

Attitudes of School Heads towards Inclusion of Student with Disabilities in Regular Schools

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Abstract

Inclusive education is indispensable for achieving Education for All. This study highlights the attitudes of public school head towards inclusive education in Punjab. The attitude of school heads plays a vital role for an effective inclusive education process as well as for overall educational progress of students. The present study is descriptive in its nature. All the heads of the schools of both sexes in public schools of Punjab province are the populations of this study. A questionnaire was used as an instrument to measure attitudes of school heads towards inclusion of students with disabilities in schools and how these school heads conceptualize inclusive education. Reflecting on data carried out from 200 schools of ten districts of Punjab. This research gives a valuable indication of the attitudes and awareness of school heads towards inclusion. The study found that school heads of rural area have more positive attitude towards inclusion and there is no significant difference between male and female heads towards inclusion of students with disabilities. The research reveals the difficulties in implementing inclusive education and also contributes in the field of educational leadership.

Keywords: Attitude, inclusive education, children with disabilities

Preface

The Almighty Allah, with his infinite love for mankind has bestowed upon us numerous blessings. But there are people who are less fortunate than physically and mentally sound people. Everyday person are seen limping, carrying white cane, deaf and dumb, or unintelligible words or perform abnormal action, they are either physically handicapped, hearing impaired, mentally retarded or visually impaired children. It is our religious, social, moral and humanitarian

obligation to reduce their sufferings, so that they become the useful part of society and lead a very reputable life. Inclusive education has become a significant element of the progressive attempt to enhance the delivery of services to special children and focus on their placement in the normal education setup for the last two decades. This innovative deal for given services has produced challenges for several educational professionals as well as the school heads. The responsibility of the school heads has

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been radically changed to comprise extra tasks, paperwork and personnel. School heads are currently expected to plan, guide, manage, and implement programs for all learners including disabled students (Sage & Burrello, 1994).

Contextual Background

Inclusive education was an agenda point in 1994 at Salamanca Conference. In the area of special education The Salamanca Statement issued on inclusive education was one of the most remarkable International documents (McRae, 1996). Pakistan has just developed the policy of “Education for All” (EFA) to achieve the developmental commonly known as Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs) by 2015. These goals are to be achieved till 2015 by all countries. Out of the 8 Millennium Developmental goals, 2 goals are mainly linked with the education; first one is “universal primary education” (all students male and female), and the second one is linked with 'equality' between male and female students as well as women's empowerment. United Nations and other organizations will give priority to education and inclusion is one of the perceptions included in the strategy as an approach to accomplish the goal of 'Education for ALL'.

Literature Review

Inclusive means shifting from 'obsession with individual difficulties' to an 'agenda of rights' by keeping flexibility, developing helpful systems, promoting respect for personal differences, promoting consultative, co-operative and adaptive educational practices, give power to teachers and by providing barrier-free education with equal opportunities. Skrtic (1996) has defined inclusive education as:

“Inclusive education refers to a unified education system that sees students' diversity as a source of enrichment and challenge, school resources must be realigned to provide maximum support for teachers so that they can help all students develop as fully as possible”.

Many difficulties faced by the developing nations in practicing of inclusive education, like shortage of related studies, information, insufficient supportive services, shortage of suitable services and resources, insufficient training plans and unsuccessful strategies and legislation (Charema, 2007). Education is the main neglected sector in Pakistani like other developing countries. Since the creation of Pakistan, the educational and rehabilitation services provided to the persons with disabilities

were not remarkable. Inclusive education brings together several fundamental aspects of education. It is right focused. It can be considered the ultimate educational outcome of principle of normalization. The beginning of inclusive education in Pakistan can be traced back, with the dawn of 21st century. In the past, religious institutes mostly teach the children with disabilities. A small number of institutes were found for the education of students with disabilities, at time of independence. The Article 38(d) of the 1973 Constitution said that the Govt is accountable for the provision of fundamental requirements of life like food, clothing, housing, education and medical facilities for all people, regardless of gender, social group or race. Pakistan is also the signatory with 164 countries that have dedicated to give basic and quality education for all by 2015 or earlier (UNESCO, 2000). Pakistan has actively participated in all the declarations. Attaining that target seems very challenging; particularly inclusion of disable students in normal primary schools (Miles & Farhad, 1999; UNICEF, 2003; Haider, 2008). Even though efforts are in progress in Pakistan for the successful implementation of inclusive education (USAID, 2010).

