



## Inclusion Fatigue: Emotional Burnout of Teachers Working in Long-Term Inclusive Classrooms in Pakistan

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### Abstract

Inclusive education has increased professional liability on the part of teachers and in most cases emotional, pedagogical and ethical work that has to be carried out in a long term basis. This paper investigates inclusion fatigue which is the emotional exhaustion of the teachers working in the long-term inclusive classes in the Pakistani primary and secondary schools. The research problem is based on the fact that little empirical interest exists in emotional impacts of the long inclusive instruction, especially in education systems with scarce resources, and those that are highly exam-based. The present research aims were to study the experiences, interpretation, and management of the emotional exhaustion in teachers based on the long-term inclusion responsibilities. A qualitative study design was used in which semi-structured interviews were administered on teachers in both the public and the private schools in Pakistan. It was presumed in the study that the emotional experiences depend on the influence of institutional expectations, the intensity of work, and the support structures and the boundary conditions were characterized by the case of long-term exposure to inclusion teaching conditions. The results indicate long-term emotional pressure with the presence of exhaustion traits, frustration, and professional depletion, which can be seen as the patterns in the literature on international burnout and indicate the presence of context-specific stressors in Pakistan. The research affirms that inclusion fatigue is a structural issue and not individual failure, which calls on the necessity of institutional sources of support and long-term inclusion policies.

**Keywords:** Teacher Burnout; Inclusion Fatigue; Emotional Labor; Inclusive Classrooms; Special Education; Teacher Wellbeing; Pakistan Education

### Introduction

Inclusive education has greatly transformed the professional roles of teachers, with the underlying responsibilities being much more than teaching; and, accordingly, involves emotional support, the creation of individualized plans, and continuous responsiveness to diverse needs of learners. The emotional aspects of teaching research point out that the long-term interpersonal contact, the work focused on care is a type of emotional labor that may confuse and weaken the process when unprovided (Hargreaves, 1998; Day and Gu, 2014). These requirements are further pressured in inclusive classrooms where they have to serve diverse learning profiles in the standardized

curriculum (Florian, 2019). Primary and secondary teachers in Pakistan work under examination-focused systems and being resource-limited, further compounding emotional stressors apart. What comes with the long-term inclusion are emotional pressures (Singal, 2008; Shah, 2015). These circumstances precondition teachers with emotional burnout especially. A shared belief in the inclusive education policy is that commitment and professional ethics of teachers will be able to maintain inclusive practices in the long run. Nevertheless, studies existing on the topic of teacher burnout indicate that excessive work and emotional load exerting high levels of stress without sufficient resources may increase burnout and consequently, disengagement (Maslach et al., 2001; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2017). Although some international studies have explored teacher burnout in general, little has been done to explore emotional burnout that comes about as a result of inclusive teaching over a long period (Loreman, 2014). In Pakistan, the previous studies have focused on the implementation barriers and teacher attitudes and little on emotional sustainability (Ehsan, 2018; Hayat, 2016). The gap will lead to the next research question: How do teachers in Pakistani schools experience and conceptualize emotional burnout related to long-term inclusive classroom work?

This research will aim to find out the inclusion fatigue among the teachers operating in long-term inclusive primary and secondary classrooms in Pakistan. Through a qualitative method, the research problem is explored through the description of emotional exhaustion by teachers, the identification of stressors, and the way of managing sustained inclusion-related demands. The results also show the trend of emotional burnout, role overload and lack of professional satisfaction associated with long-term inclusive instruction without institutional support. This research (through foregrounding the emotional experience of teachers) can benefit the research literature on inclusive education and teacher wellbeing, especially in Global South contexts. The article follows through with a literature review of the pertinent literature, a methodology, results, discussion and conclusion.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The concept of teacher wellbeing has become a major concern of inclusive education especially because inclusion involves long-term emotional, relational and didactic work. This literature review focuses on studies connected to the topic of teacher burnout, emotional work, workload concerning inclusion, and long-term professional sustainability. The guiding question of the current research, which is tackled in the review, is the following: How does prolonged involvement in inclusive classrooms cause emotional burnout among educators? Through generalizing international literature and using studies in the Global South and similar contexts, this review will establish that there are predominant theoretical viewpoints, empirical trends, and gaps that make the qualitative study of inclusion fatigue in Pakistani primary and secondary schools justified.

