Investigating the Factors Preparing Special Educators for the Implementation of Inclusive Education

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Abstract- The study investigates the readiness of teachers towards inclusion in educational process. It aims to explore the factors that influence special educators' readiness for inclusive education. It pursues quantitative research compiling the relevant data through survey method and questionnaire. It employs descriptive method to analyze the research data. Proportionate random sampling has been used to compile the relevant data. For this purpose, the study collects quantitative data from 195 teachers, belonging to six districts of the Punjab province. The study finds that special education teachers have higher professional readiness toward inclusion as compared to the other factors of the sub-scales which include personal and psychological readiness. The effects of demographic variables and research implications have also been discussed. The study concludes that the professional training of prospective teachers, awareness campaigns and professional development programs are required for the achievement of the mission of inclusive education.

Index Terms- Inclusive Education, Professional Readiness, Psychological Readiness, Special Education teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

This article critically evaluates the readiness of teachers towards inclusion in educational process. Various national and international organizations have recognized and accepted education as a human right (Sector Policy on IE, 2013). The majority of these groups believe that students with special needs should have the same access to a high-quality education as their classmates (UNESCO, 2000). According to the United Nations Guidelines for Inclusion, all children, regardless of their social, emotional, intellectual, linguistic, or any other condition, may be accommodated in schools, and curricula should be modified to meet the requirements of the children (UNESCO, 2005). Inclusion, according to Booth and Ainscow (2011), is defined as participation for all children and adults. As a result, inclusive education can be defined as offering equal chances for students with disabilities to study alongside their classmates in normal educational settings. The education that welcomes all kids by ensuring that instructors, parents, policies, schools, and curricula do not discriminate towards them is called Inclusive education (Save the Children, 2016). It is a continuous process that necessitates a long-term perspective, with the ultimate objective of ensuring that every kid is completely integrated into child-friendly schools and society (UNICEF, 2017). Acceptance, greater academic standards, and the elimination of societal prejudice against people with special needs are some of the benefits of inclusive education (Millian, 2008).

Despite national and international efforts to guarantee that inclusive education policies are adopted, there are still learners in many parts of the world who are taught in segregated, special schools. Few inclusive schools are active in Pakistan's urban areas. In those institutions, the full inclusion model is still not evident (Thakur & Abbas, 2017). As far as accommodation types are concerned, it has been recorded that the curriculum is marginally changed in few inclusive schools in large urban cities of the country, not taking into account the actual requirements of the child.

Training may be imparted to all educators, including special instructors to accommodate impaired students in an inclusive setup. The attitudes, beliefs, and readiness of teachers are crucial in deciding whether inclusive education succeeds or fails (Nishan, 2018). According to Sharma, Chunawala, and Chari (2017), teachers with prior experience with students with special needs expressed concern about being unprepared to deal with inclusive classrooms. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) stated that teachers must believe that all children have the right to belong in regular classes in order to successfully implement inclusive education. Despite the fact that there has been a lot of research on teacher attitudes and readiness, the results vary. According to Monje (2017), studies with disparate outcomes are unsurprising because special education varied by school system.

Teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion model and children with special needs, according to Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, and Tlale (2015), appear to be a major predictor of success. In addition, instructors' attitudes toward students with disabilities and special education in general education classes have been identified as a critical aspect in the implementation of inclusive education on a global scale (Nketsia, Saloviita, & Gyimah, 2016). Salisbury (2006) discovered that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion were largely influenced by their education and academic background. This is corroborated by a study by Lambe and Bones (2006), who found that teachers who did not have formal training for inclusive

education reported a more positive attitude toward inclusion when compared to teachers who received specific training to teach students with special needs. Similarly, Oswald and Swart (2011) discovered that after taking an inclusion course, student teachers' views toward inclusion and overall attitudes toward people with special needs changed. Other research suggests that brief training on inclusion can influence teachers' attitudes (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Ahmmed, Sharma & Deppeler, 2012).

Rigid curriculum, inflexible pedagogy, insufficient knowledge on the part of instructors, and a lack of teacher readiness, training, and resources are all commonly cited reasons for exclusion (Bashir, 2005). Teachers' readiness for inclusion includes psychological readiness, and professional readiness. The focal point of professional preparation is to prepare teachers to impart information, to master and handle technology in pedagogical practices and the awareness of acknowledging social and individual differences, acknowledging the differences in the characteristics of children with different developmental disabilities at the individual level, and readiness to collaborate adroitly. However, psychological readiness incorporates the emotional acknowledgment and acceptance of children with different forms of developmental disabilities. It also includes the readiness and motivation to engage and tackle the various types of issues in the behavior of children, and satisfaction with their pedagogical practices (Mngo & Mngo, 2018).

