



Awareness of Disability among General Education Teachers: A Study in the Schools of District Gilgit

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Abstract

This study investigates the awareness of disabilities among general education teachers in the district of Gilgit, Pakistan, with a focus on their knowledge of disability types, inclusive teaching strategies, and related policies. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 103 teachers selected through simple random sampling. A Likert-scale questionnaire was employed, and responses were analyzed using SPSS to examine patterns across demographic variables such as gender, qualifications, and urban–rural differences. Findings revealed that teachers demonstrated low to moderate levels of awareness in all three domains. While some awareness was observed regarding the broader developmental impacts of disabilities, significant gaps remained in identifying specific impairments, adapting lesson plans, and understanding policy frameworks. Gender differences showed male teachers reporting higher awareness of disability types, while urban teachers displayed significantly greater awareness than their rural colleagues across all areas. Academic qualifications, however, did not show a meaningful impact on awareness levels. These results highlight the urgent need for targeted professional development, policy orientation sessions, and resource support, particularly for rural teachers. The study concludes that improving teacher preparedness is essential for effective implementation of inclusive education in under-resourced contexts such as district Gilgit.

Keywords

Inclusive Education, Teacher Awareness, Disabilities, Gilgit-Baltistan

Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and a cornerstone for both personal and societal development. In contemporary discourse, the right to education is no longer understood simply as access to schools, but also as access to *quality* education that meets the needs of all learners, including those with disabilities. Inclusive education has therefore emerged as a critical global priority, emphasizing that children with disabilities should be educated alongside their peers in mainstream classrooms with appropriate support. This principle is reflected in international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations, 2015).

In Pakistan, as in many other developing countries, the journey toward inclusive education has been gradual and marked by systemic challenges. Traditionally, children with disabilities were

either excluded from schools or placed in specialized institutions with limited opportunities for interaction with their peers. Over the past two decades, however, there has been growing recognition of the importance of integrating children with disabilities into mainstream schools. Despite these efforts, practical implementation remains inconsistent. One of the key barriers is the limited awareness and preparedness of teachers, who are the primary facilitators of learning in classrooms. Without adequate knowledge of disabilities and inclusive practices, even the most progressive policies are unlikely to translate into meaningful change at the classroom level (Malik et al., 2021; Rafique & Hameed, 2020).

Teachers hold a particularly influential role in this process. They are often the first to observe developmental delays, behavioural differences, or learning difficulties in children. Early recognition can make a substantial difference, enabling timely intervention and support that may positively shape a child's academic and social trajectory. Conversely, insufficient awareness may result in misidentification or neglect of children with disabilities, leading to academic failure and social isolation (Akhter et al., 2014; Ali et al., 2019). In contexts such as Pakistan, where formal systems for early identification are limited, teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices become even more critical.

The region of Gilgit-Baltistan provides an important context for examining this issue. As a geographically remote and socio-culturally diverse area, Gilgit faces unique challenges in terms of resource allocation, professional training, and educational infrastructure. Rural schools often operate with limited facilities, minimal access to specialized services, and fewer opportunities for professional development, while urban schools benefit from better resources and training exposure (Hussain, 2012; Jameel & Khan, 2020). Cultural perceptions of disability may also influence how differences in learners are interpreted and addressed. Studying teacher awareness in this region can therefore provide valuable insights into how inclusive education may be strengthened in under-resourced settings.

Previous research across Pakistan has consistently revealed inadequate knowledge among teachers about disabilities and inclusive education. For example, Akhter et al. (2014) found that a significant proportion of teachers in Karachi lacked the ability to correctly identify learning impairments, while Ali et al. (2019) reported similar gaps in Lahore. These findings mirror international evidence, such as studies from India, where Sharma and Desai (2002) observed limited awareness of specific disabilities but greater recognition of their developmental consequences. Although these studies highlight the scale of the issue, there is little research specific to Gilgit-Baltistan, leaving an important gap in understanding the awareness levels of teachers in this region.

Therefore, the present study was undertaken to assess the awareness of disabilities among general education teachers in the schools of district Gilgit. Specifically, it aims to evaluate teachers' knowledge of disability types, inclusive teaching strategies, and related policies, while also exploring differences across demographic and contextual factors such as gender, qualification, and school location. By doing so, this research seeks to inform professional development programs, policy orientation sessions, and community-based initiatives that can improve the preparedness of teachers to support students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

Literature Review

Disability awareness among teachers is a critical factor in promoting inclusive education, particularly in developing regions such as Gilgit, Pakistan. Teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and preparedness toward students with disabilities play a significant role in shaping classroom practices and determining the level of support these students receive. A lack of awareness often leads to unintentional exclusion, marginalization, and low academic outcomes for children with disabilities. This literature review synthesizes findings from international, national, and regional studies to highlight the current state of awareness among general education teachers and its implications for inclusive education.

