ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION
The attitude of Teachers Towards Delayed Students in Mainstream Classrooms at Elementary Level in Pakistan

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Abstract— After becoming a signatory of UNCRPD, inclusive education is a reality for approaching days; however, due to our already weak and socio-religiously confused educational system, teachers and parents of delayed students, are not ready to accept them in mainstream classrooms. The basic reason for such reluctance is lack of awareness and fears of added responsibilities, which may be associated with this major shift in educational methodology. The aim of the research is to understand the attitude and perception of teachers about the inclusive education concept. In this study, mixed-method research (both qualitative and quantitative) was used. The research instrument was developed according to the directions and guidance provided by experts with fourteen items, which were then shared with 100 elementary school teachers belonging from different Federally administered educational institutions in District Okara, and their responses were quantified for analysis. Moreover, interviews of senior teachers from the same educational institutions were also conducted to obtain a clear perspective of the issue. Convenience sampling techniques were used, and descriptive analysis was used to assess responses. Based on acquired data, results were finalized, which showed reluctance by teachers due to lack of awareness as well as fear of additional responsibilities and expectations without any visible incentive. Moreover, neither required human resources nor infrastructures allow an inclusive schooling system to be adopted. Thus, a gradual approach towards implementation of a new concept along with concrete steps by the government is found to be the most viable option for approaching the issue.
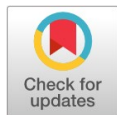
Introduction

"Inclusion" or "Education in inclusive environments" is defined as "a system where students with disabilities are inducted into mainstream educational settings." As per Tonegawa (2022), it is widely believed that such learners can be educated in regular classes with their age fellows, reaping better results and improved performance (Nilholm, 2021; Bowden, Corcoran, & Pinnock, 2022). The effect of class composition also determines the performance of students with disabilities. Peer effect, one of the composition characteristics, observes that students perform better when placed in a high-performing group. The composition of the learning group (Justice et al., 2014; Sallin

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& Balestra, 2022). The very concept of inclusive education got impetus due to approval of the United Nations convention on "Rights of Persons with Disabilities," according to which all signatories are bound to ensure the provision of equal opportunities of education to all citizens. The emergence of inclusive education cannot be understood in isolation without looking back into history (Krämer, Möller, & Zimmermann,2021). Unfortunately, persons with disabilities (PWD) were always treated with stigma and considered a risk to society and the human race. Such Individuals either were eliminated or used as a source of entertainment. The treatment of persons with disabilities (PWDs) can easily be assimilated from Aristotle's (384 -322 BC) thought, as stated by Dunn (2006), "Let there be a law that no deformed child shall live." Later, philanthropists felt that it would be better to keep the disabled in custodial care or a protected environment. This led to keeping them in asylums, where although they were provided with food and clothes but environments were never of any educational institution. It was in the 15th Century that Special schools began to emerge. However, the real change started to occur in a year in the early nineties, when "The League of Nations" adopted the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." According to Shaukat et al. (2013), "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights" declares that every individual has a right to a sustainable educational system without any differentiation on the basis of socio-religious beliefs and gender. Since the necessity of educating the disabled was understood and binding of League of Nations forced the governments to provide learning facilities to the disabled; hence, a new method acceptable to most of the society members emerged, where; students with special needs were accommodated in specifically categorized schools where their specific disabilities were addressed. In fact, these very practices lead to the establishment of now known as "Special Schools".

According to Kisanji (1999), it was in the last few decades that social scientists, thinkers, and educationalists started to question the advantages and disadvantages of having two different educational systems in society (Li & Ruppar, 2021; Tuncay & Kizilaslan, 2021). Hence, the very reason for the existence of "Special Schools" or "Special Education Concept" started to dissolve paving way for a better and more comprehensive educational concept that encompasses legal and social cum humanitarian needs of the society. It was at this stage that the concept of "Inclusive Education" emerged. United Nations Convention on "Rights of People with Disabilities", also known as UNCRPD, further strengthened the concept of Inclusiveness in education (Husin et al., 2021; O'Toole & Burke, 2013).

