

## **Quality Improvement through Inclusive Education at Primary School Level**

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Inclusive education offers opportunities for learners with diverse needs to benefit from the teaching-learning process in a barrier and threat-free environment. It leads not only towards the provision of quality education services but also facilitates social inclusion. The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of teachers regarding inclusive education as a lever to improve the quality of education at the primary school level. This quantitative exploration based on a self-report survey was made by taking a sample of 120 teachers from 30 inclusive primary schools of a metropolitan city Lahore of Pakistan through a census technique. The instrument consisted of 69 items under seven factors regarding inclusive education with a reliability coefficient  $\alpha = 0.97$ . The data analysis revealed that teachers' assessment, learners' and learning environment's quality, parent and community attitudes, school facilities, and instructional strategies are important factors in inclusive schools contributing towards the improvement of quality education. However, the marginalized students' factor seems the dominant factor affecting quality education. A significant difference in the perception of teachers in terms of gender and experience regarding inclusive education was also observed. On the basis of explored facts, it is suggested that parents, teachers and communities should act proactively for the implementation of inclusive education. The stakeholders should be provided awareness and training regarding inclusive schooling to address the unique needs of learners.

**Keywords:** *learners with special needs, marginalization, inclusive schools, diversity, quality education.*

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### **Introduction**

Education is key to the well-being of the society where every human being has a right to education. Inclusive education provides equal opportunity to every child including poor, nomadic, children with ethnic and language minorities, and also addresses gender bias and marginalized students which are important in improving the quality of education. Inclusive education reduces exclusion and increases participation of learners with diverse needs (UNESCO, 2000). UNESCO (2009) takes inclusive education as "a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all children and the youth, through increased participation in learning, cultures and

communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications to content, approach, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children". The development of children's intellectual, emotional and creative abilities are only possible through education (UNESCO, 2005). Inclusive education provides education for all that is right of every child. Therefore, the purpose of inclusive education is full participation of all learners, which is important in the improvement of an education system (UNESCO, 2005). Inclusive Education addresses some

important dimensions regarding the improvement of educational quality that includes quality of learners, environments, curriculum, instructional strategies, school facilities, teachers' assessment, marginalized and vulnerable students, and parents' attitudes and the community environment. All these dimensions of quality are interdependent and influence each other (UNICEF, 2000).

The systems of schools work for the children who come here for learning. Learners are influenced by the quality of their lives before beginning formal education. Inclusive education addresses the children's basic needs such as love and affection, safety, nutritious food, safe environment and shelter which are necessary for their growth and development. Several elements include developing learners' through health, early experiences in their childhood and family support (WHO, 1998). Teachers and schools must try to ensure that learners' basic needs are being met because without these they may be held back or their ability to learn could be reduced (Farooq, 2013; UNESCO, 2001).

Williams (2003) claimed that learners' higher scores in tests and their lower grade retention are related to parental involvement and understanding of young children. On the other hand, Carron and Chau (1996) found that malnourishment, temporary hunger and micronutrient deprivation, illness and poor health have adverse effects on achievement which increase dropout rate in schools. Clean water, provision for de-worming, and health education programs in the schools have been encouraging for health improvement,

nutritional and academic achievement outcomes (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991; UNICEF, 2014; William, 1999; Williams & Leherr, 1998). It is reported by UNICEF (1998) that the quality of education cannot be improved without positive learning environments. Education systems having a quality learning environment typically produce better learning results. Different elements are important in making learning environments. These include physical, psychological, sociological and quality service delivery elements. Safe, caring and non-discriminatory environments are the right of every child in which they can feel secure and learn better (UNESCO, 2000). Several policies on inclusive education are implemented in the schools and classrooms of Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam (Mitchell & David, 1995).

The quality of school facilities such as building, infrastructures, instructional materials, library, water and electricity facilities are very important in improving the quality of education. Learning is directly affected by school facilities provided to a learner. Formal learning should take place in modern and well-equipped physical learning spaces (UNICEF, 2000). Reynolds (1991 cited in Pennycuik, 1998) asserted that physical characteristics (school size, age of buildings) do not have an effect on students' academic performance. However, Carron and Chau (1996) stated that the quality of the physical environment (presence and good condition of the school building, the supply of clean water, library facilities, electricity etc.) is highly associated with students' academic performance. Lack of

classroom materials and inadequate library facilities have a negative effect on pupils' academic achievement (Williams, 2003). Effective schools provide good working conditions and well planned physical learning spaces for pupils and teachers. Inclusive education addresses the quality of curriculum and instructional strategies that deals with the individual needs of the learner (UNICEF, 1998). Quality curriculum and instructional strategies refer to the intended and flexible learning opportunities for schools. The quality curriculum is flexible and caters the needs of individual learners and teachers use different strategies to teach the learners with diversities. In these ways, students at primary school level learn more self-awareness skills literacy (reading, writing and speaking) and numeracy skills (UNICEF, 2000).

