



## Teacher perceived barriers in implementation of inclusive education: A qualitative study in Kashmir

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### Abstract

Inclusive education is one of the most significant and visible goals of schools because of the rising importance of equity and equal opportunity for all students. It aims to give students with special needs the same social rights as other students through incorporating them into regular school settings. It has been difficult to promote inclusive education, and many factors have contributed to its effective implementation. The success of the inclusion process, and whether learners are included or excluded from the supply and process of educational opportunities, will be mainly determined by teachers. The present study thus aimed to find out the teacher perceived barriers that hinders the successful implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools of Kashmir. The study used a qualitative methodology in collecting and analysing data. The data in this study were examined using interpretive qualitative approach. Infrastructural issues, lack of trained teachers, lack of resources, work load of teachers and inflexible curriculum were found to be the barriers of inclusive education.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, barriers, infrastructure, curriculum inflexibility, resources

### Introduction

Over the past three decades, there has been a growing commitment on a global scale to education for students with special needs in general educational settings. The actions, laws, and policies of the UN that have been put into place in numerous nations have contributed, to this tendency. Since the early 1990s, legislation in several nations has incorporated the new idea of inclusive education. Additionally, it has started to show up in a number of international institutions' declarations and programmes, such as those of the European Commission (2010), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2005), the Council of Europe (2010), and UNESCO itself (2015). Additionally, it was covered by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the United Nations. Delegates from 92 nations, including India, and 25 international organisations attended the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994. All governments were asked by the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education to implement the inclusive education principles as a matter of law or policy (UNESCO, 1994). These initiatives inspired India's decision to embrace the notion of inclusive education to provide students with disabilities access to equal educational opportunities. A regulated approach known as inclusive education creates a learning environment that respects diversity, abilities, and a child's or student's numerous educational needs. Inclusive education is quickly rising in importance as schools prioritise providing all students with fair and equal access to opportunities. It aims to give special needs students the same social rights as other students by integrating them into regular school settings. Students with disabilities and others who struggle with a range of learning issues are being accepted into regular classrooms and curricula. To set up a school system and learning environment to be inclusive

Places that deliver excellent education, a lot of work over many years is required.

It has been difficult to promote inclusive education, and many factors have contributed to its effective implementation. The success of the inclusion process, and whether learners are incorporated into or excluded from the pool and process of learning opportunities, will be mainly determined by teachers. The professional characteristics of teachers, their capacities to be acquired, standards, ambitions, as well as their attitudes and norms that drive teaching practise, need to be carefully considered for them to become leaders and promoters of inclusion (UNESCO 2014). The Education 2030 Framework for Action reiterates the crucial role of teachers by stating that they must be (1) empowered, effectively recruited, well-trained, highly skilled, enthusiastic, and endorsed, and (2) recognised, acknowledged, and capable to respond to the wide range of learners' needs, which include instructional, emotional, developmental, and social needs (Operti, R. 2017) <sup>[1]</sup>. According to the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, to work effectively in inclusive environments, teachers must possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes as well as a specific set of values and beliefs (Borg, *et al.* 2011) <sup>[2]</sup>. Earlier studies have shown that teachers' competence is connected to their attitudes toward students with special needs (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer, *et al.* 2011) <sup>[3, 4]</sup>. Teachers face enormous obstacles because of the diverse student populations, and they generally feel underprepared, which makes them less willing to make accommodations for students with special needs (Blanton *et al.*, 2011) <sup>[5]</sup>. However, neglecting students with Special needs may not only result in decreased learning possibilities but also in social exclusion and stigmatization (Gabel, 2009) <sup>[6]</sup>. In fact, research have shown that both students with and without special needs can benefit significantly from education in

inclusive classrooms. For instance, academic success among children with special needs in inclusive classes was better or on par with that of students in segregated classes (Buysse & Bailey, 1993; Odom, *et al.*, 2011) <sup>[7, 8]</sup> and performed better in terms of acceptability, engagement, and peer connections (Buysse *et al.*, 2002) <sup>[9]</sup>. According to research, it can be difficult to teach a diverse group of students. For different student groups, teachers must come up with a variety of pedagogic strategies. They also need to improve their abilities to offer individualized support, identify students with challenges, and create and implement adaptive learning activities. In this regard, teachers' motivation to carry out their professional responsibilities efficiently, as well as their professional skills are crucial (Brooks & Goldstein, 2008) <sup>[10]</sup>.

