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Assessing Teachers' Training Needs for Inclusive Education: A Qualitative Study of Teachers' Perception

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Abstract: *Despite numerous interventions from the national and international governments and NGOs, the provision of education for children with individual needs has always been a challenge in Pakistan. Including children with particular needs in the regular education system is the first step towards achieving the target of a hundred per cent literacy rate. To achieve the target, teachers need to assess the training needs of including all the children with diverse needs. The current study comprises seven elements, including awareness, collaboration/relationship, curriculum, assessment, instructions, in-class support, and professional training (Jardí et al., 2021; Minondo et al., 2001). The phenomenology research design was used in this study to illustrate the training needs and get similar and contrasting patterns from responses of the four cases. Findings from all four participants demonstrated that teachers have a perception of commitment and high determination about inclusion. Still, there is a need for training teachers to differentiate according to the student's individual needs. All the participants were enthusiastic to include all the children with individual needs.*

Key Words: Training Needs, Inclusive Education, Children with Individual Needs

Introduction

Inclusive education is a global education reform in which students with individual needs attend classes regularly and are placed according to their age group. Such students should learn, contribute, and participate in all the activities offered during their study and learning process (Ainscow, 2016).

According to UNESCO, inclusive education is "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and within education." The goal is that the whole education system will facilitate learning environments where teachers and learners embrace and welcome the challenges and benefits of diversity. Within an inclusive education approach, learning environments are fostered where individual needs are met, and every student has an opportunity to succeed.

Besides, inclusive education as a process is used with the understanding that all children receive education better if provided in common settings, under similar conditions, and within the company of their age fellows (Slee, 2018). Education becomes a source of an individual's physical, emotional, intellectual, and social growth. It can be said that education should enable a person to excel in the ever-changing, complex, and interdependent world (Omwami & Rust, 2020).

It is also supposed that students with individual needs are not separated from their classmates. An inclusive education classroom considers all the members essential and respectful to the classroom, learning process, and society. They are made a full part of the whole learning process. They feel that they are part of something important and creative and are cared for during the learning experiences. Legislations and policies mainly focus on children's inborn right to get a proper education (Sokal & Katz, 2015).

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Objectives of the study

- To know about the perception of teachers regarding inclusive education in regular schools.
- To explore the training needs of the teachers to implement inclusive education in regular schools.

Questions of the study

- What is the perception of teachers regarding inclusive education in regular schools?
- What are the teachers' training needs to implement inclusive education in regular schools?

Literature Review

In the process of inclusion, teachers are considered the backbone and central focus of the whole system. They work to exercise the basic philosophy of inclusive education through differentiated instructions. One of the main conditions for attaining the inclusive process is the attitude of the teachers toward students with individual needs. If the teachers show and possess a positive attitude towards children with individual needs results, outcomes will be better and satisfactory (Bualar, [2016](#); Ogba et al., [2020](#); Song, [2016](#); Stanton-Chapman et al., [2016](#); Thomas & Uthaman, [2019](#)).

Nishan ([2018](#)) explains that inclusive education proves helpful in bringing out the maximum potential of the learners. Over the past so many years, it has been observed, as far as the contribution of educational research on inclusion is concerned, that young learners might benefit greatly from differentiated instructions in fulfilling their learning requirements.

Inclusive education instructions require special preparation of competencies from teachers that they usually did not possess. The Council for Exceptional Children" (CEC) provides some essential abilities to guide children with exceptional needs in regular classrooms. Such competencies incorporate the information and abilities to show techniques and approaches that address the problems of all offspring in ordinary classrooms (Ainscow & Goldrick, [2010](#)).

Regular education teachers may require specific knowledge and capabilities in special needs education. According to Kuyini et al. ([2016](#)), these abilities may not be significant for them but are essential to teaching in inclusive education settings.

Teacher training is also vital in forming teachers' positive attitudes toward including students with individual needs in differentiated classrooms. Pre-service and in-service training prove supportive in preparing the teachers for the class. Makoelle ([2014](#)) Explained there is a need to plan for the training of teachers because, without proper training, it is difficult to get positive results.