Teachers' command on subject matter and area of complex subject matter both are interlinked. Therefore, teachers' training in both content and teaching methods are necessary because it affects the students' academic achievement (Mullens, Murnance & Willett, 1996). Interactive video plays an important role in the training of geographically detached teachers through which they can understand different pedagogical issues (Maheshwari & Raina, 1998). Assessment and evaluation techniques used by teachers are important to improve the classroom practices as well as students learning. A teacher must know the assessment and evaluation skills according to the diverse needs of the learners to assess their performance and factual knowledge which helps a teacher to select different instructional strategies to improve students'

learning (Carron & Chau, 1996). Continuous assessment provides the necessary information about students' performance to teachers to improve the individual student's learning (UNICEF, 2016).

Teachers' traditional evaluation techniques (paper-pencil test) endorse rote memorization in students rather than deep and higher-order thinking, that affects the quality of education (Colby, 2000). The EFA Global Monitoring Report (2010) takes "marginalization as a form of critical and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities". It includes poverty, ethnicity, region, disability, gender or membership of a minority group which limits access to education (Padhi, 2016). Inclusive education provides the rights to each learner and places the marginalized groups in more central positions. According to UNESCO (2009) and UNRWA (2013) the concept of inclusive education provides a broad vision of education for all reflected by national government policies, must take into account the needs of deprived, nomadic children, distant rural areas, including working children, affected by war, starvation and children with special learning needs. Inclusive education carefully monitored the students at risk of marginalization and provided services and interventions carefully in order to decrease the rate of dropout (Ainscow, 2000). Parent and community is the most important dimension to improve the quality of education which makes the learner able to participate in a democratic society (UNICEF, 2000). Positive attitude and contribution of parents and community nurture learning opportunities for learners

with different educational needs. Low parental involvement in school causes the lower tests scores and higher grade repetition of children (Willms, 2002).

All the dimensions of inclusive education (quality of learners and environment, school facilities, curriculum and instructional strategies, assessment and evaluation techniques marginalization, parents and community) perform a vital part in the improvement of education quality. Inclusive education system creates a sense of acceptance and patience in society. The system of inclusive education gratifies the segregation of children with risk, poor, nomadic and different minority groups who are currently not supported by their parents and community to get their rights regarding education. The development of an inclusive society (schools, teachers and the community) will be helpful in acquiring quality education by providing equal rights to all learners. It can be said that inclusive education will develop a system to meet the individual needs of all learners, instead of treating the same, especially in the context of Pakistan which is a developing country there is a need of inclusive education so that resources in education could be used effectively. Students face quality related issues and challenges at primary schools that are providing inclusive education. Teachers can play an important and vital role in improving quality at these inclusive schools. The perceptions of the teachers were measured regarding inclusive education as an approach to improve the quality of education at the primary school level.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Objectives of the study were to:

1. Explore the perceptions of teachers about inclusive education as an approach to improve the quality of education at the primary school level.
2. Identify the dominant factors of inclusive education contributing to improving the quality of education at the primary school level.

### **Research Questions**

The study addressed the following questions:

- a. What do teachers perceive about inclusive education as an approach to improve the quality of education at the primary school level?
- b. What is the difference in teachers (males & females) perception about inclusive education as an approach to improve the quality of education at the primary school level based on their work experience?
- c. What are the dominant contributing factors of inclusive education in improving the quality of education at the primary school level?

### **Methodology**

The quantitative descriptive research was based on a self-report survey used to conduct this study. In light of the review of related literature, a questionnaire consisting of Likert type scale was developed as an instrument of the study by the researchers. This instrument was validated by the three experts and having a good level of reliability ( $\alpha = .97$ ). The questionnaire consisted of 69 items related to seven contributing factors of inclusive education: *Quality learners, Quality learning environment, School facilities, Quality curriculum and*

*instructional strategies, Teachers' assessment techniques, Marginalized students, and Parents' attitude and community.* The instrument was tried out on 50 teachers of the inclusive schools. The data were collected by the researchers through personal visits to teachers in inclusive schools.

