Framing the Inclusion of Students with Visual Impairment in the Regular Schools of Punjab: Efforts and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to frame the inclusion for students with visual (SWVI) in the public schools of Punjab. For this purpose, researchers took the opinions of principals and teaching staff of the regular schools where SWVI are enrolled. Researchers used the survey method to conduct the study. A descriptive type of research was used. The study population compromised of all principals and teaching staff teaching in general inclusive schools of Punjab. The total ratio of the sample is 151(N=38). Principals and teachers teaching in inclusive schools (N=113) were taken as a sample of the study. The two-structured questionnaire were used, encompassing a dichotomous scale (Yes / No). The reliability of the instruments was estimated respectively 0.77 and 0.86. In contrast, the content validity of the instruments was assessed through experts who had experience in the field of special and inclusive education. The IBM version 20 was used for the analysis of the results. Results of the responses were calculated through frequency distribution with their percentage. Most of the principals who were administrators in regular inclusive schools emphasized that they have a zero rejection policy for admission in schools and make possible the friendly environment for students, positive feedback from the community, and an open-door policy for teachers, students, and parents to solve problems related to students. The majority of the school heads highlighted that school infrastructure is not according to the needs of students. Many teachers said that they lack training, have less knowledge to modify the syllabus and assessment procedures, do not have a proper source to adapt teaching material.

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1.   Introduction

In spite of twenty-five years of discussion at international level, compromise on inclusive education remains indefinable (Ainscow, 2020). At international level, it is progressively seen as a norm to provide support and say welcome to diversity that has presence among all learners (UNESCO, 2017). This overall debate assumes that the purpose is to eradicate social exclusion that creates inequitable behaviors about race, social status, culture, creed, sex, and capability. As result, its takes start from the belief that education is considered a basic human right and provided the strong ground for a more just mortality (Ainscow, 2020).

The idea of inclusion recommends that the focus of school not only should be learners with special needs as well as to fulfill the individual needs of all students (Snipstad, 2020b). The main concept of inclusion is to provide sources in variant ways so that all learners could take part in all co-curriculum activities (Snipstad, 2020a). Fundamentally, inclusion is the responsibility of whole society. So, that those all peoples could make strong members of the society (Ehsan, 2018). The situation of inclusion in Pakistan is totally different but with passage of time, things are going towards the betterment.

The inclusive education policy has gained acceptance overall in the world after the passage of human rights declaration (Rashid, 2017). The most influential conventions are Millaniu developmental Goals and sustainable developmental goals (SDGs) (Schuelka, 2018). It is no doubt an educational change. Globally many steps have been taken to bring this change at maximum level (Alasuutari, Savolainen, & Engelbrecht, 2019, 15 March). Inclusive education is most important element within the informed development process within the responsibilities of schools. It includes variations in content of syllabus, methodologies, and physical arrangements of building etc. It is the duty of the administrated and planners of general education system to provide the facility of education to all individuals (Initiative, 2010). Inclusion is based on two advancements; access of maximum students to the school and to have a common core inclusive curriculum. To achieve these milestones, schools will be requiring changes in school policies and infrastructure. The equal embracement of diversity of learners' needs in regular school is a key for successful inclusive (Shemanov & Ekushevskaya, 2018).

In the educational process, the teacher has basic and most important role (Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018). As a general teacher, it is necessary to develop the professional abilities of teaching, whereas the matter of teacher who has responsibility to teach specific subject is more important than the general one. In this scenario, expertise in teaching students with different disabilities is required as a part of teaching as mentioned in many international studies (Smelova, Ludikova, Petrova, & Souralova, 2016). The inclusion in regular schools requires not only placement in regular settings of the students with disabilities rather it also talks about providing unconditional and equal respect and a categorical support to all students (Smelova et al., 2016). The collaboration with other organizations can be parents facilitations ,supplementary services and support, adapted teaching aids, strategies and facilities (Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018). Achievement of these milestones requires qualify teachers and a proper mechanism to teach (Smelova et al., 2016).

