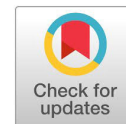




Research Article

A Study about Identifying the Factors Related to Mainstream Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education



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ABSTRACT

The study used a descriptive methodology to investigate teachers' perspectives on inclusive education practices in urban schools, with teacher attitudes serving as the dependent variable and taking into account factors such as disability types, the role of co-teaching, administrative support, and in-service training for inclusive educational success. The survey included 122 District East high school mainstream teachers from the Karachi Division. Participation was completely voluntary and considered a convenience sample. Females responded at a greater rate (69%), and the majority of participants were above the age of 45 with Master's degrees. The study reveals an evenly divided instruction level between three teaching levels, with seminar/workshop attendance ranking was comparatively high. However, only few of them had no special needs courses. The study found that mainstream teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of children with special needs are typically positive, but they may be improved, consistent with earlier studies. In conclusion, the study reveals that teachers have modest views on inclusive education with significant challenges in all five sub-domains. Despite this, most teachers believe children with special needs can be effectively taught in regular classrooms.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last three decades, the number of children with disabilities in general education classrooms has increased, leaving instructors feeling overwhelmed by the everyday demands of students with special needs for inclusive education (Van Reusen et al., 2000; Graham, 2020). The teacher's attitude towards inclusion is crucial for successful integration of students with special needs. Positive attitudes can significantly impact the effectiveness of the inclusion model (Charitaki, et al., 2022; Barnová, et al., 2022). However, Kavale (2002) suggests that the necessary attitude for incorporating children with special needs into the general curriculum has not yet been established. Inclusion in education refers to placing handicapped students in general education classrooms for most of the day, providing tailored instruction and support for students with special needs. This environment ensures equal participation

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for all students (Shaeffer, 2019). A thorough analysis of inclusive education and the best placement alternatives for children with special needs is necessary to effectively implement inclusion.

According to Baumgartner, et al., (2003), inclusion benefits children with disabilities because they witness their classmates obtaining instruction outside of the traditional classroom context. Inclusive activities enhance the intellectual and social benefits of regular students, as research by Salend and Duhaney (1999) demonstrates. Schools are increasingly using standard classrooms to accommodate students with disabilities, with various factors influencing the effectiveness of inclusion programs (Huber, et al., 2001). Wolpert (2001) argued that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and confidence in mentoring students with impairments are crucial factors in the quality of an inclusion class, even though inclusion is often seen as the model of prioritizing disabled students.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers strongly support inclusive education, recognizing the benefits it provides for their students. However, studies show that teachers frequently lack appropriate assistance and training to manage inclusive classes, limiting their effectiveness in such situations. The review of the related literature suggested that long-term attitudes must change for children with disabilities to be fully integrated into the classroom. It's crucial to differentiate between teachers' attitudes and the factors contributing to successful integration, as others may view these as obstacles.

Research Questions

What is the attitude of mainstream teachers towards inclusive education related to various types of disabilities?

What are the views of mainstream teachers about the role of co-teaching, administrative support and in-service training for the success of inclusive education?

What are the least effective inclusive education training strategies deemed by mainstream teachers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Impact of Inclusive Education on Exceptional Students

According to Mastropieri and Scruggs (2004), inclusion in education is both praised and criticized, with teachers potentially lacking adequate training, being unable to meet special needs, and not having sufficient resources in all classrooms. Additionally, there is a risk of mistreatment or mockery towards students with special needs. Children with special need benefit from inclusive education because it allows them to see and learn from classmates who do not have difficulties. This social setting helps outstanding students to connect into their school community while also developing empathy for individuals who may be isolated. Inclusion in special education enhances social acceptance and friendship among students with learning disabilities (Yilmaz & Yeganeh, 2021). According to a study by Vaughn, et al., (1998), inclusive practices resulting in significant improvements in peer acceptance ratings and overall friendship quality.

Elementary school students with mild disabilities perform better academically, demonstrate more considerate conduct, and have a better comprehension of Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals (Peetsma, et al., 2001). In contrast, children with severe disabilities perform better on IEP goals, have more time for participation and instruction, and are exposed to coursework (Hunt, et al., 2003). Research shows that high school students with mild disabilities often perform better academically, and socially than their peers in special education programs. Full placement in grades 7-12 increases the likelihood of college enrollment, employment, higher income, and self-sufficiency (Rea, et al., 2002). According to Lloyd, et al., (2000), inclusion programs may not assist all special education students since individuals with moderate disabilities may not receive enough, individualized instruction within an inclusive education framework. Mills, et al., (1998) conducted a study on preschool and primary school students, revealing that only those students with mild disabilities who have higher functioning performed better and made more progress in academics and social relations.

