

The Role of Teacher Emotional Wellbeing in Promoting Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Difficulties in Rural Pakistan

Bushra Rehman¹, Prof Dr Kinza Alam², Dr. Muhammad Usman Zia³,
Muhammad Ashraf Ali Butt⁴

¹ PhD Scholar, International Islamic University Islamabad. Email: bushra.phdedu160@iiu.edu.pk

² Professor and Head of Unit One, Gynae & Obs, POF Hospital, Wah Medical College, NUMS.
Email: drkinzairfan@gmail.com

³ Lecturer, University of Education, Lahore (Faisalabad Campus). Email: usman.zia@ue.edu.pk

⁴ PhD Scholar, ELPS (Educational Leadership and Policy Studies) from University of Education, Lahore. Email: buttashraf130499@gmail.com

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Abstract

Inclusive education has emerged as a key global commitment aimed at ensuring equal learning opportunities for all children, including those with learning difficulties. However, in many developing contexts such as rural Pakistan, the implementation of inclusive education faces significant structural, pedagogical, and attitudinal barriers. Among the least explored yet crucial determinants of successful inclusion is the emotional wellbeing of teachers, who are the central agents in facilitating inclusive classroom environments. This study critically examines the role of teacher emotional wellbeing in promoting inclusive education for children with learning difficulties in rural Pakistani schools. Drawing upon international frameworks such as the *UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994)* and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006)*, alongside Pakistan's *National Education Policy (2017)*, the paper situates teacher wellbeing within the larger discourse on inclusive educational reform. It integrates global and local literature to conceptualize an empirically testable model that links teacher wellbeing, inclusive teaching attitudes, and classroom practices. Anchored in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Self-Determination Theory, the study adopts a mixed-methods design comprising quantitative surveys, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers from selected rural districts. Quantitative data are proposed to be analyzed through regression and mediation models, while qualitative data will be examined through thematic analysis to explore lived experiences, stressors, and coping strategies. The study employs validated instruments such as the *Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)*, the *WHO-5 Wellbeing Index*, and adapted teacher attitude and inclusion practice scales to ensure reliability and cross-cultural applicability. Preliminary (simulated) findings, drawn from the synthesis of existing empirical studies, suggest that higher levels of teacher emotional wellbeing are positively associated with more favorable attitudes toward inclusion, increased use of differentiated instructional strategies, and greater student engagement among learners with learning difficulties. Conversely, emotional exhaustion and burnout were found to diminish teacher efficacy and reduce patience and empathy toward students requiring additional learning support. The study emphasizes that teacher wellbeing is not merely a personal matter but a systemic prerequisite for the successful realization of inclusive education., this research contributes to both theoretical understanding and policy innovation aimed at fostering equitable learning environments in rural Pakistan.

Keywords:

Teacher wellbeing; Inclusive education; Learning difficulties; Emotional exhaustion; Rural Pakistan; Teacher attitudes; Educational policy; Self-Determination Theory; Ecological Systems Theory.

Introduction

Inclusive education defined as the process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities has become a cornerstone of global education policy. It promotes the idea that all children, regardless of disability, learning difficulty, or socio-economic background, should learn together in mainstream schools. This concept was formally recognized in the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994), which emphasized that “schools should accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions” (UNESCO, 1994). The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), adopted in 2006, further reinforced this stance by mandating that states ensure “an inclusive education system at all levels” (United Nations, 2006). These frameworks laid the foundation for a global shift from segregation to inclusion, affirming that inclusive education is both a human right and a pedagogical necessity (UNESCO, 2020).

Inclusive Education and the Pakistani Context

In Pakistan, the movement toward inclusive education has gained momentum over the past two decades, yet implementation remains uneven particularly in rural regions, where schools face chronic shortages of trained teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and limited pedagogical resources. The National Education Policy (Government of Pakistan, 2017) and the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2002) both advocate for inclusive education. However, scholars have noted that these policies are often poorly operationalized due to insufficient funding, lack of teacher training, and weak institutional coordination (Rafique, 2021; Malik & Ajmal, 2019). Empirical evidence indicates that while some urban schools have piloted inclusive practices, rural areas lag significantly behind due to teacher shortages, large class sizes, and low awareness about learning difficulties (Aly & Ullah, 2022; Hussain et al., 2021). According to UNESCO (2018), nearly 22.8 million school-age children remain out of school in Pakistan, and among those enrolled, many with mild to moderate learning difficulties remain unidentified or unsupported. These systemic disparities make the rural context particularly challenging for implementing inclusion effectively. Moreover, Pakistan’s educational landscape is linguistically and culturally diverse, which complicates inclusive practices further. Studies such as Khan, Parveen, Qadir, and Rashid (2024) highlight how bilingualism, negotiation of identity, and psycholinguistic dynamics shape communication and learning outcomes among urban youth. This linguistic complexity underscores the need to recognize emotional, linguistic, and cultural factors when designing inclusive education policies and teacher training programs especially in multilingual rural contexts where teachers may face additional stress managing diverse learners.

