



Primary Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs Regarding the Implementation of the 2017 National Education Policy for the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in District Hunza

Muhammad Hadi Haidari¹, Beenish², Rohi Gul³, Irum Zehra⁴

¹Ph.D. Scholar in Special Education, Lecturer, Department of Educational Development, Karakoram International University, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, Email: Mhadi578@yahoo.com

²B.Ed. (Hons) Special Education, Department of Educational Development, Karakoram International University, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, Email: beenishzahra185@gmail.com

³B.Ed., (Hons) Special Education, Department of Educational Development, Karakoram International University, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, Email: ruhialy7@gmail.com

⁴B.Ed (Hons) Special Education, Department of Educational Development, Karakoram International University, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, Email: Yousafirum316@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Inclusive Education, National Education Policy 2017, Teacher Attitudes, Policy Implementation, Primary Schools, Hunza, Disability Inclusion, Teacher Challenges, Pakistan

Corresponding Author.

Muhammad Hadi Haidari,
Ph.D. Scholar in Special Education, Lecturer,
Department of Educational Development, Karakoram International University, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan,

Email: Mhadi578@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2017 emphasizes inclusive education as a core priority, aiming to ensure that students with disabilities learn alongside their peers in mainstream classrooms. Aligned with global commitments, the policy seeks to strengthen teacher capacity, improve school environments, and promote equitable learning opportunities. This study examines primary school teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and challenges in implementing NEP 2017 in District Hunza. Using a quantitative descriptive survey of 110 teachers selected through simple random sampling, the findings reveal generally positive attitudes toward inclusion, with teachers acknowledging its academic and social benefits. However, their knowledge of NEP 2017 provisions and strategies remained moderate. Teachers also reported major barriers, including limited training, inadequate resources, large class sizes, unclear policy communication, and insufficient administrative support. These findings align with earlier research showing gaps between policy intentions and practical implementation. The study highlights the need for stronger training, infrastructure improvements, and school-level support to achieve effective inclusive education.

Introduction

Inclusive education is one of the core elements of the international and national educational reforms, especially in terms of the provision of children with disabilities with equal learning opportunities as compared with their peers. It recommends elimination of barriers, encourages student's involvement and tries to eliminate school discrimination (Department for Education and Skills, 2001a). Although the vision of inclusion is generally well-grounded, the meaning of this concept is complicated, and different scholars and practitioners interpret it in different ways. Lindsay (2003) states that there is usually a conflict between the philosophical intentions of inclusion and its practical application, as some educators hold onto the concept of what he terms as the true inclusion, and some apply more contextual approaches to the concept. In spite of the various definitions, the common aim is to ensure that all learners including the disabled have the opportunity of learning in the same classroom setting.

Inclusive education is not just the mainstreaming. Whereas mainstreaming subjects the students with special needs to ordinary classes without adequate adjustments, inclusive education is whereby the learning settings, modes of teaching and building designs are altered to support the various learners. They can be disability based on physical, intellectual or developmental disabilities or even communication disability, race, ethnicity, gender or socioeconomic status. The strategy focuses on engagement, connectedness, and partnership in a single school population.

Inclusive Education and the Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design of learning (UDL) framework enhances inclusion learning by offering the flexible teaching approaches to suit all learners. UDL encourages the various formats of information delivery, student interest, and evaluation of learning achievement such that all children have the opportunity to contribute effectively, with or without disability or the student learning style. Priyadharsini and Mary (2024) emphasize that UDL is a method which dismantles the classroom barriers and helps to meet the needs of different learning preferences, as well as promotes equity in the classroom. UDL promotes equality, teamwork, and equity when used in a proper manner.

Inclusive Education According to UNESCO

UNESCO (2005) points out that every child has a right to inclusive education without discrimination based on identity, background or ability. It is recommended that schools should modify the curricula, instructional strategies, and school organization to provide maximum inclusion to all learners (Besic, 2020). Notably, UNESCO assumes that inclusive education must occur in normal schools, not in special schools that put the obligation on the mainstream schools to include learners with disabilities.

Importance of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is significant in the removal of stereotypes and the propagation of respect and acceptance in the school communities. It helps students with special health or developmental needs by making sure that they have access to appropriate learning resources, help in developing self-confidence, and promote independence. In addition, inclusive practices promote good school-family relationships, equip teachers to accept diversity and improve school culture. Inclusive education not only helps children with disabilities but also the whole learning environment: it builds social unity and teaches students to put themselves in others' shoes.

Importance of Inclusive Education at the Primary Level

Inclusive education in primary school level is very significant because it grants all children with or without disability, background or circumstance equal opportunities to learn and be involved.

