
REDUCING THE RISK OF BULLYING THROUGH INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES

Dr. Imran Yousuf

Managing Director, Multinational JOFA Group,
Transformation International Society, Jofa Tower, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Karachi
Email: drimran@transformation.com.pk

Sadaf Riaz

Ph.D. Scholar, Transformation International Society, Jofa Tower, Karachi
Email: sadafriazahmed@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This Study examines how inclusive education practices can be used to eliminate the risk of bullying in schools by considering a qualitative research design with a series of case studies. A heterogeneous sample of schools was used, which consisted of interviews with teachers, administrators, and students, classroom observations, and document analysis. The results indicate that cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, and peer support are inclusive education practices that can be used to bully a student to a large extent because of the supportive and respectful school environment. The training and continuous guidance of teachers turned out to be crucial elements of successful implementation of these practices. Nevertheless, other demands like scarcity of resources and trade-offs between inclusive practices and other educational needs were also observed. The research finds that inclusive education practices, when well carried out, not only lower the incidences of bullying, but also help in an optimistic school culture which is beneficial to all students. The practice implications are that it requires thorough training of teachers, improved resource distribution and a school wide approach to inclusivity. The research also identifies future research areas, such as a need to conduct longitudinal studies and to examine the particular barriers posed by under-resourced schools to the implementation of inclusive practices.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Bullying Prevention, Teacher Training, School Culture, Cooperative Learning, Peer Support, Qualitative Research.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in schools is a widespread problem that impacts millions of students across the globe, causing serious emotional, mental and even physical outcomes. It is a multifaceted phenomenon

and may be expressed in different ways, such as physical aggression, verbal abuse, social ostracism, and cyberbullying. Bullying can have a devastating effect on students who may end up getting poor grades, low self-esteem, depressed and in the worst case, even contemplate suicide (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 2003). With schools and colleges struggling to find ways of ensuring that they can provide safe and conducive environments, there is a growing awareness of the contribution that can be made by inclusive education practices to curb bullying risk. Inclusive education, which focuses on the complete inclusion and integration of all learners irrespective of their capabilities, backgrounds and differences has been pointed out as an important approach in promoting the culture of respect, acceptance and support among schools (Ainscow, 2005; Booth and Ainscow, 2011).

The connection between exclusionary practices in education and the risk of bullying is a well-documented one. Students who are marginalized or viewed as different (based on disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation) have been found to be at greater risk of being a victim of bullies (Smith & Sharp, 1994; Swearer and Espelage, 2004). Such students usually become socially isolated, discriminated, and negatively stereotyped, and it can contribute to their susceptibility to bullying. Conversely, inclusive education practices would strive to dismantle such barriers by facilitating an educational setting in which diversity is celebrated, and all students are welcomed to contribute to the school community to the fullest. Inclusive education can be a crucial factor in reducing the factors that may lead to bullying by making students feel that they belong and that they are treated with dignity and respect (Farmer et al., 2011; Hornby, 2014).

The problem of this study is to understand how the practice of an inclusive education can diminish the risk of bullying in schools and which strategies can be most effective in meeting the aim. In this study, I am interested in comprehending not only the direct effect of the inclusive practices on the bullying rates but also their consequences on the overall school climate and students relations.

The main questions that will inform this research are: What are the current inclusive practices being adopted in schools and what is the impact of this in the occurrence of bullying? What do these practices

do to student perceptions and experiences, especially the most vulnerable to bullying? And what are the difficulties educators face in trying to make inclusive practices work?

