Learners with Special Needs: Problems faced by Students and Teachers at University Level

a Ghazal Khalid Siddiqui, b Syeda Naureen Mumtaz, c Farah Shafiq

a Associate Professor, University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan
   Email: ghazalKhalid@ue.edu.pk
b Assistant Professor, University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan
   Email: syeda.naureen@ue.edu.pk
c Assistant Professor, University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan
   Email: farah.shafiq@ue.edu.pk

ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

Every person in this world has the right to be educated and by every person means every single person, yes, the persons of special needs as well. About 15 percent of the world’s population has suffered various forms of disabilities such as visual and hearing impairment, physically handicapped, or mental retardation. Literature provides pieces of evidence that this area of education is often neglected and therefore this qualitative research aimed to highlight the importance of inclusive education in Pakistan. As there were limited researches available and most of them are based on document analysis so, the 1st purpose of this research was to find out the problems that a teacher faced while teaching a special learner at a higher education level. 2nd to find out the student’s perspective of studying in an inclusive setting at the university level. For this purpose, a phenomenological design was used and both teachers and their students took interviews. Both teachers and students that obstruct teaching and learning in inclusive classrooms identified the following four zones. (a) Insufficient knowledge of teachers and lack of awareness about inclusion in the classroom. (b) Lack of training employed in inclusive or regular classrooms with differently-abled students; (c) Lack of examination to choose the most suitable aids which helpful for the teaching in the inclusive regular classroom. (d). Learning difficulty and psychological issues in the classroom.

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Corresponding author’s email address: ghazalKhalid@ue.edu.pk

1. Introduction

The word ‘disability is controversial hence; it has been defined differently throughout the world. World Health Organization defines disability; it is a multifaceted portent that informs about
the individual's features to live/accommodate in a certain society or in other words mental or physical impairment, which prohibits contributing to society fully (2002). Whereas according to Ahmed and Khan (2011) there are many forms of physical and mental deformity such as blind crippled, deaf, dumb, and mentally retarded. Ahmed, Khan & Nasem, 2011 also reported that in Pakistan's National Policy 2002, an individual who is unfit to get a profitable job or profession because of inability caused by injury, inborn deformity, or disease; and include the mentally or physically retarded, and people with visual or hearing impairments may be considered as a disabled person. About 15 percent of the world population have various forms of disabilities such as visual and hearing impairment, physically handicapped or mentally retarded (Boorse, 2010; Farooq, 2012; Ahmed, Khan & Naseem, 2011). These disabilities have created many problems not only for students but also for all of the stakeholders when it comes to the inclusion of these students in generic classrooms. Therefore, according to Jahan, 2015, educating students having any kind of disability is an emerging issue in academic circles throughout the world. As educating individuals with different learning styles, experiencing disabilities is enduring a revolutionary change therefore, it becomes a challenge for families of learners with special needs, teachers, and administration of higher education and even for the members of society.

Generally, all the public schools are initiating the provision of inclusive education rather than isolated classrooms for disabled children, which are operated regularly. In the recent past, separate classrooms were considered highly suitable but now gradually this trend is being rejected with inclusive education.

Booth (2005) describes that it has been ambiguous to most of the practitioners specifically policymakers and decision-makers in the Education Ministry that what does mean by discrimination in human rights which follows/practiced, generally. Moreover, it is not evident that human rights are accepted and followed during policy-making and planning. In addition to this, Booth highlighted that the term ‘disabled’ mere a description of a single trait of an individual’s personality and a set of discriminatory forces. A disabled person may be a male or female, in all the regions and societies, they exist. Unless, this issue is addressed i.e. gender, caste, socio-economic status/background, religion, the pressure to enroll individuals with disabilities would not achieve significant success. It is imperative if inclusion is accepted largely without any discrimination of race, caste, socioeconomic background, and/or any other characteristic then one’s personality is being accepted as different.

