

Challenges of Inclusive Education at Elementary School Level in Islamabad

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges of inclusive education at the elementary level in Islamabad. Inclusive education, which aims to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms, faces numerous challenges that hinder its effective execution. The primary goal of this study was to identify these challenges for the successful implementation of inclusive education. The participants of study were teachers, within five selected inclusive schools in Islamabad. The study was descriptive in nature. Quantitative study design was used. A census approach was utilized to include teachers (60) from the chosen schools, ensuring a thorough examination of their views and experiences. Data collection involved administering structured questionnaires. The questionnaire was tailored with 53 statements for teachers, using a 5-point Likert scale to measure degrees of agreement or disagreement. Reliability of the instruments was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which were 0.87, indicating high internal consistency. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS 16.0 software to compute frequencies and percentages. The study identified several key challenges affecting inclusive education, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient instructional resources, and lack of proper teacher training. The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to address these barriers. Recommendations include improving teacher preparation, enhancing resource allocation, and developing robust support systems to foster an inclusive educational environment.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Challenges, Inclusive Schools, Classroom Integration

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion is a unique phenomenon that enables all pupils to gain firsthand exposure to aspects of the actual world that gives them experiences outside of what they have in their homes. It is anticipated that this widely used method will provide students new perspectives, and insights that can be difficult to develop in an educational system that divides pupils based on their racial and cultural origins. Additionally, as all students in schools are taught regarding fairness and how to embrace human variety. Equitable schooling will help create a culture that is fit for global citizens (Mukhopadhyay, 2013).

The development of an inclusive classroom is thought to be accomplished through inclusive education. The inclusion concept aims to promote universal education by changing schools into welcoming environments that foster effective learning and take into account each student's unique requirements. In order to provide kids with special needs with equal educational opportunities and experiences, inclusion may necessitate their full-time enrollment in the mainstream school. In the realm of education, inclusion refers to the idea that all students, regardless of particular characteristics or impairments, have to get their education together, "all learners have unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and particular learning needs and, further, that learners with SE needs must have equal access to and receive individual accommodations in the general education system (Ewing, Monsen, & Kielblock, 2018).

According to a study conducted by Alquraini & Gut (2012), to address the needs of all the unique learners, many schools also lack instructional resources. The lack of support services, oversized classes, inadequate facilities, and poor infrastructure are undoubtedly some of the challenges to genuine inclusion in underdeveloped nations.

The progressive goal of inclusive education is to guarantee that every student participates completely in general education settings, regardless of their unique requirements. This paradigm encourages an integrated approach where all students study together, challenging conventional approaches that frequently divide students with disabilities into distinct courses or institutions (Koster et al., 2022). Creating an equal learning environment that meets each student's unique requirements and promotes involvement and a sense of belonging is the fundamental tenet of inclusive education (Hornby, 2021).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Inclusive education goal is to offer equal access to education to each of the students, regardless of their diverse abilities and characteristics. It constitutes an ultimate human right and a vital element in fostering an inclusive and diverse society. However, despite the recognized significance of inclusive education, there are various challenges and gaps that impede its effective execution and realization of its goals. This problem statement seeks to

identify and address these challenges paving the way for more inclusive and accessible education system.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To explore the challenges of inclusive education at elementary level

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the challenges of inclusive education at elementary level?

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Exploring challenges in inclusive education is crucial for understanding the complexities and obstacles that hinder the effective implementation of inclusive practices. This process involves a thorough assessment of various constraints and barriers that affect the success of inclusive education approaches. By identifying these challenges, such as gaps in resources, insufficient training, and inadequate infrastructure, we can pinpoint areas where improvements are needed