### **Burnout and Emotional Labor in Teaching**

The idea of burnout is usually developed as a set of psychological conditions, which are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and loss of personal sense of achievement (Maslach et al., 2001). Teaching has been discovered to be a burnout occupational, as it entails emotional labor intensive, interpersonal, and moral accountability (Hargreaves, 1998; Chang, 2009). The emotional labor theory focuses on the management of emotions towards satisfying the demands of the profession and such when maintained without sufficient support leads to emotional exhaustion (Hochschild, 1983). The research studies have revealed that emotional exhaustion of teachers is highly

associated with workload, role, and the absence of institutional support (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2017).

### **Inclusion and Intensive Work of Teachers.**

The inclusive education has increased the role of teachers to involve differentiation, collaboration, documentation and emotional attention to diverse learners (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011; Ainscow, 2020). Studies indicate that inclusion usually does not lead to additional structural provisions, which increases workload and stress and fatigue (Loreman, 2014; McIntyre et al., 2017). Educationists declare emotional tension between the need to promote individualistic care and the uniformity of standards required (Norwich, 2013). Although inclusion is ethically defined as social justice its application often depends on the personal resilience of the teachers and not systemic provision that is a contributor to burnout with time. As per recent scholarship, burnout is not only episodic, but cumulative in nature and where exposure to high-demand setting is chronic, burnout increases in intensity (Schaufeli et al., 2009). The long-term effects of affective work and lack of structural support might cause compassion exhaustion or inclusion exhaustion, a phenomenon that researchers refer to as inclusion fatigue or compassion fatigue (Figley, 2002; Kim et al., 2019). There are also cases in which teachers who have been teaching extensively in a setting with inclusiveness complain of reduced emotional resources, frustration, and lack of engagement especially without professional recognition or backing. Nevertheless, there are few empirical studies that specifically study inclusion fatigue.

### **Teacher Wellbeing, Identity and Moral commitment.**

Professional identity and moral purpose have close relations with teacher wellbeing (Day and Gu, 2014; Kelchtermans, 2009). Inclusive education enhances moral determination as it places teachers in a role of promoting equity and nurture, making them vulnerable emotionally towards the constraints on system and inclusive principles (Hansen, 2001; O'Connor, 2008). The research indicates that emotional exhaustion affects the perception of professional effect and identity of teachers and leads to withdrawal or diminished dedication to the process of inclusion (Lasky, 2005). These results testify to ethical and emotional drawbacks of ongoing inclusion practice.

### **The Global South and Pakistani situation.**

Studies in the Global South highlight the role of the lack of resources, the store of high classes, and an examination-based system in the increasing stress of teachers (Miles and Singal, 2010; Grech, 2011). The research on the inclusive education in Pakistan has concentrated on the policy implementation, infrastructure, and teacher attitudes, but little has been done with the emotional sustainability (Singal, 2008; Ehsan, 2018). Research shows that educators usually do not have institutional support, professional growth, and emotional appreciation, which makes them more susceptible to burnout (Shah, 2015). It is a major gap in that there has not been qualitative research on long-term emotional experiences.

### **Coping, Resilience and Institutional Support.**

Other studies focus on the resilience of teachers as well as coping mechanisms, including peer support, reflective practice, and professional learning communities (Gu & Day, 2013; Mansfield et al., 2016). Critics however, warn of excessively focusing on individual resilience suggesting that it blames institutions out (Beltman et al., 2011). Sustainable inclusion involves a systematic approach of considering workload, emotional support and professional recognition instead of individual coping strategies.

## **Research Gap**

Through the analyzed literature, it is possible to identify six important themes, namely, teaching as emotional labor, burnout as a cumulative process, increased workload in inclusive education, moral and identity-related strain, insufficient evidence in Global South, and excessive dependence on individual resilience. Although there is increased interest in the wellbeing of teachers, they lack qualitative, context-sensitive studies of inclusion fatigue in Pakistan. The current article fills this gap through the study of teacher lived experiences of emotional burnout as a result of long-term inclusion classroom work.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Methodological Approach**

The paper analyzed the emotional burnout in teachers having long-term inclusion classrooms in Pakistani primary and secondary schools with an objective to get insight into how inclusion long-term responsibility affects the emotional state of teachers. The study dealt with the issue of inclusion fatigue, and discussion was made through the experiences of teachers regarding stress, emotional exhaustion and professional strain. The study was a qualitative interpretive research approach, as the research questions were exploratory and the research focused on making meaning using the subjective approach. The study was based on the primary data and had a descriptive and exploratory design which allowed delving into emotional processes that are frequently neglected by inclusion research which is based on the policy. Qualitative inquiry was chosen due to its ability to represent fervent emotional stories and other contextual factors on the wellbeing of teachers (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