Global Perspectives on Disability Awareness

Globally, inclusive education has been widely endorsed through frameworks such as the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006). Research suggests that teachers' awareness of disability directly influences their classroom practices. For example, Sharma and Sokal (2016) found that teachers with greater exposure to disability-related training held more positive attitudes and demonstrated stronger classroom inclusion strategies. Similarly, Avramidis and

Norwich (2002) emphasized that teachers' beliefs about disability shape their willingness to adapt teaching methods and engage in differentiated instruction.

However, despite international efforts, challenges remain. Studies in low-resource contexts, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, reveal that teachers often lack formal training, leading to misconceptions about disability (Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2013). In many cases, disabilities are perceived through cultural or medical lenses rather than educational ones, limiting teachers' ability to provide meaningful support.

National Context: Pakistan's Struggle with Inclusive Education

In Pakistan, disability awareness among teachers is still developing, partly due to limited institutional support and insufficient teacher training programs. According to Malik (2014), most teachers in mainstream schools have minimal knowledge about disabilities, which often results in stigmatization and low expectations for students with special needs. Research by Manzoor and Hammed (2018) showed that while Pakistani teachers generally expressed willingness to include students with disabilities, they lacked the pedagogical skills and awareness needed to effectively accommodate them.

Government initiatives such as the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2002) and more recent efforts under the Sustainable Development Goals emphasize inclusive education, yet implementation has been uneven. Haider (2008) noted that teacher education curricula rarely include substantial training on disability, leaving many general educators unprepared to teach inclusively.

Regional Context: Gilgit-Baltistan and Northern Areas

In the context of Gilgit-Baltistan, geographical isolation and limited access to teacher training further complicate inclusive education. Studies on education in northern Pakistan reveal systemic challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and cultural barriers (Khan & Ahmad, 2014). Although formal data on disability awareness in Gilgit schools is scarce, anecdotal evidence and regional education reports indicate that general education teachers often lack awareness of the diverse learning needs of children with disabilities.

The absence of specialized training programs in the region means that teachers rely on personal beliefs or community perceptions, which can sometimes reinforce negative stereotypes. For instance, disabilities are occasionally associated with supernatural causes in rural areas, which shapes teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (Memon, 2019). This lack of professional awareness underscores the need for targeted training and policy implementation in Gilgit's schools.

Teacher Attitudes and Inclusive Practices

Teacher attitudes are strongly linked to awareness. Positive attitudes toward students with disabilities are more likely when teachers receive exposure to disability issues during pre-service or in-service training (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Conversely, teachers who lack awareness often adopt exclusionary practices, either by lowering expectations or by avoiding students with disabilities in classroom activities. Research by Alam and Mushtaq (2016) in Pakistan found that teachers with limited disability knowledge viewed inclusive education as an additional burden rather than an opportunity for pedagogical growth.

Furthermore, awareness is not only about knowing definitions of disabilities but also about understanding pedagogical strategies, classroom accommodations, and social inclusion practices. Teachers who are aware of the social model of disability, as opposed to the medical model, are more likely to implement student-centered approaches (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Research Objectives

- 1- To assess general school teachers' awareness about different types of disabilities.
- 2- To examine general school teachers' awareness of inclusive teaching strategies
- 3- To evaluate general school teachers' awareness of policies and rights related to inclusive education.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach to investigate disability awareness among general education teachers in the district of Gilgit, Pakistan. The population for the study consisted of 1,682 general education teachers working in government schools across the Gilgit district. A sample of 103 general education teachers was selected using a simple random sampling technique to ensure representativeness. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire designed to assess teachers' Awareness about Types of Disabilities, Teachers' Awareness of Inclusive Teaching Strategies, and

Awareness of Disability among General Education-----Haideri, Abbas, Farhana & Khatoon

Teachers' Awareness of Policies and Rights. The collected data were analyzed using advanced statistical techniques in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to derive meaningful insights and identify patterns in the responses.