Indeed, Dapudong (2014) stated that instructors' awareness, attitudes, and skills have been found to have a significant impact on the process and outcome of inclusion. Teachers' understanding and attitudes, according to the author, are extremely valuable to the system because they may resolve any gaps between formally defined education programmes and their actual delivery, in terms of curriculum modification and adjustments appropriate for students with special needs. Some of the key challenges impeding inclusive education are a poor understanding of the concept of inclusive education, negative attitudes toward learners with disabilities, and resistance to change. Teachers are less motivated and committed to inclusive education due to low or no incentives whereas they find inclusive education more exhausting. Moreover, they have concerns about insufficient resources including instructional materials, necessary funding, and specific training required for the successful implementation of inclusive education programmes. All these factors influence the readiness of special education teachers for application of inclusive educational practices (Chaula, 2014).

The purpose of this research was to investigate the teachers' readiness for inclusive education, which is a vital aspect that can either hinder or facilitate the process, as well as to explore the factors that influence special educators' readiness for inclusive education. The conceptual framework as derived from literature is shown in the figure 1:
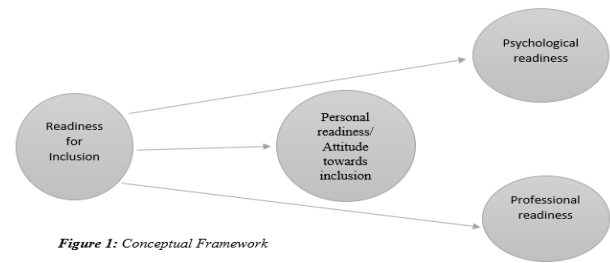

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In the light of the existing situation, the researcher intended to determine the level of special educators' readiness in order to implement inclusive education. It is sought to identify the demographic profile of special school teachers; assess personal, professional and psychological readiness in handling inclusive education; and examine what socio-demographic variables are predictors of readiness of special educators for inclusive education.

III. STUDY MODEL AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The model adopted for this study hypothesized that the more knowledge of special educators has about inclusion, the more positive their attitudes are towards including students with disabilities in regular schools. Additionally, teachers are likely to show readiness to include the children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms when they have more years of teaching experiences.

Hypothesis1

Teachers' professional readiness and teachers' knowledge about inclusive education will both be predictive of teachers' readiness for inclusive education

Hypothesis 2

Teachers who have more knowledge about inclusive education policy and legislations are more likely to display teaching readiness with inclusive classroom practices.

Hypothesis 3

Teachers who have attended any course on inclusive education are more likely to hold a positive attitude and readiness towards inclusive education.

Hypothesis 4

Teachers' years of teaching experience will be a predictor of teachers' readiness for inclusive education.

IV.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method used was descriptive quantitative research. The survey questionnaire was used to examine the readiness of the special education teachers in dealing with inclusive education. Proportionate random sampling was used. 195 teachers from six districts of Punjab were selected as a sample of the study. In order to collect data from special educators working in special schools, six districts (n=36) out of three divisions (n=10), taken randomly were selected. The researcher selected 105 (out of 1047) teachers from district Lahore, 14 (out of 140) teachers from district Kasur, nine out of 82 teachers from district Khushab, 31 (out of 308) teachers from district Sargodha, seven out of 75 teachers from district Mandi Bahuddin, and 26 (out of 264) teachers from district Gujranwala using random sampling technique i.e., 10 % of the Government special education School teachers of Punjab.

The survey questionnaire is divided into four sections:(1) demographic information, (2) personal readiness, (3) professional readiness, and (4) psychological readiness in dealing with inclusive education. Instrument was translated into Urdu by applying independent translation followed by a back-translation. The questionnaire was prepared on a six-point Likert-type scale. Inferential and descriptive statistics were used in this study. The survey questionnaire was validated by four experts in the field and it was pilot tested. Data was collected from 50 teachers who were serving in special schools to assess the reliability of the teacher's questionnaire. Then, the reliability test was performed to verify the measurement of items in the Likert scale using the Cronbach's alpha measurements. It was found that Cronbach's alpha value for the construct was 0.85.

