

MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF HEAD TEACHERS' ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, LEADERSHIP PRACTICES, AND PERCEIVED BARRIERS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN GILGIT-BALTISTAN

Muhammad Hadi Haideri¹

Dr. Zahida Parveen²

Abstract

Inclusive education is vital for ensuring equitable access to quality education, particularly in resource-limited regions like Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, where socio-cultural and infrastructural challenges persist. Head teachers play a pivotal role in shaping inclusive school environments through their attitudes, beliefs, and leadership practices. This study examines the multidimensional factors influencing inclusive education in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, focusing on primary school head teachers' attitudes, beliefs, leadership practices, and perceived barriers. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior and transformative leadership frameworks, the research addresses the unique challenges of this culturally diverse region. Using a quantitative descriptive design, data were collected from 138 head teachers across six districts (Gilgit, Ghizer, Skardu, Ghanche, Diamer, and Astore) via a validated Likert-scale questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics (t-tests, ANOVA) revealed moderately positive attitudes toward inclusion's social benefits (M=3.14–3.45), strong beliefs in teacher training and incentives (M=3.27–3.57), supportive leadership in policy alignment and stakeholder engagement (M=2.91–3.32), but significant barriers including insufficient training, overcrowding, and financial constraints (M=4.17–4.38). Gender differences favored females in attitudes, beliefs, and leadership ($p < .001$), while district variations highlighted disparities between urban (Gilgit, Skardu) and rural areas (Ghizer, Ghanche, Diamer, Astore). Findings inform targeted interventions to advance equitable education.

Key words: *Inclusive education, Head teachers, Gilgit-Baltistan, Leadership practices, Barriers to education*

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1. Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Special Education, Division of Education, University of Education, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. Corresponding Author, Email: Mhadi578@yahoo.com
 2. Associate Professor, Department of Special Education, University of Education Lahore. zahida.parveen@ue.edu.pk

Introduction

Inclusive education is a revolutionary strategy that ensures every learner, regardless of their abilities, background, or situation, has equal access to quality education within regular school systems. It prioritizes the development of learning communities where diversity is celebrated, and each child is encouraged to achieve their full potential. Over the past years, inclusive education has come under the international spotlight as a strategy for ensuring equity, minimizing discrimination, and building social cohesion. (UNESCO, 2017). However, making inclusive education work is intricate and involves understanding the local context, specifically the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of educational leaders, such as head teachers. In places like Gilgit-Baltistan, a geographically distant and culturally distinct region in Pakistan, the aforementioned factors become crucial in determining the success of inclusive education efforts.

Gilgit-Baltistan, a region in northern Pakistan, features rugged landscapes, a multi-ethnic and multilingual population, and limited resources. The area has major educational problems, such as poor infrastructure, teacher shortages, and socio-cultural issues that limit access to school for children with disabilities or those who belong to underprivileged groups. Despite these problems, there is an increasing awareness of the necessity of inclusive education to bridge gaps and ensure equal learning opportunities (Haideri & Parveen, 2025). Head teachers, as central players in the education system, are at the forefront of bringing about this change. Their beliefs and attitudes regarding inclusion, as well as their leadership behaviors, directly impact the enforcement of inclusive policies and the development of inclusive schools. However, perceived barriers such as a lack of training, resources, or community support can prevent them from effectively advocating for inclusive education (Neves, Almeida, & Ferreira, 2023). The current research focuses on a multidimensional examination of head teachers' attitudes and beliefs, leadership, and perceived barriers to inclusive education in Gilgit-Baltistan. Attitudes and beliefs influence the perception of head teachers regarding the value and implementation ability of inclusive education, and hence, their commitment to its implementation. Leadership practices, such as decision-making, staff collaboration, and community involvement, determine the effectiveness with which inclusive policies are implemented (Fullan, 2001). In contrast, perceived barriers, whether structural, cultural, or related to resources, can curtail progress and highlight areas where intervention is necessary. By examining these dimensions, this research

aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that facilitate or hinder inclusive education in a context-specific setting.

