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### ATTITUDE OF TEACHERS TOWARDS DELAYED STUDENTS IN MAINSTREAM CLASSROOMS AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL IN PAKISTAN

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#### **ABSTRACT**

After becoming signatory of UNCRPD, inclusive education is a reality for approaching days, however, due to our already weak and socio-religiously confused educational system, teacher as well as parents of delayed students are not ready to accept them in mainstream classrooms. The basic reason of such reluctance is lack of awareness as well as fears of added responsibilities, which may be associated with this major shift in educational methodology. The major component of inclusive education concept revolves around the attitude and perception of teachers, which needs detailed elaboration. In this study, mixed method research (both qualitative and quantitative) was used. The research instrument was developed according to the directions and guidance provided by experts with fourteen items, which was then shared with 100 elementary school teachers belonging from different Federally administered educational institutions in District Okara and their responses were quantified for analysis. Moreover, to obtain clear perspective of the issue, interview of senior teachers from same educational institutions were conducted too. Basing on acquired data, results were finalized which showed reluctance by teachers due to lack of awareness as well as fear of additional responsibilities and expectations without any visible incentive. Moreover, neither required human resources nor infrastructures allow immediate adoption of inclusive schooling system. Thus, gradual approach towards implementation of new concept along with concrete steps by government is found the most viable option for approaching the issue.

## INTRODUCTION

“Inclusion” or “Education in inclusive environments” is defined as a system where students with disabilities are inducted in mainstream educational settings. Today, it is widely believed that such learners can be educated in regular classes with their own age fellows, reaping better results and improved performance. The very concept of inclusive education got impetus due to approval of United Nations convention on “Rights of Persons with Disabilities” according to which all signatories are bound to ensure provision of equal opportunities of education to all citizens. The emergence of inclusive education cannot be understood in isolation without looking back in to history. Unfortunately, persons with disabilities (PWD) were always treated with stigma and considered risk to society and human race. Such Individuals either were eliminated or used as a source of entertainment. The treatment with persons with disabilities (PWDs) can easily be assimilated from Aristotle’s (384 -322 BC) thought as stated by Dunn (2006), “Let there be a law that no deformed child shall live”.

Later, philanthropists felt that it would be better to keep disabled in a custodial care or protected environment. This led to keeping them in asylums, where although they were provided with food and clothes but environments were never of any educational institution. It was in 15th Century that Special schools began to emerge. However, the real change started to occur in year in early nineties, when “League of Nation” adopted “Universal declaration of Human Rights”. Article 26 of “Universal declaration of Human Rights” declares that every individual has a right to sustainable educational system without any differentiation on the basis socio religious beliefs and gender. Since, necessity of educating the disabled was understood and binding of League of Nation forced the governments to provide learning facilities to disabled, hence, a new method acceptable to most of the society members emerged, where; students with special needs were accommodated in specifically categorized schools where their specific disabilities were addressed. Infact, these very practices lead to establishment of now known as “Special Schools”.

According to Kisanji (1999), it was in the last few decades that social scientists, thinkers and educationalist started to question the advantages and disadvantages of having two different educational systems in the society. Hence, the very reason of existence of “Special Schools” or “Special Education Concept” started to dissolve paving way for a better and more comprehensive educational concept that encompasses legal and social cum humanitarian needs of the society. It was at this stage that concept of “Inclusive Education” emerged. United Nations convention on “Rights of People with Disabilities”, which is also known as UNCRPD further strengthened the concept of Inclusiveness in education.

The importance of Special education in Pakistan was identified and is being addressed at policy level since 1959; however, no practical steps were initiated until recent past. Despite being signatory of UNCRPD, Pakistan government is facing a daunting task, as the overall state of education in Pakistan is very poor. According to Human Development Index issued by United Nations for year 2014, Pakistan’s literacy rate is one of the lowest in South Asian countries. Worst is the scenario for education for disabled as even today, in most of rural

areas, disability is considered as a stigma and people with disabilities are treated as second grade citizens. However, in urban areas, due to social pressures, families try their best to keep persons with disabilities in mainstream. Almost every mainstream classroom in urban area does have some children with mild or moderate disabilities but unfortunately, neither teachers nor other students understand the requirements of these delayed students. It is also widely believed that attitude of teachers towards such students are not good or they feel them as burden on institution or classroom. This lack of awareness and will to address the issue is strongly hurting our overall social structure and productivity.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is widely believed that provision of the knowledge and information is called Education. Infact, this process encompasses all factors including easing of learning and gaining knowledge, skills, morals, principles, and customs. Process of education or learning happens under the guidance of educators; however, with advancement in technology the learner can now even educate themselves through various means including web education etc. Special Education and inclusive education are two categories, which are linked to education of student with learning disabilities. According to earlier practices, people with disabilities were considered as a stigma and were treated very differently, until, it was felt that they are equal human and can contribute positively towards the betterment of society. Thus, to make them a beneficial member of society concept of “Special education” was evolved which addresses the specific needs of persons with disabilities.

