

THE ROLE OF TEACHER TRAINING IN PROMOTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES IN PAKISTANI SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

With regard to this background, the present paper aims to explore the factors that hinder the implementation of the included education emphasis, specifically, the importance of teacher training in the improvement of teaching practices in Pakistani schools. However, the following hurdles have remained prevalent in regard to the promotion of inclusion of special education needs: Teachers are not well equipped, there are few resources to meet the needs of these children, and society does not embrace disability. This paper looks at how teacher training programs can overcome these challenges and prepare teachers for teaching diversity differences. The paper reviews today's teacher training schemes in Pakistan and assesses their strengths, weaknesses, and prospects for development. It states that while developing the training of teachers, it is critical to consider not only the knowledge of the principles and organization of inclusive education approaches but also knowledge of how to deliver special sensitivity to the inclusiveness of learners along with strategies for instructing students with disabilities in the context of students, classrooms, and families of origin and support professionals. In addition, the paper recommends that teacher training faculties should include cultural competence and raise awareness of disability discrimination in society. It is, therefore, concluded that given schools in Pakistan invest in targeted training of their teachers, a progressive shift to pedagogy accommodative of the disabled is realistically possible, providing equal chances to every child at schools.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, teacher training, Pakistan, special needs, educational equity, professional development, classroom differentiation

INTRODUCTION

Learning for all children, regardless of the physical, intellectual, social, or emotional conditions, has become one of the required tenets at the center of contemporary educational paradigms. Inclusive education is an approach that entails having all children in mainstream education regardless of their disability (UNESCO, 2020). This approach seeks to develop centers of learning that are understood and equipped with the necessary facilities to enhance learning among the diverse learner

population. Inclusive education is a well-established idea globally, and countries realize that it is crucial to address issues of social injustices and human rights efficiently (Muhammad et al., 2024a, 2024b; Pirzada et al., 2024).

Education is a burning issue in Pakistan, and it has numerous problems (Muhammad, 2015). However, the issue of inclusive education plays a vital role in the country, including the fact that with the majority of children with disabilities

being out of school and socially excluded, there is a need for more inclusive practices for national and social development (Slee, 2018). Inclusive education—being an education system—instructs not only the disabled groups and individuals but also helps to overcome these prejudices in society and to build fair conditions for all people.

Thus, teachers are the central focus when it comes to ensuring that students with disabilities are integrated into regular classrooms. They are majorly tasked with designing classroom atmospheres and learning activities that will address the needs of learners with disabilities, modify learning content and products, and promote disability-sensitive cultures among the learners (Sharma et al., 2019). However, teachers and educationists in Pakistan have expressed that they lack the ability and know-how with reference to teach learners with disabilities in an inclusive setup, which requires urgent attention to professional development.

Thus, the thesis of this present paper is that teacher training plays a significant role in making Pakistani schools more inclusive. Having provided the teachers with the right training knowledge, skills, and attitudes, teacher training is capable of transforming the classroom into an effective teaching-learning environment for all learners with or without disabilities.

Current State of Inclusive Education in Pakistan

Education has seen movement in recent years, and Pakistan has also started focusing on the policy that enhances education inclusion. The National Education Policy 2009 was particularly aimed at guaranteeing the principle of inclusive education, and it stated that no child should be excluded from having an education based on the social, economic, and physical status of the child (Ministry of Education, 2009). This commitment was carried to the next level by the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, which provided the strategies that could be used for the education of children with special needs in mainstream schools (Government of Pakistan, 2002).

However, the practical situation remains rather different, and it is to this picture that the next section of the work will be devoted. As per the

recent estimation available, it is revealed that only four percent of children with disabilities in Pakistan attend school, and the maximum number of children with disabilities are out of school (UNICEF, 2023). Actually, the number of self-identified students with disabilities enrollment is very low, but, disappointingly, approximately more than half of them never return to classrooms by dropping out before the completion of primary school.

This paper explores some of the issues that hinder the process of inclusive education in Pakistan. Lack of capital and insufficient facilities maintain the hurdle. In many schools, basic infrastructure for students with disabilities includes ramps, accessible toilets, or aids such as computers and software. This physical inaccessibility leads to spiriting off of students with mobility impairment in terms of enrollment and attendance (Pasha, 2012).