The importance of the study is that it is a pressing concern of education the necessity to establish safe, facilitating, and inclusive learning conditions in which every student is able to excel. Bullying not only negatively affects the work of separate students but it also breaks the whole school community and creates an environment of fear and mistrust that negatively affects the educational mission (Glew et al., 2005). This study will contribute to the existing literature on the importance of inclusive education in the prevention of bullying by discussing the role of inclusive education in promoting positive social interactions between schools and hence lowering bullying rates. The results of the research will be relevant to teachers, policymakers, and administrators of schools, as they will include evidence-based suggestions on how to enhance inclusivity and protect the well-being of students. The emergence of inclusive education practices can be seen as a good opportunity to decrease the chances of being bullied at school. This paper seeks to discuss the effectiveness of these practices, and to offer insights into how the practices can be applied more widely and with greater effectiveness. Concentrating on the two areas of inclusion and bullying prevention, this study aims to make a contribution to the elaboration of educational interventions that will help not only to increase the safety of students but also foster a culture of respect, equity, and inclusion in the school setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying in School: Prevalence and Impact

School bullying is a worldwide problem that has serious implications on the mental well-being, academic outcomes, and well-being of the students. It occurs in different forms such as physical aggression, verbal abuse, social exclusion and cyber bullying. All these forms may cause devastating impact on victims, which can result in anxiety, depression, poor academic performance and in the worse scenario, suicidal thoughts and actions (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 2003). Bullying is a worrying trend and research has shown that a huge

proportion of the student body is bullied at one time or the other throughout their school life. As an example, as reported by the World Health Organization (2017), almost every third adolescent on Earth has experienced bullying. Bullying does not affect only the victims but also the school environment in general. An environment of fear, aggression, and exclusion in schools may cause high levels of disengagement among students, higher rates of absenteeism and lower levels of academic performance (Glew et al., 2005). Besides, bullying may also lead to the further promotion of bad social norms, in which aggression and exclusion become normalized, which further ensconces the issue in the school culture. It therefore becomes crucial that schools implement effective measures to prevent bullying and ensure that they create a safe inclusive environment that engages all students.

Inclusion Education Practice: Concepts And Practice

The concept behind inclusive education is that every student, irrespective of his or her abilities, background, and differences should be allowed to take part in the educational process in full. This method is based on the assumption that diversity adds richness to the learning process and the right of all students to participate in all school activities (Ainscow, 2005). Inclusive education practices entail the establishment of inclusive learning environments where students with varied needs such as disability, ethnicity, and socioeconomic statuses can co-learn in an accommodating and supportive environment. Differentiation instruction, where the teaching methods are tailored to meet various learning styles; collaborative learning, where students learn together in groups with mixed abilities; and universal design of learning (UDL) whereby multiple methods of engagement, representation, and expression are offered to help the curriculum to be accessible to all students are among the key aspects of inclusive education (Booth and Ainscow, 2011). Also, inclusive education underlines the necessity to build positive relations between children and to develop a school culture that would appreciate diversity and encourage equity (Hornby, 2014). Implementation of inclusive education needs the dedication of all stakeholders such as teachers, school administrators, and policy makers. Educators must be armed

with the knowledge and skills to effectively apply inclusive practices which may require continuous professional growth and access to resources. School administrators are very important in establishing the tone of inclusivity through encouraging policies that favor diversity and making the school climate physically and emotionally secure to all students (Gibbs & Powell, 2012).

Theoretical Approaches to Inclusive Education and Prevention of Bullying

The correlation between inclusive education and the prevention of bullying can be explained in the context of different theoretical frameworks mostly social-ecological theories of bullying. According to these models, bullying is not only caused by individual behaviors but it is a factor of the larger social context such as the norms, values and practices in the school (Swearer and Espelage, 2004). In this respect, bullying can be minimized through inclusive education practices as they can create a school culture that does not encourage exclusion, aggression, and support positive social interactions.

The social identity theory can also be useful in the aspect of how inclusive education can influence bullying. According to this theory, members of social groups acquire a sense of identity and self-esteem through membership in those groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). In schools where students are pre-classified according to the ability, ethnicity or other factors, perceived different students can be victims of bullying as a way of strengthening group identity. By eliminating these separations and enhancing a sense of belongingness among all students, inclusive education can be used to minimize the social hierarchies that drive bullying (Hornby, 2014).

