# Ready to Accept? Investigating Pakistani School Teachers' Readiness for Inclusive Education

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## Abstract

Over the last three decades, inclusive education has become an integral part of educational policies throughout the world. Unfortunately, when it comes to its successful implementation, the situation is less than ideal in many countries. One of the main reasons is the lack of teachers' mental and professional readiness for inclusive education. The aim of this study was to explore teachers' mental and professional readiness for inclusive education in Pakistan. Sample for this quantitative study consists of 366 male and female teachers from thirty-seven public schools in Kasur, Pakistan. Data was collected through a self-developed five-points Likert type scale, and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The study revealed that teachers' overall readiness for implementing inclusive education was at moderate level. Their mental readiness was slightly higher than the professional one. Male teachers' readiness for inclusive education was higher than the female ones while the urban teachers' readiness was significantly higher than the rural teachers'. Teachers' mental readiness turned out to be a significant predictor to their professional readiness for implementing inclusive education. This study suggests improving teachers' awareness, understanding and preparedness for inclusive education for its successful implementation.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, children with disabilities, mental readiness, professional readiness, Pakistan.

## Introduction

Inclusive education has become a common practice nowadays (Zulfija et al., 2013). It is a teaching and supporting model for children with disabilities for better educational and socializing opportunities (Gaydarov, 2014). In the view of Bannister et al. (2018), it is the best educational

model for children with disabilities regardless of the nature, type and level of disabilities. Inclusive education not only provides a platform for such students to learn in normal settings and surroundings, but also helps in their acceptance in the society (Zagona et al., 2017).

The Government of Pakistan is responsible for facilitating and educating children with disabilities not only because of national and constitutional commitments such as Constitution of Pakistan, 1973 (Pakistan, 2010); Disabled Persons Ordinance, 1981 (Pakistan, 1981); Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2012 (Pakistan, 2012); Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2014 (Punjab, 2014); but also international ones such as Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (UNO, 1989); UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006 (UNO, 2006); Education for All, 2000 (Wikipedia, n. d.); Millennium Development Goals, 2000 (UNO, 2000); and Sustainable Development Goals, 2015 (UNO, 2015). These national and international commitments require Pakistani governments to provide opportunities for quality education to the whole nation, irrespective of their colour, creed and physical abilities (or disabilities). Other than those commitments, it is also a matter of moral and legal obligation for a government to take steps for the education for the children with disabilities (Hameed & Manzoor, 2016).

Tahir and Khan (2010) reported that about 20% of the world population had different kinds and levels of disabilities. More alarmingly, the article stated that in developing countries, more than 90% of the children with disabilities did not attend any school. The situation is even worse in Pakistan with only 2.49% of the children with disabilities attending schools (Manzoor et al., 2016). In some studies, that number is 4%, indicating around 96% of the children with disabilities have been deprived of their fundamental human need: education (Manzoor et al., 2016; Hameed & Manzoor, 2016). Most of the students with disabilities who attend schools, go to exclusive special schools which may give them the feeling of being segregated and alienated. As a result, it is imperative that they are included into the normal educational and social life. For the promotion of inclusive education, it is pivotal to make sure the schools and teachers are ready to accommodate them. Recently, the Government of Pakistan has been focusing to develop school infrastructure and improve teachers' training so that they can be more inclusive and accommodating to the children with disabilities. It is important that all students should enjoy the right of normal and equitable education (Fazal, 2012).

The role of the teachers is critical in the successful implementation of such policies (Mthembu, 2009; Bari et al., 2014; Srivastava et al., 2017). Not only should they know and respect the mental, physical and psychological differences which may exist amongst the students (Gathumbi et al., 2015); they should also teach their students to accept and respect those differences. They should also have the ability to break the mental and psychological barriers between the children with and without disabilities (Shareefa, 2016). For inclusive education to thrive, teachers are expected to understand basic needs of the children with disabilities. They also have to bring curriculum changes according to the new and unique challenges (Sucuoglu et al., 2013).

