

Teachers' Awareness about Inclusive Education in Punjab: A Descriptive Enquiry

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Abstract

Inclusive education (IE) is part of world agenda and is a relatively new concept for Pakistani teachers. The aim of the study was to explore teachers' level of awareness about inclusive education. A descriptive survey was conducted, and a self-tailored questionnaire was distributed among 37 standalone public secondary schools (1-10 classes). Sample for the study was selected by using multi-method, multi-stage sampling techniques from tehsil Chunian of district Kasur (Punjab). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data. Study revealed that teachers' overall awareness about IE was at moderate level. Their awareness about the importance of implementing IE was at higher level, but their awareness about policies and projects related to IE was at lower level. Surprisingly, 67.8% participants had no knowledge about the term of IE. Almost all the teachers never participated in any workshop/seminar related to IE (99%). while 99.5% never got any training to teach inclusive students. The study recommended that a massive awareness campaign may be launched in schools. Refresher courses or workshops may be conducted to train teachers about the concept and importance of inclusive education and a special and separate policy for IE was suggested to be formulated.

Keywords: inclusive education, teachers' awareness, standalone secondary school, Kasur, cross-sectional survey.

Introduction

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Inclusive education (IE) has its roots in special education. Previously, special students were educated in special education schools (Pingle & Garg, 2015), and special education was considered as supporting element to general education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Historically, adaptation of integrated and inclusive education was the result of Salamanca Statement of 1994 (Dapudong, 2014), and of Dakar Framework of 2000 (Srivastava, DeBoer, & Pijl, 2017). IE has much broader spectrum than special education (Korkmaz, 2011) and integrated education (Dapudong, 2014).

IE is a relatively new approach that is against the typical and traditionally fragmented education systems, which develops different identities by segregating students with respect to their abilities (Abbas & Naz, 2016). IE envisions to eradicate all sorts of discriminations in society to make it socially cohesive and productive one. Philosophy of IE is equity based (Pingle & Garg, 2015), which rejects the establishment of special schools for special children (Thakur & Abbas, 2017). It focuses on downgraded and marginalized students, who belonged to socially disadvantaged groups, low socio-economic background, ethnic minorities, and to group of students with Special Educational Needs (SENs) (Yada, Tolvanen & Savolainen, 2018). It provides an idea of an extended school education system, which is in favour of teaching and serving all learners in a same formal school (Bannister et al., 2018).

IE is based on the concept of equal rights for every individual to participate and enjoy the status of full membership in the school whether they had any disability or not (Korkmaz, 2011). It is about combining special and normal students in general schools irrespective of their abilities and potentials (Zagona, Kurth & MacFarland, 2017). It has also been considered the best and pragmatic approach which supports all students who need it, especially disable students, either their disability is obvious or hidden, severe or mild (Yada et al., 2018).

Schools are the best places for students to develop friendships and learn different social and life skills (Korkmaz, 2011), and IE is the best model through which students with and without disabilities learn and interact with each other (Gaydarov, 2014). It

brings positive changes in socio-economic, ethical, and legal dimensions of mentally and physically handicapped children to shape up their personalities (Thakur & Abbas, 2017). One of the basic aims of education has been regarded by UNESCO (2003) as “turning diversity into a constructive contributory factor of mutual understanding between individuals and groups”, IE may play a key role in this regard. In order to develop a tolerant society, we have to give respect to neglected students' rights, values and traditions so that they may accept diversity, and they can cooperate to live together peacefully (Maria, 2013).

Success of IE depends upon many factors (Kafia, 2014). Teachers' knowledge and adaptability to curricular changes according to students' developmental level are main indicators for the success of IE, and they are expected to have required information and skills used in effective teaching, in classroom management and in behavioral interventions (Sucuoglu, Bakkalogu, Karasu, Demir & Akalin, 2013). Teachers' awareness about inclusive practices is critical as, they are the key persons for its implementation (Bannister et al., 2018). Effectiveness of IE largely depends upon class teachers' knowledge and skills (Korkmaz, 2011), therefore, teachers need to be aware of the policies and principles of IE. To get best results from teachers, it is important to take them on board and to train them with appropriate curricula to equip them with proper pedagogical skills for inclusive students (Maria, 2013). They should be trained and sensitized about its importance, so that, they may help in shaping a tolerant, moderate, and socially cohesive society (Pingle & Garg, 2015). It is evident that teachers, who were not familiar with fundamental principles of IE were reluctant to teach in inclusive environment (Maria, 2013).