The Role of Teacher Emotional Wellbeing in Inclusion

While infrastructure and policy issues dominate the discourse on inclusive education, teacher emotional wellbeing remains an underexplored yet crucial determinant of success. Emotional wellbeing refers to teachers’ psychological health, sense of professional satisfaction, motivation, and resilience in coping with job-related stress (McCallum et al., 2017). When teachers experience high levels of stress or burnout, they tend to demonstrate reduced enthusiasm, lower patience, and less adaptability in meeting the diverse needs of learners (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Kidger et al., 2016). Conversely, emotionally well teachers are more likely to build supportive classroom environments, employ differentiated teaching strategies, and sustain inclusive practices over time (Harding et al., 2019). In the Pakistani context, teachers especially those in rural schools face acute emotional and professional strain due to limited professional development opportunities, inadequate salaries, heavy workloads, and socio-cultural expectations (Asim et al., 2021; Ali & Khan, 2020).

Studies have shown that teachers with higher wellbeing levels report greater self-efficacy, positive attitudes toward inclusive education, and improved student outcomes (Dreer, 2023; Kim & Kim, 2024). However, comprehensive empirical investigations linking teacher emotional wellbeing directly with inclusive education outcomes for children with learning difficulties in rural Pakistan are scarce, revealing a significant research gap.

The Need for a Contextualized Investigation

Inclusive education requires more than policy directives it depends on teachers' emotional readiness to manage diversity and sustain positive engagement in challenging classroom contexts. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) highlights that teachers operate within multilayered environments, where external factors (such as institutional support, community expectations, and leadership) interact with internal emotional states to influence classroom practices. Thus, emotional wellbeing is not only an individual trait but a systemic outcome shaped by policy, school culture, and available resources (Day & Gu, 2014). In rural Pakistan, where inclusive education initiatives are often implemented without adequate support or training, teacher wellbeing becomes a determinant of implementation fidelity. Teachers who are emotionally supported and professionally valued are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward inclusion, adapt their instruction for students with learning difficulties, and persist in challenging circumstances (OECD, 2021; Harding et al., 2019). This paper therefore aims to examine how teacher emotional wellbeing contributes to the promotion of inclusive education for children with learning difficulties in rural Pakistan. It draws on global frameworks and national policies to conceptualize an empirically testable model integrating teacher wellbeing, inclusive attitudes, and pedagogical practices. By adopting a mixed-methods design, the study seeks to provide both quantitative evidence and qualitative insights that inform future educational reforms and teacher support programs.

Rationale and Problem Statement

Although Pakistan's National Education Policy (2017) endorses inclusive education, significant implementation gaps persist especially in rural areas where schools face limited resources, inadequate teacher training, and a lack of specialist support. Teachers are often expected to accommodate children with learning difficulties such as dyslexia and attention disorders without the necessary preparation or support (Malik & Ajmal, 2019; Hussain, Batool, & Rizvi, 2021). At the same time, research shows that teacher emotional wellbeing encompassing job satisfaction, resilience, and emotional stability strongly predicts teaching quality, classroom engagement, and student outcomes (McCallum et al., 2017; Harding et al., 2019). Teachers who experience burnout or stress are less likely to implement inclusive strategies effectively (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). Yet, studies explicitly linking teacher wellbeing to inclusive education practices in rural Pakistan remain scarce (Ali & Khan, 2020; Asim, Khalid, & Iqbal, 2021). Understanding this relationship is essential for developing evidence-based interventions such as wellbeing programs, in-service teacher training, and structural support systems that enhance both teacher effectiveness and student inclusion. While initiatives like the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) highlight digital tools for educational improvement, sustainable inclusion also requires emotional and psychological support for teachers (PITB, 2023). Therefore, this study addresses a key research gap by exploring how teacher emotional wellbeing influences inclusive education outcomes for children with learning difficulties in rural Pakistan, aiming to bridge the divide between policy goals and classroom realities.

Literature Review

Inclusive Education Policy and Practice in Pakistan

Pakistan has expressed formal commitments to inclusive education through policy frameworks such as the *National Education Policy (NEP) 2017* and its alignment with UNESCO's *Education 2030 Framework for Action*. These policies aim to integrate all learners—including those with disabilities—

into mainstream classrooms (Government of Pakistan, 2017; UNESCO, 2020). However, a significant gap persists between policy and implementation, particularly in rural areas. The UNESCO *Global Education Monitoring Report* highlights that Pakistan continues to experience structural inequities in access and quality, with disparities in teacher training, infrastructure, and curriculum design (UNESCO, 2020). Empirical research underscores that teacher preparedness is a key determinant of inclusion success. A recent study by Khan Khosa, Shakir, and Aslam (2023) found that despite policy intentions, a lack of adequate pre-service and in-service training impedes teachers' ability to manage inclusive classrooms effectively. Similarly, Anis, Waqar, and Muhammad (2025) developed a *Teacher Attitude Scale toward Inclusion* to measure attitudes across Pakistan, finding rural teachers less confident and less informed about inclusive pedagogy compared to their urban counterparts. These findings align with international literature suggesting that inclusion cannot thrive without systemic teacher support and psychological readiness (Forlin & Chambers, 2021).

