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A STUDY ON PRIMARY MAINSTREAM TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE, TRAINING NEEDS, AND CONCERNS REGARDING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore primary mainstream teachers' knowledge, training needs and concerns regarding inclusive education to be able to suggest strategies aimed at increasing the accomplishment of these teachers in inclusion methods. This research had adopted a quantitative approach was used to collect the data numerically by using cross-sectional survey method. Seven private schools of Lahore where children with special needs are studying in the mainstream classes were chosen for the present study. The sample size consisted of eighty primary mainstream teachers from whom data were collected pertaining to their knowledge, training needs and concerns towards inclusive practices in private schools of Lahore. The sample was selected using convenience sampling strategy. The result of the study revealed that participants showed positive understanding towards the implementation of inclusive education and provide a fair and positive learning atmosphere for every individual. They promote diverse teaching methods and believe in the professional development of teachers. Therefore, teachers also face numerous challenges such as anxiety, time constraint and the need of proper training for successful implementation of inclusive education. This study points to avenues that may contribute to the development of focused interventions, education programs, and support mechanisms to support primary mainstream teachers' skills at deploying inclusive education strategies. Finally, this research is intended mainly to make contributions to the creation of an equitable, supportive learning environment for all students.



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Key Words: Inclusive Education, Teachers' Knowledge, Inclusion Methods, Teachers' Training, Supportive Learning

Introduction

Inclusive education states that all students with different abilities are being taught in a same classroom without special education. How teachers amend the curriculum and try to offer the needed support to accomplish the various requirements of their students. This is why teachers must be knowledgeable. They are well trained and well informed about inclusive practices as a way of implementing such practices, and to each address each student's special need giving that person a chance to have a life filled with joy (Singal, 2005; Hunt & Goetz, 1997).

Inclusive education is dependent on the fact that students have different interests and have different needs from different backgrounds. Within such a quality framework, quality education ensures that each individual is prepared to live a successful future. To cater to different learning styles and needs of children an array of teaching strategies may be required (Haider & Ferdous, 2019).

Inclusive education offers both academic successes and social benefits for all students because it creates a favorable atmosphere for them to receive peer support and guidance. Such an inclusive atmosphere creates a community and a sense of social skills (Roldán 2021). Singal (2005) states that it is important that in an inclusive classroom all students are working towards the same curriculum so that no student is left out in an inclusive classroom.

In summary, the reason inclusive education is sought is not only to cater for the educational needs of the student with special needs, because it is also geared towards making the child's learning experiences more enriching for ordinary children. Inclusion is a process driven towards a change in teaching practices combined with a culture for a school to be inclusive to all their students (Singal, 2005; Hunt & Goetz, 1997).

The development of a society where people can enjoy equal opportunity for success and a better future depends on inclusive education. Teachers are important players in creating inclusion classrooms and influence student behavior and acceptance through understanding, attitude and usage of diverse teaching strategies. It is essential for educators to exhibit positive attitudes towards all students to foster an inclusive learning environment (González-Gil et al. 2012).



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It is obvious that primary teachers play a vital role in mainstreaming educational inclusion since it is they who welcome students with special needs and help create the conducive environment in which everyone learns. Pivotal to inclusive education (MacMullin & Vaz, 1995) is that these teachers create individualized education plans and modify the curriculum to meet the particular needs and interests of each student.

Therefore, effective inclusion of education requires that teachers understand different policies and practices. It's important to know so that all the students get the quality education aimed to proprio the critical, analytical, and logical skills forced by current market calls (Acedo, 2011). Despite the importance of this knowledge, research has revealed that some teachers lack sufficient understanding of inclusive education, highlighting the need for training through workshops, seminars, and conferences to equip educators with the skills to promote high-quality, inclusive educational experiences (Teaching, Learning and Inclusive Education: 2013), *The Challenge of Teachers Training for Inclusion*).

Research shows that, generally, teachers have a favorable attitude toward inclusive education, being even more supportive of the female teachers over the male teachers. However, it is noted that many teachers do not feel prepared to bring special needs children into the mainstream classroom as there is a wide range of needs and interests of students. Therefore, this indicates a strong need for more comprehensive teachers training program in order to meet the needs of the diverse student body of the inclusive classrooms (Acedo, 2011).

