

Exploring Teachers' Attitudes and Classroom Practices Toward Inclusive Education in Female Secondary Schools of District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is a global priority, yet implementation remains challenging in low- and middle-income countries. Teachers' beliefs and classroom practices are central to the success of inclusion. This study investigated female secondary school teachers' attitudes and classroom practices regarding inclusive education in public girls' secondary schools in District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

A quantitative descriptive-correlational survey design was used. Data were collected from 85 teachers of Grades 9–10 in 15 randomly selected government girls' secondary schools. A self-developed, validated questionnaire collected information on teachers' attitudes, self-reported classroom practices, and perceived barriers. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation in SPSS (Version 26).

Teachers reported generally positive attitudes toward inclusive education ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.61$ on a 5-point scale), but only moderate levels of inclusive classroom practices ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.74$). Large class size, lack of training, insufficient resources, and inadequate infrastructure were rated as major barriers (overall barriers mean = 4.17, $SD = 0.79$). Teachers with prior training in inclusive education had significantly more positive attitudes and higher reported use of inclusive practices than those without training ($p < .01$). Academic qualification showed a significant relationship with attitudes but not with practices; teaching experience showed no significant association with either. A moderate positive correlation was found between attitudes and practices ($r = .51$, $p < .001$).

The findings reveal a clear gap between supportive beliefs and everyday practice and underline the need for systematic professional development, manageable class sizes, and improved school-level support to translate inclusive education policies into classroom realities in girls' secondary schools in Peshawar.

Keywords: inclusive education; teachers' attitudes; classroom practices; girls' secondary schools; Pakistan; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Introduction

Inclusive education seeks to ensure that all children, regardless of disability, gender, socio-economic status, or other characteristics, learn together in ordinary schools with appropriate support. It has been endorsed globally through the Salamanca Statement, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In Pakistan, inclusive education is recognized in constitutional provisions (Article 25-A) and policy documents, and provincial sector plans, including the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Education Sector Plan, refer to mainstreaming children with disabilities. However, a gap persists between policy discourse and classroom realities. Overcrowded classrooms, exam-driven curricula, shortages of trained teachers, and infrastructural constraints limit implementation, particularly in government schools. Teachers are at the core of inclusive reform. Their attitudes, confidence, and day-to-day classroom practices largely determine how inclusive education is experienced by learners. In KP, gender norms and conservative social values make the context of girls' secondary schools especially significant. Yet little empirical work has focused on female secondary school teachers' views and practices regarding inclusion. This study addresses that gap in District Peshawar.

Internationally, inclusive education is now seen as a system-wide approach that requires schools to adapt to learner diversity, rather than expecting learners to adapt to existing structures. It is grounded in a rights-based understanding of education and closely linked to the social model of disability, which locates disability in environmental and attitudinal barriers rather than in individual deficits.

Vygotskian sociocultural theory supports inclusive practices by stressing that learning is mediated through social interaction and can be scaffolded in diverse classrooms. Ecological perspectives further highlight that learners are influenced by multiple systems: family, school, community, and policy, so that inclusive education cannot be reduced to individual teacher effort alone. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) adds a framework for designing flexible curricula that provide multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression, though its application remains limited in low-resource contexts.

Research consistently shows that teachers' attitudes are a key determinant of whether inclusion is supported or resisted. Many studies report that teachers are, in principle, supportive of inclusion but express concern about their skills, workload, and the likely impact on other students. Positive attitudes and higher self-efficacy are associated with prior training in inclusive education and experience with learners with disabilities. At the same time, numerous studies point to an "attitude-practice gap": teachers may endorse inclusive values but continue to use uniform, whole-class teaching and rigid assessment, particularly where classes are large and resources are scarce.

In Pakistan, policies have increasingly adopted inclusive language, and some

initiatives have sought to mainstream children with disabilities. However, empirical studies report limited implementation, with teachers often lacking training, support, and resources. Research indicates that while many Pakistani teachers express willingness to teach diverse learners, they feel under-prepared and constrained by system-level factors, especially in public schools.

In KP, these challenges are layered with gendered expectations and security concerns that shape girls' education. Evidence on inclusive education at primary level is emerging, but studies focusing on girls' secondary schools and linking teacher attitudes with their reported practices remain scarce. This study therefore responds to an important empirical gap.

Objectives and Research Questions

The study aimed to:

- 1.Examine female secondary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in District Peshawar.
- 2.Identify the classroom practices teachers report using to support inclusive education.
- 3.Explore the relationship between teachers' attitudes and their classroom practices.
- 4.Identify the main challenges teachers face in implementing inclusive practices.