Some of the studies, such as Srivastava et al. (2015) about pre and in-service training those different training based on short-term duration related to special needs education did not prove very beneficial to change the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion of students with individual needs in regular classrooms (Ahmad, [2015](#)).

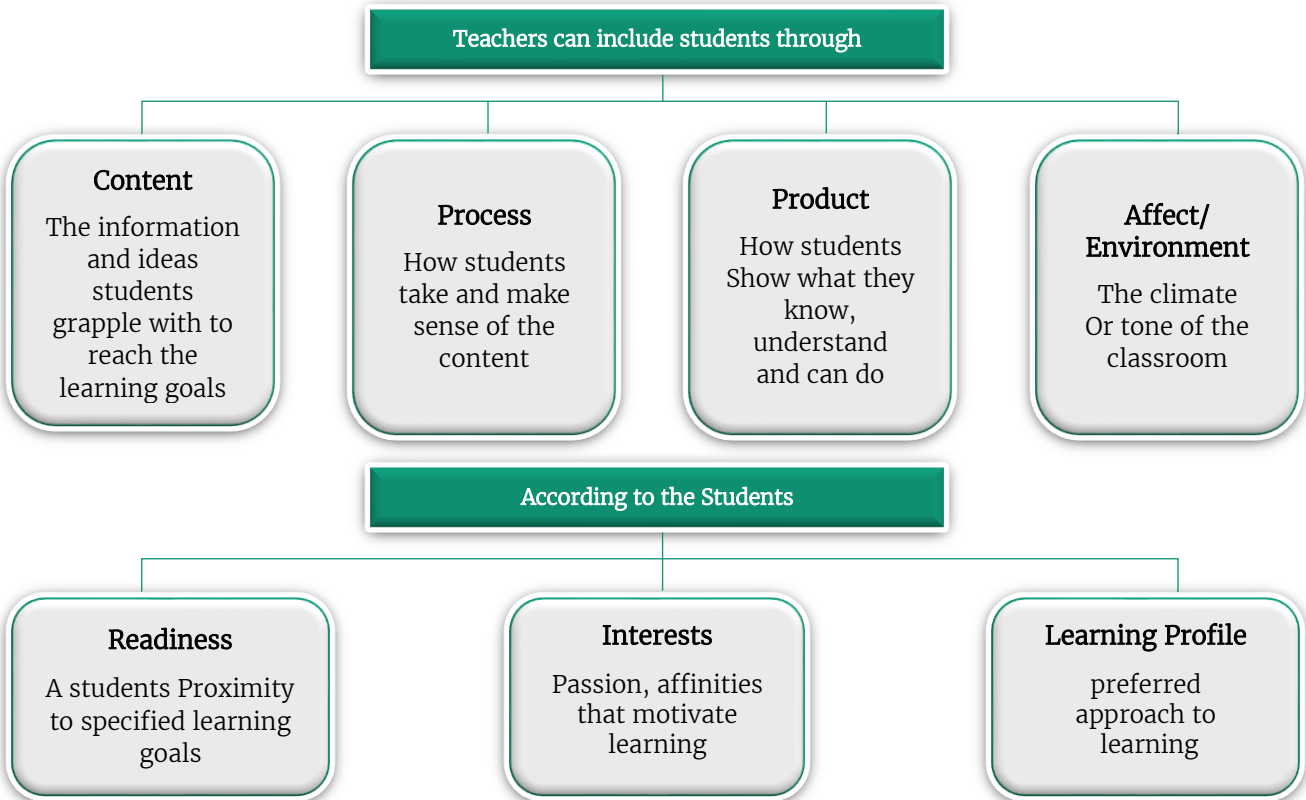
Teachers' training is tied to having youngsters with various needs in similar settings for the fruitful execution of the provision of needs that educators are furnished with the imperative information and abilities to adequately work in such circumstances. The role of the teachers working in regular education has drastically changed after the paradigm shift from exclusion to inclusion of students with individual needs in regular educational settings (Hornby, [2015](#); Kuyini et al., [2016](#)).