Literature has proven repeatedly that inclusive education is more conducive for educational, emotional and psychological development of the children with disabilities (Gaydarov, 2014; Bannister et al., 2018). As a result, more and more countries and schools are promoting inclusive education; but if the environment and attitude of the normal students is not positive and supportive,

and due attention is not paid; it may create further tensions at different levels (Michailakis & Reich, 2009). Therefore, the role of teachers becomes pivotal for achieving the desired goals of inclusive education.

Despite the apparent advantages of inclusive education, many schools administrators, teachers and parent are apprehensive about it (Gathumbi et al., 2015). One of the fears is that the children with disabilities might not be accepted by other students, or even bullied by them (Norwich & Kelly, 2004). Literature shows that considerable number of school administrators and teachers are not ready to accommodate heterogeneity of abilities among students due to multitude of reasons such as lack of positive attitude, knowledge about relevant instructional strategies and pedagogical skills for the children with disabilities, and specialized school infrastructure (Zulfija et al., 2013). Literature has repeatedly pointed out that many teachers are not properly trained to teach the children with disabilities (Anati & Ain, 2012; Sucuoglu et al., 2013). As a result of all these reasons, inclusive education still remains a challenge for teachers (Sucuoglu et al., 2013).

In 2012, UNICEF pointed out three important dimensions for inclusive education readiness: school and teachers readiness which means that the infrastructure of the school is ready to accommodate and facilitate those students, and teachers are ready to accommodate, facilitate and assist them; child readiness which means that children with disabilities are mentally and emotionally ready to be a part of inclusive community; and families readiness which is about the readiness of families to send their children to inclusive schools (Shareefa, 2016). Teachers readiness is one of the most important ones as a willing, properly trained and motivated teacher can not only improve the students attitude in this regard, but also overall school environment. Furthermore, teachers can also play a big role in motivating the families to overcome any apprehension and send the children with disabilities for inclusive education.

There are multiple factors that may influence teachers' mental and professional readiness for inclusive education such as general and specialized pedagogical and assessment skills, and attitude towards inclusive education and the children with disabilities (Mthembu, 2009). Teachers' attitude towards inclusive education, their knowledge about different types of disabilities and their pedagogical skills in the relevant areas are the main prerequisites for trained and motivated inclusive education teachers (Mthembu, 2009; Srivastava et al., 2017). To be effective inclusive education teachers, their mental and professional willingness is as significant as their specialized pedagogical and instructional expertise (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Knowledge of specialized educational needs and inclusive pedagogical skills are also fundamental characteristics required for effective inclusive teachers (Shareefa, 2016). Some researchers think that there is also a need to specifically identify the list of skills and competences required to prepare effective inclusive education teachers (Zulfija et al., 2013).

Managing such diversity in the class is a great challenge for any teacher who is not properly trained for it. It has also been observed that children with disabilities feel uncomfortable in inclusive classroom when they are taught by untrained teachers (Fazal, 2012). Teachers without such specialized training also expressed their concerns and apprehensions when asked to manage inclusive classes. This reluctance is not limited to young teachers, but also the experienced ones (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). This proves that even experience cannot compensate for specialized trainings

when it comes to conducting inclusive classes successfully. Specialized training is thus essential for the successful implementation of inclusive classes (Sucuoglu et al., 2013; Abbas & Naz, 2016).

In a study carried out by Mathembu (2009), it was found that teachers were not ready to implement inclusive education as an overwhelming majority (96%) showed concerns. 90% of them also expressed need of guidance from experts in the field to deal with children with disabilities. Literature shows that along with teachers' motivational and professional readiness (Dolgova et al., 2017), their psychological readiness also plays a crucial role for motivating children with disabilities (Gaydarov, 2014). Zulfija et al. (2013) found that teachers with lower professional skills were less motivated to work in inclusive settings, and were not mentally ready to be inclusive teachers. Teachers' success in inclusive education is linked with their psychological and professional readiness along with motivation (Gaydarov, 2014).

