

PAKISTANI TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To explore classroom teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms and collaboration between the classroom and special education teachers in Pakistan.

Methodology: Fifty mainstream class room teacher (48 women two men) and fifty special education teachers (47 women and three men) from four schools of Lahore participated in the study. Their views were ascertained through three specially designed questionnaire exploring their attitude and knowledge towards inclusive education besides collaboration between mainstream and special education teachers.

Results: In general, teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusive education. They agree that it enhances social interaction thus minimizes negative attitude towards students with special needs. The findings also show that collaboration between the mainstream and the special education teachers is important and that there should be a clear guideline on the implementation of inclusive education.

Conclusions: More efforts are needed for teaching students with special education needs in Pakistan. The findings of the study have significant implications to the school administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders who are directly and indirectly involved in implementing inclusive education.

KEY WORDS: Special Educational Needs, Children, Inclusive education.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a concept that allows students with special needs to be placed and

receive instruction in the mainstream classes and being taught by mainstream teachers. Supporters of inclusive education believe that students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) can and should be educated in the mainstream education classroom with the provision of supplementary aids and services.¹ Research, as well as practical experience has demonstrated that teacher's perceptions are important in determining the effectiveness of inclusion, as teachers are the school workforce and mostly responsible for implementing inclusive service delivery models.

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The present study is perhaps the first one exploring the perceptions of mainstream classroom and special education teachers in teaching children with SEN in inclusive setting in Pakistan. The purpose of the study was to identify teacher perceptions about educating students with SEN in the mainstream classrooms. The study only focused on primary private classroom teachers in Lahore (Pakistan). This is an ongoing study. The following research questions were the focus of the study.

1. What is the classroom teachers' attitude towards inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms in Pakistan?
2. To what extent collaboration exists between the classroom and special education teachers in mainstream classrooms in Pakistan?

Education provisions for SEN children in Pakistan:

According to the census for 1998, there are thirty two lac eighty six thousand six hundred thirty (32,86,630) people with disability constituting 2.54 percent of the population.² Of the total population with disability, 0.82 million (24.8 percent) are of school-going age (5-14 years). It is estimated that about 20,000 children with disability are aged between 5-20 years, 2.4 percent of the total are enrolled in special schools. The figure is underestimated, as the definition of disability did not include moderate and mild disability and data collectors for the census were not trained to identify and classify all forms of disability. A survey of the special needs children indicated that 10 percent of the population had some sort of disability, such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, mental retardation, physical disability, learning disability or multiple disabilities. Of these, only two percent had access to institutional facilities.³

There are very few published texts concerning SEN in Pakistan. The schools vary considerably in organizational structure for supporting students with special needs. Special Education Ministry's goal for the private schools system is to be able to indicate the requirements for accepting and supporting students with special needs. The Ministry is also interested

in creating awareness and fostering effective intervention approaches for students with special needs. These efforts are being made in collaboration with the same group which is responsible for special needs services within the public sector.

The students with disabilities such as Hearing Impairments, Communication Disorder, Intellectual Challenged and PMLD (Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties) enroll in Special Centers. The students with special educational needs such as learning difficulties (LD) sometimes enroll in mainstream public schools. However, without any training in special needs, teachers often cannot involve them in the class and, hence, such students tend to become demoralized and take extra classes after school as parents are worried about anything that might hold their child back.

METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study involved mainstream classroom teachers and special education teachers. The study focused on four schools in the city of Lahore. All schools provide primary and secondary years of schooling to their students. The average class size in both schools was twenty students with one teacher.

One hundred teachers from four schools, (95 women and 5 men) participated in the study. The first group comprises of 50 mainstream classroom teachers – 48 women and two men. These teachers have degrees of bachelors and masters in science, commerce or art subjects.

The second group was also made up of fifty teachers – 47 women and three men. They were teaching in the same schools as special education teachers. The special education teachers who participated in the study have a teaching certificate in special education along with three years or more experience of teaching students with special needs. All the one hundred teachers who agreed initially to participate in the study, returned the completed questionnaires. (response rate of 100%)

A survey on the attitudes and knowledge of school teachers regarding inclusive education was conducted. It consisted of an 18-item scale,

divided in three parts: a) teachers perceptions (8 items), assessment of teachers' views with the claim that children with disabilities are entitled to education together with their typically developing peers in inclusive classrooms, b) collaboration between the mainstream and special education teachers (5 items), which explored the relationship between the mainstream and special education teacher and c) strategies to improve inclusive education (5 items), which examined how inclusion can be enhanced. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of percentages based on three categories: Agree, Uncertain, and Disagree.

RESULTS

Table-I depicts the teachers' perceptions regarding inclusive education in Pakistan. More than half of the respondents (70.2%) agree that students with special needs are academically better in inclusive classrooms. Only 25% of the respondents agreed that the placement of students with special needs in

regular classes negatively affects the academic performance of normal students. Seventy five percent of the respondents believed that the negative attitude of special needs students can be minimized in inclusive classrooms.

