

## **Inclusive Education: A Challenge for Contemporary Teacher Education in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

*The current study aimed to investigate the impact of teacher education on the implementation of inclusive education practices at the school level. The primary goals of this research were to assess the present state of teachers' education in equipping competent instructors for inclusive education and to determine the future direction of teachers' education for enhancing the capabilities of teachers in inclusive settings. Due to the exploratory character of the research, a qualitative technique was employed to collect data in order to achieve the research aims. The available literature in the topic was examined and a content analysis was conducted to achieve the research objectives. The findings indicate that despite the Higher Education Commission (HEC) recommending a course on inclusive education in the revised 2010 plan of studies for teachers' education, only a small number of universities have included the subject of inclusive education in their Bachelor of Education (BE.D) Program, with a credit value of 3. The study also indicated that the inclusive education course's material lacked adequate breadth to effectively prepare future teachers in addressing the needs of all pupils. Ensuring inclusive education in Pakistan is crucial for attaining high-quality education, as it is based on the principle that all students should have equal opportunities for education regardless of their skills or impairments. The challenges encountered in implementing inclusive education in Pakistan necessitate attention from the stakeholders. The importance of addressing challenges related to teachers' capacity building cannot be overstated, and this can be achieved through adequate sensitization of academia. Given that a few public sector universities are currently teaching this subject, it is advisable for HEC to take necessary steps to implement the curriculum for teacher education programs in universities and degree granting institutions. It is advisable for universities in the faculty of education to provide M.Phil. and PhD programs in inclusive education. These programs should include courses on many aspects of inclusive education, such as inclusive teacher education, inclusive classroom*

*development, theories of inclusive schools, and models of inclusive education. Acquiring knowledge in these courses would improve teachers' ability to meet the requirements of special learners in inclusive environments.*

*Keywords: Inclusive Education, Teacher Education in Pakistan*

### **Introduction**

Inclusive education refers to the practice of placing all students, regardless of any challenges they may face, in age-appropriate general education classes in their own neighborhood schools. In this setting, students receive high-quality instruction, interventions, and supports that help them succeed in the core curriculum. This approach has been supported by research conducted by Bui, Quirk, Almazan, and Valenti (2010) as well as Alquraini and Gut (2012). Effective inclusive education is achieved by embracing, comprehending, and addressing the various distinctions and variations among students, encompassing physical, cognitive, academic, social, and emotional aspects. Introducing inclusive education does not imply that kids with special needs never spend time outside of regular education classes. Occasionally, individuals seek counseling, speech therapy, or occupational therapy. The primary objective of this goal is to ensure the inclusion of all students in the mainstream education system by adapting the school curriculum to meet their specific learning requirements. Teachers, special education consultants, and other staff members, including parents, are crucial stakeholders in this situation.

Teachers play a crucial role in the education system. Currently, there is a special education department at both the Federal and provincial levels that focuses on the education of children with special needs and disabilities. Additionally, there is a separate directorate general of special education that is responsible for the education and rehabilitation of these children. The teachers in this setup possess the necessary abilities and effectively meet the demands of exceptional children. Separate schools are in operation to educate children without disabilities or handicaps, when teachers possess the necessary skills and competencies to effectively teach these students. Kumwenda (2021) emphasizes that a harmful mindset can contribute to ignorance, despair, and subjective reasoning. Effective teacher training may initiate and provide instructors with the necessary skills to effectively manage inclusive teaching.

According to Forlin (2013), teacher education serves as a means to generate successful teachers capable of addressing the learning requirements of all students. Effective and skilled teachers are necessary to meet the various learning requirements of all students in a classroom. In order to do

this, teachers must have a positive attitude towards inclusion and be willing to adapt the curriculum accordingly.

Successful inclusion in the mainstream school system is only possible when the learning demands of the pupils are taken into consideration.