Proper training of the teacher to promote the type of inclusive practice is a must to create an effective inclusive classroom. Limited knowledge, a lack of materials and a lack of training can make it difficult to create an inclusive environment. Educators must receive knowledge and training for the development of the productive and living society that meets the needs of all the children (Acedo, 2011 & Jaafar et al., 2020).

Teachers' concerns in regard to inclusive education are not uniform with regard to attitudes that range from positive to negative, dependent on a lack of competence, proper equipment and resources that ensure provision of such learners' needs and promoting an inclusive atmosphere (Adefila et al., 2020; Jaafar et al., 2020).

At present, a main problem for the educators relates to the revision of the curriculum and creation of the individual programs, which comply with students' individual needs and requirements. Quality education demands that teachers employ several teaching styles, which are



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appropriate to this modern society to ensure fair educational access for all individuals. Teachers often experience many obstacles in changing behavior and attitudes (Zickafoose et. Al. 2024).

Teachers must provide the necessary support services and resources for students to be academically and socially successful and for inclusive education to be successfully implemented. For an effective inclusive classroom environment, it is imperative that there are various stakeholders including teachers, parents, students and the wider community working together to identify such issues and create inclusivity (Jaafar et al., 2020, Zickafoose et. al. 2024). All in all, the effort towards creating an inclusive space will include the effort together to combat the above-mentioned challenges to enhance inclusivity and treat all students equally.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How much does one primary mainstream teacher know about inclusive education?
2. In the context of inclusive education what are the particular training requirements of primary mainstream teachers?
3. What concerns do mainstream primary teachers have about inclusion?

Methodology

Research Approach

The present quantitative research employed cross sectional survey method to investigate three core aspects: the knowledge primary inclusive teachers have, training needs and what they are concerned about inclusion education of the regular classroom with special needs students. Quantitative approach was used to gather data from primary mainstream teachers of Lahore, employing.

Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire with close-ended questions was the key instrument in this research. The questionnaire comprised of 18 statements which were divided equally into three sections, with each section containing six statements related to one of the three focus areas of the study: knowledge, training needs and concerns. In carrying out this research, 80 questionnaires



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were distributed out to the participants through a non-probability sampling technique specifically utilizing convenience sampling as it is more efficient and practical. Later, the collected responses were quantified and analyzed.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively and presented in tabular format as well as pie charts for facilitating easier understanding of the collected data. This visual representation helped the researchers in drawing comparisons among the levels of knowledge, training and concerns.

Reliability and Validity

A Cronbach alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire to measure the internal consistency of the items. The questionnaire was evaluated by the experts in inclusive education to analyze the items for their validity as this was important to ensure that the information gathered was relevant to the study’s objectives exactly.

Sr.No		Cronbach Alpha Value
1	Knowledge	.801
2	Training Needs	.891
3	Concerns	.709

Results

Table 1: Mean Scores for Knowledge, Training Needs And Concerns Items Among Primary Mainstream Teachers

Sr No.	Knowledge	Mean scores	Training Needs	Mean scores	Concerns	Mean scores
1	Item 1	3.84	Item 7	4.26	Item 13	3.43



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2	Item 2	3.81	Item 8	4.2	Item 14	3.96
3	Item 3	4.15	Item 9	4.29	Item 15	3.94
4	Item 4	3.59	Item 10	4.32	Item 16	3.64
5	Item 5	3.81	Item 11	4.37	Item 17	4.26
6	Item 6	3.58	Item 12	4.19	Item 18	3.76

The data presented in the above table 1 reflects the mean scores for knowledge (items 1-6), training needs (items 7-12), and concerns (items 13-18) items among primary mainstream teachers of Lahore.

