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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND PRACTICES OF 21ST-CENTURY TEACHERS IN SINDH

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ABSTRACT

Education is the right of every individual, regardless of race, creed, gender, abilities, or skills, and children with and without special needs as well. As a long time has passed, those who are concerned and working in the field of education still face serious questions like what kind of strategies or methodologies should be adopted or adapted to provide education to differently abled children and ordinary children in the same context. It is necessary to find out the teachers' practices towards the implementation of inclusive education in Sindh. The key purpose of this study was to identify the practical challenges faced by teachers towards the successful implementation of inclusive education in public primary-level schools in Sindh. The population of the current study was the public primary-level schools of the city of Nawabshah, Sindh. A self-designed questionnaire was developed and distributed among the 16 public primary-level schools (8 boys and 8 girls), and one senior teacher and two students from each school were selected as a sample for the study. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items related to teachers' practices for implementing inclusive education in their respective schools, and five items pertain to concerned students. The SPSS software was utilized for data analysis. The findings of the study reveal that the teachers of public primary schools were unaware of the teaching practices of differently abled children. Moreover, they never attended seminars or conferences and did not undergo any training regarding the implementation of inclusive education. The study recommended that a chapter regarding the concept of inclusive education, including teaching practices, be included in teachers' training manuals so that teachers are aware of the concept of inclusion or inclusive education and teaching practices regarding an inclusive classroom. Moreover, there were some hindrances in policy, school leadership, adequate teaching and learning material, and curriculum.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Practices of 21st century teachers; Sindh.

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INTRODUCTION

Various research studies suggest the global trend towards inclusion is a practice where all children with and without special needs, regardless of abilities and understanding level, are included in a single classroom with the same-age peers. Inclusive education practices were endorsed about 29 years ago in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994). Inclusive education is based on all types of students and the provision of equal access to all educational programs, activities, and environments. Different countries around the world have recognized inclusive education as a human rights issue and ratified worldwide agreements such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), the Dakar Framework (UNESCO, 2000), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nation, 2006). This has encouraged governments to develop suitable policies and legislation to

save the rights of differently abled persons throughout societies and, more specifically, in participating in and accessing education (de Bruin, 2010; Forlin et al., 2013).

Instead of all the worldwide support and day-to-day legislative moves towards the successful implementation of inclusive practices by teachers, the concept of inclusive education is still complex, and the education system is facing different challenges in achieving the obligations outlined in the worldwide declarations recognized by their administrations (Sharma et al., 2012; Bruggink et al., 2016; de Bruin, 2019). It is highly acknowledged that teaching practices play a central role in the successful implementation of inclusive education or inclusion of all types of students (Ainscow et al., 2006; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Jacobs & Sharma, 2016). The school system must understand the influence of inclusive education practices before delivering policy and legislative obligations (Sharma et al., 2012). Consistent factors contributed to inclusive practices at the school level, such as the teachers' attitudes, their willingness or intention, and the concerns of limited teachers about teaching inclusive education classrooms (Sharma et al., 2021). Yada et al. (2021) describe that teacher self-efficacy (TSE) is a construct for implementing inclusive education because it combines the specificity and generalizable domains.

Specific skills are required to teach an inclusive education classroom, such as the ability to effectively collaborate, to differentiate learning keeping in view the regular assessment practices, to use interrelated teaching methods, and to perform with positive, supportive behavior in the classroom (Sharma et al., 2012; Sharma & George, 2016). Research supports that teachers with a higher TSE for inclusive education are more likely to utilize the above-mentioned skills, refining an inclusive education atmosphere and educational programs (Sharma et al., 2012; Urton et al., 2014; Yada et al., 2021). A large number of researchers across the world have used a variety of measures to determine the factors that affect inclusive education practices. This paper provides detailed information on how to teach differently abled students with general students in the same classroom. This paper will be a guideline for all those who have been connected with the teaching and learning process for a long time, especially in the field of inclusive education.

