

## **Inclusive Education in Azad Jammu and Kashmir: A Cross-Sectional Survey of Secondary Schools**

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### **Abstract**



*Inclusive education represents the concern of the entire school and is committed to providing quality education to all students in the most effective way, so that special education and general education are consistent. The study aimed to analyze inclusive education in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The study was descriptive in nature and a cross-sectional survey was applied to collect the data. All 538 secondary school teachers and headteachers of District Pooch were the population of the study. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample. The researcher selected 185 secondary school teachers and 45 head teachers through a proportionate stratified random sampling technique as a sample. A questionnaire for teachers and headteachers was used as a research instrument in this study. Data were collected through personal visits and postal service. Data were analyzed through mean scores and standard deviation. Based on analysis it was found that inclusive education provides an opportunity for the enjoyment and implementation of full human rights without any discrimination because inclusive education allows understanding individual differences. It is recommended that the school Education Department of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) may introduce inclusive education at the district and tehsil level. Further, they need to plan for all teachers and headteachers to provide awareness about inclusive education.*

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Secondary Schools, Azad Jammu and Kashmir

### **Introduction**

No one can deny the fact that for the survival of any individual and nation, education is important. Education is a lifelong investment in human resource development. The strength of a nation is determined by the quality and quantity of educated manpower. Education is a fundamental right of every individual regardless of caste, color, creed, ability, or disability (Ainley, 2010). Inclusive education is the innovative style in the direction of teaching the students with different aptitudes and wisdom problems with that of common ones using a similar method of teaching. It searches for discourse on the knowledge requirements of all kids with a particular emphasis on those who are susceptible to relegation and prohibiting. It points concerning all students-with or without incapacities being accomplished to acquire collective kindergarten requirements, institutes, and public instructive background with a suitable system of maintenance facilities. This is conceivable only in elastic teaching coordination that integrates the desires of a miscellaneous variety of students and acclimatizes itself to encounter these desires (Ainscow, 2002).

Inclusion is not a trial to be verified but a worth to be monitored. Entirely the kids whether they are incapacitated or not have the right to instruction as they are the upcoming inhabitants of the nation. In the prevalent condition, properties are inadequate even to deliver excellence conventional institutes for communal kids, it is unprincipled and unviable to put kids with distinct desires to test or to verify something in an investigation study to live and acquire in the conventional of the institute and communal (Dash, 2006). The inclusive system provides better quality education for all children and is instrumental in changing discrimination. A school provides the context for a child's first relationship with the world outside their families, enabling the development of social relationships and interactions. Respect and understanding grow when students with diverse disabilities and

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backgrounds play, socialize, and learn together. It is the dire need of time to establish and familiarize the concept of inclusive education to socialize and to make productive a major portion of the population that is labeled as disabled. It is also very important to provide all students with the most appropriate learning environment and opportunities for them to best achieve their potential that's why the focus of the study was to analyze inclusive education in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

**Objectives of the study**

1. To explore the prevailing practices of inclusive education in AJ&K.
2. To find out the strengths and weaknesses of inclusive education in AJ&K.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the existing practices of inclusive education in AJ&K?
2. What are the strengths of inclusive education in AJ&K?
3. What are the weaknesses of inclusive education in AJ&K?

**Review of Literature**

**Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is a contentious term and lacks a strict conceptual emphasis, which may lead to some confounding activities and misunderstandings. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) first found out in 1994, concerning students with disabilities, that inclusive schools are the most successful way to eradicate prejudice and attitudes towards students. International laws and regulations have subsequently grown into threats to proprietary practices while upholding diversity and insisting on equality for all and access to high-quality education (UNESCO, 2010). Just ordinary schools have been more inclusive, according to UNESCO (2011). In other words, if they are willing to educate all children in the community, they can create an "inclusive" education system. Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities acknowledges the need to receive education 'without prejudice based on an equal opportunity at all levels of the inclusive education system.' It is well known, however, that children with disabilities continue to experience various types of exclusion, depending on their disability, their residence, their community, or class (UNICEF, 2013).

Inclusive education represents the concern of the entire school and is committed to providing quality education to all students in the most effective way, so that special education and general education are consistent. Equity issues have always been a major force internationally, which has promoted the development of more inclusive education systems and ways to define inclusiveness (Ebersold, 2017). Loreman (2009) believes that most educators are very clear about tolerance, but politically speaking; they manipulate the terminology to adapt to whatever practice they are currently engaged in, regardless of whether it is tolerance.

