

Role of Inclusive Education in Promoting Equity in Education: Teacher's Perspectives

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Abstract: *Inclusive education is a powerful strategy to promote equity in the education system. This study was conducted to identify and highlight the role*

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of inclusive education to promote equity in education from the perspectives of teachers. The research was quantitative and descriptive. A sample of 143 teachers was taken from public and private special/general education schools using simple random sampling. A validated self-developed questionnaire ($\alpha=0.78$) was employed for data collection. Descriptive statistics suggest that inclusive education promotes equity by providing equal opportunities to learn and succeed for all students regardless of their backgrounds and abilities. It recognizes and value the unique needs and abilities of each student, fostering mutual respect, understanding, and appreciation for different cultures, languages, and abilities. Inferential statistics (t-test & One-way ANOVA) showed no discrepancy in the opinion of respondents at the basis of gender and department. Teacher training programs should be conducted to enhance their knowledge/skills in implementing inclusive education practices.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Equity, Education, Teacher's Perspectives*

Introduction

Ensuring that everyone, no matter their background, gets a fair and equal education is very important nowadays. Inclusive education acknowledges the intrinsic worth and importance of each student and endeavors to establish a conducive atmosphere wherein all learners, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds and abilities, are provided with equitable opportunities to thrive and achieve academic success. Inclusive education imparts great role in fostering equity and celebrating diversity from the perspectives of teachers. By understanding the experiences, challenges, and perceptions of educators, valuable insights can be gained to enhance the implementation of inclusive practices and contribute to more inclusive and equitable educational systems (Ehsan, 2018).

Inclusive education goes beyond just putting students with disabilities into regular classrooms. It's a comprehensive approach that values and respects the unique qualities of every learner, considering things like their race, ethnicity, gender, economic situation, language, and cultural background. Its goal is to foster an inclusive and embracing culture within educational

institutions, where every student experiences a sense of belonging, actively participates in their learning, and has their individual needs and strengths catered to (Francis et al., 2016).

Teachers are crucial in making inclusive education a reality. They are the key agents who facilitate the development of inclusive practices and create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. As such, their perspectives on the challenges, benefits, and strategies related to inclusive education are essential for guiding policy and practice in this area. This study aims to explore how inclusive education affects fairness in educational environments by looking at the experiences and viewpoints of teachers (Finkelstein et al., 2021).

Despite the global recognition of the importance of inclusive education in promoting equity, there is a significant research gap in the context of Pakistan. Limited studies have been conducted specifically focusing on the role of inclusive education within the Pakistani educational system. This research gap calls for empirical investigations to explore the current status of inclusive education, identify barriers to its implementation, and examine the impact on marginalized groups. Furthermore, there is a need for research that delves into teacher perspectives and experiences related to inclusive education, along with an exploration of cultural and societal factors influencing its implementation. Addressing these research gaps will contribute to the advancement of inclusive practices in Pakistan and provide evidence-based recommendations to foster Equity in the educational system.

Research Objectives

Research objectives for the research are listed below;

1. To emphasize how Inclusive Education is important so that society acknowledges the rights of children with special needs.
2. To highlight the role of Inclusive Education in promoting Equity in education.
3. To highlight the difference in opinions of teachers at the basis of their demographics.

Research Questions

Research objectives for the research are listed below;

1. Why is Inclusive Education important for society to acknowledge the rights of children with special needs?
2. What are the teachers' perspectives on role of Inclusive Education in promoting Equity in education?
3. What is the difference in opinions of teachers at the basis of their demographics?

Literature Review

Inclusive education has gained significant attention in the educational landscape as a framework that promotes equity and celebrates diversity. Inclusive education recognizes the value of every learner, aiming to create a setting where all students, regardless of their diverse backgrounds and abilities, have fair opportunities to learn and succeed (Campbell, 2021). In Pakistan, several research studies have looked into the current state of inclusive education. For instance, Akram et al. (2021) examined the adoption of inclusive practices in various schools across the country, revealing differences in implementation levels among schools. Another study by Hafeez (2020) emphasized the importance of policy frameworks and guidelines to support inclusive education in Pakistan, underscoring the need for effective policy implementation at all levels.