Disability continues to be misunderstood and dreaded in Pakistan, which influences the kind of reception disabled children get in. Preconceived beliefs about disability, asserting that people with disabilities are a menace to society, and receiving unfair treatment from peers and certain teachers generate a hostile climate, which slows down the implementation of IEP (Fazal, 2012). These societal barriers keep disabled students out of practice and socially marginalized with complete disregard for the concept of inclusive education (Iqbal & Muhammad, 2020; Muhammad et al., 2024a; Pirzada et al., 2024).

Undoubtedly, the availability and accessibility of trained human resources are among the major problems of the inclusive education in Pakistan (Hameed & Manzoor, 2016a, 2019b, 2019a). Based on the research, most of the teachers who teach in regular schools lack adequate knowledge and expertise in the fields of special education or inclusion. Hassan et al. (2010) aims to develop an understanding of the needs of teachers working in ordinary schools regarding inclusive classes in Pakistan. The study shows that while most of the teachers are quite ready to embrace inclusive education with requisite preparation and facilities, they have some concerns and are not sure to what extent their teaching will meet goals for everyone. In this regard they get to realize some of the difficulties that could hinder them, for instance the school system (Hassan et al.,

2010). Such lack of preparation is detrimental not only to the quality of education that is offered to learners with learning difficulties but also to all students since it alters the social organization of the classroom.

Another factor that contributes to the issue is the scarcity of special education teachers and auxiliary staff. Generally, schools are under-resourced to offer specialized service delivery, such as employing speech therapists, occupational therapists, or counselors to support numerous students with multiple needs. The absence of specializations in those areas means that only a limited number of weak students can receive the necessary interventions and the help they need for learning and development.

Solving these challenges is possible only through the following general intervention strategies where teacher training is a priority. A well-facilitated need for enhancing the understanding of inclusive education among educators to acquire all the relevant sets of skills and attitudes necessary for delivering quality education to all children regardless of the child's disability and disadvantaged background in Pakistan can go a long way toward making the dream of education for all a reality in the country.

Teacher Training in Pakistan: An Overview

Many changes have been proposed and implemented over the years in teacher education programs in Pakistan, mainly concentrating on the quality of teaching and the global accreditation of these programs (Khizar et al., 2019; Shaukat & Chowdhury, 2020). Teachers are expected to perform at the National Professional Standards for Teachers that were issued in 2009; these laid stress on such aspects as subject content, teaching approaches, and teachers' ongoing learning and development (Ministry of Education, 2009). The degree of teacher education in Pakistan is currently being delivered through universities, colleges of education, and teacher training institutions.

The main pre-service teacher education programs are the Bachelor's Degree in Education (B. Ed.), Associate Degree in Education (ADE), and the recently popular four-year B.ED. (Hons) Elementary program. Their purpose is to equip future teachers with an understanding of educational theories, their own subject

curriculum, and adequate teaching experience (Halai & Durrani, 2018). Still, the integration and implementation of Special Education, as well as inclusive practices in these existing curricula, are still a work in progress across the institutions.

Although some progressive teacher education programs have realized that they should include modules on inclusive education, these are frequently not well developed. Some of the reasons of the special educators' professional readiness consist in the absence of pre-service and in-service preparation courses concerning the inclusive education, one course on the inclusive education, and the limited number of exposures concerning the practical or the field practice on the inclusive education (Batool et al., 2023). This has left many graduating teachers in very volatile positions to adequately address the needs of students in the inclusive teaching-learning environment.

The current teacher training approaches in Pakistan have the following problems regarding preparing educators for inclusion. First, the material seems to be issued in **Word**, and then the actual implementation is barely looked into; a major drawback that has brought about criticism is that many plans are intensive in course theory and less on skill implementation (Batool et al., 2023; Hameed & Manzoor, 2016b; Shaukat & Chowdhury, 2020). This results in teachers' inadequate preparation and lack of practical experience in the ability to develop and put into practice plenty of inclusive structures in the classroom.