The inclusive education provides opportunity to students to mix together for healthy participation and learning in a similar environment regardless of physical or mental disabilities. The Emergence of inclusive education can be traced back to 15<sup>th</sup> century when Special schools began to emerge, starting mainly with those with sensory impairments. The first recorded evidence is of Spanish national Pedro Ponce de Leon who is known as “The First Teacher of Deaf”. Later; It was in 1945 that “League of Nations” approved “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”. Thereafter, Nations started looking in to the matter with a new approach. It was only in recent past that concept of practicing two different educational models in same environment was questioned and thus concept of “Special Education” started to crumble. Infact, there is no denial that development occurred in the field of disability studies during last fifty years or so had a very positive and encouraging impact on complete social system making people understand as to how to treat individuals with disabilities and same influenced the techniques being practiced in “Special education” as well as regular mainstream educational models.

In any educational system, fundamental variable is “TEACHER”. Teaching can rightly be termed as an art where output quality is directly proportional input by the teacher in terms of his or her faith, hard work and devotion. Therefore, it is justified to believe that no teaching program can rise beyond the quality of its teachers. It is, therefore, imperative to understand teacher’s attitude and competency as well as willingness for a particular teaching system or method. Hence, with this background it can be easily presumed that the probability of success to inclusive education is dependent greatly on how good mainstream

teachers are qualified or equipped to work in inclusive environments and settings (Akram et al., 2021; Treder 2000). Alongside teachers, another variable is “Attitude”. The origin of word “attitude” can be traced from Latin language where it stands for training to act. This word explains an outward and noticeable posture which determines what each of us will feel, see, hear, think and do. The “Attitude” can be defined as a tendency to react positively or negatively to any situation or thing including person, group of people or any institution. We can distinguish it as positive (values) or negative (prejudice). (Souza, & Marcos, 1997)

In case of educational environments, cognitive, affective and behavioral components appears simultaneously affecting or shaping a teachers’ behavior towards a particular classroom, through a direct and indirect interaction between teacher and social environments as well as institutional environments. Similarly, attitude of teachers have a direct bearing on learning abilities of students. In this regards, Biggs and Moore (1993), believed and propagated that teachers vary in their opinions of students. Some of them believe that pupils are inherently lazy, lack discipline, and must be pushed to work hard. As a result of this belief, they adopt a conventional and autocratic outlook towards students. Whereas, another category of teachers believe that every student is a unique and capable of exercising self-direction and self-control. Resultantly, they adopt a liberal and democratic attitude with every student. In short, it is universally accepted that teacher’s attitude directly influences learning abilities and educational environments of any institution.

Traditionally, teachers use to work in isolation meaning by one teacher to a classroom. Similarly, when special need children joined the educational institutions in early seventies, teaching were practiced in separate classes with their own teachers (Special schools / special education). However, during last couple of decades, these learners have slowly started appearing in mainstream classrooms under the concept of inclusiveness thus cementing the process and concept of “Inclusive education”. This new concept leads to “Cooperative Teaching”

As per Bauwens and Hourcade (1995), cooperative teaching is a concept that defines the responsibilities and desired attitude of teachers as "A method in which common and special education teachers works in a synchronized manner to mutually teach diverse groups of students in integrated educational settings. In such an environment, all educators are simultaneously available in the classroom, seeking joint responsibilities for all processes which are to occur within that setting". Although every individual with special need is unique, yet, there are certain common worries that are linked to the parents of special children that include assurance for availability of desired care and acceptance of their child; generating acceptance in family and social circles; securing future and realigning daily routines and expectations. It has been observed that parents of children with disabilities are more accommodative, sympathetic and resilient as compared to others. They mostly understand challenges involved in education of delayed students and knew that education for a special need person is not a simplified and isolated affair. It requires involvement of complete society especially the motivation and dedication of teachers and determination

of parents. The social environments act like a catalyst in positive and productive development of personalities of delayed students.

Student academic performance means the engagement of a student which he spent during the time and effort that student invest in mutual activities, it is often linked with the achievement of positive student learning outcomes, such as individual student development and critical thinking.

