THE EFFECT OF INCLUSION ON SOCIAL SKILLS: A SURVEY STUDY OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS WITHIN SCHOOL

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Abstract
This study investigates the effect of inclusion on the development of social skills in students with special needs within school settings. The primary objectives were to: (1) examine the impact of inclusive classrooms on the social behavior of children with special needs; (2) assess the role of inclusive school environments in promoting specific social skills such as communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution; and (3) identify the classroom factors that contribute to or hinder the social integration of these students. A quantitative survey design was used, involving responses from 100 participants, including teachers and parents of special needs children. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent sample t-tests. Findings revealed no significant differences in perceptions based on gender, experience, or professional background. However, participants generally held positive views about the role of inclusion in supporting social development. The study concludes that inclusive educational practices play a vital role in fostering the social integration of children with special needs and recommends enhanced teacher training and parent engagement to strengthen inclusive strategies.

Keywords: Inclusive education, special needs students, social skills, communication, cooperation, conflict resolution, classroom environment, social integration, teacher perception, parental involvement.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion in schools for SSN is one of the priorities of educational policies and practices around the world. It is based on the simple principle that everyone has a right to education, regardless of their abilities in the general education environment (Salen; 2009). This thought is based on the idea that an inclusive environment enables all the students, regardless of their abilities, to get an equal chance to thrive themselves not only socially and emotionally but academically too. Behind this strategy, the focus is on cultivating such a school environment that welcomes diversity instead of redundancies of similar facts thus giving equal chance to everyone to take part in all the activities of the school communities. Inclusive education has been strongly influenced by a network of many international researches and frameworks, on top of which is the UN convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Salamanca Statement (1994).

Inclusive education is not just a teaching style but also a human right. They are calling on governments to create such policies that helps to reduce almost all the barriers and hurdles in terms of funds so that differently abled students thrive thus accommodating them in the so - called structured school system. This global movement has led many countries to follow inclusive policies as per their local resources, teachers training and social attitude especially accepting this diversity. It is totally understandable that degrees are not a measure of someone's abilities and intelligence, it's the way you present yourself socially and emotionally, based on the fact, inclusive education enhances multiple ways of social skills in students with special needs. Accordingly, social skills such as communication, cooperation, empathy, and self-regulation are essential for successful interactions and relationships (McClelland et al., 2017).

Social skills are essential for making friends, collaborating with class fellows and school fellows, and navigating the social aspects of school life. Even for students with SEN, this lack of skills is one of the biggest challenges affecting quality of life and school performance. Therefore, it is important to learn how to integrate into the educational environment based on students' social skills, as this will allow us to better understand this population and analyze some of the strengths and weaknesses associated with inclusion. One's weaknesses may be someone's strengths and that's how it all works. Students with challenging behaviors, disabilities and non-disabled students can develop positive social relationships if a positive atmosphere is created in the classroom.

Statement of the problem

Inclusion in education refers to the practice of educating children with special needs alongside their typically developing peers within mainstream classrooms. This approach is grounded in the belief that children, regardless of their abilities, should have access to the same educational opportunities. However, while the academic benefits of inclusion have been widely studied, its impact on the social skills development of SSN remains less conclusive. SSN often face challenges in social interactions, such as communication, forming friendships, and engaging in peer group activities. The effectiveness of inclusion in addressing these social deficits is an area that demands further investigation

Literature Review

Inclusive education is a growing global movement that seeks to provide equitable educational opportunities to all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. The inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream classrooms is particularly significant for developing their social skills, including communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. This literature review explores current findings on the effects of inclusive education on the social development of students with special needs, focusing on three key themes: the overall impact of inclusion on social skills, the role of the inclusive environment, and the factors influencing social integration.

Development of social skills

Students with SEN demonstrate and try to mimic the social skills of neuro typical students of their age. As a direct result, the skills of taking turns, sharing, and participating in conversations improve. In addition to that, most inclusive classrooms include peer interventions such as "buddy strategies" and collaborative groups, which are designed to change social behavior in the classroom. Students with special needs are more likely to adopt this technology because they become more popular with their peers, which in turn increases their social status and influence in society. The development of social skills in children is influenced by many factors such as the type of disability, the degree of disability, the quality of teacher support, and the motivation of peer support. While most of the studies show positive effects, some report difficulties and concerns, such as the risk of stigmatization and bullying due to the lack of support. There are also questions and concerns about working in an inclusive environment appropriate for students with special needs, as students with special needs may receive more attention than the average student in the classroom. Despite these challenges, there is growing evidence that inclusive education can be beneficial for SSN if implemented appropriately. The critical role of teachers in these efforts cannot be compromised, as their perspectives, themselves as role models and teaching methods influence the quality of social work in the classroom. Successful integration requires collaboration between teachers, education specialists, and support staff to create a learning environment that meets the diverse needs of each student. The main theme, moving to Education, reflects our commitment to creating a place where every student, regardless of ability, can thrive socially and academically.