The sample comprised 195 teachers (80 percent female, 20 percent male) from six districts of the Province Punjab, Pakistan. The age of 23.1 percent of participants was between 20 to 30 years, whereas 61.5 percent participants were between 31 to 40 years. 10.3 percent participants were between the age of 41 to 50 years, and 5.1 percent participants were between 51-60 years. The academic qualification level of 3.1 percent participants was B.A/ B.Sc whereas 56.4 percent participants were M.A/ M/SC. 39.5 percent participants were MPhil, and 1.0 percent were PhDs. With regard to the professional qualification, 30.3 percent of the participants were B.Ed degree holders whereas 37.9 percent were M.Ed. Moreover,5.6 percent participants were SLT,1.5 percent were TD and 3.6 percent of the participants was not having any professional qualification. The teaching experience of the 27.7 percent participants was between 1 to 5 years whereas 34.4 percent were between 6-10 years. 23.6 percent participants were between 11 to 15 years while 14.4 percent were between 16 to 20 years. 67.7 percent participants were specialized in the area of Hearing Impairment, whereas 12.8 percent participants were specialized in the area of Mentally Challenged Children. The area of specialization of 9.2 percent was Visual Impairment, whereas 3.1 percent participants were specialized in the area of Physically Handicapped Children. 1.5 percent participants were specialized

in the area of Speech and Language Therapy whereas 5.6 percent participants had other areas of specialization.

V.   VARIABLES

Course on Inclusive Education

In order to assess the importance of attending any course on inclusive education, the participants were asked if they have attended any course on Inclusive Education during teacher training program. 56.4 percent of the participants reported that had not attended any course on Inclusive Education whereas 43.6 percent of the participants had attended the course on inclusive education during their training program.

Knowledge of inclusion policy or legislation

To assess the knowledge of inclusion policy and legislation participants were asked about the level of their knowledge regarding inclusion policy and legislation. 46.2 percent stated 'somewhat', 44.1 percent stated 'to a great extent', and 9.0 percent stated 'very little' in their responses to the statement.

VI.   RESULTS

The following tables present data on readiness for inclusive education measured in terms of personal readiness, professional readiness, and psychological readiness. The mean scores were calculated, and simple linear regression and multiple linear regression analysis were performed.

Table 1

Comparison of Mean Scores of special educators' readiness towards Inclusion on three Subscales

Rank Order	Factors	Mean	SD
1	Professional Readiness	4.53	.863
2	Personal Readiness	4.08	.510
3	Psychological Readiness	3.33	.819

Table 1 demonstrates that special education teachers have higher professional readiness (m= 4.53) toward inclusion as compared to the other factors of the subscales which include personal readiness (m= 4.08) and psychological readiness (m= 3.33).

Table 2

Estimates of the multi-level regression analyses to predict readiness for inclusion of special education teachers (model with predictors)

Variables	β	SE	T	P
Gender	-.083	.094	-1.12	.263
Academic Qualification	.068	.067	.921	.358
Professional Qualification	.018	.033	.247	.805
Experience	.162	.038	2.16	.032

A multiple linear regression was calculated to see the impact of gender, academic qualification, professional qualification and teaching experience on readiness for inclusion of special education teachers. The R2 value of .028 revealed that the predictors explained 2% variance in the outcome variable. The findings revealed that gender (β = -.083, p=.263), academic qualification (β = .068, p= .358), and professional qualification (β = .018, p= .085), have no significant effect on readiness of special education teachers for inclusion whereas teaching experience (β =.162, p=.032), positively predicted the readiness of special education teachers for inclusion.

Table 3

Estimates of the multi-level regression analyses to predict readiness for inclusion of special education teachers (model with predictors).

Variables	β	SE	T	p
Have you attended any course on Inclusive Education during teacher training program?	.20	.121	1.74	.04
Do you think that you have the knowledge of inclusion policy or legislation?	.23	.061	2.79	.01

Table shows the impact of attending any course on inclusive education and knowledge of inclusive policy on readiness for inclusion of special education teachers. The R2 value of .09 revealed that the predictors explained 9 % variance in the outcome variable. The findings revealed that attending any course on inclusive education (β = .20, p=.04), and knowledge of inclusive policy (β = .23, p= .01) positively predicted the readiness of special education teachers for inclusion.

Table 4

Regression Analysis of Predictor (Professional Readiness) for Personal Readiness

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Standard error of estimate	Sig. F change
1	.440	.194	.190	.459	.000

Table shows that professional readiness as independent variables have a direct, positive and meaningful effect on personal readiness as dependent variables. Value of R² (.194) shows that the independent variables explain 19.4 % variance in the dependent variable which is significant (p<0.01). Here we can say that this model explains significant variation in the personal readiness.