Prevalence and Awareness of Learning Difficulties in Pakistan

Learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia remain under-researched and under-diagnosed in Pakistan. Estimates suggest that 10–15% of school-aged children may experience learning difficulties, but these numbers are likely higher in underserved rural populations (Khan et al., 2022; Nasim, Hussain, Akhtar, & Shoqat, 2023). Awareness among teachers and parents is limited, leading to delayed diagnosis and inadequate classroom accommodations. Nasim et al. (2023) reported that while teachers in Multan generally hold positive attitudes toward students with learning difficulties, they lack professional expertise to apply inclusive strategies. The *Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP)* similarly found that many government schools lack basic screening tools and trained personnel for early identification (PESRP, 2022). Consequently, children with mild learning disabilities often remain unrecognized or are labeled as “slow learners,” perpetuating stigmatization and educational exclusion (Ijaz & Malik, 2021).

Teacher Emotional Wellbeing: Definitions and Outcomes

Teacher emotional wellbeing refers to a multidimensional construct encompassing job satisfaction, emotional balance, psychological resilience, and a sense of professional efficacy (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). High levels of wellbeing are associated with lower burnout and greater instructional quality, while emotional exhaustion contributes to teacher attrition and decreased classroom engagement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). In the Pakistani context, recent findings by Ahmad and Farooq (2022) revealed that teachers experiencing higher levels of workplace stress demonstrate reduced classroom productivity and less patience toward struggling students. Similarly, Dreer (2023) conducted a meta-analysis establishing that teacher wellbeing has a direct effect on student motivation and academic achievement. Tools like the *Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)* (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) and the *WHO-5 Wellbeing Index* have been validated across various educational settings to assess emotional health. In rural Pakistan, however, few studies have utilized these standardized measures, highlighting a methodological gap in understanding the local psychological dynamics of teaching.

How Wellbeing May Affect Inclusion for Children with Learning Difficulties

Teacher emotional wellbeing directly shapes teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, willingness to adapt instruction, and persistence when facing challenges (Ainscow, 2020). Teachers with higher wellbeing are more likely to employ differentiated instruction, show empathy toward struggling learners, and engage collaboratively with special educators (Sokal, Trudel, & Babb, 2020). A recent Pakistani study by Khan and Parveen (2024) found that teacher efficacy for inclusive practices (TEIP) was significantly correlated with emotional wellbeing among 215 secondary school teachers in Karachi. Teachers who reported lower burnout were more adaptive, patient, and inclusive in their teaching approaches. This is consistent with global findings that emotionally resilient teachers foster more inclusive learning environments (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Conversely, emotionally exhausted

teachers often resort to traditional, exclusionary methods that marginalize children with learning difficulties. Wellbeing also influences communication styles and language use in the classroom. As Khan, Jameel, Parveen, and Sajjad (2025) argue in their sociolinguistic study of “Online Linguistic Micro-Tribes,” emotional and linguistic expression plays a central role in inclusion and exclusion processes. Their findings highlight that emotional tone and linguistic adaptability can reinforce or challenge exclusionary dynamics, suggesting that teacher emotional intelligence may be crucial for inclusive communication within bilingual classrooms in Pakistan.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite the existence of global evidence on teacher wellbeing and inclusion, Pakistan’s rural education context remains under-researched. Existing studies focus primarily on teacher attitudes, leaving the emotional and psychological aspects of inclusion largely unexplored (Nasim et al., 2023; Ahmad & Farooq, 2022). There is little empirical work linking validated measures of teacher emotional wellbeing to observable inclusive practices or student outcomes for learners with difficulties in rural settings. Furthermore, the intersection between teacher wellbeing, bilingual classroom dynamics, and inclusion has received almost no attention. As noted by Khan et al. (2025), emotional expression and linguistic adaptability are integral to inclusion, yet rarely addressed in educational policy or teacher training. Therefore, there is a need for contextually grounded, mixed-method research examining how teacher emotional wellbeing impacts inclusive practices for children with learning difficulties in rural Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon an integrated theoretical foundation combining Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (EST), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Inclusive Pedagogy Models as articulated by UNESCO’s Salamanca Statement and related educational frameworks. Together, these models provide a comprehensive lens through which to examine how teacher emotional wellbeing interacts with contextual, motivational, and pedagogical factors to influence inclusive educational practices.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (EST)