Frederickson & Cline (2015) identified various challenges, including lack of awareness among teachers, limited resources, and inadequate professional development opportunities. Similarly, Oliver (2018) emphasized the influence of cultural and societal attitudes towards disability, which can impede the successful implementation of inclusive practices in Pakistan. Research has focused on exploring teacher perspectives on inclusive education in the Pakistani context. A study by Shaukat et al. (2019) investigated the attitudes and beliefs of teachers towards inclusive practices and found that while many teachers recognized the importance of inclusive education, they faced challenges in translating their beliefs into practice due to various

contextual factors. It examined the professional development needs of teachers in relation to inclusive education, emphasizing the importance of targeted training programs to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills.

A study by Rivera & McKeithan (2021) looked into how students with disabilities fare academically and socially in inclusive settings. The results showed positive outcomes, including academic progress and improved social interactions. Additionally, Koller et al. (2018) investigated the experiences of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, emphasizing the positive impact of inclusive practices on their self-esteem and overall well-being. In their book, Foreman & Arthur-Kelly (2017) identified effective inclusive pedagogical approaches and classroom strategies. They stressed the importance of differentiated instruction, teacher collaboration, and personalized support to address the diverse needs of students.

Equity is central to the principles of inclusive education, ensuring that every learner has equal opportunities for success, regardless of their background or characteristics. Equity in inclusive education focuses on eliminating barriers and providing fair and just opportunities for all students to succeed. Researchers emphasize that equity requires addressing systemic inequalities and providing targeted support to marginalized groups, including students from low-income backgrounds, racial and ethnic minorities, and those with disabilities. Inclusive education plays a critical role in promoting equity by creating inclusive environments that prioritize individual needs, foster belonging, and ensure access to quality education for all learners (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015).

Inclusive Education is a best practice in education, recognizing and celebrating the unique characteristics and identities of students. Research by Gay (2018) highlights the importance of embracing diverse perspectives, cultures, languages, and abilities within the educational setting. Inclusive education promotes a sense of belonging and respect for all students, encouraging an inclusive and pluralistic learning environment that values diversity as a strength. Understanding the intersectionality of identities is

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essential in fostering equity within inclusive education. Scholar such as Bešić (2020) and Mitchell (2016) highlight that students possess multiple intersecting identities based on race, gender, socio-economic status, ability, and more. Inclusive education should recognize and address the unique experiences and needs of students who navigate multiple identities, ensuring that their diverse perspectives and realities are valued and incorporated into the educational process.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is a critical component of promoting Equity within inclusive education. Research by Samuels (2018) emphasizes the importance of incorporating students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. Culturally responsive pedagogy recognizes and affirms diverse cultures, values, and ways of knowing, empowering students from various backgrounds and promoting educational equity. Language diversity is another aspect of diversity that requires attention in inclusive education. Researchers like Frederickson & Cline (2015) emphasize the importance of valuing and supporting students' home languages while developing their proficiency in the language of instruction. Inclusive education recognizes language diversity as an asset and ensures that linguistic and cultural backgrounds are acknowledged, respected, and integrated into the educational experience.

Research consistently demonstrates the positive impact of inclusive education on promoting equity. Studies by Srivastava et al., (2015) highlight its potential to mitigate social inequalities and exclusion. Inclusive education aims to create a supportive and inclusive culture within schools, where all students feel a sense of belonging and have their diverse needs and strengths met. Inclusive education goes further than just putting things together; it involves a thorough approach that appreciates and respects the distinct qualities of each learner. This includes factors like their race, ethnicity, gender, economic background, language, and cultural roots. Teachers are essential in making the vision of inclusive education a reality. Research by Haug (2017) explores the challenges, benefits, and strategies related to

inclusive education from the perspectives of teachers. These studies emphasize the importance of teacher training, collaboration among educators, and the need for supportive school leadership in facilitating the implementation of inclusive practices.

Inclusive education brings advantages to students with disabilities, as indicated by Tedla's research (2017). This includes better academic results, more social interactions, improved self-esteem, and increased self-advocacy skills when they are in inclusive settings. Inclusive education offers chances for their overall growth, creates a sense of belonging, and supports their general well-being. Yet, it's important to note that implementing inclusive education comes with its set of challenges. Study by Ahmad (2015) identify various barriers and constraints that hinder its effective implementation. These include inadequate resources and support, lack of teacher preparedness, attitudinal barriers, and systemic factors. Overcoming these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that addresses policy, professional development, and the creation of inclusive school environments.

The cultural and societal context significantly influences the implementation of inclusive education. Study by Hardy & Woodcock (2015) explore the role of cultural beliefs, norms, and values in shaping attitudes towards disability and diversity. Culturally responsive approaches to inclusive education are crucial, as they recognize and respect diverse cultural perspectives while promoting equity.