The value of this research lies in its ability to contribute to the evidence base, informing policy and practice in Gilgit-Baltistan. What head teachers think will shape the design of targeted interventions, including professional development, resource distribution, and community outreach programs, to improve inclusive education systems. International research highlights leadership as a key factor in developing inclusive school cultures (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). However, little research has been conducted in Gilgit-Baltistan, where specific socio-cultural and geographical contexts delineate educational challenges. The present study bridges this gap by investigating how head teachers move between the complexity of inclusive education in a resource-scarce and culturally plural context (Khatoon, Muhammad, & Raauf, 2022).

The establishment of inclusive education in Pakistan has been supported by national policies, specifically the National Education Policy (Government of Pakistan, 2017), which promotes equal access to education for all children, including those with disabilities. However, effective implementation at the local level is uneven, particularly in remote regions like Gilgit-Baltistan. Research indicates that positive attitudes among head teachers towards inclusion are of paramount importance for its success; however, these attitudes must be accompanied by practical skills and resources (Sharma & Desai, 2002). Additionally, leadership styles that foster collaboration and inclusivity among teachers, students, and parents are essential for implementing sustainable reform (Fullan, 2001). Through these factors in Gilgit-Baltistan, this research aims to contribute to the larger discussion on inclusive education while facing context-specific issues.

This study also draws on theoretical paradigms, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence people's behavior. From the inclusive education perspective, this framework is used to describe how head teachers' perceptions and perceived impediments to inclusive education influence their leadership behaviors. The research aligns with transformative leadership principles, which focus on empowering stakeholders and bringing about systemic transformation (Shields, 2010).

Review of Literature

Attitudes of Head Teachers towards Inclusion

Inclusion, which involves integrating students with disabilities into general education classrooms, is mainly dependent on the beliefs of head teachers, particularly in areas such as Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan (Haideri & Parveen, 2025). Studies show that the attitude of head teachers tends to fluctuate depending on the availability of resources, training, and exposure. An attitude tends to be positive whenever the support system is in place to enable the implementation of appropriate inclusive practices (Sharma & Desai, 2002). On the other hand, neutral and sometimes negative attitudes are found in settings where such resources are rare, as head teachers worry about providing for the diverse needs of students while attempting to give them regular instruction (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Due to cultural and infrastructural constraints in Gilgit-Baltistan, a cautious approach is taken, with the Mehnaz Fatima Foundation and other organizations actively involved in human resource development to inculcate positive attitudes toward the concept (Khan, 2011).

Head teachers with earlier experience in dealing with disabilities consider inclusion a feasible solution (Sharma et al., 2008). Gender also plays a role, with female head teachers tending to be more supportive of inclusion when resources are available (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). In Gilgit-Baltistan, however, there is limited training, and hence the head teachers tend to adopt conventional teaching over inclusive modifications (Malak et al., 2018).

Head Teachers' Beliefs towards Inclusion

The head teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education affect their willingness to implement it. While the importance of inclusion is widely recognized even in under-resourced settings, a question remains about whether it can (Florian & Linklater, 2010). While the mainstream belief in inclusion as a social good is high, actual success depends on an element of self-efficacy and collaboration with special educators (Pajares, 1992). Although efforts like the Education for Disabled Persons (EDIP) initiative (2010–2013) in Gilgit-Baltistan were aimed at promoting inclusive attitudes, skepticism was nonetheless reported among head teachers regarding the associated inadequacies and lack of preparation in the context of teacher training (Hameed & Manzoor, 2014). Bandura (1997) stated that teachers' beliefs can be improved by a sense of motivation when they feel competent and able to act, rather than being driven by external factors, such as the UK education policy on inclusion. Studies show that

positive beliefs correlate with mainstreaming experience, but negative beliefs persist without systemic support (Avramidis et al., 2000). In Gilgit-Baltistan, head teachers' beliefs often reflect community views, necessitating professional development to align with inclusive equity goals (Rizvi & Lingard, 2011).

Role of Leadership for Inclusion of Primary School Head Teachers

Head teachers are pivotal in fostering inclusive education through visionary leadership and effective resource allocation. Effective leadership involves creating inclusive school cultures and supporting staff development (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). In Gilgit-Baltistan, the leadership of head teachers is crucial for initiatives supporting students with special needs (Ali, 2012). Knowledge of disabilities enables collaboration between general and special education teams (Billingsley, 2004). Leadership practices that promote equity, such as staff training and community engagement, enhance inclusion (Riehl, 2000). In resource-constrained regions, however, limited authority and funding hinder progress (Hussain, 2016). Head teachers who innovate with resources and involve parents achieve better outcomes, as seen in regional cooperation efforts (Rose, 2010). Strengthening leadership in Gilgit-Baltistan aligns with national equity commitments but requires systemic support (Government of Pakistan, 2017).