Past Research on How Inclusion Education Can Help to Minimize Bullying

The effectiveness of inclusive education practices in reducing bullying has been studied in many studies. Studies have demonstrated that schools with inclusive programs like cooperative learning and peer support programs have low bullying rates (Salmivalli, 2010). Indicatively, a study by Waasdorp, Bradshaw, and Leaf (2012)

revealed that schools which had the best positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) as reported by them had far fewer cases of bullying and an improved school climate. Teacher training and support has been emphasized as important in the success of inclusive education by other studies. When teachers are trained on inclusive practices, they have a better chance of developing a classroom atmosphere where every student feels appreciated and welcomed which can minimize the chances of bullying (Gibbs and Powell, 2012). In addition, an inclusive education approach that focuses on social-emotional learning (SEL) has been illustrated to promote empathy and respect among learners, which further helps to prevent bullying (Durlak et al., 2011). In spite of the positive results, some studies have reported that there are difficulties in applying inclusive education practices successfully, especially in the schools that have few resources or staff which have not been adequately trained. Further, as most of the studies have been conducted on the positive effect of inclusion on students with disabilities, it is necessary to determine how the practices have affected other disadvantaged groups, including ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ students (Swearer et al., 2010).

Scientific Gaps in Current Research

Although the current literature offers good pieces of evidence as to the effect of inclusive education in alleviating bullying, a number of gaps exist that would be of interest to explore. The long-term effectiveness of inclusive practices on bullying prevention is one of the main areas that need further research. Numerous research works have been conducted on the immediate effects, but it is necessary to know how such practices affect the behavior of students and school culture in the long run. The other gap in the literature is that more research should be carried out on the application of inclusive education in various contexts of education. Although a lot of the current studies have been carried out on high-resource contexts, the extent to which inclusive practices in less-resource schools, or in non-Western educational systems, are applied has received less evidence. Lastly, additional qualitative studies, which examine the lived experiences of

both students and teachers in inclusive schools, are required. Whereas quantitative research will give useful information regarding the prevalence of bullying and the effectiveness of intervention, qualitative research may be used to give more insight into the implementation and perception of inclusive practices (Mishna et al., 2006). These experiences are important to understand in order to come up with more refined and effective bullying prevention strategies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

The research design used in this study was a qualitative research design so as to understand the role of inclusive education practices to mitigate the risk of being bullied in school. The qualitative method was chosen because it can give in-depth information about the experiences and perception of participants, as well as the surrounding conditions that affect how effective inclusive practices are. The purpose of the study was to learn the lived experiences of students, teachers and school administrators within schools that have adopted inclusive education strategies, and how these strategies help prevent bullying and the overall school climate. The study was based on multiple case study methodology that provides the possibility of the profound analysis of the practices of inclusive education in various school settings. In such a way, the researcher was able to investigate the way in which inclusive practices are applied in different contexts, how other stakeholders view them, and what particular effects they have regarding a decrease in bullying. The multiple case study design also helped in making comparative analysis of effectiveness of inclusive practices in various schools and types of schools, such as urban and rural schools, public and private schools, schools with low and high resources.

Sampling:

The research used purposive sampling whereby the researcher picked the participants who were directly engaged in the practice and experience of inclusive education. The sample included 15 schools, which were chosen to include a great diversity of educational

