

Inclusive Education in Pakistan: Practices and Challenges

Nadia Nazir* and Asma Nazir**

Abstract

Inclusive education is designed to provide equitable access to quality education for children with disabilities in mainstream schools. While it is acknowledged as a policy priority in Pakistan, its implementation has shown variability across different districts. This qualitative study explores the perspectives of teachers regarding the practices and challenges of inclusive education in primary schools in Pakistan. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with eight purposively selected teachers from four government primary schools across four districts. Thematic analysis revealed persistent challenges, including a lack of teaching resources, inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of trained staff, and weak institutional support. Although teachers displayed positive attitudes toward inclusive education, systemic and administrative barriers hindered its effective implementation. The study calls for context-specific teacher training, better infrastructure, and stronger policy implementation to support inclusive education in Pakistan.

Keywords: Inclusive education, teacher perspectives, implementation challenges, infrastructure, primary schools

* Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam Higher Secondary School, Lahore. Email: nadianazir.khan@yahoo.com

**Head Mistress, School Education Department, Govt of the Punjab. Email: asma.nazir98@yahoo.com

Cite this article:

Nazir, N., & Nazir, A. (2025). Inclusive education in Pakistan: Practices and challenges. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 37(2), 41-48.



Introduction

Inclusive education refers to educational systems that aim to include all students, including those with disabilities, in mainstream schools. It involves adapting school environments, curricula, and teaching strategies to meet diverse learning needs, rather than segregating students based on their abilities (UNESCO, 2001). Research has shown that exclusion from education hampers the social, emotional, and academic development of children with disabilities (Hart et al., 2004).

Internationally, inclusive education gained traction through frameworks like Education for All (EFA) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which regard education as a fundamental right (UNCRC, 1989; UNESCO, 2001). However, despite these global commitments, children with disabilities remain marginalized, especially in developing countries (Iqbal et al., 2016).

In Pakistan, inclusive education has emerged as a policy priority over time. The Ministry of Special Education, established in 1985, was a response to the educational needs of children with disabilities. The National Education Policy (2009) further emphasized the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education. Despite these policies, the implementation of inclusive education has been inconsistent, particularly in public primary schools, due to inadequate resources, poor infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and weak administrative support (Farooq, 2012; Pasha, 2012; Iqbal et al., 2016).

While studies in Pakistan have explored inclusive education from policy and systemic perspectives, there is limited qualitative research examining teachers' experiences of implementing inclusive practices in mainstream schools. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring primary school teachers' perspectives on inclusive education in selected districts.

Statement of the Problem

Despite national and international commitments to inclusive education, many children with disabilities in Pakistan continue to face barriers to meaningful participation in mainstream education. While policies advocate for equal educational opportunities, implementation remains uneven at the school level. Teachers, as central figures in the implementation process, often work in environments with limited resources, insufficient training, and inadequate institutional support. This study aims to explore teachers' perspectives on the practices and challenges of implementing inclusive education in Pakistan.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine teachers' perceptions of inclusive education practices in primary schools.
2. To identify the challenges teachers face in implementing inclusive education.
3. To explore the institutional and administrative support available to teachers for inclusive education.

Research Questions

1. How do primary school teachers describe inclusive education practices in their schools?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing inclusive education in Pakistan?
3. What forms of institutional and administrative support are available to teachers for implementing inclusive education?

Research Significance

This study offers qualitative insights into the implementation of inclusive education from the perspective of primary school teachers. By identifying key challenges related to training, curriculum adaptation, infrastructure, and institutional support, the study may inform policymakers, administrators, and teacher educators in developing targeted professional development programs and strengthening the implementation of inclusive education policies. Furthermore, the findings contribute to the limited empirical literature on inclusive education in Pakistan and provide context-specific evidence for future reforms in primary schools.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' views on inclusive education. The sample included eight teachers selected from four primary schools across four districts (Lahore, Bahawalpur, Muzaffargarh, and one additional district). Purposive sampling was employed to ensure participants had relevant experience in inclusive education.

Purposive Sampling Criteria

1. Teachers with at least 3 years of experience working with children with special needs.

2. Teachers who have participated in training programs related to inclusive education or special needs education.
3. Teachers from schools that provide some form of support for special needs students (even if not fully inclusive).
4. Teachers from diverse geographic regions within Pakistan.

The sample size of eight was chosen to achieve thematic saturation, where additional participants would no longer provide significantly new insights.

Interview Protocol

The semi-structured interviews included both narrative and exploratory questions designed to capture personal experiences and specific issues related to inclusive education practices and challenges. The interview protocol was piloted with a small group of teachers to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions. Feedback from the pilot interviews was used to refine and finalize the protocol for the main study.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with teachers. Each interview was scheduled individually according to the participant's availability. The researcher greeted each participant, explained the study's purpose, and informed them that their responses would be recorded and transcribed for research purposes only. Interviews took place over a span of three weeks.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of patterns or themes in the qualitative responses. Thematic analysis allows for the identification of patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The emerging themes were grouped into categories and linked to the study's research objectives and questions.

1. The main themes that emerged from the data were:
2. Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education Practices
3. Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education
4. Institutional and Administrative Support
5. Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education
6. Barriers to Inclusive Education (Social, Academic, Environmental, and Administrative)

The data analysis process was iterative, involving the constant comparison of new data with previously collected data to ensure that the findings were comprehensive and robust.

Findings

Objective 1: To examine teachers' perceptions of inclusive education practices in primary schools.

Research Question 1: How do primary school teachers describe inclusive education practices in their schools?