### **Data Collection Methods**

The researcher drew information in state and privately run primary and secondary schools in Punjab, Sindh as well as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which represents a variety of institutional backgrounds. The subjects were teachers working in inclusive classrooms at least three sequential years, [approximately 30-40] and this was to ensure that the teachers in question had long-term exposure to inclusive teaching. The method of purposive sampling was used to recruit teachers who had a first-hand experience of maintaining inclusion-related duties. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data in order to give participants a chance to describe emotional experiences, stressors, coping, and institutional support perceptions. The interviews were held in a language of choice of the participants so that they feel comfortable and all-inclusive. The research got the ethical approval and ensured informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data, which was audio-taped, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed. Analysis was conducted according to the 6 stages suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), which included familiarization and initial coding, theme generation, review and refinement. The rates of emotional exhaustion, role overload, coping and institutional support perceptions were employed in the coding process. The analysis of the qualitative data (e.g., NVivo) was utilized to systematize and manage data. Constant comparison in participants and reflexive memo writing to explain positionality of the researcher and emotional interpretation were all aimed at improving analytic rigor.

### **Review and Reasonableness of Methodology.**

The qualitative interpretive approach has been selected according to its ability to explore the emotional experiences and the long-term professional strain. Semi-structured interviews allowed the teachers to express their emotions of burnouts and fatigue in words not available to other measures. These characteristics (the presence of teachers with long experience in inclusive classrooms) enhanced the concentration of the study on cumulative influences of emotions. Its weaknesses are based on self-reported information and it does not provide a longitudinal observation. The problems of these limitations were considered with the help of close probing, comparison of cases, and reflexive analysis. Even given these limitations, the methodology offers a solid platform upon which analysis of inclusion fatigue in Pakistani schools can be undertaken.

### **Results**

It is a part that summarizes the results of semi-structured teacher interviews on long term teachers employed in inclusive primary and secondary classrooms in Pakistan. The findings to the research issue of emotional burnout caused by extended inclusive schooling are presented in logical clusters that could be found in all interviewees and in all school scenarios.

#### **Emotional Exhaustion and Chronic Fatigue**

Teachers were always found to have experienced emotional exhaustion which is the constant feeling of being tired, lack of emotional energy and inability to maintain interests in teaching. Participants referred to this as them feeling drained once they had long-lasting involvement in inclusive classroom tasks. These experiences were cited in both the public and private schools and they were not limited to certain subject areas. Experienced teachers in inclusive settings said that they experienced cumulative fatigue, but not episodic stress. The reported indicators of emotional exhaustion are summarized in table 1 (to be inserted here) of participants.

#### **Intensification of Workload and Role overload.**

The respondents noted that there was more workload in the teaching of inclusiveness which involved differentiation of the lessons, lessons planning, documentation as well as liaising with parents and administration. Educators reported role overloading caused at once by having to achieve academic goals and consequently offer emotional reinforcement to diverse students. These workload demands were experienced irrespective of grade levels and aggravated during examination times. Educators observed inadequate adaptability of workload along with increased duties.

#### **Emotional Strain and Low Professional Fulfillment.**

According to teachers, emotional strain is experienced whereby they expressed frustration, irritability, and reduced professional satisfaction. The respondents talked about a slow loss of motivation and a feeling of achievement related to long-term work in the area of inclusion. Other teachers even stated that they were doubting their long-term commitment to including roles as teachers. These experiences were recounted qualitatively and were of varying magnitude and levels among people.

#### **Coping Implicit and Emotional Regulation.**

The teachers mentioned several coping behaviors to ensure that the emotional strain is dealt with, such as emotional distancing, informal peer support, and depending on personal coping mechanisms. Victims indicated low use of formal emotional support systems at schools. The

coping behaviors were extremely personalized and unofficial and they were given no or little institutional support and advice.

### **Institutional Support, Perceived to Lack.**

The perceptions of inadequate institutional support, such as lack of professional growth, poor staffing, and emotional recognition, were continually reported by the participants. Educators reported that shared duties had been seen as a commonplace expectation as opposed to a specialized endeavor that needed directions. Such perceptions were stated in terms of the types of schools and administration systems.

### **Limitations in the Data.**

Due to some limitations, the results need to be taken into account. The statistics were based on self-reported emotional experiences, and it could be affected by personal interpretation. Classroom observations did not occur meaning that practices could not be verified. Also, qualitative sample size does not allow making generalizations outside the similar settings. These constraints are recognized without explanation and they are discussed subsequently in the Discussion section.