Second, the content related to inclusive education, if any, is presented as a complementary subject that is introduced and taught like a topical or **differential** subject across the curriculum. This approach does not enhance the development of the concept of inclusion as a core component of Education. Moreover, many teacher educators have little knowledge about the inclusive practices they are expected to teach in their classes: such topics remain on the surface of the learning process (Sharma et al., 2019; Shaukat & Chowdhury, 2020).

Finally, there is a lack of sustained in-service training programs designed with respect to inclusive education for in-service teachers. Sometimes, there are short-term workshops or training sessions provided for teachers, but they

are not as effective as they seem because they do not provide enough details, and even in cases where they provide follow-up sessions, it is quite challenging for the teachers to conform, and implement those practices in their classroom as it is needed.

Understanding the above-mentioned shortcomings of the approaches towards trainers' preparation is, therefore, obligatory to accomplish the objectives of inclusion in Pakistani schools. What is more, a significant change in the current programs aimed at the preparation of teachers and their continual professional development is needed in order for them to meet the necessary requirements and foster equality in class.

The Importance of Teacher Training for Inclusive Education

The acquisition of competencies, as well as the skills needed for the formation of inclusive classrooms, relies heavily on proper teacher training. This entails a scope of different skills, knowledge, and attitudes that teachers have to characteristically partake in in order to accomplish the goal of addressing all the needs of the students. Training should give more attention to the capacities of the teachers to recognize different learning needs, evaluate them, alter the curriculum and instructional techniques, and also foster a learning environment for all learners (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; DeMonte, 2013; McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008). Thus, by strengthening these competencies, teachers are prepared to better cater to students' differences, make appropriate instructional adaptations, and ensure that disabled students have equal opportunity to learn as well as their non-disabled counterparts.

Another challenge that hinders the implementation of inclusive education is the presence of stereotype perceptions among the teachers. These may be due to ignorance, as a result of avoiding the unknown or socialization. These attitudinal barriers call for proper training of teachers who undergo a process of updating their information concerning students with disabilities, eliminating prejudice and aggressive or negative attitudes, and embracing the value of diversity (Sharma et al., 2019). Training programs that expose teachers to the need to

embrace individuals with disabilities and engage with them will assist in altering the teachers' perceptions to be more categorical about the inclusion of students with disability and the value of their academic ability.

In diverse classrooms, behavior management poses some of the greatest issues that teachers are bound to face (McGuire et al., 2024). Teachers have to understand their different roles in catering to students' learning requirements, replacing behavior problems, and providing a highly effective learning environment. Such teacher training enables the educators to have ways of preventing and responding to child behavioral problems, uses of positive behavioral interventions, and ways of handling conflicts. These skills are all crucial in order to provide an environment that enables children with learning disabilities to learn together with the rest of the class (Arifin et al., 2024).

As with most concepts in the process of learning, implementation of inclusive education entails teamwork involving class teachers, special education teachers, teaching assistants, and school leaders. It may be necessary for teacher training to focus on collaboration and give recommendations on how collaboration should be achieved (Nasir & Latif, 2024). This comprises teaching, interaction with other professionals, and engagement in a team of senders and/or recipients. Thus, professional training of teachers makes it possible to use collective efforts and knowledge in assisting students with special requirements or learning difficulties.

Key Components of Effective Teacher Training for Inclusion

In the case of inclusive education, the knowledge of the theory will ensure that the teachers comprehensively understand why the practices are being adopted and how the practices should be put into practice. Training programs should include such components as the social model of disability, UDL, equity, and access in education (Ainscow & Messiou, 2018). Such knowledge helps teachers raise awareness and appreciate the value of the concept of inclusion in the formation of a humane society.

Inclusive education encompasses the process of modifying teaching approaches to suit the needs of the learners, especially the disabled. Some of

the specifics that effective training programs should offer to teachers encompass a variety of competencies in terms of how to modify the content, process, and product aspects of the learning-teaching process. These are strategies for altering curriculum, grouping and organization, and means of representation and expression for academic content (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). Such strategies should be practiced and demonstrated several times to make sure that the teacher is capable of implementing differentiation in instructional practices.