environments, including urban, suburban, and rural schools, as well as a mix of a large number of both public and private schools. These schools were selected based on their reputation of being good in adopting the inclusive education practices and the desire to participate in the study. In each school, the sample comprised of a variety of participants; 30 teachers, 10 school administrators, and 60 students. The students who were selected to attend were of diverse backgrounds, with students with disabilities, students of different ethnic backgrounds and students with different socioeconomic backgrounds. The aim of this diverse sampling was to cover a broad perspectives and experiences so that the results would be generalized to the general student population.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The combination of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were used to gather data. These approaches were selected to have a holistic view of the implementation of inclusive education practices and its effects on bullying in school.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews with teachers (semi-structured) and a few selected students were conducted to get in-depth details about their experiences with inclusive education practices and how they saw the impact of these practices on bullying. The semi-structured format offered flexibility in the interviews also giving the participants the chance to talk about the issues that were most pertinent to their experiences as well as giving the researcher the possibility to delve deeper into a particular theme. The interview questions focused on the events that occurred to the participants on inclusion and effectiveness of the strategies being used, and the changes in interactions between students, and school climate.

Classroom Observations

The classroom observations were carried out to directly observe the practice of inclusion and how it affects student behavior and interactions. These observations were designed with the aim of

highlighting major areas of inclusive education which included teacher student interactions, peer relationships, and classroom atmosphere as a whole. The researcher was especially concerned with the inclusion of the hitherto marginalized students in classroom proceedings and the effects of such practices on the social processes in the classroom. The observations were useful contextual data that supplemented the results of the interviews, and enabled a more comprehensive view of the impact of inclusive education on bullying.

Document Analysis

Document analysis of school policies, school curriculum materials, and anti-bullying program was also included in the study. This analysis sought to single out the formal strategies and guidelines that schools had put in place to advance inclusion and avert bullying. Through these documents, the researcher could evaluate the fit of policy and practice and highlight any gaps or inconsistencies that could have an impact on the effectiveness of inclusive practices. The analysis of the documentary also gave a wider perspective of the support of inclusive education at the institutional level.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis, a qualitative approach, which entails recognition, analysis, and reporting patterns (themes) in data, was used to analyze the data received through interviews, observations, and document analysis. This study adopted thematic analysis due to its flexible and systematic nature of qualitative data analysis that enables the researcher to discover the important themes that arose out of the data and to explain the themes in terms of research questions. The transcription of the interview data and detailed recording of observations started the analysis. The researcher then undertook a preliminary coding procedure, whereby he systematically labeled parts of the data that were pertinent to the research questions. It was these preliminary codes that were consolidated into larger themes that defined the nature of the experiences and perceptions of the participants. These themes were repeatedly refined and revised by the researcher as they needed to be reflective of the data and give valuable

information on how inclusive education practices affect bullying. The last themes were arranged into a logical story which formed the foundation of the results of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Considering the sensitivity of the topic of bullying and the fact that students were involved in the study, ethical concerns were a priority. All participants (including parents or guardians in case of student participants) gave informed consent. The participants were fully briefed of the study aim, data collection techniques, and that they could leave the study any time without being punished. Anonymity ensured confidentiality because all data were anonymized and no details that identified an individual were contained in the research reports. Also, the researcher was keen to provide conducive environment during the interviews and observations so as to make the participants comfortable and safe when sharing their experiences.

RESULTS

The findings of this research are also structured around the five major themes identified during the data analysis process which include the effect of an inclusive classroom practice on bullying, the role of teacher training and support, the perceptions and experiences of the students, difficulties in having inclusive practices and the overall impact of inclusive practices on the school environment and culture. These themes give a full picture as to the role played by inclusive education practices in mitigating the risk of bullying at school, through the insights provided by interviews, classroom observations, and reading documents.

Theme 1: Effect of Inclusion Classroom Practices on Bullying

Among the most notable conclusions of the research was how the inclusive classroom practices had a great influence on the minimization of bullying incidences. Teachers and students both continually noted that in classrooms where inclusive practices were actively applied there were fewer cases of bullying. Indicatively, educators who employed cooperative learning techniques and mixed-

