

## Students with hearing impairment in inclusive classrooms

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### Abstract

*The history of the education of children with special needs in Pakistan dates back to the British Colonial period. The first special school was established in 1906 at Lahore to cater for the educational and vocational needs of children with visual impairment. Another school, Ida Rieu, for children with visual and hearing impairment was established in Karachi in 1920. The first plan of National Development in 1955-60 included a specific program entitled Services for Physically Handicapped and Provision of Vocational Education for Mentally Retarded Children. However, this could not be implemented due to lack of administrative support, funds and trained personnel. This paper looks at the development of Inclusive Education in Pakistan; in particular the inclusion of children with hearing impairment.*

### Introduction

The allocation of Education Policy funding for 1972-80, saw provision for special education services and this brought about a revolutionary change in the system of education. All private institutions were nationalized by the government in 1972, and in 1979, a workshop was arranged by the President of Pakistan, in which the needs of children with disabilities were highlighted. In 1981, a cabinet committee studied the special needs of children with disabilities and made recommendations for improving services to them. When the United Nations declared the period 1983 – 1992 the Decade of the Disabled, it was considered necessary to formulate a national policy to tackle the problems of children with special needs and a national policy was prepared in 1986 and this was further improved in 1988 and 1998. A separate directorate 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 teachers of special schools.

At the federal level, a separate directorate for the promotion of special education was established under the Ministry of Women Development, Social Welfare and Special Education. The Directorate General of Special Education now runs 56 institutions to cater the educational and rehabilitation needs of children with special needs.

At provincial level, the Government of Punjab has recently established a separate Department of Special Education under the direct supervision of the Chief Minister. The provincial government controls 48 special schools. The provincial government had recently established 90 special schools.

### Inclusive Education: An Educational Reform

This reform means that every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. It acknowledges that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs, therefore education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented, to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are considered to be the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive

society and achieving education for all; and are able to provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness, of the entire education system. (Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Education, Article 2). Additionally, the definition of inclusion is clearly broader than just disability, as reform spells out the many different categories of children who may be excluded from education. The guiding principle that informs this inclusive education is that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social and emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote and nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or religious minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups. Special needs education through inclusion assumes that human differences are normal and that learning must accordingly be adapted to the needs of the child rather than the child fitted to pre-ordained assumptions regarding the pace and nature of the learning process.

The Convention on the Rights of Child (1989) reiterates education for all in stating 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 capabilities and so on. The United Nations has played a key role in building up a global movement on the education for all (EFA).

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.

Pakistan has actively participated in all these declarations. The government has taken many initiatives to implement these declarations but there are still huge targets to achieve. Recently, a number of steps have been initiated by the Government to promote the education of children with special needs in general schools. National plan for inclusive education are nearly finalized. Currently 90 schools for children with special needs are established in Punjab.

### **Students with Hearing Impairment**

Accessibility and participation are critical issues in inclusive education. Children with disabilities who are placed in special schools are segregated from their non-disabled counterparts, and are therefore isolated from day to day experiences with other children. Physical segregation eliminates all possibilities of social interaction between the children with and without disabilities. As a result of segregation, communities of the deaf emerge as sub-cultures of the society. Inclusion is an ongoing process of accepting diversity and learning to love together. An inclusive education programme prepares the child with hearing impairment for a life in a hearing community.

Inclusion provides experiences which hearing impaired children cannot gain from their deaf environment. Regular schools provide a more stimulating learning environment and a wider curriculum with normal oral language. Inclusion helps children with hearing impairment to master new skills, encourages them to strive for greater achievements and help them to develop a healthy and positive self-concept. Children with hearing impairment find new strategies to cope with hearing in normal situations, and as a result their adjustment in the hearing world increased.

The inclusion of children with hearing impairment does not depend solely on whether the child is severely or profoundly deaf, or the level of intelligence. There is no single factor such

as ability to lip read, language development, parental support or availability of a resource teacher in regular school. Inclusion involves the efforts of many people working as a team. The key factors of successful inclusion of children with hearing impairment include: a supportive school leadership; supportive system for staff and pupils; collaboration of teachers; curricular modification; adaptation of instruction; restructuring of classes and effective use of existing resources.

The lack of policy initiative is major barrier to inclusive education in Pakistan. There is fear among teachers and parents of normal children that there will be an extra burden on teachers. Parents feel that the academic achievements and behavior of their children will be affected by children with special needs. Many regular schools prefer not to admit children with hearing impairment as they have many misconceptions about hearing impairment. Usually, both

teachers and parents consider that children with hearing impairment have low ability. They assume that their ability to learn new skills is limited. Such schools will feel strongly that it is the responsibility of special school to provide education to children with hearing impairment and they feel uncomfortable with children with hearing impairment as they do not know how to manage them.