Data Analysis**Table 1: Analysis at the Basis of Demographic**

Sr	Variables	Group	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Gender	Male	65	63.1%
		Female	38	36.9%
2	Area	Rural	46	44.7%
		Urban	57	55.3%
3	Disability in family/Relatives	Yes	23	22.3%
		No	80	77.7%
4	Age	20-30	33	32.0%
		31-40	33	32.0%
		41-50	20	19.4%
		51-60	17	16.5%
5	Teacher Experience	1-5	8	7.8%
		6-10	41	39.8%
		11-15	33	32.0%
		16-20	15	14.6%
		21-Above	5	4.9%
6	Qualification	BA/BSc	18	17.5%
		MA/MSc	73	70.9%
		MPhil	7	6.8%
		PhD	5	4.9%

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The majority of teachers were male (63.1%), while females accounted for 36.9%. Most participants belonged to urban areas (55.3%), with 44.7% from rural settings. Only 22.3% reported having a family member or relative with a disability. In terms of age, the largest groups were 20–30 years (32.0%) and 31–40 years (32.2%), followed by 41–50 years (19.4%) and 51–60 years (16.5%). With respect to teaching experience, most teachers had 6–10 years (39.8%) or 11–15 years (32.0%), while smaller proportions fell within 1–5 years (7.8%), 16–20 years (14.6%), and above 21 years (4.9%). Regarding qualifications, the majority held MA/MSc degrees (70.9%), whereas fewer teachers had BA/BSc (17.5%), MPhil (6.8%), or PhD (4.9%) qualifications.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of General School Teachers' Awareness about Types of Disabilities.

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std.
I can identify different types of disabilities (e.g., physical, sensory, intellectual, learning) in school children.	30 (29.1%)	22 (21.4%)	26 (25.2%)	25 (24.3%)	00	2.45 (00%)	1.152
I am aware of the common signs of learning disabilities among students.	13 (12.6%)	28 (27.2%)	41 (39.8%)	21 (20.4%)	00	2.68 (0.0%)	.942
I can differentiate between physical disabilities and learning difficulties.	21 (20.4%)	22 (21.4%)	21 (20.4%)	33 (32.0%)	6	2.82 (5.8%)	1.250
I am familiar with the challenges faced by children with visual and hearing impairments.	19 (18.4%)	23 (22.3%)	30 (29.1%)	25 (24.3%)	6	2.77 (5.8%)	1.182
I know that disabilities can affect students' social, emotional, and academic development.	23 (23.3%)	24 (23.3%)	12 (11.7%)	25 (24.3%)	19	2.93 (18.4%)	1.457

Table 2 shows that general school teachers' awareness about types of disabilities is generally low to moderate. Most teachers disagreed or remained neutral about their ability to identify different disabilities and recognize signs of learning difficulties, reflected in low mean scores (2.45 and 2.68).

Awareness of Disability among General Education-----Haideri, Abbas, Farhana & Khatoon

Slightly higher awareness was noted in differentiating physical and learning disabilities ($M = 2.82$) and recognizing challenges of visual and hearing impairments ($M = 2.77$). The highest awareness was seen regarding the impact of disabilities on students' development ($M = 2.93$). Overall, the results suggest that teachers' knowledge remains limited, highlighting the need for further training.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of General School Teachers' Awareness of Inclusive Teaching Strategies

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std.
I am aware of teaching methods that help both disabled and non-disabled students learn together.	28 (27.2%)	22 (21.4%)	37 (35.9%)	16 (15.5%)	00 (0.0%)	2.40	1.051
I know how to adapt lesson plans to meet the needs of students with disabilities.	19 (18.4%)	38 (36.9%)	24 (23.3%)	16 (15.5%)	6 (5.8%)	2.53	1.136
I am familiar with classroom management strategies that support inclusive education.	23 (22.3%)	24 (23.3%)	26 (25.2%)	25 (24.3%)	5 (4.9%)	2.66	1.209
I understand the importance of using teaching aids and resources to support students with disabilities.	22 (21.4%)	30 (29.1%)	21 (20.4%)	16 (15.5%)	14 (13.6%)	2.71	1.333
I know how to encourage participation of students with disabilities in group activities.	15 (14.6%)	32 (31.1%)	36 (35.0%)	18 (17.5%)	2 (1.9%)	2.61	1.002
I am aware of assessment methods suitable for students with different learning needs.	20 (19.4%)	51 (49.5%)	16 (15.5%)	12 (11.7%)	4 (3.9%)	2.31	1.039