Items related to knowledge show mean scores between 3.58 to 4.15 indicating moderate level of knowledge among respondents. The highest average is for Item 3 (I know the importance of using different teaching methodologies) as is 4.15, which shows respondents feel confident in thinking about the significance of different instructional strategies. On the contrary, Item 6 (I can modify my teaching methodology to accommodate special children) obtained the lowest average rating with 3.58, indicating a relatively less knowledge about inclusive teaching practice. For most knowledge-related items, the range is narrow and is between 3.81 and 3.84, which further validates that respondents are competent in most areas, but could use more support in certain dimensions, such as adapting a teacher's methods to special needs students.

Training needs (items 7-12) had a wider range of mean scores (4.19 to 4.37), which showed a demand for professional development. Item 11 (The training will help me to use different examples to explain the content taught) has the highest training need (4.37), which indicates respondents acknowledge using diverse examples while teaching to make it effective.

Similarly, item 12 (The training is useful for me to be able to adapt, add, delete, or modify curricula to meet the needs of special children) received the lowest mean score in this category (4.19) and is still high, reinforcing the idea of the need for specialized training in adapting curricula. Overall ratings are generally in the 4.30 range for other items also in this category, reinforcing a consistent demand for training programs to further improve classroom management, assessment strategies and inclusive teaching methodologies.



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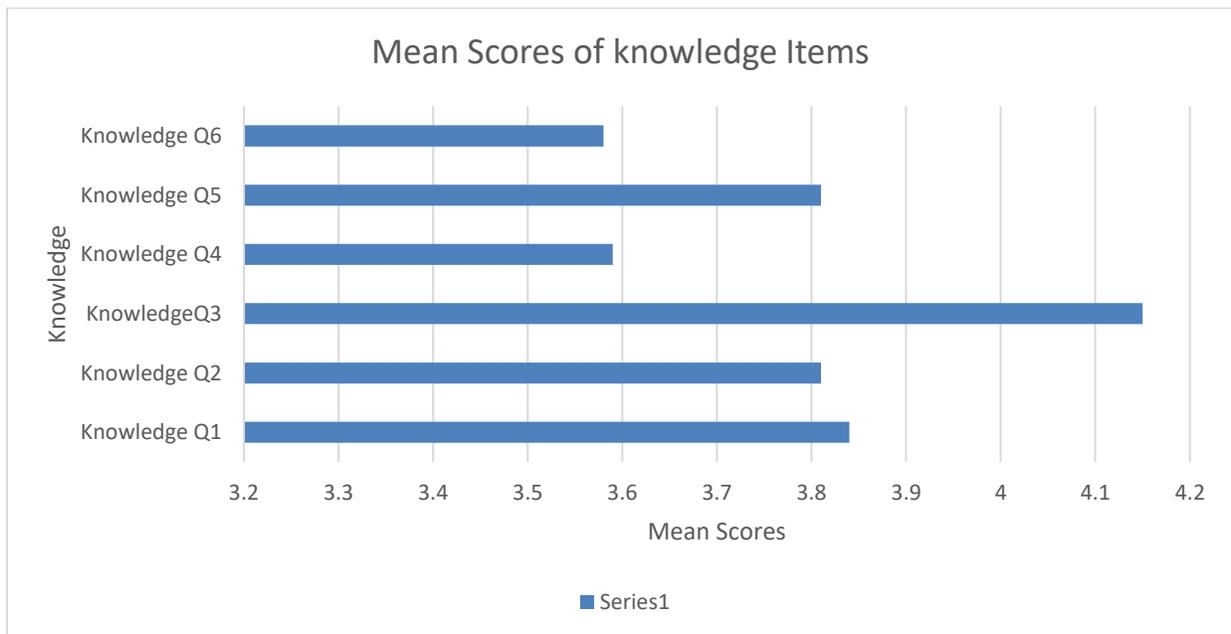
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In terms of teaching in inclusive classroom (items 13-18), the results indicated a high level of concerns towards these items as mean scores were between 4.26 and 4.32. In particular, items 13-16, which ask about issues of stress placed on teachers, challenges faced in classroom management and worry about the academic impact of students without special needs, are rated between 4.26 and 4.32, indicating that teachers are widely in agreement about common concerns (which relate to inclusivity and the responsibilities involved).