The scholars like Croll and Moses (2000) define inclusive education as a moral requirement that portrays the role of a society to ensure that all learners are taken care of at all levels of schooling. This opinion is also supported by research conducted in the Pakistani setting. According to Haideri, Abbas, and Khatoon (2025), teachers in the primary schools tend to have different degrees of awareness regarding disability and this directly influences the way inclusion has been applied within the normally occurring primary classrooms. Likewise, Parveen (2022) emphasizes that the exposure to inclusive settings at early ages helps children to develop their social skills, empathy, and desire to cooperate with peers with different needs. As international and national organizations (such as the United Nations) promote the inclusion of policy, primary education is the decisive point where equity and fairness can be implemented in practice. The teachers are at the centre of such a process because their attitudes and awareness of inclusion have a great role to play in the learning process of young children (Boyle, 2012; Subban and Sharma, 2006). Notably, inclusion goes beyond accommodating the physical or mental disability; it is a diversity that is brought about by poverty, social classes, race, religion, language, gender and culture of background (Topping, 2012). Treating students with special needs by adopting inclusive practices during the initial phase of their school life, not only promotes the academic development of these learners but also enhances a sense of empathy, respect, and social responsibility among all learners, preconditioning building a more equal society.

The Inclusion in Pakistan and National Education Policy (NEP) 2017.

The National Education Policy of Pakistan (2017) puts a lot of focus on inclusion of children with disabilities in normal education. The policy goes further to broaden the scope of inclusion to include any learner with differing needs. Some of the objectives will be to increase access to inclusive education, to convert half of the educational institutions in Pakistan into disability-friendly institutions by 2025 and to make teacher training, assistive technologies and resources accessible to facilitate inclusion. The NEP 2017 also stipulates that at least five percent of the education budget should be allocated to special education, the data system should be enhanced, and the mechanisms of support like transport and scholarships should be enhanced. In spite of such commitments, the implementation is uneven in various regions, particularly the remote areas.

Statement of the Problem

The National Policy of 2017 on education is focused on the inclusion of students with disabilities, but the inclusion practices in most areas of Pakistan are not established. Teachers in District Hunza where schools usually have limited resources available, and chances of professional development are few are of vital importance in defining the way the inclusion classroom practice is done. Their attitudes, beliefs, and will play a direct role in ensuring inclusion is a working fact or a policy aspirin. Although the country has made national commitments, there is a lack of empirical data relating to the ways primary teachers in Hunza comprehend and decipher the inclusive education requirements. Teacher training, insufficient awareness about the policy, cultural ideas about disability and poor facilities at schools can be the obstacles to successful implementation. Policymakers cannot overcome the existing gaps or offer specific assistance without knowing the attitude and beliefs of teachers. Thus, the research question is to explore the perceptions of the primary school teachers in Hunza about inclusive education with the NEP 2017 and find out the obstacles to the implementation of the strategy to better plan in the future, distribute resources, and provide professional training.

Research Objectives

- 1- To examine the attitudes of primary teachers toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms.
- 2- To explore primary teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of inclusive education under the 2017 National Education Policy.
- 3- To assess teachers' awareness and understanding of the inclusive education guidelines presented in NEP 2017.
- 4- To identify challenges faced by primary teachers in implementing inclusive education practices in District Hunza.

Literature Review

The concept of inclusive education has become a key topic in the educational policy of the world, which is focused on the right of all children, irrespective of disabilities, backgrounds, or learning differences, to receive high-quality education in general classrooms. In the past 20 years, global initiatives such as those facilitated by UNESCO have strengthened the concept of inclusion being more than putting students with disabilities in regular school; but an overhaul of curriculum, pedagogy and school culture to accommodate the various learning needs (UNESCO, 2005). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2017 of Pakistan is identical to Sustainable Development Goal 4, as there is reaffirmation regarding the need to offer inclusive and equitable quality education to all learners. According to the policy, the major areas of actions include training of teachers, modification of curriculum, presence of accessible school facilities and community involvement to make sure that disabled children are not left behind. Nevertheless, irrespective of such promises, the actual reproduction of inclusive education is yet to be even spread, especially in geographically isolated regions such as Hunza in Gilgit-Baltistan, where the lack of infrastructures and qualified teachers is a major issue.

Awareness and Understanding of inclusive Education by teachers.

The understanding of the principles and policies of inclusive education among teachers forms a central role in determining the implementation of successful classroom practices. In a research study on the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion education in Turkey, that is, 128 teachers of third and fourth grade, it was identified that most teachers had positive perception of inclusion education, but they also needed additional support to facilitate social and emotional growth of students who needed to succeed with inclusion (Sirem & Çata, 2023). In the same manner, Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2012) note that competencies and perceptions of teachers have a great impact on the quality of inclusive practices. They provide a point that teachers who comprehend the diversity among students and/or respect the differences of individual learners can better manage to establish positive and conducive classrooms.