Inclusive Education and Teaching Practices

Inclusive education is a new trend, which is why teachers face new issues and challenges in properly implementing teaching strategies. The perception of different teachers' showed that using different teaching methods in inclusive education practices, such as differentiation (for different groups of students) and personalization (for individual students) is fruitful for the diversity of students (Lindner & Schwab, 2020; Schwab, 2021). Different teaching strategies were described for heterogeneous students. A conducive and friendly environment for each and every student who belongs with or without special needs should be provided for all types of children, including the setting of academic goals as per the individual's needs, ongoing internal and external assessment, assignment of flexible tasks, group activities, and respect for the individual characteristics of all students in the same class (Tomlinson, 2014). The successful implementation of inclusive education and diverse characteristics of students strongly depends on the teaching strategies and offered pedagogical skills (McMurray & Thompson, 2016; Petersen, 2016; Ainscow & Messiou, 2018). This background supports the inclusion of all students with and without special needs for the successful implementation of inclusive education teaching practices. Keeping this in mind, it is essential to know that providing inclusive education through inclusive teaching strategies can be fruitful and fulfill the needs of individual recipients.

Inclusive Education and the Academic Performance of Students

Many researchers have concluded that students' academic self-concept positively affects inclusive education (Elbaum & Vaughn, 2003; Stiefel et al., 2018). The effectiveness of inclusive education teaching practices depends on students' cognitive and non-cognitive output. Engels et al. (2004) described "a positive emotional state that is the result of a harmony between the sum of specific context factors on the

one hand and the personal needs and expectations towards the school on the other hand.” In the field of inclusive education, it looks relevant, given the facilitation of differentiation and personalization of learning content and the level of achievement. Therefore, a question is arising about whether inclusive education teaching and learning practices such as personalization and differentiation enhance or decrease the successful implementation of inclusive education in all public schools. To know about the real practices regarding implementing inclusive education, one must consider students' perceptions. Venetz et al. (2015) stated that the perceptions of students in inclusive education are one of the best methods to assess the possible outcomes of inclusive teaching strategies and practices. The above study suggested that it is not essential to know the perceptions of teachers and parents about inclusion alone; the students of inclusive classrooms are the main stakeholders regarding teaching practices at the school level. Keeping this in mind, the perception of students is an unavoidable factor in the fruitful results of inclusion or inclusive education practices.

Contribution of the current study

The present study aimed to investigate the perceptions of school teachers and students towards the implementation of inclusive education teaching practices. The theoretical background and framework of the present study are not only to provide adequate facilities to ordinary students and enhance their learning experiences in the classroom but also to support the inclusion of all types of children in the class without having differences in pedagogical, academic, and social skills. The main purpose of this study is to know the teaching practices of 21st-century teachers toward the successful implementation of inclusive education.

In the context of past studies, the researcher formulated the following research questions and hypotheses for the investigation of the study:

1. Do you have any problems with existing educational policies regarding the implementation of inclusive education?

Hypothesis 1: It is expected that existing educational policy fully supports inclusive education practices.

Do you have any kind of training about the implementation of inclusive education?

Hypothesis 2: Teachers are expected to be trained to implement inclusive education practices.

2. Do you have all kinds of resources in your school to facilitate the children with and without special needs?

Hypothesis 3: Schools are expected to be fully equipped with all types of resources for successful implementation of inclusive education.

3. Does the existing curriculum make it flexible for all types of children in a single classroom?

Hypothesis 4: It is expected that the existing curriculum is suitable to implement inclusive education practices in ordinary schools.

4. Do you agree with the ongoing teaching and learning practices of teachers?

Hypothesis 5: It is expected that students will get a quality education and agree with teachers' ongoing teaching and learning practices

METHODOLOGY

The sample for the present study consisted of 16 public primary schools in the city of Nawabshah. These schools were located in different areas of the city. To collect the relevant data and representation of the population, the researchers selected schools in different areas of the city. Moreover, keeping in view the prefixes of schools, the researchers also selected an equal number of boys' and girls' schools as a sample. However, the survey tool was distributed among participants with the collaboration of school

administration and teachers in selected schools. The concept of inclusive education was shared with administration, teachers, and students, as at least one student should be present in the classroom, having the right to differently abled services, given that he or she has been identified with learning about special needs.

Overall, 16 senior teachers and 32 boys and girls in the fifth grade participated in the study. The selection of students was made on the basis of one normal and one differently abled student from each selected school. Hence, 32 students of the same grade were selected from all schools. Researchers distributed survey questionnaires among participants, and the purpose of the study was briefly discussed with all participants. Each and every statement was explained by the administration, teachers, and students. The researchers provided enough time to the participants so that they could complete the questionnaires and respond easily as per their understanding. The participants filled out the questionnaire during school time.

Measures and scale

To determine the use of inclusive teaching practices by teachers and related experiences, a five-point Likert scale was utilized (Schwab et al., 2022). To determine inclusive education practices as a predictor of learner-inclusive perceptions. The inclusive education practices of teachers were examined through the students' perceptions. The participants were asked to rate items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree). The collected views of participants were summed up as "disagreed, neutral, and agreed."