In Pakistani, good practices of

inclusive schools are mostly in private sector established in big cities. These schools are not accessible to the majority of students with disabilities who live in rural and other backward areas. There is not worth mentioning facilities of special education provided in rural areas. In a country report on inclusive education sponsored by the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA), Hameed (2002) documented the few inclusive schools. These schools were chosen as good practicing models. They range from small school (100 to 1000 students) to large school. The fee structure of these schools varies from free Rs1500 per month. Though these schools were selected as good practicing models but not means the best inclusive schools. Without any professional or financial support from Government, NGOs or the society they are making progress reasonably to be the model inclusive school. Pakistani teachers have optimistic feelings about inclusion of disable students in normal setup. They agree that inclusive education enhance social action and minimize negative feelings towards students with disabilities. Cooperation between general and special teachers is significant and must be a clear instruction on the achievement of inclusive education and more efforts are required for teaching

children with disabilities in Pakistan (Haider, 2008). In Pakistan, the researches conducted on the attitude of school teachers towards inclusion found that they are ready to include student with disabilities in schools if they are provided training, teaching learning, financial resources and other related services.

School head's attitudes towards inclusive education

Many studies have verified the significance of principal attitude toward inclusive education. Positive perceptions and approaches promote appropriate policies and supports necessary for successful inclusive education programs. Praisner (2000) studied 408 principals to examine the relationship regarding attitudes toward inclusive education, training and experience, and placement perceptions. Findings of the study pointed out that merely twenty percent of the principals' attitudes are positive. Brown (2007) studied the attitudes of school head toward inclusion of special students in the normal classroom and factors affect those decisions. The study revealed a noteworthy difference in attitude of the participants towards inclusive education regarding gender, school level assignment, years of experience as an administrator and regular education teaching experience.

School Head Role & Contribution in the Inclusive Education Process

The administration of special education policies and programs has been the obligation of district level administrators in the past. Responsibility for administration the programs and supports necessary for successful inclusion has moved to the school principal (Patterson & Bowling, 2000). The achievement of these programs is mainly dependent on the school administrator (Praisner, 2000). School administrators are expected to assume leadership in the area of special education even with minimal training and experience (Praisner, 2000). In order to be perceived as an efficient leader and to deal with the many challenges compulsory by IDEA, school based administrators should acquire knowledge of special education law, programming, and supports needed for successfully educating and including children with disabilities in the general education setting (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004). Moreover, managing with the legal requirements, parental demands, and ethical thoughts of the inclusion effort has become a component of many administrators' job description.

Purpose and objectives

This study investigated the attitudes of school heads toward inclusion and

perception about inclusion of disabled students into the general education setup and how these school heads conceptualize inclusive education. The study is to identify attitudes of school heads towards inclusion of students with disabilities in schools and how these school heads conceptualize inclusive education.

Questions of the Study:

The study was intended to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of school heads toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setup?
2. What is the level of understating about inclusive education of school heads?
3. Is the attitudes of male school heads is differ from female school heads?
4. Is the attitudes of school heads of rural areas is differ from school heads of urban areas?
5. Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of school heads towards inclusion with reference to their age?
6. Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of school heads towards inclusion with reference to their qualification?

7. Is there any significant difference between the understating of school heads towards inclusion with reference to their age?
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Significance

Pakistan is a developing country in which inclusive education is a new trend. School heads can play a vital role in the implementation of inclusive education and this implementation depends on their attitudes and knowledge. To include children with disabilities in the regular schools the attitude of the school heads is highly important for an effective inclusive education process. This study highlights the attitudes of public school heads towards inclusive education in Punjab. This study also focuses on the identification of characteristics which may influence school heads in relation to their attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities. The characteristics that are addressed are the school heads age, gender and their educational and professional qualification, years of experience as a teacher and administrator, and knowledge of special education terminology and law. The results

of this study may provide more insight into the leadership characteristics which are essential for the creation of an effective and efficient inclusive school environment. This research will develop a mode of training for the school heads to be capable of creating an inclusive learning environment in schools.

Methods and Procedures

The present study is descriptive in its nature. In quantitative research, descriptive research is one of the most common types in education. Descriptive research type concerned with data collection in order to test hypothesis or to inquire the answers regarding the present condition of the subject of the research.

Sample of the Study

All the heads of the schools of both sexes in public schools of Punjab province are the populations of this study. Convenient sampling technique was used. Convenient sampling is most common form of non-probability sample, with this method subjects are chosen on the basis of availability. The sample of the study was 200 public schools heads of ten districts of Punjab both from male and female including urban and rural areas.

Instrumentation

In this study a questionnaire used as instrument for data collection that was

separated into three parts. First part of the questionnaire was used to acquire professional and demographic information of the participants and second part is about understanding of inclusion containing 15 items. The third part of the questionnaire containing 16 items was Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES) which was developed by Wilczenski (1992). It was designed to find out responder's attitudes about inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools. It has been utilized by various researchers and tested for reliability and validity by its author Felicia L. Wilczenski. Before the use of Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES) permission was granted by the author. The scale calculated attitudes of participants toward inclusion of children with disabilities in four areas: social, physical, academic and behavioural. Responses of the participants are measured on a likert scale (0=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree). The questionnaire for the school heads was developed bilingually (English and Urdu) and content validity and reliability of Urdu translation was checked by a panel of experts for the better comprehension of the participants as English is the second language in Pakistan.