In Pakistan, a very little work has been done in the field of inclusive education due to various reasons including financial limitations and social constraints. At present, very few schools are extending inclusive environment that too under the umbrella of UNESCO or other educational NGOs. Hence, a vacuum exists for working in said field to collect reliable data and statistics for future planning as well as measurement of attitudes of teachers, parents and society. UNESCO took an initiative in year 2003 with a project titled “*ENGAGE*” with an aim to address the problems of easy accessibility and lower participation to quality education by poor and disable community. They tried to experiment by increasing possibilities for accessing quality education and strength that can access quality-learning environments regardless of social segregations. Similarly at Islamabad, a major National level consultative session on Inclusive education was also organized on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2005 that urged governments at Federal, Provincial and District levels as well as education institutions, parents, NGOs and other members of the society to do work on inclusive education. Recently, Punjab government has initiated a pilot project to address the issues of children with “Mild disabilities”. The title of project is “*Punjab Inclusive Education Project*” commonly referred as “PIEP”. The aim and objective of said program is to mainly identify the children suffering with “Mild Disabilities” and ensure provision of equal opportunities to these children for education without experiencing any discriminatory behavior in two districts; Bahawalpur and Muzaffargarh. Such projects can be a good initiative to increase awareness amongst general masses and to address the fears of teachers and managements of inclusive education schools. UNCIEF program titled “Alternate Learning Pathways (ALP)” is also yielding very positive results, where, deprived and disabled individuals are brought in to the loop of educational institutions. Infact, ALP is part of UNICEF’s broader initiative known as SCR or UNICEF Social Cohesion and Resilienceprogramme. Similarly, “*Telenor Open Mind Programme*” offered people with disabilities an on job training and opportunity for employment. Despite all the heartening acts and participation of private sector, a lot is required to be done.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Mix method research (qualitative and quantitative both) was used to carry out the research with an aim to measure the attitudes of mainstream classroom teachers towards the concept of inclusive education and its practical manifestation. Research instrument was shared with target population and results were than analyzed. Parallel to obtaining data through questionnaire, qualitative approach was also adopted by interviewing senior teachers and management thorough unstructured questions for seeking clarity regarding problems being faced as well as challenges perceived in adoption to inclusive schooling system.

### *Population, Sample & Participants*

The target population was teachers of mainstream classes at elementary level in District Okara. Population of the study included 100 volunteer mainstream classroom teachers both male and female from five different public sector schools of Okara District being managed by Federal Government Educational Institutions Directorate (FGEI Directorate). Selection of 100 teachers was made on voluntary basis, however, gender balance was ensured by having 50 male and 50 female respondents.

### *Instrument*

Research instrument was prepared basing upon already carried out research in the field of inclusive education with the assistance and guidance from subject specialists. The items included in the research instrument were primarily related to teachers' attitude and perception regarding inclusive schooling system. The questionnaire was divided into three general categories including basic information, subject inquiry and specific suggestions.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

The data for research was obtained from two means i.e. questionnaire and interviews. The data after collection was analysed through Likert scale method and responses were accordingly grouped basing on percentages. Each section of questionnaire was analysed separately and findings were reached after inclusion of qualitative responses acquired through interviews.

### *Research Ethics*

The data collected was used for research purpose only and was secured personally. The respondents were ensured about the anonymity of the data as well as were requested to respond on voluntary basis. The results obtained from questionnaire and interviews were kept anonymous. The data after finalization was disposed off safely.

## **RESULTS**

**Table 1:** Comparison between Separate and Inclusive Education Systems

Items	Gender	Response				
		SD	D	NS	A	SA
Students with or without Disabilities can get Academic Improvements because of Inclusive Education	M	2	4	0	11	33
	F	1	3	0	12	34
Children who communicate in special ways be educated in special settings	M	7	13	0	13	17
	F	8	12	0	14	16
Inclusion sounds good in theory but doesn't work well in practice.	M	12	8	5	10	15
	F	13	7	5	10	15

Are you in favor of accepting delayed students in regular schools?	M	3	6	2	17	22
	F	4	4	0	19	23

**Table 2:** Perception / Interaction with Students

Items	Gender	Response				
		SD	D	NS	A	SA
Do you feel comfortable working with students with disabilities and their parents?	M	33	10	2	4	1
	F	30	15	0	3	2
As a teacher, do you feel comfortable to teach in inclusive environments?	M	30	10	0	5	5
	F	30	10	5	5	0
Do you agree that mostly teachers have lower expectations from the handicapped students?	M	25	7	3	9	6
	F	25	8	2	10	5

**Table 3:** Effects of Inclusive Education

Items	Gender	Response				
		SD	D	NS	A	SA
Inclusive education is likely to have a positive effect on social & emotional development of delayed students.	M	0	2	5	11	32
	F	1	2	0	13	34
Inclusive education provides opportunities for mutual communication, promoting understanding and accepting individual diversity.	M	6	9	3	8	24
	F	8	8	2	7	25

**Table 4:** Challenges, Environment and Resources

Items	Gender	Response				
		SD	D	NS	A	SA
Sufficient supportive resources & professional pedagogues are available to support inclusive education in regular schools.	M	4	17	8	9	12
	F	2	19	6	15	8

Existing infrastructure can support immediate implementation of UNCRPD	M	30	3	2	10	5
	F	36	5	3	4	2
Regular teachers' instructional effectiveness will be enhanced by having delayed students in regular classes.	M	10	12	7	10	20
	F	15	10	0	10	15
Teaching in inclusive environment is more demanding.	M	5	3	3	30	9
	F	1	2	0	33	14
Trained teacher's attitude towards delayed students is better than untrained teachers.	M	0	0	5	34	11
	F	0	0	0	27	23

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Necessity of inclusive education has been very well established and need no further elaboration after its endorsement by United Nations in the shape of UNCRPD. However, unfortunately, despite being signatory of the convention lot of countries are still not sure about its implementation philosophy and practical manifestation. The reasons vary from region to region and are mostly attached to people's perception coupled with social restrictions and financial constraints.

