

# EFFECT OF WORKING EXPERIENCE ON MAINSTREAM TEACHER'S PERCEPTION ABOUT INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Shafia Zahoor<sup>1</sup>, Raffa Mubeen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Riphah International University, <sup>2</sup>Riphah International University  
PAKISTAN.

<sup>1</sup>shafia\_imran@yahoo.com, <sup>2</sup>rafiasnadeem@outlook.com

## ABSTRACT

*The disability is limitation of doing any task of daily routine like a normal individual due to any impairment. The people with disability should also have opportunity to learn through normal social setting than artificially created setting. The main aim of this study was to explore relationship between perception of mainstream teachers about inclusion of students with disabilities and their working experience. It was a cross sectional survey conducted on 300 general education teachers through purposive sampling technique. The sample of mainstream teachers was selected for research purpose, which have at least Masters level education in any subject. The schools of Rawalpindi and Islamabad were selected to approach the teachers. All the teachers have at least 1 to 2 years of teaching experience. They all were teaching at the primary level in mainstream schools. They may be general education teachers and general education teacher assistants. All the mainstream teachers who have qualification less than masters and with no experience, teachers of secondary levels and higher classes, teachers of special education schools were excluded from the sample. The data collection tool is "Opinions Relative to the Integration of Students with Disabilities". The teachers rated their responses on 6 point Likert scale that have options: I disagree very much (-3), I disagree pretty much (-2), I disagree a little (-1), I agree a little (+1), I agree pretty much (+2), I agree very much (+3). Half of the statements of this tool were negative and the rest half were the positive statements to prevent acquiescent response style threat. Results of the study shows there is a positive significant relationship between perception of teachers and their teaching experience. This is indicated by the p value of two groups for experience of mainstream teachers i.e. 0.050.*

**Keywords:** Mainstreaming, perception, disability

## INTRODUCTION

According to world health organization, the term disability refers to any type of limitation for doing the day to day tasks, just like the normal individuals. Individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA) states that students with disabilities should be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Least restrictive environment means students with disabilities should not be separated from the general classroom in any case except the possibility that they could not be accommodated in the general classroom even with special help and services. The disability can be mild, moderate or severe. The major domains are the physical impairment, sensory issues, behavioral issues or cognitive impairment.

Islamic Republic of Pakistan proclaimed its 1st "National Policy on the problem of incapacity in 2002 that outlined disability as: "A person with disabilities means that who, on account of injury, disease, or inborn deformity, is incapacitated in enterprise any paying. The Policies

of international organization and their Implementation 127 profession or employment, and includes persons who are visually impaired, hearing impaired, and physically and mentally disabled”.

Earlier, systematic care of disabled persons was initiated in 1981 once “Disabled Persons' (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance” was published. This ordinance mounted the responsibility of the State toward the interference of disabilities; protection of rights of persons with disabilities; and provision of medical aid, education, training, employment, and rehabilitation to the persons with disabilities. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan Census Organization (PCO) in its 1998 national population census has provided knowledge concerning incapacity underneath seven categories: Crippled; Insane; Mentally Retarded; Multiple incapacity, Blind; Deaf, Mute.

Educating the students with varied needs is a challenge for the mainstream teachers. It may take a great deal of administration and maintenance of a massive educational plan. Due to this inclusive education plan is difficult for mainstream teachers. Only trained teachers have capability of meeting the goals of inclusive education program timely and effectively with the range of academic requirement within the classroom.

Teachers play an important role in applying the plan for inclusive education, so the perception of teachers can lead to success or failure of students placed in the mainstream class. These students may require extra time from the teacher to complete their task. So the behavior of these students should be handled appropriately because it may have a bad impact on other students if they are mismanaged. It may require more patience of the teachers to manage the issues with difficulties.

There are three qualities that are important to build a successful inclusive education program i.e. attitude of teachers, expectation of teachers from the students and capability of teachers to effectively educate all the students of class. So it is very important for a teacher to strengthen the abilities of their students and to show the positive attitude and acceptance for all the students regardless of their disabilities. Positive perception of teachers will lead to successful inclusion of students with disabilities and vice versa.

The Pakistani Government first time took step for the education of disabled people by developing a report on Commission on National Education in 1959. The plan for the education of them was proposed in Education Policy 1972-1980 and special education system was developed. Budgetary provision was given for the special education schools in 1980s.

Persons with disabilities are generally overlooked in debate about future of Pakistan. Not only in Pakistan, this unusual discrimination is common worldwide. Since Pakistan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2011, there has been little progress towards achieving its goal for persons with disabilities to participate fully and effectively in society. Some would claim that Pakistan has many priorities it should address before this one, and it can be argued that developed countries, including the UK, should also do more to ensure inclusion and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. Globally, and in Pakistan, policy approaches to disability have largely been focused on rehabilitation, welfare handouts and related charity.