Teachers and administrators need to be provided with proper training to successfully include students with individual needs in regular education classrooms. This will make them efficient and effective in employing inclusive education materials, teaching skills, and knowledge by attaining new concepts, classroom management skills, methods, and approaches to understanding students with individual needs (Ogba et al., [2020](#)).

The above discussion shows a need for training to enhance the teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the effective implementation of inclusive education in regular schools because a separate setup of special education doesn't cater to all the students and enhances the cost to the country. Following is the theoretical/ conceptual framework of the study.



Theoretical/Conceptual Framework



Methods and Material

A qualitative design of phenomenology was used to gather information. This design may help explore perceptions about teachers' training needs for implementing inclusive education in regular schools. "It is used to explore the meaning, composition, and core of the lived experience of a specific phenomenon. It also describes how participants make sense of their immediate experience" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The participants in this study were teachers at regular schools experiencing inclusive education in their classrooms. The research aimed to explore the teachers' training needs for implementing inclusive education in regular schools. A purposive sampling technique was used to collect the data about the training needs of teachers working in regular schools. The criteria for selecting the participants were elementary teachers who have experienced inclusive education in their classroom for more than one year. Participants of the current study were selected from one district of the Bahawalpur division.

The interview questions allowed the participants to express their experiences and ideas in their own words instead of using limited categories determined by the researchers. During transcription, the researcher ensured that nothing was missed in the data while documenting all the responses. Quotations were also used to display the data of each case study. Data analysis was done through qualitative/thematic content analysis. All the ethical protocols were observed while conducting the research.

Participants Demographic Information

Participant 1

Demographic profile: Male Teacher with nine years of teaching experience with three years experience in inclusive classrooms with professional qualification of B.Ed and M.Ed in teacher education in government secondary school of district Bahawalnagar.

Participant 2

Demographic profile: Male Teacher with six years' teaching experience with four years of inclusive classroom experience with professional qualifications of B.Ed. and M.Ed. in special education in government secondary school district Bahawalnagar.

Participant 3

Demographic profile: Female Teacher with six years of teaching experience with two years of inclusive classroom experience with professional qualification of B.Ed and M.Ed. in government secondary school district Bahawalnagar.

Participant 4

Demographic profile: Female Teacher with 18 years of experience teaching with seven years in an inclusive classroom with professional qualifications of B.Ed and M.Ed. Additional qualification: two master's degrees. I am currently working in the government secondary school district of Bahawalnagar.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study are as follows:

Introduction to Inclusive Education

Most participants explained inclusive education as all the children are in the same setup. Normal and special children are taught in the same class, but due to the lack of proper facilities (ramps for wheelchair users and washrooms and trained staff general education teachers. According to all participants, disability level and class proper strength are also important for inclusive education. Some participants observed the positive effect of inclusion on students' personality. According to the participants, inclusive means to include, or inclusion means that a child has disabilities or has some mental issues or is mentally low to include all types of children in inclusive education.

One of the participants stated that inclusive education plays an important role because the concept is that children learn from their peers more than other members of society, which means they learn from children. When the children are in the same class or sit together, they talk to or play with each other. Communication will be enhanced. They will learn from them how to move in society. Children with special needs learn from normal children, and society also teaches how to live and when the special needs children will live or sit in the classroom. They will learn a lot from others (repeatedly).

Education is necessary for all types of children to have the same rights to education and for all the children to be in the same classroom, which is called inclusive education. According to the participants' opinions, not all the schools are equipped to include all the children in regular classrooms. The schools don't have an environment that supports all learners. So, only teachers should have to maintain according to their needs on their own. For example, if a child has an eyesight problem, the class teacher will help the child with large prints or come and sit near the whiteboard. So the child may be able to see the writing on the whiteboard. Teachers accommodate on their end but don't have any equipment that facilitates the specific child with a problem.

