



Inclusive Education and Rehabilitation of Students with Neurological and Developmental Disabilities: A Case of Pakistani Schools- Community Collaboration

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ABSTRACT

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The study was carried out to explore the nature of collaboration between the schools of students with neurological and developmental disabilities (SWNDDs) and the community institutions including family, health, general education, and social welfare. The study is carried out through a quantitative survey. The population of the study was teachers, and the parents of students with neurological and developmental disabilities studying in different schools in Punjab. A total number of 100 teachers (both male and female) and 31 parents (Mothers & fathers) were selected through a simple random sampling technique. Two structured questionnaires, one for teachers and one for parents, were used to collect the data. Each questionnaire consisted of two sections; demographic information and close-ended statements. The validity of the questionnaires was estimated from experts in special education. The reliability of the questionnaires was .83 and .80 (Cronbach's Alpha). The data analysis shows that schools had a low level of collaboration with health and social welfare departments but a moderate level of collaboration with regular education and families of students with NDDs. The need for strong and effective school-community collaboration for the welfare and uplift of students with neurological and developmental disabilities and their parents is recommended.

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1. Introduction

Neurological and developmental disabilities or Neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs) are a group of disorders that arise during the developmental period of an individual, before adulthood, and happen because of less growth of the central nervous system (Cole & Aravamathan, 2023). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V) intellectual, speech & language, autism, attention deficit hyperactivity, learning disability, and motor disabilities, etc. are included in neurological and developmental disabilities. These children face significant problems in language and learning, motor skills, behaviour, memory, motor skills or other neurological skills (Al-Worafi, 2023). Rehabilitation is an important component of primary health care strategy because it provides prevention and cure for students with Neurological and developmental disability. Education with good excellence provides social and economic flexibility to the down-grounded students of society (Mpofu, 2022). The irony of fate is that in our society quality education is not accessible for all. Affluent parents have access to schools and other resources, therefore, their children get fame and names quickly but on the other side poor parents have no access to these things and thus our economic division has been created (Hands, 2023). The excellence of education has a remarkable impact on the career and income level of children with or without any disability. Research suggests that education of good quality is enough to remarkably enhance educational achievement among students from low-income or

underprivileged families. This is important for those schools using a community-focused approach because they have carefully addressed the effects of absence and other out-of-school threats that lead students with disabilities toward inequalities in learning and achievement. Educating and rehabilitating students with neurological and developmental disabilities is not an easy task and requires the collaboration of multiple disciplines (Hands, 2023). Schools that collaborate with the community at an advanced level provide equal learning opportunities for students with the help of additional strategies that solve the needs of the whole child (Lindner, Schwab, Emara, & Avramidis, 2023). In Pakistan, students with developmental and neurological disabilities are deprived of inclusive educational opportunities and rehabilitation services due to poverty and a lack of community awareness (Hanif, Zameer, Waheed, Zaidi, Ahmed, & Choudary, 2023). The community has many resources that are not as active as they ought to be for the rehabilitation of students with disabilities (Ahmed, Shaikh, Riaz, Midhet, & Zia, 2023). The main purpose of the study was to explore the nature and types of collaborations established by the special schools catering the educational needs and providing rehabilitative services to the students with developmental and neurological disabilities in the public schools of Punjab, Pakistan

2. Literature Review

The current study focuses on the efforts of schools in collaboration with the community to include and rehabilitate students with neurological and developmental disabilities. Inclusive education is the placement and inclusion of all types of students into regular school settings regardless of discrimination based on personal characteristics, social, cultural or racial background. Neurological disability is characterized due to its impacts on the nervous system, such as autism, ADHD, or cerebral palsy. In contrast, developmental disabilities encompass a range of conditions that typically emerge during infancy or childhood, affecting physical, cognitive, or emotional development. Many of the Previous research studies have discussed the importance of collaboration between schools and other community institutes to promote inclusive education effectively, particularly for students with Neurological disabilities. The studies have underlined the collaboration among educationists, parents, healthcare professionals, and policymakers to create supportive environments for the rehabilitation of students with Neurological and Developmental disabilities. The collaborating agencies can extend their roles to craft educational settings tailored to meet the learning needs of children with neurological and developmental disabilities to ensure their full participation and inclusion in regular schools. The purpose of inclusive education in Pakistan is aligned with the global agenda i.e., provides a fair and equal chance of learning to students with all types of diversity, including students with various disabilities. Even though there are great challenges to acquiring the goal of inclusive education, the state has made many efforts to flourish inclusive education in the country. Certain national initiatives including policies, programs, and initiatives have been undertaken since 2011 till now.