The results of an article indicate that the teachers who have more experience of teaching students with disability show positive attitude towards integration. Teacher's attitude becomes more positive if they have awareness about the inclusion program. Another study reveals that increasing experience of the inclusion increases the concern of the teachers towards students with special educational needs. Due to this concern teachers put in more efforts for educating the students in inclusive education more effectively.

A study was conducted to find out the difference of opinion between mainstream and special education teachers about the inclusion of students with disabilities. The statistical evaluation of the study indicated that the lack of awareness about the inclusion results in unplanned role of teachers and administrators during the process of inclusion. This affects the successful implementation of plan. The study results also showed that more experience and professional training results in more positive perception towards inclusion.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to find out the effect of working experience on the perception of mainstream teachers about the inclusion of the students with disabilities.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Study Design

Cross sectional survey design was used for the present research which can be conducted for a short period of time on a particular population. The main purpose of this study was to gather relevant information about “the effect of working experience on the perception of mainstream teachers about the inclusion of students with disabilities”. Then the given population was assessed on the criteria that either teacher’s opinion shows positive perception about inclusion of students with disabilities or not. The results of this type of survey can be helpful in assessing the attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of a population for a particular feature.

### Setting and Duration of Study

The study was conducted in the Private schools of Rawalpindi and Islamabad from different sectors. Current survey was completed over the period of 6 months.

### Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The questionnaire was administered to the sample of 300 mainstream teachers selected from private schools i.e. 150 teachers from Islamabad and teachers from Rawalpindi.

Purposive sampling technique was used for collecting data from participants. Only those teachers were selected who fulfills purpose of the research and inclusion criteria. Schools were also selected through the purposive sampling technique.

### Sample Selection

**Inclusion criteria:** The sample of mainstream teachers was selected for the research purpose, which have at least Masters level education in any subject. The schools of Rawalpindi and Islamabad were selected to approach the teachers. All the teachers (i.e. general education teachers and general education teacher assistants) had at least 1 to 2 years of teaching experience. They all were teaching at the primary level in the mainstream schools. The primary level includes Kindergarten to fifth grade teachers.

**Exclusion criteria:** All the other mainstream teachers who had qualification less than masters and with no experience were excluded from the sample. The teachers of secondary level and higher classes or teachers of special education schools were also not included as a research participant.

### Data Collection Procedure

The study variables were experience of mainstream teachers i.e. 1 to 2 years, 2 to 3 years, 3 to 4 years, 4 to 5 years, 5 to 10 years and above. The other variable was age i.e. 25 to 30

years, 30 to 35 years, 35 to 40 years, 40 to 45 years and 45 above. And the third variable was exposure with a child having disability. Six primary and secondary private schools in the Rawalpindi and 10 primary schools in Islamabad were approached randomly for collecting the data. Randomly three schools were selected from each sector to visit for research purpose and afterwards the objectives of the study were communicated to the school principal. Then informed consent was taken from the principal for taking their primary school teachers as research participants. The copy of research questionnaire was given to the teachers. The confidentiality of the responses was ensured to all the participants. As a way of maintaining confidentiality, teachers were asked not to mention their names or any other personal information on the questionnaire. . It took approximately 10 minutes for each participant to complete the questionnaire. All the schools that are included did not have special education, they were mainstream schools. Some of these mainstream schools also have inclusive education for students with disabilities. The sample of 300 teachers was collected over the period of three weeks

### **Data Collection Tool**

The data collection tool was “Opinions Relative to the Integration of Students with Disabilities”. This opinion tool has 25 items with 6 point Likert like rating. The teachers rated their responses on this Likert scale that have options: I disagree very much (-3), I disagree pretty much (-2), I disagree a little (-1), I agree a little (+1), I agree pretty much (+2), I agree very much (+3). Half of the statements of this tool are negative and the rest half are the positive statements to prevent acquiescent response style threat.

According to Antonak&Larrivee, there are four factors in this questionnaire that is showing the variety of responses to assess the perception. These factors are benefits of integration, integrated classroom management, perceived ability to teach students with disabilities and special vs integrated general education. The item numbers of benefits of integration are 3, 7, 11, 14, 17, 20, 21, 24, for integrated classroom management 1, 4, 6, 9, 12, 15, 16, 18, 22, 25, for perceived ability to teach students with disabilities 2, 10, 19 and for special vs integrated general education 5, 8, 13, 23.

Total of all the responses were calculated by ignoring the negative value. After this a constant value of 75 was added to the calculated value to exclude the negative scores. The responses varied from 0 to 180. The results were interpreted on the criteria that, higher the score of a participant the more positive perception a teacher has about the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream classroom. The data was collected and analyzed by using SPSS-21.

### **Limitations of the Study**

1. The data was collected only from the teachers of private schools.
2. Most of the teachers do not have exposure of students with disabilities in their classrooms.
3. The generalizability of the results will be affected because the sample of teachers is homogenous. The perception can vary according to urban and rural areas.
4. The data collection was based on closed ended questions; the researcher can get in depth information about the perception of teachers through open ended questions like interviewing the teachers (self reporting).

