

Towards Inclusive Classrooms: Identification of the Role of Teachers in Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment

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Abstract

The development of education is vital to the expansion of human evolution. Learning philosophy and disciplinary practices advise the inclusive model of classroom teaching. The objective of this research study is to identify teachers' role in creating inclusive classrooms in primary level schools. According to School Information System (www.sis.punjab.gov.pk), Tehsil Gojra has total 113 male primary schools where 206 teachers are teaching. By maintaining a 95% confidence level and confidence interval 5, and using www.surveysystem.com, the sample size of 134 was determined. Convenient method of sampling was used to select the respondents. Essential information was collected from the respondents through a structured questionnaire. The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to process the information. This study demonstrated how important teachers are in fostering an inclusive learning environment. The highest-ranked initiative, 'Provide support for them in ways which benefit all children in your class,' having mean score 2.33, which emphasizes significance of inclusive teaching strategies that benefit the entire class rather than addressing the needs of special students only. 'Focusing on the strength of students' with mean score of 2.27 and 'Promoting empathy in students' with mean score of 2.25 follow closely, emphasizing the significance of identifying student talents and creating a caring, empathetic environment in the classroom. Teachers saw how crucial it was to use a range of tactics and adaptations to help struggling students.

Keywords: Role of Teachers; Inclusive Classroom; Inclusive Learning.

Introduction

The fundamental human right to education serves as the foundation for inclusion (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). In the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, UNESCO made an offer to present inclusion as a new teaching strategy (UNESCO, 1994). The worldwide campaign of 'Education for All' (UNESCO, 2000) presented, upon the basis of the premise set by Salamanca declaration, that the best way to defeat discriminatory attitudes and achieve the goal of inclusive education is through the inclusion of all children into regular schools. Because the educational systems vary widely on classification and inclusion rates, this trend has earned extensive attention and empirical study over the decades since its establishment (Richardson & Powell, 2011). Currently, it can be regarded as a genuine global standard that is now adopted by over 175 countries following the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, though it originated in the past century (Powell et al., 2016). Due to the lack of close-by specialist facilities, a large number of school-age children with

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special needs do not attend special education schools. Even though there are normal schools close to the homes of special needs students, many of them do not attend. When compared to peers who do not require assistance, they have a lower chance of completing their schooling. Mainstream schools provide inclusive classrooms where regular students and students with special needs study side by side as per Punjab Education Sector Plan, 2020-24 (Chaudhry & Tajwar, 2021; Government of Punjab, 2019). There has been a push around the world to involve learners with disabilities into mainstream education contexts for at least 30 years. Education can be truly inclusive only if a student has access to all resources and supports necessary for simple learning (Amor et al., 2019). Professional attitude will help the reflective educator to be more effective in self-evaluation, commitment, accountability, and independent behaviors and being a reflective teacher will make developing a new teacher more achievable through developing opportunities for learning that will support the application of various methodological approaches enhancing teaching competencies regarding inclusive education (Ferreira, 2022).

Need for Study

Present study has been conducted to identify the role of mainstream teachers for creating inclusive classrooms. Previous studies have focused on the needs and challenges of students in special education schools. As many students with special needs are also studying with normal students in the same classrooms in mainstream schools. Therefore, teachers should also know about their role and how to prepare better for such inclusive classroom scenarios.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed towards the identification of role of teachers in creating an inclusive learning environment in regular classrooms.

Significance of Research

This research has significance as:

1. It provides insights about the role of teachers which is very crucial in creating an inclusive learning environment in regular classrooms having students with many types of learning needs.
2. Policy makers may develop future plans using the insights of research develop strategies to establish inclusive learning environment in learning institutes.

Literature Review

Jamieson (2003) concluded that it is crucial for educators to create a physical learning environment because it fosters critical thinking in their students, helps teachers understand their role as facilitators of successful classroom activities, and gives students the social skills and abilities they need to succeed in new learning settings. Teachers should understand the intricacy and significance of small-group instruction as well as the need to set up the atmosphere for inclusive learning. In turn, each student received the advantages commonly associated with this kind of instruction.