Several types of research have been conducted in the field of inclusive education, for example, Ypinazar & Pagliano, 2004; Miles & Singal, 2010; Mortier et al., 2010; Boer et al., 2011; and Watkins & Ebersold, 2016. However, in a few past years, limited research was conducted for individuals (with special needs) especially at the university level. The literature depicts that there are three sets of perceptions related to inclusive education. 1) No supportive policy identification of possible replacement to improve the provision of inclusive higher education aiming for learners having any sort of disability. 2) Problems related to institutional management, emphasis on physical facilities and conducive environment opportunities and problems they may face, who are with special needs, by improving directing frameworks of institutes, priorities, and organizational norms. Last but not least 3) Problems related to the conducive learning environment. This is related to investigating particular learning difficulties and obstacles i.e. understanding the content and techniques, which are adapted to deliver the content, for the learner and teacher, and highlighting the effective techniques/ways to cope with these situations.
Ainscow et al. (2006) developed the ideas on inclusion which are as follows. i). It is linked with the individuals having any physical impairment and others are described as those with special educational needs. ii). It is a reaction/alternative to the traditional isolated education system. iii). all the individuals being susceptible to segregation. iv). Development of schools as a place for all to learn together. v). Education for all and an effective way to provide access to all children to education. It explains differently and it is factual that inclusive education as a term is not clear but it may inevitably take diverse forms which depend upon the context.

Dyson, 2004 reported that Ainscow et al (2006) describe a typology of thinking related to inclusion categorized as 1). Having special educational needs. 2). A response to disciplinary exclusion. 3). All groups are seen as being vulnerable to exclusion. 4). Developing the school for all. 5). As ‘Education for All’. 6). A principled approach to education and society, In essence, inclusion is the elimination of segregated/isolated classrooms in the education system and from societies and being wary of fears to equal opportunity to all.

Students with disabilities are facing varied problems in developing countries including Pakistan (Hickman, 2000). According to National Commission for Child Welfare and Development 2005, although the government has launched various programs for the welfare of special students, the provision of facilities to this relegated section of the society is still not a top agenda. According to Singal, 2015, although the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill, has been introduced as per Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan 1973, the Act does not contain any particular provision for students with special needs. These students are those sections of society that are facing societal judgment, disgrace, stigma, and have limited access to quality education (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2014).

Tinklin, Riddell &Wilson, 2004 reported that according to Hussain. S, et al. 2020 people with disabilities justify special support in learning, both at policy and practical levels. According to Vickerman & Blundell, 2010 the provision of opportunities on an equal basis to learners with disabilities has remained a distant dream in Pakistan. Learners with disabilities face extreme challenges to fulfill their educational needs (Holloway, 2001). Shah, 2007 reported that educational institutions need effective and appropriate measures in the form of provision of resources and capacity building to cope with the education of the disabled population, rather than sympathies extended to them.

The Rights of Persons with Disability has been complied with by Pakistan to determine the rights of individuals having disabilities including the right to education. In association with this, Pakistan acceded to the “World Conference of Education for All” (UNESCO, 1990), Salamanca Declaration’ (UNESCO, 1994), and the 'Dakar Framework for Action of Education for All' (UNICEF, 2004). In addition to that Pakistan has embraced the principle of accessibility in the “Special Citizens Act 2008”. The Special Citizen Bill 2015 which is currently in a compiling phase, aspires to assure the accessibility of public places and transportation friendly to the special persons. According to the Act, all public transport should have seats specified for the disabled, and all buildings – public and private – should be easily accessible to them. The progress on the Act towards the facilitation of individuals with disabilities is very little and insignificant in both private and public sectors (Ahmed & Khan, 2011; Lewis, 2004).

Basic education is vital for job creation, political empowerment, and nationwide growth.
(Jameel, 2011). Through this, we may produce a talented workforce for national development. Moreover, it provides demoted communities with prospects by preparing them with access to quality education (Azad, 2008). The policies at the higher education level are aimed to be focused on protecting the rights of special persons (Hardman, & Dawson, 2008). Although Pakistan has introduced several programs for achieving the target of “Education for All” but the goal will remain intangible without including students with disabilities. As part of governmental efforts, the higher education institutions of Pakistan have encompassed various measures for educating people about disabilities. For instance, universities, “Karachi University, Allama Iqbal Open University”, and “University of Education” offer degrees and certificates in special education (Akram & Bashir, 2014).