## **Discussion**

### **Summary of Major Findings**

This paper identified an emotional burnout among teachers in Pakistani primary and secondary schools in long-term inclusive classroom settings. The results suggest chronic emotional depletion, an augmented work demand, insufficient professional fulfilment and scarce institutional assistance. Educators reported general exhaustion through continuous honing inclusive tasks with emotional stress and the need to use informal means of coping. Inclusion-related demands were also viewed in the context of normalized expectations instead of a specialized professional work demanding support across school types. These results imply that the notion of inclusion fatigue is persistent and ingrained as opposed to a transitory and personal phenomenon.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The results also hint that structural factors in which inclusive education is introduced with matching workload, staffing, or emotional support deficiencies result in inclusion fatigue. Emotional exhaustion by teachers indicates long exposure to heightened emotional work and outstanding role overload. This dependence on individual methods of coping shows that the process of regulating emotions is individualized with no support at institutional level. These trends indicate the lack of correspondence between the principles of inclusive education and the material and emotional resources according to which teachers are supposed to implement them.

### **Relation to the Existing Literature.**

The results are in line with studies that have found teaching to be an emotionally taxing endeavor that is prone to burnout in case of inadequate support by the institution (Hargreaves, 1998; Maslach et al., 2001). Research on inclusive education also records the augmentation of workload and emotional burden relating to processes of variousiation and care-based endeavors (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011; Loreman, 2014). The accumulative information of burnout in this research is consistent with the information on long-term exposure to high job demands (Schaufeli et al., 2009). This research expands the Global South interests in teacher wellbeing in inclusive education by presenting empirical data about Pakistan (Singal, 2008; Shah, 2015).

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are a few limitations, which must be mentioned. Data on self-reported interviews was used in the study and its interpretation can be biased towards subjective emotions. The study is limited to cross-sectional data, which does not support the analysis of the change in burnout throughout time. Moreover, the sample of participants was diverse among the school settings, but the qualitative sample does not allow making generalizations. The limitations imply a necessity to use complementary research designs.

### **Theory and Practical Implications.**

Conceptually, the contribution of this study is that it is able to conceptualize that inclusion fatigue is not something that an individual lack but instead it is a structural phenomenon. In practice, the results demonstrate the necessity of institutional policies the focus of which is on the wellbeing of teachers such as the workload modification, the supportive mechanisms and professional acknowledgement of inclusive work. The in-service training and teacher education in Pakistan should include the explicit discussion of emotional sustainability and inclusive pedagogy.

### **Alternative Explanations**

Another interpretation of reported burnout is that emotional exhaustion is indicative of system-level issues in the teaching profession, including large class sizes and exam pressure and not inclusion-specific issues. Changes in the leadership within schools and peer support might also have an impact on the experiences of burnout. The possibilities imply that the structural factors that influence inclusion fatigue intersect.

### **Getting Back to the Research Question.**

Going back to the research question, which is how do teachers at Pakistani schools experience emotional burnout related to long term work in inclusive class rooms, the results indicate that inclusion burnout is defined by cumulative emotional burnout, role overload and feeling unsupported. The article establishes that inclusive education can only be maintained with the need to build solutions that encompass pedagogical, emotional, and structural aspects of the teaching process.

### **Conclusion**

The research aimed to discuss inclusion fatigue among teachers who teach in long-term inclusive primary and secondary classrooms in Pakistan. The study related to the emerging issue of stable and inclusive education roles as having emotional costs that are not well recognized in policy and practice. Once again repeating the main point of the research, the obtained results prove that emotional burnout in the teachers is structural effect of long inclusive work but not personal failure or insufficient professional determination. The research identified chronic emotional exhaustion, increase in workload, diminished professional satisfaction and lack of institutional support to be distinct characteristics of inclusion fatigue. These results make an addition to the inclusive education and teacher wellbeing literature by preempting emotional sustainability as an important component of inclusive practice. The study brings back to the concerns discussed in the intro so that the notion that inclusive education is achievable only due to moral commitment or resilience of teachers is reasserted. This research is important to the Pakistan context because it has implications on the educational policy, school leadership, and teacher education. Sustainable inclusion would entail institutional acknowledgment of emotional work and workload moderation as well as official wellbeing care arrangements. The upcoming studies must analyze the models of

interventions and leadership that can ensure emotional sustainability and long-term participation of teachers in inclusive education.

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