In the context of Pakistan, there is a need for further research on the role of inclusive education. Limited studies have been conducted specifically focusing on inclusive education within the Pakistani educational system. Research by Sharma et al. (2015) suggests that the implementation of inclusive education practices varies across different regions and schools in Pakistan. Barriers such as inadequate resources, limited teacher training, and cultural attitudes towards disability and diversity persist. Addressing these research gaps will contribute to the advancement of inclusive practices in

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Pakistan and provide evidence-based recommendations to foster Equity in the educational system.

Inclusive education plays a crucial role in promoting equity in education. It provides equal opportunities for all learners, embraces diversity, and creates inclusive and accepting environments within schools. However, challenges related to implementation and cultural factors must be addressed to ensure the successful integration of inclusive education practices. Further research in specific contexts, such as Pakistan, is necessary to inform policy and practice and advance inclusive education initiatives.

Research Methodology

Research Design: The research design employed in this study is quantitative and descriptive.

Research Population: The research population consists of teachers from the Special Education and Education Departments of Punjab, Pakistan.

Research Sample & Sampling Technique: The research sample includes 143 teachers. The sample is selected through a simple random sampling technique.

Research Tool: A self-developed questionnaire is used as the research tool to gather data from the participants. The questionnaire includes both closed-ended questions to capture quantitative information related to inclusive education practices and challenges.

Data Collection: The data collection process is conducted using a Google Form link. The questionnaire is administered electronically to the participants, allowing them to respond to the survey at their convenience. The use of an online platform enables efficient data collection and ensures the confidentiality of participants' responses.

Data Analysis

The gathered information is examined using statistical methods in SPSS, including both descriptive and inferential techniques. Descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentages are employed to summarize and display demographic details and answers to closed-ended questions. For

making comparisons in respondents' opinions, inferential statistics such as t-test and One-way ANOVA are used to assess the mean differences.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1

Analysis at the Basis of Demographics

Sr. No.	Description	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender		
	Male	92	64.3
	Female	51	35.7
2	Department		
	Special Education	74	51.7
	General Education	69	48.3
3	Location		
	Urban	85	59.4
	Rural	58	40.6
4	Age of Respondents		
	21-30 Years	80	55.9
	31-40 Years	51	35.7
	41-50 Years	12	8.4
	Total	143	100

The table provides summarized data on gender, department, location, and age distribution of the respondents. Among the respondents, 64.3% were male and 35.7% were female. In terms of department, 51.7% belonged to the Special Education department, while 48.3% were from the General Education department. Urban respondents accounted for 59.4%, while rural respondents made up 40.6% of the total. The age groups were categorized as follows: 21-30 years (55.9%), 31-40 years (35.7%), and 41-50 years (8.4%). The total number of respondents in the study were 143.

Table 2

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Analysis at the Basis of Importance of Inclusive Education

Sr. No.	Question		SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
1	Inclusive education is crucial for ensuring equal opportunities and rights for children with special needs.	F	60	80	3	0	0	4.3986	.53260
		%	42	55.9	2.1	0	0		
2	Society should actively promote inclusive education to create an inclusive and accepting environment for children with special needs.	F	54	83	4	0	2	4.3077	.66323
		%	37.8	58	2.8	0	1.4		
3	Children with special needs have the right to be educated in the same schools as their peers without disabilities.	F	61	69	6	6	1	4.2797	.79084
		%	42.7	48.3	4.2	4.2	0.7		
4	Inclusive education benefits both children with special needs and their typically developing peers.	F	37	84	14	8	0	4.0490	.76295
		%	25.9	58.7	9.8	5.6	0		
5	Society needs to raise awareness and understanding about the importance of inclusive education for children with special needs.	F	51	72	16	4	0	4.1888	.74068
		%	35.7	50.3	11.2	2.8	0		
6	Inclusive education fosters social integration and empathy among all students.	F	47	80	14	1	1	4.1958	.69463
		%	32.9	55.9	9.8	0.7	0.7		
7	It is the responsibility of educational institutions to provide necessary support and accommodations for children with special needs in mainstream classrooms.	F	49	83	8	2	1	4.2378	.68132
		%	34.3	58	5.6	1.4	0.7		
8	Inclusive education promotes diversity and enhances the overall learning experience for	F	41	91	8	0	3	4.1678	.71193
		%	28.7	63.6	5.6	0	2.1		

	all students.								
9	Society should invest more resources in inclusive education to ensure that children with special needs receive quality education.	F	53	76	8	4	2	4.2168	.78847
		%	37.1	53.1	5.6	2.8	1.4		
10	The successful implementation of inclusive education requires collaboration and training among educators, parents, and the community.	F	43	87	9	1	3	4.1608	.74730
		%	30.1	60.8	6.3	0.7	2.1		

Table 2 presents the analysis of respondents' opinions on the importance of inclusive education, covering various questions and responses measured on a five-point Likert scale. Respondents agreed that Inclusive Education is very important for sustainable society and promote learning among diverse learners.