Principals of schools referred to as a leader of their institutions, to play critical role to ensure the success of IE in their schools. They have authority to take different action like changes in school culture, environment and principles to work (Romanuck Murphy, 2018). According to Romanuck Murphy (2018), principals have ability to apply IE services and facilities through teachers and provided to students a place where they can learn comfortably (Lynch, 2021). They play active role to arrange meetings with teachers and parents to resolve the issues and problems related to IE. Sometime, principals face many challenges due to lack of knowledge and training about IE. But they have the responsibility to arrange different training programs for professional development of himself and teachers to fulfill the needs of students (Romanuck Murphy, 2018). Positive inclusion demands direct and at a time strong collaboration and inspiration from principals. Without the help and support of principals, there is nothing possible to find fruitful opportunities in inclusive environment (MacCormack, Sider, Maich, & Specht, 2021).

The inclusive schools require a flexible system to make the learners successful learners. It requires a quality learning environment with highly motivated beliefs of teachers about the strengths of students with different disabilities (Pit-ten Cate, Markova, Krischler, & Krolak-Schwerdt, 2018). For instance, the inclusion of students with visual impairment requires training of mobility and independent life skills including daily living skills (Tyagi, 2016). Competency of teaching through tactile methods and use of different learning and mobility devices are also crucial for successful inclusion (Grynova & Kalinichenko, 2018). Provision of proper resources, community awareness, and a proper system of adaptations in assessment procedures are also required for proper inclusion of SWVI in regular schools (Rofiah, Sudiraharja, & Ediyanto, 2020). Teacher training is most important to educate the students

with special needs. According to the report of American Institute for Research, due to the training, apprentice that belong to the field of education, teachers became more assured about their capabilities and successfully able to teach the learners in inclusive schools (American Institute for Research, 2020).

Inclusion of students with VI required necessary changes and adaptations with the regular and formal school system. Provision of least restrictive environment is the core for the placement of visually impaired students in regular settings (Alzahrani, 2020). Proper classroom arrangement (front seating position), well illuminated and safe environment. In addition to this, provision of optical and non-optical devices and low-vision lab is required too (Colclasure, Thoron, & LaRose, 2016).

Inclusive schools are facing challenges to make possible the full education system and also with learners. The challenges that originate from IE include infrastructural and physical hurdles, inadequate human and material resources and lack of skills, and inflexible curriculum (Alzahrani, 2020). Moreover, other problems like unsatisfactory training programs of teachers, according to needs, insufficient budget and allocation of time, shortage of staff (Romanuck Murphy, 2018) as well as problems of lake of provision to use assistive technology (Lintangsari & Emaliana, 2020). According to Abernathy (2012); Ball and Green (2014); Praisner (2003); Romanuck Murphy (2018) workload is also created problem for teachers (Geleta, 2019) in the presence of big ratio of students in the inclusive classroom. Following objectives were developed for the study;

- To analyze the views of principals to frame the inclusion for visually impaired students in the general schools of the Punjab
- To find out the opinions of teachers to structure the inclusion for visually impaired students in general schools of the Punjab
- To study the challenges, faced by management to frame the inclusion of visually impaired students in the Punjab.

2. Method to Precede the Study
The subsequent ways adopted to organize this study were;

2.1 Design of the Study
Researcher chose descriptive method of research study and self- reported survey technique for the purpose of data collection.

2.2 Population &Sampling Strategies
The population for the study encompassed of all principals of general inclusive schools and school teachers who were teaching visually impaired students, studying in inclusive schools of 08 districts of the Punjab, including Multan, Rawalpindi, Chakwal, Attock, Bahawalpur Vehari, Lahore, and Muzafargarh. A total number of 38 principals of schools, having students with visual impairment, by using convenient sampling technique and 113 teachers who teach in regular inclusive schools to students with visual impairment, through random sampling technique.

2.3 Instrumentation of tool and data Collection
Two research instruments after reviewing the previous studies were developed. These instruments were structured and were encompassed on dichotomous scale (Yes, No.) statements. Both questionnaire mackerel one-part demographic variables, the questionnaires consisted of total 11 areas. These are related to the principals' views (about policy and management, building infrastructure, collaboration with parents, students and teachers, role of community, services and facilities) and teachers views about professional capacity building, modification in classroom ecology, adaptations in content of syllabus, teaching material, teaching pedagogies about regular IS in the Punjab. The reliability of the instruments was estimated as 0.77and 0.86 through SPSS. Similarly, the validity of content was predicted through experts who had experience in inclusive education. At first stage, the researcher through literature review identified the schools of Punjab in the administrative divisions/districts, where the students with visual impairment were getting education in regular schools according to the policy of Punjab Government. The researchers contacted the

principals telephonically and decided the date and time with principals to visit schools for data collection. Researchers collected data through self-visits from the schools situated in the districts mentioned above from principals and teachers working in visually impaired schools.

