

Research Article

Challenges to Implement the Inclusive Education in Pakistan: A Case of Intellectually Disabled Children

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the current education status of Intellectually Disabled Children and the challenges to inclusion of Intellectually Disabled Children in Pakistan. Using a quantitative research approach, data was gathered from the families of students having intellectual disabilities using mother's reports about the interaction of normal sibling with intellectually disabled children in a school environment. The findings of the study reveal that the level of warmth is much higher in the inclusive education classes as compared to the Rivalries, Relative Status and Conflicts with intellectually disabled students. A higher level of empathy increases the sense of responsibility, tolerance, and encouragement. The research strongly recommends that the educationist and professionals must initiate the teachers' awareness programs about disabilities. Government and media can assist in spreading awareness about relationship and interactions among students by establishing awareness programs that focuses on the implementation of the inclusive education systems in Pakistan.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is an educational approach that seeks to address the learning needs of all students, including those with disabilities, by integrating them into mainstream classrooms (Graham, 2020). This approach, according to Lindner and Schwab (2020), emphasizes the importance of ensuring equal access to education and providing appropriate support and accommodations to enable every student to succeed. Alzahrani (2020) describing the principles of Inclusive Education (IE) includes equity, participation, support, flexibility, and respect for diversity. Alzahrani (2020) argues that an inclusive educational system ensures that all students have access to the same educational opportunities and resources. It encourages

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active involvement of all students in the learning process and school activities and provides necessary support systems and services to meet the diverse needs of students. Its focus is to adapt curricula, teaching methods, and learning environments to accommodate different learning styles and needs to value and respect the differences among students and fostering an environment of acceptance.

Shedding light of the benefits of IE, Moberg, et al., (2020) consider social integration, academic achievement, personal development, and preparation for society. Moberg, et al., (2020) believe that an inclusive educational system promotes social interaction and friendships among students with and without disabilities, fostering a sense of community by providing opportunities for all students to learn from each other and improve academically. It also helps students with disabilities develop better self-esteem and confidence. The system prepares all students for life in a diverse society by promoting understanding and acceptance of differences. Inclusive education offers numerous benefits for students, teachers, and the broader community. According to Mag, et al., (2017), by integrating students with disabilities and other special needs into mainstream classrooms, inclusive education fosters a learning environment that values diversity and promotes the development of all students. Inclusive education often leads to better academic performance for students with disabilities. Access to the general education curriculum, alongside their peers, helps these students achieve higher academic standards.

Implementation of inclusive education in Pakistan is considered to be a challenge in various aspects. According to Shaukat (2023), the challenges range from cultural and societal attitudes to structural and policy-related issues. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing strategies to overcome them and promote a more inclusive education system. There is a significant stigma associated with disabilities in Pakistani society, leading to discrimination against individuals with disabilities. This societal attitude affects the willingness of schools and communities to embrace inclusive education. Many parents, educators, and community members lack awareness about the benefits and importance of inclusive education. This results in resistance to integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. While Pakistan has some policies and international commitments (like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), these policies are often not comprehensive enough to support inclusive education effectively (Hendriks, 2007). Existing policies related to inclusive education are often poorly implemented due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of accountability, and insufficient monitoring mechanisms (Shaukat, 2023).

“There are 371,833 children with disabilities in Pakistan across disability areas such as blindness (19,643), deafness and speech impairment (25,183), physical disabilities (295,093), and intellectual disabilities (31,914)” (Shaukat, 2023, p. 75). In Pakistan, children with disabilities are not integrated into the society and encounter multiple challenges such as a lack of access to health facilities, funds, and qualified educational staff to satisfy to their needs. Similarly, parents consider their child with a disability as an economic burden, who may be the target of inappropriate remarks, disrespectful behavior, cursing, and mocking both by adults and by children. Pakistan is one of the highest reported countries having intellectually disable children in the world, which is 19.1 per 1000 for severe intellectual disabilities and 65.3 per 1000 for mild IDs (Awan, et al., 2015; Lakhani, et al., 2013). Considering the existing situation in Pakistan regarding the IE, this study has the following objectives:

- To explore the challenges to inclusion of Intellectually Disabled Children
- To explore the current education status of Intellectually Disabled Children

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intellectual Disability

Schalock et al., (2007) define the term “Intellectual Disability” as significant limitations in intellectual functioning as well as in adaptive behavior which is expressed as social, conceptual, and practical adaptive skills. The disability is usually originated before the age of eighteen. Conducting study on the interactions between classmates, Furman and Buhrmester (1985) found four dimensions including relative status/power, warmth/closeness, conflict, and rivalry. Similarly, conducting study on the relationship between children with autism Kaminsky and Dewey (2001) found positive relationship. Furthermore, the study suggests that the factors such as warmth and closeness are more evident in the interactions between

classmates with intellectual disabilities comparing to the conflicts and rivalries. However, while exploring the experience of children with disabled and nondisabled students, McHale and Harris (2013) found that rivalries and conflicts are more observed when students perceive their teachers to be differential to a child with intellectual disability.

A study conducted by Gallagher and Powell (1989) on classmates' interactions found that a disabled or debilitated child has a sudden profound effect on the entire family. From this perspective, the study suggests that the birth of a new child is an important event for the entire family. It is even more difficult for students to accept a student who is disabled and needs more attention and support from the teachers. However, it is important for the well-being of an academic institute that the normal student adjust to the disabled students. It can affect and help the disabled child adjust and develop his/ herself-esteem. Similarly, Crnic and Leconte (1986) found that students are the first friends of each other in their lives. They are considered to be a first step towards the social development as well as the social interaction other than their teachers. The study recommends that over the time the relationship of students nurtures and acquires new roles. However, if one student is disabled or chronically ill, it may create severe difficulty among the other students in a classroom.

The findings of the study, on the relationship of students, conducted by Hannah and Midlarsky (2005) reveals that as the children grow, both positive and negative feelings cultivate towards their classmates. Every child possesses different temperament and personality at different ages. Hannah and Midlarky (2005) describes that children with intellectually challenged students have tends to have positive social interactions. A higher level of empathy increases the sense of responsibility, tolerance, and encouragement. On the other hand, older students provide more assistance than younger ones. The findings of the study further reveal that girls are more likely to provide emotional support than the boys. In another study Cuskelly and Gunn (2003) found that children who have students with Down syndrome are more involved in care giving activities. The scores of students regarding unkindness on the Sibling Inventory of Behavior were significantly lower and higher empathy was reported among same-sex dyads. Presenting the findings of the study conducted on the students' relationship of chronically ill children, McKeever (1983) figures out that students are least aware of the problems and disabilities of their classmates. Therefore, it is significantly important for them to be aware of the situation. They need information, throughout their lives, that is appropriate to their age.

The development of quality relationship of the students with intellectual disability with their students' needs to be well addressed in Pakistan. Research studies conducted within Pakistani context have addressed the issues, in acquisition of support services, faced by disabled children (Awan, et al., 2015). The issue faced by special children in school, families, special education curriculum, and mothers of children with disabilities etc. According to Ahmed, et al., (2013), parents and students of intellectually disabled child experience increased responsibility, emotional pressures on themselves and stigmatization. Parents feel guilt and thus deny the child's disability and displays aggressive feelings for the intellectually disabled childbirth. However, they overcome these feelings and move towards constructive acceptance with the passage of time.

