



Role of School Environment in Reducing Stigmatization of Students with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

The primary goal of the study was to examine the role of school environment in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities. This study used a descriptive survey design to meet its goals. The participants in this study are included all of the male and female teachers of special education schools at secondary level from the divisions of Multan, Bahawalpur, DG Khan and Sahiwal. The researcher employed the census sampling technique to choose the sample because the population was small. So, all the 144 teachers (80 male and 64 female) working in special education at secondary level were selected as a sample. Similarly, all the students of special education from the divisions of Multan, Bahawalpur, Dg khan and Sahiwal were included in the population. As the population of the students was large, so the researcher employed the stratified random sampling technique. Finally, 881 students (542 male and 339 female) of special education school at secondary level were selected in sample. Self- structured questionnaires comprising 25 items (for teachers) and 15 items (for students) were used to investigate the role of school environment in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities. One hundred and forty four questionnaires were provided to the teachers and 144 were returned. Similarly, eight hundred and eighty one questionnaires were provided to the students and 881 were returned. Using SPSS, the researcher analyzed the data of 144 teachers and 881 students using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Results revealed school environment has significant role in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities.

Introduction

In today's educational climate, educators are faced with a critical and challenging responsibility, combating the stigmatization of kids with disabilities. In order to ensure that all students receive an equal education, legislation and research both emphasize the need of educating kids with disabilities in the least restrictive environment possible (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004; Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act, 2008; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Educating kids with impairments in the least restrictive environment has also been shown to be helpful in recent research (Timberlake, 2014).

As a result of stigma, students are more likely to suffer from poorer disability prognosis, less likely to seek or continue treatment, less self-esteem, self-efficacy and overall wellbeing, and fewer prospects for both academic and professional success in the long run (Fellner, 2015). Schools have a duty to combat stigma by preventing it from happening in the first place, intervening when it does, or making adaptations in the classroom for kids who are already dealing with it (Dorsey et al., 2016).

Many teachers have difficulty implementing empirically-based interventions to enhance acceptance of children with impairments, in spite of the research to support such measures (Yu et al., 2016). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), students with impairments are increasingly enrolling in higher education, despite the difficulty in calculating exact admittance statistics and future estimates (Sniatecki et al., 2015).

In general, it is accepted that children and adolescents with disabilities face additional adversities and disadvantages as they grow up and are often excluded from age-appropriate activities (Hart et al., 2014). As a result, it has been suggested that interventions and practices aimed at improving resilience may be especially beneficial for these children, provided that their equal access and participation in them are ensured (Hart et al., 2014).

A person's response to adversity and the severity of the effects of risk factors can be altered by protective factors, which include both personal and environmental traits. Child features (such as intelligence, self-esteem, and social skills) and family characteristics (such as effective parenting, affectionate closeness with a parent) have been found to be protective variables in resilience research (e.g., positive experiences in school, positive relationships with peers (Masten, 2014).

Adolescents with vision impairments experience poorer self-esteem and are bullied more frequently in school than their sighted peers (Halder & Datta, 2012). Adolescents with visual impairments, like younger children, may experience high levels of loneliness (Jessup et al., 2017). Students with special educational needs in mainstream schools may be at danger of developing long-term socio-emotional issues if they don't receive adequate help from their teachers (Schwab, 2015).

Teachers and peers can have a positive impact on students' well-being by helping them create a feeling of belonging in the school setting and providing them with instrumental and emotional support (important elements of social support). Social assistance in inclusive environments may help students with special educational needs achieve the same degree of social inclusion as their peers, according to research (Tuersley-Dixon & Frederickson, 2016).

Negative attitudes and behaviors displayed by classmates can have long-term impacts on all

children. Peer rejection or avoidance of students with disabilities as well as potential physical and verbal hostility toward them should be considered bullying and dealt with accordingly, according to recent professional literature.

As a result, people with visual impairment may have a negative impact on their socio-emotional growth. When it comes to emotional and behavioral issues, children with visual impairments may be more vulnerable than their sighted peers (Harris & Lord, 2016). As a result, they may have more behavioral issues and less developed social skills than their sighted peers (Ozkubat & Ozdemir, 2015). Children and adolescents with visual impairments appear to have an increased incidence of emotional problems such as anxiety, fear, and/or depression. This finding comes from a comprehensive literature review (Augestad, 2017).

