

Attitudes and Concerns towards Inclusive Education in Pakistani Context: Pre-Service Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: Inclusive education projects are being practiced in few public sector schools in Punjab. This research aims at investigating the perspectives of pre-service teachers in terms of their attitudes and concerns about inclusive education in the Pakistani context.

Methodology: For this purpose, a survey was conducted on (N=191) students enrolled in different teaching training programs at a public sector university in metropolitan city, Lahore. The responses of students were recorded on ATIES (Wilczenski, 1992) and CIES (Sharma & Desai, 2002).

Findings: The findings showed that pre-service teachers have favorable attitudes regarding including those kids who have trouble expressing themselves, who perform two or more academic years below grade level, and who require instruction in self-help skills and daily living tasks. However, they had the least favorable opinions of visually impaired and kids who required individualized functional academic programs in reading and math. The respondents expressed higher concerns about shortage of time, disliking of parents of children without disabilities and inappropriate infrastructure of public schools. Differences in attitudes and concerns were explored on the basis of gender, disability in family and course studied.

Conclusion: Implications of this research for teacher training institutes were also discussed. The results of this study have a number of ramifications both worldwide and within the setting of Pakistan. This study suggests that the length of the program is subject to the content covered in the pre-service teacher education programme and it carries more importance. The practical application of the study's findings should enable the development of more confident and upbeat educators who can guarantee education for all students through inclusive education.

Keywords: Attitudes, Concerns, Disability, Inclusive, Pre-service.

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Introduction

Education is considered to be the best social equalizer, but it also turns out to be the most discriminatory tool when individuals are not included in educational process in accordance with their distinct needs. We have seen that students from disadvantaged groups, including those with disabilities, are not treated equitably in schools and are not provided with educational opportunities that meet their unique requirements. They are perceived as a burden on the educational system in particular, and on society in general, which causes them to be excluded from daily life and hence leading the educational system against the principles of the constitution of Pakistan.

Inclusive education promotes respect for diversity. It believes in providing an equitable environment to all individuals. Inclusive education addresses the diversity of students by facilitating the involvement of individual learners in the context of learning, and culture by reducing and curbing the discriminatory treatment with students with diverse needs in educational sector. (Murdaca et al., 2018). Including all students, recognizing their range of needs, skills, and traits, and eliminating all forms of prejudice in the classroom, inclusive education upholds the right to an education. It achieves this by accepting the student variety rather than viewing individual differences as flaws (UNESCO, 2015).

Therefore, it is stated that traditional schools need to develop the capacity to educate all students locally, where they live (Meijer & Watkins 2019; Opertti et al., 2014). The essential prerequisites of inclusive education in traditional schools are taken as abiding by universal design principles by obtaining the access of equality through accommodations (Ainscow et al., 2020).

The contributory factors that have an impact on how well inclusion works in schools include the teaching faculty members, the institutional support for quality instruction, and some other external factors (Engelbrecht et al., 2013). However, the attitudes of instructors toward inclusive education are what determine all these favorable outcomes (Hernandez et al., 2016). Therefore, it's crucial to consider how an inclusive classroom environment affects students with disabilities and their peers who don't have any disabilities as well as instructors' attitudes, sentiments, and fears about instructing in an inclusive environment (Alexiadou & Essex 2016; zokçu, 2018).

Recent studies have concentrated on the difficulties that teachers have to come across when they start teaching in an inclusive setup. The studies also focused on their attitudes toward it, and how comfortable they are interacting with children who have impairments. This is because these issues could have a significant effect on how successfully inclusive education is implemented (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014). It is pertinent to investigate the attitudes of pre-service teachers about educating special children since they are among the most significant factors influencing the performance of the learners in an inclusive classroom (Monsen et al., 2015). According to Siuty (2019), one of the key components of inclusivity is instructors' ability to deal with student diversity in inclusive settings.

According to Gunnórsdóttir and Jóhannesson (2014), teachers' attitudes toward IE are influenced by a variety of demographic factors that include a) teachers' characteristics (as characterized by teaching experience; gender; age; and number of courses taken by special educator), b) student-related factors (characterized by the nature and types of the disabilities), and c) environmental factors (which include instructional materials, and the accessibility of support staff).

According to Goddard and Evans (2018) and Costello and Boyle (2013), the majority of pre-service (at primary level) teachers had positive attitudes about inclusion, which grew during the relevant training years. Believers, Non-Believers, and True Believers are three groups that have developed unique perspectives on inclusion. According to Monje (2017), Both the Believers and True Believers favored inclusiveness for all. The Non-Believers were no in favor of including all pupils and excluding those who were with impairments. The negative views of instructors, as made from time to time toward inclusive education are a huge impediment to the effectiveness of IE and have a significantly negative impact on students' learning and effectiveness of instructional strategies. (Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012). The ability of

teachers is another crucial element of inclusive education, and Khan, Hashmi, and Khanum (2017) suggested that inclusive education must be incorporated in the training programs of teachers.