The importance of Special education in Pakistan was identified and has been addressed at the policy level since 1959; however, no practical steps were initiated until the recent past. Despite being a signatory of UNCRPD, the Pakistan government is facing a daunting task, as the overall state of education in Pakistan is very poor. According to Human Development Index issued by United Nations for the year 2014, Pakistan's literacy rate is one of the lowest in South Asian countries. Worst is the scenario for education for the disabled as even today, in most the rural areas, disability is considered as a stigma, and people with disabilities are treated as second-grade citizens (Sharma et al., 2015; Sorkos & Hajisoteriou, 2021). However, in urban areas, due to social pressures, families try their best to keep persons with disabilities in the mainstream. Almost every mainstream classroom in an urban area does have some children with mild or moderate disabilities but unfortunately, neither teachers nor other students understand the requirements of these delayed students. It is also widely believed that the attitude of teachers towards such students is not good or they feel them as a burden on the institution or classroom. This lack of awareness and will to address the issue is strongly hurting our overall social structure and productivity (Gaad & Khan, 2007; Tuncay & Kizilaslan, 2021; Bowden, Corcoran, & Pinnock, 2022).

Literature Review

It is widely believed that providing the knowledge and information is called Education. In fact, this process encompasses all factors including easing of learning and gaining knowledge, skills, morals, principles, and customs (Li & Ruppar, 2021; Love & Horn, 2021). The process of education or learning happens under the guidance of educators; however, with advancements in technology, the learner can now even educate themselves through various means including web education, etc. Special Education and inclusive education are two categories, which are linked to the education of a student with learning disabilities. According to earlier practices, people with disabilities were considered as a stigma and were treated very differently until, it was felt that they were equally human and could contribute positively towards the betterment of society. Thus, to make them beneficial members of society concept of "Special education" was evolved which addresses the specific needs of persons with disabilities (Shaukat & Rasheed, 2015).

Nilholm (2021) explained in his work that inclusive education provides an opportunity for students to mix for healthy participation and learning in a similar environment regardless of physical or mental disabilities. The Emergence of inclusive education can be traced back to the 15th century when Special schools began to emerge, starting mainly with those with sensory impairments. The first recorded evidence is of Spanish national Pedro Ponce de Leon who is known as "The First Teacher of Deaf." Later, it was in 1945 that "The League of Nations" approved the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (Park et al., 2016). After that, Nations started looking into the matter with a new approach. It was only in the recent past that the concept of practicing two different educational models in the same environment was questioned, and thus the concept of "Special Education" started to crumble. In fact, there is no denying that development that occurred in the field of disability studies during the last fifty years or so had a very positive and encouraging impact on the complete social system making people understand as to how to treat individuals with disabilities and same influenced the techniques being practiced in "Special education" as well as regular mainstream educational models (Schwab et al., 2017; Tuncay & Kizilaslan, 2021; Bowden, Corcoran

& Pinnock, 2022).

In any educational system, the fundamental variable is "TEACHER". Teaching can rightly be termed as an art where output quality is directly proportional to input by the teacher in terms of his or her faith, hard work, and devotion. Therefore, it is justified to believe that no teaching program can rise beyond the quality of its teachers (Hellmich et al., 2019). It is, therefore, imperative to understand a teacher's attitude and competency as well as willingness for a particular teaching system or method. Hence, with this background, it can be easily presumed that the probability of success in inclusive education is dependent greatly on how good mainstream teachers are qualified or equipped to work in inclusive environments and settings (Treder et al., 2000). Alongside teachers, another variable is "Attitude." The origin of the word "attitude" can be traced from the Latin language where it stands for training to act. This word explains an outward and noticeable posture that determines what we will feel, see, hear, think and do. "Attitude" can be defined as a tendency to react positively or negatively to any situation or thing including a person, group of people, or any institution. We can distinguish it as positive (values) or negative (prejudice)(da Silveira et al., 2019; Sorkos & Hajisoteriou,2021).

In the case of educational environments, cognitive, affective, and behavioral components appear simultaneously affect or shape a teachers' behavior towards a particular classroom through a direct and indirect interaction between teacher and social environments as well as institutional environments. Similarly, the attitude of teachers has a direct bearing on the learning abilities of students. In this regard, Biggs and Moore (1993) believed and propagated that teachers vary in their students' opinions. Some believe that pupils are inherently lazy, lack discipline, and must be pushed to work hard. As a result of this belief, they adopt a conventional and autocratic outlook towards students. Whereas another category of teachers believe that every student is unique and capable of exercising self-direction and self-control. Resultantly, they adopt a liberal and democratic attitude with every student. In short, it is universally accepted that teachers' attitudes directly influence the learning abilities and educational environments of any institution (Miesera et al., 2019; Iacono, et al., 2021).