Data Collection

The data were collected by administering the questionnaire. The researcher visited the schools and administered the questionnaires personally. The researcher educated the respondents about inclusive education personally and also provides literature and pamphlets about inclusive education to make the respondents aware about inclusive education. This was done in order to achieve maximum return rate, the return rate was 100 percent

Findings

On the bases of findings, that study gives a valuable indication of the attitudes and awareness of school heads towards inclusion. The researcher found at the following findings as a result of data analysis:-

1. Collected data indicates that male school heads were well experienced as compared to female school heads.
2. Majority of the school heads were well qualified.
3. Majority (59%) of school heads had minimal knowledge about the policies regarding special education.
4. There is no significant difference between male and female school heads about

knowledge/understanding of inclusive education.

5. There is not any significant difference between the school heads of rural and urban areas about knowledge/understanding of inclusive education.
6. There is a significant difference in the understanding of school heads towards inclusion between the school heads having age less than 30 years and 31-40 years and between less than 30 years and 51 years or above.
7. There is no significant difference between the understanding of school heads towards inclusion with reference to their qualification.
8. The overall understanding of school heads about inclusive education is more than 50%.
9. Collected data indicates that the attitude of school heads about inclusion of children with disabilities is just satisfactory.
10. There is no significant

difference between male and female school heads attitudes towards inclusion of children with disabilities in the general setting.

11. There is a significant difference between the attitudes of school heads having age less than 30 years & 41-51 years towards inclusion.
12. There is no significant difference between the attitudes of school heads towards inclusion with reference to their qualification.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is indispensable for achieving EFA (Education for All). To include children with disabilities in the regular schools the attitude of the school heads is highly important for an effective inclusive education process. The present study is descriptive in its nature. Generally, the findings indicate that the majority of school heads have a positive attitude toward inclusion of children with disabilities. School heads believe that children with disabilities can achieve academic accomplishment effectively from being

included in the general education. The participants of this study felt that policy and law should be made to include children with disabilities into the general education and also providing sufficient resources and training. This research reveals that the school heads have to face difficulties in implementing inclusive education policies. It will also contribute in the field of educational leadership

Discussion

The objective of this research is to identify attitudes of school heads towards inclusion of students with disabilities in schools and how these school heads conceptualize inclusive education. In this study; the researcher solicited the opinions toward inclusion of public school heads in Punjab Province. Wilczenski's Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES) alongwith several items relating to understanding of inclusion and demographics were administered to identify attitudes of school heads towards inclusion of students with disabilities in regular schools.

The school head has direct influence on the activities and resources implemented in the school as the instructional leader. Research has emphasized to the significance administrators' attitude toward inclusive education. Inzano (1999) examined the

attitudes of school principals in the state of New Jersey toward inclusive education. The findings of the study found that neither years of experience as a principal nor location of school had an effect on principals' attitude toward inclusion. This study also found that school heads were in favor of including children with disabilities in the general education classroom and there is not any significant difference between the attitude of heads belonging to rural and urban areas.

Haider (2008) found that teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusion in Pakistan. They agreed that inclusive education enhances the social interaction and minimizes negative attitudes towards inclusive education. They also said there must be a clear guideline on the implementation of inclusive education and collaboration between the general and special education teachers is very important. He also suggested that more efforts are required for the inclusion of students with special needs in Pakistan. Rukhsana (2010) pointed out that there is no significant difference between attitudes of male and female about inclusion of hearing impaired students in mainstreaming. She also concluded that parents and teachers of hearing impaired children are generally in favour of inclusive education. She also

found that teachers and parents of rural area have more positive attitude towards inclusion of children with hearing impaired. This study also showed the same findings e.g. School heads of rural area have more positive attitude towards inclusion of student with disabilities and there is no significant difference between male and female school heads towards inclusion of students with disabilities in normal schools.

Recommendations and Suggestions

On the bases of the findings and conclusion of the study, following recommendations have been made to promote inclusive education in regular schools:-

- More in-service courses and training should be organized for school heads to improve their professional attitude towards inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream.
- School heads that show positive attitudes towards inclusive education should be encouraged. Some incentives or rewards, for example, certificates of appreciation or cash prizes, etc should be given to those school heads

who enrolled at least 10 disabled students in his/her school.

- To increase the awareness among the school heads and to enhance positive attitude of school heads towards inclusive education, seminars and workshops should be arranged at district and provincial levels.
- Inclusive education as a course should be introduced /included in the B.Ed/M.Ed programmes.
- Sufficient resources and fund should be provided to the school heads about inclusive education.
- There should be legislation to make it necessary for every school to implement Article 25-A of the constitution of Pakistan so that every child should be provided all the facilities of education in his/her nearest public school.
- Latest literature and books about inclusive education should be provided in the school libraries.

- More funds should be allocated to Education sector, and special emphasis be given on child friendly and inclusive environment.
- Longitudinal research should be conducted to address other associated issues of inclusive education.
- There should be legislation and law to make it necessary for every regular school to admit all pupils irrespective of their disabilities

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