The Impact of Inclusive Education on Mainstream Teachers

Inclusion benefits both students and educators by promoting diversity in the classroom, enhancing

teachers' skills, and preparing all students better (Carter, 1991). Mainstream teachers can enhance their pedagogical and social skills when they collaborate with special educators, IEP teams, and co-teachers. Cook (2001) emphasizes that educators have the power to positively impact the lives of all their students. Teachers' opinions on special education models are generally consistent, but they often feel they lack sufficient training and support. Their attitudes significantly impact students' achievement and the program's success. Supporting inclusive models can boost confidence and create a positive learning environment.

Carroll, et al., (2003) revealed a shift in Australian teachers' attitudes towards children with disabilities, with some arguing that their education programs don't adequately prepare them for working with special needs students. A ten-week training program improved pre-service teachers' awareness and ability to interact effectively with these students. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) indicate that most teachers strongly support inclusion, believing it is a beneficial teaching tactic for both mainstream and special education students, and respondents are willing to work in inclusive classrooms. Most studies suggest that teachers need extensive training to integrate special education students into mainstream curriculums.

The inclusion of disabled students in the standard curriculum presents challenges for general and special educators who must adapt to their unique needs, as physical separation alone is insufficient for success. Teachers must be aware of accommodations and adaptations that assist students with special needs. According to research, good inclusion benefits both children with and without disabilities intellectually and socially. However, positive teacher attitudes are necessary to create a successful inclusive environment (Hwang & Evans, 2011). In-service training (Beacham & Rouse, 2012), career development (Dodge-Quick, 2011), experience (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007), and career development, and administrative assistance (Irvine, et al., 2010).

The impact of various factors on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education is still unclear. Inclusive experiences seem to influence positive attitudes, but more research is needed to understand how different experiences can change attitudes. Professional development positively influences teachers' attitudes, but more evidence is needed to determine its benefits. Researchers feel that administrative and special educational help, while ambiguous in nature, promotes inclusion; nonetheless, further research is needed to understand their characteristics in an inclusive setting.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive methodology to examine teachers' views on inclusive education practices in urban schools, focusing on teacher attitudes as the dependent variable, as defined by Gall, et al., (1996). The study analyzed quantitative data using frequency and percentages, considering factors like types of disabilities, role of co-teaching, administrative support and in-service training for the success of inclusive education.

Participants

The study comprised 173 District East high school mainstream teachers from Karachi Division. The survey was completed by 71% (N=122) of participants. Each participant received a cover page stating the study's goal and an assurance that their responses and names would be kept secret. Participation was entirely voluntary and considered a convenience sample. Table 1 provides the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participating Teachers

Characteristics	f	%
Gender		
Male	38	31
Female	84	69
Age Range (years)		
<36	26	21
36 - 45	32	26
>45	64	53
Educational Level		
Bachelor's	50	41
Master's	67	55
M. Phil/Ph. D.	05	04
Current Level of Teaching		
Elementary	56	46
Middle	34	28
High School	32	26
Special Education Courses		
Seminar/Workshop	27	22
Certificate/Diploma	19	16
Bachelor/Master	61	50
No response	15	12
Teaching Experience		
Less than 5 Years	49	40
6 – 10 Years	52	43
More than 10 Years	21	17

The response rate from female (69%) was higher than that of male (31%). Fifty-three percent (53%) of the participants were above the age of 45, and 55% had master's degrees or higher in education. Only five of the responders have PhD degrees. Between the three teaching levels, the level of instruction was evenly divided. The proportion of respondents with a university degree in special education who took how many special education courses, with seminar/workshop attendance ranking second (22%). Twelve percent of participants said they had no special needs courses. Working experience to teach children with disabilities (CWD), overall years teaching, and years teaching at the present level were comparable, albeit each category showed a broad variety of expertise.

Materials

A survey was conducted to better understand teachers' views on inclusive education. The survey contains three sections: A, B, and C. Part A gathers information about teachers' gender, age group, education level, current education level, number of years of education, total number of years of schooling, and training for teaching CWD. Part B has 42 items about teachers' viewpoints on inclusive education. Teachers were asked to rate their responses using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from SD (strongly disagree) to SA (strongly agree). Part C asks teachers to describe the training they believe would be most helpful in implementing successful inclusion and to express any concerns they may have about teaching students with special needs. A higher score indicated a more positive attitude towards overall attitudes.