The lowest mean score identified in this category (4.19) relates to Item 18 (I doubt whether parents will be pleased with the idea of sending this child to a classroom for special needs children). This indicates that, there is some concern about parental acceptance but in the context of teacher workload, classroom dynamics and student performance parental acceptance is marginally of less concern.

Figure 1





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Figure 2

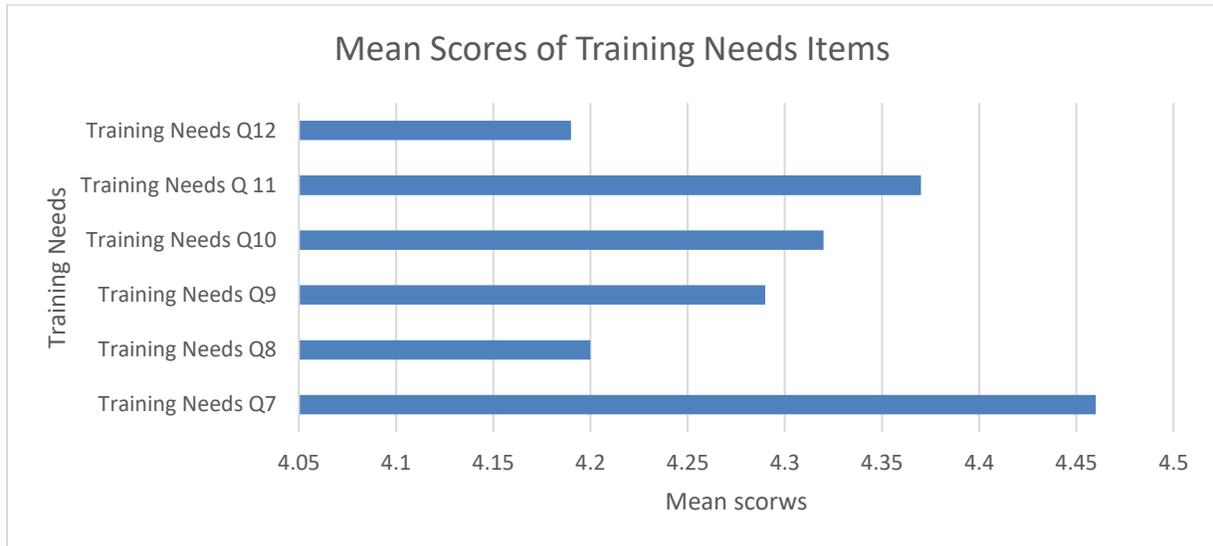
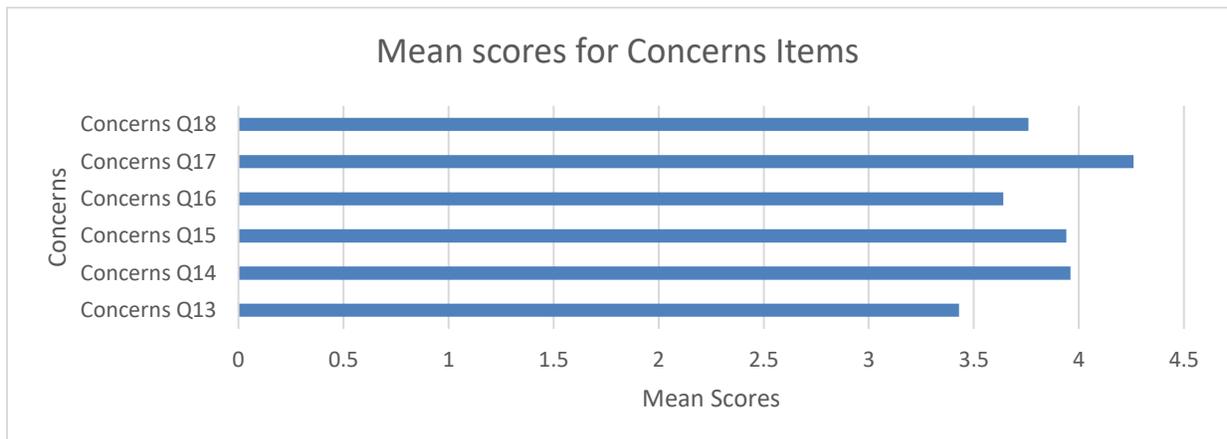