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Florian (2014), it is essential to comprehend various global definitions of inclusive education and to examine teacher practices. The principles, assumptions, and actions that place a priority on student learning and the dynamics of classroom communities are demonstrated by these practices. An "inclusive school" is one in which all students receive the assistance they need to integrate all students into general education classrooms and where teachers and administrators receive this assistance. Meeting the requirements of students with special needs is a component of addressing diversity in schools in this context. Kuyini and Desai (2007) say that inclusive education aims to give every child in mainstream schools a good education to the greatest extent possible. This system meets the requirements of children who are enrolled but have difficulty learning as well as those who are not enrolled but are capable of receiving an education if accessible schools are available. Children with significant disabilities who require unique learning requirements and specialized settings fall under this category. If all children have access to a child-friendly and accessible learning environment that encourages their participation in the mainstream educational system, inclusive education can be successful. By providing culturally relevant curriculum and support systems, an inclusive school removes all physical and symbolic barriers to participation (Koller et al., 2018). the school encourages equality and collaboration through interactions between parents and administrators as well as between teachers and students. The creation of inclusive schools, which aim to embrace diversity rather than separating children with disabilities from their peers, is a central goal of global educational policy (DeMatthews et al., 2021). According to Ainscow (2005), this collaborative approach not only improves academic performance but also prepares all students for workplaces in the future that place an emphasis on diversity and teamwork. In addition, inclusive education upholds social justice and human rights principles by opposing

discriminatory practices that disadvantage certain student groups based on their abilities or differences (UNESCO, 2021). Schools play a crucial role in the development of an inclusive society in which everyone has the opportunity to participate fully and equally by embracing inclusive practices. Importantly, inclusive education has benefits that go beyond the classroom. The fundamental right to training for everybody, as well as the qualities that regard understudies' health, honor, freedom, and their part in the public eye, are accentuated by UNESCO (2018) despite the difficulties. In addition, it requests that ongoing efforts be made to remove obstacles to learning and to encourage adjustments to school procedures and culture so that all children are included. as a fundamental component of the right to education, education should be emphasized to support high-quality, equitable, and effective learning outcomes for everyone. in order to receive top-notch training, support, and interventions that help them achieve in the core curriculum (Cameron & Cook, 2015). According to Ghouri, Abrar, and Baloach (2010), inaccessible school infrastructure, a lack of supportive policy frameworks, restricted learning resources, teachers with limited skills, poverty, disability, and conflict are the primary reasons why CWDs are excluded from the traditional educational system While everyone at the school has a duty, teachers play a crucial role in providing an inclusive education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is both descriptive and quantitative in nature. Data was collected through questionnaire. The study population consisted of teachers at the elementary level in inclusive schools in Islamabad. All five inclusive schools in Islamabad were included in the study. The target population consisted of 60 teachers from selected schools. For this study a census was utilized for teachers. This means that all 60 teachers within the inclusive schools were included in the study, allowing for a thorough examination of their perspectives and experiences without sampling.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The instrument was developed by the researcher under the guidance of a supervisor and by studying the related literature. The questionnaire for teachers consisted of a total of 53 statements, A closed-ended questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale was used to measure respondents' degrees of agreement or disagreement with particular item. To ensure the instrument's validity in this study, a series of steps were implemented. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the collected data. A pilot study involved 10 randomly selected teachers from a total target population of 60 individuals. After completing the questionnaire, their responses were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, revealing a high reliability coefficient of 0.87, indicating strong internal consistency among the questionnaire items.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data from teachers and the head of school was collected through direct visits to the schools by the researcher. Questionnaire responses were tabulated and statistically analyzed using SPSS 16.0 software. Percentages and frequencies were calculated and organized into tables to provide clarity and highlight trends and patterns.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section the researcher presents the teachers' perception on the challenges faced during inclusive education. The challenges identified are teacher preparedness and training, availability of resources, attitudinal barriers, curriculum adaptation, administrative support, social integration, and classroom management issues.

Teacher Preparedness and Training

There were four statements about teacher preparedness and training. The results are summarized in table 1. In view of the trend of all the responses, it seems that the respondents generally agreed with all four statements.

