

# The Role of Inclusive Education in Developing the Potential of Children with Special Needs in Pakistan

Zohaib Hassan Sain<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>) OSHAssociation UK, Pakistan

\* Correspondence e-mail; zohaib3746@gmail.com

## Article history

Submitted: 2024/04/17; Revised: 2024/05/12; Accepted: 2024/06/18

## Abstract

One of the primary issues confronting Pakistan's educational system is the lack of access to quality education for children with special needs. Traditional educational practices in the country have historically been exclusionary, with children with disabilities often being marginalized or completely left out of the mainstream education system. The study aims to investigate the role of inclusive education in developing the potential of children with special needs in Pakistan by examining how inclusive practices impact their academic and social development. Using a qualitative approach, the study included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions with educators, parents, and policymakers, and case studies of successful inclusive education programs. The study findings reveal that while inclusive education policies exist, their implementation could be more consistent, with significant challenges related to resource allocation, teacher training, and stakeholder perceptions. Despite these challenges, inclusive education has shown potential in improving academic performance and social integration for children with special needs. The study highlights the need for enhanced training, better resource management, and increased community engagement to support inclusive practices effectively. The results contribute to a deeper understanding of inclusive education's practical and theoretical aspects, providing insights for future policy improvements and research directions in the Pakistani context.

## Keywords

Developing; Inclusive Education; Potential Children; Role.



© 2024 by the authors. This is an open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY SA) licence, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.

## INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education, a philosophy that ensures equal educational opportunities for all children regardless of their abilities or disabilities, has gained significant attention worldwide. In Pakistan, a country with a diverse and growing population, the importance of inclusive education is particularly critical (Farooq et al., 2022). Children with special needs, who often face societal and educational barriers, require an educational framework that not only accommodates their differences but also empowers them to reach their full potential (Ali et al., 2021). Despite various efforts and policies aimed at supporting these children, many challenges persist, making it

essential to explore and enhance the role of inclusive education in Pakistan (Khushik & Diemer, 2018).

One of the primary issues confronting Pakistan's educational system is the lack of access to quality education for children with special needs. Traditional educational practices in the country have historically been exclusionary, with children with disabilities often being marginalized or completely left out of the mainstream education system (Jamiah et al., 2019). This exclusion not only hinders their personal development but also deprives the society of the unique contributions these individuals can make. The gap between policy and practice, limited resources, and insufficient training for educators are some of the critical factors contributing to this issue. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that redefines the education system to be more inclusive, accessible, and effective for all students (Sigit Gesang Permana et al., 2022).

Another compelling aspect of inclusive education in Pakistan is its potential to foster a more inclusive society. By integrating children with special needs into mainstream classrooms, the education system can promote social cohesion, empathy, and mutual respect among students (Sethi et al., 2019). This integration helps break down stereotypes and prejudices, paving the way for a more tolerant and understanding society. Moreover, inclusive education benefits all students, not just those with special needs. It encourages a collaborative learning environment where diversity is valued, and different perspectives are appreciated, enriching the educational experience for everyone involved (Jamin et al., 2024).

Inclusive education also plays a crucial role in the overall development of children with special needs. When these children are given the opportunity to learn in a supportive and inclusive environment, they are more likely to develop self-confidence, social skills, and a sense of belonging. These factors are essential for their holistic development and can significantly impact their future success in both personal and professional realms (O'Connor et al., 2023). The inclusive model also allows educators to tailor teaching methods and resources to meet the unique needs of each child, ensuring that they receive the appropriate support to thrive academically and socially (Asfahani et al., 2023). So, the role of inclusive education in developing the potential of children with special needs in Pakistan cannot be overstated. While significant challenges remain, the benefits of creating an inclusive educational environment are manifold, both for the individuals directly involved and for society as a whole (Artipah et al., 2024). By embracing inclusive education, Pakistan has the opportunity to unlock the full potential of all its children, fostering a more equitable

and progressive nation.