Teachers' views toward integration or inclusive education have been the subject of research from decades due to the importance they hold (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Chazan, 1994; de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011) <sup>[11, 12, 13]</sup>. Positive attitudes are one of the fundamental tenets of inclusive education, according to Loreman (2007) <sup>[14]</sup>. Cook *et al.* (2000) <sup>[15]</sup> also view positive attitudes of teachers as a key determinant of the quality of inclusive education. According to Hobbs and Westling (1998) <sup>[16]</sup>, the strategies and processes that effectively guarantee the success of inclusion are made possible and supported by teachers' positive attitudes. According to Van der Veen, Smeets, and Derriks (2010) <sup>[17]</sup> the progress made by special needs pupils in numeracy from year 6 to year 8 was correlated with the teacher's attitude toward including students with special education needs in conventional primary education. Silva and Morgado (2004) <sup>[18]</sup> state that adoptions about what instructional administration approaches to use in the class are based on attitudes. Leatherman and Niemeyer (2005) <sup>[19]</sup> believe it is critical to pinpoint the specific elements of pre-gradual professional development and training for teachers that support the growth of teachers' pro-inclusion attitudes. If effective inclusive educational initiatives are to be created, teacher issues need to be taken into consideration and alleviated to guarantee that inclusive initiatives are implemented effectively; educators have professions that are satisfying and moderately demanding, and students profit from such initiatives (McLeskey *et al.* 2001) <sup>[20]</sup>. The number of students with special needs is huge in India. Despite these large numbers and the work that is going on in the development of inclusive education in India in the last three decades, there has been a dearth of research on teacher perceptions regarding inclusive education. As for as the union territory of Kashmir is concerned, the research on this issue is negligible. Analysis of the theoretical background led us to the conclusion that teachers' perceived barriers are cardinal determinant in improving status of inclusive education. The study thus aims to find out the teachers' perceived barriers that hinders the successful implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools.

## Method

The study employed qualitative method of data collection and interpretation. For the examination of the data in this study, interpretive qualitative methodology was used. According to research, an issue can be understood from the perspective of the people who are experiencing it through written descriptions that can be analysed to identify themes and produce interpretable conclusions.

A semi-structured questionnaire was created based on a thorough examination of the literature and the existing body of knowledge. The method of data collection used was semi-structured interviews because they offer qualitative information that is trustworthy and comparable and give participants the right to express in their own words. The experiences and perceptions of teachers and special/resource teachers in inclusive schools were gathered with the aid of a semi-structured questionnaire.

## Participants

The study has been carried out in Kashmir division. Five Major districts *viz.* Srinagar, Ganderbal, Anantnag, Pulwama, and Baramulla were selected in this regard to represent the central, south, and northern part of Kashmir Province. All schools of these districts which have implemented inclusive education served as sampling units of the study. The teachers, and special/resource teachers associated with these inclusive schools were contacted and served as the respondents.