Despite all the research proving the importance of teachers' readiness, unfortunately it is generally neglected (Dolgova et al., 2017). The situation is especially deplorable in many of the developing countries where education for children with disabilities remains neglected. In Pakistan, many of the children with disabilities are ignored by their immediate family members and the society (Ahmed et al., 2011). Many of them spend all of their lives in their houses, being deprived of even the basic human rights like education. Although, Pakistan made huge progress about inclusive education and education for children with disabilities during the decade of disabled- 1983-92 (Sultana,1993); the situation has become stagnant in the recent times. Children with disabilities are still stigmatized by many (Husain, 2003), and quite often parents try to hide their disabilities from others (Bibi et al., 2019).

Although, it has been generally accepted that inclusive education is more suitable for children with disabilities as it allows for a more comprehensive growth and social acceptance (Gaydarov, 2014), studies about Pakistan have revealed that children with disabilities face "attitudinal, structural and the organizational" problems in ordinary schools (Farooq, 2012, p. 22). These are mostly due to the unavailability of specialized infrastructure and lack of specialized training for the teachers. As a result, not only children with disabilities find it hard to spend time in ordinary schools, but teachers also find it tough to deal with their special needs. There is another issue about the perceptions of the parents and teachers. Bashir (2005) pointed out that many parents and teachers thought that inclusive education would waste class time as children with disabilities may take longer to understand the concepts and instructions. She also pointed towards the lack of specialized training for the teachers that could help them in overcoming such perceptions and challenges.

This study has been carried out to investigate this important aspect of education for children with disabilities in Pakistan: teachers' readiness for inclusive education. The main objectives of this study are to find out Pakistani teachers' mental and professional readiness for implementing inclusive education. To investigate these objectives, two main null hypotheses are developed for this study.

$H_1$: Pakistani teachers are not mentally ready for inclusive education.

$H_2$: Pakistani teachers are not professionally ready for inclusive education.

Third null hypothesis is about teachers' mental readiness for inclusive education as predictor to their professional readiness.

H3: Teachers' mental readiness for implementing inclusive education is a not significant predictor to their professional readiness for implementing inclusive education.

Two more null hypothesis are developed about the relationship between the demographics (gender and urban/rural area) and teachers' overall readiness for inclusive education.

H4: There is no significant difference between male and female teachers about their readiness for inclusive education.

H5: There is no significant difference between urban and rural teachers about their readiness for inclusive education.

## Research Methodology

### Research Method

The current study uses survey method within quantitative research design. Quantitative research design is best suited when the intent is to gather data from a larger population. Furthermore, descriptive research is the most suitable when not much is known about a certain problem or issue (Ary et al., 2010). As this area is relatively less known and explored in Pakistan, descriptive research would help in filling some of this research gap.

### Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of all the teachers teaching in public secondary schools in Punjab, Pakistan. According to the school census carried out in 2018 by Punjab Education Department, 390782 teachers were teaching in public schools in Punjab. Out of which 173035 (44.28%) were male and 217747 (55.72%) females (Punjab Education Department, n.d.[a]).

### Sample of the Study

The sample of the study was selected using multistage sampling technique. First of all, out of thirty-six districts of Punjab province, one was selected randomly. It was done using RAND function in MS Excel. The district selected was Kasur. In the second stage, out of 1,060 schools in District Kasur (Punjab Education Department, n.d.[b]), 37 were selected randomly. It was again done using the same Excel function. Finally, teachers were selected out of those schools.

Statisticians and researchers have presented various formulas and sampling calculators to find out sample size for a given population. This study used the table presented by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for determining sample size. The total population of the study is 390782. According to the table, for a population ranging from 75000 to 1000000, sample size should be 382 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Understanding the issue of return rate, the researchers distributed questionnaires to 425 teachers. Out of them, 366 returned properly filled questionnaires, indicating a return rate of 86.12%.

As the data was collected before the outbreak of Covid-19 and closure of the schools in Pakistan, the researchers were able to go to the schools and get the questionnaires filled by the teachers. First of all, permission of the headmasters/ headmistress (term for public school leaders in Pakistan) was sought. After that, the researchers gathered data. In some of the schools, teachers filled the

questionnaires on the spot; while in the others, the researchers left the questionnaires with the teachers and gathered them after a few days.