Procedure

The research process involves obtaining approval from the school principal, providing teachers with access to cover letters and information about inclusive education attitudes, and obtaining informed consent from the teacher. The letter also guaranteed anonymity, confidentiality of data, and the ability to view the study's findings. Participants could contact the investigators with any issues or queries. The research followed a procedure where teachers could choose not to participate, and all data remained private.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

The findings are described below in five sub-domains:

Student Related Factors

According to Table 2, 88% of teachers feel that every child with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) should get special education, regardless of the cause. However, 87% refuse special education services for speech and language disorders. The majority of the participants (87%) feel that emotionally disturbed children should attend frequent lessons, whereas 83% strongly oppose for the inclusion of physically aggressive children. Seventy-two percent teachers in favor of teaching mentally challenged children in special education settings, while 70% say that children should be taught in ordinary schools with a comprehensive IEP. Sixty-six percent respondents were highly opposed to maintaining verbally hostile children in traditional classes. Finally, 53% teachers feel that special education assistance should be provided to students below grade level.

Table 2
Sum of Responses within Student Related Factors on the Teacher Survey

Student Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1] Students who are at least two years below grade level are required to enroll in special education programs.	12%	53%	23%	12%
2] Students diagnosed with autism must attend special education programs.	04%	42%	38%	16%
3] IEP children should be taught in normal educational settings to the best of their ability.	03%	27%	40%	30%
4] Mentally challenged kids should be educated in special education classrooms.	03%	25%	49%	23%
5] It is feasible to maintain verbally aggressive children in regular classroom environments.	23%	43%	31%	03%
6] It is feasible to maintain physically aggressive children in mainstream classroom environments.	33%	50%	17%	00%
7] Every child with an IEP, regardless of the cause, is required to attend special education classes.	26%	62%	09%	3%
8] Special education programs should be accessible to children who have speech and language difficulties.	23%	64%	10%	03%
9] Special education programs should be offered for students who are below grade level.	27%	60%	10%	03%
10] Depressed students who do not exhibit disruptive behavior should be allowed to participate in normal education classrooms.	03%	23%	64%	10%

Peer Support

The survey found that 89% of teachers felt their colleagues were willing to provide advice on educating children with special needs, and 85% agreed that they would seek support from their colleagues. However, 77% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that incorporating children with IEPs into the general classroom would ensure that all special needs students were included. This highlights the need for more inclusive and supportive teaching approaches for children with special needs.

Table 3
Sum of Responses within Peer Support on the Teacher Survey

Peer Support Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1] When I have students with IEPs in my classroom, my coworkers are happy to help me with any issues that arise.	03%	12%	65%	20%
2] If I have students with special needs in my classroom, I may ask my colleagues for assistance as necessary.	06%	09%	65%	20%
3] When I approach my coworkers for advice on how to teach students with special needs, they are eager to help.	03%	08%	66%	23%
4] When I am dealing with students that have special needs, I feel comfortable asking my coworkers for assistance.	03%	16%	60%	21%
5] If I start bringing children with IEPs into my regular classroom, my colleagues will try to place all of their special needs students in my class.	23%	54%	17%	06%

Administrative Support

Table 4 shows that 70% of teachers are required by their administration to attend conferences and training sessions on teaching students with special needs. Fifty-seven percent participants discuss their concerns with their administrators while 61% feel supported by their administration when dealing with challenging students. Majority of the teachers (70%) reported that they have special need students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and the administration helps them adequately. Eighty-three (83%) of participants have enough time to attend relevant conferences and training sessions. Majority of the teachers (80%) have access to resources to tailor lessons to students with special needs. Slightly positive remarks (56%) indicated that teachers feel supported by their administration when dealing with learning difficulties. Almost all participant teachers (93%) receive financial support to attend conferences and training sessions.

Table 4
Sum of Responses within Administrative Support on the Teacher Survey

Administrative Support Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1) Administrators encourage me to attend conferences and training sessions on teaching children with exceptional needs.	32%	38%	25%	05%
2) I am willing to express my concerns regarding the handling of students with special needs to my administrators.	18%	25%	40%	17%
3) When dealing with challenges caused by children who display disorder behaviors in my classroom, I feel supported by my administration.	28%	33%	31%	05%
4) When I have children with IEPs in my classroom, my administration gives me with adequate support.	30%	40%	25%	05%
5) I have plenty of time to attend training and conferences on educating children with IEPs.	40%	43%	14%	03%
6) I have access to adequate materials to tailor my pedagogy to the needs of my special needs students.	38%	42%	17%	03%
7) When faced with challenges posed by students with learning difficulties in my classroom, I feel supported by my administration.	26%	30%	34%	10%
8) I receive financial assistance to attend conferences and training on teaching children with exceptional needs.	68%	25%	07%	0%