The idea and definition of inclusive education have also been provided by academics, practitioners, governments, and organizations such as UNESCO and UNICEF. Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006) suggested a typology of the inclusion of schooling in six forms of thought. These are sensitivity to students with disabilities; as a reaction to disciplinary actions; referring to all easily excluded groups; creating schools for all; as education for all; as a system of education and culture founded on values. International human rights agreements, conventions, and legislation, therefore, provide definitions that are essential for understanding and implementing inclusiveness, as these definitions usually bind all signatories and influence national legislation.

**Measuring inclusive education**

Bines (2007) described the first step of inclusive education as having a clear understanding of "what is what" to prepare for a broader "what may be". To this end, inclusive education needs to be measured. It is not different from the IQ tests that are designed to measure intelligence without a consensus definition. Inclusive education measuring tools are forced to define their definitions (or at least implicitly in the standards used) before providing inclusiveness. Following UNESCO's (2011) definition of inclusiveness in the report, schools must be prepared to accept students with different needs and actively eliminate barriers to full participation. Schools must adopt the characteristics of tolerance and be prepared to dismantle the mechanisms and practices leading to exclusion (Wagner, 2009). Measurements, therefore, need to examine inclusiveness from the perspective of the entire school approach, such as the UNICEF definition of inclusiveness. This is a practical change to a child-friendly school to ensure that all children, regardless of background or ability, are successful.

Winter and Raw (2010) lists 10 areas related to inclusive education:

1. Provide information
2. Inclusive school policy
3. Physical characteristics
4. Performance evaluation
5. Teaching strategy
6. IEP
7. Student interaction
8. Course Setting
9. External links
10. Personnel and staffing.

Several measures have been developed to combine these characteristics. Booth and Ainscow's (2002) "Inclusion Index" is the most commonly quoted measurement tool (revised in 2011). The index was developed in the United Kingdom and validated in 2001. The index can be used in a small number of schools in Western Australia and provides a series of research-based inclusion indicators to be used at the school level through self-censorship. Its use has been widely reported throughout the world and has been translated into at least 22 different languages and has been modified in a range of international environments. There is evidence that the use of this index in schools may cause some difficulty, especially when school staff lacks the ability to self-check (Schulz & Losito, 2010). The conclusion is that, given the comprehensive nature of the index and the time it takes for employees to effectively use the index based on the Western Australian School Inclusion Index test, the index appears to be fully popularized (Forlin, 2004). However, it is useful to inquire about the nuances of the evolving cultural construction of the school through pedagogy, curriculum, school, and classroom organization, and the nature of the decision-making process.

Newman (2009) also suggested that the inclusive education system should be measured at three levels: macro (school jurisdiction, country, region, etc.), meso (school, school group, and local community), and micro (individual classroom and people). Newman (2009) sets out a set of standards consistent with its model that can be used to help measure inclusive education. Loreman's (2009) review of the literature points to possible outcomes for measuring inclusive education. This process produced many themes, leading to the classification of results into three levels: macro, meso, and micro, suitable for the measurement of inclusive education. However, many international scholars have been consulted as part of the review process. They doubt that any set of results or indicators, whatever their quality, is sufficient to measure the task of inclusive education.

**Methodology**

The study was descriptive and quantitative in nature and a survey method was applied for conducting this research. All the secondary school teachers and headteachers of district Poonch were the population of the study. A stratified random sampling technique was used by the researcher to choose the sample from the population. The researcher selected 45 headteachers and 185 secondary school teachers through a proportionate stratified random sampling technique (Gay, 2009).

Two questionnaires were developed using a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from strongly agreed to strongly disagree each containing 40 items to get opinions from headteachers and secondary school teachers. To test whether the research instruments were valid or not, the researcher validated the research instruments from the educational experts. To check the internal consistency of items, Cronbach's alpha statistical technique was used. The values of Cronbach's alpha were 0.825 and 0.860 which were appropriate for conducting the research. The researchers distributed the questionnaire among 45 head teachers and 185 secondary school teachers through personal visits from approachable areas, whereas, from distant areas, the researchers used postal services and electronic services. Data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Mean and Standard deviation was used to analyze the data.