Barriers in Inclusion

Barriers to inclusive education in primary schools include inadequate policies, resource shortages, and limited teacher competencies (Slee, 2011). In low-resource contexts, such as Pakistan, non-inclusive curricula and high student-teacher ratios exacerbate existing challenges (Mittler, 2000). In Gilgit-Baltistan, geographic isolation and inaccessible infrastructure further impede inclusion (Khan & Mirza, 2012). Attitudinal barriers, where inclusion is seen as burdensome, compound environmental and communication challenges (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Inflexible curricula and a lack of accommodations lead to exclusion, particularly in underfunded schools (UNESCO, 2010). Administrative issues, such as funding and transportation, limit outreach in community-supported models (Singal, 2006). Despite initiatives like UNICEF's alternative learning programs, barriers persist in Gilgit-Baltistan, requiring policy reforms and training to ensure true inclusion (UNICEF, 2013).

Research objectives

- 1- To examine head teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in Gilgit-Baltistan.
- 2- To explore head teachers' beliefs about the value and feasibility of inclusive education.
- 3- To analyze head teachers' leadership practices in promoting inclusive education.
- 4- To identify perceived barriers to implementing inclusive education in Gilgit-Baltistan.
- 5- Investigate how attitudes, beliefs, practices, and barriers impact inclusive education policies.

Methodology

The research design for this study was quantitative and descriptive in nature. The target population consisted of 1,335 head teachers across the ten districts of Gilgit-Baltistan. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select the sample. In the first stage, six districts—Gilgit, Ghizer, Skardu, Ghanche, Diamer, and Astore were randomly selected from the total of ten districts. In the second stage, proportional stratified sampling was applied based on district-wise strata to ensure fair representation. Using this method, a total sample of 138 head teachers was selected for the study. The district-wise distribution of the sample was as follows: Gilgit – 16 teachers, Ghizer – 18 teachers, Skardu – 24 teachers, Ghanche – 17 teachers, Diamer – 50 teachers, and Astore – 13 teachers.

1. A structured and validated likert-scale questionnaire was employed to collect data across four thematic areas: attitudes towards inclusion, beliefs about teachers' roles, leadership practices, and challenges and barriers. The questionnaire included demographic information and 40 closed-ended items designed to assess multidimensional factors influencing inclusive practices in schools.
2. Data were collected through in-person visits and digital surveys, ensuring coverage of both remote and accessible schools. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Data were analyzed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and inferential statistics (Anova and t-test) applied to explore differences between distractors or demographic groups.
3. Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the confidentiality of their data was strictly maintained. No

identifying information was disclosed in any publication or report. Additionally, ethical approval was obtained from the institutional ethics review committee prior to data collection.

Results

Table 1

Analysis at the Basis of Demographic

Sr	Variables	Group	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Gender	Male	89	64.5%
		Female	49	35.5%
2	Area	Rural	126	91.3%
		Urban	12	8.7%
3	Training	Yes	23	16.7%
		No	115	83.3%
4	Current School Setting	General	131	94.9%
		Inclusive	2	1.4%
		Special	5	3.6%
5	Age	20-30	27	19.6%
		31-40	76	55.1%
		41-50	27	19.6%
		51-60	8	5.8%
6	Academic Qualification	BA/BSc	21	15.2%
		MA/MSc	90	65.2%
		MPhil	26	18.8%
		PhD	1	0.7%
7	Head Teacher Experience	1-5	49	35.5%
		6-10	65	47.1%
		11-15	23	16.7%
		16-20	1	0.7%
8	Division	Gilgit	34	24.6%
		Baltistan	41	29.7%

Sr Variables	Group	Frequency	Percentage %
	Diamer	63	44.7%
9 Districts	Gilgit	16	11.6%
	Ghizer	18	13.0%
	Skardu	24	17.4%
	Ghanche	17	12.3%
	Diamer	50	36.2%
	Astore	13	9.4%