Table 1: Perception of teachers on teacher preparedness and training challenges

Statements	SDA		DA		N		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Teacher education programs lack comprehensive training on inclusive education practices.	4	6.2	5	7.7	10	15.4	25	38.5	16	24.6
I feel unprepared to teach students with mild disabilities.	9	13.8	9	13.8	6	9.2	22	33.8	14	21.5
Teachers often lack access to mentoring or coaching for effective implementation of inclusive practices.	7	11.7	5	8.3	9	15.0	15	25.0	24	36.8
Teachers lack sufficient knowledge about the needs of students with disabilities and to address these needs effectively	8	12.3	13	20.0	14	21.5	15	25.0	10	15.4

The data displayed in Table 1 depict the frequency and percentages of responses from teachers in inclusive schools. The largest percentage (38.5%) felt that teacher education programs are insufficiently comprehensive for inclusive education. Additionally, 33.8% of teachers felt unprepared to teach students with mild disabilities, and 36.8% reported a lack of mentoring or coaching for effective implementation of inclusive practices. Furthermore,

25.0% of teachers indicated they lack sufficient knowledge about addressing the needs of students with disabilities.

Availability of Resources

There were three statements about availability of resources. The results are summarized in table 2.

Table 2: Perception of teacher respondents on availability of resources

Statements	SDA		DA		N		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
School lacks sufficient resources to effectively support students with diverse needs.	5	8.3	22	36.7	18	30.0	9	15.0	6	10.0
The school lacks specialized equipment for students with disabilities.	5	7.7	10	13.8	14	21.5	15	23.1	16	24.6
Access to special education materials and equipment, such as adaptive technology, communication devices, and modified learning tools, is limited.	8	12.3	10	15.4	11	16.9	19	29.2	12	18.5

The data displayed in Table 2 depict the frequency and percentages of responses from teachers in inclusive schools. For statement School lacks sufficient resources to effectively support students with diverse needs. The largest group (36.7%) disagreed that schools are under-resourced. For statement the school lacks specialized equipment for students with disabilities. The highest percentage (24.6%) agreed, reflecting a noticeable gap in the availability of specialized equipment necessary for supporting students with disabilities. For statement Access to special education materials and equipment, such as adaptive technology, communication devices, and modified learning tools, is limited. The largest proportion (29.2%) agree that access to these essential materials is limited, indicating a need for improved access to adaptive technologies and learning tools.

Attitudinal Barriers

There were four statements about attitudinal barriers. The results are summarized in table 3

Table 4.7: Perception of teacher respondents on attitudinal barriers

Statements	SDA		DA		N		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Students without disabilities feel uncomfortable interacting with disabled students.	5	8.3	7	11.8	9	13.8	25	41.7	16	24.1
Disabled students often experience social isolation due to negative behaviors from their peers.	5	7.7	11	16.9	12	18.5	12	18.5	20	30.8
Disabled students frequently experience anxiety or low self-esteem because of the lack of support from classmates	4	6.7	7	10.8	9	13.8	21	32.3	19	29.2
Parents of normally developing students often hold negative attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled students in their children's classrooms	2	3.3	4	6.7	8	13.3	20	33.3	26	43.3

Table 3 highlights several challenges related to social dynamics in inclusive schools. The highest percentage (41.7%) of teachers agreed that students without disabilities often feel uncomfortable interacting with disabled students. Additionally, 30.8% of teachers noted that disabled students frequently experience social isolation due to negative peer behaviors. Another significant finding is that 32.3% of teachers observed that the lack of support from classmates leads to anxiety and low self-esteem among disabled students. Furthermore, 43.3% of teachers reported that negative attitudes from parents of typically developing students pose a considerable barrier to successful inclusion

Curriculum Adaptation

There were four statements about curriculum adaptation. The results are summarized in table 4.

