

# Teachers' Perspective on the Inclusion of Individuals with Special Needs in the Mainstream Schools of Pakistan

Amatur Raof<sup>1</sup>, Tariq Manzoor<sup>2</sup> and Munawwar Ahmed<sup>3</sup>

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## Abstract

*The study investigates the experiences of secondary school educators with inclusive education. The primary objective of this research was to ascertain the opinions of educators on the use of inclusive education. The questionnaire was adapted from NJCIE (2010). The school in the Sargodha District was chosen as the location for inclusive education. The questionnaire was sent to each of the 17 teachers at the chosen school in order to obtain their opinions on a four-point Likert-type scale for the collection of data. The data was analyzed by measuring frequency distribution and percentage. Results showed that the teachers' opportunities provided to individuals with special needs in academic and non-academic are almost the same as those provided to their peers without disabilities. It was recommended that teachers should be provided training on inclusive education. Technology should be used for the best academic outcomes for students with disabilities. There might be an addition in policy to support a more equitable and inclusive education system in Pakistan by giving teachers comprehensive support and training, allocating resources, and creating an inclusive atmosphere that promotes acceptance and understanding between students, teachers, and the community.*

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Disabilities, Mainstream Schools, Diversity

## Introduction

Several nations have enacted laws to encourage including individuals with impairments in conventional classes, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. The "inclusive" educational strategies of emerging nations, including India (Sharma & Deppeler, 2005), the Philippines, Hong Kong (Sharma et al., 2008), and Pakistan (Hameed, 2003), have been impacted by these laws. In contrast to Western nations, Pakistan has seen a slower shift to inclusive educational practices. Pakistan's education policy initially dedicated funding for special education programs in 1972.

Integrating special needs pupils into mainstream classes is gaining importance in Pakistan. Teachers play a critical role in this endeavor, and their perspectives are invaluable in assessing the efficacy of inclusive education. Over the last few years, there has been a noticeable shift in the understanding of inclusive education as a means of promoting diversity and equity. Despite the wide range of opinions among educators, a growing number of them are beginning to support inclusive practices. They place a strong emphasis on the importance of providing customized education, a wealth of resources, and opportunities for professional development in order to fulfill the diverse needs of their students better (Sharma et al., 2013).

The "National Policy for Rehabilitation of the Disabled" and the "National Policy for Education and Rehabilitation of the Disabled" were two significant policies developed between 1980 and

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<sup>1</sup>PhD Scholar, Department of Education, University of Sargodha.

<sup>2</sup>School Education Department, Government of the Punjab, Email: [Tariq.0014@gmail.com](mailto:Tariq.0014@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup>Lecturer, Department of Education, Virtual University of Pakistan. Email: [Munawwar.ahmed@vu.edu.pk](mailto:Munawwar.ahmed@vu.edu.pk)



1990. These tactics had a limited effect due to financial limitations and a shortage of instructors with the necessary skills and qualifications (Shahzadi, 2000).

Special schools were usually the only places where students with disabilities could get most of their education until the end of the 1990s. Pakistan did not create and implement its first inclusive education policy for pupils with disabilities until 2002. Still, it has not been easy to put these concepts into practice in classrooms (Khan, 1998). Only 2% of children with disabilities were estimated to have had access to special education services by the year 2000. It makes sense that in a nation of 180 million people, 8.23% of whom have a handicap, delivering services would be very difficult (Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Sultana, 1993).

It has been discovered that training on how to teach children with disabilities in a classroom successfully has a positive influence on educators' attitudes towards inclusion (Savolainen et al., 2011), despite some evidence suggesting that the successful implementation of inclusion reforms depends on the willingness of educators (Sharma et al., 2008). Additionally, it seems that throughout teacher training programs, teachers' views regarding instructing students with disabilities in ordinary classrooms may be easily changed (Campbell et al., 2003). According to earlier studies (Loreman et al., 2005; Savolainen et al., 2011), teachers who had received training in inclusive educational practices and completed more postsecondary education (Sharma et al., 2008) had more positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Teachers who had finished special education programs focused on teaching students with special needs were more willing to include students with disabilities in their classrooms, consistent with these findings. Though the instructors were aware of the advantages of inclusive education, many expressed practical worries regarding how they would incorporate inclusive practices into their teaching methods. In fact, according to Palmer (2006), a teacher's capacity to instruct students with disabilities successfully is significantly impacted by their ability to teach self-efficacy.