Policies were formed for the introduction of all-encompassing education for learners with disabilities in Pakistan. National Education Policies 1998 and ‘National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2000’ are notable examples of the provision of education to students with disabilities. Besides, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has framed policies for all-encompassing education at the university level (Hameed, 2008). The basic purpose of these policies is to make sure that learners with special needs are offered a healthy and friendly environment at higher levels of education.

In this connection, the Higher Education Department, Government of Punjab, has notified facilities for the students with disabilities and has asked the universities to announce reservation of at least one seat in every program such as BS, MS/MPhil, and Ph.D. admissions. Besides measures at the governmental and institutional level, the teachers at the university level lack in-service training to meet the challenges of wide-ranging education at the university level (Mahmoud, Emam, & Mohamed, 2011). As the problems faced by this special segment of society are of varied nature, therefore, the teacher has to accommodate behavior and show patience to answer their questions and adapt with the pace of the students while delivering lectures (Behlol, 2011). Bartolo held that the realization of inclusive education rests on teachers' preparation as well as the provision of a favorable environment to the students in educational institutions. Such students face an additional burden as they must accept an environment for education that is not appropriate for them (Tinklin & Hall, 1999; Rieser, 2012). In Pakistan, the Higher Education Institutions lack adequate infrastructure, trained faculty, clinical services, and proper learning material which add to the problems of these vulnerable students and lead to their exclusion from the mainstream education system (Yasmeen, Minto & Khan, 2010). Inclusive education demands classroom space, the design of the classroom according to the needs of the learners with special needs, lighting arrangements, and teaching methods (Safder, Akhtar, Fatima, & Malik 2012). The teaching methodology is very important in an inclusive environment at higher education institutions (UNESCO, 2009).

In Pakistan, students with disabilities face various problems in higher educational institutions, including inappropriate curriculum, learning difficulties, defective methods, and unavailability of equipment that badly affects their performance in regular and/or inclusion setup (Bano, Akhter, & Anjum, 2013). Similarly, the students with sight problems face difficulty in reading the whiteboard and cannot take part in discussions in the class. Also, some of the teachers do not allow students to record their lectures on audio recorders which creates problems for the students to follow lectures (Fuller, Healey, Bradley, & Hall, 2004). Moreover, the attitude of faculty members towards these students is also vital for the success of inclusive education in universities (Rao, 2004). According to Idrees and Ilyas (2012), these students with disabilities face extreme conditions due to the negative attitude of the public and the social stigma attached to disability. Besides, the attitude of
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teachers and normal classmates is often negative towards students with disabilities at university (Zakaryya, 1995; Mittler, 2012). However, the degree of rejection of PWDs depends on the type of disability and gender. According to Groce (2004), it is admitted worldwide that the greatest hurdle to learners with disabilities is the prejudices, stigma, and bias (Despouy, 1991). Inequity, based on gender discrimination, is observed in societies, where boys are given more preference than girls. As a result, investment in education for girls is much less than for boys. In addition to these problems, learners with disabilities face accessibility problems, as well as a lack of assistive devices. Accessibility to educational institutions is very important for learners with disabilities (Rimmerman & AratenBergman, 2005). Low enrolment and high dropout rates in HEIs are due to the lack of accessibility to institutions of tertiary education (Johnson, 2006). Without accessible buildings, SWDs cannot achieve the goals of education (UNESCO, 2015). Assistive devices are the basis for the mobility of such students. Services for such students mean those physical and human resource arrangements that lead to the integration and addition of learners with unusual requirements (Groce, 2004). In universities of Punjab, assistive devices like ramps, lifts, wheelchairs are required for reaching classrooms, libraries, and administrative offices (Hamad, 2001). These universities lack space for the movement of students with wheelchairs in the university. Furthermore, there are no physiotherapy services, which add to the problems faced by this vulnerable section of society (Idrees & Ilyas, 2012).