Kumwenda et al. (2021) assert that the presence of skilled educators is essential for the genuine education of students with special needs and impairments. Competent educators are employed at specialized institutions where they provide instruction to children with special needs in a separate and distinct environment. According to the research conducted by Itimu & Kopetz (2008) and Kumwenda (2021), it has been shown that mainstream teachers, with the exception of those working in special schools, have not been provided with pre-service or in-service training to effectively educate children with special needs and disabilities. The absence of adequate teaching training is a significant factor that is impeding the implementation of inclusive education in the mainstream school system.

Kamchedzera (2015) conducted a study which suggested that in order to address the scarcity of special education teachers, the government should allocate resources to provide training for a greater number of special needs teachers in Malawian schools. In order to address this issue, it is imperative that instructors receive proper education and are strategically placed in schools throughout the entire nation. Regular and ongoing in-service training should be organized to ensure that instructors has the essential abilities to meet the needs of all students.

In their study, Chataika, Kamchedzera, and Semphere (2017) identified a range of difficulties encountered by normal primary school teachers while developing instructional strategies for inclusive classrooms in Lilongwe. The findings indicated that teachers encountered a range of difficulties, such as insufficient knowledge and abilities, inadequate training materials, overcrowded classrooms, limited time for preparation, and providing support to students with special needs in regular classes. Charema (2010) and Forlin (2013) regarded inclusive education as a response to increasing challenges, serving as a comprehensive solution to various difficulties. Over time, several policy documents have been developed that emphasize the principles of social justice, human rights, and universal access to quality education. Although people in Pakistan are aware of the benefits of inclusive education, there are still several factors that hinder its

implementation in mainstream schools. There exists a significant disparity between the policy and the actual implementation of activities on the ground. While there are other factors influencing the implementation of inclusive education in Pakistan, this research primarily focuses on the teacher education program, teacher in-service training, teaching skills, and teachers' ability to work in inclusive education settings.

### **Applied Significance**

Current research offers valuable insights into the different aspects of modern teacher education programs that are designed to address the difficulties of inclusive education. The objective is to discover the different gaps and fundamental explanations behind teachers' negative attitude towards inclusive practices in the mainstream education system. Due to the lack of preparedness among teachers.

Effectively managing the diversity of learners in mainstream settings. In the modern world, the education system cannot maintain its integrity without including students who have special needs and impairments. This duty is crucial, important, and honorable in its essence and necessitates preparation in terms of teacher training, adjustments to the school curriculum, inclusive teaching methodologies, and assessment. Although the preparation of skilled teachers may require some modifications to the existing teacher education program, it has the potential to significantly impact the lives of children with disabilities and special needs. Currently, a large number of these children, over 80%, are unable to attend school due to the lack of access to special schools and the mainstream education system. The results of this research may help HEC, universities, and degree awarding organizations understand the urgent need for a partial change of the current curriculum for teacher preparation, taking into account the challenges of inclusive education. The findings of this research would also allow the education system to effectively meet international commitments and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### **Literature Review**

As an essential element of the education system, teachers must be well educated to handle the responsibility of inclusion. In industrialized countries, inclusion in education is mostly practiced. This is due to the availability of ample resources, teacher training, and the commitment of school administrators to guarantee that all learners are included in effective learning, regardless of their particular requirements. The concept of inclusion or inclusive education holds equal significance

for developing countries such as Pakistan. It is equally important because the education system can support and celebrate the diversity of learners. It gives all learners the potential to succeed by creating an environment where children with special needs are not separated or seen as different, but are included as part of the same group of learners. Inclusion effectively challenges negative cultural ideas and attitudes towards individuals with disabilities or those belonging to marginalized communities.