A peer-reviewed literature review on the effects of social support on children and young adults with visual impairments was not found, despite the fact that the importance of social support has been widely acknowledged (Douglas et al., 2019). This study aimed to study the role of School Environment in Reducing Stigmatization of Students with Disabilities. This study is also helpful for the educational leaders, managers and educational policy makers to know about the stigmatization of students with visual impairment. So the objectives of the research aim to:

1. To investigate the teachers' opinion about the role of school environment in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities.
2. To examine the students' opinion about the role of school environment in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities.
3. To ascertain the difference between the teachers' opinion regarding the role of school environment in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities on the base of demographics i.e. gender, qualification, teaching experience, locality.

Research Methodology

The study was aimed at investigating the role of school environment in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities in the divisions of Multan, Bahawalpur, DG Khan and Sahiwal. The study is descriptive in nature. Cross sectional survey design was used following quantitative approach.

All secondary school teachers of special education schools from the above-said divisions formed the population. Census Random Sampling technique was used for the teachers and stratified random sampling techniques was used for students. Researchers self-developed tools using Likert's Scale. To ensure validity of research tool, expert opinion was sought along with prior pilot study. Researchers used Reliability Coefficient to ensure reliability. Researchers visited special educations schools to collect data. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analysis.

Table 1: Sample Distribution of Teachers

Level Division	Number of school	Teachers		Total
		Male	Female	
Multan	6	26	22	48
Bahawalpur	4	17	15	32
DG Khan	4	19	14	33
Sahiwal	4	18	13	31

Total	18	80	64	144
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The above table shows that 144 teachers (80 male and 64 female) of special education from the divisions of Multan, Bahawalpur, Dg khan and Sahiwal were included in the population.

Table 2: Sample Distribution of Students

Level Division	Number of school	Students		Total
		Male	Female	
Multan	6	174	115	289
Bahawalpur	4	120	71	191
DG khan	4	130	73	203
Sahiwal	4	118	80	198
Total	18	542	339	881

Table 2 shows that 881 students (542 male and 339 female) of special education from the divisions of Multan, Bahawalpur, Dg khan and Sahiwal were included in the population.

Content validity of tool was ensured through available expert opinion. Internal reliability of the tool was calculated through Cronbach's Alpha. In this method, coefficient of correlation was obtained among the variables and factors and reliability of these factors is tested.

Table 3: Scale Reliability

Category	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Teachers	0.73	19
Students	0.72	15

Table 3 shows the reliability statistics of the scale. Chronbach's Alpha value is 0.73 for teachers' questionnaire and 0.72 for students' questionnaire which shows high reliability of the tools.

A written consent form was approved from ethical committee of university. After approval the researcher took permission from the heads of the schools for data collection.

Data Analysis

The descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to analyze the data.

Statement wise Analysis of Teachers' Opinions

This section presents descriptive analysis of teachers opinions

Table 4: Teachers' Attitude

Sr #	Statements	SA f(%)	A f(%)	UD f(%)	D f(%)	SD f(%)	M	SD
1	I call my students with full name.	74 (51.4)	63 (43.8)	4 (2.8)	1 (.7)	2 (1.4)	4.43	.71
2	I always talk with students politely.	79 (54.9)	61 (42.4)	1 (.7)	2 (1.4)	1 (.7)	4.49	.65
3	I never disrespect students due to disability.	73 (50.7)	62 (43.0)	6 (4.2)	1 (.7)	2 (1.4)	4.42	.67

4	I support students with disabilities in their studies.	86 (59.7)	54 (37.5)	1 (.7)	1 (.7)	2 (1.4)	4.54	.62
5	Students feel easy to interact with me.	55 (38.2)	81 (56.3)	4 (2.8)	1 (.7)	3 (2.0)	4.31	.61

Table 4 explains the results about teachers' attitude. Respondents strongly agreed (51.4%) and agreed (43.8%) that they call their students with full name with mean (4.43) & standard deviation (0.71) and strongly agreed (54.9%) and agreed (42.4%) that they always talk with students politely having mean (4.49) & standard deviation (0.65). This table also elaborates that they never disrespect students due to disability such as respondents strongly agreed (50.7%) and agreed (43.0%) having mean (4.42) & standard deviation (0.67) as well as strongly agreed (59.7%) and agreed (37.5%) that they support students with disabilities in their studies having mean (4.54) & standard deviation (0.62) and strongly agreed (38.2%) and agreed (56.3%) that students feel easy to interact with me having mean (4.31) & standard deviation (0.61).