Despite Pakistan's potential to become one of the most significant economies in the world, decades of social unrest and conflict have severely damaged the country's infrastructure, including its railway system, electrical grid, and educational system. Inadequate teacher training programs and a dearth of resources for practicing classroom instructors have contributed to the lack of educational chances for children with disabilities (Hameed, 2003; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). The adoption of inclusive practices in schools may have been hampered by preservice teachers' attitudes towards these practices and their levels of teaching self-efficacy, according to recent research from a few South Asian nations (Ahsan et al., 2013; Sharma, 2011). Nonetheless, there needs to be more comparable studies in Pakistan about preservice teachers' perspectives on inclusion.

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to investigate teachers' attitudes towards inclusion as well as their current situation of inclusive education in Pakistani schools in order to estimate the potential effects of these two factors on their capacity to instruct students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

## Literature Review

### Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a universal approach that has been widely used in current history. The civil rights reforms and educational policies initiated this principle and school of thought (Khan, 2017). However, people who are in favor and against it make the implementation of inclusive education complicated. Inclusive education is a complex and challenging concept short of a universal definition. Moreover, he says that although there is no commonly accepted definition of inclusive education, there is an international agreement and urge to agree on the sole features of this multifaceted notion. As Jean-Francois et al. (2023), states that indeed, the phrase has moved so much that it got jet-lagged. However, as time passed, researchers have defined the term inclusive education in a manner that goes with their circumstances.

### **Requirements of Inclusive Education**

Hameed and Manzoor (2019) pointed out that inclusive education promotes more interactional and interconnected teaching techniques in which learners assist each other and increase involvement. Due to this, inclusive education is considered a technique to meet the educational requirements of all students, either with or without special needs, and enable them to study mutually in the same educational contexts with a suitable set-up and aid structure. Inclusion requires a comprehensive modification in the system, in which all individuals are welcomed, fit in, and respected as a part of the education system. It is achievable in an adaptable education system that can integrate the requirements of various students and modify them to meet their requirements (Haider, 2008).

Parasuram added that everyone inside the organization (teachers, students, family, and society members, in addition to the executives and stakeholders) must be accepting towards diverse students and consider it a challenge and not a dilemma. A child's learning is affected by a variety of factors, such as the environment of home and school, including the home and school environment, the skillfulness and strategies of teachers, and societal insight into what kind of learning is appreciated. Therefore, the purpose of inclusive education is to make sure that all students have access to suitable, applicable, reasonable, and functional learning in their society. It is initiated at home by the family and comprises all kinds of learning, formal and non-formal. Inclusion is also regarded as a human right, where all individuals are acknowledged and educated collaboratively in a general school setting (Khan, 2017).

The Salamanca Framework of 1994 stressed the rights of people with special needs. It stated that the creation of inclusive schools will aid in minimizing prejudice and adverse perceptions, maximize student's social self-esteem, and support in constructing an inclusive setting for them. The Salamanca framework provides individuals with special needs the right to be known as an individual who can participate significantly in constructing a state with other people (Kamran & Bano, 2023).

