

Confusion, Tension, and Transformation: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of Learning Inclusive Education in Punjab's Initial Teacher Education Programs

Tahira Batool Bokhari ¹ Yaar Muhammad ^{2*} Faisal Anis ³

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Education, Government College for Women, Jhang, Punjab, Pakistan.

Email: drtahirabatool96@gmail.com

² Associate Professor, Department of Education, GC Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

Email: Yaar.Muhammad@gcwus.edu.pk

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Education, School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: faisal.anis@umt.edu.pk

ABSTRACT: This study examines inclusive education learning experience among pre-service teachers in initial teacher education in Punjab, Pakistan. It focuses on the meanings that the pre-service teachers construct on the basis of their learning experiences. Data were collected based on semi-structured interviews, which involved individual meetings with eight pre-service teachers who were registered in various teacher education institutions in Punjab. The interviews were transcribed through AI transcription tools and analysed through NVivo software with the AI-assisted coding option. The analysis led to four themes, which included overcoming conceptual confusion, overcoming practical unpreparedness, living in tension between policy and practice, and personal transformation. The findings indicate that there are quite notable discrepancies between the theoretical training and the working process, insufficient experience in the real classroom experiences of inclusion and in attitudes that lie very deep in the sociocultural assumptions. Some participants stated that they were not ready to pursue inclusive practices even after completing the coursework requirements. The findings serve to inform how initial teacher education programmes construct the ability of Pakistani pre-service teachers to create inclusive learning spaces.

KEYWORDS: Inclusive Education, Pre-Service Teachers, Initial Teacher Education, Reflexive Thematic Analysis, Punjab, Pakistan, Teacher Training, Qualitative Research

Introduction

Inclusive education is a total change in the mode of providing education to learners. The strategy involves teachers accommodating the diverse abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs of students in general classrooms (Florian et al., 2011). Studies indicate that the quality of teachers is a critical factor that defines the effectiveness of inclusive education programs (Sharma et al., 2011; Sharma). Initial teacher education programmes are of key importance in equipping future teachers with the skills and knowledge of good practice in inclusion (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Countries have revised teacher preparation curricula due to the significance of inclusion in educational equity (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013).

Pages: 81 – 92

Volume: 5

Issue: 1 (Jan-Feb 2026)

Corresponding Author

Yaar Muhammad

✉ Yaar.Muhammad@gcwus.edu.pk

Cite this Article: Bokhari, T. B., Muhammad, Y., & Anis, F. (2026). Confusion, Tension, and Transformation: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of Learning Inclusive Education in Punjab's Initial Teacher Education Programs. *The Regional Tribune*, 5(1), 81-92.

<https://doi.org/10.55737/trt/v-i.204>

Pakistan is a signatory to international education frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and SDG 4 (Pakistan, 2018). Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, operates numerous teacher education institutions that prepare thousands of teachers annually. These institutions have a role to play in providing pre-service teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will allow them to be inclusive. Recent research indicates that Pakistani teacher education programmes have little content on inclusive education, often emphasise a theoretical-based perspective, and lack adequate opportunities for practical training (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018).

However, significant gaps exist in the understanding of the training process of pre-service teachers in Punjab on the topic of inclusive education. Available research indicates gaps in the curriculum and a negative attitude of teachers, although peers seldom refer to the personal experience of teachers undergoing preparation. Key questions remain about how pre-service teachers understand the content of inclusive education, their perception of their readiness to work in inclusive classrooms, and whether any aspect of their training is particularly useful or problematic. The sociocultural background in Pakistan, where disability is a stigma and segregated education is the norm, complicates the process of pre-service teachers creating meaning based on learning experiences. To learn about these experiences, one must move beyond survey and descriptive studies, which necessitate an in-depth qualitative investigation of the process through which pre-service teachers make professional identities and develop feelings about their preparation.

This study fills these gaps through the exploration of pre-service teachers' experiences in relation to studying inclusive education in pre-service teacher education programmes in Punjab. The research question was as follows: How do pre-service teachers learn about inclusive education? What meanings do they derive from their training? What is their perception of their readiness for inclusive classrooms? Through this investigation, we can gain a deeper understanding of the teacher training and preparation that can influence future teachers and their ability to teach students inclusion, and where the practice can be improved to make the programme better. The paper proceeds with the relevant literature review, describing the methodology, reporting results thematically, interpreting the study implications and practice, and finally offering recommendations towards enhancing the pre-service teacher training.