Traditionally, teachers used to work in isolation meaning by one teacher to a classroom. Similarly, when special needs children joined the educational institutions in the early seventies, teaching was practiced in separate classes with their teachers (Special schools / special education). However, during the last couple of decades, these learners have slowly started appearing in mainstream classrooms under the concept of inclusiveness, thus cementing the process and concept of "Inclusive education." This new concept leads to "Cooperative Teaching" (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2019).

As per Yilmaz & Yeganeh (2021), cooperative teaching is a concept that defines the responsibilities and desired attitude of teachers as "A method in which common and special education teachers works in a synchronized manner to mutually teach diverse groups of students in integrated educational settings (Bauwens & Hourcade,1995). In such an environment, all educators are simultaneously available in the classroom, seeking joint responsibilities for all processes which are to occur within that setting". Although every individual with special needs is unique yet, certain common worries are linked to the parents of special children that include assurance for the availability of desired care and acceptance of their child, generating acceptance in family and social circles; securing future, and realigning daily routines and expectations. It has been observed that parents of children with disabilities are more accommodative, sympathetic, and resilient as compared to others (Krstić, 2021). They mostly understood challenges involved in the education of delayed students and knew that education for a special needs person is not a simplified and isolated affair. It requires the involvement of complete society especially the motivation and dedication of teachers and the determination of parents. The social environment acts as a catalyst in the positive and productive development of the personalities of delayed students.

In Pakistan, very little work has been done in inclusive education due to various reasons, including financial limitations and social constraints. At present, very few schools are extending inclusive environments under the umbrella of UNESCO or other educational NGOs. Hence, a vacuum exists for working in the said field to collect reliable data and statistics for future planning as well as the measurement of attitudes of teachers, parents, and society. UNESCO took the initiative in the year 2003 with a project titled "ENGAGE" to address the problems of easy accessibility and lower participation in quality education by poor and disabled communities. They tried to experiment by increasing possibilities for accessing quality education and strength to access quality-learning environments regardless of social segregations (Veselinović & Knežević, 2015; Love & Horn, 2021). Similarly, at Islamabad, a major National level consultative session on Inclusive education was also organized on 27th April 2005 that urged governments at Federal, Provincial, and District levels as well as educational institutions, parents, NGOs, and other members of the society to do work on inclusive education. Recently, the Punjab government has initiated a pilot project to address the issues of children with "Mild disabilities." The title of the project is "Punjab Inclusive Education Project," commonly referred to as "PIEP." The aim and objective of said program are to mainly identify the children suffering from "Mild Disabilities" and ensure the provision of equal opportunities to these children for education without experiencing any discriminatory behavior in two districts; Bahawalpur and Muzaffargarh. Such projects can be a good initiative to increase awareness amongst the general masses and to address the fears of teachers and management of inclusive education schools. UNICEF program titled "Alternate Learning Pathways (ALP)" is also yielding very positive results, where deprived and disabled individuals are brought into the loop of educational institutions (Radivojević et al., 2019). In fact, ALP is part of UNICEF's broader initiative known as SCR or UNICEF Social Cohesion and Resilience program. Similarly, "Telenor Open Mind Programme" offered people with disabilities on-the-job training and employment opportunity. Despite all the heartening acts and participation of the private sector, a lot is required to be done.

Methodology

Mix method research (qualitative and quantitative both) was used to carry out the research with an aim to measure the attitudes of mainstream classroom teachers towards the concept of inclusive education and its practical manifestation. The research instrument was shared with the target population and results were then analyzed. Parallel to obtaining data through questionnaires, a qualitative approach was also adopted by interviewing senior teachers and management through unstructured questions for seeking clarity regarding problems being faced as well as challenges perceived in adoption to the inclusive schooling system.

Population and sample

The target population was teachers of mainstream classes at the elementary level in District Okara. The population of the study included 100 volunteer mainstream classroom teachers, both male and female from five different public-sector schools of Okara District being managed by the Federal Government Educational Institutions Directorate (FGEI Directorate). The selection of 100 teachers was made on a voluntary basis, however, the gender balance was ensured by having 50 male and 50 female respondents.