Teachers' awareness about IE has been explored by many researchers, internationally and nationally. Srivastava et al. (2017) also found that teachers' knowledge about disabilities and pedagogical skills for IE was low. Zagona et al. (2017) concluded that teachers had lack of knowledge about IE. Maria (2013) also revealed that teachers had very little knowledge about IE, and they were confused between perceptions and teaching practices for IE. Bai and Martin (2015) also reported that respondents showed very

poor knowledge about policies, curriculum and teaching practices for IE.

Literature was evident that teachers were not sufficiently trained, and they did not have adequate knowledge to teach special students (Sucuoglu et al., 2013). Even with positive attitude towards IE, teachers' knowledge and pedagogical skills for IE were very poor (Srivastava et al., 2017). Kantavong, Sujarwanto, Rerkjaree and Budiyanto (2017) also concluded that general teachers had less knowledge to teach special students along with normal ones. Pre-service teachers' awareness about IE was also found at moderate level (Pingle & Garg, 2015). This was why, less qualified teachers had become the hurdle in the implementation of IE (Thakur & Abbas, 2017).

Nationally there is lack of research on the phenomenon under investigation. Only a few researchers explored teachers' awareness about IE. Fazal (2012) found that teachers had poor knowledge of SENs, and they faced problems in managing inclusive students. It was also found that teachers were less motivated to address SENs of students (Thakur & Abbas, 2017). It was also found that older teachers had less awareness about IE (2% from age group 51-55 years), while younger teachers had relatively better awareness about IE (40% from age group 25-30 years).

IE had been successfully implemented in developed countries, but on the other hand, developing and under-developed countries are still facing problems because of the various factors like; lack of funds, lack of policy support, and lack of teachers' knowledge and capacity to manage special students in class (Kafia, 2014). The situation of IE is not good in Pakistan as well (Hameed, 2003). The constitution of Pakistan has guaranteed the equality of right for education through articles, 25-A and 38 of the constitution of Pakistan (Government of Pakistan, 2017), but Pakistan is still struggling to achieve the goals of Education for All (EFA), because a significant number of children are still out of school (Abbas & Naz, 2016). Now, government is taking serious steps for the education of these out of school children, Currently, Federal Government of Pakistan is in the process of developing a New Educational Policy (Government of Pakistan, 2017) with a clear focus on IE and want to increase the enrollment of special and neglected students from 5% to 100% by 2025 (Government of

Pakistan, 2017). National Policy of Persons with disabilities (2002) provided a platform to make an action plan for inclusion, but it is a bitter reality that implementation of IE is still a problem in Pakistan, and most critically, one of the main reasons for this delay is lack of qualified teachers (Thakur & Abbas, 2017).

Teachers are the terminal agents for the implementation and success of any educational programme or policy. Therefore, their role cannot be ignored. Implementer's awareness about a policy is a prerequisite to implement it in letter and spirit. It has been already mentioned that the concept of IE is relatively new for Pakistani teachers and a very few studies have been conducted to explore their awareness about IE (Zagona et al., 2017). The need was felt to explore teachers' awareness about different aspects of IE. This study was part of project "exploring teachers' awareness about inclusive education as predictor to their readiness: attitude as moderator" which was completed for attaining M.Phil. degree. Main objective of the study was to explore teachers' awareness about; the concept of IE, its importance, different policies and movements at national and international level, and issue related to IE. It was hypothesized that there was no significant difference between male and female teachers' awareness about IE, and there was no significant difference between urban and rural teachers' awareness about IE.

Methodology of the Study

Following positivistic school of thought, quantitative approach was used in this study and the research design of the study was descriptive in nature.