Literature Review

Inclusive Education as Pedagogical Framework

Inclusive education was brought about by human rights movements that opposed separate and segregated schools for learners with disabilities (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). The framework includes any type of diversity, such as disability, language, socioeconomic status, gender, and cultural background (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Inclusive pedagogy also necessitates that teachers think of difference as normal and not problematic and perceive deficit-based strategies as strength-based ones (Florian, 2015). Research demonstrates that inclusive classrooms are useful to all students rather than just those who are identified as having special needs, as they facilitate both academic success and social integration (Kalamvouka et al., 2007). The Universal Design Learning framework offers effective instructions for the development of non-discriminatory learning settings in many ways of engagement, representation, and expression (Meyer et al., 2014).

Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Education

Pre-service teacher education programs impact the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of pre-service teachers associated with inclusion (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Good programs consider inclusive education within the program and not as a separate course. Research identifies essential components of quality preparation as disability awareness training, differentiation instruction strategies, behaviour management strategies, collaboration skills, and assessment

modification strategies (Loreman et al., 2013). Field experiences in inclusive environments can be especially beneficial as they enable pre-service teachers to observe experienced teachers and implement inclusive strategies under supervision (Chambers & Forlin, 2010). Evidence demonstrates that when coursework includes both theoretical application and real practical encounters, pre-service teachers develop a high self-efficacy for inclusive teaching (Sharma & Sokal, 2015).

Challenges in Teacher Education for Inclusion

Despite widespread recognition of the significance of inclusive education preparation, it suffers a number of setbacks worldwide. Most teacher education programmes do not have faculty that specialise in the area of special education and inclusive instruction, restricting the quality of training that pre-service teachers obtain (Rouse, 2010). The limitations of the curriculum usually lead to limited time devoted to the inclusion material, and programs prioritise other competencies (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Pre-service teachers often enter programs with negative attitudes towards inclusion due to their previous experiences and societal beliefs (Sharma & Sokal, 2015). Studies show that a limited exposure to inclusive content of past cases has only a small effect on attitude change, and only a longer connection with diverse learners would shift attitudes (Campbell et al., 2003). The disconnect between university coursework and school realities creates tensions, as pre-service teachers are confronted by various barriers to implementation during field placements, which are not in agreement with the ideals learned in the classroom.

Pakistani Context of Teacher Education

There are many problems associated with the Pakistani education system, including low school attendance, school dropout rates, gender imbalance and inequality within the state (Memon, 2007). Teacher quality remains a persistent challenge, and a large number of teachers have not been trained or have qualifications that are acquired in low-quality institutions (Rizvi & Elliott, 2007). In Punjab, there are various routes to initial teaching education, which include distance education, teacher teaching college and those in the universities (Halai, 2013). The programs are diverse in terms of duration, enrolment requirements, curriculum, and quality assurance schemes (Aly, 2007). The policy of inclusive education is designed at the national and provincial levels, though its realisation is still weak because of the lack of resources, insufficient infrastructure, and administrative ability. Research documents that teachers in Pakistan usually have negative feelings about inclusion and tend to think that students with disabilities cannot be taught in regular classes (Andleeb et al., 2025). Studies indicate pre-service educators receive little training about inclusive practices, and the majority of programs do not include special coursework on the matter (Srivastava et al., 2013).

Methodology

Research Design

The qualitative research methods employed in the study involved Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022). Reflexive TA offers an adaptable and accessible system for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns of meaning in any qualitative dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This approach allowed us to explore the subjective perceptions and conceptualisation of inclusive education learning among pre-service teachers. Reflexive TA, unlike methods that adhere to a specific theoretical model, enabled the researchers to act in alternative epistemological and ontological stances to maintain a level of analytic rigour (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Participants and Sampling

Eight pre-service teachers enrolled in initial teacher education programmes in Punjab, Pakistan, were recruited through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were as follows: The participants should be currently pursuing a Bachelor of Education or Associate Degree in Education programme, and they should have already taken at least one course on inclusive education or special needs and should be ready to take telephonic interviews. Six female and two male participants were recruited for interviews, which is the predominant gender distribution in Pakistani teacher education. The sample size included 22–28-year-olds who were located in Lahore. The number of government university students was five, and the number of private university students was three. The sample can be considered adequate according to the principles of information power, which identify adequacy in accordance with the purpose of the study, sample specificity, theoretical premises, the quality of dialogue, and the analysis plan, but not a specific number (Malterud et al., 2016).