2.4   Data Analysis & Interpretation

Researchers used SPSS version 21 for coding and analyzing. Researchers used simple descriptive statistics. The researchers applied simple methods of descriptive statics like frequency distribution with percentage.

3.   Results of the Study

Findings were interpreted on the bases of domains related to principals and teacher of regular inclusive schools.

Table 1:   Views of principals of inclusive schools and teachers about efforts and challenges to frame inclusion for SWVI in regular inclusive schools of the Punjab

Serial#	Addressing Areas	No. of Respondents (38)	
	Options	YES	NO
(a)	Views about inclusion policy	34=89.45%	04=10.6%
(b)	Opinions about administrative responsibilities	30=78.94%	08=21.05
(c)	Physical structure of school building	35=92.1%	03=7.89%
(d)	Supportive and collaborative relations with teachers, parents & students	37=97.37	01=2.63%
(e)	Accessibility of services and facilities	33=86.84%	05=13.16%

Majority of principals (89.5%) said that they have knowledge about inclusion and implementation process of inclusion policy. They said that they provide chance to all students to get admission in their schools. They reported that they put all their efforts to make friendly environment and provide barrier free settings.

A reasonable part of sample (78.94%) of respondent said that they adjust school timing according to feasibility of students with special needs. They conducted indoor and outdoor activities for students. A smaller number of principals said that they arrange seminar for the learning of their teachers on inclusive education. All of the heads/principals stated that they monitor the plans and policy regarding the special students. They further add that even after inclusion of SWVI there is no problem of discipline in their schools.

Almost (92.1%) of the heads responded that their schools are accessible for students with mild to moderate visual impairment and it's secure and safe for the students. Nearly (90%) of the respondents said that they are needed additional rooms like computer lab, resource room, and occupational room, mobility & orientation lab and music room to fulfill the needs of students with VI. A very few of the respondents responded that they have computer lab and library in their schools.

Most of the principals (97.37%) replied that they have good collaboration with their teaching staff. They further added that they give freedom to the teachers to adapt the curriculum and solve the problems related to students with VI. They deal parents with respect and arrange meetings with parents on regular basis. A good number of heads responded that mostly parents tend to be supportive with them. According to vast majority of the principals they have open door policy for the students with visual impairment and met them freely. They also reported that they take great interest to solve the students' problems.

According to mostly ratio of principals (33=86.84%) they do not provide the facility of free transportation, bus, uniform and however some of the heads responded that they provide books, uniforms, scholarship and medical facility to the students with visual impairment. All of the Heads responded that their budget is insufficient to full accommodate the needs of Students with visual impairment.

Table 2: **Views of regular inclusive schools teachers about efforts and challenges to frame the inclusion of SWVI in regular inclusive schools of the Punjab**

Sr. #	Addressing areas	No. of Respondents (113)	
	Options	YES	NO
(a)	**Interpretations of IE policy**	100=88.49%	12=10.7%
(b)	**Need of professional development**	106=96.46%	04=3.6%
(c)	**Psychological environment of inclusive classroom**	110=97.34%	03=2.7%
(d)	**Modification in content**	44=38.10%	69=61.06%
(e)	**Adaption in teaching strategies**	108=95.6%	05=4.42%
(f)	**Modification in teaching resources & material**	03=2.7%	110=97.3%
(g)	**Modification in mode of assessment**	05=4.42%	108=95.6%

Majority of the teachers (88.49%) said that government is taking positive step to include students with special needs in regular schools. But teachers do not have proper knowledge about inclusive education and its policy. They said that they teach the students without knowing about disabilities and special needs of students. Good number of respondents (96.46%) said that they have lack of knowledge about the provision of inclusive education, adapted curriculum. Government had arranged training programs but through these programs, training was mostly provided to head or principals not teachers. Schools' heads were rarely conveyed the information to teachers related to inclusion process, so, due to this reason, they were not able to handle the students with visual impairment in better ways. So, professional development is most needed element in the inclusion process.

A big part (97.34%) of respondent, replied that they provide sitting arrangement and adapt environment, according to the needs of students with VI in the classroom and also welcome to each student. They provided full participation chances in the classroom. The (95.6%) respondents said that they use self-adapted teaching strategies during instruction and assessment process as well as provided strong support and help to students with VI.A vast ratio of teachers (97.3%) reported that they have shortage of adapted material in their school and unavailability of latest teaching technology. Excessive number of teachers (97.35%) said that they have not any specific technique or use of devices to evaluate the performance of SWVI. They use traditional way (written exam), to take exams.