According to Murdaca et al., (2018), teachers should be better equipped through their education to take on increased responsibility for ensuring that every student, without exception, has a participative and relevant school experience as well as to expose them to fresh, multifaceted educational models. Universities provide a variety of programmes to aid in teacher training, but one of the most challenging steps is to ensure the efficiency of inclusion programs both at both the national level and global level in order to meet the variety of learning requirements (Forlin et al., 2015; Husebo, 2012; Snyder, 2012). Literature has also emphasized the importance of teacher education in fostering the perspectives of the prospective teachers, their knowledge, and aptitude for inclusion (Massouti, 2019). Teacher training programs assist educators in planning and putting their experience into practice. By supporting their learning process, these developmental activities also assist students in forming enduring and favorable perceptions of inclusion (Flores et al., 2014).

The researcher wanted to see the teachers' attitudes and concerns about inclusive practices in education because their perspectives are vital to the successful implementation of inclusive educational programs. How do the attitudes and concerns of aspiring teachers vary depending on various factors? What demographic variables are predictors of teachers' perceived attitudes for IE? Several studies have been conducted to analyze the concerns and attitudes of in-service teachers, educators, and scholars toward inclusive practices in public and private sectors schools across the globe (Singh, Kumar, & Singh, 2020). Moreover, the attitudes of preservice teachers have also been analyzed in multiple studies carried out by researchers from different parts of the world (Maulida et al., 2020; Nouf et al., 2020; Tuncay, & Kizilaslan, 2022). In-service teachers' concerns and attitudes have also been researched. The purpose of this study, according to the researchers, is to examine preservice teachers' attitudes and concerns in the setting of Pakistan. It will pave the way for further research to find the differences among teachers of various countries.

Objectives of the Study

1. Determine the level of attitudes and concerns that prospective teachers have about inclusive education
2. Examining the views of prospective teachers regarding inclusive education in relation to various demographic factors

Methodology

A quantitative survey-type descriptive study was used. The questionnaire was prepared on having the two subscales; Attitudes towards Inclusive education scale, Concerns regarding inclusive education scale. For the purpose of analysis, mean scores were calculated and further tested, and multiple regression analysis were applied to these scores.

Participants

Participants of the study were (N=191) students enrolled in different teaching training programs at a public sector university in metropolitan city, Lahore. The university provides a variety of courses, some of which are geared toward preparing students for positions as teachers in the future. In order to assess their views and concerns toward inclusion education, we chose participants who planned to pursue careers as teachers in the education sector. Only pre-service instructors were the subject of this study. Of the total pre-service teachers 80% were female (n = 153) and the rest were male (n = 38). 76 (39.8%) of the respondents were being prepared to work in special education while 115 (60.2%) were being prepared to work in general education schools. Majority of the pre service teachers (81.7%) reported that they don't have any disability in family and relations (69.6%). 125 (65.4%) pre service teachers have attended the course on inclusive education. Regarding experience teaching kids with special needs in a regular classroom, 71 (37.2%) of the 120 respondents had such experience, while 120 (62.8%) had none.

Additionally, 56 people (29.3%) had experience teaching students with special needs in segregated classrooms, compared to 135 people (70.7%) who had no such experience

Table 1. *Demographic of the sample*

Variables	Group	F	%
Gender	Male	38	19.9
	Female	153	80.1
Specialization	Education	115	60.2
	Special Education	76	39.8
Disability in Family	Yes	35	18.3
	No	156	81.7
Disability in Relations	Yes	58	30.4
	No	133	69.6
Attended any course on inclusive education	Yes	125	65.4
	No	66	34.6
Teaching special needs kids in a mainstream classroom	Yes	71	37.2
	No	120	62.8
Teaching special needs kids in special classroom	Yes	56	29.3
	No	135	70.7

Instrument

Part I: Demographic Survey

A series of questions were used to gather demographic data on pre-service teachers, including gender, specialization, whether any family members or close relatives had disabilities, whether they had experience working with students who had disabilities in regular classrooms or in segregated settings, and whether they had taken any courses on inclusive education.

Part II: Attitudes regarding Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES)

The responses of students were recorded on ATIES (Wilczenski, 1992). The scale had 16 questions regarding teacher's attitudes towards inclusive education. Response choices consisted of pre-defined options on a 5-point Likert scale.