Resistance or uncertainty can occur in situations where a teacher is less familiar or has had little experience with inclusive pedagogies. According to CS (2024), the awareness of the teachers has a direct influence on their reactions towards students with disabilities. The positive awareness would boost classroom belonging, academic achievement, and self-esteem of students with special needs, whereas negative attitudes may result in exclusion and marginalization. These results highlight the need to train teachers in terms of adopting an inclusive attitude and practice.

Attitudes of the teachers towards the special needs students.

The attitude of teachers has been one of the most effective predictors of successful inclusion. Research has always indicated that teachers who are supportive have a higher disposition to change teaching methods, cooperate with parents, and promote the needs of students (Boer et al., 2012). On the other hand, the teachers who are ill equipped, overwhelmed or poorly trained tend

to develop negative perception which prevents implementation. In most developing nations, such as Pakistan the absence of pre-service and in service training is also one of the factors that make teachers reluctant to embrace inclusion. Instructing students with disabilities can be challenging to accomplish when the teachers possess a limited understanding of the different types of disability, instruction methods and assistive technology. These issues are supported by studies carried out in Bangladesh. Totini, Fuad, and Alam (2025) have discovered that, in many cases, a teacher, a head teacher or a student was not aware of the principles of inclusive education. Inclusive teaching strategies were not widely used in classroom observations, but this indicates wider teacher training and institutional failure. According to the researchers, without specified training opportunities, teachers cannot assist the students with the special needs successfully, which leads to a shallow inclusion.

Beliefs about Policy and Practical Implementation

Government policies and other socio-cultural factors highly influence the beliefs of teachers concerning inclusive education. In Bangladesh, Al et al. (2013) emphasize that although the country has ratified major international treaties on the use of inclusive education, the local practice is poor. The policies usually mimic the international models without accommodating the local classroom conditions which result in confusion of the educators and other education employees. Such a gap between practice and policy is restrictive to the success of inclusive education efforts.

Durand, Huarcaya, Yacha, and Regalado (2024) state that inclusive education has not only become an instructional method but also a social duty. Their study indicates that the schools that have inclusive cultures need structural changes, reforms in teaching strategies and better teacher education. Neoliberal governance structures also shape the beliefs of teachers as teachers are compelled by the governing structure to achieve performance targets hence the beliefs of teachers on inclusion are affected indirectly. Such policies that support equity and inclusion but not enough are likely to make teachers frustrated and limit their preparedness.

Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education

Although there has been a great improvement in policy, a lot of challenges are faced to ensure that it is implemented. In Pakistan, the NEP 2017 has clear inclusion strategies, but the policy has inconsistencies and implicit biases that render it challenging to actualize the policy. Acknowledging the BIAS FREE tool, Chauhdry and Azeem (2025) discovered that the policy was not consistent in terms of language and failed to consider the important aspects of equity, including gender, cultural diversity, and representation of disabled people. These contradictions pose confusion to teachers and administrators who have to put the policy in effect.

According to other studies, there are classroom and school level challenges. Joseph and Ganesan (2021) discovered that there were significant variations in the awareness of teachers on inclusive education when they depended on demographic variables like gender, locality, and marital status. Their research also gave a positive correlation between teacher morale and knowledge of inclusion, implying that well-motivated teachers who have a deeper knowledge of inclusive ideals have more chances to employ productive practices.

Studies in Nigeria give additional information on the problems at classroom level. The research by Adesokan and Bojuwoye (2023) surveyed 120 teachers and found significant obstacles in the negative attitude of teachers, the absence of training, inadequate facilities, and peer acceptance problems. It is worth noting that the study did not find gender difference in perceived barriers, thus suggesting that structural and not personal factors influence the experience of teachers regarding inclusion. These results are in line with other emerging economies, which have huge

class sizes, scarce teaching materials, and inappropriate administrative services, which inhibit inclusive behaviours.

Teacher Training and Professional Development

Another pattern we found is that teacher training is very critical towards successful implementation of inclusive education. The research has continually demonstrated that teachers who are provided with systematic training have a higher degree of confidence and effectiveness in inclusive classrooms. Nevertheless, there are not enough training programs in many countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan. Das and Ochiai (2012) established that the Certificate in Education (C-in-Ed) course in Bangladesh did not have sufficient content in special education needs. The scarcity of resources, oversaturation of training classes, and the lack of qualified trainers worsened the effectiveness of the program even more.