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979) offers a holistic perspective on human development by conceptualizing individuals within multiple, nested environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Applied to education, this model situates the teacher’s emotional wellbeing and inclusive practice within a web of contextual influences. At the microsystem level, teacher wellbeing directly affects day-to-day classroom interactions, emotional climate, and teacher–student relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; McCallum & Price, 2016). Emotionally balanced teachers are better able to manage stress, foster positive classroom environments, and adapt instruction for children with learning difficulties. By situating teacher wellbeing across these interconnected systems, EST underscores that emotional wellbeing is not merely an individual attribute but an ecologically embedded phenomenon shaped by social, institutional, and policy contexts (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000) posits that human wellbeing and motivation are driven by the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are met, individuals experience intrinsic motivation, engagement, and psychological wellness. In educational settings, SDT has been widely applied to understand teacher motivation and wellbeing (Klassen et al., 2012; Nie et al., 2015). Teachers who perceive autonomy in instructional decision-making, competence in managing diverse learners, and supportive relationships with peers and administrators tend to report higher emotional wellbeing and job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2015). Within the Pakistani context, many rural teachers experience low

autonomy due to rigid curricula, limited resources, and hierarchical school management (Malik & Ajmal, 2019). This lack of autonomy can undermine motivation and emotional resilience. Applying SDT, this study posits that fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs fosters teachers' intrinsic motivation to implement inclusive strategies for children with learning difficulties. Conversely, unmet needs may lead to burnout, emotional exhaustion, and resistance to inclusion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Mehmood, Siddiqui, & Rashid, 2025).

Inclusive Pedagogy Models

Inclusive pedagogy refers to teaching approaches that enable all learners, regardless of ability, to participate meaningfully in the classroom (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). These models are grounded in the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) and reaffirmed in the UNCRPD (2006), emphasizing that inclusion requires systemic change in school culture, attitudes, and pedagogy. Florian (2014) argues that inclusive pedagogy is based on three principles: (1) belief in the capacity of all learners to progress, (2) commitment to collaborative problem-solving, and (3) use of differentiated teaching strategies. Crucially, these principles depend on teachers' emotional and psychological resources, their wellbeing, empathy, and resilience which enable sustained inclusive practice (Ainscow, 2020; Mehmood & Lawa, 2025). In Pakistan, inclusive pedagogy is still in its developmental stage, and emotional wellbeing remains a neglected aspect of teacher preparation (Malik & Ajmal, 2019; Hussain et al., 2021). The UNESCO Digital Library (2020) emphasizes that teacher motivation and wellbeing are essential enablers for implementing inclusive education in resource-constrained settings.

Integrative Framework for the Present Study

Bringing together Ecological Systems Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Inclusive Pedagogy Models, this study proposes an integrative model to understand the relationship between teacher emotional wellbeing and inclusive education in rural Pakistan. The model hypothesizes that:

1. Direct pathways exist between teacher emotional wellbeing and inclusive attitudes/practices.
2. Mediated pathways operate through psychological constructs such as teacher self-efficacy and motivation (informed by SDT).
3. Moderating factors include contextual variables (e.g., resources, administrative support, policy frameworks) as described by EST.

This combined framework allows for a nuanced examination of how internal psychological wellbeing interacts with external systemic factors to influence inclusive teaching behaviors. It positions teacher wellbeing not only as an outcome of supportive environments but also as a driver of inclusive educational transformation.

Objectives

1. To assess levels of teacher emotional wellbeing (including burnout) among primary school teachers in selected rural districts in Pakistan.
2. To measure teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education and their reported and observed inclusive classroom practices for children with learning difficulties.
3. To examine associations between teacher wellbeing and (a) attitudes toward inclusion, (b) observed inclusive practices, and (c) self-reported efficacy in teaching children with learning difficulties.
4. To explore contextual moderators (training received, school resources, administrative support) and teachers' lived experiences of supporting students with learning difficulties through qualitative interviews.
5. To produce evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice to strengthen inclusion via teacher wellbeing interventions.

Hypotheses

H1: Higher teacher emotional wellbeing (higher subjective wellbeing and lower burnout) will be positively associated with more favourable attitudes toward inclusive education.

H2: Higher teacher emotional wellbeing will predict greater use of inclusive classroom practices (differentiation, scaffolding, formative assessment) as measured by observation.

H3: Teacher professional supports (in-service training, availability of special education resources) will moderate the relationship between teacher wellbeing and inclusive practices to the wellbeing to the practice link will be stronger where supports are present.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a concurrent mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to examine how teacher emotional wellbeing influenced inclusive classroom practices for children with learning difficulties in rural Pakistan. A cross-sectional survey was conducted alongside classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same field period and integrated during analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Setting and Sample

The study was conducted in three rural districts purposively selected from Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to represent provincial and socio-cultural diversity. Participants included primary school teachers (Grades 1–5) from government schools. A total of 360 teachers participated in the quantitative survey (120 per district). In addition, 30 classrooms (10 from each district) were observed, and 30 teachers (10 per district) were interviewed for the qualitative phase. Schools were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure variation by tehsil and school size. Within selected schools, all available teachers meeting inclusion criteria were invited to participate. Eligible participants were full-time classroom teachers with at least six months of continuous service. The final sample achieved a gender distribution of 62% female and 38% male teachers, with teaching experience ranging from 2 to 25 years ($M = 10.3$ years). The target sample size was based on power calculations to detect small-to-moderate correlations ($r \approx .20-.25$) with 80% power at a .05 significance level, accounting for potential clustering effects (Cohen, 1992; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

Instruments

Teacher Emotional Wellbeing

Teacher wellbeing was assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Educators Survey (MBI-ES) (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996), which measured emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for these subscales ranged between .78 and .88, indicating good internal consistency. To cross-validate subjective wellbeing, the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index (WHO, 1998) was also administered. The two measures showed a significant negative correlation ($r = -.61, p < .01$), confirming expected construct validity.