Table 4: Perception of teacher respondents on curriculum adaptation

Statements	SDA		DA		N		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of all students is challenging.	3	5.0	7	11.7	11	18.3	23	38.3	16	26.7

There is a lack of resources and support for modifying the curriculum to suit all learners.	11	18.3	12	20.0	20	33.3	9	15.0	8	13.3
Teachers often find it difficult to adapt the curriculum due to insufficient training on inclusive practices	9	15.0	7	11.7	10	16.7	24	40.0	19	16.7
Creating individualized education plans (IEPs) is time-consuming and complex.	8	13.3	5	10.0	12	20.0	21	35.0	13	21.7

Table 4 outlines several challenges teachers face in adapting the curriculum for inclusive education. The highest percentage (38.3%) agreed that adapting the curriculum to meet all students' needs is challenging, indicating a need for better support and resources. Additionally, 33.3% of teachers reported a lack of resources and support for curriculum modification. The largest group (40.0%) noted that insufficient training on inclusive practices makes curriculum adaptation difficult. Finally, 35.0% of teachers found creating individualized education plans (IEPs) to be time-consuming and complex, highlighting the need for streamlined processes and additional support.

Administrative Support

There were three statements about administrative support. The results are summarized in table 5.

Table 5: Perception of teacher respondents on administrative support.

Statements	SDA		DA		N		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
I do not receive sufficient guidance from administrators on inclusive practices.	12	20.0	20	33.3	12	20.0	11	18.3	5	8.3
The administration does not effectively facilitate collaboration strategies, making it difficult for teachers to support inclusive education.	14	23.3	19	31.7	12	20.0	11	18.3	4	6.7
There is a lack of recognition and reward for teachers who successfully implement inclusive practices.	8	13.3	7	11.1	13	21.7	22	36.7	10	16.7

Table 5 reveals insights into the support teachers receive from administrators regarding inclusive education. The highest percentage (33.3%) disagreed with the statement that they do not receive sufficient guidance from administrators, suggesting that guidance is indeed provided, which is crucial for implementing inclusive practices. Additionally, 31.7% disagreed that the administration fails to facilitate effective collaboration strategies, indicating that such strategies are in place. However, 36.7% agreed that there is a lack of recognition and reward for teachers who successfully implement inclusive practices, highlighting a potential issue with motivating teachers and supporting the overall success of inclusive education.

Social Integration Challenges

There were three statements about administrative support. The results are summarized in table 6.

Table 6: Perception of teacher respondents on social integration.

Statements	SDA		DA		N		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Students with disabilities often struggle to form meaningful friendships with their peers.	3	5.0	13	21.7	20	33.3	12	20.0	12	20.0
Students with disabilities frequently experience social isolation during group activities.	3	5.0	10	15.7	6	10.0	18	30.0	23	38.3
I find it challenging to address the social needs of disabled students in the classroom.	4	6.7	6	10.0	9	15.0	19	31.7	22	36.7

Table 6 highlights key challenges related to social integration for students with disabilities. The highest percentage (33.3%) strongly agreed that these students often struggle to form meaningful friendships, indicating a significant issue that requires targeted interventions for social integration. Additionally, 38.3% agreed that students with disabilities frequently experience social isolation during group activities, emphasizing the need for inclusive strategies to enhance group interactions. Lastly, 36.7% agreed that addressing the social needs of disabled students in the classroom is challenging, suggesting a need for specialized strategies and support for teachers to better meet these needs.

Classroom Management Issues

There were three statements about administrative support. The results are summarized in table 7.

