

Inclusive Schools: An Emerging Trend in Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper is based on information collected for two different studies of inclusive education in Pakistan, sponsored by UNICEF and UNESCO. A detailed literature review on the topic is presented, plus a review of the history of special needs education in Pakistan. National policies initiatives by the government in this regard are also analyzed. Societal attitudes toward disabled and role of non-governmental organizations in educating and rehabilitating these persons are discussed. The history of inclusive education is summarized with respect to global trends in general and Pakistan in particular. Information about a good practice model was collected through contacting the relevant government departments and by a newspaper advertisement. Selected institutions in four major cities of Pakistan were visited and their heads were interviewed. The paper summarizes the findings of these activities and points to implications for the future.

Introduction

In Pakistan 19.521 million children of ages 5-9 are enrolled in 164,200 primary schools through out the country. The net participation rate is about 66%. The student-teacher ratio is 48:1. The marginalized school age children are 34% of the total school age population. Further details about these children with reference to their type and incidence are not available.

Children with disabilities constitute, unfortunately, a major segment of this population. The reasons for such marginalization include distance from home to school; value of education perceived by the family; gender discrimination in which the son is preferred over daughter in sending school; poverty; disability and lack of awareness of the parents about disability and how to handle it properly. It is estimated that six million children have been left out from schools (Pakistan Ministry of Finance, 2003).

There has been a worldwide movement to include the marginalized children in the ordinary school system which is easily accessible at the door step of these children. UNESCO is a major flag holder in this movement. As a result, all member states are responding to the international declarations. Pakistan is actively pursuing the achievement of the targets set in Dakar Framework for Action, through the EFA Wing of the Ministry of Education.

Too often, however, children with disability do not benefit from such global initiatives. They are still being segregated from the mainstream and are placed in special schools. According to the national census of 1998, the population with

disability in Pakistan is 3,286,630 (2.54 percent of the total population). Amongst the persons with disability, 2.85 percent are male and 2.21 percent female. The figure seems highly under-estimated because of the current definition of disability. The census definition was not precise enough to include the persons suffering from moderate to mild disability, and other disabilities such as learning disability, emotional disorders, etc. It may be pointed out that the census staff was not trained to identify/classify the persons with disability by using a standard classification scheme.

Durkin (2001) conducted surveys in three developing countries, i.e., Bangladesh, Jamaica and Pakistan. A two-phase methodology for population-based studies of childhood disability was used. In Phase I, a ten question screen was used to identify children with disability in the 2-9 age range. A comprehensive clinical assessment was then undertaken of the children identified. Based on a clinical assessment of more than 22,000 children, it was estimated that the prevalence of disability ranges from 1% to 4.4% for severe disabilities, and up to 20% for mild disabilities. The researchers reported that based on a sample of 6,365 children, ages 2-9 the prevalence of disability could climb up to 14.7% in Pakistan.

Educational opportunities for children with disability

The history of the education of children with disabilities in Pakistan dates back to the British period. The first special school was established in 1906 at Lahore to cater for the educational/vocational needs for children and adults with visual impairment. Another school, Ida Rieu, for the children with visual as well as hearing impairment was established in Karachi in 1920. Similarly, a middle school in Distt Sialkot became famous for including blind girls in its regular classrooms.

After the inception of Pakistan as an independent state, some non-governmental organizations became very active in providing educational services to special children. The parents of children with hearing impairment at Lahore established the Deaf and Dumb Welfare Society. This society opened a school called “Gung Mahal” (Palace for the Deaf). The first government initiative for the education of special children can be traced in the report of the National Commission on Education, 1959. It recommended the provision of vocational education for mentally retarded children and adults, as no such facility was being offered in public or private sector. The Commission also recommended that teachers of the disabled should be trained in the specialized field.

In the Education Policy, 1972-80, for the first time in the history of Pakistan, funds for the provision of special education services were allocated. The country witnessed a revolutionary change in the system of education, as all private institutions were nationalized by the government in 1972. The special education institutions run by NGOs, where 268 special students were enrolled, were no exception. Along with the improvement of nationalized special schools, the policy also made financial provision for the establishment of a training college for the teachers of the deaf.