## Research Tool

To gather data from the participants, the researchers developed a scale titled "Teachers' Readiness about Inclusive Education Scale (TRIES). It was in English, and consisted of three parts: part one investigating demographic and background information, part two about overall understanding about inclusive education and training for it, and part three consisting of five points Likert type scale (1 not at all ……. 5 fully well) for measuring teachers' readiness for inclusive education. Part one consists of seven items, part two three, while part three consists of twenty items (ten each for professional and mental readiness).

## Validity and Reliability of the Scale

Validity and reliability of the questionnaire were ensured with the help of expert opinion and pilot testing. For content validity, fifteen educationists and researchers from the field of special education were requested to give their feedback on TRIES. They were sent the questionnaire with the research objectives, and requested to mark every item from 3 to 1 (relevant, somewhat relevant, and not relevant). For any item to be retained, at least nine out of ten experts should mark it as relevant or somewhat relevant. The original scale had twelve items each for professional and mental readiness, but four items were deleted as per the experts' feedback. Some of the language was also modified as per their suggestions.

After experts' opinion, the modified scale was distributed to thirty-five public school teachers to ensure that the language of the tool was understandable for them. Realizing the level of English competency of Pakistani public school teachers, the researchers had already used simple and easy-to-understand language. Some minor modifications were again made in the light of the teachers' feedback (mostly by replacing difficult words with easy ones).

Reliability of the scale was determined by using Cronbach's Alpha. Terwee et al. (2007) said that any value above 0.70 is acceptable. The value for the current tool turned out to be 0.82 which is highly acceptable.

## Ethical Considerations

"Ethical issues have become an essential aspect of research" (Liamputtong, 2009, p. 32). As a result, the researchers took them very seriously. Research ethics were followed by taking informed consent from the participants. Every questionnaire had a cover letter, explaining the purpose of the research and seeking informed consent. The participants were clearly informed about their right to withdraw from the research at any time. Those who did not return the questionnaires were not forced to do so. They participants were also ensured about their anonymity, and that the data would be used for the said research purpose only.

## DataFindingsandAnalysis

Data findings and analysis have been divided into the different parts. First part is about the

demographic and background information of the sample while the other parts are about research hypotheses.

## Demographic and Background Information

The study gathered data from 366 teachers. There was equal gender representation in the sample with equal number of male and female teachers (183 each). 99 teachers (27%) belonged to urban areas while 267 came from rural areas. Majority of them (n=300, 82%) had master's degree (sixteen years of education), 45 (12.3%) bachelor's (fourteen years of education), and 21 (5.7%) had M.Phil degree (eighteen years of education). All the teachers had professional qualification with either B.Ed. or M.Ed. degrees.

## Knowledge, Understanding and Training about Inclusive Education

### Table 1

*Knowledge, Understanding and Training about Inclusive Education*

| Questions | Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Have you heard about inclusive education?. | Yes | 118 | 32.2 |
| | No | 248 | 67.8 |
| Have you attended any workshop/ seminar on inclusive education? | Yes | 4 | 1.1 |
| | No | 362 | 98.9 |
| Have you ever got any training about inclusive education? | Yes | 2 | .5 |
| | No | 364 | 99.5 |

In the second part of the questionnaire, the teachers were asked to respond to three general questions about their knowledge, understanding and training about inclusive education.

Table 1 shows the basic knowledge, understanding and training of the teachers about inclusive education. It shows that over two third of the teachers (n=248, 67.8%) had not even heard about inclusive education in Pakistan. Only four had of them had attended a seminar/ workshop about inclusive education and even half of that number (n=2, 0.5%) had attended any training for it. This indicates that inclusive education is not part of mainstream educational and teaching discourse in Pakistan.

## Teachers' Mental and Professional Readiness for Inclusive Education

First and second hypotheses of the study were about teachers' mental and professional readiness about inclusive education. Data were analyzed at both factor (mental and professional readiness) and item level.