### **Inclusive Education in Punjab**

Ahmad and Yousaf explained that according to the 1998 Census, the population of Punjab was 73,621,000, 1,826,623 of them were individuals with disabilities. Among these numbers, 605,695 were individuals of school-going age. At present, there is no up-to-date and trustworthy data either from the federal government or provincial government regarding individuals with disabilities after the 1998 census. Moreover, according to the Punjab Government, no individual should be left behind in getting an education, regardless of disability. The Punjab Department of Special Education is providing training to train the teachers so they can teach individuals with disabilities. It has become apparent that Inclusive Schools are there for 85% of individuals with mild disabilities. For the rest of the 15% of special needs individuals, the Department of Special Education has set up segregated schools only for special needs students. All the regular schools are asked to admit all children regardless of their physical disability by the Department of Education, Punjab. A Project has been proposed by the Department of Special Education of figure Rs.1 235.00 million to the provincial government for acceptance (Shaukat, 2013).

### **Inclusive Education in Sindh**

According to Rizvi (2018), the Government of Sindh is dedicated to universalizing education regardless of diversity. In 2013, the Government of Sindh passed the 'Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2013', which targeted the education needs of individuals aged 5 to 16 years, exclusive of prejudice.

The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2002) and international policies are the guidelines used to provide inclusive education to individuals with special needs. The Special Education Department of the Sindh Government educates individuals with special needs. The Sindh Education Sector Plan (SESP) has been formed on the principle of the National Education Policy, targeting to improve Pakistan's accomplishment of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy, the internationally-agreed Education for All (EFA) commitments, and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

An initiative has been taken by the Department of Special Education, Sindh, to collect data regarding individuals with disabilities for improved programs, policies, and plans. Accomplishments of the Sindh Government include free education from secondary to higher to individuals with special needs, textbooks, notebooks, school bags, stationery, winter and summer uniforms, rehabilitation services, therapies, counseling, assistance, computer training, transport services, diet @ Rs. 42/- per day of attendance, to Special need individuals.

### Inclusive Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Pasha et al. (2021) added that the Social Welfare Department is accountable for the academic and vocational training of individuals with disabilities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It stated different schemes for genders, beggars, orphans, needy women, and individuals with disabilities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As per the 1998 census, the entire population of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is 17.656 million, and 1.06 million individuals have disabilities.

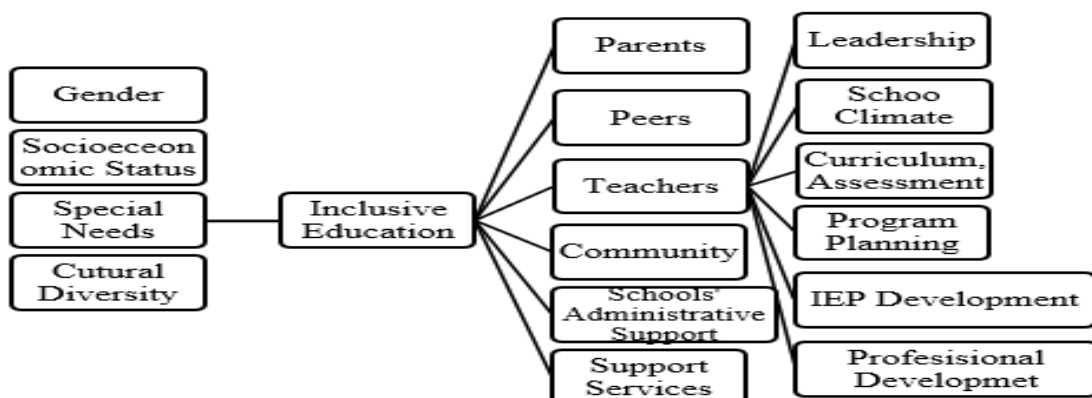
### Inclusive Education in Baluchistan

The Department of Social Welfare is accountable for the services of special education in Baluchistan. In Baluchistan, inclusive education is very restricted. School structure standards need to be revised to the need for inclusive education. A few numbers of special education are there in Baluchistan, and they are mainly in Quetta.

Due to the conflicts, terrorization, intolerance, and violence in Baluchistan, the inclusive education model has not been understood completely. However, the Government of Baluchistan Education Department is taking the following steps to promote inclusive education (Kamran et al., 2022).