Table 3 highlights general school teachers' awareness of inclusive teaching strategies, showing overall low to moderate levels. Many teachers disagreed or stayed neutral about their knowledge of inclusive methods, adapting lesson plans, or using classroom management strategies, with mean scores ranging from 2.31 to 2.71. The lowest awareness was seen in assessment methods for diverse learning needs ($M = 2.31$), while relatively higher awareness was noted in the use of teaching aids ($M = 2.71$) and classroom management strategies ($M = 2.66$). Overall, the findings suggest that teachers' preparedness for inclusive practices is limited, pointing to a need for professional training and support.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of General School Teachers' Awareness of Policies and Rights

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std.
I am aware of the national policies related to the education of students with disabilities.	20 (19.4%)	39 (37.9%)	27 (26.2%)	9 (8.7%)	8 (7.8%)	2.48	1.136
I know that students with disabilities have the right to study in regular schools.	17 (16.5%)	28 (27.2%)	33 (32.0%)	21 (20.4%)	4 (3.9%)	2.68	1.096
I am familiar with the legal rights of students with disabilities in Pakistan.	24 (23.3%)	22 (21.4%)	25 (24.3%)	28 (27.2%)	4 (3.9%)	2.67	1.216
I am aware that schools are required to provide equal learning opportunities for students with disabilities.	17 (16.5%)	30 (29.1%)	25 (24.3%)	29 (28.2%)	2 (1.9%)	2.70	1.110
I understand that discrimination against students with disabilities is prohibited by law.	23 (22.3%)	34 (33.0%)	20 (19.4%)	24 (23.3%)	2 (1.9%)	2.50	1.137
I know about government or district-level initiatives that support inclusive education in Gilgit.	16 (15.5%)	42 (40.8%)	29 (28.2%)	14 (13.6%)	2 (1.9%)	2.46	.978
I am aware of the responsibilities of teachers in ensuring the rights of students with disabilities are protected.	11 (10.7%)	30 (29.1%)	37 (35.9%)	25 (24.3%)	00 (0.0%)	2.74	.949

Table 4 presents teachers' awareness of policies and rights related to students with disabilities. The results show generally low to moderate awareness, with many respondents disagreeing or remaining neutral. Awareness of national policies ($M = 2.48$) and government initiatives in Gilgit ($M = 2.46$) was particularly limited. Slightly higher awareness was reported regarding students' right to study in regular schools ($M = 2.68$), legal rights ($M = 2.67$), and equal

Awareness of Disability among General Education-----Haideri, Abbas, Farhana & Khatoon

learning opportunities ($M = 2.70$). The highest mean score ($M = 2.74$) was recorded for teachers' awareness of their own responsibilities in protecting these rights. Overall, the findings indicate gaps in policy-related knowledge, underscoring the need for targeted orientation and training.

Table.5 Independent Samples t-test Results for Gender Differences in Teachers' Awareness of Disability

Factors	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	Std. Error Diff	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Awareness about Types of Disabilities	.005	.946	2.748	101	.007	.51166	.18617	.14234	.88098
Awareness of Inclusive Teaching Strategies	3.806	.054	1.126	101	.263	.14933	.13258	-.11368	.41233
Awareness of Policies and Rights	.553	.459	1.824	101	.071	.23898	.13105	-.02098	.49895

Table 5 presents the results of the independent samples t-test conducted to examine gender differences in teachers' awareness of disability. The findings indicate a statistically significant difference in awareness about types of disabilities between male and female teachers, $t(101) = 2.75$, $p = .007$, with male teachers reporting higher awareness ($MD = 0.51$). However, no significant gender differences were observed in awareness of inclusive teaching strategies ($p = .263$) or in awareness of policies and rights ($p = .071$). These results suggest that while gender plays a role in teachers' ability to identify different types of disabilities, it does not significantly affect their awareness of inclusive strategies or policy-related knowledge.