VII. DISCUSSION

The study investigated the readiness of special teachers for the inclusion of learners with disabilities. The findings revealed that special education teachers have higher professional readiness toward inclusion as compared to the other factors of the subscales which include personal readiness and psychological readiness. It is identified by Lavrykova, Kuzmenko, Demchenko, Kovalchuk, Slipchuk, & Pilevych, (2020); Arthur-Kelly, Sutherland, Lyons, Macfarlane & Foreman (2013); Malinen, Väisänen & Savolainen (2012) that instructors' psychological and personal readiness for inclusive education in several types of institutions is lacking. Simultaneously, respondents' psychological readiness for inclusive education of people with disabilities at the university level is higher than that for inclusion at the school level. We can conclude that this is related to respondents' lack of knowledge of children with special educational needs and the peculiarities of their studies in inclusive institutions (Myronova, Dokuchyna, Rudzevych, Smotrova, & Platash, 2021). Findings of the present study revealed no significant effect of gender (β = -.083, p=.263), academic qualification (β = .068, p= .358), and professional qualification (β = .018, p= .085) on readiness of special education teachers for inclusion which is consistent with studies that have shown no gender differences in attitudes towards inclusion (Loreman, Forlin, & Sharma, 2007; Sharma, Ee, & Desai, 2003; Kraska, & Boyle,2014). Park and Chitiyo (2011) concluded that there had been inconsistent results regarding gender differences in

teachers' attitudes towards students with disabilities, though a large number of studies showed higher levels of positive attitudes in females compared with males. However, the results of another study conducted in Bangladesh showed that in the government primary schools the attitude of the male teachers towards inclusion of children with disabilities is slightly more positive than the attitudes of their female colleagues (Ahmmed, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2012). Similarly, it demonstrated a contrary finding to the present study which indicated a statistically significant relationship between the educational qualification of the teachers and their attitudes towards inclusion (Ahmmed, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2012).

Nevertheless, teaching experience (β =.162, p=.032) positively predicted the readiness of special education teachers for inclusion. Hryshko and Klevaka (2017) presented the similar findings that teaching experience enhances the competence of teachers for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Therefore, in working with other practitioners, seasoned teachers display greater autonomy for the integration of learners with disabilities and successful use of the learning environment in contrast with inexperienced staff. However, the present findings contradict the findings of another study conducted by Kraska, and Boyle (2014) where no significant differences were found in attitudes of teachers towards inclusion on the basis of teaching experience.

The findings of the study demonstrated that attending any course on inclusive education (β = .20, p=.08) positively predicted the readiness for inclusive education. Similar findings have been suggested in the previous studies. The challenges faced by teachers in the context of inclusive education were noted by Lavrykova, Kuzmenko, Demchenko, Kovalchuk, Slipchuk, & Pilevych (2020), Arthur-Kelly, Sutherland, Lyons, Macfarlane & Foreman (2013); Malinen, Väisänen & Savolainen (2012). It indicates that inclusive education has not yet been the subject of their course study. Rabi, Ghazali, Rohaizad & Zulkefli (2018) investigated some aspects of teachers' readiness for inclusion, and it was proposed that an inclusive education course be offered at the university. Furthermore, research have shown that elements such as prior training, institutional support, and professional development training have an impact on teachers' attitudes and readiness. (Sharma, Chunawala, & Chari, 2017).

The findings of the present study suggest that knowledge of inclusive policy (β = .23, p= .01) positively predicted the readiness of special education teachers for inclusion. In order to create a conducive environment for inclusive educational practices at school level and community level, awareness activities regrading laws and legislations about inclusive education must be arranged at school level and community (Maheshwari & Shapurkar, 2015; Nishan, 2018).

From the findings, it was found that professional readiness has a direct, positive and meaningful effect on personal readiness. Salisbury (2006) explored that academic qualification and education largely influence the attitudes of teachers toward inclusion. The study is validated by another study conducted by Lambe and Bones (2006), which explored that general school teachers who were not imparted any formal training to teach in an inclusive setup demonstrated a more positive attitude toward inclusion as compared to those who were imparted training to teach student with special needs. Likewise, Oswald and Swart (2011) explored that after taking a course on inclusion, views and overall attitudes of prospective teachers underwent change toward inclusion of special need students. Additional research has found that short-term training course on inclusion can improve teachers' attitudes and readiness (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Ahmmed, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2012).

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the factors influencing the special educators in the implementation of the inclusive practices in Pakistan. Major difficulties that impede the successful implementation of inclusive education have been highlighted. Extra-curriculum training aimed at forming the psychological readiness of future educators is required. Professional training of prospective teachers is required for the achievement of the mission of inclusive education. In addition, to encourage good attitudes toward inclusion, initiatives should be taken to support instructors with necessary knowledge, and requisite skills through awareness campaigns and professional development programmes. It is recommended that current policies and legislation regarding inclusive education should be shared with the special educators. Furthermore, it is recommended that policymakers should form collaborations with higher education institutions to promote creative teacher education programs so that all teachers have the requisite knowledge, essential skills, and relevant experience to implement inclusive education.

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