When participants were asked how important it is to include all the learners in regular education, the answer from all the participants was yes, it is very important and needed to include all the children. Still, there is also a need to facilitate according to the children's needs because all the children are mostly from marginalised background or poor backgrounds and unable to afford the special setup expenses, so regular education institutions must include all learners; if the children learn at the same environment, children will spend their life in a normal way, in the society or outside the school. It will also enhance the confidence and overall development of the learners. It may enhance the acceptance of children with special needs in society.

Perception about Awareness

Participants expressed in the following words:

If teachers include special children with normal students and a class size of 30 students or 40 students and two children have mentally challenged or mentally retarded included with normal children, there is the possibility of disruption all the time in the classroom.



Some participants stated that regular education teachers have enough knowledge because there is no difference between general and special curricula and lack of skills, such as problems in communication with special children. In the participants' view, there is a need to launch an awareness program so the Teacher of general education may be able to include all the children with special needs. Participants stress that teachers do not help because the teachers already have enough strength to deal with extra burdens in school. One class contains 60 or 70 students; they are already having trouble managing them. Then how can they help me? For example, one is with special needs children. These children have a shorter syllabus than regular children, focusing mainly on regular students.

All the participants stressed that if one Teacher has the same number of students, other teachers also have the same number. If teachers receive special education training, they may be able to help each other. Individual Education Plan is difficult to plan with strength because teachers already have enough strength to reach 30, 40, and 50. Hence, the teachers cannot focus on it, which will be difficult to carry. In the participants' views, the school administration doesn't help the teachers, but officials come to check outside the schools. They appreciate the teachers for working with individual needs students, but heads already have extra workload and face many issues. Other colleagues do not appreciate it because they don't have much vision. They take it negatively.

According to one of the Participants, there is not much awareness because if some children come to regular school with severe hearing issues or are deaf, so the teachers don't have signs or are unable to communicate like a trained special educationist. Suppose children come to regular school with severe disabilities or severe issues like severe mental challenges, fully blind or hard of hearing, or maybe deaf students. In that case, teachers need more knowledge to deal with such service. If the children come with mild levels, then teachers have enough knowledge.

Participants' opinions are needed to launch an awareness campaign because those students come to regular schools in larger numbers due to awareness, which will benefit all. As the participant said earlier, they have included the mild-level children in classes and are adjusted. They don't have any problems in regular classes. They have no issues if the child with severe disabilities attends regular school. Then maybe chance of having a lack of facilities in the classroom, but not yet. Currently, all the children are adjusted to school. Participants also use peer tutoring techniques or group work in the classroom sometimes. If one group member is busy with his work, he will ask another for guidance.

One of the participants stressed that teachers don't have proper facilities. If the Teacher is making efforts by themselves, that is good. But don't have any facilities from the administration, and there is also no facility from the government for special children. For normal children, regular schools have more facilities. For example, as teachers, we encourage regular children, but not special needs students, in different activities. Teachers do hard work for normal children rather than special needs students. Because society always thinks these types of children cannot do extraordinary work. Planning is always according to the needs of the students.

The participant explained that the teachers have enough practice to include. Because teachers are actors in their classrooms, they must play a role in the children's understanding. Teachers can handle all types of children. Being human, all the teachers have different abilities. Now, it is the responsibility of the Teacher how they can use their abilities to handle the children. Due to their competencies or skills, they are successful teachers in their classrooms. There is a dire need to launch an awareness campaign because new trends are coming daily, and teachers should be aware of them. Teachers don't have proper facilities, teaching materials, and teaching aids, but sometimes, if needed, teachers create the material for the children. A participant says they always try to facilitate according to children's needs.

Curriculum

All participants stressed that the existing curriculum doesn't support inclusive education because students have lengthy syllabi in the regular education system. Children (with special needs) are unable to cover fully, but regular children have no problem with it. But if teachers shorten the syllabus precisely, it basically enhances the quality..... then it is possible. Participants describe that there is no special inclusive policy. Teachers tailor the syllabus internally for students with individual needs. There is no

possibility of accommodating one child or focusing on one child, particularly because students are offered the general syllabus. But the special education institution is located near the school. Teachers collaborate and contact with them. We take a copy of their syllabus, which their head office gives to the needy child.