Pakistan signed the UNCRPD on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2011, authenticating that as nation we accept the inclusive education concept, however, still very less has been done in this field. At present very few educational institutions are openly administering inclusive education, though, almost every mainstream school does have special need children enrolled as a normal student.

Teacher's attitude is a fundamental aspect in an inclusive education environment, therefore, to evaluate education system for delayed students, attitude and perception of teachers towards their training needs detailed investigation. Unfortunately, due to lack of resources and being time-consuming process, no worthwhile work has been undertaken in this regard.

The current study focused upon the attitude of public sector teachers towards inclusive education limiting to the Okara District of Punjab province, Pakistan. The data was collected through a questionnaire from sample of volunteer teachers of both genders i.e. male and female. The results obtained were then processed on Likert scale and following findings have been summarized as per the set objectives:-

#### Comparison between Inclusive and Separate Education systems

- i. Teachers were found in favor of inclusive system and believe that it can be helpful towards educational improvements of the delayed students.



- ii. Majority of teachers' were in favor of inclusive environments for students with special needs, however, a considerable number believes that special needs must be addressed in special ways.
- iii. Teachers were found fearful to adapt to inclusive system due to lack of motivation, limited resources and infrastructure issues.  
Perception / Interaction with Students
  - i. Majority of teachers were found not comfortable while dealing with delayed students and their parents and had reservations regarding teaching in inclusive environments.
  - ii. Majority of teachers have lower expectations from delayed students as compared to normal students.  
Effects of Inclusive education
    - i. Inclusive education will bring positive impact towards social and emotional development of delayed students.
    - ii. Inclusive education provides opportunities for mutual communication, promoting understanding and accepting individual diversity amongst students.  
Challenges, environment and Resources
      - i. Availability of supportive resources & professional pedagogues in regular schools to convert them in inclusive system are still not satisfactory.
      - ii. Existing resources / environments are not supportive of immediate conversion to inclusive system.
  - iii. With delayed students in regular classes' teachers instructional abilities and standards will improve.
  - iv. Teaching in inclusive environments will be more demanding.
  - v. Trained teacher's attitude towards delayed students is better than untrained teachers.  
Miscellaneous aspects
    - i. Government patronage is missing due to which vacuum in policy making and enforcement is missing.
    - ii. Fear of teachers to shifting from separate to inclusive system is basically due to lack of requisite training and knowledge to handle students with special needs.
    - iii. Lack of motivation especially due to added responsibilities without any visible incentive also lower teachers' willingness towards inclusive system despite fact that they believe that inclusive system can bring more healthy changes.
    - iv. Teachers fear apparent decline in displayed performance gauged through current examination system.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Mainstream classroom teachers though agree to benefits of inclusive education but have lower expectations from delayed students (if admitted to inclusive system).
2. Majority of the mainstream classroom teachers think that special children need special attention, whereas, in current regular classroom, teachers may not have time and resources to focus on individual needs of such student.
3. Teachers were found fearful because average classes in our educational environment consist of 35 – 40 students; hence, sparing time to address individual intellectual and physical needs appears to be a daunting task.
4. Trained teachers attitude appears to be encouraging towards delayed students as compared to untrained teachers.

5. Teachers and schools management fears that without introducing complete educational reforms in system, any attempt to shift to full time inclusion will have negative impact.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are few practical recommendations for adoption in our current system: -

1. Government must formulate a clear and comprehensive educational policy integrating inclusive education as per UNCRPD and chalk out a timeframe for its partial and subsequently full adoption.
2. Inclusion be part of all teacher's training activities and shall be added as a special subject for some time in syllabi of all education related courses, thereby, addressing fears of teachers before asking them to teach in inclusive environments.
3. Educational institutions infrastructure and resources be upgraded to accommodate students with special needs.
4. Approach of gradual shifting to inclusive system is adopted, whereby, only part time inclusion is practiced first and depending upon its results further steps be initiated.
5. Incentives be announced for teachers who are willing to work in inclusive environments.
6. Media campaign be launched to create greater awareness amongst all strata of society, thereby, educating parents of delayed students towards their responsibilities.

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