The boom period of special education in Pakistan started with the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, who, for personal reasons, became concerned about the well-being of persons with disability. He had personally experienced the dismal state of special education in the country. As a result, he became active for its reformation. As a first step he shifted the control of special education institutions from the Federal Ministry

of Education, to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Health. He invited consultants from abroad to improve the standard of special education in Pakistan. On the basis of the consultation various reforms were brought about. For example, a separate Directorate of Special Education was established to run model special education institutions throughout the country. The National Institute of Special Education was established to provide in-service training to the teachers of special schools. Similarly the National Institute of Handicapped was developed to undertake research and development on the medical aspects of the disabilities. An ordinance was also promulgated to protect the rights of employment for persons with disability in both public and private sectors. A national policy of special education was prepared in 1986 and was further improved in 1988. As a result of these initiatives, the number of institutions offering special education services to the children with disability was dramatically increased. It is unfortunate that the foreign experts did not suggest the mainstreaming which had already become a popular approach in the West. Indeed, it is frustrating to comment on the professional honesty/competence of these experts.

The government initiatives also activated the private sector to come forward to play its role in this noble cause. The Zia-ul-Haq regime ended in 1988. Then the priorities of the government started changing. The focus was not to expand and improve the facilities for special people but to maintain them with marginal standards. During the decades of 1980s and 1990s, a strong international movement driven by the United Nations for the rights of special people and children had far reaching impact on the government policies of the member states. As a response to this movement the Government of Pakistan approved its National Policy on Special Education in October 2002.

As already mentioned, a separate directorate for the promotion of special education was established under the Ministry of Women Development, Social Welfare and Special Education. This Directorate General of Special Education, headed normally by a Federal Additional Secretary, controls 56 institutions throughout the country catering for educational and rehabilitation needs of about 4000 children with disability. The geographical distribution of the institutions includes Islamabad 12, Punjab 21, Sindh 10, Balochistan 3, NWFP 8, Northern Areas 1, and AJK 1. Out of these 56 institutions, 11 deals with children having hearing impairment, 11 for children with physical disability, 11 for children with blindness and low vision, 12 for children with mental retardation and learning disabilities, and 11 for vocational/rehabilitation needs of children with all disabilities. The physical facilities of these institutions are excellent. The curriculum and system of examination are standardized. The teachers are regularly refreshed with modern knowledge and skills to educate children with special needs in National Institute of Special Education. These institutions serve as model institutions for the provincial special schools and special schools in private sector.

At the provincial level, the Government of Punjab has recently established a separate Department of Special Education under direct supervision of the Chief Minister. The provincial government runs 48 special schools with 4051 enrolment. Out of these 32 are meant for children with hearing impairment, 11 for children with blindness and low vision, 2 for children with physical disability, 3 for children with mental retardation and 3 for the training of the teachers of children with disability. The curriculum and system of examination are standardized. The Special Education

Department has set up a computerized Braille Printing Press and provides all Braille textbooks to the children with blindness free of cost irrespective of the fact that they are enrolled in govt. school or in a private school. The children with blindness gets free furnished hostel accommodation, uniform, transportation from home to school if not boarded and handsome pocket money. There are three teacher training institutions offering diplomas in the teaching of the deaf, M.Ed. (visual impairment) and in-service training through short courses. In addition to the Department of Special Education, in the University of the Punjab offers Master's and Ph.D. degrees in special education.

The Government of Sindh has established a separate wing in education department that controls 16 special schools where federal curricula and evaluation system is followed. As for as the provinces of NWFP and Balochistan are concerned 20 and 4 special schools have been established, respectively, under the department of Women Development and Social Welfare. These institutions also follow the federal curricula and evaluation system. There are about 230 special private schools in the country which are partially funded by the Government of Pakistan (Waheed, 2003).

Inclusive education: A global movement

A revolt against institutionalization of children with disability through various forms of special education surfaced in 1970s. It was argued that special education led to permanent isolation of individuals with disabilities through inculcating disability culture and physical segregation thus eliminating all possibilities of social interaction between the children with and without disability. As a result of segregated schooling communities of the deaf, the blind and the physical disabled started emerging as sub-cultures of the society. Consequently, all efforts aimed at their rehabilitation in the society were resisted by these communities. They believed that the only way to survive in the society was through their community mobilization and a sustained struggle against majority for the protection of their rights. Such regimentation proved to be the strongest barrier against any systematic rehabilitative effort in the society. Moreover, the special needs of the children with disabilities, such as good health, shelter and nutrition, appropriate education, respectable career and prestige, became the second order priority in the communities of the persons with disabilities, whereas the survival of community became the first order priority.