Special education for persons with learning disability involves giving them Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) that help them to be facilitated. The teacher's training should include information on how to create, operate with, and evaluate IEPs. This involves possessing knowledge of the legal and ethical factors concerning IEPs, working alongside parents and other professionals on its formulation, and putting into practice the goals and objectives laid down by the IEPs (Lambrecht et al., 2022; Timothy & Agbenyega, 2022). It has been noted that teachers have to be more proficient when it comes to using IEPs, especially in their practice, and therefore, it is recommended that some schemes be developed for practical exercises when it comes to the creation of such documents.

Students with disabilities can benefit from assistive technology and adaptive resources, which considerably improve their learning experiences (Edyburn, 2000; Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022; Lee & Templeton, 2008). Teacher training programs should familiarize teachers with a variety of augmentative and assistive technologies, beginning with low-end implements to existing high-tech facilities. This entails knowledge of identifying students' technology requirements, integrating, and evaluating the uses of technology in learning. Teachers may not be comfortable educating their students with disabilities on their own due to the lack of experience they may have in working with students with such disabilities; therefore, exposure to different assistive technologies would build the teachers' confidence in instructing their students.

The management of students' behavior in inclusive classrooms is very significantly complicated since students in these classrooms

exhibit various behaviors. Teacher-training courses must ensure the understanding of positive behavior support and teach how to apply it, preventing crises and using necessary measures only as a last resort. These are methods used in fostering a conducive learning environment as well as methods used to help students learn appropriate social skills and methods used in managing individual student's behaviors (Sailor et al., 2021). Case studies and or role-playing should also prove useful in the development of these sorts of skills.

Thus, comprehension of the concepts of teachers, families, and support professionals is imperative for the improvement of inclusive education. Another aspect that should be stressed during the teacher training is how those collaborations should be done effectively and how they establish an effective synergism. This includes conducting successful parent-teacher meetings, engaging families in decisions regarding the child's education, and cooperating with various specialists, such as speech or occupational therapists (Turnbull et al., 2019). Perhaps the use of simulation-based learning together with actual teaching practicum assignments can assist teachers in cultivating the aforementioned interpersonal skills.

Successful Models of Inclusive Education Teacher Training

Learning from the global best practices acknowledged in the delivery of inclusive education teacher training offers a valuable understanding that can help introduce improvements in the Pakistani context. It is, therefore, noteworthy that globally, current practices in teacher education and training advocate for broad, sustained, and culturally relevant preparations.

There is a well-known model of preparing teachers in Finland that is recognized as one of the best and most inclusive. In Finnish teacher training, the principles of inclusion are included as threads throughout teacher training as a specialty, not as a specific subject. Thus, it guarantees that all teachers, including those specializing in particular fields, are ready to work within an inclusive environment (Saloviita, 2020). The Finnish model also pays for a lot of practical experience, where student teachers

spend many hours in schools, where observing and, therefore, practicing activities that are inclusive of children with disabilities are supervised by experienced teachers (Tirri & Laine, 2017).

Canada has also not been left behind in the provision of inclusion in education, which has gained popularity and is known as the New Brunswick model (Hornby & Kauffman, 2024; Horne-Shuttleworth et al., 2024; Sider et al., 2024). In their teacher training approach, they first provide a sound and extensive philosophical model of inclusion and then provide good practical difficulties of teaching, which includes understanding the former and different kinds of instruction for later. Another major component is a focus on collaborative practice and the ability to perform as colleagues in team teaching and with other personnel (Mendoza & Heymann, 2024).

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan program laid a cascaded model of training at the national level, with master trainers who trained state-level trainers who, in turn, trained the local teachers. Such an approach facilitated the dissemination of the principles and practice of IEP to even the distant parts of the country (Singal et al., 2014).

Besides, in the United Kingdom, the Manchester Metropolitan University has developed an exemplary MA in Inclusive Education, which is properly grounded in theory and is supported by practice. These are teaching for inclusion, organizational leadership in inclusion, and research on inclusion. One is the focus on teachers carrying out their action research within their own classrooms and the resultant reflective practice adopted in teaching.