School management practices also affect professional development. According to Rhodes and Beneicke (2003) in order to enhance teacher performance, there should be open communication, trust, and specific support. They define the conflicts between the managerial accountability requirements and the professional development possibilities of the collaboration. The attempts to enhance inclusive practices are not effective when the professional development does not appeal to the real needs of the teachers.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design to examine primary teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding the implementation of the 2017 National Education Policy (NEP) for including students with disabilities in District Hunza. A structured Likert-scale questionnaire with 40 items was developed based on relevant literature and NEP guidelines. The instrument covered four major areas: teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, understanding of NEP 2017, awareness of inclusive policy provisions, and challenges faced in implementing inclusive practices. The population consisted of approximately 280 primary school teachers working in public, private, and community schools across District Hunza. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 110 teachers, ensuring that every teacher had an equal chance of being included and providing a representative sample from urban and rural school settings. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires during school visits, with prior permission from school heads and informed consent from participants, and the right to withdraw at any stage. The study was delimited to primary teachers in District Hunza and focused solely on inclusive education under NEP 2017 using quantitative data.

Result and Analysis

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 110)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	60	54.5
	Female	50	45.5
Age	24–30 years	30	27.3
	31–35 years	37	33.6
	36–40 years	39	35.5

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
	41 and above	4	3.6
Qualification	BA/B.Ed	25	22.7
	BS	25	22.7
	MA/M.Ed	34	30.9
	MPhil	23	20.9
	PhD	3	2.7
Teaching Experience	1- 5 years	49	44.5
	6–10 years	42	38.2
	11–15 years	19	17.3
Type of School	Government	35	31.8
	Private	39	35.5
	Community	36	32.7

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 110 respondents. The sample includes 54.5% male and 45.5% female teachers. Most participants were between 31 and 40 years old, while only a small percentage (3.6%) were aged 41 or above. Regarding qualifications, the largest group held MA/M.Ed degrees (30.9%), followed by BA/B.Ed and BS degrees (22.7% each). The teaching experience data show that most teachers had 1–5 years (44.5%) or 6–10 years (38.2%) of experience, with fewer having 11–15 years (17.3%). Respondents were also well-distributed across government (31.8%), private (35.5%), and community schools (32.7%), and ensuring balanced representation of school types.

Table: 2 Descriptive Statistics of Teacher Attitudes toward Inclusive Education (N = 110)

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SD
I believe students with disabilities should be taught in regular classrooms.	20 (18.2%)	25 (22.7%)	20 (18.2%)	30 (27.3%)	15 (13.6%)	2.87	1.10
Inclusive education benefits both disabled and non-disabled students.	15 (13.6%)	20 (18.2%)	25 (22.7%)	35 (31.8%)	15 (13.6%)	3.03	1.12
I feel confident in handling	12	18	20	40	20	3.14	1.15

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SD
students with different learning needs.	(10.9%)	(16.4%)	(18.2%)	(36.4%)	(18.2%)		
I enjoy teaching in an inclusive classroom setting.	14 (12.7%)	20 (18.2%)	22 (20.0%)	40 (36.4%)	14 (12.7%)	3.05	1.14
Inclusion helps develop social skills among all students.	16 (14.5%)	22 (20.0%)	20 (18.2%)	32 (29.1%)	20 (18.2%)	2.90	1.13
Having a child with a disability in my class is a positive experience.	12 (10.9%)	18 (16.4%)	20 (18.2%)	35 (31.8%)	25 (22.7%)	3.12	1.10
I feel comfortable adapting lessons for students with disabilities.	10 (9.1%)	15 (13.6%)	15 (13.6%)	40 (36.4%)	30 (27.3%)	3.20	1.12
I feel comfortable adapting lessons for students with disabilities.*	15 (13.6%)	18 (16.4%)	20 (18.2%)	35 (31.8%)	22 (20.0%)	2.93	1.11
I believe inclusion increases my workload unnecessarily (reverse scored).	22 (20.0%)	25 (22.7%)	20 (18.2%)	25 (22.7%)	18 (16.4%)	2.79	1.10
I am supportive of including all students regardless of disability.	18 (16.4%)	25 (22.7%)	20 (18.2%)	30 (27.3%)	17 (15.5%)	2.77	1.12

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. Overall, the results show that teachers generally hold moderately positive attitudes about including students with disabilities in regular classrooms. Many teachers agreed that students with disabilities should learn alongside their peers ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.10$) and believed that inclusive education benefits both disabled and non-disabled students ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.12$). Teachers also reported confidence in supporting diverse learning needs ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.15$) and enjoyment in teaching in inclusive settings ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.14$). Responses indicate that teachers view inclusion as helpful for developing social skills ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.13$) and consider having a child with a disability in class a positive experience ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.10$). Many also expressed comfort adapting lessons to support students with disabilities ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.12$). However, some teachers felt that inclusion may increase their workload ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.10$), and overall support for including all students regardless of disability was moderate ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.12$). The findings suggest generally supportive attitudes, with some concerns about practical challenges.