Figure 3



Figures 1, 2 and 3 show the mean scores for knowledge, training needs and concerns items among primary mainstream teachers



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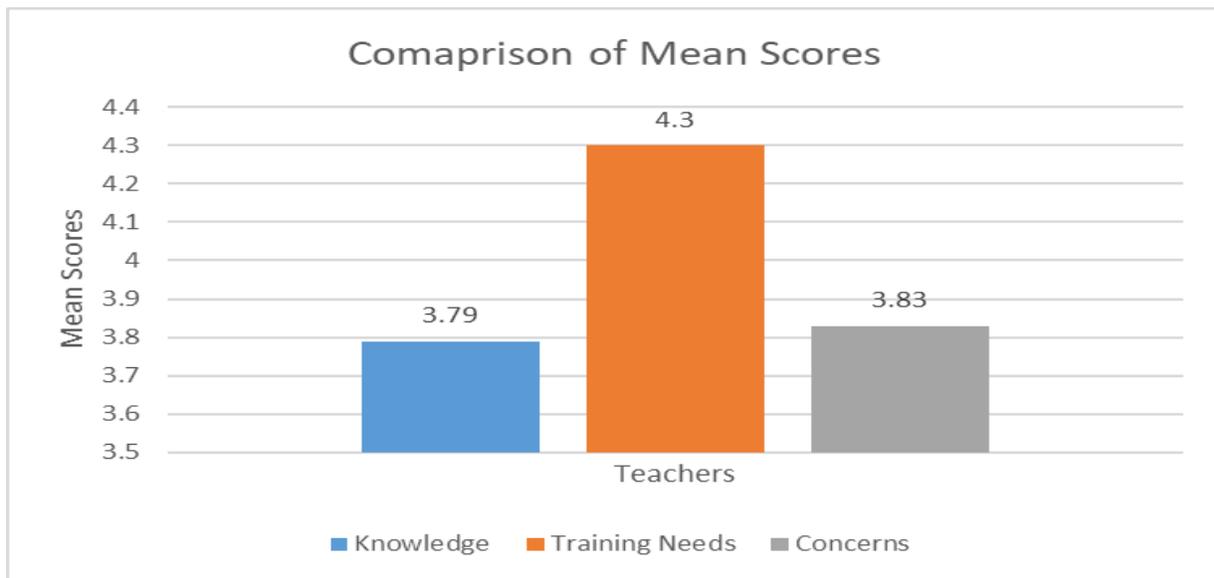
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Table 2: Comparison of the mean scores for knowledge, training needs, and concerns among primary mainstream teachers.

		Knowledge	Training Needs	Concerns
N	Valid	80	80	80
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.79	4.30	3.83
Median		3.75	4.16	3.75
Mode		4.00	4.00	3.50

The above table 2 depicts the comparison of mean scores of knowledge, training needs and teachers concerns about inclusive education. The average knowledge score was 3.79 (± 1.17), with a mode of 4.00 and a median of 3.75. The average training needs score, the median was 4.30, the median was 4.16 and the mode was next 4.00 The mean concerns score was 3.83 (median, 3.75). The mode was 3.50. This indicates that teachers seem to have relatively high knowledge (compared to other groups); however, they have a high concern for the need for training or development. In addition, they have questions regarding inclusive education and children with special needs that may need to be addressed in future training / interventions.



The figure above presents a comparison of the mean scores for knowledge, training needs, and concerns among primary mainstream teachers in Lahore.



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Discussion

The findings of this research are compared with previous studies to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' knowledge, training needs, and concerns regarding inclusive education. The primary objective of this study was to examine the knowledge, training needs, and concerns of primary mainstream teachers about inclusive education. Data was collected from primary mainstream teachers in Lahore through a questionnaire consisting of 18 questions, designed to assess their understanding, required training, and challenges in implementing inclusive education.