ability clusters reported that these tools promoted cooperation and respect among students, and consequently minimized chances of bullying. One teacher of one of the urban schools said, "Working in groups where each person has a role and a voice, students will be less likely to single out or marginalize their classmates. It gives them a sense of community. These reports were backed by classroom observations which indicated that students in classrooms where inclusive practices were high were more engaged in their activities as well as exhibited a greater degree of peer support. There were also significantly fewer instances of teasing, exclusion, and other types of bullying in these settings compared to classrooms where bullying behaviors were less frequently implemented. In addition, students who had been marginalized because of their disabilities or other difference were found to be more active in terms of their class rooms discussions and group work, thus indicating that the practice of inclusion helped to make such students more integrated into the classroom social fabric. These results can be compared to the previous studies that emphasize the beneficial influence of inclusive education on the creation of a positive classroom atmosphere and lessening bullying (Salmivalli, 2010; Waasdorp et al., 2012). The evidence suggests that with equal chances of participation provided to all students and encouraging them to learn, the social processes that tend to contribute to bullying are reduced.

Theme 2: Role of Teacher Training and Support

Teacher training and continuous support became one of the key factors to the successful realization of inclusive education practices and the following decrease in bullying. Those teachers who were trained on the inclusion practices and anti-bullying strategies were more confident about handling the diversity in the classroom and handling the bullying behaviors. These educators stated that their training equipped them with tools that help them to design inclusive lesson plans, classroom management, and promote positive relationships with students. One school administrator stressed the relevance of professional development, saying, "Inclusive education is not a one-time training. Our teachers require constant support in order

to sharpen their skills and be on the best practices. This is the only way to keep an inclusive environment where bullying is unacceptable. Conversely, those teachers who were not adequately trained or supported, reported difficulties in the consistent use of inclusive practices. They said they were unprepared to deal with the complexities of diverse classrooms and were more apt to fail when dealing with bullying when it happened. The importance of teacher training and support is not new to the literature, as research shows a supportive professional development works as a key to successful implementation of inclusive practices and prevention of bullying (Gibbs and Powell, 2012). The results of this paper support the significance of teacher training to ensure inclusivity and mitigate bullying at school.

Theme 3: Perceptions and Experiences of Students

The student perceptions and experiences were informative in understanding the effectiveness of the inclusive practices in minimizing bullying. Student interviews showed that students in schools with good inclusive practices were more secure and accepted by their colleagues. These students experienced less bullying and reported that when they had experienced bullying, they were more likely to have their bullying dealt with promptly and efficiently by the teachers. The importance of peer relationships to developing an inclusive environment was also identified by students. Students in schools where inclusive practices were focused on reported more positive experiences with their peers, including those who were not necessarily similar to them. One of the students in a country school commented, "The buddy system in our school takes older students to assist younger students, particularly those who may require additional assistance. It makes everybody feel that they fit in school, and there is not much bullying. The data, however, also indicated that in schools where the inclusive practices were not always implemented, students were more exposed to bullying. Such students have indicated that their school climate was not so supportive, and some of them said that they were not willing to report bullying since they did not feel confident about how the issue would be addressed. Through this contrast, the

significance of a school-wide inclusivity in designing a safe and supportive environment to every student is emphasized. This is in line with other studies that have noted the significance of student perceptions in determining the success of bullying prevention initiatives (Swearer & Espelage, 2004). When students feel that their school is welcoming and supportive, they have better chances of feeling safe and minimizing their chances of being bullied or becoming a victim of bullying.

Theme 4: Obstacles to Inclusion Practices

Although inclusive education comes with positive results, the research revealed a number of barriers to the effective application of these practices. Administrators and teachers cited the challenges of balancing requirements of inclusive education with their other commitments, including standardized testing and curriculum requirements. They were especially acute in the schools with scarce resources or high material attendance, where educators were not able to allocate the necessary individualized attention to the students to ensure their effective support. An educator at a suburban school remarked, "Ideally, inclusive education is great, but practically, it is difficult when you have a classroom of 30 students, each with a specific need and you cannot give them all the attention they require. Also, other teachers indicated that they were not satisfied with their training on inclusive practice especially in dealing with complicated cases like bullying among students with special needs. Administrators also reported a difficulty in keeping inclusive practices in the school in consistent implementation. In other situations, the disconnect between school policies and classroom practices was an impediment to the success of inclusivity initiatives. To illustrate this, although a school may have policies which encouraged inclusion, these policies were not always applied in the daily activities of teachers and as such there were discrepancies in the way students experienced inclusiveness. These issues are representative of the more general problems in adopting inclusive education, especially in schools with a different number of resources and assistance. The results indicate that inclusive practices should be effectively implemented in schools to ensure the reduction