2.1. Types of Neurological and Developmental Disabilities

According to the literature, certain types of neurological and developmental. These disabilities are presented in the following paragraphs in a crispy form.

2.2. Intellectual Disability

Intellectual disability is described as a sub-average overall intelligence that causes a deficit in the adaptive behaviour of such persons. This condition is established during the developmental period. The condition badly affects a child's educational performance. The condition can be verified further with the following three factors: a test score of IQ around 70 or above, substantial losses in two or more adaptive skill areas and the manifestation period before the age of 18.

2.2.1. Epilepsy

Epilepsy is described as a severe brain condition in which neurons, in the brain sometimes send the wrong signals to the body and cause seizures. Neurons usually produce electrical and chemical signals that act on other neurons, organs, and muscles to produce human thoughts, feelings, and actions. Epilepsy is also known as abnormal electrical activity of the brain.

2.2.2. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulties in social relationships and dealings, communication, and behaviour (repetitive). These students need proper educational and training programmes for their rehabilitation and inclusion. Due to

the communication problems and repetitive behaviour patterns, they face huge problems in inclusive education in our local schools.

2.2.3. Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder accompanied by signs of lack of attention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. Usually, these three personality traits significantly impact the education and rehabilitation procedures of students with ADHD. Numerous research studies have explored the presence of anxiety and restlessness among such children that impact their ability to manage routine life chores (Christoforou, Theodorou, Fella, & Papadopoulos, 2023; Garcha & Smith, 2023).

2.2.4. Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)

Specific Learning Disabilities is an umbrella term used to define certain conditions including problems in reading, writing, listening, speaking and mathematics. The conditions of learning difficulty differ from one person to another person. Some students can have problem in one area while other students may have in more areas (Yakut & Akgul, 2024; Yaman, 2023). Common types of learning disabilities are dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia.

2.2.5. Communication Disabilities

Communication Disabilities comprise a range of attributes that impact language ability of the student. It includes problems in speech production, language, and social communication incapacities (Matveieva, 2024; Tanzeem, Abass, Akram, & Aftab, 2024).

2.3. Inclusive education and Neurological and developmental disabilities

Inclusive education in Pakistan is guided by several policy documents, including the National Education Policy (NEP) and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities UNCRPD and most recently Sustainable Developmental Goals. These policies and conventions emphasize the importance of providing equal educational opportunities to all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, or disability. Inclusive education is at the infancy level in Pakistan. The inclusion of students with (neurological and developmental disabilities) N&DD in public schools is very rare in Pakistan. Inclusive education aims to include and rehabilitate them in mainstream society. Inclusion has a close link with the rehabilitation of students with N&DD by providing them with equitable opportunities. Despite challenges, there have been efforts to promote inclusive education in the country, with various policies, and legislations undertaken since 2011.

Rehabilitation has many dimensions including medical, educational, vocational, social and emotional. The provision of rehabilitative services varies with the intellectual, socio-emotional and physical growth and development of students with N&DD. Rehabilitative services are required for inclusion into mainstream society as these services strengthen the weak areas of students with disabilities and help them to use their strong areas.

2.4. Importance of school community collaboration

With the help of school community collaboration societies empower persons with neurological and developmental disabilities. Students with disabilities get more opportunities of employment, therapeutic services, recreational services, and more ways to live a healthy life. Through school community collaboration people get awareness about the rights of disabilities. They evolve and utilize their services in unique ways including the burden of special persons and their exclusion from civilized society can be reduced. School-community collaboration plays a vital role in nurturing inclusive education for students with N&DD. Strengthening the collaborating efforts between various schools, families, and other community institutions ensures equitable inclusive educational facilities for the students with N&DD. The involvement of community stake holders for the rehabilitation of students with N&DD will provide equal opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive. Disability inclusion is a multidisciplinary field and it cannot be effective without the collaboration and consultation of relevant stakeholders. Schools cannot work on their own, they need a collaborative mechanism to support the schools for the effective inclusion and rehabilitation of students with N&DD. In the following paragraphs, the authors have highlighted some outcomes of school-community collaboration.

2.5. Enhanced Support Systems

The research studies have emphasized the importance of school-community collaboration in creating enhanced support systems Chui (2007) to cater to the unique needs of children with N&DD. Through collaborative and collective efforts, the access to salient services required for inclusion of students with N&DD has increased such as special education services, therapeutic interventions, and parental support groups.