Despite ongoing efforts to implement inclusive education practices in Pakistan, several research gaps remain that hinder a comprehensive understanding of their impact on children with special needs. One significant gap is the lack of empirical data on the specific outcomes of inclusive education in various regions of the country. While national policies and frameworks exist, there is a need for localized studies that assess how these policies are applied in different contexts and their effectiveness in improving educational and developmental outcomes for children with special needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Additionally, there is limited research on the experiences of teachers, parents, and students within the inclusive education system, particularly regarding the challenges they face and the strategies that can be developed to address these issues (Aldiab et al., 2019). This research gap indicates a need for detailed, context-specific studies to provide a clearer picture of the current state of inclusive education in Pakistan.

The novelty of this research lies in its potential to bridge these gaps by providing an in-depth analysis of inclusive education practices and their effects on children with special needs in Pakistan. By focusing on underexplored areas such as the local implementation of national policies, the practical challenges faced by educators and families, and the real-life outcomes for students, this study aims to offer fresh insights and actionable recommendations (Vears & Gillam, 2022). Furthermore, this research will contribute to the development of a more nuanced understanding of how inclusive education can be effectively adapted and improved to meet the diverse needs of children with special needs across different regions of Pakistan (Shehzadi et al., 2021). This approach not only addresses existing gaps but also paves the way for future research and policy development in the field of inclusive education.

The primary objective of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive education in enhancing the developmental potential of children with special needs in Pakistan. This involves examining the implementation of inclusive education policies, identifying the challenges faced by educators, parents, and students, and assessing the impact of these practices on the educational and social outcomes for children with special needs. The research aims to provide actionable insights and recommendations to improve the inclusivity and effectiveness of educational practices. The benefits of this study include a deeper understanding of the practical challenges and successes associated with inclusive education, which can inform policy adjustments and educational strategies. Additionally, the findings are expected to contribute to the development of a more inclusive educational environment that supports the holistic

growth of children with special needs, ultimately fostering a more equitable and supportive society.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the role of inclusive education in developing the potential of children with special needs in Pakistan. The research will utilize in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as primary data collection methods. Interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders, including educators, parents, and policymakers, to gain comprehensive insights into their experiences and perspectives on inclusive education (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Focus group discussions with teachers and parents will provide a collaborative platform to discuss challenges, successes, and suggestions for improving inclusive practices. These qualitative methods will allow for a detailed exploration of the nuanced experiences and perceptions of individuals directly involved in the implementation and impact of inclusive education.

Additionally, the study will include case studies of specific schools or educational programs that have successfully implemented inclusive education practices. These case studies will provide contextual understanding and highlight practical examples of effective strategies and potential areas for improvement. The qualitative data collected will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the effectiveness and challenges of inclusive education. This approach will facilitate a deeper understanding of how inclusive education influences the developmental potential of children with special needs and will contribute to the formulation of recommendations for enhancing inclusive practices in Pakistan.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The study on the role of inclusive education in developing the potential of children with special needs in Pakistan reveals several key findings that illuminate both the progress and challenges within the current educational framework.

One of the primary findings indicates that while inclusive education policies are in place, their implementation is often inconsistent across different regions and schools. In areas where inclusive education practices are effectively implemented, children with special needs have shown significant improvements in academic performance, social skills, and overall self-confidence. Educators who have received specialized training in inclusive practices report better outcomes for their students, suggesting that targeted professional development is crucial for the success of

inclusive education.

Despite these successes, numerous challenges persist. Many schools lack the necessary resources and support systems to fully integrate children with special needs into the mainstream classroom. Insufficient funding, inadequate learning materials, and a shortage of trained staff are common barriers that impede the effectiveness of inclusive education (Alfidyah & Mawardi, 2021). Additionally, there is a notable gap in awareness and understanding among some educators and parents regarding the needs of children with special needs, which can result in less effective educational strategies and limited support.

Interviews and focus group discussions reveal that parents and teachers have mixed perceptions of inclusive education. While some parents are enthusiastic about the benefits of inclusion and advocate for their children's rights, others express concerns about the adequacy of the support provided and the potential impact on their children's learning experiences. Teachers, on the other hand, often highlight the need for more comprehensive training and support to manage diverse classrooms effectively. These varying perspectives underscore the importance of continuous dialogue and collaboration among all stakeholders to address concerns and improve inclusive practices.