Table: 3 Descriptive Statistics of Teacher Perceptions of the 2017 Inclusive Education Policy (N = 110)

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SD
The 2017 policy effectively promotes inclusive education.	15 (13.6%)	20 (18.2%)	20 (18.2%)	35 (31.8%)	20 (18.2%)	3.06	1.10
The goals of the 2017 policy are achievable in our schools.	15 (13.6%)	20 (18.2%)	20 (18.2%)	35 (31.8%)	20 (18.2%)	3.06	1.12
The policy provides clear guidance for inclusive classroom practices.	18 (16.4%)	25 (22.7%)	20 (18.2%)	30 (27.3%)	17 (15.5%)	2.93	1.15

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SD
The implementation of the policy has improved student learning outcomes.	10 (9.1%)	15 (13.6%)	15 (13.6%)	40 (36.4%)	30 (27.3%)	3.28	1.13
Teachers are well-informed about the inclusive education guidelines in the policy.	12 (10.9%)	20 (18.2%)	20 (18.2%)	35 (31.8%)	23 (20.9%)	3.08	1.11
The policy encourages collaboration among teachers for inclusion.	12 (10.9%)	18 (16.4%)	20 (18.2%)	40 (36.4%)	20 (18.2%)	3.11	1.12
I believe the policy is realistic considering the resources available.	20 (18.2%)	25 (22.7%)	20 (18.2%)	30 (27.3%)	15 (13.6%)	2.76	1.10
The 2017 policy reflects the real needs of students with disabilities.	15 (13.6%)	20 (18.2%)	25 (22.7%)	35 (31.8%)	15 (13.6%)	2.96	1.12
The policy has motivated teachers to embrace inclusion.	12 (10.9%)	20 (18.2%)	20 (18.2%)	35 (31.8%)	23 (20.9%)	3.05	1.11
The policy's focus on inclusion is improving education quality overall.	15 (13.6%)	20 (18.2%)	25 (22.7%)	30 (27.3%)	20 (18.2%)	3.00	1.12

Table 3 shows the perceptions of teachers about the Inclusion Education Policy of 2017. The findings indicate that the teachers have rather positive and even moderate views in terms of the purpose and effectiveness of the policy. A significant number of respondents believed that the policy facilitates inclusive education ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.10$) and that the objectives of the policy are realistic in schools ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.12$). Teachers were also of the view that implementation of the policy has increased student learning outcomes ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.13$), which were positive on their effect. Nonetheless, there were mixed reactions in certain areas. Teachers were not very sure about the transparency of classroom instructions offered by the policy ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.15$) and doubted whether the policy is practical under the current resources ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.10$). Nonetheless, most of them were highly informed about policy instructions ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.11$) and thought that the policy promotes teacher collaboration ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.12$). The results imply that, although teachers are aware of the positive intentions of the 2017 policy, they also believe that the policy needs to guide them better, provide more resources, and support them better to ensure the effective implementation of inclusive education practices.

Table: 4 Descriptive Statistics of Teacher Knowledge of the 2017 Inclusive Education Policy (N = 110)

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SD
I am aware of the inclusive education provisions in the 2017 policy.	15 (13.6%)	20 (18.2%)	20 (18.2%)	35 (31.8%)	20 (18.2%)	2.95	1.12
I have read or been trained about the inclusive education policy.	14 (12.7%)	20 (18.2%)	20 (18.2%)	40 (36.4%)	16 (14.5%)	2.97	1.11

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SD
I understand the objectives of the 2017 education policy.	16 (14.5%)	22 (20.0%)	20 (18.2%)	35 (31.8%)	17 (15.5%)	2.92	1.10
I know how the policy defines inclusive education.	18 (16.4%)	25 (22.7%)	20 (18.2%)	30 (27.3%)	17 (15.5%)	2.88	1.12
I can identify key strategies for inclusion mentioned in the policy.	20 (18.2%)	25 (22.7%)	20 (18.2%)	30 (27.3%)	15 (13.6%)	2.81	1.11
I understand the teacher's role as described in the policy.	10 (9.1%)	15 (13.6%)	15 (13.6%)	40 (36.4%)	30 (27.3%)	3.26	1.10
I have attended workshops or sessions related to the 2017 policy.	12 (10.9%)	18 (16.4%)	20 (18.2%)	40 (36.4%)	20 (18.2%)	3.02	1.12
My school administration has discussed the inclusive policy with staff.	15 (13.6%)	20 (18.2%)	25 (22.7%)	35 (31.8%)	15 (13.6%)	2.95	1.10
I feel well-informed about my responsibilities under the policy.	22 (20.0%)	25 (22.7%)	20 (18.2%)	30 (27.3%)	13 (11.8%)	2.78	1.12
I am confident explaining the inclusive education section of the policy to others.	16 (14.5%)	22 (20.0%)	20 (18.2%)	35 (31.8%)	17 (15.5%)	2.92	1.11