**Results**

Table 1

*Demographic analysis of Head Teachers*

<b>Demographic Variables</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gender	Male	21	46.7%
	Female	24	53.3%
Academic Qualification	B.A/B.Sc	3	6.7%
	M.A/M.Sc	32	71.1%

Professional Qualification	M. Phil	10	22.2%
	B. Ed	22.2%	22.2%
	M. Ed	77.8%	77.8%
Administrative Experience	below 5 Years	4	8.9%
	5-10 years	6	13.3%
	11-15 years	8	17.8%
	16-20 years	3	6.7%
	21-25 years	9	20.0%
	26-30 years	11	24.4%
	Above 30 years	4	8.9%

Table 1 shows the demographic analysis of headteachers. The table further indicated that the majority of the participant were female and had the academic qualification and professional qualification of M.A/M.Sc and M. Ed accordingly. Furthermore, the majority had the experience of 21-25 and 26-30 years.

Table 2

*Demographic analysis of Secondary school teachers*

Demographic Variables	Level	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	105	56.8%
	Female	80	43.2%
Academic Qualification	B.A/B.Sc	11.4%	11.4%
	M.A/M.Sc	82.2%	82.2%
	M. Phil	5.9%	5.9%
Professional Qualification	B. Ed	48.1%	48.1%
	M. Ed	51.9%	51.9%
Administrative Experience	below 5 Years	18	9.7%
	5-10 years	22	11.9%
	11-15 years	26	14.1%
	16-20 years	37	20.0%
	21-25 years	25	13.5%
	26-30 years	21	11.4%

Table 2 shows the demographic analysis of secondary school teachers. The table further depicted that majority of the participants were male and had the academic qualification and professional qualification of M.A. /M.Sc. and M. Ed. accordingly. Furthermore, the majority had the experience of 16-20 years.

Table 3

*The mean and standard deviation of existing practices of inclusive education in AJ&K*

S. No.	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
1.	The individual needs of each student are taken care of in inclusive education.	4.05	.928
2.	Teachers know their students' strengths, needs weaknesses, interests, and learning preferences	3.86	1.109
3.	The teachers take care of special needs learners which ensure the success of their inclusion in the mainstream classroom	3.96	.888
4.	General education teachers use to teach children with disabilities	4.30	.707
5.	The learning experiences are designed to tap into the strengths and interests of students	3.66	1.098
6.	Schools and districts have a zero-rejection policy and all children are welcomed and valued	3.21	1.140
7.	Educators have resources, supports, training, and time to implement the inclusion	2.85	1.311
8.	There is a positive involvement of the community in school regarding inclusive education	3.92	.881
9.	There are practices regarding strengthening and sustaining the participation of pupils, teachers, parents, and community members to enhance inclusion	3.42	1.082
10.	All students are supported to make friends and socially successful with their peers	3.47	1.169

Table 3 depicts the existing practices of inclusive education in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The table further showed that the statement, “General education teachers use to teach children with disabilities” found the highest value  $M=4.30$  and  $SD=.707$  regarding existing practices of inclusive education. The other inclusive education practices also showed better mean scores which were near to the mid-value i.e. 2.5. It means that the schools were using all the above-mentioned inclusive education practices.

Table 4

*The mean and standard deviation of strengths of inclusive education*

S. No.	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
1.	Creates an environment in which every student has the opportunity to learn	4.02	.998
2.	Positive effect on the social development of special need students	4.27	.899
3.	Positive effect on economic development of special need students	4.22	.854
4.	Economically effective for developing countries	4.16	.925
5.	Inclusive classrooms are more active than general	4.16	.756
6.	Helps to create an inclusive society	3.81	1.076
7.	Inclusion allows understanding individual differences	4.04	.741
8.	Work a lot in the socialization of special need students	4.13	.837
9.	Inclusive education allows teachers to develop teamwork skill	4.14	.777
10.	Fulfillment of human rights	4.09	.773

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation of the strengths of inclusive education. The table further indicated that the majority of participants agreed with the statements, “Positive effect on the social development of special need students” ( $M=4.27$ ); “Positive effect on economic development of special need students” ( $M=4.22$ ); “Inclusive classrooms are more active than general” ( $M=4.16$ ); and, “Inclusive education allows teachers to develop teamwork skill” ( $M=4.14$ ). The other strengths of inclusive education also showed better mean scores which were above or near to 4. It means that all the above-mentioned statements were considered the strengths of inclusive education by the participants.