Instrument

The research instrument was prepared based upon already carried out research in the field of inclusive education with the assistance and guidance from subject specialists. The items included in the research instrument were primarily related to teachers' attitudes and perceptions regarding the inclusive schooling system. The questionnaire was divided into three general categories basic information, subject inquiry, and specific suggestions.

Data collection and analysis

The data for research was obtained from two means i.e., questionnaires and interviews. The data after the collection was analyzed through the Likert scale method, and responses were accordingly grouped based on percentages. Each section of the questionnaire was analyzed separately, and findings were reached after the inclusion of qualitative responses acquired through interviews.

Research ethics

The data collected was used for research purposes only and was secured personally. The respondents were ensured about the anonymity of the data as well as were requested to respond voluntarily. The results obtained from the questionnaire and interviews were kept anonymous. The data after finalization was disposed of safely.

Results and Analysis

Comparison between separate and inclusive education systems

The table below gives a gender-based response to inclusive education. 94 respondents believed that Students with or without Disabilities could get Academic Improvements because of Inclusive Education. 33 respondents agreed to communicate in special ways be educated in special settings, but almost 40 respondents also disagreed to this idea. Majority of respondents agreed to have delayed students in their class.

Table I

Items	Gender	Response				
		SD	D	NS	A	SA
Students with or without Disabilities can get Academic Improvements because of Inclusive Education	M	2	4	0	11	33
	F	1	3	0	12	34
Children who communicate in special ways be educated in special settings	M	7	13	0	13	17
	F	8	12	0	14	16
Inclusion sounds good in theory but doesn't work well in practice	M	12	8	5	10	15
	F	13	7	5	10	15
Are you in favor of accepting delayed students in regular schools?	M	3	6	2	17	22
	F	4	4	0	19	23

Perception/interaction with students

The table has assessed the overall perception of teachers working with delayed students. It is counter intuitive to find that teachers find it uncomfortable in inclusive teaching classrooms. As data reflects, 88 respondents reported being uncomfortable while working with disabilities.

Table II

Items	Gender	Response				
		SD	D	NS	A	SA
Do you feel comfortable working with students with disabilities and their parents?	M	33	10	2	4	1
	F	30	15	0	3	2
As a teacher, do you feel comfortable to teach in inclusive environments?	M	30	10	0	5	5
	F	30	10	5	5	0
Do you agree that mostly teachers have lower expectations from handicapped students?	M	25	7	3	9	6
	F	25	8	2	10	5

Effects of inclusive education

Effects of inclusive education were assessed through 2 items.90 Respondents agreed that Inclusive education is likely to have a positive effect on the social & emotional development of delayed students.64 respondents agreed that Inclusive education provides opportunities for mutual communication, promoting understanding and accepting individual diversity.

Table III

Items	Gender	Response				
		SD	D	NS	A	SA
Inclusive education is likely to have a positive effect on the social emotional development of delayed students	M	0	2	5	11	32
	F	1	2	0	13	34
Inclusive education provides opportunities for mutual communication, promoting understanding and accepting individual diversity	M	6	9	3	8	24
	F	8	8	2	7	25

Challenges, environment and resources

The below table has assessed the responses regarding available infrastructure provided. Unfortunately, very few teachers agreed to have availability of resources for professional pedagogues.

Table IV

Items	Gender	Response				
		SD	D	NS	A	SA
Sufficient supportive resources & professional pedagogues are available to support inclusive education in regular schools	M	4	17	8	9	12
	F	2	19	6	15	8
Existing infrastructure can support immediate implementation of UNCRPD	M	30	3	2	10	5
	F	36	5	3	4	2
Regular teachers' instructional effectiveness will be enhanced by having delayed students in regular classes	M	10	12	7	10	20
	F	15	10	0	10	15
Teaching in an inclusive environment is more demanding	M	5	3	3	30	9
	F	1	2	0	33	14
Trained teachers' attitude towards delayed students is better than untrained teachers	M	0	0	5	34	11
	F	0	0	0	27	23

Discussion

As results suggest, teachers are not yet prepared for dealing with the challenges of inclusive education. The respondents have asserted the idea of inclusive education, but also affirms that our teachers are not well equipped to handle delayed students. The necessity of inclusive education has been very well established and needs no further elaboration after its endorsement by the United Nations in the shape of UNCRPD. However, unfortunately, despite being a signatory of the convention lot of countries are still not sure about its implementation philosophy and practical manifestation. The reasons vary from region to region and are mostly attached to people's perceptions coupled with social restrictions and financial constraints. Pakistan signed the UNCRPD on 5th July 2011, authenticating that as a nation, we accept the inclusive education concept, however, still very little has been done in this field. At present, very few educational institutions are openly administering inclusive education, though almost every mainstream school does have special needs children enrolled as normal students (Krstić, 2018). But it remains an open question that whether persons with disabilities and corresponding special educational needs (SEN) should have the opportunity to be educated in the general educational system and should not be excluded because of their disabilities, keeping in view their cognitive and psychosocial outcomes based on learning differences.