4.   Discussion

This study was conduct to study the current status of framing the inclusive activities for visually impaired students in the regular schools of the Punjab and also to known about challenges, facing by the management, so for taking the views of principals who are administrating inclusive schools and their concerned teachers. Findings of different research study support the results of the study in such a way.

The current study shows that both principals of schools and teachers have warm attitude to include children with visual impairment in regular inclusive school. These findings are lined with study that conducted by (Geleta, 2019) that both principals and their concerned teachers have positive opinions about the execution of IE. Some results of study are highlighted by another study results that was conducted by Khan, Hashmi, and Khanum (2017), teachers had positive attitude to include students with visual impairment in inclusive setup. In another study, researchers concluded the same results, regular school teachers had positive attitude about IE (Hussain, 2017). According to Rizzo and Vispoel (1991), teachers are cooperated for inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities than students with severe or profound disabilities (Alzahrani, 2020).

The results indicated that they have, collaborated system among school heads, parents and teachers (Ainscow, 2020). The results of the study showed that principals provide full collaboration, conduct, meeting and training for teachers to do work in a better way. The other study showed that when principals provide collaboration where teachers are able to evaluate their practices, to make them more receptive and flexible (Anesco, 2020). Similarly, teachers said that they have seating arrangement according to the needs of students with visual impairment. Mostly, students had seating plan in front rows of the class. The finding highlighted a need of teachers training and professional growth for teaching students with

disabilities in regular inclusive settings mostly teachers have not sufficient knowledge and training to teach students with special needs in regular setup (Henry & Namhla, 2020). Teachers had inadequate knowledge concerning inclusive related educational activities reported by Ehsan (2018), attitudes of teachers and a need for adequate resources were most important to implement the inclusive education at school level.

The study has also highlighted need of adapted teaching material in braille print and large print, well illuminated and spacious classrooms as without this provision, inclusion would not be fruitful for visually impaired students (Pires et al., 2020). The results of the study represented those students with visual impairment had strong support from students and teachers. This statement is defended by Bhan (2012), peers helped the students with visual impairment in mobility, in academics and also in sports and other co-curricular activities (Ratliff, 2020). The need to increase the school accessibility is highlighted by the study. Increase in physical accessibility requires construction of ramps, railings, widened doors, barrier free environment, adapted washrooms, play grounds, accessible libraries, etc. The study revealed that schools are providing the facilities and services of free education, free uniform, health, transportation (Rofiah et al., 2020).

5.   Conclusion

Inclusive education is a continuing process to eliminate hindrances that are created for individuals with any type of exceptional need. Inclusion brings improvement in the practices of schooling. So that, all students could get equal chance to enjoy the services and facilities (Schuelka, 2018) at the same place (Cobley, 2018; Florian, Black-Hawkins, & Rouse, 2016).

The current study was conducted to explore the inclusive educational activities for visually impaired student in regular IS of the Punjab as well as to see the efforts and challenges faced by school administration. The study explored that the regular schools were providing services and facilities (mild to moderate) visually impaired students. This can be resolute that the situation of providing IE to visually impaired students is not good; there is much more needed to do. On the base of results, it is concluded that schools are facing different challenges, deficiency of teacher training databases, shortage of provision of budget, inflexibility in course content, shortage of resources for modification in teaching material and assessment modes etc.

These all problems are on their place but, a good number of schools and their administration have the opinion that they are providing different services and facilities to visually impaired students, like free travelling services, free of cost provision of uniform, books and medical facility, and water sanitation, school and classroom ecology according to individual needs of learners. Teachers of regular inclusive schools have seating arrangement, according to exceptional needs of visually impaired students and teach according to their exceptionalities. Teachers have supportive and collaborative attitudes with teaching staff and students. The principles of schools also have collaboration with teaching and non-teaching staff as well as with parents. They have open door policy for all to meet and discuss any problem whenever they felt.

6.   Recommendations

The recommendations of the study are as follow;

- The schools may have flexible/accommodative/adoptive building pattern and assistive technology to increase the access of students with visual impairment.
- The government and private institutions may arrange training packages and seminars to improve the professional capacity of teachers, through which they can facilitate the learners with exceptional needs.
- The government needs to develop resource centers in inclusive schools.

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