Table 5: School Environment

Sr#	Statements	SA f(%)	A f(%)	UD f(%)	D f(%)	SD f(%)	M	SD
1	Supporting material for disable students is available in school.	103 (71.5)	27 (18.8)	11 (7.6)	2 (1.4)	1 (.7)	4.59	.75
2	Assistive technology is available in school for disable students.	88 (61.3)	46 (31.9)	5 (3.4)	3 (2.0)	2 (1.4)	4.54	.62
3	Separate washrooms for disable persons with all facilities are available in school.	115 (80.6)	22 (15.3)	3 (2.0)	2 (1.4)	1 (.7)	4.74	.56
4	Physical facilities are available in classrooms for disable persons.	112 (77.8)	22 (15.3)	7 (4.8)	1 (.7)	2 (1.4)	4.68	.66
5	Helping material i.e. wheelchair, hearing loops and seats are available for disable students.	102 (70.8)	35 (24.3)	2 (1.4)	4 (2.8)	1 (.7)	4.61	.71
6	Games for students are arranged by school management.	96 (66.7)	37 (25.7)	6 (4.2)	3 (2.0)	2 (1.4)	4.55	.73
7	Grounds are available in school with necessary Facilities for disables.	101 (70.1)	37 (25.8)	3 (2.0)	2 (1.4)	1 (.7)	4.65	.59

Table 5 explains the results about school environment. Respondents are agreed (71.5%) that supporting material for disable students is available in school with mean (M=4.59) & standard deviation (SD=0.75) and strongly agreed (61.3%) that assistive technology is available in school for disable students having M (4.54) & SD (0.62). This table also elaborates that separate washrooms for disable persons with all facilities are available in school such as respondents strongly agreed (80.6%) having M (4.74) & SD (0.56), strongly agreed (77.8%) that physical facilities are available in classrooms for disable persons having M (4.68) & SD (0.66), strongly agreed (70.8%) that helping material i.e. wheel chair, hearing loops and seats are available for

disable students having M (4.61) & SD (0.71), strongly agreed (66.7%) that games for students are arranged by school management having M (4.55) & SD (0.73) and agreed (70.1%) that grounds are available in school with necessary facilities for disables having (4.65) & SD (0.59).

Table 6: Instructional Strategies

Sr #	Statements	SA f(%)	A f(%)	UD f(%)	D f(%)	SD f(%)	M	SD
1	I use ICT in instruction which is helpful for disable students to understand complex topics.	104 (72.2)	32 (22.3)	4 (2.8)	3 (2.0)	1 (.7)	4.63	.67
2	I use appropriate method for teaching students with disabilities.	83 (57.6)	57 (39.6)	1 (.7)	2 (1.4)	1 (.7)	4.53	.60
3	Use of ICT is effective for performing different activities for disable students.	90 (62.5)	42 (29.2)	6 (4.2)	5 (3.5)	1 (.7)	4.49	.79
4	Use of ICT is helpful for mapping curriculum for disable students.	72 (50.0)	68 (46.6)	1 (.7)	2 (2.0)	1 (.7)	4.45	.60
5	ICT make my instruction more interesting for disable students.	69 (47.9)	52 (36.3)	10 (6.9)	8 (5.5)	5 (3.4)	4.22	.92
6	Use of ICT is useful to prepare question paper for assessment of visual impaired students.	62 (43.0)	66 (45.9)	10 (6.9)	4 (2.8)	2 (1.4)	4.30	.70
7	I make my instruction according to the disability of students.	81 (56.3)	51 (35.3)	6 (4.2)	4 (2.8)	2 (1.4)	4.44	.76

Table 6 explains the instructional strategies. Respondents strongly agreed (72.2%) that they use ICT in instruction which is helpful for disable students to understand complex topics with M (4.63) & SD (0.67) and strongly agreed (57.6%) that they use appropriate method for teaching students with disabilities having M (4.53) & SD (0.60). This table also elaborates that use of ICT is effective for performing different activities for disable students such as respondents strongly agreed (62.5%) having M (4.49) & SD (0.79), agreed (50.0%) that use of ICT is helpful for mapping curriculum for disable students having M (4.45) & SD (0.60), strongly agreed (47.9%) that ICT make my instruction more interesting for disable students having M (4.22) & SD (0.84), agreed (43.0%) that use of ICT is useful to prepare question paper for assessment of visual impaired students having (4.30) & SD (0.70) and agreed (56.3%) that they make their instruction according to the disability of students having (4.44) & SD (0.76).