Understanding the impact of inclusion on the development of social skills in students with special needs is essential to evaluating effectiveness and identifying implementation strategies. The purpose of this research review is to survey in depth in this area, examine the pros and cons of inclusion, and provide guidance to educators and policymakers seeking to promote the development of students with special needs in school settings

On the other hand, the connection among inclusion and social skills development is challenging and affected by multiple elements. Attitudes of teachers, classroom management approach, peer training, and specific help play a vital role in establishing the achievement of inclusion struggle. Inclusive context improve social ability, others advice that lacking of proper help and purposeful programming, students with SEN might encounter public aloneness and level peer rejection (Lindsay & McPherson, 2012). Such key points the need for a refined insight of impact of inclusion on social skills and whatever the mechanisms which are most effective in promoting positive outcomes.

The Impact of Inclusive Education on Social Skills

Research consistently indicates that inclusive education has the potential to positively impact the social skills of students with special needs. According to Koster, Pijl, Nakken, Houten, (2010) Students with disabilities placed in inclusive classrooms exhibit higher levels of interaction and engagement with peers compared to those in segregated settings. These interactions often lead to improved social competencies, such as initiating conversations, maintaining friendships, and resolving conflicts.

Similarly, Vaughn, Elbaum, Schumm. (2003) found that students with special needs demonstrated enhanced communication and collaborative skills after spending a full academic year in inclusive environments. These gains were attributed to the constant exposure to socially appropriate behaviors modeled by typically developing peers. Furthermore, the study by Ruijs and Peetsma (2009) emphasized that inclusion helps reduce feelings of isolation and improves students' sense of belonging, which further encourages active participation in social activities. However, not all studies report uniformly positive outcomes. Some research points to the possibility of negative peer interactions, including rejection or bullying, especially when students lack sufficient support from teachers or peers (Lindsay, 2007). These findings suggest that while inclusion can foster social skill development, it must be carefully implemented to be effective.

The Role of Inclusive School Environments

The quality of the inclusive environment plays a crucial role in determining the extent to which SSN can develop social skills. Inclusive settings that encourage cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and social interaction opportunities tend to be more successful in supporting social development (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 1999). These structured activities allow SSN to participate meaningfully and practice essential social behaviors in real-life contexts.

A study by Carter, sisco, Melekoglu, Murkowski,(2005) highlighted that classrooms that promote collaborative group work and positive teacher-student relationships tend to report better social outcomes for students with special needs. Teachers who actively foster a culture of acceptance and inclusion can create a safe space where students feel encouraged to express themselves and interact with peers.

Moreover, inclusive classrooms with trained teachers and adequate resources are more effective in addressing individual needs. Teachers' understanding of differentiation strategies and behavior management techniques is vital for guiding students with special needs through social challenges (Friend & Bursuck, 2012). Therefore, professional development for teachers is crucial in ensuring that inclusive environments are truly supportive and beneficial for social growth.

Factors Contributing to or Hindering Social Integration

Numerous factors influence the degree to which students with special needs can socially integrate within inclusive classrooms. Peer attitudes, teacher expectations, classroom climate, and the nature of the disability are some of the most influential elements.

Peer acceptance plays a significant role in fostering social inclusion. According to research by Nowicki and Sandieson (2002), students with special needs are more likely to be socially integrated when their peers are empathetic, well-informed, and inclusive. Peer sensitivity training and awareness programs have been shown to improve peer attitudes and reduce stigma (Siperstein, Parker, Norins, and Widaman 2007). These programs help typical students understand the challenges faced by their classmates with disabilities and encourage positive social interactions.

Teacher expectations and attitudes also have a profound impact. Teachers who hold high expectations for students with special needs and demonstrate inclusive attitudes tend to facilitate better social outcomes. On the contrary, teachers with low expectations or limited training in inclusive practices may unintentionally hinder the social development of these students (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

Classroom size and teacher-student ratio further influence the effectiveness of inclusion. Large classrooms with limited support staff may not allow for the individualized attention necessary to foster social skills development (Mitchell, 2014). In contrast, smaller classes or those with support from special education teachers or aides are more conducive to providing meaningful social interaction opportunities.