Table 5

*The mean and standard deviation of weaknesses of inclusive education*

S. No.	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
1.	Inclusive education is costly	4.16	.723
2.	Burdens the regular class teachers	4.06	.867
3.	Inclusion sounds good in theory but does not work well in practice	3.00	1.216
4.	Exclusion causes many disadvantages such as isolation and non-socialization	3.24	1.053
5.	General education teachers are untrained to teach learners with disabilities in a regular class	3.38	1.244
6.	Exclusion causes disadvantage such as poverty	3.69	1.165
7.	Lessen the quality of education of students without disabilities	3.07	1.075
8.	Disable students feel uncomfortable in the inclusive classroom	3.58	1.163
9.	General education teachers are unprepared to teach learners with disabilities in a regular class	3.58	1.130
10.	Inclusion makes disabled students an object of ridicule in general class	3.07	1.075

Table 5 shows the mean and standard deviation of the weaknesses of inclusive education. The table further exposed that the majority of participants agreed with the statements, “Inclusive education is costly” ( $M=4.16$ ); and, “Burdens the regular class teachers” ( $M=4.06$ ). The other weaknesses of inclusive education also showed better mean scores which were near to 4 or above 3. It means that all the above-mentioned statements were considered the weaknesses of inclusive education by the participants.

### **Discussions**

The main purpose of this research is to explore the inclusive and comprehensive education practice of AJ&K. Discover that inclusive education supports and meets the individual needs of each student. Most of the respondents agreed that public high schools implement a zero-tolerance policy regarding the implementation of inclusive education, and teachers knew the strengths, needs, weaknesses, and interests of students. A study found that compared with students in special schools, students with intellectual disabilities who were fully included in general education made greater progress in literacy skills (Dessemontet, Bless & Morin, 2012). Hence, it was concluded that inclusive education was practiced in the secondary schools of AJ&K.

The second objective of the research was to find out the strengths and weaknesses of AJ&K's integrated education. Studies have found that inclusive education has played an important role in the socialization of students with special needs, reducing marginalization and helping to build an inclusive society, where everyone is affected, regardless of their disability. Inclusive education puts a burden on ordinary class teachers. In addition, untrained general education teachers can teach disabled children in ordinary classrooms. A similar study found that non-disabled students made significant progress in reading and mathematics when studying in an inclusive environment (Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004). Another study also found that students who provided peer support for students with disabilities in general education classrooms showed good academic performance, such as improved academic performance, homework completion, and classroom participation (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997). Keeping in view, it was concluded that the inclusion of education had strengths and needed to be practiced in the secondary schools will full zeal and zest.

### **Conclusion**

Following conclusions were drawn from the results of the study.

1. It is concluded that inclusive education supports and addresses the individual needs of each student. The majority of the respondents agreed that there was a zero rejection policy of enrolment in government secondary schools and teachers knew their student's strengths, needs, weaknesses, and interests. It is also concluded that the success of inclusion in the general classroom depended upon teachers. The majority of the respondents agreed that administration and teachers worked together to enhance inclusion but to implement in a real sense they had not enough resources like training and time. It is further concluded that the attitude of people of society towards special need students was biased to some extent, and the environmental factors to a great extent acted as barriers to enhance inclusion in general education institutions.
2. Inclusive education worked a lot in the socialization of special needs students, decreases marginalization, and helped to create an inclusive society in which everyone can be treated equally regardless of their disabilities. It is also concluded that inclusive education is economically effective for developing countries and it has a positive effect on the social and economic development of special needs students. Inclusive education helps teachers to develop teamwork skills and to make the classrooms more active than general classrooms.
3. It is concluded that inclusive education burdened the regular class teachers. Furthermore, general education teachers were untrained to teach children with disabilities in general classrooms. It is also concluded that exclusion caused many disadvantages such as isolation, non-socialization, poverty, and to some extent disable students feel uncomfortable in inclusive classrooms.

### **Recommendations**

1. The result of the study showed the success of inclusion depends upon teachers so special training related to inclusive education on an annual basis may be given to all teachers to enrich them to promote understanding, disposition, and different basic skills related to inclusive education. Workshops and refresher courses may be arranged at the district level to promote inclusive education.
2. For the implementation of inclusive education, vacancies of special education trained teachers may be advertised and these newly appointed teachers may be provided in inclusive education schools as co-teachers to minimize the burden of regular teachers.
3. People in general and schools in common may be taken the initiative to arrange seminars and meetings to focus on the needs of special children and to eradicate segregation and

- marginalization and exclusion. Parents of special needs children may be encouraged to educate their special children to make them useful and productive figures.
4. It is recommended that the Government of AJ&K may formulate a policy to launch inclusive education in the State of AJK because special education is an expensive system of education. It is almost non-existent on the governmental level. So that, a remarkable portion of the population (disable children) may be productive and prolific by taking steps to promote inclusive education in the state of AJK.
  5. Ministry of Education and Department of Education may build up a secondary school as a model school for promotion of inclusive education on a district level to promulgate inclusive education with letters and spirit.

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