Statement wise Analysis of Students’ Opinion

Table 7: Students’ opinions

Sr #	Statements	SA f(%)	A f(%)	UD f(%)	D f(%)	SD f(%)	M	SD
1	I feel easy in school.	413 (46.9)	374 (42.5)	51 (5.8)	24 (2.7)	19 (2.2)	4.29	.86
2	Helping material is available in school.	263 (29.9)	400 (45.4)	75 (8.5)	112 (12.7)	31 (3.5)	3.85	1.09
3	Teacher support me in my learning.	258 (29.3)	376 (42.7)	90 (10.2)	130 (14.8)	27 (3.1)	3.80	1.10
4	Teachers never degrade me.	293 (33.3)	379 (43.0)	81 (9.2)	108 (12.3)	20 (2.3)	3.92	1.05
5	Teachers call me with full name.	225 (25.5)	447 (50.7)	90 (10.2)	97 (11.0)	22 (2.5)	3.85	1.00
6	I feel respected myself in school.	310 (35.2)	375 (42.6)	87 (9.9)	89 (10.1)	20 (2.3)	3.98	1.02
7	Supporting material is available in school According to my disability.	284 (32.2)	370 (42.0)	129 (14.6)	90 (10.2)	8 (.9)	3.94	.97
8	Assistive technology is available in school.	301 (34.2)	388 (44.0)	80 (9.1)	92 (10.4)	20 (2.3)	3.97	1.03
9	I learn different skills in school which help me in professional life.	321 (36.4)	316 (35.9)	103 (11.7)	124 (14.1)	17 (1.9)	3.91	1.10
10	I feel respect in society after attending school.	310 (35.2)	384 (43.6)	80 (9.1)	90 (10.2)	17 (1.9)	3.99	1.01
11	I believe that I can play productive role in society after attending school.	335 (38.0)	382 (43.4)	75 (8.5)	77 (8.7)	12 (1.4)	4.07	.96
12	ICT is available in school.	305 (34.6)	360 (40.9)	103 (11.7)	91 (10.3)	22 (2.5)	3.94	1.04
13	I never feel hesitation in interaction with teachers.	347 (39.4)	356 (40.4)	79 (9.0)	95 (10.8)	4 (.5)	4.07	.97
14	Transport is available in school.	287 (32.6)	369 (41.9)	99 (11.2)	108 (12.3)	18 (2.0)	3.90	1.05
15	Washrooms of school are according to the need of disable students.	289 (32.8)	388 (44.0)	93 (10.6)	93 (10.6)	18 (2.0)	3.95	1.01

Table 7 explains students’ opinions. Respondents are strongly agreed (46.9%) that they feel easy in school with M (4.29) & SD (0.86) and agreed (45.4%) that helping material is available in school having M (3.85) & SD (1.09). This table also elaborates that respondents are agreed (42.7%) about teachers support them in their learning having M (3.80) & SD (1.10), agreed (43.0%) that teachers never degrade them having M (3.92) & SD (1.05), agreed (50.7%) that teachers call them with full name having M (3.85) & SD (1.00), agreed (42.6%) that they feel respect themselves in school having M(3.98) &SD (1.02), agreed (42.0%) that supporting material is available in school according to their disability having M (3.94) & SD (.97) and agreed (44.0%) that assistive technology is available in school having M (3.97) & SD (1.03).

The table explains the respondents are strongly agreed (36.4%) that they learn different skills in school which help in professional life with M (3.91) & SD (1.10) and agreed (43.6%) that they feel respect in society after attending school having M (3.99) & SD (1.01). This table also elaborates that they believe that they can play productive role in society after attending school such as respondents agreed (43.4%) having M (4.07) & SD (0.96), agreed (40.4%) that ICT is available in school having M (3.94) & SD (1.04), agreed (40.4%) that they never feel hesitation in interaction with teachers having M (4.07) & SD (.97), agreed (41.9%) that transport is available in school having M (3.90) & SD (1.05) and agreed (44.0%) that Washrooms of school are according to the need of disable students having M(3.95) & SD (1.01).