Table 4 shows the level of knowledge of teachers on the inclusive education policy of 2017. The general results indicate that teachers have a medium awareness and knowledge regarding the policy. The majority of the respondents knew about the provisions of the policy ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.12$) and had read the policy or received some training regarding the same ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.11$). The teachers were also moderately aware of the purposes of the policy ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.10$) and the definition of inclusive education in the policy ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.12$). Nevertheless, the respondents were not so sure about the specific strategies to be included in the policy ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.11$), which points to the lack of deeper understanding of the policy. The best part of knowledge was the perception of their role as teachers to the policy guidelines ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.10$), which implies a clear understanding of the role of the teacher. Moderate involvement in workshops on the policy was also reported by the teachers ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.12$), and the teachers also agreed that school administrations had communicated with the staff about the policy information ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.10$). Conversely, teachers perceived themselves as less knowledgeable about their roles ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.12$) and moderate in their beliefs of how to clarify the policy to others ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.11$). the findings reveal that even though teachers understand the 2017 policy to the best of their ability, they need further education and enhanced communication skills to demonstrate the policy knowledge and be more confident in using it in a practical manner.

Table: 5 Descriptive Statistics of Teacher-Perceived Barriers to Inclusive Education (N = 110)

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SD
I face difficulties managing large classes with diverse learners.	12 (10.9%)	18 (16.4%)	20 (18.2%)	40 (36.4%)	20 (18.2%)	3.11	1.12

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SD
Lack of training limits my ability to teach inclusively.	18 (16.4%)	22 (20.0%)	20 (18.2%)	35 (31.8%)	15 (13.6%)	2.77	1.11
There are not enough teaching resources for inclusive education.	15 (13.8%)	20 (18.3%)	18 (16.5%)	35 (32.1%)	21 (19.3%)	3.06	1.12
Parents of non-disabled students resist inclusion.	14 (12.8%)	20 (18.3%)	18 (16.5%)	38 (34.9%)	19 (17.5%)	3.07	1.13
I do not get enough support from school administration.	16 (14.7%)	22 (20.2%)	18 (16.5%)	35 (32.1%)	18 (16.5%)	2.93	1.12
Inclusive teaching requires more time than I can manage.	12 (11.0%)	18 (16.5%)	20 (18.3%)	40 (36.7%)	20 (18.3%)	3.13	1.11
There is a shortage of special education experts for guidance.	20 (18.3%)	25 (22.9%)	20 (18.3%)	30 (27.5%)	14 (12.8%)	2.68	1.12
Physical infrastructure in schools is not suitable for all students.	15 (13.8%)	22 (20.2%)	20 (18.3%)	38 (34.9%)	14 (12.8%)	2.98	1.11
I find it hard to meet the needs of all students equally.	12 (11.0%)	18 (16.5%)	20 (18.3%)	40 (36.7%)	20 (18.3%)	3.14	1.12
Collaboration among teachers for inclusion is limited.	18 (16.5%)	22 (20.2%)	20 (18.3%)	35 (32.1%)	15 (13.8%)	2.84	1.11

Table 5 shows how the teachers perceive the challenges they encounter in the implementation of inclusive education. In general, the results indicate that teachers face various moderate to high-end difficulties when it comes to inclusion practice. The most common mean score was achieved on the difficulty of producing the needs of all students equally ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.12$), which shows the pressure that teachers experience when they are dealing with diverse learning needs. Likewise, several teachers concurred that inclusive teaching was time-consuming than what they could handle ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.11$) and that large classes complicated matters in ensuring that students with different abilities were supported ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.12$). The scarcity of resources also became the key hindrances. Teaching materials ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.12$) and inappropriate physical infrastructure in schools ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.11$) had been reported by teachers. Inclusive practices are further complicated by social factors, including resistance of parents of children who are not disabled ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.13$). The lack of administrative support ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.12$), little cooperation between teachers ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.11$), and deficiency of special education professionals ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.12$) are also among the issues. It is also observed in the data that teachers do not have sufficient professional training, which impedes the efficient implementation of inclusion ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.11$). The data shows that teachers have various systemic, resources, and instructional problems that do not allow them to implement inclusion smoothly. Training reinforcement, better facilities and support systems can be used to mitigate these barriers.