Table 1 shows the demographic distribution of 138 primary school head teachers. The majority were male (64.5%) and from rural areas (91.3%). Only 16.7% had received relevant training, while 83.3% had not. Most respondents worked in general schools (94.9%), with a smaller proportion in inclusive (1.4%) and special schools (3.6%). The largest age group was 31–40 years (55.1%), followed by 20–30 years (19.6%), 41–50 years (19.6%), and 51–60 years (5.8%). In terms of head teacher experience, most had 6–10 years (47.1%), followed by 1–5 years (35.5%), 11–15 years (16.7%), and 16–20 years (0.7%). Respondents were from three divisions: Diamer (45.7%), Baltistan (29.7%), and Gilgit (24.6%). Geographically, they represented six districts: Diamer (36.2%), Skardu (17.4%), Ghizer (13.0%), Ghanche (12.3%), Gilgit (11.6%), and Astore (9.4%). Regarding academic qualifications, most respondents held an MA/MSc (65.2%), followed by MPhil (18.8%), BA/BSc (15.2%), and a small proportion with a PhD (0.7%).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Primary School Head Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusion"

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
Inclusive education benefits every student	21 (15.2%)	47 (34.1%)	14 (10.1%)	39 (28.3%)	17 (12.3%)	2.88	1.313
Comfortable applying inclusive policies	15 (10.9%)	47 (34.1%)	35 (25.4%)	25 (18.1%)	16 (11.6%)	2.86	1.187
Support inclusive learning	21 (15.2%)	49 (35.5%)	23 (16.7%)	32 (23.2%)	13 (9.4%)	2.76	1.235
Manage an inclusive environment	14 (10.1%)	48 (34.8%)	21 (15.2%)	33 (23.9%)	22 (15.9%)	3.01	1.282

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
Inclusive education fosters relationships	26 (18.8%)	29 (21.0%)	14 (10.1%)	38 (27.5%)	31 (22.5%)	3.14	1.461
Inclusion breaks negative behavior	22 (15.9%)	31 (22.5%)	23 (16.7%)	39 (28.3%)	23 (16.7%)	3.07	1.349
Allocate resources for inclusion	21 (15.2%)	34 (24.6%)	18 (13.0%)	40 (29.0%)	25 (18.1%)	3.10	1.369
Appreciating diverse abilities	27 (19.6%)	31 (22.5%)	19 (13.8%)	40 (29.0%)	21 (15.2%)	2.98	1.385
Inclusive learning, better results	24 (17.4%)	45 (32.6%)	24 (17.4%)	33 (23.9%)	12 (8.7%)	2.74	1.246
Committed to an inclusive culture	26 (18.8%)	27 (19.6%)	25 (18.1%)	45 (32.6%)	15 (10.9%)	2.97	1.312

Table 2 presents the views of 138 primary school head teachers from Gilgit-Baltistan, representing general, special, and inclusive schools. The results indicate generally positive attitudes, with mean scores ranging from 2.74 to 3.45. The strongest agreement was that inclusive education fosters better social relationships (M = 3.45, SD = 1.37), while the lowest support was for the belief that inclusion leads to better academic results (M = 2.74, SD = 1.25). The spread of responses (SD between 1.18 and 1.46) shows that, although most head teachers value inclusion, confidence in applying it particularly in policy and practice varies across schools.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Primary School head teacher's beliefs of Teachers' Roles in Inclusive Education

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
Inclusive teaching methods, disability accommodation.	17 (12.3%)	23 (16.7%)	21 (15.2%)	40 (29.0%)	37 (26.8%)	3.41	1.360
Teachers require training for inclusive practices.	17 (12.3%)	28 (20.3%)	23 (16.7%)	24 (17.4%)	46 (33.3%)	3.39	1.437
Teachers play a key role in fostering an inclusive classroom.	18 (13.0%)	25 (18.1%)	33 (23.9%)	23 (16.7%)	39 (28.3%)	3.29	1.389
Teachers' collaboration with parents for SWSN.	18 (13.0%)	29 (21.0%)	21 (15.2%)	25 (18.1%)	45 (32.6%)	3.36	1.450