The results provide valuable insights into teachers' perspectives. The findings suggest that teachers have a strong grasp of inclusive education principles and strategies. They acknowledge the importance of adapting curricula, employing diverse teaching strategies, and integrating assistive technologies to support students with special needs. However, the study also highlights the challenges teachers face when implementing inclusive education in regular classrooms. These findings emphasize the need for enhanced teacher training programs and policy interventions to facilitate effective inclusive education.

Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of teachers' ability to differentiate instructional methods and adapt them to cater to the unique learning needs of each student. Every student is different, and teachers must employ appropriate techniques, support services, and guidance to ensure that all learners receive quality education. Jones and Lee (2020) reported similar findings, emphasizing the role of individualized learning in effective inclusive education.

The results show that most teachers acknowledge that training workshops help them to improve their knowledge, the management of the classroom behavior, the use of alternative strategies for teaching and ways for assessment, and also their ability for adapting the curriculum. These findings support existing literature, which emphasize the importance of teacher training to promote adequate inclusive education (United Nations, 2008; Avramidis et al., 2002). Moreover, teachers' concerns of anxiety, difficulties in addressing all students' needs, worries about academic achievement, time constraints and the complexity of inclusive teaching without enough training parallel research on the challenges of inclusive education in the first place (Pottas, 2005; Brown, 2020). These were some of the findings that underscored the realized need for targeted interventions and help mechanisms to enable teachers to enhance and manage inclusive classrooms collectively.

The study further emphasizes the need to address the concerns of parents and to strengthen positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Many teachers seemed uncertain about



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parents' acceptance with placing their child in a class with students with special needs. This highlights the need for preemptive action to address the disconnect between fear and embrace. However, to increase the effectiveness of inclusive education, transparent engagement with parents must be strengthened, adequate information and resources regarding inclusive education must be provided, and collaboration among teachers, parents, and educational authorities must be encouraged.

The role of the teachers is critical in realizing inclusion in education. These steps can help foster a space where every student is valued and integrated into the learning process. Inclusive education isn't only about access to belonging, it's about growth and it's about making sure every student is set up to thrive. The current findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of parent engagement, open dialogue, and inclusive learning environments (Brown, 2022; Johnson & Garcia, 2023; Smith et al., 2024).

This study reveals the strengths and challenges teachers face in fostering an inclusive learning environment, reinforcing the significant role teachers play in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Teachers showed a sound understanding of inclusive education principles and recognized the value of differentiated instruction; however, their concerns about training gaps, classroom management and parental acceptance point to the need for targeted support and systemic interventions. The study emphasizes once again that effective teacher training, communication with parents and institutional support are the keys to overcoming such challenges, allowing inclusive education to be both sustainable and impactful. It is critical that a collective effort is made of teachers, policy makers, parents and support staff to establish an education system in which every child, regardless of ability, is made to feel valued, supported and encouraged to flourish. These actions would benefit the societies and help close the gap between inclusive education policies and the often very different classroom reality, making education accessible and equitable for all.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research findings shed light on primary teacher's perceptions and understand accessibility in education in a broader context with a general trend towards appreciation and deep understanding of inclusive education concepts, policies and practices. Majority teachers believe that it is essential to employ a variety of teaching methodologies, adapt curriculum, and leverage assistive technologies to meet the needs of all students. There is a wide recognition of the importance of continuous professional development through attending training workshops to improve teaching skills and to alleviate frustration over classroom management,



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effective teaching methods, and assessment. Nevertheless, this research also indicates the hindrances and issues faced by teachers for the effective and efficient implementation of inclusive education. Challenges exist such as anxiety and stress in teachers, worry of academic achievement, time constraints, and the perceived difficulty in teaching without proper training. Additionally, teachers' uncertainty about parents accepting inclusive classrooms highlights the need for proactive measures to effectively build a bridge between their fears and acceptance of inclusive classrooms. Nonetheless, a global trend toward increased acceptance and implementation of inclusive education is observed, highlighting the necessity for continuous support, training, and awareness campaigns to ensure effective execution and consideration of challenges related to inclusive education.

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