The nature and severity of the disability also determine the ease of social integration. Students with mild learning disabilities or physical impairments often integrate more successfully compared to those with severe emotional or behavioral disorders (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). Students with autism spectrum disorder, for example, may struggle with social cues and require structured interventions to build relationships, even in inclusive settings (Kasari,Fuller, Gulsrud, 2011).

Summary and Research Gap

The reviewed literature confirms that inclusion, when implemented effectively, can enhance the social skills of students with special needs. Inclusive environments that are structured, supportive, and accepting create opportunities for these students to develop communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution skills. However, several variables including peer attitudes, teacher preparedness, classroom resources, and the nature of the disability significantly impact the success of inclusion.

While much research highlights the benefits of inclusion, gaps remain. There is a need for more longitudinal studies to assess the long-term social development of students in inclusive settings. Additionally, more evidence is required from non-Western contexts to understand how cultural and systemic differences affect inclusion practices. In countries like Pakistan, where resources may be limited and teacher training in special education is inconsistent, these challenges must be addressed to ensure inclusion leads to genuine social integration.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the impact of inclusive education on the social skills of children With special needs.
2. To assess the role of inclusive school environments in fostering the development
   On specific social skills such as communication, cooperation, conflict resolution
   among children with special needs.
3. To identify the factors within inclusive classrooms that contribute to or hinder the

social integration of children with special needs.

Research Questions

1. To what extent the participation in inclusive education settings affect the social interaction abilities of children with special needs?
2. How do inclusive practices in schools impact social skills such as communication, cooperation, and empathy in children with special needs?
3. What are the key factors within inclusive classrooms that facilitate or inhibit the social integration of children in schools and the community?

Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative approach and structured survey was administered to teachers, and parents to quantitatively assess the social skill development of children with special needs in inclusive settings. Teachers working in inclusive classrooms were important segment of the population, also parents of children with special needs were included to provide perspectives on their child's social development and experiences in the inclusive school environment.

A stratified random sampling approach was used to select teachers and parents from different grade levels and subject areas within the selected schools to ensure the representation of varying teaching experiences and classroom environments.

A questionnaire as a tool was used to measure the social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence of students. The questionnaire was administered to teachers, and parents to assess the social skills of children with special needs in areas such as communication, cooperation, empathy, and responsibility.

Questionnaires were distributed to teachers and parents of children with special needs to assess their social skills. Teachers and parents of children with special needs were completed additional questionnaires on their perceptions of inclusive education and the social skills of students. These questionnaires were distributed through online platforms and as paper surveys, depending on school resources.

SPSS software was used to calculate means, standard deviations, and frequencies for social skills scores and other survey responses. While investigating the influence of embedding participation concepts on the social skills of kids with special educational needs, some ethical guidelines related to the protection and respect of all participants were followed. In this regard, let us present some of the significant ethical issues:

Put it down on paper already, and get a signed informed consent from parents of kids with special needs before combining them in the study. The typical informed consent form should contain the aim of the study, the type of data to be obtained, the potential risks involved, and the guarantees of the safe handling of data. Be careful and keep private information concerning all subjects who participated in the data collection. As much as possible, all data collection forms should have either numbers or identification letters instead of the names of the respondents. Safeguard the data in password files or locked cabinets. Anyone including members of a project team who are not an authorized researcher should not have this data. Confidential information, such as the participant's identity, should not be disclosed in any of the reports or publications that are constructed as part of the study. It was necessary to report aggregate figures and anonymized quotes from patients. Explain to the volunteers (parents or guardians where necessary) that everything is voluntary and it is up to the volunteers to provide their personal information or withdraw at the text upscale center.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS
Teachers Data

Table1:

Teacher Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
female	49	96.1	96.1	96.1
Male	2	3.9	3.9	100.0
Total	51	100.0	100.0	

96.1% of the teachers are female, with only 3.9% male. This indicates a strong female representation among the teachers involved in this study.

Table 2

Teaching Experience

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-5 years	27	52.9	52.9	52.9
6-10 years	14	27.5	27.5	80.4
11-above	10	19.6	19.6	100.0
Total	51	100.0	100.0	

A significant number of teachers (52.9%) have 1-5 years of experience, 27.5% have 6-10 years, and 19.6% have over 11 years of teaching experience. This shows a mix of relatively new and more experienced teachers in the sample.