## Data Analysis

The technique of inductive reasoning, thinking, and conceptualizing was applied in qualitative data analysis. The interviews conducted for this study were taped, and textual transcriptions were completed manually. A constant comparative data analysis method was used to analyse the data. Transcripts and notes from the interviews conducted for the study that were transcribed and then analysed into themes and sub-themes made up most of the data for the current study. A constant comparative data analysis basically entails contrasting the most recent data acquired with older data collected to identify differences and similarities and detect common themes. This led to the formation of a thorough coding system. This means that new data was compared with old categories as categories were continually identified. Various themes evolved, and the similarities were recognized. As the categories emerged, we looked for internal consistency while keeping in mind that they needed to be unique from one another. We had to take note of consistency as we generated the categories. We identified meaning units, arranged them into categories, and then allocated them codes. This was the initial coding level. The second level of coding entailed breaking down the meaning of the first level categories into more understandable themes. The main category was thoroughly associated to other categories through selective coding, and these categories were then built out, improved, and interrelationships were found. When we reached saturation point, we stopped interviewing respondents and we deleted categories that were on the periphery.

## Results and Discussion

The following themes emerged by grouping concepts.

### Lack of Infrastructure

Physical school infrastructure is a prerequisite for inclusive education. Most research participants responded that the main obstacle to adopting inclusive education is infrastructure. Most schools in Kashmir are inaccessible to students with disabilities including the blind and deaf. Teachers who participated in this study's interviews noted that the educational facilities in Kashmir are inaccessible to students with disabilities. The lack of ramps in school buildings, lift facilities, accessible bathrooms, and

accessible transportation are only a few of the infrastructure challenges identified. The facilities in the classrooms are poor, and there is no technology to provide additional assistance to address a specific challenge. Teachers also noted that while government rules recommend that all students attend schools in their communities, certain impaired students may not be enabled to acquire education there. It was claimed that teachers in Kashmir's schools lacked resources like braille equipment and were illiterate in sign language in addition to not being able to read and write braille. The outcomes are in line with earlier studies.

For successful inclusion, school buildings must undergo architectural changes, such as lowering sink and water tap heights, constructing wider corridors and classrooms to accommodate wheelchair access, placing ramps next to stairwells, and increasing the number of lifts in the buildings (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014)<sup>[21]</sup>.

### **Lack of Trained Teachers**

The fruitful execution of inclusive education rests heavily on teachers. Many respondents noted that teachers in general education settings lacked fundamental knowledge about the specialty and emphasised the dearth of training resources available to them. The greatest barrier to implementing inclusive education is teachers who are untrained, reluctant, or unenthusiastic about working with or for children with disabilities. According to Symeonidou and Phtiaka (2009)<sup>[22]</sup>, teachers' perceptions of disability and children with disabilities are based on the medical and charitable models, and teachers need to be supported by the provision of numerous training opportunities and resources since they act as facilitators of inclusion.

A more effective implementation of inclusive learning would place a greater focus on inclusive teaching methods in pre-service preparation classes for every teacher trainee as well as continuous and ongoing in-service development. The goal of the teacher preparation programme should be to adequately prepare aspiring educators in terms of knowledge and abilities, enabling them to interact with and educate a varied range of students in an atmosphere of acceptance. Most teachers are required to reevaluate their own practises, create new classroom roles and expectations regarding students' outcomes, as well as teach in ways they have never taught before, to implement the reform agenda's vision of practises. The achievement of inclusive teaching ultimately rests on teachers' ability to successfully complete the tasks of picking up the abilities and viewpoints supposed by new dreams of inclusion and discarding the practises and views about pupils and teaching that have previously subjugated their proficient careers. Nevertheless, there are not many opportunities or resources for this sort of professional development in our institutions.

### **Curriculum Inflexibility**

Another difficulty to the execution of inclusive teaching was revealed to be rigid curriculum. Lack of curriculum flexibility prevents pupils with unusual needs from studying on par with regular pupils. According to most respondents, there is no special curriculum to meet the varied demands of special students.