Accordingly, the study addressed four questions:

- 1.What are teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in female secondary schools of District Peshawar?
- 2.What classroom practices do they report using to support inclusive education?
- 3.What is the relationship between their attitudes and classroom practices?
- 4.What challenges do they encounter in implementing inclusive practices?

Significance of the Study

The study offers context-specific evidence from government girls' secondary schools in Peshawar, a setting where inclusive education intersects with gender norms, resource constraints, and strong exam pressures. The findings may inform provincial policy, teacher education programmes, and school-level initiatives seeking to move inclusion from policy into practice in KP.

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative descriptive-correlational survey design was used. This design is appropriate when the goal is to describe prevailing attitudes and practices within a defined population and explore relationships between variables without experimental intervention.

Population and Sample

The target population included all female teachers teaching Grades 9 and 10 in 42 public girls' secondary schools in District Peshawar in the 2024–2025 academic year. A multi-stage random sampling procedure was applied. First, 15 schools were randomly selected from the 42 public girls' secondary schools. Second, within these schools, teachers who met the inclusion criteria (teaching Grades 9–10, at least one

year of experience, and willing to participate) were randomly approached and invited to participate. Ninety questionnaires were distributed and 85 were returned complete (response rate 94.4%).

Instrument

Data were collected through a self-developed questionnaire: the Teachers' Attitudes and Classroom Practices toward Inclusive Education Questionnaire (TACP-IEQ). Development was informed by a review of international instruments and local studies. The questionnaire comprised:

demographic information (e.g., qualification, experience, training);

24 items on attitudes toward inclusive education;

22 items on classroom practices related to inclusive education;

12 items on perceived barriers.

Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Negatively worded items were reverse-coded.

Validity and Reliability

Content and face validity were ensured through review by experts in inclusive education and research methodology from universities in KP. After revisions, the final questionnaire contained 66 items.

Data Collection and Analysis

Permissions were obtained from relevant education authorities and school principals. The researcher visited sample schools, explained the purpose and procedures, obtained informed consent, distributed the questionnaires, and collected them after several days.

Data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 26). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) described the sample and summarized attitudes, practices, and perceived barriers. Independent samples t-tests examined differences between teachers with and without training in inclusive education. One-way ANOVA tested for differences by teaching experience and qualification. Pearson product moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between attitudes and practices. Assumptions of parametric tests were checked and met. The significance level was set at $p < .05$.

Results

4.1 Participant Characteristics

The 85 participating teachers were largely early- to mid-career. Most held BS/B.Ed. (Hons) or M.Ed./MA Education degrees. About 31% reported having received some form of training on inclusive education. Slightly less than half (46%) indicated that they were currently teaching at least one student with a disability or special educational need.

Attitudes toward Inclusive Education

The mean attitude score was 3.82 (SD = 0.61), indicating generally positive attitudes. Teachers agreed that students with disabilities can be successfully educated in regular

classrooms with appropriate support, that inclusion benefits the social development of all students, and that girls with disabilities have a right to mainstream education. At the same time, some items revealed uncertainty about personal competence and concern about additional stress associated with managing diverse classes.

Classroom Practices

The mean score on the classroom practices scale was 3.36 (SD = 0.74), suggesting a moderate level of reported inclusive practice. Teachers indicated that they sometimes:

- adapt methods to individual needs;
- use mixed-ability group work;
- provide extra time or simplified tasks;
- monitor progress of students with additional needs.

These strategies, however, were not reported as consistently or extensively used. The difference between the overall positive attitude mean (3.82) and the moderate practice mean (3.36) indicates an attitude–practice gap.

Perceived Barriers

Teachers rated perceived barriers as high overall (M = 4.17, SD = 0.79). The most significant were:

- large class sizes (M = 4.41);
- lack of training in inclusive education (M = 4.35);
- inadequate physical infrastructure (e.g., lack of ramps, adapted toilets; M = 4.22);
- insufficient teaching materials and resources (M = 4.18);
- limited support from school administration and specialist staff (M ≈ 3.95);
- limited parental awareness and support (M ≈ 3.89).

These results suggest that teachers see inclusion as constrained primarily by systemic and resource-related factors rather than by their own unwillingness.

Influence of Training, Experience, and Qualification

Independent samples t-tests revealed significant differences between teachers with and without training in inclusive education:

- attitudes: trained teachers (M = 4.21, SD = 0.49) scored significantly higher than untrained teachers (M = 3.64, SD = 0.58), $t(83) = 4.28$, $p < .001$;
- practices: trained teachers (M = 3.78, SD = 0.61) also reported higher levels of inclusive practices than untrained teachers (M = 3.18, SD = 0.73), $t(83) = 3.15$, $p = .002$.