Table-II illustrates the perceptions of Pakistani teachers regarding the collaborative efforts between mainstream and special education teachers in an inclusive classroom. The majority of respondents (90.0%) agreed that the collaboration between the special education teachers and regular teachers is vital in the implementation of the inclusive program. Of the teachers sixty five percent concur that the role of special education teacher is to assist the students with disabilities.

Table-III highlights some of the issues that need the attention of the parties involved in implementing this program. Majority of the respondents (70.1%) feel that the mainstream classroom teachers lack the exposure and the skills to deal with students with special needs and 90.3% agreed that special needs students need extra attention and help in the classroom. In reply to question number five, 81% of the

Table-I: Teachers perceptions towards inclusive education

<i>Item</i>	<i>Agree (%)</i>	<i>Uncertain (%)</i>	<i>Disagree (%)</i>
1 Students with special needs are academically better in inclusive classrooms	70.2	2.0	18.0
2 Students with special needs must be integrated into the regular community	65.1	3.0	32.0
3 In order to achieve the highest level of inclusion, it is necessary for students with special needs to be placed in regular classes with back up support	67.7	12.3	20.0
4 The placement of students with special needs in regular classes negatively affects the academic performance of mainstream students	25.0	23.0	52.0
5 The academically-talented students will be isolated in the inclusive classrooms	27.2	30.6	42.1
6 Students with special needs will benefit from the inclusive program in regular classrooms	68.1	14.4	18.1
7 Students with special needs have the right to receive an education in mainstream classes	80.0	5.1	15.3
8 Students with special needs will not be labeled as 'stupid', 'weird' or 'hopeless' when placed in regular classrooms	75.0	20.0	5.4

Table-II: Collaboration between mainstream and special education teachers

<i>Item</i>	<i>Agree (%)</i>	<i>Uncertain (%)</i>	<i>Disagree (%)</i>
1 Special needs teachers and regular teachers need to work together in order to teach students with special needs in inclusive classrooms	90.0	2.0	8.1
2 Although the inclusive education in a good concept, its implementation is ineffective due to objections from the mainstream classroom teachers	49.8	28.9	21.3
3 Mainstream classrooms teachers have a main responsibility towards the students with special needs placed in their classrooms	55.4	20.2	25.4
4. The presence of a special education teacher in the regular classrooms could raise difficulties in determining who really is responsible for the special students	44.5	23.0	33.0
5 The special education teacher only helps the students with special needs	65.0	9.0	25.0

respondent agreed that limited resources in teaching are the critical aspects that need to be improved.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study, in general, the efforts to implement the inclusive programme received a positive response from the teachers. Moreover, the present study shows that experience in working with children with SEN did differentiate between teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. More specifically, it was found that teachers with experience in working with children with SEN held more positive attitudes towards their inclusion than their colleagues without relevant experience. This finding has been supported by studies conducted in other countries as well.⁴⁻⁷

Studies have shown that the success of the inclusive education depends, to a large extent, on the willingness and the ability of teachers to make accommodations for individuals with special needs.⁸⁻¹⁰ It is likely that teachers with a few years of teaching experience did not have the chance to benefit from proper training, which could make them less resistant to inclusive practices.^{11,12}

Limitations of the study: The sample size is too small and since the study was conducted in four schools of Lahore, it cannot be a representative sample of the whole population of Pakistan. Further studies with an enlarged sample drawn from all the provinces of Pakistan are needed. This should also differentiate teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of different types of SEN, which are thought to constitute an important parameter as well as

Table-III: Strategies to improve inclusive education

<i>Item</i>	<i>Agree (%)</i>	<i>Uncertain (%)</i>	<i>Disagree (%)</i>
1 Mainstream classroom teachers have the training and skills to teach special needs students	25.4	5.0	70.1
2 Special needs students need extra help and attention	90.3	5.4	5.2
3 Students with special needs committed more disciplinary problems compared to the regular students	60.4	10.2	3.0
4. Mainstream classroom teachers received little help from the special needs teachers	44.5	23.0	33.0
5 Although inclusive education is important, the resources for the students with special needs in a mainstream classroom are limited.	81.2	5.3	15.1

data linking attitudinal scores to either teaching effectiveness or to student outcomes which is yet to be explored.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings of the study reveal that more efforts are needed for teaching students with SEN in Pakistan. Overall teachers hold a positive attitude towards inclusion of students with SEN. However, collaboration between the mainstream and special education teachers is important. Workshops should be conducted regarding teaching students with special needs. Provision of adequate resources to inclusive classes is also recommended. Inclusion requires support by school administrators, principals, parents, teachers and students.

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