Data Collection

The data were collected by interviewing the participants through semi-structured interviews. The researchers developed an interview guide that addressed the experiences of the participants in relation to inclusive education coursework, field placements, experience with diverse learners, and perceptions of readiness and opinions on the strengths and limitations of the programme. The interviews were held using telephone in a period of three months, between September and November 2025. The average duration of each interview session was 45 to 75 min. Every interview was recorded with the approval of the participant. The researcher applied active listening and follow-up probes to promote deeper and thoughtful responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The interactive nature of the interviews also allowed participants to tell their stories in their own words and allowed the researcher to explore more of what was mentioned.

Data Analysis Procedures

The six phases of Reflexive TA proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022) were used for the analysis. Phase 1 involved familiarisation with the data through reading and re-reading the transcripts with initial notes. The researchers delved deeper into the dataset, taking the trends, contradictions, and surprising details. Phase 2 involved systematic coding of the complete data. The relevant pieces of data that answered the research questions were documented with the codes. The coding itself was organic and flexible, in which the code development was achieved as the analysis process proceeded. Phase 3 was associated with the generation of initial themes that entailed combining codes with related concepts. The themes of candidates were developed in the process of the analysis of the relationships within the code, as well as extended patterns of meaning. Phase 4 involved verification and refining of the themes based on comparison with coded extracts and the whole dataset. During this stage, some themes were merged, reorganized, or discarded. Phase 5 was to determine the nature of each theme and come up with short descriptions. Phase 6 entailed an analytic writing whereby it was possible to write an analysis of various interpretations of illustrative data extracts.

The dominant orientation of the analysis was mostly inductive and data-driven, with themes evolving as per the dataset without predetermined theoretical categories (Patton, 2015). However, owing to the researchers' familiarity with the literature on inclusive education, there was always a probability of an analytic process incorporating both inductive and deductive elements. The meaning was central at both the semantic and latent levels and focused on explicitly surface values of the meaning when listening to the participants, as well as the interpretation of implicit assumptions and conceptualisations. These dual analytical foci allowed for a detailed and multilayered interpretation that transcended or went beyond descriptive summaries to create analytic meaning.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

The quality was controlled by attending to methodological consistency, where all details of the study were congruent in concept (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The study reflected the reflexive interaction with information due to repetitive analysis and continuity of interest in the meaning. The decision-making and analytics were documented to promote transparency. The analysis was carried out in terms of depth as compared to the superficial description of the analysis. Data extracts grounded analytical claims but were not very quotation-intensive to replace analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The research study followed key standards of ethical research. Participants provided informed consent after receiving thorough information on the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used and identifying details were removed. Data were stored securely, and only the research team had access to them. All participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Findings

Analysis generated four themes representing patterns of shared meaning in the experiences of the pre-service teachers learning inclusive education. Each theme had two or three dependent themes associated with particular dimensions of the overall pattern.

Theme 1: Navigating Conceptual Confusion

The participants were in a state of continuous confusion regarding what inclusive education entailed. This confusion was caused by the inconsistent definitions of the concepts provided throughout the courses, the naive theoretical foundation, and confusion with charity-based approaches.

Encountering Multiple and Conflicting Definitions

Participants reported that various instructors provided them with different descriptions of inclusive education. One participant expounded that children with disabilities are taught in regular schools, according to one of the professors. Another claimed, "It meant all children, irrespective of their background. I still do not understand what the real definition is" (Participant 3). This inconsistency raises questions regarding the extent and purpose of their inclusion. Another participant stated:

This confusion prevented me from comprehending my future teaching profession. The presentation of each course differed. Some specialised in physical impairments. Some spoke about poverty and gender. I was unable to understand what I was really preparing for in my classroom. (Participant 5)

Participants reported that theoretical content seemed disconnected from classroom realities. One of the participants stated, "I studied the definitions and policies for exams and did not know how to use them in practice" (Participant 2).