Table 3

Analysis at the Basis of Inclusive Education Promoting Equity

Sr. No.	Question		SA	A	N	D	SD	M	SD
1	Inclusive education promotes equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their diverse backgrounds and abilities.	F	41	80	17	4	1	4.0909	.75907
		%	28.7	55.9	11.9	2.8	0.7		
2	Inclusive education helps reduce educational inequalities among students.	F	40	84	14	3	2	4.0979	.76282
		%	28	58.7	9.8	2.1	1.4		
3	Inclusive education ensures that all students feel valued and included in the learning environment.	F	45	87	8	3	0	4.2168	.64064
		%	31.5	60.8	5.6	2.1	0		
4	Inclusive education supports the academic and social-emotional development of marginalized students.	F	53	78	10	2	0	4.2727	.65199
		%	37.1	54.5	7	1.4	0		

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5	Inclusive education fosters a sense of belonging and acceptance for all students.	F	35	97	7	4	0	4.1399	.62350
		%	24.5	67.8	4.9	2.8	0		
6	Inclusive education helps break down barriers and prejudices based on gender, race, or disability.	F	44	86	9	4	0	4.1888	.67083
		%	30.8	60.1	6.3	2.8	0		
7	Inclusive education encourages empathy, respect, and understanding among students.	F	53	80	8	2	0	4.2867	.63493
		%	37.1	55.9	5.6	1.4	0		
8	Inclusive education promotes a culture of equality and fairness in the educational system.	F	42	83	12	6	0	4.1259	.73030
		%	29.4	58	8.4	4.2	0		
9	Inclusive education enhances students' self-esteem and confidence in their abilities.	F	46	82	9	5	1	4.1678	.75046
		%	32.2	57.3	6.3	3.5	0.7		
10	Inclusive education contributes to creating a more equitable society beyond the classroom.	F	44	84	12	3	0	4.1818	.66752
		%	30.8	58.7	8.4	2.1	0		

Table 3 presents the analysis of respondents' opinions on the inclusive education promoting equity, covering various questions and responses measured on a five-point Likert scale. Overall response of the respondents was that Inclusive Education promotes equity and fairness in educational setting which encourages empathy, respect and understandings among learners.

Inferential Analysis

Table 4

Independence Sample T-Test at the Basis of Gender of Respondents

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Male	92	83.8152	7.23078	141	-.379	.705
Female	51	84.2549	5.41791			

*P > .05 Level of Significance

Table 4 displays the outcomes of an independent sample t-test based on the gender of the respondents. Among the male participants (92 individuals), the average score was 83.8152, with a standard deviation of 7.23078. For female respondents (51 individuals), the mean score was 84.2549, with a standard deviation of 5.41791. The p-

value, representing the level of significance, was found to be greater than 0.05. The computed t-value was $-.379$, and the p-value was $.705$, indicating that there wasn't a statistically significant difference in the responses between males and females.

Table 5

Independence Sample T-Test at the Basis of Department of Respondents

Department	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Special Education	74	84.8919	6.72058	141	1.732	.086
General Education	69	82.9855	6.42260			

*P > .05 Level of Significance

Table 5 reveals the outcomes of an independent sample t-test based on the department of the respondents. In the Special Education department (74 participants), the average score was 84.8919, with a standard deviation of 6.72058. In contrast, for the General Education department (69 respondents), the mean score was 82.9855, with a standard deviation of 6.42260. The p-value, representing the level of significance, was observed to be greater than 0.05. The computed t-value was 1.732, and the p-value was .086, indicating that there wasn't a statistically significant difference in the responses between the Special Education and General Education departments.