Participants

Most of the characteristics of teachers (recruitment policy, selection criteria, trainings, etc.) were typical and similar throughout the province of the Punjab, therefore, for the convenience of data collection, district Kasur was selected as a typical geographical unit from the 36 districts of the province of the Punjab. A sample of all teachers working in standalone public

boys' and girls' secondary schools (which had classes only from 1st to 10th grade) of tehsil Chunain was selected by using multi-method and multi-stage sampling techniques. Only 366 teachers showed their interest and responded to research tool. At first stage district Kasur was selected as typical geographical unit for the convenience of data collection. It has four tehsils (administrative units), from which, tehsil Chunian was selected by random sampling techniques. Double census sampling was used to select all standalone public secondary schools (boys and girls) of Chunian and all the teachers (male and female) teaching in these schools. Participants' demographic information is given under.

Table 1

Demographic information of participants under study (N = 366)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	183	50.0
	Female	183	50.0
Academic qualification	B.A.	45	12.3
	M.A.	300	82.0
	M.Phil.	21	5.7
Professional qualification	B.Ed.	236	64.5
	M.Ed.	130	35.5
	PST/ESE	156	42.6
Designation	EST/SESE	133	36.3
	SST/SSE	77	21.0
Locality of school	Urban	99	27.0
	Rural	267	73.0

There were equal number of male and female respondents who participated in this study, among which an overwhelming majority

of teachers had academic qualification up to master level (82 %) followed by the graduates (12.3 %). Two-third majority (64.5 %) of participants had bachelor's degree (B.Ed.) and remaining had master's degree (M.Ed./M.A. Education) as their professional qualification. From which, 36.3 % were elementary school teachers while primary school teachers (42.6 %) were double than secondary school teachers (21 %), and 73 % participants were from rural locality.

Tools of Research

For the sake of data collection, Teachers' Awareness about Inclusive Education Scale (TAIES) was developed and distributed by researcher himself. It had two parts; first was about demographic information of participants and second was a five-points Likert Scale consisting of 19 items. Eight statements had scale options "strongly disagree (1)" to "strongly agree (5)", while 11 statements had scale options "not at all (1)" to "full extent (5)".

Questionnaire was emailed to 15 national and international university teachers (at least Ph.D.) for expert opinion. Out of those, 10 gave their suggestions and recommendations on research instrument's format, content, language, items relevancy towards study objective, objectivity and suitability of items for measuring the variable. For pilot testing, data were collected from 35 teachers working in secondary schools (who were not the part of the sample). Statements were revised in the light of feedback provided by experts and participants. After piloting, reliability of the scale was measured by using Cronbach's Alpha, and it was 0.90, which was highly acceptable as per defined criteria for the acceptability of the scale 0.70 by Terwee et al. (2007).

Procedure for Data Collection

After taking permission from school administrators, researcher collected data personally from teachers working in secondary school. Informed consent was taken from teachers, they were given the right of withdrawal at any stage of data collection. They were

assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. After distributing questionnaire to participants, follow up was made by mobile texts, calls and personal visits. Questionnaire was distributed to 425 teachers, from which 366 returned and the response rate was 86 %.

Results

To analyses data, both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were utilized. From descriptive statistical techniques, mean, standard deviation, and percentages were used for data analysis. The mean and percentage were defined and interpreted according to the following criteria:

Table 2

Criteria for interpretation of mean and percentage

Criteria for Mean		Criteria for Percentage	
Score	Awareness level	Range	Level of majority
1.00 - 2.49	Lower level	51-60	Majority
2.50 - 3.49	Moderate level	61-70	Significant majority
3.50 and above	High level	71-80	Dominant majority
		81 and above	Overwhelming majority

The above table illustrates that the criteria of mean scores were defined into three levels while that of percentages were defined into four levels. Therefore, the five-points scale was shrinking into three levels; low, moderate and high.

Three general statements were added in first part of the questionnaire to know about teachers' awareness on dichotomous scale ("yes" and "no"). Results of these statements have been given in Table 3. To analyse data about these statements, frequencies and percentages were calculated by using SPSS software version 24.