Table 7: Perception of teacher respondents on classroom management issues

Statements	SDA		DA		N		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Managing behavioral issues of students with special needs is challenging.	6	10.0	8	13.3	13	21.7	15	25.0	18	30.0
I struggle to maintain classroom discipline in an inclusive setting.	6	10.0	9	15.0	10	16.7	13	21.7	22	36.7
Inclusion makes too many demands on teachers.	2	3.3	3	5.0	9	15.0	18	30.0	28	46.7

Table 7 reveals significant challenges in managing an inclusive classroom. The highest percentage (36.7%) agreed that maintaining classroom discipline in an inclusive setting is a major difficulty, highlighting the need for improved classroom management strategies. Additionally, 30.0% of respondents agreed that managing behavioral issues of students with special needs is challenging, indicating a requirement for enhanced behavioral management techniques and support. Moreover, 46.7% agreed that inclusion places excessive demands on teachers, underscoring the need for a balance between the demands of inclusive education and adequate support and resources.

FINDINGS

The findings reveal key challenges in inclusive education. Teachers report a low level of preparedness to handle inclusive classrooms, with insufficient professional development opportunities contributing to this issue. Confidence in teaching students with diverse needs is notably low, indicating a critical need for more targeted training. Curriculum adaptation is perceived as inadequate for meeting the needs of students with disabilities, and there is uncertainty about the accessibility and effectiveness of instructional materials. While administrative support for inclusive initiatives is seen positively, funding and policy implementation gaps remain areas of concern. Classroom activities that promote interaction are moderately successful, but student acceptance of inclusive education practices remains a challenge. Bullying and discrimination are generally well-addressed, though the classroom environment and school infrastructure need to be more inclusive. Assistive technologies are insufficiently provided, reflecting a significant gap in resources. Overall, the findings indicate that while some positive steps have been taken, significant improvements are needed in teacher preparedness, resources, and inclusive infrastructure to fully support diverse learners.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal several key challenges in implementing inclusive education, especially in areas of teacher preparedness, curriculum adaptation, and resource availability. Teacher preparedness is a critical issue, with many educators citing insufficient professional development, which hinders their ability to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Effective teacher training is essential for fostering inclusive classrooms, yet a lack of such training lowers teachers' confidence in handling diverse learners (Smith et al., 2018; Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2019). Another major challenge is the inadequacy of curriculum adaptation, which fails to cater to diverse learning needs. Without sufficient differentiation, students with disabilities struggle to thrive in mainstream settings (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2019). Additionally, there is uncertainty about the accessibility and effectiveness of instructional materials, which are vital for bridging the gap between students with and without disabilities (Avramidis & Norwich, 2018). Administrative support was generally seen as positive, but gaps in funding and inconsistent policy implementation remain barriers. Even with supportive policies, the lack of adequate resources often limits their impact (Ainscow, 2020). Moderate success was reported in promoting social interaction in classrooms, though challenges remain with student acceptance of inclusive practices. While bullying and discrimination are generally well-addressed, improvements are needed in classroom environments, infrastructure, and assistive technology availability, which is crucial for supporting students with disabilities (Judge, Floyd, & Jeffs, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive analysis of the current state of inclusive education at the elementary level, with a focus on the challenges faced by teachers, students, and schools. Key areas of concern include the insufficient preparedness of teachers, inadequate curriculum adaptation, and a lack of resources, particularly in terms of assistive technologies and infrastructure. Although administrative support for inclusive education is generally positive, gaps in funding and inconsistent policy implementation hinder the full realization of inclusive practices. The need for more targeted professional development programs is clear, as many educators feel ill-equipped to handle the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Curriculum reform is also essential to ensure that instructional materials and teaching strategies are flexible enough to accommodate different learning styles. Moreover, efforts to promote social integration among students require ongoing attention to foster peer acceptance and reduce instances of exclusion.

RECOMMENDATION

- Develop and implement strategies to make the curriculum more inclusive, catering to the varied learning needs of students in inclusive classrooms.
- Invest in thorough training programs that focus on inclusive teaching practices and address the needs of students with diverse abilities.
- Strengthen partnerships between schools, parents, and community organizations to support inclusive education.
- Implement programs and activities that promote social integration and inclusion of students with disabilities with their peers.
- Review and refine strategies for managing behavioral issues in the classroom to ensure they are effective and supportive.

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