Brant (2011), in literature the first group of researchers from Norway highlighted the experiences of special students regarding policy goals of inclusive education and the problems while executing it. Conclusively, it was informed that inclusive policy has a great impact upon individuals with special needs and these efforts must be encouraged in the future to provide students with constant support and guidance in institutions. Further, it could not have a significant impact, if inclusive higher education policy works as a separate entity. In correspondence to this, Mutanga and Walker (2015) proposed effective methods to inclusive higher education policy. They highlighted that irrespective of the implementation of policy learners with special needs still face certain difficulties to continue their education. Moreover, in most of the research studies, a modified inclusive policy framework was recommended to direct higher education institutions for the sustenance of students with disabilities and/or special needs (Ramaahlo et al., 2018).

Fuller et al. (2004) highlighted that numerous obstacles prohibit access and participation of individuals with special needs, i.e. limited tutors, supplementary services, residence, operations, and logistics. The perceptions of the students revealed that through the provision of physical facilities and value-driven techniques, inclusive education can be ensured. In addition to this, it was also suggested that in future the research studies must be conducted to know more about institutional beliefs and norms to promote inclusive education at higher-level studies. Hanafin et al. (2007) not only presented the overall structural aspects of transiting to higher education but also highlighted the certain constraining characteristics which prohibit the education of special students. In pursuance with special needs students, the insufficient enrollment to higher education was also detected with a suggestion that mutual understanding must be developed among students. Further, Hughes et al. (2016) investigated that several students are in chronic disease, it is essential to learn about their needs and make certain improvements in the process which will ultimately impact in improving the higher education environment.

Ryan and Struhs (2004) identified the students having physical and/or mental impairment and investigated their perceptions towards higher education both in general and specific research
fields. In addition, Savvidou (2011) consolidated the responses of the teaching staff regarding their efforts to teach the English Language to students having physical and mental difficulties. In 2011, Kochung highlighted more obstacles that hinder a conducive learning environment about utilizing suitable teaching methods used by a teacher/facilitator, deleterious comments from staff or colleagues, and the traditional result-oriented examinations among others. Kioko and Makoelle (2014) also highlighted the experiences of special students and their difficulties in completing higher education. This study explored that there is a need to revisit the traditional examination system which is a prevalent barrier in teaching and learning in inclusive education. Morina (2017), explains that perpetual consciousness reading the promotion of inclusive higher education has removed the direct structural obstacles, higher education is unable to eradicate the problems which prohibit inclusive curricula, formal teaching, and examination techniques, all these stops maximum engagement of special students. Furthermore, the studies also emphasized the significance of executing an inclusive curriculum to promote justifiable “inclusion” in higher education.

As previously stated, students in need of special education have physical challenges, limited access to facilities, inadequate supervision, or other challenges linked with a tough curriculum, substandard instruction, and evaluation methodologies. The literature has established that we face a variety of university hurdles. The existing literature is dispersed, preventing scholars from doing research that can clearly explain and influence the current status of students with disabilities. Furthermore, Kioko and Makoelle (2014) addressed complex efforts in the existing literature to address the concept of inclusive education at the higher educational level. According to them a diversified, long-term strategy to "rapid solutions" is required to fully induce special students in higher education institutions (Moria, 2017). As a result, this study fills a gap in the literature by focusing on the question that what university teachers and special learners feel about inclusive education at the higher educational level. What are their experiences regarding inclusive education? The gap this research question focuses on is that although it is the ultimate role of the teacher to carry out the teaching in inclusive classrooms, however, the literature does not provide information that to how a university teacher feels about their inclusive classroom and their experiences regarding inclusive education. Therefore, this study examines the assistance afforded to the learners with infirmities as well as their teachers in higher education institutions of Lahore Pakistan. The study adds to the current bulk of knowledge on infirmity and helps understand the difficulties faced by learners with disabilities and their teachers in the universities of Lahore (Pakistan). The study is beneficial for nationwide planning, as well as authorities who are supposed to work with learners with disabilities.