Peters (2004) explored that one of the most important indicators of whether or not teachers are willing to accommodate children with special needs a fundamental component of inclusive education is their attitude toward and comprehension of inclusive education. This review's goal is to draw attention to and contextualize the factors that support the opinions held by these educators. It is vital to determine why educators understand inclusive education in the ways that they do in order to guarantee the appropriate inclusion of all children with special needs. Flores and Day (2006) reported that the same detrimental effects were significant in all of the studies we looked at, despite the fact that those instructors' viewpoints were less negative in

some research than in others. For inclusive education to be effective, all stakeholders must accept responsibility for their own actions and recognize that collaboration is essential. This research analysis shows that factors such as the number of students with disabilities in a classroom, a lack of resources, inadequate teacher preparation, ignorance, and unfamiliarity with inclusive education all contributed to the negative views that instructors held. Numerous studies' conclusions demonstrated that a variety of factors, such as instructor cooperation, student connections, instructional methodologies, and instructors' attitudes, may have an impact on the success of inclusive education.

Rouse (2008) concluded that review of what educators function to do, their responsibilities, and identities turns out a possible way for reform of the challenging stages of creating effective inclusive environments. Additionally, some recommendations regarding the role of teacher education in developing the competencies, knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of educators are presented. The Inclusive Practice Project at the University of Aberdeen is examining different approaches that may help educators and educational institutions to make places of learning inclusive for children who might have previously found engagement and learning a challenge. Nind (2014) explored that the choice of an inclusive learning process places a strong emphasis on individual differences in problem-solving, knowledge storage and transformation, and perception, memory, and thought processes. Students are more aware of their responsibility for their own learning during the inclusive learning process. Using a variety of learning styles, inclusive learning techniques meet the needs of pupils. In order to preserve a solid parent-teacher relationship, teachers provide emotional support to both parents and pupils. Students are encouraged by inclusive learning to evaluate their own performance, which helps them make fewer mistakes when they are learning.

Loreman (2017) defined that the unique concepts that students apply during the learning process in an inclusive learning strategy allow them to learn as much as possible. Teachers typically choose an inclusive learning approach based on the demands and nature of the subject matter. The main purpose of inclusive learning is to provide students with correct information that will enable them to meet their academic objectives. The general goal of inclusive learning is to pique students' interest in their subjects.

Moreno (2017) explored the integration of homework-like assignments and other classroom duties into the learning environment are made possible by the inclusive classroom method. Long assignments and group projects are important components of inclusive classrooms, but so is peer collaboration and peer tutoring. An inclusive classroom naturally incorporates a number of activities. Students that engage in online discussion forums, watch lectures online, or undertake independent study outside of class and then present their findings to their teachers are a few instances of this. The inclusive classroom paradigm states that while students spend more time studying independently outside of class, lecturing takes place in the classroom.

Adams et al. (2018) explored by making use of current empirical data regarding how teacher-parent collaboration affects inclusive teaching methods and examined how much it helps to create a more inclusive learning environment in the classroom and emphasizes some of the traits of a successful collaborative approach and offered a modern perspective on how educators and parents perceive their joint responsibilities in ensuring improved academic results for adolescents with special needs.

Damianidou and Phtiaka (2018) pointed that although the attitude of secondary school teachers in Cyprus towards their students with disabilities is generally positive; they never practice an inclusive teaching approach. Moreover, they often have low expectations and classify pupils based on baseless illusions or ideas about their abilities. Even more, discrimination and stereotypes are more pronounced for those students with particular cognitive challenges. Participants in the study hypothesized that if teachers receive inclusion training, where they

can begin to perceive the person, not the handicap, then it would be possible to introduce inclusive education regardless of the observed damaging practices.

Elder et al. (2018) encouraged that educators may focus on the deficiencies to be addressed and focus on each child as an individual and highlight the strengths and capabilities of such children by adopting a strength-based approach. This also facilitates the development of attitudes in focusing on students' strengths more than on the weaknesses.

Naraian and Schlessinger (2018) demonstrated that in a traditional classroom, the teacher is a key figure in the knowledge transfer process. However, by allocating class time to more in-depth topic investigation and the creation of more engaging learning activities, the inclusive classroom aims to place the student at the center of the learning process. Because of this, students actively participate in the creation of knowledge by making meaningful contributions to and reflections on their own learning.

Pit-ten Cate (2018) focused on the characteristics that may contribute to the effective implementation of inclusive education. More precisely, it considers the teachers' traits in a way that might either facilitate or impede the learners' participation with Special Education Needs (SENs) and their attitudes toward inclusive education as well as their ability to accommodate SEN students in regular classrooms. Furthermore, the analysis aims to determine what extent teachers' attitudes toward inclusion education and pupils with special educational needs influence their instructional practices and actions towards learners who have special educational needs.