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
Teachers should use IEPs for student with disabilities	19 (13.8%)	19 (13.8%)	22 (15.9%)	21 (15.2%)	57 (41.3%)	3.57	1.480
Teachers should receive incentives for inclusivity.	13 (9.4%)	27 (19.6%)	24 (17.4%)	17 (12.3%)	57 (41.3%)	3.57	1.429
Teachers must set high expectations for all students.	24 (17.4%)	20 (14.5%)	22 (15.9%)	24 (17.4%)	48 (34.8%)	3.38	1.510
Teachers should undergo regular training in inclusive education.	14 (10.1%)	27 (19.6%)	26 (18.8%)	33 (23.9%)	38 (27.5%)	3.39	1.342
Teachers should be evaluated on inclusive practices.	23 (16.7%)	22 (15.9%)	14 (10.1%)	31 (22.5%)	48 (34.8%)	3.43	1.509
Teachers should integrate assistive technologies in learning.	16 (11.6%)	22 (15.9%)	35 (25.4%)	39 (28.3%)	26 (18.8%)	3.27	1.265

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of 138 primary school head teachers from Gilgit-Baltistan, representing general, special, and inclusive schools, regarding their beliefs about teachers' roles in inclusive education. The findings indicate overall positive beliefs, with mean scores ranging from 3.27 to 3.57. The highest levels of agreement were recorded for the use of individualized education plans ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.48$) and for providing incentives to teachers working in inclusive classrooms ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.43$). Relatively strong support was also expressed for evaluating teachers on their ability to implement inclusive practices ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.51$) and for collaboration with parents to support students with special needs ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.45$). By contrast, the lowest mean score was found for integrating assistive technologies into teaching ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.27$), suggesting limited emphasis on technological solutions. The range of standard deviations (1.26–1.51) indicates moderate variability in responses, highlighting that while head teachers generally endorse the importance of teachers' roles in inclusion, differences remain in their prioritization of training, incentives, and innovative strategies.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics of Primary School Head Teachers' Leadership Practices for Inclusive Education

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
I prioritize inclusive education training for my staff.	24 (17.4%)	24 (17.4%)	27 (19.6%)	43 (31.2%)	20 (14.5%)	3.08	1.329
I promote a collaborative culture for inclusive education.	24 (17.4%)	22 (15.9%)	19 (13.8%)	59 (42.8%)	14 (10.1%)	3.12	1.298
I encourage co-teaching to support inclusive practices.	20 (14.5%)	25 (18.1%)	30 (21.7%)	43 (31.2%)	20 (14.5%)	3.13	1.283
I provide resources to support inclusive education in my school.	19 (13.8%)	38 (27.5%)	32 (23.2%)	35 (25.4%)	14 (10.1%)	2.91	1.220
I involve parents and community in promoting inclusion.	17 (12.3%)	21 (15.2%)	30 (21.7%)	56 (40.6%)	14 (10.1%)	3.21	1.193
I ensure school policies reflect inclusive education principles.	14 (10.1%)	25 (18.1%)	28 (20.3%)	45 (32.6%)	26 (18.8%)	3.32	1.256
I regularly monitor the progress of inclusive practices.	20 (14.5%)	29 (21.0%)	22 (15.9%)	44 (31.9%)	23 (16.7%)	3.15	1.329
I address staff resistance to inclusion through support.	22 (15.9%)	17 (12.3%)	31 (22.5%)	50 (36.2%)	18 (13.0%)	3.18	1.274
I encourage innovative teaching methods to support inclusion.	15 (10.9%)	25 (18.1%)	35 (25.4%)	49 (35.5%)	14 (10.1%)	3.16	1.167
I ensure the school environment is accessible for all students.	20 (14.5%)	22 (15.9%)	35 (25.4%)	44 (31.9%)	17 (12.3%)	3.12	1.244

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of leadership practices reported by 138 primary school head teachers from Gilgit-Baltistan. The results indicate that head teachers demonstrate generally positive leadership orientations towards inclusive education, with mean scores ranging from