**Data Analysis**

For data analysis descriptive (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) and

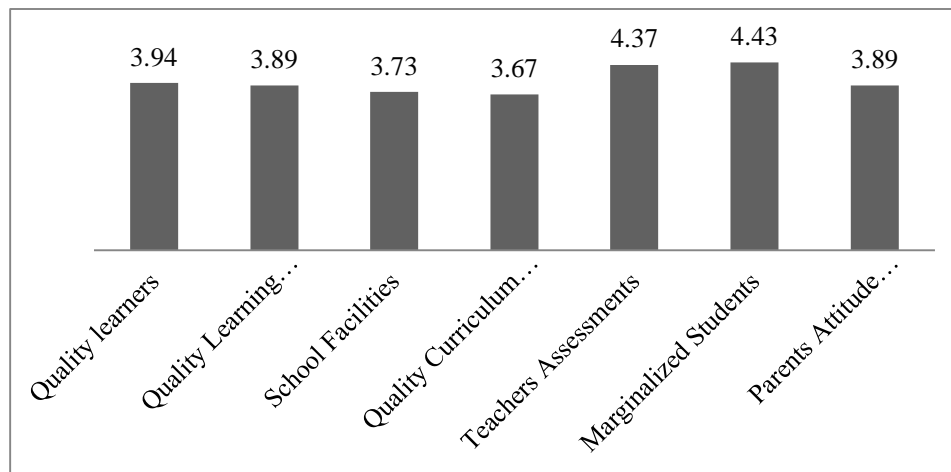
All the teachers of inclusive primary schools of Lahore were the population of the study. The sample of the study comprised of 120 inclusive school teachers selected from 30 inclusive primary schools of the Lahore through census technique.

inferential statistics (t-Test and ANOVA) were applied.

**Table 1**

*Inclusive education factors improving quality of education (N=120)*

	Minimum	Maximum	M	S.D
Quality learners	3	5	3.94	.47
Quality Learning Environment	3	5	3.89	.55
School Facilities	3	5	3.73	.55
Quality Curriculum Instructional Strategies	3	5	3.67	.60
Teachers, Assessments Techniques	3	5	4.37	.46
Marginalized Students	3	5	4.43	.52
Parents Attitude Community	3	5	3.89	.52



*Figure 1: Inclusive education factors for improving quality*

Table 1 and Figure 1 shows that the majority of the teachers are in favour of the fact that marginalized students factor of inclusive education is the dominant factor improving quality at primary schools (M=4.43)

followed by teachers assessment factor (M=4.37). However the most of the teachers show agreement that quality learners (M=3.94), quality learning environment (M=3.89), parents attitude and community

(M=3.89), school facilities (M=3.73) and quality curriculum and instructional strategies (M=3.67) are also important factors of Inclusive education contributing

in improving quality of education at primary schools.

**Table 2**

*Comparison of perception of teachers (male and female) about the usefulness of inclusive education approach (df=118)*

Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	t-value	P
Quality learners	Male	31	44.87	11.32	-2.60	.01
	Female	89	50.61	08.12		
Quality learning environment	Male	31	34.06	07.22	-1.02	.31
	Female	89	35.48	04.78		
School facilities	Male	31	28.42	07.37	-1.33	.19
	Female	89	30.34	05.45		
Curriculum and instructional strategies	Male	31	67.65	13.44	-.465	.64
	Female	89	68.80	11.31		
Teachers' assessment	Male	31	17.65	04.10	-3.12	.00
	Female	89	20.70	03.64		
Marginalized students	Male	31	18.68	04.13	-2.88	.01
	Female	89	21.04	03.39		
Parents' attitude and community	Male	31	41.00	09.17	-1.40	.17
	Female	89	43.48	06.36		
Overall	Male	31	252.32	52.14	-1.80	.08
	Female	89	270.45	35.37		

\*p≤0.05 level of significance

Table 2 shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the responses of teachers about the usefulness of inclusive education on the factors *quality learners* (t = -2.60, p = .01), *teachers' assessment* (t = -3.12, p = .00), and *marginalized students* (t = -2.88, p = .01). Hence, it is concluded that the perception of male and female teachers about inclusive education on these mentioned factors is different. There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of inclusive teachers about *quality learning environment* (t = -1.02, p = .31), *school facilities* (t = -1.33, p = .19),

*curriculum and instructional strategies* (t = -.47, p = .64), and *parents attitude and community* (t = -1.40, p = .17). Hence, it is concluded that teachers have the same perception about these listed factors. Overall analysis shows that male and female teachers have the same perceptions about the usefulness of inclusive education. The mean values show that female teachers are more in favour of statements on the usefulness of inclusive education than their male counterparts.