The details of teachers' overall mental and professional readiness are given in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Analysis of Teachers' Mental and Professional Readiness to Implement Inclusive Education (Factor level)*

| Factors | M | S.D. | Level |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teachers' mental readiness for implementing inclusive education | 2.85 | 1.02 | Moderate |
| Teachers' professional readiness for implementing inclusive education | 2.71 | 1.15 | |
| Overall teachers' readiness for implementing inclusive education | 2.78 | 1.04 | |

Table 2 shows both teachers' mental and professional readiness for inclusive education at moderate level. Their mental readiness (M=2.85, SD=1.02) was slightly higher than the professional one (M=2.71, SD=1.15), and overall readiness for implementing inclusive education was also only moderate (M=2.78, SD=1.04). On the basis of these results, first two null hypotheses were rejected as teachers showed moderate level of mental and professional readiness.

**Table 3**

*Analysis of Teachers' Readiness to Implement Inclusive Education (Item wise)*

| Items | Mental Readiness for Inclusive Education | | Professional Readiness for Inclusive Education | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **To what extent are you ready to…** | **M** | **S.D.** | **M** | **S. D.** |
| teach inclusive classes. | 2.61 | 1.9 | 2.54 | 1.30 |
| plan your lesson (s) for inclusive classes. | 2.72 | 1.17 | 2.69 | 1.28 |
| manage inclusive classroom settings. | 2.86 | 1.81 | 2.76 | 1.31 |
| interact in the inclusive classes. | 2.90 | 1.21 | 2.77 | 1.33 |
| prepare tests for inclusive classes. | 2.92 | 1.27 | 2.77 | 1.35 |
| manage curricular activities in inclusive classes. | 2.88 | 1.27 | 2.78 | 1.34 |
| manage co-curricular activities in inclusive classes. | 2.83 | 1.31 | 2.63 | 1.35 |
| cover syllabus in time in inclusive classes. | 2.81 | 1.34 | 2.64 | 1.34 |
| resolve psychological issues of the students in inclusive classes. | 2.81 | 1.37 | 2.67 | 1.36 |
| create a culture of respect for children with disabilities in inclusive classes. | 3.17 | 1.45 | 2.89 | 1.41 |

Next step was to find the teachers professional and mental readiness items wise. The findings are given in the table 3. The item with the highest means value was the same for both professional and mental readiness "create a culture of respect for children with disabilities in inclusive classes". It was

an interesting revelation. It shows that teachers perceived themselves to be mentally and professionally better prepared for the activities which would not require professional and technical expertise, but were of more general in nature (morality, preaching, schooling etc.). "Prepare tests for inclusive classes" was second for mental readiness and third for professional. As the term children with disabilities is too general (including the students with impaired hearing, vision, speaking issues, learning disabilities etc.), the teachers could think that for some of the children with disabilities like with hearing and speaking disabilities, they can prepare and use the same tests as for the other students. Surprisingly, the item with second highest mean value for professional readiness was "manage curricular activities in inclusive classes". The teachers thought that they were professionally ready to engage the students in an inclusive class.

The table reveals that the teachers were not ready to "teach inclusive classes". It was an interesting one. It could be that the teachers thought that they were not ready to teach the inclusive class, but they could engage them in curricular activities (self-study, reading, group activities, pair work etc.). Second lowest mean for mental readiness was about "plan your lesson (s) for inclusive classes". It also makes sense as planning for the inclusive class means having a clear idea and strong grip on the inclusive classroom activities which the teachers might be lacking. For professional readiness, it was "manage co-curricular activities in inclusive classes." Again, teachers felt that they were professionally prepared for conducting co-curricular activities in inclusive classes.

**Teachers' Mental Readiness as Predictor to their Professional Readiness**

Third null hypothesis was developed to find out teachers' mental readiness for implementing inclusive education as predictor to their professional readiness. It was important to explore as professional readiness of the teachers does not rely on their professional awareness, trainings and workshops only; but also depends on their mental receptiveness and readiness. If teachers are not mentally ready for a thing, they are unlikely to be professionally ready for that. It was tested by applying simple linear regression (significance level of Alpha = 0.05).