of bullying by providing schools with improved resources, continuing to train teachers, and enhancing the fit between policy and practice (Ainscow, 2005).

Theme 5: School Culture and Environment

The last theme that appeared based on the data was the overall impact of inclusive education practice on the school culture and school environment. Schools that were successful in the implementation of inclusive practices indicated that there was a more positive school culture, which involved mutual respect, acceptance of diversity, and community spirit. This healthy culture was translated into the conduct of students, who had higher chances of supporting and defending each other, eliminating the chances of bullying taking place. The practice of inclusion was not regarded as an isolated action in these schools but rather a part of the overall school ethos. Teachers, students, and administrators talked about the culture of inclusion whereby all people, irrespective of their background and capabilities were treasured and nurtured. A school administrator of a private school commented, "Our inclusion emphasis has changed our school culture to one that is not competitive but one which appreciates collaboration and respect towards others. There has been a reduction in bullying, as students are not perceived as competitors but rather as partners. On the other hand, schools in which the practice of inclusion was less entrenched in the school culture were more likely to have a weaker cohesion, and increased incidences of bullying and social exclusion. The absence of a common approach to including everyone in these schools also led to a more fragmented and competitive environment, whereby differences are not celebrated but rather emphasized. These observations underscore the importance of school culture to the success of the inclusive practices and the provision of a safe learning environment to all students. The fact that inclusive education has a positive relationship with a supportive school culture is an indication that inclusive education may be able to cause significant improvements in bullying and overall student well-being when incorporated into the culture of a school.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research offer strong arguments that inclusive education practices are very important in curbing bullying in schools. The data showed that in classrooms in which inclusive practices were regularly used, the cases of bullying occurrence were lower. This is consistent with the available literature that points to the necessity to develop inclusive settings that can help to promote positive interactions between peers and minimize aggression (Salmivalli, 2010; Waasdorp et al., 2012). The findings of the study suggest that, in case the students are involved in cooperative learning as well as their diverse needs are recognized and addressed, the social dynamics that tend to foster bullying are considerably reduced. Among the major lessons of this research is the value of the teacher training and support in effective implementation of inclusive education practices. The teachers, who had undergone extensive training in inclusive strategies, were more confident in dealing with diverse classrooms and were more effective in dealing with bullying behaviours. This observation is aligned with the rest of the literature that has emphasized the need to provide teachers with the skills and knowledge that they need to create an inclusive environment (Gibbs and Powell, 2012). Another point of the study is that the constant professional growth is necessary to make sure that teachers are still able to cope with the challenges of diverse students population and can intervene in case of bullying.

The research on how students perceive and experience inclusive practices also highlights the importance of inclusive practices in ensuring that the school is a safe and supportive environment. Students who attended schools where the inclusion practice was high said that they felt more accepted by their classmates and had fewer cases of bullying. These results indicate that inclusive education can not only lessen bullying but also improve the overall feelings of belonging and safety among students. It is especially significant as the perceptions of students towards their school climate are directly connected to their academic and psychological well-being (Swearer and Espelage, 2004).