Research Ethics

The approval for this study's participants' conduct was obtained from their respective school heads or administrators. The school administrators signed consent with the researcher regarding collecting and processing the collected data only for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, the authors mention the views of teachers and students regarding the implementation and practices of inclusive education at primary-level schools. The issues were teacher training, policy, curriculum implementation, professional support, and student performance and attitude. The results are as follows:

Table 1. Policy-related issues.

Statement	Disagreed		Neutral		Agreed		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Policies and practices should be cleared about the implementation of IE	0	0	0	0	16	100	16	100
2. Weaknesses in a policy undermine the implementation and practices of inclusive education methods.	5	31	1	6	10	63	16	100
3. Despite the availability of inclusive education policies, there is still exclusion in the schools.	0	0	2	12	14	88	16	100
4. Successful implementation of inclusive education practices is impossible in the school without supportive leadership.	0	0	1	6	15	94	16	100
5. Schools should make policies to provide inclusive education and successfully implement it.	8	50	3	19	5	31	16	100

The analysis of Table 1 shows that 100% of respondents agreed with modifications and clearances in the existing educational policies and practices for the successful implementation of inclusive education practices in the general education system, and 94% of teachers agreed with the statement of supportive

leadership. They showed that implementation of inclusive education practices is possible with the support of supportive leadership.

Moreover, 88% agreed that despite the availability of inclusive education policies, ordinary schools still exclude differently abled children from the mainstream education system. 63% of respondents responded that available weaknesses in policy create hindrances and barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Table 2. Teachers training related issues.

Statement	Disagreed		Neutral		Agreed		Total	
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Keeping in view, the successful implementation of inclusive education, teachers should be trained along with professional training and with ongoing trainings.	5	5.5	2	2.2	83	92.2	90	100.0
2. Teachers should be trained adequately to equip the different educational needs in the same classroom.	19	21.2	13	14.4	58	64.4	90	100.0
3. Teachers do not give enough time to differently abled learners and slow learners.	8	8.9	6	6.7	74	82.2	88	97.9
4. Inadequate teacher training is the main cause of teachers' unwillingness to teach differently abled students.	12	13.3	8	8.9	70	77.8	90	100.0
5. Teachers need adequate training for proper and successful implementation of inclusive education practices	2	2.2	3	3.3	85	94.4	90	100.0

The results of Table 2 show that teachers have a dire need for training in their professional lives. The majority of respondents agreed that successful implementation of inclusive education practices is impossible without adequate teacher training.

In addition, the respondents said pre-teacher training is essential for all kinds of teachers, or a chapter regarding inclusive education practices may be included in the training manual of newly inducted teachers. The pre-service training equips the teachers to deal with differently abled students with different educational needs in the same classroom.

Table 3. Available resources issues.

Statement	Disagreed		Neutral		Agreed		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Inadequate supportive services and availability of limited resources can influence the practices of inclusive education.	1	6	2	13	13	81	16	100
2. For successful implementation of inclusive education practices, sufficient supportive material is mandatory.	0	0	2	13	14	87	16	100
3. Schools should have experts such as educational psychologists and remedial teachers) in order to implement successful inclusive education practices.	4	25	3	19	9	56	16	100
4. Schools are fully equipped with all the required infrastructure to implement inclusive education.	12	75	4	25	0	0	16	100
5. The concerned governments at the provincial level provide adequate material for children with special needs and successful implementation of inclusive education in general schools.	14	88	2	12	0	0	16	100

The analysis of Table 3 shows that 88% of respondents disagreed with statement number five, which shows the concerned provincial government does not support inclusive education practices by providing adequate teaching and learning material and trained teachers. Further, 87% of participants agreed that the implementation of successful inclusive education practices is impossible without the availability of adequate resources. 75% of respondents disagreed that schools are fully equipped with the required teaching and learning material; it seems there is a need for equipped schools for the implementation of inclusive education.

Table 4. Curriculum related issues.