2.6. Holistic Development

School-community collaboration promotes the overall development of students with disabilities by addressing their social, emotional needs, and behavioural problems in addition to academic needs (Stewart-Ginsburg, Kittelman, & Rowe, 2023). Collaborations between school and community institutes facilitate the implementation of individualized education plans (IEPs) for the comprehensive skill development of students with various disabilities (Themane, 2023) and N&DD.

2.7. Positive School Climate

Various research studies highlight the role of school-community collaboration in developing a positive school climate to address students' individual and diverse needs. A positive school climate promotes awareness and acceptance among students, academicians and community members (Weist, Domlyn, & Collins, 2023). Hence, collaborations help create a supportive environment where students with N&DD feel valued, respected and included.

2.8. Effective Transition Planning

In some research studies, authors have discussed the importance of school-community collaboration in helping the effective transition planning for students with N&DD. The transition from different levels of education/grades, between different educational settings, and into adulthood is the most essential type of transition. Collaborative efforts between schools, community agencies, and vocational programs ensure the continuity of such services, smooth transitions, and successful outcomes for students with diverse needs (Stewart-Ginsburg, Kittelman, & Rowe, 2023).

2.9. Empowerment of Families

The research studies have underlined the role of school-community collaboration for the families of students with N&DD. According to the authors, school-community collaboration empowers families of students with N&DD by increasing access to information, resources, and rehabilitation services. It enables families of students with disabilities to take an active part in the decision-making processes related to their children, participate in their educational planning, and access community-based services that promote their inclusion and rehabilitation (Xu, 2020). In conclusion, school-community collaboration is essential for promoting inclusive education and fostering the holistic development of children with neurological and developmental disabilities. By leveraging collective expertise, resources, and support networks, collaborative efforts create inclusive learning environments where every child can thrive and succeed (majeed Hameed & Al-Salam, 2023).

2.10. Objectives of the Study

The following were the study's objectives:

1. Explore the status of school community collaboration in the views of teachers and parents of students with neurological and developmental delays.
2. Explore the barriers in school community collaboration in the views of teachers of students with neurological and developmental disabilities.

2.11. Question of the study

1. What are the views of parents and teachers on the status of school-community collaboration for the inclusion and rehabilitation of students with neurological and developmental disabilities?
2. What are the different barriers in school community collaboration in views of teachers, of students with neurological and developmental disabilities?

2.12. Limitations of the study

1. The study was limited to a few schools of students with physical impairments were chosen for this study only from one province of Pakistan due to time and financial constraints.

2.13. Delimitations of the Study

1. Only the parents and teachers of SWNDD were taken as samples of study to explore the status of the school community collaboration.
2. Researchers developed both instruments by themselves to conduct this study.

2.14. Methodology and Procedures

The study was carried out to explore the nature of collaboration between the schools of students with neurological and developmental disabilities (NDDs) and the community institutions including family, health, general education, and social welfare. The study is carried out through a quantitative survey. The population of the study was teachers, and the parents of students with neurological and developmental disabilities studying in different schools in Punjab. A total number of 100 teachers (both male and female) and 31 parents (Mothers & fathers) were selected through a simple random sampling technique. The range of teachers' qualifications was from B.Ed to M.Phil and 31 to 59 years of age. The majority of parents were graduates in different subjects and belonged to the middle level of socio-economic status. This study was conducted through two structured questionnaires, one for teachers, and one for parents. Each questionnaire consisted of two sections; the 1st section of the questionnaire consisted of demographic information and the 2nd part of the questionnaire consisted of sub-sections based on the school community collaboration statements. The validity of the questionnaires was estimated by gathering information from experts in special education and the reliability of the questionnaires was .83 and .80 (Cronbach's Alpha).

The population of the study was comprised of two different groups i.e. Teachers, and Parents from different districts of Punjab. The estimation of the population of this study was done by data collection. Initially, the researcher gathered the numbers of the parallel list of students with neurological and developmental disabilities and their parents located through the school head and collected the data from the researchers. The sample was selected by random sampling techniques including head teachers, teachers, and parents of the neurological and developmental delayed children. The data collection tools were used to collect the data after getting their validity and reliability estimation. Descriptive and inferential statistics were performed for the analysis of The first author personally collected the data from the teachers and parents after getting the permission. The data was analyzed through a parametric statistical model with the help of IBM version 21. Frequency of the responses along with percentages and tests of mean comparisons were applied to analyze the data based on demographic variables. The study was delimited to the only public sector special schools that were providing education for neurological disabilities and developmental disabilities in one province of Pakistan due to financial and time constraints.