Fung and Liang (2019) concluded that inclusive classroom paradigm promotes group projects, critical thinking, peer collaboration, and online completion of coursework. The inclusive classroom, as defined by aims to consciously change instruction to a learner-centered paradigm in which class time explores topics in more depth and generates meaningful learning opportunities, by employing educational technologies like internet videos to 'deliver material' outside of the classroom. The 'content delivery' in an inclusive classroom could take many different forms. While text readings, digital research, online group discussions, and video courses from the teacher or other sources are sometimes used, video courses are the main way that content is delivered.

Hellmich (2019) reported that self-efficacy beliefs about teaching inclusive education and attitudes toward inclusive education strongly predict daily practices in diverse classrooms. Neither their combined self-efficacy belief nor perceptions of school management expectations predicts these factors. Teachers' intentions toward adopting inclusive education play an important mediating role for the influence of their views on their daily actions in diverse classrooms.

Noreen et al. (2019) explored that they postulated that in comparison with special education professionals, general education educators working with mainstream children have more unfavorable opinions about inclusive education. But the study advances the assessment of educators' multifaceted perspectives on inclusive education.

Muñoz-Martínez et al. (2020) found that on the implications of the program show a positive influence on the social lives of students, learning, emotional intelligence, and coexistence. They said that they learn that socialization and self-respect have a positive effect on inclusive education.

Muñoz-Martínez and Porter (2020) examined curriculum and learning design and how it affects the growth of inclusive teaching methods and discovered that educators are still having trouble creating successful individual learning strategies. They proposed a model that teachers can use to conceptualize suitable tactics and student accommodations in their regular lesson plans and prioritized developing a welcoming, stimulating, and inclusive educational setting for all children in addition to academic instruction.

Wilson et al. (2020) reported that self-efficacy predictors; mastery experiences and the school environment, which was composed of a collective efficacy and school environment, both predicted self-efficacy. Teachers' reports of inclusive behavior and perceptions about the school climate were also mediated by self-efficacy. This helps explain how the school environment is involved and how teacher self-efficacy is developed. Involvement with teacher belief systems could help in establishing an inclusive school climate.

Wakeman et al. (2021) explored that they closely monitor their students and provide them with timely, useful feedback and assessments on their classroom performance. Educators that employ the inclusive classroom model possess the capacity to evaluate their own teaching, work together with peers to improve their techniques, accept constructive criticism, and put up with a certain amount of chaos. These days, through cooperative peer contact, the inclusive classroom gives students more chances to enhance their own learning processes. By giving each student feedback, the instructor assumes the position of facilitator and guide in a more cooperative and collaborative learning environment. Since the technique allows the teacher to spend more time working with individual students and small groups and involves the students more in the learning process, it is believed to have the potential to improve student learning.

Lelinge (2023) stated that the phrase "inclusive learning" or "flipping the classroom" is now more often used, but the word "inclusive education" was first used to refer to an inverted classroom. Instead than only listening to lectures, students who engage in inclusive learning actively engage in their education. While lectures are given virtually using tools like screencasts, online video podcasts, and more, these will be self-directed learning experiences with the teacher acting more as a coach and facilitator. In an inclusive classroom, many evaluation methods will be employed to ascertain whether or not pupils have grasped the subject matter.

Methodology

Research Design

The research method used in this study was descriptive in nature. It was a quantitative research.

Area of Study

The Punjab province of Pakistan contains the city of Gojra. It lies inside the district of Toba Tek Singh. According to population, as of the 2017 census, it is the fifty-fifth largest city in Pakistan.

Population, Sample and Sampling

According to School Information System (www.sis.punjab.gov.pk), Tehsil Gojra had total 113 male primary schools where 206 teachers were teaching. By maintaining a 95% confidence level and confidence interval 5, and using www.surveysystem.com, the sample size of 134 was determined. Convenient method of sampling was used to select the respondents. Essential information was collected from the respondents through a structured questionnaire. The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to process the information.

Data Collection

The design of a structured questionnaire featuring a 3-point rating system was based on the goals and nature of the research. To ensure that the questions were valid and helpful for the data collection process, they were all carefully crafted in consultation with the study supervisor and other academic members. After giving the respondents the necessary instructions to complete the questionnaire, the researcher handed it to them and collected it from them. Throughout the data gathering process, the respondents were led by the researcher. The statements and scale that were provided allowed the participants to fill out the questionnaire.