**RESULTS**

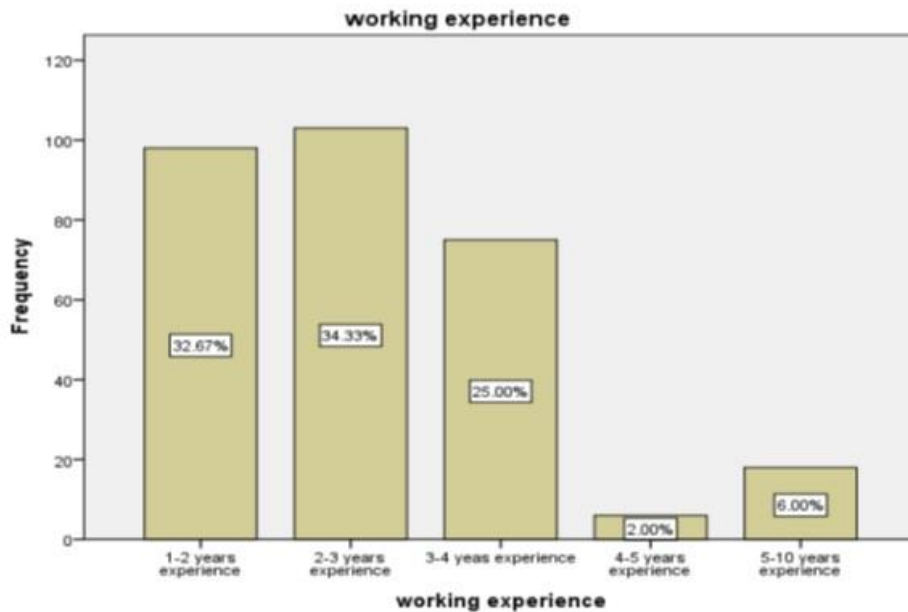
The results of study are presented as under:

**Table 1. Frequency/Percentage of working experience**

Variables (experience/year)	Frequencies	Percentage
1-2 years experience	98	30.8 %
2-3 years experience	103	32.4 %
3-4 years experience	75	23.6 %
4-5 years	6	1.9 %
5-10 years	18	5.7 %

The frequency and percentage of the participants having the work experience of 1 to 2 years are 98 and 30.8 % respectively. For the second group (i.e. 2 to 3 years’ experience), the frequency is 103 and percentage is 32.4 %. The participants belonging to the group of 3 to 4 years’ experience have percentage of 23.6 % and frequency of 75. The least number of frequency and percentage is in the group of 4 to 5 years experience i.e. 6 and 1.9 % respectively. The last group of 5 to 10 years experience has frequency of 18 and percentage 5.7 %.

**Figure 1. Working experience of mainstream teachers**



**Table 2. t value for work experience**

Variables (working experience)	Mean ± Standard Deviation	P value
1 to 2 years	71.6429 ± 11.00164	0.050
3 to 4 years	74.8400 ± 9.91592	

The above table shows that the mean value of 1 to 2 years experience is 71.6429, and the standard deviation is 11.00164. The mean value of 3 to 4 years experience is 74.8400 and its standard deviation is 9.91592. The independent t test was applied between two variables i.e. 1 to 2 years of experience and 3 to 4 years of experience and the calculated p value of these two variables is 0.050.

## **DISCUSSION**

The study of teacher's perception about inclusion is a multifaceted field, as many variables contribute in developing teacher's attitudes towards inclusion. The perception of teachers can lead to success or failure of students placed in the mainstream class. Teachers can create an accepting environment for students in the classroom.

A study was conducted in New Delhi to find out the attitudes of secondary mainstream teachers about the inclusive education for students with disabilities. The foremost findings of the study were that the mainstream teachers have positive perception about the inclusive education. They also indicated that the teachers having positive attitude were with more working experience than others.

Another study conducted in Pakistan on Government pre service mainstream teachers (both males and females) indicate that male teachers with more experience exhibits positive attitude than the female teachers about the inclusion. The pre service teachers from the special education system indicated less positive attitude than the mainstream teachers. The special education teachers having training about the inclusion and previous teaching experience, and information about the laws of disability have high self efficacy about the inclusive education. Teachers with training in special education, knowledge of disability legislation, teaching experience and personal experience with a disability reported higher levels of self-efficacy towards teaching within inclusive settings.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is concluded that there is a positive significant relationship between the perception of mainstream teachers towards inclusion of students with disabilities and their teaching experience.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Teacher's perception can also be assessed at the start of the session and after the end of the session. It may help to find out the change in attitude of the teachers and the relationship of their attitude towards students with disabilities.
2. Parent's perception can also be investigated about the inclusive education program for the students with disabilities.
3. A comparison of the perception of teachers between the special education system and general education system can be investigated.

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