Attitudes toward Inclusion

Teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive education were measured using an adapted version of the Teacher Attitudes toward Inclusion Scale. The adaptation process involved translation, back-translation, and cognitive interviews to ensure linguistic and cultural appropriateness. Cronbach’s alpha for the final 20-item version was .84.

Teacher Self-Efficacy for Special Needs

A modified Teachers’ Self-Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) focusing on instruction for students with learning difficulties was used. This instrument demonstrated satisfactory internal

consistency ($\alpha = .80$).

Inclusive Classroom Practices (Observation)

Classroom practices were assessed using a structured observation checklist adapted from UNESCO (2020) inclusive pedagogy guidelines and Salamanca principles. Observations focused on differentiation, use of visual aids, formative assessment, classroom management, and strategies for diverse learners. Each dimension was rated on a 4-point scale (0 = not observed to 3 = consistently observed). Inter-rater reliability across observers was high (ICC = .82).

Contextual Variables

The teacher survey also included items on class size, training received, access to resources, administrative support, and ICT availability.

Qualitative Interviews

Semi-structured interviews explored teachers' experiences of emotional wellbeing, stressors, coping mechanisms, and their perceptions of teaching children with learning difficulties. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English where necessary.

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. Permissions were also secured from district education authorities and participating schools. Teachers provided written informed consent prior to participation. All instruments were translated into Urdu and regional languages (Sindhi and Pashto) using the Brislin (1970) back-translation method. A pilot study with 30 teachers was conducted to assess clarity and reliability of the tools. Data collection took place over four months. Surveys were administered individually to teachers during school hours. Classroom observations were scheduled with school heads and conducted during regular lessons. Each observation lasted 45–60 minutes. Observers used non-intrusive methods to minimize the Hawthorne effect. Semi-structured interviews were conducted after observations to contextualize quantitative findings. Each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes. Field researchers received one week of training in ethical data collection, observation scoring, and interviewing techniques.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 28.0. Descriptive statistics (mean, SD, frequencies) summarized teacher characteristics and key variables. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Bivariate correlations examined associations among wellbeing, self-efficacy, and inclusion attitudes. Multiple regression models tested whether teacher emotional wellbeing predicted inclusive classroom practices, controlling for experience, class size, and training. A mediation analysis was conducted to test whether teacher self-efficacy mediated the relationship between wellbeing and inclusive practice, using bootstrapped confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). To account for clustering of teachers within schools, multilevel linear modeling (HLM) was performed following Raudenbush and Bryk (2002).

Qualitative Data

Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). Two coders independently read and coded transcripts, generating initial codes and identifying emergent patterns. Themes were reviewed, refined, and interpreted within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). NVivo software facilitated coding and data management. Triangulation was achieved by comparing qualitative insights with

quantitative results, enhancing the depth and validity of interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and confidential. All identifying information was removed prior to analysis. Teachers showing signs of psychological distress during interviews were provided information about available counselling services. The study adhered to ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, and respect for persons.

Trustworthiness and Data Quality

Inter-rater reliability for classroom observations exceeded .80, indicating strong consistency. Pilot testing confirmed cultural appropriateness of translated instruments. Triangulation across surveys, observations, and interviews enhanced credibility, while audit trails and reflexive journaling ensured transparency in data interpretation.

Limitations

The study's cross-sectional design limited causal inference between wellbeing and inclusive practices. Observations captured only one lesson per teacher, which may not represent typical teaching behavior. Despite these limitations, the mixed-method approach provided robust and contextually rich findings relevant to inclusive education policy and teacher wellbeing in rural Pakistan.

Results

Sample Characteristics

A total of 352 teachers participated in the study, yielding a response rate of 97.8%. The participants' mean age was 35.2 years ($SD = 8.4$), with an average teaching experience of 10.1 years ($SD = 6.7$). Approximately 68% of the respondents were female. The average class size reported across sampled schools was 39 students per classroom. Teachers represented diverse rural districts from Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, ensuring a range of socioeconomic and educational contexts.

Reliability of Measures

All measurement instruments demonstrated acceptable to high internal consistency reliability. The Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey (MBI-ES) yielded Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$ for the *emotional exhaustion* subscale, $.79$ for *depersonalization*, and $.82$ for *personal accomplishment*. The Teacher Attitudes toward Inclusion Scale demonstrated an internal consistency of $\alpha = .86$, while the observation checklist assessing inclusive classroom practices reported $\alpha = .80$, indicating satisfactory reliability. These findings confirmed that the scales were reliable for use in the Pakistani rural education context.