This study aims to address the ongoing issue of discrimination faced by children with disabilities in accessing mainstream schools despite the efforts made by the school education department to promote inclusive education in 2019. The study will focus on the impact of this exclusion on the reality and personal experiences of these children, highlighting the need for a more inclusive education strategy. The findings of this study will allow us to ascertain the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, such as donor agencies, the school education department, the literacy and non-formal education department, the special department, primary and secondary health, teacher training institutions (Quaid academy), and the community, in order to effectively implement inclusive education in Pakistan. Teacher training is a crucial aspect that provides professional development for teachers working in both general and special education schools and centers. Given that

Inclusive education is recognized as a philosophy that aims to provide objective, impartial, and high-quality education to all learners, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, ethnicity, gender, or other unique characteristics. Although inclusive education has been successfully implemented in many countries, some countries are still in the process of achieving this goal.

Inclusive education mandates equal learning opportunities for all pupils, irrespective of their disability status. Teacher education has significantly overlooked inclusive education, despite the 2017 education policy's goal of achieving 50% inclusive schools by 2025. These schools are intended to provide education for all children, including those with special needs. It was additionally decided that by 2025, 50% of special children would be enrolled, and a separate budget of 5% would be allotted for special education throughout Pakistan.

The strategy could not be implemented effectively due to various factors, including a deficient communication system, inadequate administration, limited assessment tools, financial irregularities, negative attitudes, lack of political will, governance gaps, and unstable regimes. The

efficacy of the system could be improved if the current administration promptly identifies and resolves these shortcomings in a cordial manner. Regrettably, the concept of inclusive education remains an unfulfilled aspiration in Pakistan. Currently, the concept of inclusive education is in its early stages, even at the federal government level. Only a limited number of training courses were provided to the leaders of the institutions with the aim of enhancing their capacity. The commencement of such courses is like to the first drop of rain amid oppressive weather. However, achieving successful inclusion requires more from the education system. This is because the school facilities, policies, teacher qualifications, and teaching skills play a crucial role in imparting education.

The promotion of inclusive education has been widely recognized worldwide over the past three decades, following the Salamanca Statement in 1994. Subsequently, the concept of inclusive education has been further advanced through the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG, 2015). These frameworks establish inclusive education as a fundamental human right, which is mandatory and not a matter of privilege. Developed nations across the globe have implemented inclusive education systems, yet the situation in Pakistan is highly upsetting. Across the nation, the inclusion of children with special needs and disabilities in regular schools is a challenging task. In this setting, several factors appear to be involved, but the function of teacher education is paramount.

In Pakistan, inclusive education is a very unusual component of teacher education programs, however it is crucial for achieving the goal of education for all. Hence, this study aims to ascertain the significance of teacher education in effectively implementing inclusive education at the school level. The current findings

Research would allow academia to explore new possibilities for permanently eliminating the key barriers that impede access to schools for children with exceptional needs.

### **Research Objectives**

- To examine the current status of teacher's education in preparing skillful teachers for inclusive education.
- To determine to direction of teacher's education for capacity building of teachers for inclusive settings.

### **Research Methodology**

Since nature of the research in exploratory therefore, for the attainment of research objectives qualitative approach was used for the collection of data. Since first objective was to examine the current status of teachers' education in preparing skillful teachers for inclusive education. For this purpose module of inclusive education included in the scheme of studies of Teachers education program B. ED /B.S. ED developed by HEC and scheme of studies offered in the various private and public sector universities and degree awarding institutions were examined through content analysis.

In 2010 Higher education commission revised scheme of studies of teacher education program. B.Ed. 4-year program for elementary and secondary education and introduced Associate Degree in education 2 years. Duration of this teachers Education Program was 4 years, it comprised of 8 semesters and duration of 1 semester 16 to 18- weeks. In addition to this proposed course load per semester was of 15-18 credits.

#### **The structure of schemes is as under**

HEC in revised schemes of studies recommended only one 3 credit hours course on inclusive education in semester VII of B.Ed. program. Total 6 unit proposed for this, detail of proposed content is as under:

UNIT 1: An Overview of Child Development

UNIT 2: An Introduction to Special Needs

UNIT3: Approaches to the Education of Children with Special Needs channelizing Through relevant statutory bodies of the universities.