**Table 4**

*Teachers' Mental Readiness for Inclusiveness as Predictor to Their Professional Readiness*

| | Model | Coefficients | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | $t$ | $P$ |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | Constant | 0.092 | 0.102 | | 0.895 | 0.371 |
| | Overall teachers' awareness about IE | 0.919 | 0.034 | 0.819 | 27.199 | 0.000 |
| | $R$ | 0.819 | | | | |
| | Adjusted $R^2$ | .671 | | | | |
| | $F$ | 739.78 | | | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| $p$ (For $F$) | 0.000 | |

Table 4 shows results for regression analysis. Value of R is 0.819 which shows that there is a strong correlation between teachers' mental and their professional readiness for inclusive education. Value of adjusted $R^2$ is 0.671 which explains that teachers' mental readiness for inclusive education can account for 67% variation in their professional readiness for the same purpose. Value of $\beta_o$ (0.092) is Y intercept, which means even if teachers' mental readiness is zero, their professional readiness is at level of 0.092. Value of $\beta_1$ is the gradient of regression line and its value is 0.92. It is the slope of regression line, which represents the change in teachers' professional readiness related to one-unit change in their mental readiness. If predictor variable is increased by one unit, this model predicts that 0.92 unit change will be observed in outcome variable.

As a result of the regression test, it may be concluded that teachers' mental readiness for implementing inclusive education is a significant predictor to their professional readiness for implementing it at p=0.000. Therefore, results of this study do not support third hypothesis.

**Difference between Male and Female Teachers about their Overall Readiness for Inclusive Education**

To investigate differences between male and female teachers' level of readiness for implementing inclusive education, fourth hypothesis was tested at significance level of Alpha 0.05 by applying independent sample $t$-test. Table 5 shows the results of that test.

**Table 5**

*Difference between Male and Female Teachers' Overall Readiness for the Implementation of Inclusive Education*

| Variable | Gender | M | S. D. | $t$ value (df = 366) | $p$ value ($\alpha$ = 0.05) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mental readiness for implementing IE | Male | 2.89 | 1.07 | 0.76 | 0.45 |
| | Female | 2.81 | 0.98 | | |
| Professional readiness for implementing IE | Male | 2.77 | 1.16 | 0.87 | 0.39 |
| | Female | 2.66 | 1.13 | | |
| Teachers' overall readiness for implementing IE | Male | 2.83 | 1.08 | 0.83 | 0.41 |
| | Female | 2.74 | 0.99 | | |

There were equal number of male and female teachers in this study (183 each). Table 5 depicts the difference between male and female teachers' overall level of readiness. Male teachers' overall readiness (M=2.83, SD=1.08) for implementing inclusive education was slightly better than that of female teachers (M=2.74, SD=0.99), but the difference was not statistically significant ($t$=0.83, $p$=0.41) at Alpha level of 0.05. Results were also similar for both mental and professional readiness, validating the fourth null hypothesis.

**Difference between Urban and Rural Teachers' level of Readiness for the Implementation of Inclusive Education**

The final test was carried out to test fifth hypothesis to find out if there were any differences between urban and rural teachers' level of overall readiness for implementing inclusive education. It was also tested by applying *t*-test at significance level of Alpha (0.05).

**Table 6**

*Difference between Urban and Rural Teachers' Overall Readiness for the Implementation of Inclusive Education*

|  | Locality of teachers | M | S. D. | *t* value (df = 366) | *p* value (α = 0.05) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mental readiness for implementing inclusive education | Urban | 3.03 | 1.10 | 1.92 | 0.04 |
|  | Rural | 2.79 | 0.99 |  |  |
| Professional readiness for implementing inclusive education | Urban | 3.02 | 1.15 | 2.98 | 0.002 |
|  | Rural | 2.60 | 1.09 |  |  |
| Overall teachers' readiness for implementing inclusive education | Urban | 3.02 | 1.10 | 2.59 | 0.01 |
|  | Rural | 2.69 | 1.00 |  |  |

Ninety teachers in this study belonged to Urban areas while 267 from rural. Table 6 reveals that urban teachers' overall readiness (M=3.02, SD=1.10) was higher than that of rural teachers (M=2.69, SD=1.00). More importantly, the difference was statistically significant (*t*=2.59, *p*=0.01) at Alpha level of 0.05. Similar results were found for their mental and professional readiness. Consequently, fifth null hypothesis was rejected.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study was carried out to investigate Pakistani teachers' mental and professional readiness for inclusive education. More than two third of the participants (67.8% to be exact) revealed that before being part of this study, they had not even heard the term inclusive education. This was not a surprise as Farooq (2012) also reported that one of the biggest challenges about inclusive education in Pakistan was the lack of awareness about it. It could be because an overwhelming majority of the participants never took part in any seminar/workshop (98.5 %), or in any training related to inclusive education (99.5%). This shows a general apathy for inclusive education in Pakistan.