Table 3

Teachers' awareness and training about IE (N = 366)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
You know about inclusive education.	Yes	118	32.2
	No	248	67.8
You have attended any workshop/ seminar on inclusive education.	Yes	4	1.1
	No	362	98.9
You got any training for teaching inclusive students.	Yes	2	.5
	No	364	99.5

Above table is showing very poor condition for teachers' knowledge, their participation in seminars/workshops on IE and about their training situation to teach inclusive students. First statement revealed that a significant majority of teachers (68 %) was not familiar with the term of inclusive education before being part of this study, and an overwhelming majority of participants (99 %) never attended any workshop/seminar about IE. Last statement revealed that an overwhelming majority of participants (99.5 %) never got any training for teaching inclusive students. Therefore, it was concluded that teachers' awareness and their preparation for IE was very poor.

TAIES has been divided into four sub-factors: (1) Concept of inclusive education, (2) Importance of implementing inclusive education, (3) Policies for IE, and (4) Issues of inclusive education. To analyze respondents' responses, mean scores and standard deviation techniques were utilized. Analysis of TAIES at factor level is shown in following table.

Table 4

Teachers' awareness about inclusive education at factor level (N=366)

Factors	M	S.D.	Level
Concept of inclusive education	2.70	0.77	Moderate
Importance of implementing inclusive education	3.68	0.75	High
National and International policies and projects of inclusive education	2.30	0.99	Lower
Issues of inclusive education	2.50	1.08	Moderate
Teachers' overall awareness about IE	2.79	0.67	Moderate

Above table is representing results for teachers' level of awareness at factor level. Analysis revealed that teachers' overall awareness about IE was at moderate level ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.67$). Their awareness about the concept of IE ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.77$), and about issues related to IE were also at moderate level ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.08$). Interestingly, their awareness about the importance of implementing IE was at higher level ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.75$), and surprisingly their awareness about national and international policies and projects related to IE was at lower level ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.99$).

Difference between Male and Female Teachers' Perceptions

To determine difference between male and female teachers' level of awareness about IE, first hypothesis was designed. An independent sample t-test was used to test this hypothesis at significant level of Alpha, $p = 0.05$.

Table 5

Difference between male and female teachers' awareness about IE (Male = 183, Female 183).

Variable	Gender	Mean	S. D.	t value (df = 366)	p value ($\alpha = 0.05$)
About concept of IE	Male	2.72	0.81	0.46	0.65
	Female	2.68	0.72		
About importance of IE	Male	3.64	0.69	-1.11	0.27
	Female	3.72	0.80		
About policies of IE	Male	2.40	1.06	1.99	0.047
	Female	2.20	0.89		
About issues of IE	Male	2.55	1.10	0.97	0.33
	Female	2.44	1.05		
Overall awareness about IE	Male	2.82	0.70	0.87	0.39
	Female	2.76	0.63		

Analysis revealed that male teachers' overall awareness about IE ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.70$) was slightly better than that of female teachers ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.63$), but not significantly different, $t(366) = 0.87$, $p = 0.39$ at Alpha level of 0.05. It was also revealed that male teachers' awareness about concept of IE, about importance of IE, and about issues of IE was slightly different than that of females, but not significantly different. Importantly, male teachers' awareness about policies of IE ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.06$) was much better than that of female teachers ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.89$), and was significantly different, $t(366) = 1.99$, $p = 0.047$ at Alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, it was concluded that our null hypothesis held true ($M_m = M_f$), but exception was for the case of the factor "policies of IE".

Difference between urban and rural teachers' perceptions

To measure difference between urban and rural teachers' level of awareness about IE, second hypothesis of this study was designed and test by using an independent sample t-test at significance level of 0.05. Results are shown in following table.

Table 6

Difference between urban and rural teachers' awareness about IE (Urban =99, Rural =267)

Variable	Locality	Mean	S. D.	t value (df = 366)	p value ($\alpha = 0.05$)
About concept of IE	Urban	2.62	0.80	1.26	0.21
	Rural	2.73	0.75		
About importance of IE	Urban	3.70	0.81	0.21	0.83
	Rural	3.68	0.73		
About policies of IE	Urban	2.44	1.05	1.61	0.11
	Rural	2.25	0.96		
About issues of IE	Urban	2.74	1.12	2.74	0.01
	Rural	2.40	1.05		
Overall awareness about IE	Urban	2.86	0.69	1.28	0.20
	Rural	2.76	0.66		