3. Data Analysis

After the data collection, the collected data is subjected to analysis. The responses of the teachers and parents are computed in SPSS and mean and standard deviation are calculated to explore the answer to the first question of the study which was

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability of Teachers' questionnaire on the status of school community collaboration

Sr. #	Factors	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Health institute	5	.771
2	Social Welfare	5	.753
3	Leisure/recreation	5	.756
4	Therapeutic institutes	6	.709
5	Collaboration with Regular school	5	.783
6	School-Family collaboration	3	.674

The above table shows the reliability of the instrument used to get the responses from the teachers on the school community collaboration. The reliability of health institute is .771 and the number of items is 5, social welfare is .753 and n=5, leisure\recreation is .756 and n=5, therapeutic institutes is .709 and n=6, collaboration with regular school is .783 and n=5, school-family collaboration is .674 and n=3.

Table 2: Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability of Parents Questionnaire

Sr. #	Factors	N of items	Cronbach’s Alpha
1	Health institute	4	.848
2	Social welfare	4	.860
3	Regular Schools	3	.701
4	Counselling Institutes	2	.989
5	Parents’ training	6	.826
6	School -family collaboration	3	.688
7	Leisure /recreation institutes	2	.985
8	Legal institutes	4	.716

The above table shows the Cronbach alpha reliability of the instrument used to collect the data from the parents on school community collaboration for inclusion and rehabilitation of students with neurological and developmental disabilities. The table shows the reliability of Collaboration with health institutes is .848 against the 4 items, social welfare .860 for 4 items, regular schools are .701, n =3, counselling institutes is .989, n =2, parents training is .826, n=6, school family collaboration reliability is .688, reliability of leisure/recreational is .985 where n=2 and reliability for items on school community collaboration with legal institutes are .716 with n =4.

Table No. 3: Cronbach alpha reliability of the teachers’ questionnaire on barriers to school community collaboration for inclusion and rehabilitation of students with neurological and developmental disabilities

Sr #	Factors	N of items	Cronbach’s Alpha
1	Educational barriers	4	.762
2	Economic barriers	4	.768
3	Lack of collaboration between teachers	3	.739
4	Public Policy	4	.811
5	Community characteristics	2	.719
6	Parents preferences	2	.731
7	Awareness about disability	6	.760
8	School policy	4	.707
9	Lack of infrastructures	2	.769
10	Services and facilities	2	.699

The above table shows Cronbach alpha reliability of the questionnaire used to illicit the responses of teachers on the local barriers to school community collaboration for the inclusion and rehabilitation of students with N&DD.

Q 1: What are the views of teachers on the status of school-community collaboration for the inclusion and rehabilitation of students with neurological and developmental disabilities?

Table No.4: Mean and standard deviation of teachers on school community collaboration for inclusion and rehabilitation of students with neurological and developmental disabilities

Sr. #	Factors’ names	M	SD
1	Health institute	17.862	6.087
2	Social Welfare	17.495	4.403
3	Leisure/recreation	16.495	5.679
4	Therapeutic institutes	16.157	5.474
5	Collaboration with Regular school	13.567	5.501
6	School-Family collaboration	10.200	3.680

The above table shows the mean and SD of the responses of teachers collected to explore the nature of school-community collaboration. The table shows that the mean score of collaboration with health institutes is 17.862 and SD is 6.087, the mean of collaboration with social welfare is 17.495 and SD is 4.403, mean leisure\recreation is 16.495 and SD =5.679, the mean therapeutic institutions is 16.157 and SD=5.474 and mean of collaboration with regular

school is 13.567 and SD is 5.501 and mean of school family collaboration is 10.200 and SD is 3.560.

Table 5: Mean and SD of parents' perception of the school community collaboration for inclusion and rehabilitation of students with neurological disabilities

Sr. #	Factors' names	M	SD
1	Health institute	25.800	10.184
2	Social Welfare	22.867	9.210
3	Leisure/recreation	17.219	6.496
4	TherapeuticInstitutes	17.133	7.017
5	Collaboration with Regular school	11.438	4.821
6	School-Family collaboration	11.476	5.355
7	Leisure /recreational institutes	11.438	4.694
8	Legal institutes	17.219	6.496

The table shows the mean and SD of the parents' responses on the instrument used to collect the data for this study. It shows the mean of schools' collaboration with health institutes is 25.800 and SD is 10.184, the mean of social welfare is 22.867, SD is 9.210, leisure and recreation SD is 6.496 and the mean is 17.219, therapeutic institutions SD is 7.017 and the mean is 17.133, collaboration with regular school SD is 4.821 and the mean is 11.438, school-family collaboration is 5.355 and mean is 11.476, leisure\recreational institutes SD is 4.694 and mean is 11.438, legal institutes is 6.496 and mean is 17.219.