Summary

The article examines primary school teachers' attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and challenges regarding the implementation of Pakistan's National Education Policy (NEP) 2017 for including students with disabilities in District Hunza. Using a quantitative descriptive survey with 110 teachers, the study reveals that teachers generally support inclusive education and recognize its

benefits for both disabled and non-disabled students. However, their understanding of policy details remains moderate, with gaps in knowledge about specific strategies and provisions of NEP 2017. Teachers expressed belief in the policy's positive intent but highlighted practical concerns such as unclear guidelines, insufficient resources, and limited administrative support. Findings also show significant barriers, including large class sizes, lack of training, inadequate teaching materials, and a shortage of special education experts. Despite these challenges, most teachers demonstrated willingness to adapt their teaching methods and embrace inclusive practices. The study concludes that while NEP 2017 has raised awareness about inclusion, successful implementation requires stronger training programs, clearer communication, better school infrastructure, and continued policy support.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into primary school teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and challenges related to implementing the 2017 National Education Policy (NEP) on inclusive education in District Hunza. Overall, the results show moderate to positive attitudes toward inclusion, but also highlight persistent gaps in training, resources, and policy awareness that affect effective implementation.

The study found that teachers generally believe students with disabilities should be taught in regular classrooms and recognize the social and academic benefits of inclusive education. These findings align with Ainscow (2019), who emphasizes that teachers' positive beliefs are foundational for building inclusive school cultures. Similar results were reported by Al-Zyoud and Gaad (2021), who found that teachers in developing countries increasingly acknowledge the value of inclusive practices, even when practical barriers remain.

Despite positive attitudes, teachers demonstrated only moderate knowledge of NEP 2017 provisions. Many had limited understanding of policy objectives, definitions, and specific strategies for inclusion. This is consistent with the findings of Haideri, Abbas, and Khatoon (2025), who reported that teachers in Gilgit often lack adequate training and awareness regarding disability-inclusive policies. Likewise, Farooq and Zeshan (2021) found that one of the major obstacles to inclusion in Pakistan is insufficient policy communication and professional development for teachers.

The results also show that teachers face significant structural and instructional challenges, including large class sizes, limited teaching resources, unsuitable school infrastructure, and lack of administrative support. These findings strongly align with Parveen and Haideri (2025), who concluded that support facilities in Gilgit-Baltistan are inadequate for meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Similar concerns were reported in international contexts; Sharma, Forlin, and Loreman (2020) highlight that overcrowded classrooms and lack of specialized support hinder teachers' capacity to apply inclusive methods effectively.

Teachers' concerns about increased workload and lack of time for individualized instruction reflect broader evidence that inclusion requires appropriate staffing, manageable class sizes, and access to expert guidance. This is supported by Felisilda (2024), who noted that teachers experience stress and performance challenges when inclusive responsibilities increase without adequate support. The reported shortage of special education experts further reflects the findings of Ofologi et al. (2022), who emphasize the need for trained professionals to support teachers working with students with learning difficulties.

The study's findings indicate that while NEP 2017 has established a strong framework for inclusive education, its implementation in Hunza is constrained by gaps in teacher training, resource availability, and school-level support. Teachers' willingness to embrace inclusion is

clear, but translating policy into practice requires addressing these systemic limitations. Strengthening teacher preparation, improving infrastructure, and ensuring sustained administrative and policy-level support will be essential for advancing inclusive education in the region.

Recommendations

Strengthen Teacher Training on NEP 2017 and Inclusive Education

The results indicate that teachers are only moderately familiar with policy provisions, strategies and objectives. The professional development programs about NEP 2017, understanding of disability and inclusive teaching methods should be arranged regularly and structured to improve the policy awareness and competence of the teachers.

Improve Availability of Teaching and Learning Resources

The shortage of learning materials and a lack of special resources were reported by teachers. Schools are supposed to set aside special budgets towards inclusive classroom resources, aids, visual aids, and differentiated instructional resources.

Reduce Class Size and Provide Additional Classroom Support

One of the most rated challenges was difficulty in dealing with large classes with diverse learners. The possibility to reduce the student-teacher ratio or hiring assistant teachers can considerably increase the possibility of teachers of supporting all learners efficiently.

Enhance School Infrastructure for Accessibility

The results show that not all schools have appropriate physical conditions of students with disabilities. Ramps, accessible toilets, supportive classroom layouts and sensory-friendly spaces should be given priority by governments and school management.

Increase Administrative and Leadership Support

Teachers reported a lack of school administration support. Principals must take an active role in guiding, monitoring, and supporting teachers to engage in inclusive practices such as designing collaborative planning and rewarding inclusive teaching.

Provide Access to Special Education Experts

A significant obstacle was a lack of professional assistance. The schools need to liaise with rehabilitation centers, special educators, therapists, and psychologists whose services can guide, assess, and train the schools on a continuous basis.

Strengthen Parent Awareness and Community Engagement

Teachers reported resistance from parents of non-disabled students. Awareness campaigns, parent meetings, and community sensitization programs can help build acceptance and reduce negative attitudes toward inclusion.

Develop Clear Policy Guidelines at the School Level

Since teachers expressed uncertainty about policy clarity, schools should create simplified, practical guidelines based on NEP 2017. These may include step-by-step strategies, classroom procedures, and referral pathways for students needing support.