Some private schools have become interested in inclusive education and they have started to include children with hearing impairment without making needed changes in existing infrastructure and facilities. This study was conducted to identify the challenges and needs of children with hearing impairment in inclusive settings.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study is conducted to:

1. Identify the attitudes of regular school teachers towards inclusion of children with hearing impairment.
2. Study the ecological changes made by the school to accommodate the children with hearing impairment
3. Investigate the academic, behavioral and social skills of children with hearing impairment in inclusive setting.
4. Understand the problems and constraints faced by schools that need immediate attention.
5. Give recommendations for the improvement of the school.

### **Methodology of the Study**

This is a case study of the Cardinal School System in Lahore. Case study is generally concerned with developing a detailed understanding of a particular institution, individual or phenomenon. The school is situated in one of the developed area of Lahore city. It was established in March, 2000 to educate non-disabled children, and it started inclusive classes in April, 2003. The classes range from play group to fifth level. The school has its own building and has a dedicated and energetic Principal. It is run by an NGO.

The study surveyed the population of the school. Out of the total population of 175, 24 children had special needs. The study examined the opinion and experiences of the Principal of the school, the special education teacher and regular teacher, and children with and without hearing impairment. The school accommodates all children with special needs but the focus of this study was on the adjustment of students with hearing impairment. The total number of students with hearing impairment is nine. There were 6 girls and 3 boys, with ages ranging from 4 years to 11 years. The children have congenital bilateral hearing losses, and the degree

of hearing loss ranged from severe to profound. All children used hearing aids; three of them also had cochlear implants.

### Frequency Distribution of Students with Special Needs

Categories	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage
Hearing Impairment	9	37.5 %	37.5
Mental Retardation	4	16.7%	54.2
Physically Handicapped	3	12.5%	66.7
Learning Disabilities	1	4.2%	70.9
Behavior Disorders	2	8.3%	79.2
Slow Learners	5	20.8%	100
<b>Total</b>	24	100%	

Interview schedules were used to collect information from the parents of the children with hearing impairment and the regular teachers. Group discussion was employed to explore the challenges faced by teachers in handling children with hearing impairment. Teachers were interviewed about the deaf child's educational performance, socialization, the teacher's view about the child's readiness for integrated education, and their perceived role in the integration process. The special education teacher, regular classroom teachers and students were interviewed. Observation of the classroom during study hours and interval time was also done.

Inclusive education has had tremendous influence on the achievement of student with and without special needs. In the process of including students in the regular classroom the teachers have had to convey positive feelings and caring attitudes. This has created a positive and comfortable environment which is essential if educational experiences are to be successful and rewarding for all students.

### Findings of the Study

1. The percentage of children with special needs in the school is 13.7%.
2. The school accommodates all children with special needs.
3. The majority of students come from higher socio-economic classes.
4. The estimated cost for each child is approximately 4-6 thousands rupees monthly.
5. The school offers speech therapy, auditory training and IEP. Services.
6. The majority of children with special needs included came from special schools.
7. There are 27 teachers on the staff, and 3 of them have a masters degree in special education.
8. The degree of hearing loss ranged from severe to profound, all losses were bilateral.
9. Regular teachers of children with hearing impairment had good opinions and high expectations of them.
10. All teachers felt that inclusive settings helped children to improve in their academic, communication and social skills.
11. The attitudes of teachers were positive toward diversification and they took responsibility to educate the students with hearing impairment.
12. Regular teachers were not sufficiently trained to adapt the curriculum and instruction for students with hearing impairment.

13. The school has the potential to sustain and an inclusive environment, and is capable of creating even more desirable social interactions between students with and without hearing impairment.
14. The school is not coordinated with other inclusive schools to share experiences and resources that overcome barriers to inclusive education.
15. The decision to integrate the students with hearing impairment was taken by the parents because they felt that inclusion provide more opportunities to learn.
16. Regular students felt that others with hearing impairment do not create any adjustment problems for them.

### **Recommendations**

1. Regular schools should offer free access to every child in its locality irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity and social class.
2. Regular schools should be located in areas where all socio-economic classes are found.
3. The school environment, especially the resource room should be sound-treated.
4. Periodic in-service training for regular teachers is very necessary for successful inclusion.
5. There is need to fully implement the Inclusive Policy of 2000, so that every child can have access to education at their local school.

### **References**

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