One-way ANOVA showed no significant differences in attitudes or practices across teaching experience categories. Academic qualification was significantly associated with attitudes [$F(4, 80) = 2.91$, $p = .027$], with teachers holding M.Phil./MS degrees showing the most positive attitudes. Qualification did not significantly affect practices.

Relationship between Attitudes and Practices

A moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlation was found between attitudes and classroom practices ($r = .51$, $p < .001$). Teachers with more positive attitudes were more likely to report using inclusive classroom strategies.

Discussion

The study's findings show that female secondary school teachers in public girls' schools in Peshawar generally support the principles of inclusive education but face considerable challenges in implementing them fully in their classrooms.

The positive attitudes recorded here are consistent with other studies in Pakistan and internationally, which suggest that teachers often accept the idea of inclusion but harbor doubts about feasibility and their own preparedness. The relatively high scores for rights-based items (e.g., girls with disabilities having a right to mainstream education) may reflect the influence of recent policies, public discourse, and teacher education content that emphasize inclusive ideals.

Yet the moderate practice scores and the size of reported barriers indicate that these attitudes are not easily translated into classroom practice. The most prominent barriers large class size, lack of training, and inadequate infrastructure and materials are systemic and fall largely outside individual teachers' control. These findings resonate with broader research that emphasizes how structural and resource constraints in low- and middle-income countries limit the implementation of inclusion, even where teachers' attitudes are reasonably positive.

The strong association between training and both attitudes and practices underscores the critical role of targeted professional development. Teachers who had received training felt more confident and reported more frequent use of inclusive strategies. This supports the argument that training in inclusive pedagogy, differentiation, and classroom management is not optional but central to making inclusion workable.

The absence of significant effects for teaching experience suggests that more years of teaching, on their own, do not ensure more inclusive practice. Without specific preparation and support, teachers may continue to teach in traditional ways. The association between higher qualification and attitudes (but not practice) suggests that advanced study may enhance theoretical understanding and commitment to inclusion without necessarily equipping teachers with concrete, context-appropriate strategies.

The moderate correlation between attitudes and practices indicates that beliefs matter but are not sufficient. Teachers who are more supportive of inclusion are more likely to attempt inclusive practices, but what they can realistically do is still heavily mediated by conditions such as class size, time, resources, and school leadership.

Conclusion

Female secondary school teachers in public girls' schools in District Peshawar hold positive attitudes towards inclusive education but report only moderate levels of inclusive classroom practice. They identify large classes, lack of training, resource shortages, and inadequate infrastructure as major obstacles. Training in inclusive education is clearly associated with more positive attitudes and more frequent use of inclusive practices, whereas teaching experience alone is not. Higher academic qualifications appear to improve attitudes but do not automatically translate into more inclusive practice.

Overall, inclusive education in this context appears as an emerging but fragile practice: recognized in policy and largely accepted in principle by teachers, yet

constrained by systemic conditions. Addressing these conditions is essential if inclusive education is to move beyond rhetoric and become embedded in the daily life of girls' secondary schools in KP.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

Professional Development

Integrate structured, practice-oriented modules on inclusive education into regular in-service training for secondary school teachers, prioritizing government girls' schools. Ensure that training is continuous and supported by follow-up mentoring at school level.

Class Size and Support Staff

Where reducing class size is not immediately feasible, provide additional support staff (e.g., teacher aides, resource teachers) to assist with differentiation and individual support.

Infrastructure and Resources

Allocate specific funds to improve physical accessibility (ramps, adapted toilets, accessible classrooms) and to supply low-cost teaching and learning materials that support diverse learners.

Teacher Education Programmes

Embed inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and assessment adaptation throughout pre-service (B.Ed., M.Ed.) curricula and incorporate school-based practicum in diverse classrooms.

In postgraduate programmes, balance theoretical content with practice-based components that engage teachers in designing and evaluating inclusive strategies.

School-Level Culture and Collaboration

Encourage school leaders to promote and model inclusive values, recognize and share good practice, and create opportunities for teachers to collaborate around problem-solving for diverse learners.

Engage parents through meetings and awareness activities to build understanding and support for inclusive education, particularly for girls with disabilities.

Monitoring and Policy Implementation

Incorporate specific indicators of inclusive practice into school supervision and reporting systems to ensure that inclusive education moves beyond policy text to observable practice.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future research could build on this study by:

using classroom observation and interviews to explore how inclusive practices are enacted and experienced by teachers and learners;

examining students' perspectives, especially those of girls with disabilities, on inclusion in girls' secondary schools;

evaluating the impact of specific professional development programmes on teachers' attitudes, self-efficacy, and classroom behaviour over time;

conducting comparative studies across districts (urban–rural) or school types (public–

private) in KP;

investigating how disability interacts with gender, poverty, and ethnicity to shape educational opportunities and outcomes at the secondary level.

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