Statement	Disagree		Neutral		Agreed		Total	
	f	%	F	%	F	%	f	%
1. The existing curriculum is inflexible for children with and without special needs to be taught in the same classroom.	1	6	2	13	13	81	16	100
2. Curriculum needs modification and should be flexible for everyday survival issues of all types of children.	0	0	2	13	14	87	16	100
3. Implementation of Inclusive education is impossible with content-loaded curriculum.	0	0	25	38	39	81	66	100
4. Inclusive education is possible with a flexible curriculum because it provides equal chances to all kinds of learners.	0	0	6	38	10	62	16	100
5. Teachers only follow the designed curriculum it is impossible to pay attention to differently abled learners.	0	0	2	13	14	87	16	100

The results of Table 4 show that 87% of respondents agreed regarding the modification of the curriculum. They need the curriculum to be modified as per the needs of children with special needs. Moreover, 87% of teachers were using and implementing the designed curriculum, which is why they do not give proper attention to children with special needs. 81% said implementation of inclusive education is impossible without flexible curricula and a reduced curriculum load. Furthermore, the existing curriculum is not supportive of inclusive education.

The results of Table 5 show that teachers use different teaching strategies in an inclusive classroom. Through the utilization of different teaching skills and abilities, children with and without special needs learn equally in the same class. Furthermore, they give equal respect to all kinds of students in the class.

Moreover, the respondents said the practices regarding the successful implementation of inclusive education are not executed in the classroom. Children with special needs are treated equally as other students, while they need more support and time than normal students. The existing curriculum is not supportive of the proper implementation of inclusive education; it needs more modification.

Table 5. Students' view on inclusive education.

Statement	Disagree		Neutral		Agreed		Total	
	F	%	f	%	F	%	f	%
1. Our teachers teach us in different ways so that all children with and without special needs learn equally.	5	16	8	25	19	59	32	100
Our curriculum is supportive, and we learn from it equally.	17	53	6	19	9	28	32	100
3. There is equal respect of all types of students in the class.	8	25	3	10	19	59	32	100
4. Our teachers equally treat us during the teaching and learning process in the class.	12	37	8	25	12	38	32	100
5. Inclusive education practices fully implemented in the school and classroom.	18	56	6	19	8	25	32	100

Discussion

The current study's findings reveal that inclusion can be successful with supportive school leaders. Qeleni (2013) noted the influence of school leaders' effects on the inclusion of children with and without special needs when they support teachers appropriately. This indicates that teachers need support from their supervisors and immediate leaders to successfully implement inclusive education practices.

In addition, if school leaders are not supporting the inclusive education policy, it will affect the successful implementation of inclusive education. Keeping in view the teachers' training factor, this study's findings reveal that for successful implementation of inclusion, teachers must be trained and receive induction training in educational institutions with special educational needs. Marimuthu and Cheong (2015) found that for the successful implementation of inclusion, there is a need for competent, knowledgeable teachers who fulfill the required needs and values of children with special needs. This shows the majority of teachers are not trained to teach differently abled children; hence, there is a need for in-service training.

The majority of respondents were in favor of a flexible curriculum. They said the current curriculum does not meet the requirements of children with special needs. They said a modified and flexible curriculum provides equal learning opportunities for all kinds of children in a single classroom. This shows inclusion or inclusive education practices are impossible unless modifications are made to the existing curriculum of regular schools. Miles (2002) found that where there was an understandable and flexible curriculum, the types of children learned and got education easily, and their progress was also recognized. Mowes (2002) argued that there should be different curricula for children with special needs as per their needs and circumstances. Stofile (2008) stated that a curriculum must be accessible and responsive as per the needs of all types of learners to fulfill the needs of different populations simultaneously.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study focused on factors that affected the practices of 21st-century teachers during the implementation of inclusive education in selected primary schools. The current study concluded that the challenges that hinder inclusive education practices are due to different reasons, such as the unsupportive behavior of school leaders and leadership, a lack of teacher training, support, and resources, and a complicated curriculum. Despite all efforts by national and international educational organizations and donors to ensure inclusive education practices, there is still exclusion in selected schools and contexts as well. This study suggested that all stakeholders, such as the provincial government, the Education Ministry,

parents, teachers, and other education workers who are linked with the education sector or field, should pay attention to the successful implementation of inclusive education.

It is recommended that the provincial governments provide the required support to teachers to successfully implement inclusive education. The Ministry of Education should arrange in-service training programs for all teachers to successfully execute inclusion. It is highly recommended that the government appoint supportive and trained school leaders to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education. It is recommended that all adequate teaching and learning materials, including resources, be provided to the schools to cater to the diverse needs of differently abled children. It is recommended that the existing curriculum be modified per the needs of all types of children to provide equal educational opportunities for all types of learners.

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