Table 6. Independent Samples t-Test Results for Urban–Rural Differences in Teachers' Awareness of Disability

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	Std. Error Diff	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Awareness about Types of Disabilities	20.634	.000	3.237	101	.002	.57727	.17831	.22355	.93099
Awareness of Inclusive Teaching Strategies	1.266	.263	6.970	101	.000	.74161	.10640	.53054	.95268
Awareness of Policies and Rights	6.414	.013	4.570	101	.000	.53776	.11768	.30432	.77120

Table 6 shows the results of the independent samples t-test comparing urban and rural teachers' awareness of disability. The analysis revealed significant differences across all three factors. For awareness about types of disabilities, urban teachers scored significantly higher than rural teachers, $t(101) = 3.24$, $p = .002$ ($MD = 0.58$). A highly significant difference was also found in awareness of inclusive teaching strategies, $t(101) = 6.97$, $p < .001$ ($MD = 0.74$), favouring urban teachers. Similarly, for awareness of policies and rights, urban teachers demonstrated greater awareness, $t(101) = 4.57$, $p < .001$ ($MD = 0.54$). These results indicate that teachers from urban areas reported significantly higher awareness in all domains compared to their rural counterpart.

Table 7. One-Way ANOVA Results Examining General School Teachers' Awareness of Disability Based on Their Qualifications

Factors		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Awareness about Types of Disabilities	Between Groups	4.950	3	1.650	1.916	.132
	Within Groups	85.278	99	.861		
	Total	90.228	102			
Awareness of Inclusive Teaching Strategies	Between Groups	2.065	3	.688	1.660	.181
	Within Groups	41.043	99	.415		
	Total	43.107	102			
Awareness of Policies and Rights	Between Groups	.584	3	.195	.455	.715
	Within Groups	42.382	99	.428		
	Total	42.965	102			

Table 7 presents the results of a one-way ANOVA examining teachers' awareness of disability based on their qualifications. The findings indicate that there were no statistically significant differences in awareness across qualification levels for any of the three domains. For awareness about types of disabilities, the effect was not significant, $F(3, 99) = 1.92, p = .132$. Similarly, awareness of inclusive teaching strategies showed no significant variation, $F(3, 99) = 1.66, p = .181$. Finally, awareness of policies and rights also did not differ significantly by qualification, $F(3, 99) = 0.46, p = .715$. These results suggest that teachers' qualifications did not significantly influence their awareness of disability, inclusive strategies, or policies.

Summary

This study examined the awareness of general education teachers in Gilgit regarding disability, inclusive teaching strategies, and related policies. Data were collected from 103 teachers representing both urban and rural schools with diverse age groups, teaching experience, and qualifications. The analysis included descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA. Results revealed generally low to moderate levels of awareness across all domains, with variations based on gender and area of residence, but not qualifications.

Results and Discussion

Teachers play a crucial role in recognizing and managing children with disabilities, as they are often the first professionals to observe developmental differences in the classroom. The present study conducted in the district Gilgit, revealed that teachers exhibited low to moderate awareness regarding different types of disabilities. Many struggled to accurately identify impairments and early signs of learning difficulties, though their understanding was comparatively better when considering the broader developmental impact of disabilities. These findings are consistent with previous research in Pakistan where Akhter et al. (2014) reported limited knowledge of learning impairments among teachers in Karachi, with fewer than 53% able to correctly identify them. Similarly, Ali et al. (2019) highlighted weak awareness of learning disabilities among teachers in Lahore, underscoring the urgent need for structured training in early identification. Comparable results have also been documented in India, where Sharma and Desai (2002) observed limited awareness of disability types but greater recognition of their developmental consequences. Together, this evidence highlights a persistent regional and international challenge: inadequate awareness among teachers, which may delay timely intervention and hinder the provision of effective support for students with disabilities.

In addition, this study findings demonstrated that general teachers in District Gilgit showed limited knowledge of inclusive teaching strategies, particularly about adapting lesson plans and assessments to meet diverse learner needs. Their knowledge was somewhat stronger in classroom management and the use of teaching aids. Despite these strengths, the overall preparedness for inclusive practices was inadequate. This is consistent with national findings by Malik et al. (2021), who revealed that teachers across Pakistan lacked full preparation for inclusive education due to insufficient training and professional development. Nasir and Latif (2024) further noted that teacher education programs in Pakistan fail to adequately equip educators with the ability to design inclusive lessons, reflecting a systemic gap in professional preparation. Collectively, this emphasizes the pressing need to strengthen teacher training in inclusive pedagogy to ensure effective implementation of inclusive education.