UNIT 4: Assessing Children with Special Needs

UNIT 5: Curriculum Adaptations and Teaching Strategies UNIT 6: Collaboration and Teamwork for School Improvement

Analysis of the content revealed that while developing outline of inclusive education, focus was on given on the conceptual aspect related with special needs and disabilities but operational and technical details of handling children with special needs and disabilities seem lacking. Next step was to examine the inclusion of the course of inclusive education in the scheme of the studies of

the teacher's education program (B. ED B.S. ED) of various public and private sector universities.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Review of Scheme of studies**

In order to examine the course/ subject of inclusive education in the scheme of studies of Teachers Education Program (B. ED B.S. ED) offered by various public and private sector universities and degree awarding institutions, schemes of studies followed by these universities were examined thoroughly.

Second objective was to determine the direction of teachers' education for capacity building of teachers for inclusive settings. For this purpose a panel of 5 university teachers having specialization in the field of inclusive education was requested participate in the focus group discussion and examine the existing status of inclusive education and recommend breath of the component of inclusive education in teacher education program. They also desired to delineate courses which are important for teachers' education at B.Ed. level.

Discussion started with this that at present the concept of inclusive education undermined in the teacher education program of Pakistan. Since Government is determined for the implementation of inclusive education in Pakistan because inclusion is fundamental for the achieving of quality education for all, due to the notion that all learners should have equal access to education irrespective of their abilities and disabilities. Following questions were discussed in the focus group discussion:

1. Are you satisfied with the existing curriculum of teacher education in complying the challenges of inclusive education?
2. What sort of courses are required to promote inclusive education among prospective teachers/ professionals in the field of education?
3. For understanding of the mechanism of inclusive practices what sort of courses could be included in teacher education at various level?
4. What are the major barriers in the launching comprehensive specialization in inclusive education?
5. What remedies can be used to overcome barriers of inclusive teacher education?

*Question 1: Asked about the satisfaction of the group of experts about existing curriculum of teacher education in complying with the challenges of inclusive education.*



For this course, the outlines of three public sector universities examined keeping in view the challenges of inclusive education in handling the diverse learning needs of the students with special needs and disabilities. Since at present three universities named as University of Peshawar, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University and Urdu University Karachi are teaching course of inclusive education in the teacher education program. After detailed analysis of the schemes of studies of teacher education program by experts' extensiveness of content of course of inclusive education determined with reference to practical aspects of inclusive pedagogy, inclusive curriculum, assistive devices and inclusive assessment.

Content of inclusive education with reference to practical aspects of inclusive pedagogy, inclusive curriculum, assistive devices, and inclusive assessment. Main objectives set for this course include, definition of inclusive education, recognition of the nature of inclusion in education, understanding the difference between inclusive and special education. All experts were totally dissatisfied with the existing teacher's education program with reference to the challenges of inclusion because only conceptual and theoretical knowledge imparted to students through this course. One course of 3 credit hours without teaching practice seems to be insufficient.

*Question 2 asked was about courses required for skillful teaching in an inclusive setting for prospective teachers / professionals in the field of education.*

For this purpose, a detailed analysis was carried out about the existing literature available in the field. Experts of the view that all types of content is important which could enable teachers to cater the unique needs of the learners in inclusive setting. There is urgent need to improve this area through induction of various course which could cater the individualized needs of the learners with special needs and disabilities. Unanimously it was decided for prospective teachers' training about inclusive education must equally focus on theory and practice.

*Question 3 is for understanding of the mechanism of inclusive practices what sort of courses could be included in teacher education at various level?*

In response to above question experts believed that pursuit of inclusive education is suffering at the moment due to the reason that processes and procedures of inclusion never included in the preserves or in-service teachers education program.