Part III: Concerns regarding Inclusive Education Scale (CIES)

Concerns regarding Inclusive Education (CIES) scale (Sharma & Desai, 2002) was used with pre-service teachers. While employing a 4-point Likert scale, CIES has 21 responses that include 'not concerned at all', 'A little concerned', 'very concerned', and 'extremely concerned'. Reliability of the scales is .86, .78 respectively.

Using conceptual translation techniques, the survey questionnaire was translated into Urdu (Sperber, 2004). This method involved the use of two different translators, and the compilation of the translations was done by the first author of the manuscript. The study followed the moral guidelines that the institution had approved. A consent form was signed by the head on behalf of the pre-service teachers. Identity details were kept secret.

Findings

Table 2. *Level of pre-service teachers' attitudes and concerns*

Scores	Mean	SD
ATIES	55.7	14.4
CTIES	54.0	11.5

Attitude towards inclusive education scale (ATIES), Concerns towards inclusive education scale (CTIES)

The average total score of pre-service teachers on the ATIES was 55.7, reflecting a generally favorable attitude toward inclusive education. The CTIES (M= 54.0) was given after that.

Pre-service teachers' attitudes towards IE

Participants who have a score on the attitudes subscale that is close to 3 are said to "Agree" with the response statements reflecting their attitudes toward IE. As a result, the pre-service teachers in this study have a generally favorable opinion of IE. Mean item scores for attitudes proposed that pre-service teachers had the highest favorable attitudes on including kids with disabilities having academic achievement two or more years below than other students (M=3.63, SD=1.62) and Cannot move without help (M=3.54, SD=1.46), have difficulty in expressing thoughts verbally (M= 3.72, SD=1.34) , require instruction in daily living tasks and self-care techniques (M= 3.56, SD= 1.57), followed by those students use sign language or communication boards (M=3.53, SD=1.46). They had a less favorable attitude toward teaching pupils who required tailored functional academic programmes in basic reading and math. (M=3.0, SD=1.25) and Unable to read standard print and need to use Braille can be taught in inclusive classrooms (M=3.2, SD=1.45).

Pre-service teachers' concerns about IE

A score on the concern subscale more than 2.6 indicates that participants submitted responses reflecting 'somewhat Agree' statements expressing their concerns about IE. As a result, the pre-service instructors in this study are quite concerned about IE. It indicates that pre-service teachers are most concerned about providing enough time to plan educational programs for students with diverse needs (M=3.05, SD=3.08) , concern about the parents of children without disabilities may not like the idea of placing their children in the same classroom where there are students with disabilities (M=2.82, SD=1.84) followed by concerns about increased workload (M=2.75, SD=0.89), inappropriate infrastructure (M=2.79, SD=1.04), cope with disabled students who do not have adequate self-care skills e.g. students who are not toilet trained (M=2.97, SD=0.91). Pre-service teachers who were less concerned about students with disabilities will not be accepted by those students who are non-disabled students (M=2.47, SD=1.08), stress will be increased (M=2.39, SD=0.97) and least concerned about academic standards of the school will suffer (M=2.43, SD=1.07).

Table 3: *Comparison of the Attitudes and Concerns based on the gender of the teachers*

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	Sig.
ATIES	Female	153	54.46	13.68	189	2.42	.04
	Male	38	60.71	16.33			
CTIES	Female	153	53.83	10.75	189	.515	.01
	Male	38	54.92	14.63			

An independent sample t-test was performed to investigate the interaction of gender and their attitudes and concerns towards inclusive education. It was based on the gender of the teachers, and the results revealed that there is a significant mean score difference between the attitudes (t= 2.42, p= .04) and concerns (t= .515, p= .01) of the teachers based on the gender. The means core of male teachers was higher than the female teachers i.e., ATIES (m= 60.71> 54.46), and CTIES (m= 54.92> 53.83).

Table 4: *Summary of Multiple Regressions for significant variables predicting perceived attitudes towards inclusive education*

Predictor Variables	B	SE	T	P
Gender	6.40	2.64	2.42	.01
Specialization	4.38	2.09	2.08	.03
Disability in Family	.963	2.72	.354	.72
Attended any course on inclusive education	4.67	2.24	2.08	.03
teaching special needs kids in mainstream	.711	2.42	.293	.77

classroom					
teaching special needs kids in special classroom	2.13	2.45	.872	.38	

To ascertain the impact of the scale and find predictor demographic characteristics on the independent variable "Attitudes," a multiple regression analysis was carried out. For the dependent variable "attitudes," a major model has been developed. The entire model's adjusted R square was noted to be 0.051 (SE=14.05), while the predictors of attitudes were determined to be three variables. The strongest contribution was made in the case of the statement regarding 'Attended any course on inclusive education' ($\beta = 4.67$, $p=0.03$) among the significant variables to predict the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards IE. Gender ($\beta = 6.40$, $p=0.01$) and specialization ($\beta = 4.38$, $p=0.03$) were the other significant predictors of the attitudes towards inclusive education.