The study also revealed weak awareness among general education teachers in the district of Gilgit, regarding national policies and local initiatives related to disability. While teachers were somewhat familiar with the principles of equality and their responsibility to protect students' rights, their knowledge of the formal frameworks guiding inclusive education was inadequate. These results align with Rafique and Hameed (2020), who found that Pakistani teachers were poorly informed about disability-related legislation, reflecting a persistent policy–practice divide in education. Similarly, Brookings (2012) highlighted that teachers in Gilgit-Baltistan had limited exposure to inclusive education policies despite government-led initiatives. This suggests an urgent need to incorporate training on disability rights and educational policies into teacher professional development, ensuring that inclusive practices are not only encouraged but institutionally supported.

Gender differences were also observed among general education teachers in the district of Gilgit, with male teachers scoring significantly higher than their female counterparts in awareness of different types of disabilities. However, no significant differences were found in relation to inclusive teaching strategies or policy awareness. This pattern reflects broader trends in South Asia where

gender disparities in professional exposure and training opportunities often shape knowledge levels. Shaukat and Sharma (2016) similarly noted that gender roles and unequal access to capacity-building programs in Pakistan may contribute to such differences. Ensuring equitable access to training for both male and female teachers is therefore essential for bridging these awareness gaps.

Urban–rural disparities were particularly pronounced, with urban teachers in district Gilgit reporting significantly higher awareness across all domains compared to their rural colleagues. This is consistent with Jameel and Khan (2020), who observed more positive attitudes toward inclusion among urban teachers due to greater access to training programs and resources. Hussain (2012) also highlighted the structural disadvantages faced by rural schools in Gilgit-Baltistan, where limited professional development opportunities constrain teacher preparedness. However, evidence from NGO-led interventions demonstrates that rural disadvantage is not inevitable. For example, Khan (2018) described how teacher training programs initiated by the Aga Khan University successfully exposed rural teachers to inclusive practices, thereby reducing the awareness gap. These findings suggest that targeted training initiatives can mitigate inequities in resource distribution and professional development.

Interestingly, academic qualifications were found to have no significant effect on teachers' awareness of disabilities or inclusive practices, as shown by the one-way ANOVA analysis. This result suggests that holding higher academic degrees does not necessarily translate into stronger knowledge or preparedness for inclusive education. Zafar et al. (2020) similarly found no significant differences in autism awareness among teachers with varying qualifications. However, studies such as Akhter et al. (2014) noted that in some contexts, better-qualified teachers may demonstrate stronger awareness of learning impairments. This indicates that academic attainment alone is insufficient; rather, specialized training in inclusive education is the decisive factor in preparing teachers, as reinforced by Iqbal et al. (2023).

Conclusion

The study concludes that general education teachers in the district of Gilgit possess inadequate awareness of disabilities, inclusive teaching strategies, and related policies, with overall knowledge remaining at a low to moderate level. Notable disparities were observed between urban and rural teachers, while no meaningful differences emerged to academic qualifications. This lack of preparedness poses a considerable challenge to the effective implementation of inclusive education, as insufficient awareness limits early identification, appropriate support, and adherence to disability-related policies. Addressing these gaps through structured professional development, policy-oriented training, and equitable access to resources is essential for fostering an educational environment that is inclusive, responsive, and supportive of all learners.

Recommendations

1. Professional Development

Regular training programs and workshops should be organized for teachers, focusing on disability identification, inclusive pedagogy, and evidence-based classroom management strategies. Continuous professional development will help educators remain updated and better prepared to support diverse learners.

2. Policy Orientation

Teachers should be provided with structured orientation sessions on national policies, students' rights, and legal frameworks related to inclusive education. This will bridge the policy–practice gap and ensure that teachers not only understand but also implement these frameworks in classroom settings.

3. Targeted Support for Rural Teachers

Given the pronounced urban–rural disparities, targeted interventions for rural schools are essential. Tailored training initiatives, resource allocation, and outreach programs should prioritize rural teachers to enhance equity in awareness and preparedness.

4. Integration into Teacher Education Curricula

Teacher education programs at all levels must be revised to include comprehensive modules on disability, inclusive pedagogy, and differentiated instruction. Embedding such content into pre-service and in-service training will help build long-term capacity within the teaching workforce.

5. **Resource Development and Provision**

Schools should be equipped with adequate teaching aids, resource materials, and adaptable assessment tools to support inclusive classrooms. Ensuring that teachers have access to these resources will enhance the practical application of inclusive strategies.

6. **Collaboration and Community Engagement**

Strong collaboration should be fostered between schools, government bodies, and NGOs to strengthen community-level awareness and support systems for inclusive education. Joint initiatives can address misconceptions, engage parents, and create a more supportive environment for children with disabilities.

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