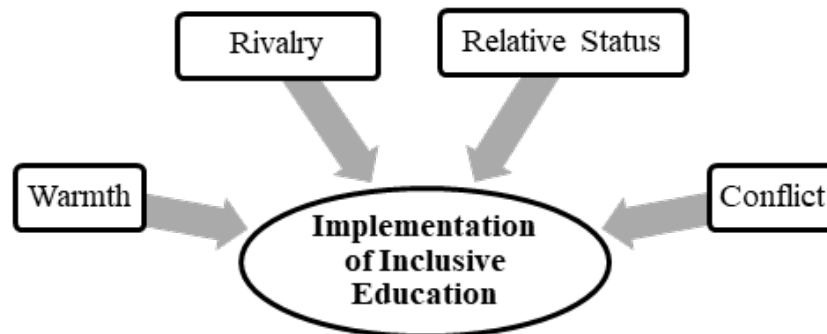
Theoretical Grounding of the Study

The personality theory, known as "Adler's Personality Theory," created by Alfred Adler, emphasizes on the external sources of personality developments and their influence on behavior (Adler, 1964). Adler considered the influence of family system, including teacher's roles and student influences, as primary in personality development. (Whiteman, et al., 2011). He describes social comparisons and power dynamics in families as components of individual's sense of self. He advocates the importance of egalitarianism (equal treatment for students) as a primary measure for developing individual's sense of self in his theory. He suggests that students create maladaptive styles for life and develop an inferiority complex when they find themselves less favorable and differential in terms of treatment as compared to other children in the family. Alder describes that students' experiences and sibling relationships processes as central points of personality development and was also interested in finding birth order effects in relationship to these centrals, particularly sibling rivalries around time and attention given by parents. According to him, the reason for sibling rivalries is to overcome the feeling of inferiority. (Whiteman, et al., 2011). In the light of reviewed literature, this study attempts to response the following research questions:

- What are the challenges to implement the inclusive education in Pakistan with intellectually disabled children?
- What is the current education status in Pakistan in reference to the intellectually disabled children?

Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature, the found challenges to implement the inclusive education Pakistan with intellectually disabled children include the following:



Hypothesis

- H_1 : Warmth has a significant influence to implement the inclusive education in Pakistan with intellectually disabled children
- H_2 : Rivalry has a significant influence to implement the inclusive education in Pakistan with intellectually disabled children
- H_3 : Relative Status has a significant influence to implement the inclusive education in Pakistan with intellectually disabled children
- H_4 : Conflict has a significant influence to implement the inclusive education in Pakistan with intellectually disabled children

METHODOLOGY

This study is based cross sectional survey design in consideration to the goal of the research that was to examine data on the aspects of students' relationships. Therefore, face to face interviews and telephonic conversion with mothers in families of intellectually challenged children found suitable. The questionnaire developed by Furman and Buhrmester (1985) was employed which has been cited by over 700 research studies possessing a good internal reliability and consistency. The targeted population consisted of families having a child with intellectual disabilities. Using purposive sampling approach, families of intellectually disabled children studying in special schools of Malir district were contacted. From this perspective, 53 families were included in the study, including a total number of 96 students among which 55 students had nuclear family structure and 41 students had joint family structure.

Data Collection and Analysis

In line with the present study, primary data was collected from 53 families of individuals having intellectual disabilities using mother's reports about the relationships of normal students with intellectually disabled children in a classroom. To analyze the gathered data, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed. At initial stage, descriptive statistics was obtained to establish the demographic information of the participants of the study. Subsequently, Pearson product moment correlation coefficients and ANOVA test were computed to examine the relationship between family constellation variables and students' relationship quality. To ensure the ethics of the study, the identity of the participants was kept confidential. Furthermore, their verbal consent was taken before the collection of their responses.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Demographic Information

The respondents of the study included 23 males, 22 females and 51 mixed students' dyads, while the total gender included 45 males and 51 female respondents. All the students were considered from families of children with intellectual disabilities regardless of their ages except those who are under 1 year of age, as the data was based on mother's reports. Furthermore, reliability of the gathered data was measured. Reliability determines to what extent a test possesses the internal consistency in the items (Heale & Twycross, 2015). In this study, data reliability has been demonstrated by calculating the value of Cronbach's Alpha using SPSS software. The overall value of Cronbach's alpha was 0.809 (See Table 1), which defines good and thus acceptable reliability of data used test (questionnaire). The constructs were taken from the study conducted by Furman and Buhrmester (1985), including Warmth/Closeness, Rivalry, Relative Status, and Conflict.