2.91 to 3.32. The highest agreement was observed for ensuring that school policies reflect inclusive principles ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.26$) and for involving stakeholders such as parents and communities in promoting inclusion ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.19$). Moderate agreement was also reported for monitoring inclusive practices ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.33$), addressing staff resistance through dialogue ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.27$), and encouraging innovation in teaching methods ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.17$). In contrast, relatively lower means were recorded for providing adequate resources to support inclusion ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.22$) and ensuring that the school environment is physically accessible for all students ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.24$), pointing to gaps in resourcing and infrastructure. The range of standard deviations (1.17–1.33) reflects moderate variability in responses, suggesting that while many head teachers are committed to inclusive leadership practices, there remain differences in how effectively these practices are carried out across schools.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics of Primary School Head Teachers' Perception Barriers to Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
Limited funds hinder effective inclusive education implementation.	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.7%)	13 (9.4%)	68 (49.3%)	56 (40.6%)	4.30	0.666
High teacher turnover disrupts inclusive practices continuity.	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.7%)	7 (5.1%)	80 (58.0%)	50 (36.2%)	4.30	0.597
Lack of parental support impacts inclusive education success.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (6.5%)	73 (52.9%)	56 (40.6%)	4.34	0.598
Insufficient teacher training hinders inclusion..	0 (0.0%)	4 (2.9%)	5 (3.6%)	63 (45.7%)	66 (47.8%)	4.38	0.697
Societal attitudes towards disabilities challenge inclusive education.	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.7%)	9 (6.5%)	75 (54.3%)	53 (38.4%)	4.30	0.623

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev.
Overcrowded classrooms hinder inclusive practices.	0 (0.0%)	5 (3.6%)	7 (5.1%)	57 (41.3%)	69 (50.0%)	4.38	0.747
Limited assistive technology availability is a major obstacle.	0 (0.0%)	7 (5.1%)	14 (10.1%)	65 (47.1%)	52 (37.7%)	4.17	0.810
Lack of time for collaboration affects inclusion quality.	0 (0.0%)	8 (5.8%)	40 (29.0%)	59 (42.8%)	31 (22.5%)	3.82	0.848
Staff resistance to change impacts inclusive education success.	1 (0.7%)	7 (5.1%)	14 (10.1%)	60 (43.5%)	56 (40.6%)	4.18	0.865
Inadequate support from authorities hinders inclusive education.	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.2%)	0 (0.0%)	81 (58.7%)	54 (39.1%)	4.35	0.600

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics of barriers perceived by 138 primary school head teachers in implementing inclusive education. The results indicate that head teachers strongly acknowledged several barriers, with mean scores ranging from 3.82 to 4.38. The most critical challenges reported were insufficient training opportunities for teachers ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.70$) and overcrowded classrooms ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.75$). Other major barriers included limited financial resources ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.67$), high teacher turnover ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.60$), and negative societal attitudes towards disabilities ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.62$).

Similarly, lack of parental support ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.60$) and inadequate support from education authorities ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.60$) were also recognized as substantial constraints. Limited availability of assistive technology ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.81$) and resistance to change among staff ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.87$) emerged as additional obstacles. In contrast, lack of time for teacher collaboration ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.85$) was perceived as a comparatively lesser, though still significant, barrier. The relatively low standard deviations (0.60–0.87) suggest strong consensus among head teachers, highlighting that these barriers are widely acknowledged across schools in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Table 6
Independent Samples t-Test of Gender Differences in Head Teachers' Attitudes, Roles, Leadership, and Perceived Barriers to Inclusive Education

Factors	t	df	p	Mean Difference	95% CI (Lower, Upper)
Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education	-4.13	136	<.001	-0.75	-1.11, -0.39
Perceptions of Teachers' Roles	-5.31	136	<.001	-1.07	-1.47, -0.67
Leadership Practices for Inclusive Education	-4.00	136	<.001	-0.68	-1.01, -0.34
Barriers to Effective Implementation	-1.71	136	.089	-0.11	-0.23, 0.02

Table. 6 shows that an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare male and female head teachers on four factors related to inclusive education: attitudes toward inclusion, perceptions of teachers' roles, leadership practices, and barriers to effective implementation.

A significant gender difference was found in attitudes toward inclusive education, $t(136) = -4.13$, $p < .001$, with female head teachers ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.05$) scoring higher than male head teachers ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.01$). A significant gender difference was also found in perceptions of teachers' roles in inclusive education, $t(136) = -5.31$, $p < .001$, with females ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.18$) reporting higher scores than males ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.11$). Similarly, a significant gender difference emerged in leadership practices for inclusive education, $t(136) = -4.00$, $p < .001$, with females ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.04$) scoring higher than males ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.90$). However, no significant gender difference was found in perceived barriers to effective implementation of inclusive education, $t(136) = -1.71$, $p = .089$.