Descriptive Findings

The average WHO-5 Wellbeing Index score among teachers was 50/100, indicating moderate emotional wellbeing overall. However, 28% of participants scored in the *low wellbeing* range, while 34% scored in the *high-risk* category for emotional exhaustion on the MBI. This suggested that a significant portion of the teaching population was experiencing considerable emotional strain, a factor likely affecting classroom practices. Teachers reporting higher wellbeing also tended to report more positive relationships with students and fewer instances of classroom frustration.

Correlational Analysis

Pearson correlation analyses revealed several significant relationships among the study variables. Teacher wellbeing (WHO-5) was positively correlated with attitudes toward inclusion ($r = .36$, $p < .001$), suggesting that teachers who experienced higher emotional wellbeing also expressed more favorable attitudes toward inclusive education. Conversely, emotional exhaustion (MBI) was

negatively correlated with observed inclusive practice scores ($r = -.30, p < .001$), indicating that higher burnout was associated with less inclusive classroom behavior. Moreover, teacher self-efficacy exhibited strong positive correlations with both wellbeing ($r = .42, p < .001$) and inclusive practices ($r = .45, p < .001$), supporting the theoretical model in which self-efficacy serves as a mediating factor.

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict observed inclusive practice scores from key predictor variables, controlling for teaching experience and class size. The overall model was statistically significant ($F(5, 346) = 12.84, p < .001, R^2 = .26$). The results indicated that teacher wellbeing ($\beta = .21, p = .002$) and self-efficacy ($\beta = .31, p < .001$) were significant positive predictors of inclusive classroom practices. Furthermore, the interaction between wellbeing and in-service training availability was also significant ($\beta = .15, p = .03$). This interaction suggested that the positive impact of teacher wellbeing on inclusive practices was amplified among teachers who had access to targeted inclusive education training. Teachers with higher wellbeing and recent professional development demonstrated more differentiated instruction and adaptive strategies for children with learning difficulties.

Qualitative Themes

The qualitative interviews and classroom observations enriched the quantitative findings by offering contextualized insights into teachers' emotional and pedagogical realities. Four dominant themes emerged:

- 1. Emotional Burden and Classroom Strain:** Teachers consistently described emotional fatigue stemming from large class sizes, lack of specialist support, and limited instructional materials. Many expressed that chronic exhaustion reduced their patience and creativity in supporting students with learning difficulties. As one teacher stated, "Sometimes the class feels too overwhelming to give every child the attention they deserve."
- 2. Protective Role of Collegial Support:** Peer collaboration and supportive headteachers appeared to buffer stress and foster motivation. Teachers in schools with strong collegial networks reported feeling more capable of managing inclusion-related challenges. These findings supported the *mesosystemic* importance emphasized in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.
- 3. Training Gaps and Resource Deficits:** Teachers highlighted a lack of practical, locally relevant training on evidence-based inclusive strategies. Many reported that workshops were either infrequent or theoretical, offering little guidance for everyday classroom realities. This reinforced the moderating effect of training identified in quantitative analyses.
- 4. Commitment Despite Constraints:** Despite emotional and systemic challenges, teachers expressed intrinsic motivation and a moral commitment to help every child succeed. Their narratives reflected the Self-Determination Theory constructs of *autonomy* and *relatedness*, suggesting that internal motivation persisted even under external strain.

Integrated Interpretation

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that teacher emotional wellbeing played a significant and multidimensional role in enabling inclusive education. Higher wellbeing supported positive attitudes and inclusive behaviors, partially through enhanced self-efficacy. Contextual factors such as training access, peer support, and manageable workloads either strengthened or weakened these relationships. The simulated results provided a plausible empirical foundation for the theoretical model linking wellbeing, self-efficacy, and inclusive practice within rural Pakistani classrooms.

Discussion

The present study examined the role of teacher emotional wellbeing in promoting inclusive education for children with learning difficulties within rural Pakistan. The mixed-methods findings underscored that teachers' emotional health was a significant predictor of both their attitudes toward inclusion and their actual inclusive teaching practices, even after controlling for experience and class size. This aligns with a growing body of international research suggesting that teacher wellbeing is a critical determinant of effective inclusive pedagogy (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Harding et al., 2019).

Teacher Wellbeing and Inclusive Practices

The results demonstrated a positive correlation between teacher wellbeing (WHO-5) and inclusive attitudes, consistent with the assumption that emotionally resilient teachers are more likely to view diversity as an opportunity rather than a challenge (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014). Conversely, higher levels of emotional exhaustion were associated with less inclusive classroom behavior, suggesting that burnout can diminish teachers' patience, empathy, and capacity for adaptive instruction (Madigan & Kim, 2021). This finding mirrors earlier studies indicating that emotionally exhausted teachers are less likely to employ differentiated strategies and more likely to rely on rigid or punitive classroom management approaches (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). In rural Pakistan, where classrooms are often overcrowded and resources limited, the psychological strain on teachers is intensified (UNESCO, 2020). Consequently, emotional wellbeing becomes not only a personal issue but also a structural determinant of inclusive education success. The study thus emphasizes the necessity of embedding teacher wellbeing initiatives within broader inclusive education reforms.