Collaborative Support

The study reveals that 87% of teachers feel comfortable working with special educators when students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) in their class. Majority of the respondents (94%) promote collaborative teaching when an IEP student is present, and 75% believe it can help students with special needs, especially when enrolled in a regular classroom with peers without IEPs. Sixty-six percent of respondents believe IEP students should be taught by special education professionals, and 75% disagree that regular education teachers should not teach students with exceptional needs. Almost half of the cohort (51%) appreciates being the only teacher in the class, and 83% disagreed that typical student without special needs should be taught by them. A vast majority of the participants (84%) believe IEP students should be taught by both regular and special education teachers, and 90% disagree with the idea that special education teachers would lose their employment.

Table 5
Sum of Responses within Collaborative Support on the Teacher Survey

Collaborative Support Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1] When children in my class require an IEP, I feel comfortable dealing with special educators.	03%	10%	51%	36%
2] When a student with an IEP attends my class, I prefer collaborative teaching.	0%	06%	47%	47%
3] Collaborative teaching may be extremely beneficial for children with special needs, especially when they are enrolled in a regular classroom alongside mainstream students.	03%	22%	61%	14%
4] Students with IEPs should be taught by special education teachers.	0%	34%	48%	18%
5] General education teachers should not teach special needs children.	25%	50%	20%	05%
6] I enjoy being the only teacher in the classroom.	03%	46%	36%	15%
7] I should solely be in charge of teaching mainstream students who do not have any special educational need.	20%	63%	09%	08%
8] IEP students should be taught by both regular education and special education teachers.	03%	13%	60%	24%
9] If I educate students with IEPs, special education teachers could lose their jobs.	42%	48%	07%	03%

In-Service Training

According to the survey (table 6), 68% of instructors do not believe that their training effectively qualifies them to educate pupils with cognitive impairments and deficiencies in daily life skills. Sixty-two percent (62%) agree that more training is required for educating pupils with learning difficulties. Almost majority of the participants (93%) disagreed that their principal provided adequate opportunity for outside training. Because of their intellectual credentials, a small majority of teachers (56%) can handle classroom behavioral issues. However, 59% say they are equipped to educate children with special needs. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of teachers say their school administration provides insufficient in-service training for working with children on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Participants stated that (69%) they could effectively educate children with speech issues because of their academic skills. On the contrary, 55% agree that more training is required for dealing behavioral issues. Finally, 66% of the participants feel their academic experience qualifies them to teach pupils below grade level.

Table 6
Sum of Responses within In-Service Training on the Teacher Survey

Training Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1] My education has equipped me to effectively teach individuals with cognitive delays and daily life skill deficiencies.	32%	36%	16%	16%
2] I need more training to appropriately educate children with special educational needs.	16%	22%	49%	13%
3] The principal provides ample opportunities for outside training to effectively educate students with disabilities.	53%	40%	05%	02%
4] My academic background has equipped me to effectively work with students with behavioral issues.	17%	39%	34%	10%
5] My educational background equips me to effectively educate students with special needs.	12%	29%	43%	16%
6] My school administration provides me with enough in-service training, allowing me to engage with students with disabilities.	44%	35%	18%	03%
7] My academic background has prepared me to properly teach students who have speech impairments.	05%	26%	56%	13%
8] Because of my educational experience, I can teach students who are behind their peers.	22%	18%	53%	07%
9] To appropriately educate students with IEPs for behavioral concerns, I require further training.	37%	18%	42%	03%
10] My academic background has prepared me to successfully teach students who are below grade level.	09%	25%	52%	14%

Discussion

The growing diversity of society and schools demands an emphasis on giving equitable chances to impoverished and vulnerable children. Addressing obstacles and stigmas can lead to increased engagement in disability communities. Positive attitudes and appreciation for variety are essential for recognizing people's heterogeneity. Teachers have an important role in achieving inclusive education. This study aimed to evaluate the attitudes of working teachers toward inclusive education, as prior research indicates that understanding the importance and breadth of inclusive education is crucial for developing favorable attitudes toward the inclusion of students with special educational needs (Ajzen, et al., 2018; Kraska & Boyle, 2014). In general, the study's findings demonstrated that teacher views regarding the inclusion of students with special needs are relatively good; however they may certainly be improved upon. This conclusion is consistent with prior findings (Ewing, et al., 2018; Hettiarachchi & Das, 2014). The study by Gallego-Ortega & Rodríguez-Fuentes (2021) suggests that there is ample room for growth in attitude, requiring improved conduct in various inclusion-related scenarios or events.