Need for Inclusive Education: The overwhelming majority (90%) of teachers emphasized the necessity of inclusive education. Teachers noted that inclusive education is a fundamental right for students with disabilities, and many expressed a strong desire for more professional development to improve inclusive teaching practices. One teacher explained, "Inclusive education is essential for every child's development. We need workshops to learn how to support students with disabilities better."

Objective 2: To identify the challenges teachers face in implementing inclusive education.

Research Question 2: What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing inclusive education in Pakistan?

Inadequate Infrastructure: 80% of teachers identified the lack of accessible infrastructure as a major barrier to inclusive education. Teachers highlighted that schools often lacked basic accessibility features, such as ramps or accessible toilets, which prevented students with physical disabilities from fully participating. One teacher mentioned, "Without accessible entrances or ramps, students with mobility issues cannot attend school regularly."

Lack of Teacher Training: Over 70% of teachers reported feeling inadequately trained to implement inclusive education effectively. There was a strong call for more hands-on training, with teachers expressing the need for guidance on managing classrooms with diverse needs. One teacher stated, "We need more practical training on how to handle students with different disabilities."

Negative Attitudes Toward Inclusion: 65% of teachers, along with some community members, expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of inclusive education. Many teachers shared concerns that some parents and staff members did not believe

students with disabilities could succeed in a mainstream classroom. A teacher commented, “Many parents don’t believe that students with disabilities can thrive in regular classrooms.

Challenges in Supporting Students with Disabilities: Teachers reported that managing large classrooms with both general and special needs students was a significant challenge. With a large student-to-teacher ratio, teachers found it difficult to provide individualized support to students with disabilities. One teacher shared, “It’s hard to provide the support each student needs when the class size is so large.

Objective 3: To explore the institutional and administrative support available to teachers for inclusive education.

Research Question 3: What forms of institutional and administrative support are available to teachers for implementing inclusive education?

Lack of Institutional Support: While many teachers acknowledged the importance of inclusive education, they reported a lack of sufficient institutional and administrative support. There were few resources available, and teachers often had to rely on their own efforts to implement inclusive practices. Many teachers mentioned that school leadership did not provide enough direction or resources to support inclusive teaching. One teacher noted, “We don’t have the resources we need, and school leaders don’t provide us with enough guidance on how to make our classrooms more inclusive.

Roles of School Heads: Although some teachers recognized the importance of school leadership in promoting inclusion, there was a general feeling that school heads were not doing enough to push inclusive education forward. Some teachers believed that school heads were not fully aware of the challenges faced by teachers in implementing inclusion. One teacher said, “School heads need to take more initiative in supporting inclusive education; they should be more involved in professional development for teachers.

Discussion

This study highlights the ongoing challenges and the practices employed by teachers in inclusive classrooms. While inclusive education has significant benefits, such as promoting equality and participation (Ingstad, 2001), the findings underscore that effective teaching in inclusive settings requires tailored instructional methods (Seda & Walton, 2025) and adequate resources (Nind, 2016). The research also emphasizes the role of policy in supporting inclusive education

(Koretz & Hamilton, 2000). However, the lack of infrastructure, teacher training, and negative attitudes towards inclusion remain significant obstacles in Pakistan.

Conclusion

This study illustrates the complex realities of implementing inclusive education in Pakistan. While there is a strong belief in the importance of inclusive education, barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and negative attitudes hinder its full realization. Context-specific reforms are needed to improve training, resources, and infrastructure for inclusive education.

Recommendations

1. To improve the implementation of inclusive education in Pakistan, the study recommends:
2. Continuous In-Service Teacher Training: Providing regular professional development for teachers to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge.
3. Upgrading School Infrastructure: Ensuring all schools are accessible, with ramps and facilities for students with disabilities.
4. Increased Funding for Inclusive Education Programs: Allocating more resources to support inclusive practices, including teaching materials and classroom assistants.
5. Changing Negative Attitudes: Running awareness campaigns to change public perceptions and demonstrate the benefits of inclusive education.

References

- Farooq, M. S. (2012). Problems faced by students with special needs in ordinary Pakistani schools. *Journal of Quality and Technology Management*, 8(1), 13-27.
- Hart, S., Drummond, M., & McIntyre, D. (2007). Learning without limits: constructing a pedagogy free from determinist beliefs about ability. In L. Florian (Ed.) *Learning without limits: Constructing a pedagogy free from determinist beliefs about ability* (pp. 500-515). SAGE Publications Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607989.n39>
- Ingstad, B. (2001). Disability in the developing world. In G. L. Albrecht, K. D. Seelman, & M. Bury (Eds.), *Handbook of disability studies* (pp. 772–792). Sage Publications.
- Iqbal, M. Z., Khan, S., & Zia Ullah, M. (2016). Gaps and hindrances in launching inclusive education in Pakistan. *Educational Research International*, 5(1), 20–28.
- Koretz, D., & Hamilton, L. (2000). Assessment of students with disabilities in Kentucky: Inclusion, student performance, and validity. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 22(3), 255–272. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737022003255>
- Nind, M. (2016). Inclusive research as a site for lifelong learning: Participation in learning communities. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 48(1), 23-37.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2016.1155847>
- Pasha, S. (2012). Readiness of urban primary schools for inclusive education in Pakistan. *Journal of Research and Reflections in Education*, 6(2), 113-128.
- Seda, C. H., & Walton, E. (2025). Teacher education for inclusive education: A scoping review of Global South scholarship. *Journal of Education for Teaching*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2025.2520792>
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2001). *Pathfinders: Towards full participation and equality of persons with disabilities in the ESCAP region*. United Nations.
- UNESCO. (2001). *Inclusive schools and community support programmes: Report 1998*.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000117625>