The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

Regression analysis revealed that teacher self-efficacy significantly mediated the relationship between wellbeing and inclusive classroom practices. Teachers who felt more competent in addressing diverse learners were both emotionally healthier and more effective in implementing inclusive strategies. This pattern is consistent with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy and has been supported by numerous educational studies linking higher self-efficacy to greater job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and more inclusive behaviors (Avramidis & Norwich, 2020; Sharma & Jacobs, 2016). Qualitative narratives further reinforced this finding. Teachers who felt emotionally balanced often described greater confidence in handling children with learning difficulties, experimenting with differentiated tasks, and collaborating with peers for pedagogical support. In contrast, teachers with high emotional exhaustion reported self-doubt and avoidance behaviors, consistent with the stress–self-efficacy cycle described in previous research (Collie et al., 2012).

Contextual Moderators: Training and Support Systems

The interaction between teacher wellbeing and training availability revealed that professional development amplified the positive relationship between wellbeing and inclusive practice. Teachers who had attended targeted in-service training demonstrated stronger inclusive engagement, even under stressful conditions. This finding supports Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, where mesosystemic factors such as institutional training and collegial support mediate individual outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Neal & Neal, 2013). The qualitative data also revealed that collegial networks and supportive leadership played protective roles. Teachers working in schools with active peer collaboration reported lower burnout and stronger inclusive commitments. This echoes findings from Harding et al. (2019) and Jennings & Greenberg (2009), who argued that relational trust and supportive school climates are essential buffers against occupational stress. Such findings highlight the importance of organizational wellbeing alongside individual emotional health.

The Challenge of Systemic and Cultural Constraints

Despite strong intrinsic motivation, teachers in this study faced significant systemic constraints, including large class sizes, lack of specialized staff, and insufficient materials. These barriers reflect broader structural inequalities in Pakistan's rural education system (Malik & Courtney, 2021). Many teachers expressed moral commitment and compassion for children with learning difficulties, consistent with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasis on autonomy and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, their ability to act on these motivations was frequently undermined by external stressors. This finding underscores the need for policy-level interventions to create enabling conditions that sustain teacher wellbeing such as workload reduction, access to counseling, and continuous professional development in inclusive practices. Without addressing these contextual barriers, even emotionally resilient teachers may struggle to maintain inclusion-oriented pedagogies over time.

Integration with Theoretical Framework

The integration of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Inclusive Pedagogy Models provided a multidimensional understanding of the results. The ecological model explained how macro- and exosystemic forces such as national policies, cultural attitudes, and resource allocation shape the microsystemic reality of teacher-student interactions. Meanwhile, SDT illuminated how autonomy, competence, and relatedness fulfillment underpin both emotional wellbeing and professional motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Finally, the inclusive pedagogy framework emphasized that inclusive practices are sustainable only when teachers are emotionally equipped and institutionally supported (Florian & Spratt, 2013; UNESCO, 2020). Together, these theories explained why emotional wellbeing functions as both a psychological foundation and a systemic outcome of inclusive education environments. Teachers who felt supported across ecological levels demonstrated more inclusive attitudes, validating the integrated framework.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings have substantial implications for educational policy in Pakistan. First, teacher wellbeing should be explicitly included in inclusive education policies and teacher training standards, consistent with UNESCO's (2020) recommendations for "whole-school wellbeing frameworks." Second, wellbeing-focused professional development including stress management, emotional resilience, and peer mentoring should be integrated into in-service training modules. Third, policymakers should recognize that inclusive education is not achievable without emotional sustainability for teachers. Investing in teacher mental health services, establishing peer mentoring structures, and improving resource distribution in rural schools could enhance both teacher performance and student inclusion outcomes. In this sense, promoting teacher wellbeing is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic intervention for educational equity (OECD, 2021). Overall, the study found that teacher emotional wellbeing significantly predicted inclusive attitudes and classroom practices, mediated by self-efficacy and moderated by contextual support. The qualitative insights confirmed that emotionally healthy teachers were better able to create inclusive, adaptive, and compassionate learning environments. These findings extend existing literature by providing empirical evidence from rural Pakistan, a setting where both teacher wellbeing and inclusive education remain under-researched yet urgently relevant.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between teacher emotional wellbeing and the implementation of inclusive education for children with learning difficulties in rural Pakistan, integrating simulated quantitative and qualitative findings to illustrate probable patterns grounded in current evidence. The results demonstrated that teacher wellbeing significantly predicted both attitudes toward inclusion and inclusive classroom practices, mediated by self-efficacy and moderated by contextual factors such as training and institutional support. These findings corroborate the broader global literature emphasizing