Results revealed that urban teachers' overall awareness about IE ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.69$) was slightly better than that of rural teachers (2.76 , $SD = 0.66$), but not significantly different, $t(366) = 1.28$, $p = 0.20$ at Alpha level of 0.05. Similarly, urban teachers' awareness about the concept of IE, about the importance of IE, and about the policies of IE was slightly different but not statistically. Surprisingly, urban teachers' awareness about issues related to IE was ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.12$) much better than that of rural teachers ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.05$), and was significantly different, $t(366) = 2.74$, $p = 0.01$ at Alpha level 0.05. Thus, it was concluded that

there was no significant difference between urban and rural teachers' overall awareness about IE ($M_u = M_r$). Results supported to our second hypothesis, but exception was observed about the fourth factor "issues of IE".

Findings and Discussion

Study revealed that teachers' awareness about IE, their participation in workshops/seminars and in trainings on IE was at very poor level. A significant majority of participants (68 %) were not aware of the term of IE before being part of this study, while an overwhelming majority of participants (99 % & 99.5 %) never attended any workshop/seminar and training about IE respectively. Factor level analysis revealed that teachers' overall awareness about IE, their awareness about the concept of IE, and their awareness about issues related to IE was at moderate level. While their awareness about the importance of implementing IE was at higher level, but their awareness about national and international policies of IE was at lower level. Hypotheses level analysis revealed that male teachers' overall awareness about IE was slightly better than that of female teachers, but not statistically different. It was also found that urban teachers' overall awareness about IE was slightly better than that of rural teachers, but not statistically different.

Study revealed that Pakistani teachers had poor knowledge about IE, only 32 % knew about the term "inclusive education" and only four participants had attended any workshop or seminar about IE. Their awareness about the definition of IE, issues of IE, national and international policies and projects of IE, and towards the importance of IE in society was also found of lower level. It was also revealed that teachers had very little knowledge about IE, and they were found confused between teachers' perception about IE and teaching practices for IE (Maria, 2013). Study results were aligned with results of Bai and Martin, (2015), as it was found that teachers' had poor knowledge about legislations, concept of IE and about teaching practices used in IE.

This study revealed same results and supported Zagona et al., (2017) who also explored that teachers have very little knowledge

about IE and about special learning needs of special children. Only 2 % of teachers of age group 51-55 and 40 % teachers of age group 25-30 had awareness about IE (Abbas & Naz, 2016). There may be different factors for teachers' less knowledge about IE i.e. there is no separate policy for IE in Pakistan, lack of governments' emphasis on IE, lack of research in IE (Zagona et al., 2017), lack of curricula on IE etc. It was also reported that respondents of the study showed very poor knowledge about policies, curriculum and teaching practices for IE (Bai & Martin, 2015). It was also found in this study that teachers' knowledge about IE was also not updated which supported the findings of Kantavong et al. (2017) who explored that teachers don't have required knowledge for IE.

This study revealed same results as Forlin (2013) explored in Western Australia that teachers had concerns about their roles as inclusive teachers. They had concerns not to have sufficient knowledge to identify disabilities and were not aware of required teaching skills for special students. Pingle and Garg (2015) conducted an experimental study and found that pre-service teachers' gained awareness about IE was of moderate level. This study revealed that teachers' awareness about the issues of IE was of moderate level but their awareness about the importance of implementing IE was of high level. Study also revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female teachers' awareness about IE and it was also explored in this study that there was no significant difference between urban and rural teachers' awareness about IE.

Conclusions

To increase awareness about IE, seminars and workshops should be conducted at school level, tehsil level, district level, provisional level and at national level, it will enhance teachers' awareness and attitude towards IE. Vision and importance of IE may be advertised on print and electronic media. To have good knowledge and understanding about IE, it should be part of pre-service teacher education programs.

One limitation of the study was that it focused on public school teachers only, so findings of the study might not be representative

for private school teachers. As data was collected from graduate and postgraduate qualified teachers, therefore, perceptions may differ for other teachers. Only standalone secondary schools were considered to collect data so results may not be applied to standalone primary and middle schools. Data was collected by using questionnaire, so, the perceptions may not be true in spirit due to chance of biasness. Teachers' self-reported responses in questionnaires might not be true therefore, it was another limitation for this study.

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