Prior to data collection, a few questions were given to respondents to verify their validity and reliability. The questionnaires underwent adjustments to improve their validity. Twenty respondents in all were chosen to examine the questionnaire's validity and reliability. The pre-testing's Cronbach's alpha value of 0.845 demonstrated the validity of the data collection instrument. Reliability was assessed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program.

Data Analysis

Software known as the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to evaluate and analyze the information gathered.

Results and Discussion

In order to create an inclusive learning environment, teachers play a crucial role. Their responsibilities go beyond simply dispensing academic information; they also include recognizing the unique needs of every student and modifying their methods of instruction accordingly. Developing a classroom culture that honors and promotes diversity, using individualized instruction, and cultivating an atmosphere where all students, regardless of their skills or difficulties, feel encouraged and included are all part of this. This entails implementing diversified teaching techniques, developing a classroom culture that honors and promotes diversity, and cultivating an atmosphere where all students, regardless of their skills or difficulties, feel encouraged and included. Teachers work together with families, special educators, and support personnel to ensure that each student's specific needs are fulfilled and their potential is realized. They also serve as facilitators, collaborators, and champions.

Table 1: Role of teachers in creating an inclusive learning environment

Role of teachers in creating an inclusive learning environment	1		2		3	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Understand self-respect of students	26	19.40	74	55.22	34	25.37
Promoting empathy in students	28	20.90	45	33.58	61	45.52
Fostering a culture of acceptance	17	12.69	72	53.73	45	33.58
Disciplining students	45	33.58	30	22.39	59	44.03
Use inclusive and easy to understand language	66	49.25	47	35.07	21	15.67
Consult the students' parents or guardians to get more information about their needs	27	20.15	64	47.76	43	32.09
Create a calm, purposeful learning environment	17	12.69	80	59.70	37	27.61
Let children choose how to show what they have learned	33	24.63	46	34.33	55	41.04
Provide support for them in ways which benefit all children in your class	16	11.94	58	43.28	60	44.78
Clearly display timetables and key information	26	19.40	64	47.76	44	32.84
Be aware of the specific needs of every child in class	26	19.40	62	46.27	46	34.33
Create opportunities to listen to all children	66	49.25	31	23.13	37	27.61
Don't compare the progress of one child to another; personal progress is key	51	38.06	39	29.10	44	32.84
Use pre-assessment to inform your planning	41	30.60	28	20.90	65	48.51
Understand minimum standards for behaviors	60	44.78	23	17.16	51	38.06
Provide students with sense of belonging	27	20.15	68	50.75	39	29.10
Offer an open and welcoming environment	16	11.94	70	52.24	48	35.82
Actively work to combat biases	48	35.82	30	22.39	56	41.79
Focus on boosting and maintaining students' motivation	28	20.90	55	41.04	51	38.06
Use instructional varieties	30	22.39	64	47.76	40	29.85
Recognition of hidden talents	22	16.42	75	55.97	37	27.61

Inculcate positive attitudes	30	22.39	51	38.06	53	39.55
Interaction with family	20	14.93	64	47.76	50	37.31
Focus on strength of students	33	24.63	32	23.88	69	51.49
Molding his teaching style according to need of hour	46	34.33	34	25.37	54	40.30

Note: Scale: 1. Low 2. Medium 3. High

Table 2: The mean value, standard deviation, weighted score and rank order according to rank order of role of teachers

Role of teachers in creating an inclusive learning environment	Mean	S.D	W.S	Rank order
Provide support for them in ways which benefit all children in your class	2.33	0.68	312	1
Focus on strength of students	2.27	0.83	304	2
Promoting empathy in students	2.25	0.78	301	3
Offer an open and welcoming environment	2.24	0.65	300	4
Interaction with family	2.22	0.69	298	5
Fostering a culture of acceptance	2.21	0.65	296	6
Use pre-assessment to inform your planning	2.18	0.87	292	7
Focus on boosting and maintaining students' motivation	2.17	0.75	291	8
Inculcate positive attitudes	2.17	0.77	291	9
Let children choose how to show what they have learned	2.16	0.79	290	10
Create a calm, purposeful learning environment	2.15	0.62	288	11
Be aware of the specific needs of every child in your class	2.15	0.72	288	12
Clearly display timetables and key information	2.13	0.71	286	13
Consult the students' parents or guardians to get more information about their needs	2.12	0.71	284	14
Recognition of hidden talents	2.11	0.65	283	15
Disciplining students	2.1	0.87	282	16
Provide students with sense of belonging	2.09	0.7	280	17
Use instructional varieties	2.07	0.72	278	18
Understand self-respect of students	2.06	0.67	276	19
Actively work to combat biases	2.06	0.88	276	20
Molding his teaching style according to need of hour	2.06	0.86	276	21
Don't compare the progress of one child to another; personal progress is key	1.95	0.84	261	22
Understand minimum standards for behaviors	1.93	0.91	259	23
Create opportunities to listen to all children	1.78	0.85	239	24
Use inclusive and easy to understand language	1.66	0.73	223	25