**Table 3**

*Comparison of teachers' perception about inclusive education in terms of work experience*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Groups</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Quality learners	Between	2	1.10	.14
	Within	117		
	Total	119		
Quality learning environment	Between	2	5.22	.01
	Within	117		
	Total	119		
School facilities	Between	2	2.96	.06
	Within	117		
	Total	119		
Curriculum and instructional Strategies	Between	2	6.12	.00
	Within	117		
	Total	119		
Teachers' assessment	Between	2	1.73	.18
	Within	117		
	Total	119		
Marginalized students	Between	2	2.09	.13
	Within	117		
	Total	119		
Parents' attitude and community	Between	2	4.32	.02
	Within	117		
	Total	119		

\* $p \leq 0.05$  level of significance

The results of one-way ANOVA show that there is a statistically significant difference in the perception of teachers on factors *quality learning environment* ( $F = 5.22$ ,  $p = .01$ ), *curriculum and instructional strategies* ( $F = 6.12$ ,  $p = .00$ ) and *parents' attitude and community* ( $F = 4.32$ ,  $p = .02$ ) for

the three groups of experience regarding the inclusive education. Hence it is concluded that teachers with different work experience have different views about the usefulness of inclusive education. However, on other factors, they have the same perception (Table 3).

**Table 4**

*Overall comparison of teachers' perceptions based on inclusive work experience about Inclusive education as a way for Quality Education*

<i>Experience</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>
5 years and above	48	277.88
1-5 years	43	258.55
Less than 1 year	29	257.12
Total	120	265.77

The overall mean values of teachers' responses show that teachers' perception who have experience of five years and above ( $M = 277.88$ ) have greater mean values than the other two groups. It can be

concluded that experienced teachers working in the inclusive school settings have a more favourable view about the usefulness of inclusive education regarding the quality of education at the primary school level.

**Table 5**

*Multiple comparison of teachers' perceptions based on inclusive work experience about Inclusive education as a way for Quality Education*

Dependent Variable	(I) Experience	(J) Experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Quality learning environment	> 5 years	1-5years	3.274*	1.119	.004	1.06	5.49
		< 1 year	3.111*	1.254	.015	.63	5.59
School facilities	> 5 years	1-5years	3.005*	1.246	.017	.54	5.47
		< 1 year	1.802	1.395	.199	-.96	4.57
Curriculum and Instructional strategies	> 5 years	1-5years	5.281*	2.387	.029	.55	10.01
		< 1 year	9.066*	2.673	.001	3.77	14.36
Parents' attitude and Community	> 5 years	1-5years	3.681*	1.478	.014	.75	6.61
		< 1 year	4.077*	1.655	.015	.80	7.35
Overall	> 5 years	1-5years	20.759*	8.404	.015	4.12	37.40
		< 1 year	19.323*	9.413	.042	.68	37.97

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5 shows the multiple comparison of three groups of respondents based on their work experience in inclusive schools. It is evident from the values of mean difference and significance that the perceptions of teachers with more than five years of experience are significantly different from their colleagues with lesser experience. It can be concluded that experienced teachers have more supporting perceptions than the less experienced and new entrants in the field about inclusive education as a determinant for quality education at the primary school level.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

It is concluded that the majority of the teachers endorsed all the factors of inclusive education as an agent in improving the quality of education. The inclusion of marginalized students' factor of inclusive education is the dominant factor followed by

teachers' assessment factor. Further, the most of the teachers were in favour of the fact that the factors quality learners followed and quality learning environment, parents attitude and community, school facilities and quality curriculum and instructional strategies are also important factors of Inclusive education that contribute in improving quality of education at the primary school level. Teachers have the same as well as different views regarding inclusive education as an approach to improve the quality of education on different factors at primary school level in terms of their gender and teaching experience in inclusive schools.

It is recommended that the inclusive schooling approach may be used to improve the quality of education at the primary school level. Parents' participation can also be beneficial for the implementation of this



approach. Inclusion of marginalized students and use of different assessment techniques according to the special needs of students may also be fashioned for the quality improvement of primary education.

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