Teachers use some techniques. First, teachers give simple questions and give options like five questions, and students have to attempt any five questions. Each question carries equal marks. Teachers set the paper as some easy questions, and after that, they move to difficult questions. So, from those questions, they can choose easy questions. This technique will help them pass their papers. If extra time is needed for the students individually, it is given to complete the assignments or papers.

In the regular education system, teachers don't have a special curriculum for inclusive education; they have the same curriculum in classes, and teachers only differentiate through different strategies. There is no inclusive education policy in the school.

Assessment

Regarding assessment, most participants say separating the records for every child is difficult. It is a very difficult task to manage all records. But try to take the history and make a separate file or portfolio. Teachers use data as a portfolio; we've prepared it for them. The teachers do not much differentiate. The only thing is to make a short paper and give extra time to finish or complete the assignment. Sometimes, if a child with physical needs has a problem, teachers provide a writer for help.

Participants explained that no specific assessment criteria are available for children with individual needs. Participants consider the very first thing about the writing speed of the children. And secondly, for the reading and, after that, how they speak or communicate with other children. Participants allow extra time for papers if needed. Teachers are not very aware of the concept of accommodation and modification. However, they try to accommodate or modify the syllabus or instructions according to the needs of the children.

One of the Participants stated that they don't have any different assessment criteria; what they do is give extra attention to that particular child with individual needs. If the specific child has any need, the Teacher makes arrangements to meet the needs but does not make papers individually for them. There are so many things to think about when thinking about the assessment, such as making papers so all the children may be able to solve it because, at the same time, teachers have to manage all the children. Teachers allow the students extra time to complete their assignments. Teachers have to follow the curriculum; in the curriculum, all the guidelines are available on assessing the child in the classroom or overall performance.

Instructions

One of the participants expressed the feelings in the following words: I give the same instructions to all. There is no difference at all. However, some strategies are used, such as attaching or pairing a bright student so he may help the child with individual needs. Normally, a general method is used, like the lecture method. But at the end of class, teachers give extra time to the particular student. To answer the question of modification and accommodation, the participant explained that modification means a change in instructions.

When teachers were asked to use various instructions, Participants explained their views in the following words: yes, if there is a need to arrange for flashcards for the students and draw pictures on board, teachers have to make some extra efforts for the special needs students. Teachers use both types of instruction time. They try to differentiate instruction, but mostly, they use lecture methods for the classroom... Some time is needed to facilitate special needs students' teachers' plans, such as activity-based.

Participants understand the phrase's literal meaning but don't know in detail. The literal meaning of accommodation is to make arrangements according to the needs of the students' modifications, which means a change in instructions.



The plan states that no special or individual instruction is planned for the children, but different instructional strategies, such as repetition, etc., are used to better understand the children. Sometimes, teachers call the child with individual needs on stage and ask to read it in a loud voice, or these types of strategies will help to improve that type of child in classrooms.

Some participants depicted that if instructions should not be modified or changed, the learners will not show interest as they show their interest in the differentiated instruction. They always try to differentiate, but sometimes, due to the lack of time, traditional methods are used by the Participants in the classroom. Teachers sometimes get help from mobile phones to explain concepts. If they cannot explain some concept, they go to YouTube videos and Google, take pictures for the children, and ask them to look at these, like The Teacher changes strategies. For example, the children are hesitant to learn and speak English, but when they see the different videos, they try to learn or imitate it in this way. Teachers know about the difference between accommodation and modification. Accommodation means teachers have to adjust all the children in that environment. Still, modification means teachers can change the instructional strategies to maximise learning or help the children.

In-Class Support

In all participants' views, support is not available, but other class fellows support them morally. But colleagues and teachers are not there. Participants describe that they always tried to do and repeat the instructions one or two times or a third time for that particular, but the major problem is short time. If teachers have enough time, they may try managing the child. There are no other service personnel available at the school. There is no program available to increase the relationships in school, and there is no plan in the history of this school. A participant stated that children with individual needs are sometimes not considered full-school community members. At that time, the Teacher discussed with other normal children that all must live together in or outside the school. So, anybody does not have the right to do them separate or exclude them from society. Teachers always try to motivate the children for a positive attitude.