## Theoretical Framework

Figure 1: Theoretical framework



## Methods and Procedures

A survey research design was utilized to collect data from the teachers of the selected school in Sargodha District. In order to conduct an inquiry, using a few adjustments, changes, and additions, the questionnaire was adapted from NJCIE (2010). The study used purposive sampling. All the teachers in the school were selected to provide their opinions regarding inclusive education. The researcher collected all the data by personally visiting the targeted school. The researcher was available to assist the respondents. Data were collected from 17 teachers, including 15 female and two male teachers. The data were analyzed by measuring frequency distribution and percentage. Descriptive statistics were used to find frequency distribution.

## Data Analysis

The questionnaire was adapted from the Quality Indicators for Effective Inclusive Education Guidebook of NJCIE (Pasha, 2012). This questionnaire contained 06 indicators with several items to assess the condition of inclusive education in the targeted school and teachers' attitudes. The questionnaire used a four-point Likert scale. The four responses were entirely, significantly, partially, and still need to be completed.

## Demographics of the Respondents (School Teachers)

Data collected on the demographics of school teachers were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The background of teachers involved in this study was examined by the following characteristics: Qualifications, Gender, Age, and Experience in the teaching field.

**Table 1: Demographic Detail of the Teachers**

		Frequency	Percent
Qualification	Bachelors	7	41.2
	Masters	9	52.9
	M.Phil	1	5.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age	21-25	12	70.6
	26-29	3	17.6
	30-39	2	11.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Gender	Female	15	88.2
	Male	2	11.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Experience	1-5 Years	12	70.6
	6-10 Years	4	23.5
	11-15 Years	1	5.9

Based on the results in Table 1.1, 7(41.2%) teacher's qualification was a bachelor's degree, 9(52.9%) teacher's qualification was a Master and 1 (5.9%) teacher's qualification was an M.Phil. The results indicate that slightly more than half of teachers' qualification is Masters in the selected schools. Age: 12(70.6%) teachers were in the age range of 21-25, 3(17.6%) teachers were in the age range of 26-29, and 2(11.8%) were in the age range of 30-39. The result indicates that over half of the teachers were aged 21-25. Very few teachers were in the age range 30-39. Gender aspect: 15 (88.2%) of the school teachers were female and 2 (11.8%) were male. The result indicates that most of the teachers were female in selected schools. Experience 12 (70.6%) teachers had experience of 1-5 years in the teaching field, 4(23.5%)



teachers had experience of 6-10 years, and 1 (5.9%) teacher had experience of 11-15 years. The results show that most of the teachers had experience of 1-5 years. Very few teachers had experience of more than ten years.

### Leadership Indicators

**Table 2: The Teachers Responses Regarding the 'Leadership' in Inclusive Education**

Sr. No	Statement	Entirely	Significantly	Partially	Not Yet
<b>Leadership</b>					
1.	The principal is well aware of inclusive education.	70.6	29.4	-	-
2.	Resources are supplied by the principal to put the inclusion into action.	-	35.3	64.7	-
3.	The principal actively support to carry out inclusive education.	41.2	58.8	-	-
4.	The head teacher reinforces the teachers to execute inclusive education in school.	58.8	41.2	-	-
5.	The head teacher highly reinforces teachers who show optimistic approach for the practice of inclusive education.	94.1	5.9	-	-

Table 2 shows teachers' responses regarding leadership about inclusive education in their schools. The result indicates that 70.6% of teachers agreed that the principal is aware of inclusive education entirely, and 29.4 % said significantly. As for statement 2, 64.7% of teachers agreed that it is implemented partially, and 35.3% approved that it is carried out significantly. For the third indicator, 58.8% of teachers agreed that it is applied significantly, and 41.2% accepted that it is executed entirely. Moreover, 58.8% of respondents agreed that statement 4 is implemented entirely, and 41.2% of teachers said the statement is executed significantly. For the final statement, 5 94.1% of teachers believed it was carried out significantly.