Table 6

Independence Sample T-Test at the Basis of Location of Respondents

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig.
Urban	85	83.2824	6.08592	141	-1.514	.132
Rural	58	84.9828	7.28009			

*P > .05 Level of Significance

Table 6 displays the outcomes of an independent sample t-test based on the location of the respondents. Among those from urban areas (85 participants), the average score was 83.2824, with a standard deviation of 6.08592. For respondents from rural areas (58 participants), the mean score was 84.9828, with a standard deviation of 7.28009. The p-value, indicating the level of significance, was found to be greater than 0.05. The computed t-value was -1.514 , and the p-value was $.132$, suggesting that there wasn't a statistically significant difference in the responses between respondents from urban and rural areas.

Table 7

One way ANOVA at the Basis of Age of Respondents

Age	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
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Between Groups	79.291	2	39.646	.902	.408
Within Groups	6152.597	140	43.947		
Total	6231.888	142			

Table 7 illustrates the outcomes of a one-way ANOVA used to examine how age influences the responses of the participants. The sum of squares between groups was 79.291, with 2 degrees of freedom, resulting in a mean square of 39.646. The calculated F-value was .902, and the p-value (significance level) was .408, indicating that there wasn't a statistically significant difference in the responses based on age groups. The sum of squares within groups was 6152.597, with 140 degrees of freedom and a mean square of 43.947. The total sum of squares was 6231.888 with 142 degrees of freedom.

Findings

The study involved 143 respondents, with 64.3% males and 35.7% females. Among them, 51.7% belonged to the Special Education department, while 48.3% were from the General Education department. Urban respondents accounted for 59.4%, and rural respondents made up 40.6% of the total. The majority of respondents fell within the 21-30 years age group (55.9%). The respondents expressed positive views on the importance of inclusive education, highlighting its role in ensuring equal opportunities, fostering social integration, and enhancing the learning experience for all students. The analysis of gender, department, location, and age found no statistically significant differences in the responses, suggesting a general consensus among the participants regarding the significance of inclusive education in promoting equity and creating an inclusive educational environment.

Discussion

Regarding the importance of inclusive education, the analysis of respondents' opinions revealed a strong harmony among participants. The majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with statements emphasizing the crucial role of inclusive education in ensuring equal opportunities and rights for children with special needs. Paseka & Schwab (2020) admired in their studies that inclusive schooling ensures equal education opportunities for all students. The participants also recognized the

responsibility of society, educational institutions, and the community in actively promoting inclusive education to create an inclusive and accepting environment for all students.

The study highlighted the positive impact of inclusive education on various aspects of students' development and the educational system as a whole. Respondents acknowledged that inclusive education promotes social integration, empathy, diversity, and overall learning experiences for all students. Robo (2014) found that emphasizes that social inclusion, specifically through vocational education, is crucial for achieving sustainable development in Albanian society. They also recognized its potential to reduce educational inequalities, break down barriers and prejudices, foster a sense of belonging, and enhance the self-esteem and confidence of marginalized students. These findings align with the existing literature on the benefits of inclusive education and emphasize its potential to create a more equitable society beyond the classroom.

The results of this research article underscore how crucial inclusive education is for promoting fairness and establishing a learning environment that includes all students. The study adds to what we already know by offering perspectives and demographic information about professionals engaged in inclusive education. These findings can guide the development of educational policies, practices, and interventions that support inclusive education and guarantee equal opportunities for every student. Future research should work on overcoming the limitations of this study, explore additional factors influencing attitudes towards inclusive education, and evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive education programs in various contexts.

Conclusions

In summary, most participants in the study acknowledged the importance of inclusive education in providing equal opportunities and rights for children with special needs. They recognized its role in fostering social integration and improving the overall learning experience for all students. The

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research highlights the crucial need for active promotion of inclusive education by both society and educational institutions to establish an inclusive and accepting environment. The analysis did not find significant differences in perspectives based on gender, department, or location. However, it's essential to consider study limitations, such as sample size and generalizability. This research adds to the existing literature on inclusive education, emphasizing its potential to promote equity and create a more inclusive society. The insights gained can guide the development of educational policies and practices that support inclusive education and ensure equal opportunities for all students.

Recommendation

Keeping the conclusion in mind the recommendations of the research are given below;

1. As inclusive education is powerful tool for promoting equity in educational setting, So Government should take serious action for implementing inclusive education as the special education institutions are not enough to cover the huge population of disabilities regarding provision of education.
2. Future research should address the study's limitations, explore other influencing factors, and assess the effectiveness of inclusive education programs in diverse contexts.
3. Teacher training programs should be conducted to enhance their knowledge/skills in implementing inclusive education practices.

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