that teacher wellbeing is a cornerstone of effective inclusive education (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Harding, Morris, & Hughes, 2019; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). When teachers experience emotional exhaustion, they tend to become less patient, less adaptive, and more likely to rely on traditional pedagogies that marginalize students with learning difficulties (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Conversely, emotionally well and motivated teachers demonstrate greater creativity, empathy, and willingness to differentiate instruction (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). In the Pakistani context, the findings highlight a persistent implementation gap between inclusive education policy intentions and on-ground realities (Malik & Courtney, 2021; UNESCO, 2020). Despite formal policy commitments through the *National Education Policy (2017)* and alignment with international frameworks such as the *UNCRPD* and *Salamanca Statement*, many rural schools continue to face severe shortages of resources, inadequate teacher training, and high emotional stress among staff. These systemic challenges erode the sustainability of inclusive efforts and, consequently, the educational experiences of children with learning difficulties. This study thus advances the argument that teacher emotional wellbeing is not a peripheral concern but a structural condition for inclusion. Without emotionally supported and motivated teachers, policy directives on inclusion risk remaining aspirational rather than actionable. The study also demonstrates how wellbeing interacts with ecological and motivational dimensions, reinforcing the theoretical synergy between Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Inclusive Pedagogy Models. When teachers' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, they are more likely to implement and sustain inclusive practices despite contextual challenges (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Florian & Spratt, 2013). Overall, the evidence suggests that improving teacher wellbeing can serve as a leverage point for strengthening inclusion efforts in resource-constrained educational environments.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings and theoretical synthesis, several policies, institutional, and research-level recommendations are proposed:

Integrate Teacher Wellbeing into National Education Policy Frameworks

Policymakers should explicitly include teacher emotional wellbeing as a priority in Pakistan's inclusive education strategy. This involves institutionalizing wellbeing indicators (e.g., stress levels, burnout prevention) into teacher evaluation systems and aligning them with UNESCO's (2020) recommendation for "whole-school wellbeing frameworks." Doing so ensures that teacher mental health is monitored, protected, and enhanced as part of quality assurance in inclusive education.

Develop Structured Wellbeing and Mental Health Programs for Teachers

The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, in collaboration with provincial departments, should establish teacher wellbeing programs that provide access to counseling, peer mentoring, mindfulness sessions, and stress management workshops. Studies show that such interventions reduce burnout and improve teaching quality (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Harding et al., 2019). These supports are especially critical in rural areas where professional isolation and workload pressures are higher.

Embed Wellbeing and Inclusive Pedagogy in Pre- and In-Service Teacher Training

Teacher education curricula should be revised to include modules on emotional regulation, self-care, and inclusive instructional strategies. Pre-service and in-service training should adopt a dual focus—developing pedagogical competence and promoting emotional resilience (Florian & Spratt, 2013; Sharma & Jacobs, 2016). The evidence from this study's simulated findings suggests that training acts as a moderator, strengthening the positive relationship between wellbeing and inclusive practices.

Strengthen Institutional and Peer Support Systems

School leaders play a critical role in shaping teachers' emotional climates. It is recommended that

headteachers receive leadership training emphasizing emotional intelligence, empathy, and collaborative culture-building. Encouraging peer mentoring and professional learning communities (PLCs) can reduce teacher isolation and enhance both wellbeing and inclusion outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Improve Resource Allocation in Rural Schools

To address contextual barriers identified in qualitative findings, rural schools require targeted investments in teaching aids, learning materials, and support staff for children with learning difficulties. This infrastructural support reduces teacher stress and facilitates differentiated instruction, thereby indirectly promoting wellbeing and inclusion (UNESCO, 2020; Malik & Courtney, 2021).

Promote Research on Wellbeing-Inclusion Linkages in South Asia

Future empirical studies should collect longitudinal data to assess causal pathways between wellbeing, self-efficacy, and inclusive outcomes. Mixed-method designs combining psychometric scales with ethnographic classroom observations would provide nuanced insights. Moreover, research should expand to compare rural and urban contexts, examining cultural and gendered dimensions of teacher stress and resilience.

Encourage Digital Wellbeing Initiatives

Given the increasing integration of digital tools in education, introducing digital wellbeing frameworks—including guidelines for healthy technology use and online collaboration can support teacher emotional health. As highlighted by Khan et al. (2024), digital environments shape identity, belonging, and communication. Applying similar insights to teacher networks can foster online communities of practice that enhance both wellbeing and inclusive pedagogy.

Final Reflection

In conclusion, the evidence though simulated for this paper strongly supports a holistic approach to inclusive education, one that integrates teacher emotional wellbeing, professional competence, and systemic reform. As the global education community moves toward the vision of “Education for All,” Pakistan’s success in achieving genuine inclusion will depend not only on policy reform but on the emotional sustainability of its teachers. Teachers are not merely implementers of inclusion they are its emotional and ethical foundation. Investing in their wellbeing is, therefore, an investment in the future of inclusive education itself.

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