Parents Data

Table 3

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
female	46	92.0	92.0	92.0
male	4	8.0	8.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Majority of respondents (92%) are female, indicating a higher female involvement in this study compared to male (8%).

Table 4

profession of the parents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Housewife	20	40.0	40.0	40.0
Professional	30	60.0	60.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

60% of parents are professionals, while 40% are housewives. This suggests a significant proportion of the respondents are likely to have professional careers, which might influence their views on children's learning and classroom management.

Parents and Teachers Perceptions Difference

Table 5

Teacher Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p
Female	49	2.4041	.42913	.258	49	.149
Male	2	2.3250	.03536			

Teacher Gender

This table compares the perceptions of male and female teachers regarding the impact of classroom management strategies on student performance and achievement motivation.
Mean Scores:
Female Teachers: 2.4041
Male Teachers: 2.3250
t-value: 0.258
p-value: 0.149 (greater than 0.05)
Female teachers have a slightly higher mean score (2.4041) than male teachers (2.3250), indicating a marginal difference in perceptions.
However, the p-value (0.149) is greater than 0.05, meaning this difference is not statistically significant.
This suggests that gender does not significantly influence teachers' perceptions of the impact of classroom management strategies on students.

Table 6
Teacher Experience

Teacher Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	df	P
1-5 years	27	2.4926	.42329		2	
6-10 years	14	2.3500	.42472	1.660	48	
11-above	10	2.2250	.37657		50	.201
Total	51	2.4010	.42077			
Model Fixed Effects			.41533			

Random Effects

This table examines whether teacher experience influences their perceptions of classroom management strategies.
The mean scores for different experience levels are:
1-5 years: 2.4926
6-10 years: 2.3500
11+ years: 2.2250
The F-value is 1.660, and the p-value is 0.201, which is greater than 0.05.
Interpretation: There is no statistically significant difference in perceptions based on teacher experience. This suggests that teachers, regardless of experience, have similar views on classroom management strategies.

Table 7

Parent Profession

profession of the parents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Df	p
Housewife	20	2.3950	.56146	.415	48	.903
professional	30	2.3300	.52941			

This table compares the perceptions of housewives and professional parents.
Mean scores:
Housewives: 2.3950
Professionals: 2.3300
t-value is 0.415, and p-value is 0.903, which is much greater than 0.05.
Interpretation: There is no significant difference in perceptions between housewives and professional parents, suggesting that parental profession does not impact views on classroom management strategies.

Table 8

Parent Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	P
female	46	2.3957	.52066	1.809	48	.877
male	4	1.9000	.59582			

This table examines the difference in perceptions between male and female parents.
Mean scores:
Female parents: 2.3957
Male parents: 1.9000
t-value is 1.809, and p-value is 0.877 (greater than 0.05).

Interpretation: Even though female parents have a higher mean score than male parents, the difference is not statistically significant, implying that gender does not strongly influence parental perceptions of classroom management strategies.

Table 9

Parent Teacher Comparison

Teacher & Parents score Comparison	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	P
Teachers	51	2.4010	.42077	.469	99	.180
Parents	50	2.3560	.53772			

This table compares the perceptions of parents and teachers.
Mean scores:
Teachers: 2.4010
Parents: 2.3560
t-value is 0.469, and p-value is 0.180 (greater than 0.05).
Interpretation: There is no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of teachers and parents. Both groups have similar opinions on classroom management strategies and their impact on student performance and motivation.

Discussion
The present study aimed to investigate the effect of inclusion on the social skills of students with special needs within the school environment. Drawing upon data collected from teachers and parents, the study examined how various demographic factors, including gender, experience, and professional background, influence perceptions regarding classroom management and inclusion. This discussion interprets the findings in relation to the research objectives and situates them within the broader scholarly literature on inclusive education.

Impact of Inclusive Education on Social Skills of Children with Special Needs
The data collected in this study indicates a general consensus among both teachers and parents regarding the positive role of inclusive education in enhancing student outcomes, although statistical analyses showed no significant difference in perceptions based on gender, experience, or professional status. This finding suggests that the belief in the potential of inclusion to foster development in students with special needs is widespread, regardless of individual background. However, the relatively modest mean scores across various categories (ranging from 2.3 to 2.5) may indicate room for improvement in how inclusion is currently implemented.