Table 7
One-Way ANOVA of District-Level Differences in Head Teachers' Attitudes, Roles, Leadership Practices, and Barriers to Inclusive Education

Factors	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Head Teachers Attitudes Towards Inclusive	70.992	5	14.198	21.198	.000

	Within Groups	88.413	132	.670		
	Total	159.405	137			
Head Teachers Perceptions of Teachers Roles in Inclusive Education	Between Groups	83.841	5	16.768	17.278	.000
	Within Groups	128.108	132	.971		
	Total	211.949	137			
Head Teachers Leadership Practices for Inclusive Education	Between Groups	48.989	5	9.798	14.714	.000
	Within Groups	87.896	132	.666		
	Total	136.884	137			
Barriers to Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education	Between Groups	2.462	5	.492	4.247	.001
	Within Groups	15.303	132	.116		
	Total	17.764	137			

Table. 7 shows that a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of district on head teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education, perceptions of teachers' roles, leadership practices, and barriers to effective implementation.

A significant difference was found in attitudes toward inclusive education across districts, $F(5, 132) = 21.20, p < .001$. Head teachers in Gilgit reported more positive attitudes, whereas those in Ghanche and Diamer scored lower, suggesting that contextual and regional variations may influence acceptance of inclusive practices. Significant district differences also emerged in perceptions of teachers' roles, $F(5, 132) = 17.28, p < .001$. Head teachers from Gilgit and Skardu perceived teachers' roles more positively compared to those from Ghanche and Diamer, indicating stronger professional expectations and clearer role definition in these districts. Leadership practices for inclusive education also varied significantly by district, $F(5, 132) = 14.71, p < .001$. Gilgit and Skardu demonstrated stronger leadership support, while Ghanche and Diamer reflected weaker practices, underscoring the importance of administrative commitment for advancing inclusion. Finally, significant district differences were observed in perceived barriers, $F(5, 132) = 4.25, p = .001$. Head teachers in Gilgit and Skardu reported fewer barriers compared to those in Ghanche and Diamer, suggesting that access to local resources

and institutional support systems reduces perceived challenges to implementing inclusive education.

Summary

This study investigates the multidimensional aspects of head teachers' attitudes, beliefs, leadership practices, and perceived barriers toward inclusive education in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. Employing a quantitative descriptive design, data were gathered from 138 head teachers across six districts (Gilgit, Ghizer, Skardu, Ghanche, Diamer, and Astore) using a validated Likert-scale questionnaire. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior and transformative leadership frameworks, the research highlights generally positive attitudes toward inclusion's social benefits (e.g., fostering relationships, $M=3.45$) but moderate confidence in practical implementation ($M=2.74-3.14$). Beliefs strongly emphasize teacher training ($M=3.39$) and incentives ($M=3.57$), with less focus on assistive technology ($M=3.27$). Leadership practices are robust in collaboration and policy alignment ($M=3.32$) but weaker in resource provision ($M=2.91$). Key barriers include insufficient training ($M=4.38$), financial constraints ($M=4.30$), and overcrowded classrooms ($M=4.38$). Significant gender differences show females exhibiting more positive attitudes, beliefs, and leadership practices ($p < .001$), while district variations reveal Gilgit and Skardu as more supportive compared to Ghanche and Diamer ($p < .001$). These insights underscore the gap between aspirations and implementation in a resource-constrained, culturally diverse region, informing targeted interventions for equitable education.

Discussion

Head teachers in Gilgit-Baltistan are central to advancing inclusive education, as their attitudes, beliefs, leadership practices, and perceived barriers significantly influence the adoption of inclusive policies in schools. This study, conducted across six districts (Gilgit, Ghizer, Skardu, Ghanche, Diamer, and Astore), found that head teachers hold moderately positive attitudes toward inclusive education, particularly valuing its social benefits, such as fostering relationships and reducing negative behaviors. These findings align with UNESCO (2017) and Ainscow and Sandill (2010), who highlight inclusion's role in promoting social cohesion. However, head teachers expressed less confidence in achieving

academic outcomes and implementing inclusive policies, reflecting skepticism in resource-scarce settings, consistent with Avramidis and Norwich (2002), who noted negative attitudes in under-resourced environments. This cautious optimism in Gilgit-Baltistan likely arises from cultural and infrastructural constraints, as highlighted by Khan (2011) and Malak et al. (2018).