After detailed deliberation semester wise course breakdown prepared for the inclusion in the contemporary scheme of the studies of teacher education program:

Table 1

Proposed Courses in Scheme of the Studies of Teacher Education Program:

S. No	Semester	Course Content	CH
1	Semester	Theories and models of inclusive Education	3+1 credits hours
2	Semester	Inclusive teacher education: Diversity and inclusion	3+1 credits hours
3	Semester	Inclusive schools: Transformation needed at school and classroom level	3+1 credits hours
4	Semester	Curriculum development and Inclusive pedagogy	3+1 credits hours

Table no 1 contains the detail of the proposed course for capacity building of teachers' education program for inclusive education perspective. Such courses enable teachers to develop their skills for handling students diversity effectively.

In addition to this under the faculty of education universities can offer M.Phil. and PhD in inclusive education by introducing in depth courses on inclusive education, introduction of inclusive education at M. Phil and PhD level would enhance teachers' capacity to cater the needs of prospective teachers in more vibrant way.

*Question 4 based on major barriers in the launching comprehensive specialization in inclusive education?*

In response to the above question it was analyzed that although awareness of inclusive education is common in relevant academia but due to ill prepared teachers this task has not yet been encouraged. At present teachers overall have negative attitude above inclusive education because

they think it is task of special education department. The special education department is performing its obligatory duties for the education and training of children with special needs and disabilities but scope of special education department is not vast in comparison with spread of disability. Therefore, inclusive education is the only way through which without putting extra cost of establishing schools and hiring separate teachers, children with mild to moderate disabilities can be accommodated. So, teachers' preparedness is the prerequisite after that enough resource ought to be required by the school education department (physical resources on equitably basis.) for the commencement of inclusive education in mainstream schools.

*Question 5: What remedies can be used to overcome barriers of inclusive teacher education?*

While discussing this question it was pointed out that major barrier is of lack of determination by various stakeholders. There is a need to develop accountability for the implementation of the education policy in its true letter and spirits. Consistency in the policy is also required with a vibrant time bounded monitoring mechanism. There is a need to develop culture of inclusion in our societies and there is a need to form various associations for awareness of inclusive education. There is a need to develop some workable strategy in collaboration with various stakeholders for implementation of inclusive education by identifying gaps hindering the execution of inclusive education in present schools. For removal of gaps commitment on the part of political leadership is required so education can become access for children with special needs and disabilities.

Since at present curriculum of mainstream schools is not receptive to needs of children with special needs and disabilities Teachers are untrained for the inclusive practices, head teachers are having not welcoming attitude. Resolving complications in the executing of the inclusive education in Pakistan should be given the consideration as it worth of. It ought to be a priority of the political leadership so access of the children with special needs and disabilities can be possible to mainstream school system with trained and skillful teachers.

In addition to this for the removal of hindrances all stakeholders of the education like school education Department, literacy Department, special education department and Academia and degree awarding institutions may work together and paly their due roles by devising guidelines under which teacher education program could be revamped for smooth inclusion.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Teachers play a significant role in the imparting education; understandably they are teaching for educating, they may change life of their students if fully prepared about role expectations. Role of teachers becomes even more significant when discussed with reference to their preparedness for inclusive education practices. In order to handle the students' diversity teachers' need proper education and training. Findings revealed that at present teacher education program of our country is not ready to prepare teachers for inclusive setup, therefore, its desired reforms in teacher education program so to instill training and skills in prospective teachers.

As pointed out Gale and etl. (2021) educational system has been administered by several types of policies and plans which focuses on inclusive education. Though, numerous researchers have also exposed that recognized establishments are often roughly attached and operational essentials are only roughly connected to each other and formal structures are generally constantly violated (Hawkins and James).

Even though inclusive education has long been subject of concern across nation, for past many years focus of the research was on the exploration of various barriers due to which it was not fully implemented in school education. Intend of the teacher education program is to produce high-quality of teachers who could handle the challenges of teaching in effective manner. Although in the education policy of 2017 inclusive education emphasized, but after passing many years it has not yet been implemented in its true letters and spirits.