Q 2: What are the different barriers in school community collaboration in the views of teachers of students with neurological and developmental disabilities?

Table 6: Mean and SD of views of teachers on barriers to school community collaboration

Sr. #	Factors	M	SD
1	Educational barriers	23.671	3.922
2	Economic barriers	15.129	3.643
3	Lack of collaboration between teachers	14.314	2.399
4	Public Policy	13.414	2.557
5	Community characteristics	11.914	2.370
6	Parents preferences	11.700	2.202
7	Awareness about disability	8.014	1.546
8	School policy	8.014	1.546
9	Lack of infrastructures	7.643	2.085
10	Services and facilities	7.643	2.085

The above table shows the component vice mean of the instrument used in the study for the data collection. The table shows that the mean of educational barriers is 23.671, and SD is 3.922economic barriers mean is =15. 129, SD=3.643, lack of collaboration between teachers mean is14.314, SD is 2.399, mean of public policy is13.414 and SD is 2.557, mean of community characteristics is 11.914 and SD is 2.370 mean of parent preferences is 11.700, SD is 2.202, mean of awareness about disability is 8.014, SD= 1.546, mean of school policy is 8.014 and SD is 1.546, mean of lack of infrastructures is 7.643 and SD is 2.085 and mean of services and facilities is 7.643 and SD is 2.085.

4. Discussions

The study was conducted on the status of schools' collaboration for the inclusion and rehabilitation of students with neurological and developmental disabilities. According to WHO, the ratio of disability in Pakistan is 10 % including the persons with neurological and developmental disabilities. Students with N&DD are suffering from a low quality of life due to a segregated system of education, which is also hindering their rehabilitation within mainstream society. The study highlighted the need and importance of special education institutes working in collaboration with other community institutes for the inclusion and rehabilitation of students with neurological and developmental disabilities. The findings of this study have shown that special schools have a low level of collaboration with the families of SWNDD and regular schools. This low-level collaboration hinders the inclusion of students in to mainstream society, particularly in regular schools. However, the schools have a better collaboration with health institutes including public hospitals, health centres and social welfare institutes for the medical

rehabilitation of students with developmental and neurological disabilities. The findings of parents have shown similar facts that the school of their neurological and developmental disabilities children has a low level of collaboration with neighbouring regular schools and with themselves. The schools rarely call for parent-teacher meetings. The visit of teachers from regular schools is also rare. It has many reasons, the low level of public awareness and a low literacy rate are major reasons for the low ratio of special schools collaboration with regular schools. Parents have also ascertained that the schools have a better level of collaboration with legal institutes for the protection of special children's rights and with therapeutic facility centres to work for the rehabilitation of their children with neurological and developmental disabilities. The major barriers highlighted by the teachers are the educational, economic, and public policy barriers. The literacy rate of our country is low as compared to the developed and other underdeveloped countries. The policy of special education lacks the proper infrastructure of policy implementation to enhance the collaboration of special schools with other social institutions. This situation is impacting the quality of life of students with neurological and developmental disabilities and leading them towards a more segregated and dependent life. Poverty has increased in Pakistan in the last two decades and hence changed the preferences of the parents of special children. Most of the time they remained busy in earning bread and butter for their children and foundless time for their schools or to take them for the proper therapy.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study have made it desirable to conclude the study with the need to increase the collaboration of schools of students with neurological and developmental disabilities with different institutes like hospitals, social welfare institutes, legal institutes, leisure time and recreational institutes, and legal institutes for the better rehabilitation and empowerment of SWNDD. The collaboration with neighbouring regular schools needs to be increased for the inclusion of SWNDD to provide them with quality education and life-long, sustainable learning opportunities.

5.1 Recommendations

1. The awareness of the importance of collaboration with social institutes needs to be increased among parents, teachers, and other special educationists.
2. There is a dire need to develop a framework of school-community linkage for the inclusion and rehabilitation of students with neurological and developmental disabilities.
3. The parents' empowerment through different financial incentives and facilities by the school needs to be announced by the government to lessen the economic pressure of the parents, so they can give more quality time for the rehabilitative and academic activities of their children with neurological and developmental disabilities.

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