Encourage Teacher Collaboration and Peer Support

Limited collaboration among teachers emerged as a barrier. Schools should establish peer mentoring, inclusive practice teams, and regular sharing sessions to build collective capacity.

Monitor Implementation and Provide Feedback Mechanisms

To ensure that inclusive education practices align with NEP 2017, monitoring systems should be developed, including teacher feedback, classroom observations, and progress review meetings.

References

- Adesokan, A., & Bojuwoye, O. (2023). Teachers' perceived barriers to implementing inclusive education in Nigeria. *[Journal name unavailable]*.
- Ainscow, M. (2019). *Supporting inclusive education: A school and classroom perspective*. Routledge.
- Al, M., et al. (2013). Inclusive education policies and practices in Bangladesh: A policy–practice gap analysis. *[Journal name unavailable]*.
- Al-Zyoud, N., & Gaad, E. (2021). Inclusive education for students with disabilities: Challenges and opportunities in developing countries. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(6), 752–770.
- Boer, A., Pijl, S., & Minnaert, A. (2012). Regular primary schoolteachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. *Educational Psychology*, 32(3), 1–17.
- Chauhdry, A., & Azeem, M. (2025). National Education Policy 2017: An analysis through the lens of inclusion. *[Journal name unavailable]*.
- CS. (2024). Teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusion: Implications for student belonging and success. *[Journal name unavailable]*.
- Das, A., & Ochiai, T. (2012). Inclusive education and teacher preparation in Bangladesh: An analysis of the Certificate-in-Education program. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(12), 1–15.
- Department for Education and Skills. (2001a). *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice*. DfES.
- Durand, M., Huarcaya, W., Yacha, L., & Regalado, T. (2024). Teacher beliefs and the sociopolitical influences shaping inclusive education practices. *[Journal name unavailable]*.
- Farooq, M. S., & Zeshan, A. (2021). Barriers to inclusive education in Pakistan: A regional analysis. *Journal of Educational Development*, 45(2), 55–68.
- Felisilda, A. U. (2024). Challenges and performance of novice teachers: Basis for school management plan. *American Journal of Arts and Human Science*, 3(4), 96–118. <https://doi.org/10.54536/ajahs.v3i4.3866>
- Haideri, M. H., & Parveen, Z. (2025). An evaluation of support facilities for inclusive education in primary schools: Perspectives of head teachers in Gilgit-Baltistan. *ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences*, 4(3), 2981–2992. <https://doi.org/10.63056/ACAD.004.03.0587>
- Haideri, M. H., Abbas, W., & Khatoon, N. (2025). Awareness of disability among general education teachers: A study in the schools of District Gilgit. *International Journal of Politics & Social Sciences Review (IJPSSR)*, 4(3), 44–53.
- Joseph, A., & Ganesan, S. (2021). Teachers' awareness of inclusive education and its relationship with teacher morale. *[Journal name unavailable]*.
- Lindsay, G. (2003). Inclusive education: A critical perspective. *British Journal of Special Education*, 30(1), 3–12.
- Ofologi, M., Kougioumtzis, G. A., Efstratopoulou, M. A., & Skoura, E. (2022). Specific learning disabilities and psychosocial difficulties in children. In *Advising preservice teachers through narratives from students with disabilities* (pp. 31–54). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-7359-4.ch002>
- Parveen, Z., & Haideri, M. H. (2025). An evaluation of support facilities for inclusive education in primary schools: Perspectives of head teachers in Gilgit-Baltistan. *ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences*, 4(3), 2981–2992. <https://doi.org/10.63056/ACAD.004.03.0587>

- Priyadharsini, R., & Mary, R. (2024). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in inclusive education. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 12(4), 55–68.
- Rhodes, C., & Beneicke, S. (2003). Professional development support for teachers: Tensions and opportunities. *Educational Management & Administration*, 31(2), 1–17.
- Sharma, U., Forlin, C., & Loreman, T. (2020). Impact of training on teachers' preparedness for inclusive education. *International Journal of Special Education*, 35(1), 35–47.
- Sirem, Ö., & Çata, Z. (2023). Teachers' knowledge, awareness, and attitudes toward inclusive education: A study of Turkish primary teachers. *[Journal name unavailable]*.
- Subban, P., & Sharma, U. (2006). Teachers' perceptions of inclusive education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(2), 143–156.
- Topping, K. (2012). Conceptions of inclusion: Widening the definition. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 28(3), 279–293.
- Totini, F., Fuad, A. Z. M., & Alam, M. (2025). Barriers to implementing inclusive education in Bangladesh: A school-level analysis. *[Journal name unavailable]*.
- UNESCO. (2005). *Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring access to education for all*. UNESCO Publishing.