Conflating Inclusion with Charity

Some participants' perceptions of inclusive education were based on assisting unfortunate children instead of appreciating education as a right. According to one of the participants, "inclusive education has been explained to us as a way to show pity for disabled children by enabling them to sit in our classes" (Participant 7). This conception framed various learners as subjects of generosity and not equal partners.

The participants traced these attitudes to other cultural beliefs. One of them explained,

"In our society, disability is considered a burden or punishment. Such beliefs determine the way we think about including such children in schools" (Participant 1).

The absence of critical analysis of these assumptions in the coursework perpetuated these deficit-based views.

Theme 2: Confronting Practical Unpreparedness

Participants reported low self-efficacy in implementing inclusive practices in the actual classrooms. They attributed this lack of preparedness to a lack of practical training, modelling by the instructors, and a lack of skill development.

Absence of Authentic Field Experiences

Participants said that field placements exposed them to minimal inclusion settings: "In my teaching practice, I visited a school where there were no children with disabilities" (Participant 4). Another participant claimed that he was unable to implement his theoretical learning. A few shared the same experiences since practicum schools had segregated systems.

One participant elaborated on this:

I asked my supervisor to assign me to a school with diverse learners. She informed me that such schools are uncommon and hardly accessible. Rather, I undertook my practice in a regular classroom. This disconnection between coursework and reality brought me to a point where I began to wonder about the relevance of what we were learning. (Participant 6)

The lack of genuine practice experience confused the participants regarding their ability to teach inclusively:

"I do not feel confident about my ability to cope with a classroom consisting of children with different needs. I have never witnessed it being done or attempted to do it myself (Participant 8).

Lack of Concrete Strategies

Participants complained that their training was theoretical and provided them with few practical approaches. One participant said, "The professors informed us to distinguish education but never demonstrated how to do so. They never provided an example of differentiation in the real world" (Participant 3). This disconnects between knowing things and application places the problem of future teaching in a state of anxiety.

The participants experienced certain skills that they were not ready to execute: "I am unaware of how I will modify assessments for students with learning difficulties. I have no idea how to interact with a deaf child. One participant stated that he did not know how to regulate behaviour difficulties" (Participant 2). The knowledge gaps have accumulated, resulting in low self-esteem.

Theme 3: Experiencing Policy-Practice Tensions

The participants knew about discrepancies between the inclusive education policies they had read and the realities they saw in schools. It was this conflict that was born through the understanding of the need for resources and the observation of the failures of the implementation.

Recognizing Resource Inadequacy

Participants were sceptical about the use of inclusion due to the sheer lack of resources in Pakistani education: "We are also aware of the assistive technology and the availability of infrastructure. We attended schools where furniture

was shattered, there was no electricity and 70 children in a single room. So, what do we have to think of inclusion in such a situation?" (Participant 5). One participant questioned:

The policies are announced by the government but are not funded to implement those policies. Schools lack infrastructure. There is no specialised teacher training. We are advised to accommodate children with disabilities who lack support systems. This creates a deadlock that is impossible to resolve. (Participant 1)

Participants were concerned that policy rhetoric had unrealistic expectations: "They teach the recommended aspects of being an inclusive teacher but fail to equip us with the knowledge that we will need. This poses a disconnect between ideals and what we are capable of" (Participant 7).

Witnessing Negative Attitudes in Schools

In the field placements, the participants encountered practising teachers with negative thoughts about inclusion. One participant recalled: "In my practice school, they laughed when I enquired about students with disabilities. They claimed that such children should be in special schools and not in normal classrooms" (Participant 4). Such experiences were contrary to the inclusive principles encouraged during the coursework.

The participants reported feeling caught between competing messages. One explained:

In university, teachers explained to us that inclusion is important and needed. At schools, educators say that it is unattainable and unrealistic. As a pre-service teacher, I am disoriented as to which side is right. (Participant 6)

The conflict between the policy ideals and reality in the schools left the participants mixed with the question of what to practise in the future.

Theme 4: Developing Personal Transformation

However, there were cases of participants who experienced tremendous shifts in their thought processes concerning diversity and inclusion. This change was achieved through interactions with different learners, introspection of personal beliefs, and acknowledgement of moral duties.

Encountering Diverse Learners as Individuals

Those who came into direct contact with students with disabilities mentioned how their experiences helped them break their preconceptions. One participant said: "During an assignment, I had to visit a special school. My encounters with these children changed my perspective. I understood that they can do and have dreams like any other children" (Participant 8).