All the participants describe that somehow, they have a support system, for example, making groups of children and giving them instructions in groups. If 50 students are in one classroom, teachers make groups of 8 to 10 students to help each other. A teacher always helps or gives them instructions. Through this, participants handle the class, and the children grow in their groups gradually, so it will help those students who cannot follow the instructions properly or compete in the classroom. Only the non-teaching staff is available, but no psychologist or other personnel can help the teachers and students. Yes, we have. As I told you earlier, we have a middle school. And we have three peons to support that type of children. They help us with the children's movement.

Participants illustrated with examples that support is available for the students. One of the participants explained that one student had an issue completing the homework task. The issue was the lack of enough time to complete the educational tasks. Sometimes, teachers only see the children in the scenario of classroom response, but they ignore their financial background or any other issue they face in their homes. The student was not responding in the classrooms. Many days, the participant tried to talk with her, but she did not respond. Once, the participant discussed with her very politely, and she said she was in sixth class. When she goes to her home, she goes for labour work after school timing, and she doesn't have enough time to prepare her homework or classwork for the next day. She did not have enough time to manage her school activities or responsibilities. The participant appreciated that she was doing well for her. But also elaborated on the benefits of education for her future. After a week, she was in the classroom with her homework, and she participated better than she had earlier in the classroom. The participant got positive results from that particular child. Teachers don't have such professionals in schools. Participants always tried to deal with children individually but didn't have any service personnel or get any help from others.

All the participants stated that colleagues collaborate and help each other. A healthy discussion or debate is always launched between all the staff members to resolve problems. However, teachers don't have any written education plan for special children; the only things in the classroom are special efforts or instructional strategies to boost their performance. The school administration always tried to give us everything we needed in our classroom and help us.

Most participants expressed that the fellows always help each other. For example, if the child has an issue with hand coordination, the Teacher asks the other student to help the peer in writing. Sometimes, teachers make groups of five or six children, assign tasks, and ask them to work on or complete group activities; these activities are always done to support children with individual needs. Sometimes, the Teacher attaches the student with individual needs to another student because there is a difference between a teacher and a friend with friends' children feel more comfortable and easier to talk or to work. There is no helper or co-teacher, and this support is available in the classroom. One of the participants repeated that if the student has a writing issue, the Teacher calls the child near the table and helps to write the words; although it is a taking activity if they have enough time, teachers always try to manage in that way. Teachers have no facility to have any type of service personnel in the school. However, there is a need to have a psychologist, special education teacher, or trained person who can help to understand children's behaviours, or they may help in educational activities because regular education teachers are not trained enough to solve personality problems or any other behavioural issue.

Sometimes, they have to manage 40 or 50 students in a classroom. So, there is little chance or possibility to work individually with that type of child to solve their behavioural or personality issues.

Training

All the participants said they received much in-service training in their whole career but not special education. In the participant's opinion, the department had no plan for such training shortly.

For inclusive education, first, there is a need to make training arrangements for teachers to conduct workshops and seminars. If the teachers receive ten days of training in general education, one day should be for special education (inclusive education).

One of the participants claimed that he didn't receive any training about special education but did a B.Ed. in general education and an M.Ed. in special education, which enhanced the vision and knowledge of the participant. However, the department did not plan any training in special education or inclusive education in special education. Participants received three pieces of training to enhance their professional skills for seven years.

In the participants' opinion, these types of training should be done. If inclusive education training is planned, it will give more awareness to society and the teachers.

Participants received induction training divided into different parts such as curriculum, assessment, overall class management, and how to deal with children and assess in the classroom. In induction training, the trainer once discussed the subject of special education and special needs students.