Note: Scale: 1. Low 2. Medium 3. High

The table 2 indicated data regarding the role of teachers in an inclusive classroom highlights various strategies and priorities for catering to the needs of all students. The top-ranked initiative, 'Provide support for them in ways which benefit all children in your class,' with a mean score of 2.33, emphasized the importance of inclusive teaching practices that not only address the needs of students with special requirements but also benefit the entire class.

'Focusing on the strength of students' (mean: 2.27) and 'Promoting empathy in students' (mean: 2.25) follow closely underscored the emphasis on recognizing individual abilities and fostering a supportive, empathetic classroom culture. These aspects highlight the importance of building on each student's capabilities and encouraging a positive, understanding environment. The significance of 'Offering an open and welcoming environment' (mean: 2.24) and 'Interaction with family' (mean: 2.22) indicated the value placed on creating an inclusive atmosphere and

engaging with families as partners in education. These strategies are essential for understanding and addressing the diverse needs of students. 'Fostering a culture of acceptance' (mean: 2.21) and 'Using pre-assessment to inform planning' (mean: 2.18) are also rated highly, suggested that establishing an accepting environment and using informed strategies are key components of effective inclusive teaching. The emphasis on 'Focusing on boosting and maintaining students' motivation' and 'Inculcating positive attitudes' (mean: 2.17 for both) reflected the importance of emotional and motivational aspects in learning. Allowing children to choose how they demonstrate their learning (mean: 2.16) also pointed towards a flexible, student-centered approach. Lower-ranked but still effective, 'Creating opportunities to listen to all children' and 'Using inclusive and easy to understand language' (mean: 1.78 and 1.66, respectively) indicated areas that might be seen as foundational, yet with room for improvement in practice. Overall, the data reveals a comprehensive approach towards inclusive education, emphasizing emotional support, family engagement, individual strengths, and an empathetic and flexible teaching style. These findings are in line with the findings of Muñoz-Martínez and Porter (2020); they focused not just on academic instruction, but also on creating a supportive, engaging, and inclusive learning environment for all students. These findings are also endorsed by Muñoz-Martínez et al. (2020); they found that the self-respect and socialization have positive impact in inclusive learning, and Noreen et al. (2019); they explored that teachers view their role as multifaceted. These findings are also close to the findings of Elder et al. (2018); they encourages focusing upon the strengths of students rather than deficits.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have reflected that the role of teachers in an inclusive classroom highlights various strategies and priorities for catering to the needs of all students. The top-ranked initiative, 'Provide support for them in ways which benefit all children in your class,' has emphasized the importance of inclusive teaching practices that not only address the needs of students with special requirements but also benefit the entire class. 'Focusing on the strength of students' and 'Promoting empathy in students' follow closely have underscored the emphasis on recognizing individual abilities and fostering a supportive, empathetic classroom culture. The significance of 'Offering an open and welcoming environment' and 'Interaction with family' indicated the importance of creating an inclusive atmosphere and engaging with families as partners in education. These strategies are essential for understanding and addressing the diverse needs of students. 'Fostering a culture of acceptance' and 'Using pre-assessment to inform planning' have concluded that establishing an accepting environment and using informed strategies are key components of effective inclusive teaching.

Suggestions

This study suggested that:

1. There is a need to maintain a safe and comfortable environment in classroom providing proper supervision to all the students by their teacher.
2. Teachers should not compare the progress of one child to another, and should understand the minimum standards for students' behaviors, create opportunities of listening all the students, and use inclusive and easy to understand language.
3. Special training sessions of teachers may also be organized by the authorities.

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