Discussion

The study sought to better understand how pre-service teachers perceived inclusive education and their concerns about it. The study's findings have important implications for both policy and practice. The results of pre-service teachers' attitudes and concerns concerning IE were examined in this part, as well as the effects of demographic factors on the attitudes and concern scores of those dependent variables.

After examining the mean scores of the two scales, it was discovered that the pre-service teachers who took part in this study had generally favorable attitudes toward IE. The inclusion of students who struggle to express themselves, perform two or more academic years below grade level, and require education in self-help and daily living skills was seen more favorably by pre-service teachers. However, they had the least favorable opinions of visually handicapped students who require an individualized functional academic programme in basic reading and mathematics, which has been seen as a difficult undertaking by pre-service teachers in previous studies. The findings are in agreement with research by Jain (2017), Kalita (2017), Bansal (2018), Chanda and Behra (2018), Paramanik and Barman (2018), and Das et al., (2019). In Kerala et al., (2014) study demonstrated a negative attitude on part of teachers toward inclusive education.

Pre-service teachers expressed that they had higher concerns about shortage of time, disliking of parents of children without disabilities and inappropriate infrastructure of public schools, and increased workload. Other research confirmed these conclusions (Sharma & Desai, 2002; Loreman et al., 2007). These results imply a strong policy suggestion that efforts should be taken to identify pre-service teachers' concerns about IE while they are enrolled in pre-service teacher education courses and to minimize such concerns, which may help to raise pre-service teachers perceived favorable views toward IE.

It is pertinent to say that the Female participants characterized by pre-service teachers, men expressed and demonstrated more supportive attitudes toward IE as compared to their male counterparts. This finding contrasts with that of other studies, which found no significant differences in male and female instructors' attitudes toward inclusive education (Chanda & Behra, 2018; Paramanik & Barman 2018). While the majority of the research indicated that male instructors viewed inclusive education with a more favorable attitude than female teachers (Singh, 2018; Das, et al., 2019). According to (Chavhan, 2013), the female teachers demonstrated a positive attitude as compared to their male counterparts with regard to inclusive education (Chavhan, 2013; Jana & Nanda, 2017).

The results of the current study showed a strong relationship between gender specialization and attendance at any course on inclusive education as predictors of pre-service teachers' views toward inclusive education. The study's findings are consistent with those of Bhakta and Shit (2016) study, which found that teacher preparation programmes increased teachers' awareness of the need for inclusive education. According to several studies teachers who have attended special education courses are more likely to be concerned about and supportive of inclusive education (Bayar & Üstün 2017; Karasu 2019; Ozokçu 2018). Correspondingly, students from other departments had comparatively less favorable

perceptions toward IE as compared to the pre-service special educators who had demonstrated favorable perceptions (Tuncay, & Kizilaslan, 2022; Nouf et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The results of this study have a number of ramifications both worldwide and within the setting of Pakistan. This study suggests that the length of the program is subject to the content covered in the pre-service teacher education programme and it carries more importance. The practical application of the study's findings should enable the development of more confident and upbeat educators who can guarantee education for all students through inclusive education.

Limitations, Further Studies, and Recommendations

It is important to conduct more research on this topic. Investigating variations in teachers' perspectives on inclusion at various grade levels would be valuable. It's probable that varied attitudes among teachers are caused by the responsibilities connected with inclusive practices and/or the special requirements of children with disabilities at different age levels. It is crucial to attempt additional studies to look at many factors that might be connected to instructors' viewpoints on consideration, such as the influence of collective teacher efficacy, efficacy for implementing inclusive practices in the classroom, age, and years of teaching experience.

This study suggests offering pre-service teachers' educational workshops and training to increase their understanding of the notion of inclusion in order to better prepare them for inclusive education. To further improve pre-service teachers' knowledge and skills in the field of inclusion and disability, it is advised that Pakistani universities create courses or specific programmes specifically tailored for "inclusive education." The study was limited by the fact that its design, data collection, and analyses were primarily of a quantitative character. Further research should use a qualitative approach to examine actual knowledge and attitudes regarding inclusive education in light of these constraints.

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Conflict of Interest


Authors have no conflict of interest.


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