Different parts were divided into four weeks of training. Teachers were told about the special needs students and how to deal with them in classes. In induction training, teachers were told that students with special needs come for admission, and no one has the right to reject them; they just need to be included in regular education classes. That thing made the participants motivated. The trainer explained that some parents are unwilling to send their children to special education. So, there is a need to include in regular education that they may be able to get education in their nearby areas. This thing enhances the vision of the participants.

One participant said she doesn't receive specific training to manage the children with individual needs. Participants received many pieces of training in their overall career, having 22 years experience of teaching in the government sector, almost 16 to 17 different pieces of training received on different topics, but didn't receive any training on the topic of special needs education, such as early childhood, British Council training, or Early childhood education training, subject specialist and also the master trainer of the social studies subject. During training, they learned to manage all the children with individual needs but did not receive any training in special needs education. These children are discussed in every training but not in special manners.

Conclusion

The research explores teachers' training needs to implement inclusive education in regular schools. It is evident from all four case studies that teachers are determined and committed to including children with



individual needs in regular schools. 3 out of 4 cases expressed that education is obligatory and inclusive education is good for society. Only one case showed pessimism about inclusive education. Furthermore, teachers' views affirm that not all teachers know the term inclusive education, but some teachers practice it in their classrooms. Sometimes, due to the lack of awareness, the students with individual needs face rejection in regular schools. The cases expressed that school administration doesn't help the teachers, but outside the schools' officials, they appreciate the teachers working with individual needs students. Teachers do not have a special curriculum to facilitate the process of inclusion. Due to this, sometimes children with individual needs suffer in the classroom. Teachers' training is vital to implementing inclusive education in general education. To successfully implement an inclusive process, professional development courses regarding inclusion must be added.

Discussion

The research aims to assess the teachers' training needs for inclusive education. The study's findings are evident from data that teachers need training to implement inclusive education in general education. All the Participants reflected positive attitudes towards including children with individual needs in regular classes. Studies have shown that the positive attitude of teachers is very important in the inclusion of all children with individual needs. (Florian, [2014](#); Forlin & Chambers, [2011](#)). General education teachers have enough knowledge and skills to manage children with individual needs but lack experience, such as facing problems in communication with children with individual needs. Yeo et al. ([2016](#)) found that teachers with little experience are reluctant to exercise inclusion in the classrooms.

School administrators support teachers in actualising complete practices and executing inclusive education; they become extra devoted and successful in the change (Avramidis & Norwich, [2002](#)). Findings from all cases present a need for specialised curriculum instructions and assessments to practice inclusion in schools. Studies reveal that general education teachers need to use instructional strategies, for example, individualised and flexible guidance and action-based learning, to enhance the learning of students with individual needs (Majoko, [2019](#)). None of the cases received any training, particularly to deal with individual needs students. There is a need to prepare the teachers for the students with individual needs; pre-service and in-service training will be helpful to prepare the teachers for the students with individual needs in inclusive education. Makoelle ([2014](#)) identified that there is a need to plan for the training of teachers because, without proper training, it is difficult to get positive results for inclusive education. Although this research study helps to assess the training needs for the implementation of inclusive education in regular schools, it requires further investigation of what facilitation is provided to support the inclusive education process in regular schools. Further research into the current and vital modification in the teacher education curriculum and teaching methods could enhance the substantial value of the subject. The a need to study offering training opportunities for the teachers working in regular education setups (Sirem & Çatal, [2023](#)). The research study positions the training needs in various elements to influence or enhance the capacity to include all children with diverse needs in classrooms (Walker et al., [2023](#)). However, further research to link policy to practice and initiate the study covering all the elements could reveal the foundation for important actions.

Recommendations

Based on the results from the four face-to-face interviews with all cases, the following recommendations for policy and practice are also stated:

- Inclusive education courses should be part of the initial teacher education program.
- The curriculum should be modified according to the needs of the students.
- It is observed from the four cases that the ratio of students is higher, which is difficult to manage, and the ratio of students should be reduced.
- Regular support from top management is highly favourable to strengthening the inclusive education process.
- Professional development courses on inclusive education should be offered yearly to enhance the Teachers' performance. These courses will help sustain the performance of inclusive education.

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