2. Methods and Procedures

A phenomenological design of qualitative research was used to examine the experiences and perceptions of university teachers regarding the inclusion of learners with special needs into the general classroom. The study was comprised of six public university teachers, the researchers interviewed them by using semi-structured interviews. These interviews allowed the researchers to understand the phenomena gathered and provide recommendations for the university teachers with inclusion practices at the university level. Flynn & Korcuska, (2018), stated that A phenomenological design allows the researchers to examine experienced phenomena of the participants. Phenomenology is the study of a particular subject and, it involves the utilization of language to convey the purposeful objects of involvement and individual's interpretation of an incident to produce a subjective vision (Smith, Jarman & Osborn 1999; Creswell & Poth, 2016).
2.1 Participants and Sampling

The participants were selected with the help of a non-probability purposeful sampling technique. The purpose was of this technique is Yildirim & Simsek, (2013) stated that to construct a small moderately sample as well as to reveal the diversity of persons who would be present in the problem. From this outlook, 6 teachers working in different public universities of the city of Lahore as well as their students from different programs such as Postgraduate, undergraduate, and Ph.D. Programs have been carefully chosen as well as included in the research study. The purpose of this sample in the study is to present alike as well as dissimilar perspectives of teachers who are working in different kinds of Universities settings and having different professional experiences with different students.

2.2 Data collection

The researchers ensuring the guidance of Smith & Osborn (2008), used semi-structured interviews to help informal conversation. The interviews of participants were taken during the academic time of the year in university because the experiences of teachers would be flawless besides more reachable. So, before taking the formal interview for the study, the questions of the interview were tested to decide their appropriateness in a pilot study. For the piloting of the instrument, two university teachers, as well as two students, were interviewed they were agreed with the participation in the study. The questions were asked and their responses confirmed that the data attained facilitated the determination of the practicality of the research study. Therefore, modifications were not required for the interview questions. The teachers involved in the pilot study were exclusive of the results of the study. The sample was comprised of six university teachers and six university students. Interviews were transcribed word to word, as well as the interviewers took notes from the interviewee during the interviews to support the analysis. After the data collection, the researchers applied interpretative phenomenological analysis to evaluate the data find out the common themes crosswise the interviews. Exploration of the contained interpretation and revising and color-coding each transcription text, find out mutual words as well as themes. The notes and recordings were organized and then coded so that they would be aligned to the themes. A similar procedure was accomplished for all interviews in the research study. There emerged several themes. Then, an analysis in which the researchers construct a list of main themes. These themes were developed into the teachers’ experiences a conceptual picture regarding their practices in the regular classroom.

Next, the researchers have used the NVIVO software for data analysis. Explicitly, this software is considered to analyze audio and video substantial and transliterate written words as well sentences. These themes created from using the software covered the theme that was revealed through manual coding procedures. A validity supposition was that every member was providing honest responses to the questions which were presented in the study. To raise the rationality of the research, threats of partiality, as well as pre-existing infer were diminished. Therefore, to confirm the accurateness as well as establish the generality of themes, the members’ answers, the choice to offer feedback from members was given. However, no feedback was given to the respondents; every member was provided the opportunity to examine their transcription to check for correctness. In the study, triangulation was applied to offer a multidimensional perception of the information. Therefore, triangulation involved rereading the notes taken through interviews as well the transcriptions, and the coding and themes of dissimilar words applied to the transcriptions of the text of the interviews.
3. Results

The study aimed to get information that would be vivid as well as interpretive. The questions of the interviews were used to discourse the main exploration of the study questions: How university teachers do feel regarding their experiences with students’ disabilities in their inclusive classroom? The teachers and students were provided an account of an explanation of their experiences and feelings towards inclusion. The themes from frequency analysis occurred from primary responses, teachers, and students’ words. These themes were determined by the word occurrence by the members in the interview. Although the overall theme was determined from five to eight of the partakers. Then, sub-themes were specified from two to three members identified the similar themes. The four emerged themes from the interview are as follows