The study found that both mental and professional readiness of the teachers for inclusive education was at moderate level although mental readiness was slightly higher than professional one (M= 2.85 and 2.71). This makes sense as teachers might have been inclined to go for inclusive education (mental readiness), but the lack of any seminars, workshops or trainings for it would have made them unsure about their ability to manage and deliver it (professional readiness). Literature also talks

about the importance of workshops, seminars and trainings sessions for teachers' professional development and readiness for inclusive education in particular (Gathumbi et al., 2015).

Still moderate mental readiness of the teachers is alarming as it indicates teachers' lack of motivation and willingness for inclusive education which according to Srivastava et al. (2017) are critical in successful implementation of inclusive education. In the same way, moderate level of professional readiness is also a concern as the success of inclusive education heavily relies upon teachers' professional skills, and ability to manage and educate the inclusive class (Mthembu, 2009; Srivastava et al., 2017). Without improving teachers' mental and professional readiness, it will be difficult to achieve the inclusive education related targets of Education for All (Wikipedia, n.d.) and Sustainable Development Goals (UNO, 2015).

Male teachers' overall readiness (M=2.83) for implementing inclusive education was marginally better than that of female teachers (M=2.74). Although the current study does not explore the reasons behind it, previous studies suggest that it could be due to the higher levels of professional mobility amongst males in Pakistan (Adeel et al., 2017). Urban teachers' overall readiness (M=3.02) was statistically significantly higher than that of rural teachers (M=2.69). Research indicates that professional development opportunities are less for teachers in rural areas in Pakistan (Nawab, 2020). Also, print, electronic and social media are a lot more common and easily accessible in the cities as compared to the villages which could lead to higher level of awareness and readiness for inclusive education amongst the urban teachers.

The study shows that by and large teachers are not adequately prepared for inclusive education. This situation is not exclusive to Pakistan as various studies about many countries have come up with similar conclusion (Mthembu, 2009; Anati & Ain, 2012; Zulfija et al., 2013; Zagona et al., 2017). Literature has cited lack of awareness, lack of societal and government support, general attitude of the society towards children with disabilities, lack of training, poor quality of support provided to pre-service teachers and ineffective teacher education programs as some of the prominent reasons behind it (Bashir, 2005; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Farooq, 2012; Gathumbi et al., 2015; Bibi et al., 2019).

For the promotion of inclusive education, it is very important to make sure that our general education teachers are not only aware about inclusive education and its importance, but are also mentally and professionally ready to accommodate children with disabilities in their normal classes. In a society like Pakistan where children with disabilities are still stigmatized, if they are put into the regular classes without providing specialized professional trainings to the teachers and creating awareness and moral consciousness amongst their fellow students; the results may only be counter-productive.

## Recommendations of the Study

Inclusive education is the way forward as it would not only help children with disabilities becoming useful members of the society, improve their social interaction with the others; but eventually may also help in eliminating many of the biases and stigmatizations that Pakistani society still has. This policy can only work effectively and bring the desired results if implemented properly and carefully. The issues of lack of awareness, and mental and professional readiness of the teachers must be

addressed properly before the governments can step forward to implement inclusive education at any level.

There should be a campaign on the print, electronic and social media about children with disabilities and inclusive education so that the general public may treat them normally. There should be seminars, dramas, programs and other activities about children with disabilities in the schools to create general awareness about children with disabilities.

Special training sessions and workshops should be organized for the teachers in which they are trained about children with disabilities, their specialized educational needs and probable issues that they may face in an inclusive class. Inclusive education should be made part of teachers' education and training programs. This will immensely increase their awareness and readiness for inclusive education, making its implementation effective and successful.

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