Beliefs about teachers' roles in inclusive education revealed strong support, particularly for individualized education plans and incentives for inclusive teaching. These findings resonate with Florian and Linklater (2010) on the need for adaptive pedagogy and Pajares (1992) on self-efficacy, underscoring the importance of teacher preparation. Head teachers emphasized the need for training and collaboration with parents, aligning with Bandura (1997), but placed less priority on assistive technology, suggesting gaps in innovation likely due to limited exposure in remote areas (Hameed & Manzoor, 2014). These beliefs reflect an acknowledgment of inclusion's value but highlight concerns about its feasibility without systemic support, as noted by Rizvi and Lingard (2011).

Leadership practices among head teachers are generally supportive, with notable strengths in aligning school policies with inclusive principles and engaging stakeholders such as parents and communities. These align with Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and Riehl (2000) on transformative leadership for equity. However, weaknesses in providing resources and ensuring physical accessibility underscore challenges in resource-constrained regions, corroborating Hussain (2016) and Billingsley (2004). This indicates that while head teachers are committed, external constraints limit their effectiveness, as per Fullan (2001), with innovation encouraged but not fully realized.

Perceived barriers were strongly acknowledged, with insufficient teacher training and overcrowded classrooms identified as primary concerns, supporting Slee (2011) and Mittler (2000) on structural impediments. Financial constraints, lack of parental support, and negative societal attitudes further align with Booth and Ainscow (2011) and Khan and Mirza (2012), emphasizing Gilgit-Baltistan's geographic and cultural challenges. The consensus on these barriers suggests they persist despite initiatives like those from UNICEF (2013).

Gender differences emerged, with female head teachers demonstrating more positive attitudes, stronger beliefs, and more effective leadership practices compared to their male counterparts, supporting Sharma et al. (2008) on gender influences, possibly due to empathetic orientations (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). No gender differences were found in

perceived barriers, indicating these challenges are universal. District-wise differences showed head teachers in Gilgit and Skardu exhibiting more positive attitudes, beliefs, and leadership practices compared to those in Ghanche and Diamer, likely due to better resource access (Government of Pakistan, 2017; Ali, 2012). These findings align with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), where attitudes and beliefs drive intentions but are moderated by perceived barriers, and transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) for systemic change.

Urban-rural disparities were evident, with head teachers in urban areas of Gilgit and Skardu showing greater awareness and stronger leadership practices than their rural counterparts in Ghanche and Diamer. This mirrors Jameel and Khan (2018), who noted more positive attitudes among urban teachers due to better access to training and resources, and Hussain (2012), who highlighted structural disadvantages in rural Gilgit-Baltistan. However, NGO-led interventions, such as those by the Mehnaz Fatima Foundation (Khan, 2011), suggest that targeted training can reduce these disparities. Academic qualifications had no significant effect on attitudes, beliefs, or leadership practices, indicating that specialized training, not higher degrees, is critical for inclusive education preparedness, as supported by Sharma and Desai (2002).

Recommendations

1. **Targeted Professional Development:** Implement mandatory, district-specific training programs for head teachers and staff, focusing on inclusive pedagogy, assistive technologies, and individualized plans. Collaborate with organizations like the Mehnaz Fatima Foundation and UNICEF to address training gaps, particularly in Diamer and Ghanche.
2. **Resource Allocation and Infrastructure Improvements:** Policymakers should prioritize funding for assistive tools, classroom modifications, and reduced student-teacher ratios in rural and remote districts. The Government of Pakistan's National Education Policy (2017) should be enforced with dedicated budgets for Gilgit-Baltistan to mitigate financial and overcrowding barriers.
3. **Gender-Sensitive Interventions:** Encourage female leadership in inclusive education through incentives and mentorship, leveraging their more positive orientations. Promote gender-balanced recruitment and training to reduce disparities.
4. **Community and Stakeholder Engagement:** Launch awareness campaigns to shift societal attitudes and enhance parental involvement, integrating

community outreach into school leadership practices. Foster partnerships with local authorities for sustainable support.

5. ***Monitoring and Policy Enforcement:*** Establish district-level monitoring mechanisms to track inclusive practices, with regular evaluations tied to incentives. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts and qualitative insights to refine interventions, ensuring alignment with transformative leadership principles.

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