Another participant commented as follows:

Prior to this programme, I believed that children with disabilities were incapable of learning. During the time I spent with them on a community project, I realised that they could do so much if they had the right support. It was something that I learned better than in a lecture. (Participant 2)

These individual experiences were more compelling since they experienced an attitude change. Other participants who did not have such experiences exhibited less attitude change.

Recognising Moral and Professional Responsibilities

Some participants felt an urge to ensure that they make their classrooms inclusive at all costs. One participant stated, "I now think it is my responsibility as a teacher to educate every child. It is not right and very unfair to exclude

someone” (Participant 3). This ethical dedication was developed through interaction with rights-based frameworks introduced in the coursework.

One participant elaborated:

The inclusive education course referred me to my educational experience. I recalled peers who had a hard time and were negligently treated by instructors. I determined that I did not wish to be that type of teacher. I would like to ensure that all children in my classroom feel respected and encouraged. (Participant 5)

This sense of moral purpose provided them with the motivation to overcome the obstacles and continue learning about the inclusive practice not included in the official training.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

The results indicate that the experiences of the pre-service teachers in Punjab who have experienced inclusive education are characterized by conceptual insecurity, practical insecurity, policy-practice conflicts, and personal change. These tendencies signify institutional shortcomings of initial teacher education programmes that cover inclusion. The conceptual confusion perceived by the participants is in line with research that has recorded the inconsistent implementation of inclusive education in various contexts and fields (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). Consistency in curriculum development and assessment is challenging because of the absence of agreement regarding the meaning of inclusive education. The disposition of the participants towards inclusivity as a charity and not a rights-based approach is indicative of the attitudes that are more common in Pakistani society. University-based teacher education programmes seem to fail in contesting these deficit-based perceptions.

The scenarios of lack of preparedness reported by the participants validate the results of the research, indicating that theoretical knowledge does not always relate to teaching competence (Sharma et al., 2011). This is due to the lack of real-life experiences in the field, which research has always shown to be crucial for cultivating positive attitudes and self-efficacy (Florian, 2015). The inability of university coursework and school reality to connect reflects key concerns that have been raised in other settings where the teacher education programme functions relatively insulated by the school where the graduates will be employed (Zeichner, 2009).

The policy-practice tensions that the participants noticed indicate larger implementation issues of inclusive education in Pakistan (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018). Although the policies promote inclusive ideals, significant barriers to achieving these ideals exist because of resource constraints, inadequate infrastructural facilities, and negative attitudes towards inclusion. The participants' awareness of these tensions indicates that people are becoming aware of the critical consciousness regarding the problems in the system that could underpin advocacy unless used in the right manner. However, there is a danger that knowledge about impediments without relevant skill development can also lead to sentiments of powerlessness and hopelessness.

The fact that some of these participants started their personal transformation shows that it is still possible to change attitudes with the help of good preparation. The strength of the first-hand experience with diverse learners to change the mindset validates studies that underline the role of contact theory (Slee, 2018). Attitude change is promising to be effective with programmes that can provide a structured chance for meaningful interaction between pre-service teachers and students with disabilities. The moral obligation that these participants grew up with implies that ethical obligation in the form of rights-based frameworks that are convincingly presented can encourage teachers to avoid non-inclusive approaches, even when faced with adverse circumstances.

Connections to Existing Literature

The findings align with international research that has reported shortcomings in teacher training in terms of inclusion (Florian, 2015). Research in multiple settings documents such problems as lack of time devoted to inclusion materials, lack of knowledge among faculty, inadequate experience in the field, and the existence of unfavourable attitudes (Rouse, 2010). The conceptual disorientation participants were undergoing has been reflected in studies that found inclusive education to possess no clear definition, in which opposing accounts cause difficulties in implementation (Nilholm & Göransson, 2017). Studies conducted in other South Asian nations find similar issues with teacher education, indicating that the problems have regional trends influenced by common cultural, economic, and educational factors (Srivastava et al., 2013).