Gaps persist even though large-scale legislative changes occur at the federal levels. Present research was designed to determine the role of academia in successful implementation of inclusive education through imparting effective teacher training program. In the context of school education, inclusive education purists are thwarted due to a number of factors, research in this context revealed lacking of trained teachers in school education. In addition to this, teacher also have negative attitude towards inclusion. One of the main reasons of this is this lack of knowledge and expertise to handle the educational needs of children with disabilities and special needs. In this context revamping of teacher education program through focusing on inclusive education training of teachers about inclusive teaching methodology, embracing a mentoring teaching, collaboration with special educators' education, and practicums in the field can bring desired changes in prospective teachers.

For this foremost step is to include this course at all level of teachers' education program so competencies can be inculcated in prospective teachers by imparting knowledge, skills, abilities

and attitudes anticipated to turn as responsive teacher for all kind of learners. While preparing teachers for inclusive education setting it is important to understand that mere knowledge of inclusive education is not sufficient information it is equally significant to indoctrinate competency in teachers to build a reverential mainstream classroom ethos that continued students with assorted learning needs. In addition to this expertise in student-centered teaching methods also required that might empower teachers for designing of individualized learning plans for children with special needs and disabilities rather than demanding those to apt in with typical higher-grade desires. Long term professional training and short-term professional training could be planned by focusing on various interventions for the successful implementation of inclusive education in mainstream classrooms for prospective and in-service teachers. There is an urgent need to bring transformations in the teacher education programs offered by various universities and degree awarding institutions. It ought to be integral part of teacher education to prospective teachers about their role as inclusive teachers who could able to accept all leaners with vigor to deliver his or her best in while imparting education with normal peers.

Findings of the research call for the need of the formation of up-to-date accreditation standards for teacher education program. In this regard national Accreditation council for teacher Education NCATE. NCATE may modify accreditation standards of teacher education program, by setting standard through which output skilled and seasoned prospective teachers can be produced who may able to cater the learning needs of all students irrespective to their abilities and disabilities.

At present teacher education program is very freak to handle the challenges of inclusive education. Though HEC given scheme of studies includes 3 credit hours course on inclusive education but even leading universities of the Pakistan are not teaching this course in teachers' education at Bachelors level. Quest of inclusive education is anguish at the moment due to the reason that processes and procedures of inclusion never included in the preserves or in-service teachers education program. Only a few universities are offering this course in teachers' education program but outlines seems insufficient to trained teachers for the implementation of inclusive education task in practical sense. Teachers working in the mainstream system are not ready for this task due to which they hold negative attitude towards inclusive education. Therefore, there is a dire need to revamp teacher education by keeping in view inclusive education.

### **Recommendations**

As at present limited public sector universities are offering this subject in teachers' education

program therefore, HEC may take suitable measure for execution of schemes of studies of teacher education program by keeping in the challenges of inclusion.

HEC has proposed only 3 credit hours course for the teaching of inclusive education which seems not to be sufficient to train teachers for this challenging task. It is therefore, recommended that HEC may be revise its scheme of studies partially by keeping and view inclusion and include at least 4 courses dealing with practical aspects of inclusive education.

At present course of inclusive education is not aligned with teaching practice it is therefore, recommended that this course may be aligned with 1-hour teaching practice in inclusive setting (teaching practice of 1 credit hour at each semester).

It is recommended that at MS and PhD in inclusive education may be started in the Department of Education of the private and public sector universities.

Since teacher training can certainly influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, teachers' knowledge, strategies and information about handling children of various disabilities can built their self-efficacy. Therefore, there is a dire need to review pre- service and in-service teachers' trainings from inclusive education point of view.

There is also a need to develop collaboration for effective inclusion by the involvement of different various holders representing HEC, Academia, Degree awarding intuitions, School education department and Special education.

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