Comparison of Opinions

Independent samples t. test and ANOVA was applied to know the difference between the teachers' opinion based on demographics. Results were interpreted in below tables.

Table 8: Gender Wise Comparison of Teachers' Opinion regarding the Role of School Environment in Reducing Stigmatization of Students with Disabilities

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	DF	Sig
Male	80	126.2750	9.37945	.676	142	.500
Female	64	127.5625	13.42809			

Significance Level $P \leq .05$

The table shows that there is no significant difference (0.50) between the opinion of male and female regarding the role of school environment in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities. Standard deviation value difference (4.05) and t value (0.67) also supports the claim.

Table 9: Comparison of teachers' Opinions on the base of School Locality regarding the Role of School Environment in Reducing Stigmatization of Students with Disabilities

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	DF	Sig
Urban	88	127.1250	12.13318	.368	142	.714
Rural	56	126.4107	10.03952			

*Significance Level $**P \leq .05$*

The table shows that there is significant difference (0.71) between the opinion of Urban and rural schools teachers regarding role of school environment in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities. Standard deviation value difference (2.1) and t value difference (0.36) also supports the claim.

Table 10: Comparison among teachers' Opinions by Teaching Experience regarding the Role of School Environment in Reducing Stigmatization of Students with Disabilities

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4446.421	3	1482.140	14.904	.000
Within Groups	13922.217	140	99.444		
Total	18368.639	143			

The table indicates the difference between participants' opinions about role of school environment in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities. The significance value is 0(.00) which is less than 0.05 shows that there is statistically significant difference between participants' opinion by teaching experience. F value (14.90) also supports the claim.

Table 11: Comparison among teachers' Opinions by Age Groups regarding the Role of School Environment in Reducing Stigmatization of Students with Disabilities

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4838.194	3	1612.731	16.687	.000
Within Groups	13530.445	140	96.646		
Total	18368.639	143			

The table indicates the difference between participants' opinions regarding role of school environment in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities. The significance value is .000 which is less than 0.05 shows that there is statistically significant difference between participants' opinion of different age groups. F value (16.68) also supports the claim.

Discussion

The main purpose of the study is to examine the role of school environment in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities. School environment has a significant impact reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities. According to the findings of researchers to learn, one must be exposed to a variety of social and physical environments in the classroom (Obiero, 2018; Gross, 2016; Lewis, 2016) & Kozleski et al., 2011). In the case of students with special needs, their self-esteem, self-efficacy in learning, interpersonal relations, and involvement in school are likely to be affected by the school's social and physical environment. School regulations have been demonstrated to influence attitudes toward students with intellectual disability, making the institutional setting critical. Most of the prior studies in this area compared the effects of various inclusion strategies. People with intellectual disabilities who attend mainstream schools report feeling more stigmatized than those who attend special schools, according to several studies (Cooney et al. 2006).

Good social contact should be monitored and praised on a daily basis. Working with a student requires a high degree of empathy and understanding on the part of those involved. When it comes to encouraging students to participate and grow, teachers and parents can play a vital role. However, this help is often most effective when it comes in an indirect form. It is important for adults who know their pupils to be able to stand back from an activity while still offering support and developing its potential (Roe, 2008). Teachers and parents can help students with vision impairments come to terms with their disabilities (Landsberg, 2005). In order to ensure that their children feel accepted and included in their communities, parents are willing to make compromises in the academic field (Engelbrecht et al., 2005). Many kids with disabilities are bullied at a rate twice as high as their peers, but school staff are unable to intervene (Dunn, 2004). A helpful atmosphere for learning about one's self and one's peers can be provided by parents. As a result, they will have improved social skills and will be better equipped to participate in society (Roe, 2008).

Conclusion

Special needs children' overall development is influenced by their school environment. Having a student with a disability affects how effective a school's environment is. A person's academic and developmental experiences are profoundly affected by the experiences of stigmatization that they have had as a member of a particular social group. Schools have a direct impact on the unique pupils' feelings, creativity and socialization with the rest of society. From the data and discussion, it can be concluded that school environment have significant role in reducing stigmatization of students with disabilities.

Recommendations

The majority of teachers respond that they never disrespect students due to disability. It is recommended that students should be called politely by their teachers. Physical facilities should be provided in the school with special needs. It is highly recommended for the teachers to use ICT in their instructions and use appropriate method for teachings to students with disabilities. The Curriculum should be according to the need of disable students.

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