The demands of many different types of students cannot be met by the school's current curriculum. The curriculum is often centrally prearranged and strict, having slight possibility for local adjustments or for tutors to explore and use novel methods. To facilitate inclusive education in

schools, a rigor, centralised curriculum must allow for change and flexibility (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2005; Schuelka, 2018)<sup>[23, 24]</sup>. The ability to change the curriculum, the availability of various modes of assessment, and the ability for tutors and pupils to take ownership of the syllabus and learning consequences are all influenced by bureaus of education along with other nationwide educational policies. The literature claims that enhancing the range and depth of outcomes for learning as well as the variety of ways students can accomplish these outcomes will aid in the effective execution of inclusive education. (Saebnes, *et al.*, 2015; Nelson, 2014).<sup>[25, 26]</sup> Furthermore, evidence advocates that personalising learning for every pupil can be quite effective (Rhim & Lancet, 2018; Carpenter *et al.*, 2017)<sup>[27, 28]</sup>.

### **Workload of Teachers**

Classroom overcrowding and an intense workload are two problems that have an international impact on teaching and learning. They lower the standard of instruction and learning. The respondents of this study also expressed dissatisfaction with the excessive workload and huge class sizes as obstacles to adopting inclusive education. Teachers held the opinion that special needs students are not accommodated in ordinary classrooms. They receive no instruction from teachers. Regular teachers just instruct children, but not adequately. After school hours, there are no distinct programmes available for children with special needs. Larger classes with a higher student-teacher ratio are available.

Apparently, overall lack of resources and assistance, as well as the prevalent negative attitudes regarding disability, add to the general lack of understanding towards inclusion (Bornman and Rose, 2010, p. 7)<sup>[29]</sup>. Educational inclusion increases teachers' workload. For inclusive policies to be implemented successfully, teachers must be able to consider students with SEN in regular classes. Some teachers lacked the skills and knowledge necessary to manage a diversity of pupils in one setting without substantially raising their workload and task-related obligations. (Stofile, 2008)<sup>[30]</sup>.

### **Lack of Resources/Teaching Learning Material**

The resources and assets are crucial as they allow those who implement policy to evaluate the depth and scope of the educational process in classrooms. The findings of the present study demonstrated that Kashmir's elementary schools lack the material resources necessary to provide inclusive education for pupils with learning difficulties. Teachers virtually ever use visual aids when working with deaf children. For students who are blind, schools frequently lack Braille slates, Braille sheets, and Braille-Text books.

Lack of physical resources, including teaching aids, makes it difficult to provide inclusive education for students with disabilities. It was revealed that Lack of resources, such as classroom and other amenities, made it difficult for Lesotho to provide inclusive schooling for students with disabilities. (Johnstone and Chapman, 2009)<sup>[31]</sup>. Similar events were reported to have occurred in South Africa, where instructors cited lack of resources as obstacles to providing inclusive education (Eloff and Kgwete, 2007)<sup>[32]</sup>. The word 'resources' includes not only teaching and learning gadgets, but similarly the material and proficiency that instructors have gained through education and experience, as well as the time allotted for instruction. Teaching students with special education needs in inclusive education is different

from regular setup. Students with special needs may need more training time, alternate instruction strategies, and proficient knowledge. Increasing resources or reorganizing those that are currently accessible can achieve this. The classroom accommodates each child's unique requirements rather than expecting students with special needs to fulfil the criteria (Bergsma, 2000)<sup>[33]</sup>.

### Conclusion

It's crucial to keep in mind that India, and particularly Kashmir, are just beginning to conceptualise and execute inclusive education. It is true that the policymakers' concerns about its execution are legitimate, but the objectives of inclusive education cannot be fulfilled unless people, societies, schools, progressive organisations, and the management share responsibility. Teachers play a critical role in progressing inclusive education. Although most of the teachers are passionate about inclusion and philosophically supported the idea, it was also evident that they were worried about all the challenges that stand in the way of effective implementation of inclusive education.

The findings urge reflection among all national stakeholders engaged in the execution of inclusive schooling. To fully understand the reasons behind the challenges revealed, a comprehensive debate of the findings is required. Further investigation is necessary to completely comprehend the obstacles that impede teachers from properly integrating students with disabilities into their classrooms. To address teacher concerns and perceived barriers a consistent and thorough effort from all stakeholders is required. It is only then that the true inclusion imperative can be realized in India.

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