However, this study builds on this research by presenting the subjective experiences of Pakistani pre-service teachers in a qualitative account. Other studies conducted in Pakistan mainly used quantitative surveys at the level of attitudes and knowledge, which is essential, although not as comprehensive. The available results are enlightening with regard to how pre-service teachers make meaning of their learning, which particulars they regard as either important or challenging, and how culture influences their meaning-making. The conflict between the charity and rights conceptualisation is a specific issue of concern in situations when sociocultural ideology frames disability as a lack or bad omen.

Implications

The implications of these findings are significant for policy, practice, and research. Initial teacher training in Punjab requires a major curriculum overhaul to address conceptual confusion. Education programs are to use unambiguous and consistent definitions of inclusive education based on rights-based approaches and focus on distinguishing between charity and rights (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). The coursework should go beyond general policy lectures by offering real-life, specifics-based strategies for the development of inclusive practices in environments with limited resources.

The practically unprepared participants highlighted the urgent and critical demands of expanded and more meaningful field experiences. Teacher education institutions should forge alliances with schools that are already practising inclusion to create practicum placements where pre-service teachers can observe and practice inclusion under expert supervision (Chambers & Forlin, 2010). Programs may create demonstration sites through inclusive education, where the faculty and practising teachers work together to model effective work and practice with pre-service teachers.

Negative attitudes must be dealt with through active interventions, which are not part of conventional coursework. Programs must establish guided experiences so that pre-service teachers can have meaningful experiences with diverse learners, possibly through service learning projects or other experiences in the community (Campbell et al., 2003). Critical reflection activities can play a supportive role in helping to scrutinise individual biases and sociocultural beliefs that contribute to different views. Faculty development is another priority because instructors need the knowledge and skills to provide inclusive education and model inclusive values.

The identified policy-practice tensions reveal the necessity of changing the system through systemic reform, not just teacher education. Policies on inclusive education must be well-resourced in terms of funding infrastructure changes, assistive technology, and continuing professional growth. Policies must be implemented through accountability mechanisms, rather than aspirational rhetoric.

Limitations

The study's scope limits generalisation. The sample consisted of only eight participants from specific institutions in Punjab. Findings may differ across regions, types of institutions, and education levels. The use of interviews as the only source of data implies that the resulting findings are based on the participants' recounting of their learning experiences and not direct observations. The research was performed through social desirability bias, where the participants may have responded positively. Although a necessary condition, the paradigm of telephonic interviews could have limited the level of rapport and degree of disclosure compared to that achieved during face-to-face meetings. The bias in the views of the pre-service teachers implies that the perspectives of faculty and administration were not investigated.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should examine how faculty perceive teaching inclusive education with issues in it and how it can be supported. Long-term studies that monitor the preparation of pre-service teachers through the initial stage of their careers would shed light on the effects of training experiences on real practice in the classroom. A comparison between types of teacher education institutions would help establish the features of effective programmes that could be replicated. Research on particular pedagogical methods to change attitudes and develop skills would be useful in practical terms for conducting program improvement.

Conclusion

This research paper describes the learning process of inclusive education among pre-service teachers in initial teacher education programmes in Punjab, Pakistan. The study identified four patterns that describe these experiences through qualitative interviews, which were examined with the help of Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Participants experienced conceptual confusion regarding the meaning and nature of inclusion. They faced the issue of practical inadequacy due to fewer field experiences and a lack of skill development. They experienced tensions between the inclusive education policies they learned and the realities they saw in schools, which were resource constrained. The personal change in the thinking of some of them regarding diversity and their professional duties took place.

Such findings show huge gaps in relation to the training of future teachers on how to deal with inclusive classrooms when it relates to preparing future educators in teacher education programmes. The theoretical misunderstanding, discouragement of practical preparation, and sustained adverse attitudes logged in the study signify a timely necessity of curriculum modification and augmented field experiences. Programmes should go beyond the superficial coverage of inclusion by providing preparedness opportunities on a regular basis using models of rights-based preparation and actual practice scenarios. Faculty should establish their teaching abilities to foster inclusion, as well as model inclusive values. Partnerships between the university and schools with an inclusive focus can create positive learning opportunities for their pre-service teachers.

This study is a contribution to the situated knowledge of teacher preparation in Pakistan, where cultural beliefs hold a special position as far as disability, resource deprivation and issues with policy implementation are concerned. The identified trends transcend beyond the failures of individual programmes into the system-wide issues that require unified actions on policy, institutional, and societal levels. There is some preparation in knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary before future teachers are able to implement inclusive classes. Reforming initial teacher education to embed inclusion will be a significant step towards equity in education and can offer quality learning opportunities to all children.