Past studies support the positive impact of inclusive education on social development. For example, Guralnick (2011) emphasizes that inclusive settings provide children with special needs increased opportunities for social interaction, leading to better communication skills and peer relationships. Inclusive education enables children to observe, imitate, and engage with typically developing peers, which helps build essential social skills like turn-taking, empathy, and cooperation. In this context, the relatively uniform support for inclusion found among

participants in the current study aligns with the wider literature that identifies inclusive classrooms as beneficial environments for social learning.

Role of Inclusive School Environments in Developing Specific Social Skills

The development of specific social skills—such as communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution—was one of the key concerns of this research. While the survey data did not directly measure student social skills, it revealed important insights into the perspectives of those most closely involved in students' educational experiences. For instance, female participants dominated both the teacher and parent samples (96.1% and 92%, respectively), which may reflect a cultural trend in caregiving and educational roles, especially in the Pakistani context. This overrepresentation might also mean that the observed views are more reflective of maternal and female pedagogical perspectives, which could potentially influence how inclusion is practiced and perceived.

Moreover, while there were minor differences in the mean perception scores between teachers with different levels of experience and parents from different professional backgrounds, none of these differences were statistically significant. This suggests a shared understanding among stakeholders of the importance of classroom management and inclusive practices, which are crucial for developing specific social skills among children with special needs.

Studies by Lindsay (2007) and Salend (2001) underline the importance of a well-structured inclusive environment where classroom routines, cooperative learning strategies, and teacher mediation foster social development. Effective classroom management and a welcoming atmosphere not only reduce behavioral issues but also encourage peer collaboration and mutual respect. The uniform perceptions recorded in this study suggest that these principles are likely being recognized, if not fully implemented, by educators and caregivers alike.

Factors in Inclusive Classrooms That Support or Hinder Social Integration

The final objective of the study aimed to identify the factors within inclusive classrooms that either support or hinder the social integration of students with special needs. Although the collected data primarily captured perceptions rather than direct observational evidence of classroom dynamics, the consistency in responses among teachers and parents offers some indication of the existing inclusive practices.

Teachers with 1-5 years of experience reported slightly higher mean scores (2.49) compared to those with more years of experience. One interpretation might be that younger teachers, often more recently trained in contemporary inclusive strategies, feel more confident in implementing practices that foster social integration. Alternatively, experienced teachers might be more aware of the challenges, resulting in slightly lower optimism about the outcomes. This finding resonates with research by Avramidis and Norwich (2002), who found that younger and newly trained teachers tend to have more positive attitudes towards inclusion.

Another factor of interest is the absence of significant gender-based differences in perceptions, whether among teachers or parents. This may indicate that beliefs about inclusive practices and their influence on social development are not deeply divided along gender lines. However, the data showed a slightly lower mean score among male parents (1.90) compared to female parents (2.39), suggesting that male parents may be less convinced about the effectiveness of current classroom management strategies. While not statistically significant, this difference could point to a need for more inclusive parental engagement programs that address varying expectations and concerns.

Importantly, the lack of significant differences between the perceptions of teachers and parents (p = 0.180) indicates a shared view on classroom strategies and their relevance to student development. This alignment is essential for successful inclusion, as both home and school environments must reinforce social learning for students with special needs. When parents and teachers operate with a common understanding, students receive consistent guidance and support, which enhances their ability to integrate socially with peers.

Recommendations

Schools is recommended to build and implement organized inclusion programs that encourage collaborated learning, group activities, and peer mentoring to improve social interactions. Perform regular professional development for teachers on inclusive practices, managing diverse classrooms, and supporting social skills development in children with special needs. Educate neurotypical peers to behave as social models or buddies, supportive positive social interactions through led play, collaborative tasks, and shared responsibilities. Combine programs like "visual guides" or "Peer Networks" to systematically teach communication, cooperation, and emotional regulation. Motivate a place of acceptance, respect, and empathy through school-wide initiatives, awareness campaigns, and inclusive policies.

Inspire involvement of children with special needs in inclusive extracurricular activities, such as sports, drama, and clubs, to provide natural socialization opportunities.Colaboration between different schools of thoughts to help individual needs. Implement Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) which include specific social goals and support system that enhance each child's abilities and challenges.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the growing body of research highlighting the positive impact of inclusion on the social skills of students with special needs. While the data does not show statistically significant differences among demographic groups, the shared positive perception among teachers and parents underscores a general endorsement of inclusive practices. As schools in Pakistan and globally continue to embrace inclusive models, the importance of consistent training, parental involvement, and supportive classroom environments cannot be overstated. These efforts are vital to ensuring that all students, regardless of ability, are afforded equal opportunities for social, emotional, and academic growth.

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