The major findings show that teachers support special education for children with Individualized Education Programs, but refuse services for speech and language disorders. Most teachers believe emotionally disturbed children should attend frequent lessons, while they opposed inclusion of physically aggressive children. Majority of the teachers prefer ordinary schools with comprehensive IEPs, and support special education assistance for below-grade students. The investigation of Čagran and Schmidt (2010) validates these conclusions. They discovered that teachers' views toward inclusion are influenced by the types of disabilities that integrated students have. Teachers indicated the most consent for children with physical limitations, whereas children with behavioral and emotional difficulties had the least. Our findings demonstrate that, in addition to the type of disability, teachers' professional experience working with children with special needs is an essential factor in determining the amount of agreement with inclusion. It came out that teachers who had participated in various types of education and training had a more favorable attitude regarding all aspects of influence.

Another finding of this study indicated that teachers thought their colleagues were willing to provide advice on schooling children with special needs; therefore they agreed to seek help from them. However, they questioned regarding that inclusion of children with disabilities into the general classroom would not ensure that all special needs students were accommodated. This underlines the importance of more inclusive and supportive teaching techniques for children with special needs. The surveyed teachers emphasize the necessity of collaboration and negotiating self-organization and work allocations. Teachers believe in its benefits, emphasizing the importance of resources like time and equipment. Jurkowski, et al., (2020) support this, highlighting the need for shared responsibility among administrators, school authorities, and experts in inclusive education.

Further study data showed that the administration requires from their teaching staff to attend conferences and training sessions on educating children with exceptional needs. The participants shared their problems with administrators, and feel supported. Although they have huge workload related to teaching special needs children but have significant time to attend relevant sessions. Responses regarding teacher recognition of administrative support for inclusive education were mixed, with somewhat more respondents indicating that administrators supported inclusive education. According to previous research (Andrews & Lupart, 2000), school administrators play a critical role in creating inclusive schools, but they struggle to improve inclusive education unless clear legislation is in place. Having policies and/or laws that explicitly promotes inclusive education can help encourage it and obtain support from school officials (Kennedy & Fisher, 2001).

Finally, the study found that a high number of teachers believed their training did not adequately qualify them to teach children with cognitive impairments, sign language, Braille, mobility training and daily life skills. As a consequence, they agreed that further training is needed for these learning areas. Only half of the cohort believed they could handle classroom behavioral concerns, but they emphasized on further training in dealing with children who exhibit behavior problems. They blamed the school administration for not providing adequate training opportunities. The study by Kivirand, et al., (2022) validated the analysis and found that a long-term in-service training course for school teams helped plan and implement inclusive education (IE) development initiatives. The focus was on molding school

culture and structural transformation, with a primary emphasis on inclusive education vision and values. The school underwent structural change by reforming policies, renewing student support systems, and supporting teacher professional development. Key factors included clear goals, team commitment, participation, and cooperation. However, staff involvement in development planning was hindered by a lack of time.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study reveals that teachers have modest views on inclusive education, with significant challenges in all five sub-domains including student variables, colleague support, administrative support, cooperation, and training. This was extremely promising for us because most teachers thought that children with special needs could be effectively taught in regular classrooms. The findings reveal opportunities for inclusive changes in our schools, which will necessitate a genuine spirit.

Implications

The study highlights the importance of inclusive education in Pakistan's educational system. It raises awareness among mainstream teachers about potential barriers, provides guidelines for teaching community, administrators, and parents, and opens the door for further research. The research also suggests that teachers who prioritize sustainability for inclusivity are more likely to successfully implement inclusive education. The findings suggest that improving legislation and policies can increase awareness of special needs children's rights, while curriculum professionals and stakeholders should review the national curriculum to incorporate inclusive education practices, requiring revised assessments, and policymakers should evaluate and change test criteria.

Further Research

It is critical to understand administrators' attitudes about inclusive education since they have a significant effect on teachers' thoughts on the subject. It is vital to understand what parents feel about inclusive education since they have a significant effect on their children's educational experiences. More studies examining the relationship between administrative and peer support and teachers' favorable attitudes toward inclusive education may reveal fresh insights.

textbook

Competing Interests

The authors has declared that no competing interests exist.

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