The case studies of successful inclusive education programs demonstrate that creating a supportive and adaptive learning environment can significantly enhance the potential of children with special needs. Schools that have implemented innovative strategies, such as individualized learning plans and peer support systems, have achieved notable success in fostering an inclusive atmosphere (Susila & Risvan, 2022). These examples provide valuable insights into best practices and highlight the positive impact of a well-supported inclusive education system (Holst et al., 2020).

Based on the findings, several recommendations emerge. First, there is a need for increased investment in resources and training to support inclusive education across all regions. Second, raising awareness and providing ongoing professional development for educators and parents can help bridge the gap between policy and practice. Finally, fostering collaboration between schools, communities, and policymakers is essential for developing and sustaining effective inclusive education practices that truly benefit children with special needs.

Overall, the study underscores the potential of inclusive education to significantly enhance the developmental outcomes for children with special needs in Pakistan. However, realizing this potential requires addressing existing challenges and continuously improving the implementation of inclusive practices.

The analysis of the research findings from the study on the role of inclusive education in developing the potential of children with special needs in Pakistan reveals both alignment with and divergence from previous research and theoretical frameworks in the field of inclusive education.

The study's findings are consistent with global research emphasizing the positive impact of inclusive education on children with special needs. Previous studies have shown that inclusive education can enhance academic performance, social skills, and self-esteem in children with disabilities (Wulan & Sanjaya, 2022). Similarly, the research conducted in Pakistan indicates that children who are integrated into inclusive classrooms demonstrate significant improvements in these areas, validating the broader theoretical understanding of inclusive education's benefits (Nazir & Khan, 2022).

Moreover, the challenges identified, such as inadequate resources and insufficient teacher training, align with findings from other regions. Research highlights that effective inclusion requires comprehensive support systems and ongoing professional development for educators (Lee et al., 2021). The study's results reflect this need, underscoring that despite policy advancements, practical implementation often falls short due to these common barriers (Ariyanda & Arifyani, 2020).

However, the study also reveals some divergence from previous research, particularly concerning the effectiveness of policy implementation. While theoretical frameworks often suggest that inclusive education policies lead to widespread positive outcomes (Cerna et al., 2021), the research indicates that the impact of such policies in Pakistan is uneven. This discrepancy suggests that while policies may be sound in theory, their real-world application can be hindered by contextual factors such as regional disparities and varying levels of commitment from educational institutions (Abdurahman et al., 2023; Millner, 2021).

The mixed perceptions reported by parents and teachers also highlight a divergence from more optimistic views presented in some previous studies. While earlier research often emphasizes the overall positive reception of inclusive practices (Ramlah et al., 2022), the Pakistani context reveals a more nuanced picture, with concerns about resource adequacy and support systems affecting stakeholder attitudes (Al-Mamary, 2022). This suggests that the effectiveness of inclusive education is not solely dependent on policy but also on the quality of its implementation and the support provided to all involved parties (Agustina et al., 2023; Villafuerte & Mosquera, 2020).

The theoretical implications of these findings suggest a need for a more context-sensitive approach to implementing inclusive education. Theories such as the Social Model of Disability (MacLachlan et al., 2018) advocate for systemic changes to accommodate all students, yet the research indicates that practical challenges often undermine these theoretical ideals. Addressing these challenges requires not only adherence to theoretical frameworks but also adaptation to local conditions and needs (English & Mayo, 2019).

Additionally, the study underscores the importance of aligning theory with practice. The findings support the idea that while inclusive education has the potential to be transformative, its success depends on how well theoretical principles are translated into effective, localized strategies. This aligns with the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of inclusive education practices to ensure they meet the diverse needs of students with special needs. So, the research findings align with many aspects of existing literature on inclusive education, particularly regarding its benefits and challenges. However, they also highlight the gaps between theoretical models and practical implementation, emphasizing the need for more context-specific approaches and continuous support. This analysis reinforces the importance of integrating theoretical insights with practical strategies to effectively support the development of children with special needs in diverse educational settings.