It is possible to highlight several lessons for Pakistan based on the discussed examples of other countries. First of all, the development of inclusive education principles as a core component of teachers' courses, not as an extra one, is the main strategy to foster the work on inclusive education concepts. Second, an aspect that cannot be overemphasized is the significance of skills and experience in the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal classrooms. Third, promoting collaboration skills and getting teachers ready to work together with other teachers in teaching is also important for the implementation of inclusion.

Some of these lessons that can be learned from the international case studies are relevant for Pakistan as well. First, the implementation of inclusive education in the framework of training curricula, instead of its components as supplements is vital for the formation of the overall idea of inclusive education. Second, it is necessary to stress the relevance of the practicum that involves working in collaborative settings. Third, to organize effective inclusion a development of collaboration skills and teachers' preparation for team teaching is crucial.

When applying these lessons in Pakistan, then it would be necessary to adopt the models to the Pakistani condition. For example, the cascade model that was employed in India may help communicate with the teachers in far-flung part of Pakistan. The philosophical approaches, which are stressed in the Canadian model, could be useful to solve the problem of attitudinal barriers existing in Pakistani context. Hailing UK model, action research could be adopted by training Pakistani teachers in the use of action research in order to encourage a culture of continuous self-improvement among the teaching fraternity..

Challenges in Implementing Comprehensive Teacher Training

However, several issues severely compromised the enactment of extensive teacher training in inclusive schooling in Pakistan.

Limited funds play a major role in limiting one's ability to create and implement quality teacher training programs. The scenario, particularly in the education sector of Pakistan, is that most of the time, there is a scarcity of funds, and minimal funds are available for the professional development of teachers. The training is both wide-ranging and entails significant costs in terms of money to be spent, bearing in mind that some of them entail technologies and others complex practical workouts (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018).

Another major factor that hinders improvement is resistance to change for the teaching institutions. Pakistani schools and many institutes that produce teachers often stuck to conventional approaches to teaching and may not welcome change. This can be due to ignorance of what it means to teach for diversity, workload issues, or

even issues to do with standards (Sharma et al., 2019).

This issue of a shortage of qualified teacher educators in this area is a very serious challenge. This in itself may mean that many teacher trainers in the country were not trained properly in the first place on how to integrate the disabled into the classroom, thus creating a cycle of inefficiency. This shortage of expertise restricts the amount and type of training that can be given to pre-service as well as in-service teachers.

In-service training is another major challenge due to the lack of time and the little preparedness and funding available to support in-service training. Teaching professionals in Pakistan are overburdened in terms of work assignments and rarely spare time for professional development. Depending on the type of school, institutions may be inclined to let go of their teachers for a long time, and there could be insufficient means to offer substitutes to teachers who are attending training. This can lead to a reduction of training approaches to quick one-off sessions that do not have enough time for adequate implementation of inclusion strategies (Singh et al., 2021).

To address each of these challenges, it is essential to allocate more funding to education departments/ministries to raise public awareness regarding the needs, benefits, and opportunities of children's integration and inclusion, to develop and implement capacity development programs aiming at supporting teacher educators; and to design more varied and consistent professional development models for educators.

Recommendations for Improving Teacher Training in Pakistan

The following recommendations for teacher training would be relevant to enhancing the quality of inclusive education in Pakistan, considering the identified challenges.

This escalates the need to change the pre-service teacher education curricula with the objective of producing service teachers capable of handling inclusive classes. This revision should not only include perspectives on disability as general topics but should also integrate the principles of inclusion into the courses as a framework. The components of the proposed alterations to the curricula include the emphasis on theoretical frameworks and practical techniques grounded on

the Universal Design for Learning, differentiation, and instruction for diverse learners. Also, the increase in the time for the teaching practicum and the quality of practice with students with inclusion may help the pre-service teachers learn to perform real-life tasks. Essential focus should be paid to the development of proper in-service training programs to restructure the existing teaching staff population. It should be held frequently, comprehensively, and as suitable for the professional development of Pakistan's teachers. It may encapsulate such formal and informal professional development arrangements as intensive workshops, online courses, some school-based professional activities, etc. Some of the topics can address a variety of concerns that may include handling a class, classroom management, and the use of instructional facilities such as information communication technologies-assistive technology.