### School Climate Indicators

**Table 3: The Teachers Responses Regarding the 'School Climate' in Inclusive Education**

Sr#	Statement	Entirely	Sig.	Partially	Not Yet
<b>School Climate</b>					
1.	Students with disabilities in school are valued by the administrative staff.			47.1	52.9
2.	Students with disabilities in school are valued by the teachers.	-	17.6	70.6	11.7
3.	In non-academic setting teachers exhibit constructive approach for evolving effective relationships among all students.	-	29.4	64.7	5.9
4.	In academic setting teachers exhibit constructive approach for evolving effective relationships among all students	-	52.9	29.4	11.7
5.	Teachers are knowledgeable and skilled to execute inclusion.	-	-	41.2	58.8
6.	Various disabilities and interrelated special needs are known by the teachers.			58.8	41.2

Table 3 shows the teacher's views on school climate regarding inclusive education in their school. The result indicates that according to 52.9% of teachers, the administrative staff does not value individuals with disabilities yet, and 47.1 % said they are partially valued. As for statement 2, 17.6 % of teachers agreed that it is implemented significantly, 70.6% agreed it is executed partially, and 35.3% of teachers approved that it is not yet done. For the third indicator, 29.4% of teachers agreed that it is applied significantly, 64.7% said it is exhibited partially, and 5.9% accepted that it is not yet executed.

Moreover, 53% of respondents agreed that statement 4 is implemented significantly, 29.3% assumed it occurs partially, and 11.7% of teachers said it still needs to be executed. For the fifth statement, 41.2% of teachers believed it was carried out partially, and 58.8% of respondents said it still needs to be executed. As for the last statement, 58.8% of teachers assumed that it is implemented partially, and 41.2% of respondents said it is not yet carried out.

### Indicator Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction

**Table 4: The Teachers Responses Regarding the 'Curriculum, assessment and instruction' in Inclusive Education**

Sr No	Statement	Entirely	Sig.	Partially	Not Yet
	<b>Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction</b>				
1.	To encounter a great range of student's needs teachers, utilize distinguished instructional resources.	5.9	17.6	58.8	17.6
2.	Homework is altered to accomplish the requirements of the individuals with disabilities.	-	-	29.4	70.6
3.	Students with special needs participation is reinforced by the teachers in academic settings.	-	70.6	29.4	-
4.	Students with special needs participation is reinforced by the teachers in non-academic settings.	-	35.3	53	11.7
5.	A constructive assessment is utilized by the teacher to check if student with disability developed concept.	-	5.8	47.1	47.1
6.	Technology is used effortlessly by the teachers to improve the student's result.	-	-	5.8	94.2

The findings show that 5.9% of teachers agreed that the distinguished instructional resources are entirely used to meet students' needs, 17.6% said they are used significantly, 58.8% said resources are utilized partially, and 17.6% believed they are not yet used. As for statement 2, 29.4 % of teachers agreed that it is implemented partially, and 70.6% believed it is not yet executed. For the third indicator, 70.6% of teachers agreed that it is applied significantly, and 29.4% said it is exhibited partially. Moreover, 35.3% of respondents agreed that statement 4 is implemented significantly, 53% assumed it occurs partially, and 11.7% of teachers said the statement is not yet executed. For the fifth statement, 5.8% of teachers believed that it is carried out significantly, 47.1% of respondents agreed that it is implemented partially, and 47.1% of

teachers said it is not yet executed. As for the last statement, 5.8% of teachers assumed that it is implemented partially, and 94.2% of respondents said it is not yet carried out.

### Program Planning and IEP Development

**Table 5: The Teachers Responses Regarding the 'Program Planning and IEP Development' in Inclusive Education**

Sr No	Statement	Entirely	Sig.	Partially	Not Yet
<b>Program Planning and IEP Development</b>					
1.	IEP is constructed for individuals with special needs.	-	-	-	100
2.	Parents help in developing the behavioral strategies for behavior intervention plans.	-	-	-	100

The result regarding the indicator program planning and IEP development shows that according to 100% of teachers IEP is not yet constructed for individuals with disabilities. Moreover, 100% of the respondents agreed that parents are not yet considered while developing behavioral plans.