3.1 Themes 1: Perception of teachers about teaching of special students;

The teacher’s participants were asked to share their perspectives of teaching special students with learning disabilities. A participant whereas involved her first impression regarding the teaching of students with disabilities she said, "It does not be feasible as well as practical to teach students with disabilities in the common classroom environment" as well another teacher member called it a "thought-provoking task". An alike response was given by way of another member she belonged to a public university, "A challenging task at first, to be honest". The appearance of members, as well as their observation of teaching special students with learning disabilities, suggests that Pakistan is at par with other developing countries, it lacks the planning of utilizing teaching special students with learning disabilities in teaching practices. As the teachers participants of the research study teach at higher level institutions in Pakistan, therefore, their surprising observation of teaching special students with learning disabilities in their pedagogical practices. Regardless of claims as well as an investment of an enormous budget, Pakistani universities could not include teachers in teaching special students with learning disabilities in their pedagogical practices. Therefore, with a deplorable as well as unpleasant impression by the faculty members, they considered it an extra responsibility separately from their traditional roles.

3.2 Theme Two: Teaching Experience of students with disabilities

At the higher education level, universities should adopt a flexible method of teaching special students in the regular classroom. Yet, the experience of the teachers in Pakistan described that still traditional strategies of teaching are trailed. The interviews with the teacher’s participants emphasized the real-life experience of instructors, as well as they, mentioned several obstacles, that they faced while teaching special students with learning disabilities in the regular classroom. According to the members of this study, that not all the institutions in the sample of this research were able to guide, train or offer a proper training manual to the teaching faculty members. So there is a need to provide the facilities to the teachers which helpful for the students to teach in their regular classroom such as to provide the facility of technology.

3.3 Theme Three: training affects attitudes towards teaching.

Five out of six teachers described that their comfort level was pretentious by the level of training they got in the regular classroom. Their level of comfort is pretentious in their teaching as well as attitude. The teacher members described that teaching is affected by the teacher’s attitude; Additionally, the classroom is affected by the learner attitudes as well. The members mostly agreed that educators perform better when they feel relaxed while performing their responsibilities. They will not be operative once they feel uncomfortable. However, all five members expressed that extra training would be helpful: I like some refresher courses.... I like some training. I think I have
prerequisite training. Thus, when the teachers have the training to teach in an inclusive environment when they would be able to guide them, with proper pieces of training to the students. so universities should provide training to the teachers as well as students so they perform better in an inclusive environment.

3.4 Theme Four learning difficulty and Psychological issues in the classroom

Five out of the six teacher’s participants described that the students felt Learning difficulty and psychological issues of students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom. A curriculum has to be suitable into explicit hours in the classroom, overcrowded, and short pauses restrict the amount of time consumed teachers need to good communicate with learners. Despite this fact that the technique of communication is diverse for all students. When the teachers have students with a special need they need to teach them with the support of the technology and the audio-visual aids. otherwise the teacher's participants reported that there arise psychological issues which affect all the students learning and they consider themselves inferior to other students so there is need to build the teachers relationships with the students so that to cope them on their issues which evolve in the classroom

4. Conclusion

This phenomenological research study’s findings provide an understanding of the experiences of teachers as well as perspectives regarding disabilities of learners in the regular classroom. They both recognized four zones that obstruct their capability to efficiently teach in a mixed ability classroom and the regular classroom. (a) Insufficient knowledge of teachers and lack of awareness about inclusion in the classroom. (b) Lack of training employed in inclusive or regular classrooms with differently-abled students; (c) Lack of examination to choose the most suitable aids which helpful for the teaching in the inclusive regular classroom. (d). Learning difficulty and psychological issues in the classroom. These themes can be utilized to improve teaching practices for the inclusion of the teaching regular classroom. Uncertainty applied, everyone will be benefited: students, as per their learning will be improved by it; educators as it will improve their teaching and efficiency in the classroom and parents, as their students will more likely to have a positive environment in the university. It will provide them an opportunity to learn from each other at the university level.

5. Recommendations and Future Implications

In the light of the findings, the following are the recommendations of this study.

1. The government should provide training to the teachers at the university level so that they can teach their special students in a better way.
2. The government should be provided the facilities in the higher educational institutions.
3. Quantitative studies can be framed as additional research that could be generalized to a larger population in higher education systems.
4. Studies with larger and representative samples would be welcomed as there is a scope to explore more in this field.
5. Comparative studies that cover a range of contexts can offer a bigger picture of the issue in the global scenario.
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