## **CONCLUSION**

The analysis of the research findings underscores the significant potential of inclusive education to enhance the developmental outcomes for children with special needs in Pakistan, aligning with global evidence of its benefits. However, the study also highlights a gap between theoretical models and practical implementation, revealing that while inclusive education policies exist, their effectiveness is often undermined by inadequate resources, inconsistent implementation, and varying levels of support. The mixed perceptions of parents and educators further illustrate the complexities involved in translating policy into practice, indicating that the success of inclusive education requires more than just theoretical adherence—it demands practical solutions tailored to local contexts.

Based on these findings, future research should focus on several key areas to bridge the gap between theory and practice. First, studies should explore the impact of localized training programs for educators and the development of resource allocation models that address regional disparities. Second, research should examine the long-term outcomes of inclusive education on children with special needs to provide a clearer picture of its benefits and challenges over time. Additionally,

investigating the role of community involvement and support systems in the success of inclusive education can provide valuable insights into creating more effective and sustainable practices. These efforts will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of inclusive education and help refine policies and practices to better support the development of children with special needs in Pakistan.

## REFERENCES

- Abdurahman, A., Asfahani, A., Sudarwati, N., Warwer, F., & Asrijal, A. (2023). The influence of problem-based learning model on students' learning outcomes. *International Journal of Trends in Mathematics Education Research*, 6(3).
- Agustina, I., Siregar, L. A., Husain, D. L., Asfahani, A., & Pahmi, P. (2023). Utilization of Digital Technology in Children's Education to Enhance Creative and Interactive Learning. *At-Tarbawi: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial Dan Kebudayaan*, 10(2), 276–283.
- Al-Mamary, Y. H. S. (2022). Why do students adopt and use Learning Management Systems?: Insights from Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Information Management Data Insights*, 2, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jjime.2022.100088>
- Aldiab, A., Chowdhury, H., Kootsookos, A., Alam, F., & Allhibi, H. (2019). Utilization of Learning Management Systems (LMSs) in higher education system: A case review for Saudi Arabia. *Energy Procedia*, 160, 731–737. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.egypro.2019.02.186>
- Alfidyah, M., & Mawardi, M. (2021). Development Of A Flipped Classroom Learning System Based On Guided Inquiry On Electrolyte And Non-Electrolyte Solution Materials. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 6(4), 538–549.
- Ali, W., Wen, J., Hussain, H., Khan, N. A., Younas, M. W., & Jamil, I. (2021). Does green intellectual capital matter for green innovation adoption? Evidence from the manufacturing SMEs of Pakistan. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, 22(5), 868–888.
- Ariyanda, T., & Arifyani, D. (2020). Special Autonomy Law and Education Attainment In Papua: A Quasi Experiment Analisis. *Jambura Equilibrium Journal JEJ*, 2.
- Artipah, A., Sain, Z. H., & Asfahani, A. (2024). Early Childhood Education Reform in Pakistan: Challenges, Innovations, and Future Prospects. *Absorbent Mind: Journal of Psychology and Child Development*, 4(1), 57–64.
- Asfahani, A., Sain, Z. H., & Mariana, M. (2023). Comparative Analysis of Educational Policies: A Cross-Country Study on Access and Equity in Primary Education. *EDUJAVARE: International Journal of Educational Research*, 1(1), 19–28.
- Cerna, L., Mezzanotte, C., Rutigliano, A., Brussino, O., Santiago, P., Borgonovi, F., & Guthrie, C. (2021). *Promoting inclusive education for diverse societies: A conceptual framework*.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020).



- Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2), 97–140.
- English, L. M., & Mayo, P. (2019). Lifelong learning challenges: Responding to migration and the Sustainable Development Goals. *International Review of Education*, 65(2). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-018-9757-3>
- Farooq, F., Quraishy, M. M., Hassan, M. U., Hussain, M., & Mushtaq, F. (2022). Pattern and Magnitude of Ocular Trauma Sustained in Road Traffic Accidents (A Trauma Centre Study). *Pakistan Journal of Ophthalmology*, 38(4). <https://doi.org/10.36351/pjo.v38i4.1441>
- Holst, J., Brock, A., Singer-Brodowski, M., & de Haan, G. (2020). Monitoring progress of change: Implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) within documents of the German education system. *Sustainability*, 12(10), 4306.
- Jamiah, Y., Fatmawati, F., & Purwaningsih, E. (2019). Internalization of Students' Nationalism Sense through Outbound Learning Based on Local Wisdom. *JETL (Journal Of Education, Teaching and Learning)*, 4(2), 339–344. <https://doi.org/10.26737/jetl.v4i2.1642>
- Jamin, N. S., Asfahani, A., Munirah, M., Prusty, A., & Palayukan, H. (2024). Cross-Cultural Pedagogical Perspectives: A Collaborative Study with Indian Scholars in Childhood Education. *Absorbent Mind: Journal of Psychology and Child Development*, 4(1), 77–85.
- Khushik, F., & Diemer, A. (2018). Critical analysis of education policies in Pakistan: A sustainable development perspective. *Social Science Learning Education Journal*, 3(09), 1–16.
- Lee, R., Hoe Looi, K., Faulkner, M., & Neale, L. (2021). The moderating influence of environment factors in an extended community of inquiry model of e-learning. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 41(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2020.1758032>
- MacLachlan, M., Banes, D., Bell, D., Borg, J., Donnelly, B., Fembek, M., Ghosh, R., Gowran, R. J., Hannay, E., & Hiscock, D. (2018). Assistive technology policy: a position paper from the first global research, innovation, and education on assistive technology (GREAT) summit. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, 13(5), 454–466.
- Millner, N. (2021). Unsettling feelings in the classroom: scaffolding pedagogies of discomfort as part of decolonising human geography in higher education. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2021.2004391>
- Nazir, M. A., & Khan, M. R. (2022). Identification of roles and factors influencing the adoption of ICTs in the SMEs of Pakistan by using an extended Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). *Innovation and Development*, 1–27.
- O'Connor, J., Ludgate, S., Le, Q.-V., Le, H. T., & Huynh, P. D. P. (2023). Lessons from the pandemic: Teacher educators' use of digital technologies and pedagogies in

- Vietnam before, during and after the Covid-19 lockdown. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 103(January), 1–10.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102942>
- Ramlah, R., Riana, N., & Abadi, A. P. (2022). Fun Math Learning For Elementary School Students Through Interactive Puzzle Media. *SJME (Supremum Journal of Mathematics Education)*, 6(1), 25–34. <https://doi.org/10.35706/sjme.v6i1.5775>
- Sethi, V., Yadav, S., Agrawal, S., Sareen, N., Kathuria, N., Mishra, P., Kapoor, J., & Dureja, S. (2019). Incidence of Side-effects After Weekly Iron and Folic Acid Consumption Among School-going Indian Adolescents. *Indian Pediatrics*, 56, 33–34.
- Shehzadi, S., Nisar, Q. A., Hussain, M. S., Basheer, M. F., Hameed, W. U., & Chaudhry, N. I. (2021). The role of digital learning toward students' satisfaction and university brand image at educational institutes of Pakistan: a post-effect of COVID-19. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 10(2), 276–294.
- Sigit Gesang Permana, R., Roni, M., Rahmawati, W., & Fatihatul, A. H. (2022). Building Joyful Learning to Enhance Students Motivation in Studying English. *Attractive : Innovative Education Journal*, 4(2).
- Susila, T., & Risvan, L. (2022). Reconstructing the Formation of Israel's Religion in the context of Old Testament Biblical Text. *Khazanah Theologia*, 4(2).  
<https://doi.org/10.15575/kt.v4i2.17024>
- Tomaszewski, L. E., Zarestky, J., & Gonzalez, E. (2020). Planning qualitative research: Design and decision making for new researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1609406920967174.
- Vears, D. F., & Gillam, L. (2022). Inductive content analysis: A guide for beginning qualitative researchers. *Focus on Health Professional Education: A Multi-Disciplinary Journal*, 23(1), 111–127.
- Villafuerte, J., & Mosquera, Y. M. (2020). Teaching English language in Ecuador: A review from the inclusive educational approach. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 9(2), 75–90.
- Wulan, R., & Sanjaya, W. (2022). Developing Positive School Climate for Inclusive Education. *Journal of Education for Sustainability and Diversity*, 1(1), 54–66.