### Indicator Professional Development

**Table 6: The Teachers Responses Regarding the 'Professional Development' in Inclusive Education**

Sr. No	Statement	Entirely	Sig.	Partially	Not Yet
<b>Professional Development</b>					
1.	Teachers are provided in-service teacher training to learn about inclusion and different strategies.	-	-	-	100
2.	The school is creating awareness for the best implementation of inclusive education plans and strategies.	-	-	-	100
3.	An in-service teacher training is provided to achieve the diverse needs of teaching staff.	-	-	-	100

The result regarding professional development shows that 100% of the teachers agreed that teachers are not yet provided in-service training for inclusive education and different strategies. As for the statement 2, 100% of the teachers believed that schools are not yet creating awareness for the best implementation of inclusive education plans and strategies. For the statement 3, 100% of the teachers said that teachers are not yet provided with training to meet their diverse needs.



### Indicator Planning for Continued Best Practice Improvement

**Table 7: The Teachers Responses Regarding the ‘Planning for Continued Best Practice Improvement’ in Inclusive Education**

Sr. No	Statement	Entirely	Sig.	Partially	Not Yet
<b>Planning for Continued Best Practice Improvement</b>					
1.	A plan on the implementation of inclusive education is formed which is reassessed yearly.	-	-	-	100
2.	Plan’s progress made by school is communicated to teachers, parents and other stakeholders.	-	-	-	100

The findings regarding planning for continued best practice improvement show that 100% of the teachers believed that a plan for implementing inclusive education still needs to be formed, which is reassessed yearly. For statement 2, 100% of the teachers agreed that the plan's progress made by the school has yet to be shared with teachers, parents, and stakeholders.

### Discussion

Different people would have different opinions regarding inclusive education in classrooms all over the globe. Numerous distinct and commonly conflicting ideas about what inclusion is have previously been documented in various studies. Research demonstrates that instructors need to be more prepared regarding factors like schools' purpose statements that do not support inclusive learning (Villa & Thousand, 2005) and a scarcity of chances for professional development for educators—through disorganization of management and collaboration (Bourke, 2009), missing admission policies that promote inclusion, a shortage of collaborative planning procedures, a lack of encouragement for family-school partnerships and the community (Sailor, 2002), an unwelcoming school environment for learners with disabilities (UNICEF, 2003a, 2003b), and an area lacking textual data regarding educators roles, responsibilities, and necessary competencies to instruct and assist every student, which includes disabled students (Katsafanas, 2006). Nonetheless, Pasha (2011) discovered positive signs that educators are prepared for inclusive learning. These results unequivocally demonstrate the inadequacy of primary education and underscore the need for strategic planning to be modified by all parties involved to advance inclusive education in regular schools (Porter & Smith, 2011). According to the study's findings, within the guidance of licensed psychologists and special educators, practical work must be done to increase the understanding of inclusive education among teachers, administrators, and staff members, as well as their practical application of different inclusive education practices.

### Conclusion

According to the teachers, the principal has a positive attitude toward inclusive education, but the administrative staff does not value individuals with disabilities. Opportunities provided to individuals with special needs are similar to their peers without disabilities, but technology and constructive assessment are not utilized effectively. IEPs are not developed for individuals with disabilities, and parents are not involved in intervention plans. Separate sessions are not given when needed, and teachers must be aware of up-to-date research. Evidence-based strategies are not provided to parents, and teachers need more training and awareness for inclusive education implementation. Attention is needed for various indicators of inclusive education.

### Recommendations

Brief administrative staff on inclusive education importance, provide training for teachers, utilize technology for academic outcomes of students with disabilities, adapt curriculum and assessment for special needs students, raise awareness for parents, and provide psychologists for individuals with special needs.

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