References

- Ahsan, T., & Sharma, U. (2018). Pre service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of students with high support needs in regular classrooms in bangladesh. *British Journal of Special Education*, 45(1), 81–97. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12211>
- Ainscow, M., & Miles, S. (2008). Making education for all inclusive: Where next? *Prospects*, 38(1), 15–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-008-9055-0>
- Aly, J. H. (2007). *Education in Pakistan: A white paper revised*. Government of Pakistan.
- Andleeb, I., Behlol, M. G., & Datta, P. (2025). In-service teachers' attitude towards inclusive education in Pakistan. *Curriculum and Teaching*, 40(1), 99–115. <https://doi.org/10.7459/ct/400107>
- Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2011). *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* (3 ed.). Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.
- Campbell, J., Gilmore, L., & Cuskelly, M. (2003). Changing student teachers' attitudes towards disability and inclusion. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 28(4), 369–379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668250310001616407>
- Chambers, D., & Forlin, C. (2010). Initial teacher education and inclusion: A triad of inclusive experiences. *Teaching Education*, 21(3), 265–277.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2023). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (5 ed.). Sage.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sage.
- Florian, L. (2015). Inclusive pedagogy: A transformative approach to individual differences but can it help reduce educational inequalities? *Scottish Educational Review*, 47(1), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1163/27730840-04701003>
- Florian, L., & Black Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(5), 813–828. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2010.501096>
- Forlin, C., & Chambers, D. (2011). Teacher preparation for inclusive education: Increasing knowledge but raising concerns. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(1), 17–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2010.540850>
- Göransson, K., & Nilholm, C. (2014). Conceptual diversities and empirical shortcomings – a critical analysis of research on inclusive education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 29(3), 265–280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2014.933545>
- Halai, A. (2013). Quality of private universities in Pakistan: An analysis of higher education commission rankings 2012. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 27(7), 775–786. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-11-2012-0130>
- Kalambouka, A., Farrell, P., Dyson, A., & Kaplan, I. (2007). The impact of placing pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools on the achievement of their peers. *Educational Research*, 49(4), 365–382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880701717222>
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3 ed.). Sage.

- Loreman, T., Sharma, U., & Forlin, C. (2013). Do pre-service teachers feel ready to teach in inclusive classrooms? A four country study of teaching self-efficacy. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(1), 27–44. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n1.10>
- Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1753–1760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>
- Memon, G. R. (2007). Education in Pakistan: The key issues, problems and the new challenges. *Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 3(1), 47–55.
- Meyer, A., Rose, D. H., & Gordon, D. (2014). *Universal design for learning: Theory and practice*. Cast Professional Publishing.
- Nilholm, C., & Göransson, K. (2017). What is meant by inclusion? An analysis of european and north american journal articles with high impact. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 32(3), 437–451. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1295638>
- Pakistan. (2018). *National policy for persons with disabilities*. Government of Pakistan.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4 ed.). Sage.
- Rizvi, M., & Elliott, B. (2007). Enhancing and sustaining teacher professionalism in Pakistan. *Teachers and Teaching*, 13(1), 5–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600601106021>
- Rouse, M. (2010). Reforming initial teacher education: A necessary but not sufficient condition for developing inclusive practice. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(5), 451–462.
- Sharma, U., Loreman, T., & Forlin, C. (2011). Measuring teacher efficacy to implement inclusive practices. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 12(1), 12–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2011.01200.x>
- Sharma, U., & Sokal, L. (2015). The impact of a teacher education course on pre-service teachers' beliefs about inclusion. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 15(2), 142–152. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12043>
- Slee, R. (2018). *Inclusive education isn't dead, it just smells funny*. Routledge.
- Srivastava, M., De Boer, A., & Pijl, S. J. (2013). Inclusive education in developing countries: A closer look at its implementation in the last 10 years. *Educational Review*, 67(2), 179–195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.847061>
- Waitoller, F. R., & Artiles, A. J. (2013). A decade of professional development research for inclusive education. *Review of Educational Research*, 83(3), 319–356. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654313483905>
- Zeichner, K. (2009). Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in college- and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1-2), 89–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347671>