Table 1
Reliability Statistics

Constructs	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Warmth/Closeness	11	0.937
Rivalry	05	0.808
Relative Status	05	0.766
Conflict	03	0.710

The answers to the first research question were attained through descriptive statistics presenting the levels of warmth/closeness, relative status power, conflict, and rivalry factors among the students' classroom interaction of the participants (See Table 2).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of the Constructs

	Constructs	N	M	SD
1.	Warmth	96	3.67	0.87
2.	Rivalry	96	2.17	0.69
3.	Relative Status	96	2.89	0.88
4.	Conflict	96	2.59	1.05

Comparing the means of all variables, Table 3 presents the result of One-Sample Test presenting that all the identified variables (Warmth, Rivalry, Relative Status, and Conflict) have a statistically significant influence to the implement the inclusive education in Pakistan with intellectually disabled children ($p > .000$) except the aspect of rivalry among the students having classroom interaction with the intellectually disabled classmates ($p = .090$). Nevertheless, the aspect of Warmth was found to be higher than the other aspects (mean = 3.67).

Table 3
One-Sample Test

Constructs	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Mean	Std. Deviation
Warmth	2.96	95	.004	1.170	3.67	0.87
Rivalry	3.62	95	.090	-.330	2.17	0.69
Relative Status	3.25	95	.002	.390	2.89	0.88
Conflict	4.18	95	.000	.090	2.59	1.05

Discussion

The researcher used descriptive analysis to explore that the students' relationship quality. By comparing means of all four dimensions underlying sibling relationship quality scale, it was found that the level of warmth ($\mu=3.67$) is much higher in the inclusive education classes as compared to the rivalries ($\mu=2.17$), Relative Status ($\mu=2.89$) and conflicts ($\mu=2.59$) with intellectually disabled students. This relates to the assumption made by the researcher (1) Warmth and closeness among students with intellectual disabilities is higher than conflicts and rivalries. The finding is supported by the studies conducted by Cuskelly and Gunn (2003) and McHale and Harris (2013). Similarly, the findings of the study, on the classroom interaction of studeynts, conducted by Hannah and Midlarsky (2005) reveals that as the

children grow, both positive and negative feelings cultivate towards their classmates. Every child has a different temperament and personality at different ages. Hannah and Midlarky (2005) describes that children with intellectually challenged siblings have tends to have positive social interactions.

A higher level of empathy increases the sense of responsibility, tolerance, and encouragement. The reviewed of the study conducted by Hannah and Midlarky (2005) seems not to be aligned with the findings of the present study. In another study Cuskelly and Gunn (2003) found that children who have classmates with Down syndrome are more involved in care giving activities. The scores of classmates regarding unkindness on the Sibling Inventory of Behavior were significantly lower and higher empathy was reported among same-sex dyads. Presenting the findings of the study conducted on the siblings' relationship of chronically ill children, McKeever (1983) figures out that students are least aware of the problems and disabilities of their classmates. Therefore, it is significantly important for them to be aware of the situation. They need information, throughout their lives, that is appropriate to their age.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study revealed a positive experience regarding students' interaction with intellectually disabled child in an inclusive classroom. The positive interaction includes the feelings of love, affection, and empathy for students while negative experiences relate to the conflict due teacher different treatment. Further, regarding the family constellation variables, the result indicates that the type of students' dyad influences the warmth, rivalry, and conflict levels among the students. Students had more warmth for younger special child and higher conflicts with elder brother/sister with disability among families. Regarding, family structure, the study contradicted the findings from literature, students from joint family systems.

The research strongly recommends the need for awareness. The educationist and professional must start including the students in the teachers' awareness programs about disabilities. Government and media can assist in spreading awareness about relationship and interactions among students by establishing awareness programs that focuses on sibling relationships. The need for information and understanding is not only the parent's responsibility, but it should also be addressed by professionals and other family members. It is important for the teachers to focus on psychological wellbeing of children with intellectually challenged students. They can also play important role in creating a positive sibling relationship and providing them awareness. practices.

Competing Interests

The authors has declared that no competing interests exist.

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