The United Nations has played a key role in building up a global movement on Education for All (EFA). Article 26 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 clearly lays down the foundation for this movement. It states:

Everyone has the right to education and education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) reiterated that all children have the right to receive the kind of education that does not discriminate on the basis of disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, capabilities, and so on. The Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (1990) clearly spells out that every person—child, youth and adult—shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. Underserved groups: the poor; street and working children; rural and remote populations; nomads and migrant

workers; indigenous peoples; ethnic, racial, and linguistic minorities; refugees; those displaced by war; and people under occupation, should not suffer any discrimination in access to learning opportunities. The learning needs of the disabled demand special attention. Steps need to be taken to provide equal access to education to every category of disabled persons as an integral part of the education system (Article III).

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education call upon member states to ensure the implementation of inclusive education to bring back the excluded children in the mainstream system of education. According to the Salamanca Statement the inclusive education means that:

“...schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions. They should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote and nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.”

The Statement also asserts that, “Regular school with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system” (Article 2).

The Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All (2000) points out the urgency to address the needs of learners who are vulnerable to marginalization. The key challenge is to ensure that the broad vision of Education for All as an inclusive concept is reflected in national government and funding agency policies. “Education for All...must take account of the need of the poor and most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health; those with special learning need...(Notes on Dakar Framework for Action, para 19).

Pakistan has actively participated in and is a signatory to all of the above mentioned declarations. As a member state to UN and its functionaries, the country has an obligation to implement these declarations in letter and spirit. The philosophy of this commitment is perfectly commensurate with Islamic teachings and hence makes it a religious duty of the Islamic state to include all marginalized children in the ordinary school system.

The study

Bearing these trends in mind, a study was conducted to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To assess the state of special needs children in Pakistan with reference to the policies, resources and practices.
- ii. To document the inclusive education initiatives in terms of policy, practices and allocation of resources
- iii. To understand their problems and constraints that need immediate attention

- iv. Explore the socio-economic barriers to inclusive education and means to overcome.

The following activities were undertaken for situation analysis of the country:

- Literature was reviewed to collect relevant information on prevalence, education and rehabilitation of children with disability.
- Unstructured interviews were conducted with selected policy makers, professional, decision makers and other stake holders to seek their opinion on inclusive education as alternative to special education.
- Focus group discussion were held to uncover the issues, problems and barriers to inclusive education of the stakeholders i.e. children, parents and educators having experience of inclusive education. These discussions were held at University of the Punjab, International School of Studies, Karachi and Hasan Academy, Rawalpindi as they offer inclusive education.

In addition, good practicing inclusive schools were identified and documented. These schools were selected on the basis of information collected from the government/non-government departments and newspaper advertisement, using the following criteria:

Accessibility

- The school should be located in the populous area with middle and lower class clientele.
- The school should include all types of disabilities.
- The school should offer free access to every child in his locality irrespective of his/ her form, gender, race, ethnicity and social class.
- The school should provide transport facility at low cost if not free.

Environment

- It should be able to create positive attitudes toward diversification in human race including the disability.
- The environment of the school should not be threatening such as alteration in the existing building to make it barrier-free and least restricted for the special needs children. It should be disability and gender sensitive and child friendly.
- The school has potential to sustain and large enough to create the inclusive environment, capable to create desirable social interaction among children including the special needs.
- The school should maximize personal development and encourages the access to cultural background.

Learners

- The percentage of students with disability in the school should not be more than ten percent.

- The relationship between normal and special need students should also be cordial.
- The school should adjust to pupil's characteristics and interests.

Teachers

- School should be based on equal opportunity in the appointment of teaching staff and there should be no segregation on the basis of gender among the faculty.
- Teacher should be trained and well informed and responsive to the special needs and child friendly.
- Teacher student relationship should also be cordial.

Curriculum and Learning Materials

- The school should prepare the pupil for real life.
- The school should try to balance social inequality by promoting the full development of everybody.
- The teaching approach should be child centered, active and IEP based specially for special need students.

Teaching Learning Process

- The presentation and response mode of the test needed for the academic evaluation of the special need students should be adopted according to the need of student.
- The school should have or access to a resource room where various kinds of supportive services can be provided such as speech therapy, physiotherapy, sign language and vocational therapy.
- School should make efforts to reduce the differential achievements between normal and special need students.

Community

- The school should be well grounded in the local culture by ensuring the maximum acceptability by the community.
- The school should ensure the parents involvement in running the school at all level.

As a result, the following schools were documented as good practicing models: International School of Studies, Karachi; Collegiate School system, Lahore; Perverish School, Lahore; Hassan Academy, Rawalpindi; and RCPD Inclusive School, Peshawar.

