional training and professional development to better assist students with disabilities, especially in situations where gender can impact their educational experiences and needs.

Table 3

*Percentage of distribution of teacher practices*

Item No	Item/Statement	Yes	No	To Some Extent
27	Are you satisfied with the current teaching practices in special education, keeping in view the gender differences among the students with exceptionalities?	16.7	36.7	46.7
28	Are you satisfied with the current rehabilitation practices in special education, keeping in view the gender differences among the students with exceptionalities?	16.7	36.7	46.7
29	Are you satisfied with the current vocational training practices in special education, keeping in view the gender differences among the students with exceptionalities?	18.3	41.7	40
30	Are you satisfied with the current efforts in technical education for students with special educational needs, considering the gender differences among these students?	16.7	66.7	16.7
31	Do you think the current services are specially designed keeping in view the gender differences among the male or female students with disabilities?	10	90	-
32	Do you think students with disability, male or female, can attain self-independence after completing their school education in special education institutions?	16.7	75	8.3
33	Are you satisfied with the current practices and procedures that are currently being adopted to match the universal standards and procedures for	11.7	85	3.3

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students with disability, irrespective of  
any gender discrimination?

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Table 3 items no.27,28,29 show that when it comes to gender-specific demands, educators' pedagogical and rehabilitative strategies for representing people with disabilities are severely lacking. Item no. 30 shows that 67. % Teachers in fields like vocational and technical education claim to be woefully unprepared, which they blame on gender bias. In addition, most special education teachers (90%) are unhappy with the current approaches and tactics used to help kids of both sexes become more independent. In particular, when it came to meeting the unique requirements of male and female students, 85% of respondents saw a significant departure from globally acknowledged norms and standards.

## Discussions

There is a fundamental obligation of a state to sustain the rights of students with disabilities without prejudice or discrimination. Teachers frequently play a pivotal role as helpers for outstanding students, regardless of gender. Given the complex nature of gender in the classroom, the perspectives of educators are of paramount importance. The academic and social paths that children with exceptionalities take are greatly impacted by their knowledge, teaching methods, and attitudes, particularly when they are colored by gendered viewpoints. Gender biases can influence teachers' preconceptions about the skills and strengths of students with disabilities, as well as their instructional practices and attitudes toward these children. The results of this study provide credibility to the idea that teachers have a basic understanding of the importance of gender concerns in the context of people with disabilities. The fact that pupils with visual impairments depend heavily on auditory modes to obtain instruction was recognized by all participating teachers, regardless of gender. There are no obvious gender variations in the dependence on auditory and cognitive resources among students with visual impairments, which is consistent with this observation (Rokem & Ahissar, 2009). Teachers working in special education schools are aware that there aren't enough specialized schools for the number of students with disabilities, and that gender inequality just makes the problem worse. Approximately 96% of disabled children, regardless of gender, do not attend school and do not have access to formal education, which is a major problem (Manzoor and Hameed, 2016).

The significance of comprehending gender disparities in relation to disabilities and inclusive education was acknowledged by all participating educators in this study. Because educational policies and procedures do not conform to globally recognized norms that accommodate gender diversity, it would appear that this acknowledgment is more declarative

than transformational. As a result of gender inequalities, kids with impairments have additional obstacles, and teachers seldom take the effort to help these children. The lack of adequate disability awareness training for future teachers is a major contributor to this gap, as students with disabilities (PWDs) are frequently sidelined rather than prioritized in classroom discussions. This study's results add to the growing body of evidence that disability is more often discussed in the context of gender studies than special education. "Disability discourse belongs to the part of education." This statement echoes the sentiments expressed in recent scholarly works, such as Shawn (2015), which place disability squarely at the crossroads of gender studies, educational theory, and communication studies. However, educators continue to perpetuate educational exclusion through information gaps because they are underprepared to address the needs of students from underrepresented groups.

Teachers' favorable and empathic attitudes toward students with disabilities, regardless of gender, may not always convert into active advocacy or participation, according to the present study. Implementation of inclusive practices is still spotty, despite the fact that previous research has drawn attention to initiatives addressing the employment obstacles encountered by the blind population. This study's results imply that educators seldom take the lead in promoting disability rights and that they are underrepresented in policymaking processes, especially those about the unique requirements of disabled children based on their gender. A rights-based framework, rather than a charity-driven one, is emphasized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which further highlights the need for systemic change and teacher engagement in advocacy initiatives aimed at systemic change (Kayess, 2008).

## **Conclusion**

It is clear from the results and analysis that teachers have a critical role to play in raising consciousness of the rights of people with disabilities, especially when it comes to discussing how gender intersects with disability. A more sophisticated grasp of gender-responsive pedagogies and inclusive behaviors is desperately needed via focused professional development. Teachers can be prepared to apply tactics supported by research and in line with international best practices if they participate in comprehensive training programs that address both gender and exceptionality within the context of special education. A comprehensive approach for the inclusion in the classroom and more impartial therapeutic interventions for both boys and girls can be conceivable when special

education teachers are well aware of gender differences among different disabilities.

### **Recommendations**

1. Teacher training programs for professional development must be designed to address the unique needs of children with disabilities, together with those who are diverse towards gender or gender-specific teachers, of special education institutions.
2. A professional regulatory body must constitute at the district level oversight of the rights of children with disabilities, to provide the emerging trends and issues towards gender disparity.
3. The teachers should be actively involved in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in which gender differences should be mentioned, and the possible ways to deliver the intervention for specific challenges due to gender differences.
4. The gender differential issues and challenges that impact a specific gender must be included in the teacher training programs for effective learning and rehabilitation services.
5. Special educational institutions must focus on the gender difference in creating classroom practices to create a responsive and conducive environment for learning for each gender in a co-education setup.
6. The support group of the children with disabilities, especially parents, must train and give them the awareness of gender differences for a specific type of disability and its impact on their children.

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