Teacher's attitude is a fundamental aspect in an inclusive education environment, therefore, to evaluate the education system for delayed students, attitude and perception of teachers towards their training need detailed investigation. Unfortunately, due to a lack of resources and being a time-consuming process, no worthwhile work has been undertaken in this regard. The current study focused upon the attitude of public sector teachers towards inclusive education limiting to the Okara District of Punjab province, Pakistan. The data was collected through a questionnaire from a sample of volunteer teachers of both genders i.e., male and female. The results obtained were then processed on the Likert scale, and the following findings have been summarized as per the set objectives:

Findings

Comparison between inclusive and separate education systems

- Teachers were found in favor of an inclusive system and believed that it could be helpful towards educational improvements of the delayed students.
- The majority of teachers were in favor of inclusive environments for students with special needs, however, a considerable number believe that special needs must be addressed in special ways.
- Teachers were found fearful to adapt to an inclusive system due to lack of motivation, limited resources, and infrastructure issues.

Perception / interaction with students

- The majority of teachers were found not comfortable while dealing with delayed students and their parents and had reservations regarding teaching in inclusive environments.
- The majority of teachers have lower expectations from delayed students as compared to normal students.

Effects of inclusive education

- Inclusive education will positively impact the social and emotional development of delayed students.
- Inclusive education provides opportunities for mutual communication, promoting understanding and accepting individual diversity amongst students.

Challenges, environment and resources

- The availability of supportive resources & professional pedagogues in regular schools to convert them into inclusive systems is still not satisfactory.
- Existing resources/environments do not support immediate conversion to an inclusive system.
- With delayed students in regular classes' teachers' instructional abilities and standards will improve.
- Teaching in inclusive environments will be more demanding.
- Trained teachers' attitude towards delayed students is better than untrained teachers.

Miscellaneous Aspects

- Government patronage is missing due to which vacuum in policymaking and enforcement is missing.

- Fear of teachers shifting from separate to the inclusive system is basically due to a lack of requisite training and knowledge to handle students with special needs.
- Lack of motivation, especially due to added responsibilities without any visible incentive, also lowers teachers' willingness towards an inclusive system even though they believe that an inclusive system can bring more healthy changes.
- Teachers fear an apparent decline in displayed performance gauged through the current examination system.

Recommendations and Future Implications

Following are a few practical recommendations for adoption in our current system:
- Government must formulate a clear and comprehensive educational policy integrating inclusive education as per UNCRPD and chalk out a time frame for its partial and subsequently full adoption.
- Inclusion is part of all teacher's training activities and shall be added as a special subject for some time in syllabi of all education-related courses, thereby addressing the fears of teachers before asking them to teach in inclusive environments.
- Educational institutions' infrastructure and resources are upgraded to accommodate students with special needs.
- The approach of gradual shifting to an inclusive system is adopted, whereby, only part-time inclusion is practiced first, and depending upon its results further steps be initiated.
- Incentives are announced for teachers who are willing to work in inclusive environments.
- Media campaigns are launched to create greater awareness amongst all strata of society, thereby educating parents of delayed students towards their responsibilities.

Conclusion

Mainstream classroom teachers, though agree to benefit from inclusive education but have lower expectations from delayed students (if admitted to the inclusive system). The majority of the mainstream classroom teachers think that special children need special attention, whereas, in the current regular classroom, teachers may not have time and resources to focus on the individual needs of such students. Teachers were found fearful because average classes in our educational environment consist of 35 – 40 students; hence, sparing time to address individual intellectual and physical needs appears to be a daunting task. Trained teachers' attitude appears to be encouraging towards delayed students as compared to untrained teachers. Teachers and school management fear that without introducing complete educational reforms in the system, any attempt to shift to full-time inclusion will have a negative impact.

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