Gradually promoting the practice of inclusion among teachers, it is suggested that they should be provided with a continuing source of supervision and encouragement. Such networks may be used to share experiences, strategies, and resources among educators. Therefore, the introduction of experienced teachers who understand the concept of inclusion, the ones with no prior experience in the process, can boost further teaching practice support and the continuation of the delivery of inclusion strategies.

Interaction with experts in the related field can assist in augmenting the possible favorite advancements connected to the teacher training programs in Pakistan. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, or universities where there are appropriate policies for the inclusion of children with disabilities can lead the way to new information, new techniques, books, and knowledge. Other mutual cooperation in relation to the implementation of the inclusive education system can also include the exchange program under which Pakistani educators may have to visit other countries to study the models of the good system that is being practiced in those countries. Technology integration for passive training may help to overcome geographical and resource

limitations successfully. Due to the internet, unique content can be delivered to teachers with ease through online courses and webinars, among others, through mobile applications, making the process relatively cheaper. It is also important to note that simulation assist in creating the contextual environment in which the teachers can apply pluralistic and inclusive strategies without being exposed to the life adversities that may be incurred as a consequence.

The Role of Policy and Government Support

Teacher training and other related efforts for the implementation of inclusive education highly hinge on the kinds of related policies as well as government support.

Specific policy measures that would support inclusive education, where special attention would be paid to students with disabilities, should be initiated both on the national and provincial levels. Such policies should, therefore, articulate inclusive education as a right that ought to be exercised and proclaim the frameworks or plans in that direction. They should make it a prerequisite that all the prospective teacher preparation programs integrate elements of inclusive education and establish minimum requirements for practicing teachers' professional development in the area of inclusive education.

Besides, funding should be provided for teachers' training activities. Teachers should be provided with adequate funding, especially in the area of government allocations to the education sector, particularly for inclusive education teacher training. This could include funds for universities to create awareness about the provision of inclusive education grants and funds, in-service training opportunities, and funds for schools to enhance the provision of inclusive Education (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018).

It is only possible to set high standards in teacher training if there is some form of regimen or parameters that must be met and complied with to make the training more effective. Therefore, the government should establish precise guidelines for inclusive education competencies and how often teacher education programs should be evaluated using these guidelines. Other measures that can be adopted could include regulating the certification and promotion of teachers to practice and promote inclusion.

The encouragement of research and innovation concerning best practices on inclusion is especially relevant to enhancing the advancement of the policy. The government should commission research programs, foster partnerships between universities and schools, share common practices, etc. It might mean setting up investigative institutions centered on the integration of learners, conducting conferences, and cooperating in action research in schools (Ainscow, 2020).

Conclusion

The training of teachers can be considered the most important intervention in enhancing the practice of inclusive education in Pakistani schools. Thus, by providing educators with the required knowledge, skills, and attitudes, the enhancement of training can turn classrooms into an inclusive environment for all children. Therefore, the implications of enhancing the quality of teacher training do not necessarily stop at the educational results; they correspond to societal integration and equity.

Intensive teacher training for integration can produce a positive impact on the learning achievements of students with and without disabilities, as well as reduce the dropout rate among students with special needs and increase enrollment of such children in conventional schools. However, it can bring a better understanding of diversity in society, relying less on prejudice and promoting inclusion.

To realize these benefits, a coordinated effort is needed from all the players in the education sector of Pakistan. Governing bodies should ensure that appropriate attention is paid to the principles of inclusive education and that relevant resources are provided. Teacher education institutions require upgrading curricula and professional development, which require a change in methods of training teachers. Thus, schools need to develop conditions for the successful implementation of the concept of inclusion. The help of international organizations and experts may turn out to be useful and necessary.

It is the preparation of such teachers that would determine the progressive move towards inclusive education in Pakistan. With respect to capacity building, training educationists and teachers is an area that requires improvement to

attain the desired child-centered inclusive education in Pakistan. This investment does not merely profit the individuals with learners as clients but also helps build a better society with less prejudice.

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