Summary of findings

The following key points emerged during the interviews with the policy makers, professionals, decision makers and other stake holders:

1. There is consensus that inclusive education provides the most effective and economical way to achieve the target of Education for All.
2. Inclusive education is a feasible strategy to include the marginalized children in the ordinary school system.

3. The concept of inclusion is not clear and needs orientation of some decision makers.
4. The lack of policy initiative is the major barrier to inclusive education in Pakistan.
5. Split in administrative structure at federal level for provision of basic education in the country is another barrier to initiate inclusive education. The Ministry of Women Development, Social Welfare and Special Education runs special education centers for the education of children with disability. They are all out to implement inclusive education but ordinary schools where action will take place are controlled by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education, on the other hand, is not willing to take an initiative in this direction unless the responsibility for the education of children with disability is shifted from Ministry of Women Development, Social Welfare and Special Education to Ministry of Education.
6. At the district level, there is no visible resistance from administrators, teachers and parents of ordinary schools at the moment.
7. There is fear among teachers and parents of 'normal children' that with the implementation of inclusive education there will be extra burden on teachers and students. They are not sure that professional and financial support will ever reach to them.
8. At present inclusive education is not a priority item on political agenda of the country. A strong and sustainable political will will have to be developed to implement inclusive education.
9. The ignorance of the technocrats is invisible and un-surmountable barrier to inclusive education. In spite all their well wishes for the children with disability there is a lack of knowledge and hence confidence sufficient enough to promote the idea of inclusive education as the most promising solution to the problems.
10. Over consciousness about the positions they hold and uncertainty about the fate of inclusive education has left no motivation among technocrats to become flag holders for inclusive education.

The following findings are based on documentation of inclusive schools and focus group discussions:

1. Some private institutions have become interested in inclusive education for various reasons and they have started including special needs children in their schools without bringing about desirable changes in the existing infrastructure and facilities. In the absence of such changes, professional preparation of the teachers and teaching learning resources sustainability of such efforts is not very promising.
2. It is frustrating to note that the role of the international organisations and donors to promote inclusive education has not taken grounds. The possible reason for such a vacuum may lie in the fact that the coordination between them and the Ministry of Special Education may have not been conducive enough to pursue government for taking strong initiatives in this regard.
3. The strength of inclusive education is being felt across the country. The private sector is willing to play its role in this regard. But a viable action plan is lacking. The dreams for inclusive education, therefore, can not come true as private sector does not know what to do and where to start?

4. All the studies conducted on the attitudes of primary schools teachers in Pakistan about inclusive education indicate that these teachers are willing to include special needs children in their schools provided the arrangements for their training, provision of teaching learning resources and some financial incentive are made.
5. Admission of blind and physical handicap children in professional colleges and universities for inclusive education is quite common in Pakistan. However, the training of the teachers in these institutions about the special needs and methodology to teach special students is direly needed.
6. It would be premature claim to label some of a few schools offering inclusive education as good practice models. Such ranking can be very controversial as competitive environment among NGOs prevails to such an extent that they are not to tolerate the inclination of donor agencies no matter how much fair such inclination may be.
7. The common barriers faced by the students with disability in inclusive environment include environmental barriers such as unfriendly physical structures, lack of elevators and ramps, etc. and attitudinal barriers such as avoidance and neglect by class fellows and some teachers, passing remarks between opposite gender, lack of appreciation, etc.
8. Although teachers are willing to include children with disability in their classroom they lack training, professional support and enough time to adapt curriculum and instruction.
9. Parents of children with and without disability are equally happy with the inclusive environment and feel an improvement in the attitude and academic performance of their children.
10. There is a lack of coordination among inclusive schools to share experiences and resources or to overcome barriers to inclusive education.

Challenges and opportunities for inclusive education in Pakistan

My research suggests that the implementation of inclusive education will have to face the following challenges in Pakistan:

1. The institutional attitude of neglect, disregard and disinterest is prevalent at all levels due to lack of awareness about academic and economic benefits of inclusive education.
2. The administrative segregation for the provision of basic education at federal level is a major obstacle for taking policy initiative for inclusive education.
3. The over standardization of curriculum and evaluation rules out any flexibility at school level to cater for the needs of the children with disability in an ordinary school.
4. The decision makers and administrators at various levels lack sufficient background knowledge and skills to initiate or implement inclusive education.
5. The teachers of ordinary schools are not sufficiently trained to create an inclusive environment in their classrooms through adaptation of curriculum and instruction.
6. The teaching-learning resources required for inclusive education are not available at federal, provincial or district level. The responsibility for the production of such material is not even assigned to any organization.

7. The teacher training institutions both meant for ordinary schools as well as special schools do not offer courses on inclusive education. The prospective teachers are, therefore, not being trained for implementation of inclusive education.
8. The examining bodies such as boards of intermediate & secondary education and universities provide no flexibility in the evaluation system to serve the diverse needs of students with disabilities. These bodies, therefore, discourage any inclusive effort without knowing its implication for the education of such students.
9. The admission policies of the ordinary school, colleges and universities are strictly based on either merit system or performance on entry test. Such admission policies fail to make room for the admission of students with disability unless few seats are reserved for this purpose.
10. The political will for including the children with special needs in an ordinary school for their better education is absolutely non-existent. No movement for legislation on this issue is expected in near future unless the legislators are made aware of the intensity of the problem through proper advocacy.
11. Both print and electronic media have failed to play their crucial role in creating awareness about inclusive education so that the stake holders can be mobilized for this purpose.
12. Children with disability are a special case in the marginalized groups of children in Pakistan. The other forms of marginalized children are being included at least at policy formulation level. The only exception remains are the children with disability.
13. The physical facilities of the school will have to change to make them disability friendly particularly the schools in urban areas having multiple storey need elevators/ramps.
14. An estimated cost of school improvement for implementing inclusive education at primary school level is about Rs.6 billion (Rs.41,000 per school for 164,200 primary schools). This huge amount needs uncompromising commitment at government to allocate funds for this noble cause from public exchequer.

In spite of all challenges mentioned above, the following opportunities are available for initiating inclusive education in Pakistan:

1. Pakistan is predominantly a Muslim country. The teachings of Islam clearly support the idea of inclusive education. In fact, there have been sustained traditions of including children with disability in the schools of Islamic teachings across cultures and times throughout the Muslim history.
2. The society at large does not seem to have any negative attitude towards inclusive education probably because of their faith in Islam.
3. The parents of children without disability are willing to include children with disability in ordinary schools.
4. The graduates of the Departments of Special Education at Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi are in sufficient number and scattered all over the country to take up their professional role for implementation of inclusive education.
5. The Ministry of Women Development, Social Welfare and Special Education are all out to help the Ministry of Education in this regard by extending all possible technical and professional support.

6. The international organizations and donor agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, Save the Children Fund, etc. are willing to provide all possible professional as well as financial help to initiate inclusive education in Pakistan as an obligation to international declarations.
7. The Departments of Special Education at three universities are willing to produce teaching learning resources for inclusive education as well as to impart training to the teachers working in ordinary schools. They are also ready to train the staff of the examining bodies for making adaptation in curriculum and evaluation.
8. The devolution of power through local government system in Pakistan has decentralized the decision making. This will substantially help the district administrators to make decisions according to their particular needs and resources for initiating inclusive education.

Looking to the future

In moving forward, there are a number of promising developments to consider. These include:

1. *Policy initiatives:* A national policy for persons with disability was approved in 2002. It clearly spells out a shift from segregated special education to inclusive education. A pilot project to establish inclusive schools in few districts representing all four provinces of Pakistan is being initiated.
2. *Documentation of inclusive schools:* UNICEF (ROSA) has recently sponsored a study to document good practicing models of inclusive schools in the country.
3. *Strengthening formal education:* UNESCO has sponsored a study to develop a model for strengthening formal education through innovative and inclusive education to fulfil the needs of marginalized children.
4. *Opening of new schools:* The private sector is promptly responding to the increasing demand of the parents of children with disability to make ordinary schools open and welcoming for their children. There is increasing acceptability of the parents of children without disability for inclusive education as well.
5. *Sub-regional seminar:* UNESCO has recently organized a two-day sub-regional seminar on inclusive education of four countries, i.e., Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan at Islamabad. It adopted Islamabad Declaration committing themselves for the implementation of inclusive education in all states.
6. *South-Asia inter-country meeting:* UNICEF has planned to hold a meeting of inclusive education experts of the South-Asian region in Lahore, Pakistan in third week of January, 2004 to formulate a regional policy for the implementation of inclusive education in the region.
7. *Re-union of Ministry of Education and Ministry of Special Education:* As a result of recent developments on inclusive education in Pakistan driven by the international organizations like UNICEF and UNESCO the Ministry of Education has finally agreed to implement inclusive education under Education for All program. This will help in eliminating the strongest administrative barrier to inclusive education in the form of disjointed/fragmented provisions of education to children with disability.

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