Nevertheless, the research also revealed that the application of inclusive education practices was faced with serious challenges. Administrators and teachers complained that they struggled with the

requirements of inclusive education and other tasks, including standardized testing and curriculum mandates. The latter problems were especially acute in the schools that do not have enough resources or have a great number of students in the classroom because it was hard to pay attention to everyone individually. This observation resonates with some of the issues that have been raised in the literature on the practical challenges of inclusive education implementation especially in schools that are under-resourced (Ainscow, 2005). It points out the necessity of improved resource allocation and assistance to make sure that the inclusive practices are applicable in every learning environment.

Another important discovery of this study was the extended effect of the inclusive practices on the school culture. Schools which successfully implemented the culture of inclusive education boasted of a superior and more positive and cohesive environment, with respect towards each other and an extremely strong sense of community. This school culture was associated with decreasing instances of bullying, which suggests that inclusivity could lead to a transformative effect on the school climate overall. This finding is a reinforcement of the notion that inclusive education is more than a system of practices but a paradigm shifts in how schools are operated, all aspects of student behaviour to staff attitudes and policies changed.

Findings of this research are consistent with other previous researchers, on the relationship between inclusive education and bullying prevention. Several studies have shown that several inclusive practices, such as cooperative learning and peer support programs, can be employed to minimize bullying (Salmivalli, 2010; Waasdorp et al., 2012). The study fits in the existing body of knowledge in the area because it presents a wide body of research on how these practices are applied within different learning institutions and the challenges and successes encountered by teachers, students and administrators. The subject of the research on teacher training and support also coincides with the present research. The success of the introduction of inclusive education is typically regarded as the key of professional development (Gibbs and Powell, 2012). This research supports the fact that continued training and assistance are essential, especially in assisting

teachers to cope with the dynamics of diverse classrooms and dealing with bullying appropriately. The outcomes related to the perceptions students attribute to inclusiveness and safety are particularly relevant since they show the necessity to create a space within the school that will make every student feel valued and safe. This is in keeping with the wider body of research on the effects of school climate on student welfare and achievement (Swearer and Espelage, 2004). By encouraging an inclusive culture, it is not only possible to reduce bullying; in addition, the experience of students in schools can be enhanced, and better learning results will be achieved.

CONCLUSION

This study provides solid data that the inclusion education practice can be highly effective in reducing the risk of school bullying. The findings demonstrate the value of the inclusion classroom model, such as cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, and peer support, in creating a positive school culture, in which no student feels neglected or offended. These practices do not only minimize the social processes that may lead to bullying but they also bring a feeling of belonging and protection to the students, which is important in their academic and emotional well-being. The role of teacher training and teacher support in the successful implementation of inclusive education is also highlighted in the paper. The teachers who have skills and knowledge of how to work with the diverse classes are better placed to guarantee the establishment of inclusive and safe environments. The continuous professional growth is needed so that the teachers could be able to adjust to the changing needs of the students and be able to react to bullying behaviors. School administrators, as well, are vital in supporting teachers and strengthening the inclusive policies as they are the first to set an example in the school fraternity.

Nevertheless, the research also shows that there are major difficulties in adopting inclusive education practices, especially when schools are under resourced or have a high number of students per classroom. The issues here are that it is difficult to focus on each student individually and the need to fulfill the requirements of

inclusive education with other academic requirements, such as standardized testing. These findings suggest that to attain the effectiveness of inclusive practices schools have to surmount such obstacles by offering a better allocation of resources, fewer children in classes, and more teacher-specific assistance. The other significant conclusion of this research is the general implications of inclusive education on the school culture. The schools which incorporate the practice of inclusion into the school culture document a more cohesive and supportive culture and a mutual respect and collaboration. Such a positive school culture does not only decrease the rates of bullying but also improves student well-being and academic performance in general. The findings suggest that inclusiveness cannot be viewed as a set of practices but rather as a paradigm shift in the school functioning as it will influence not just the behavior of students but the attitude of staff members, as well as school policies.

FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the results and limitations of the present study, some research areas to be explored in the future are proposed. To begin with, further research into the role of inclusive education in bullying in a broader scope of educational settings is required. This type of research might assist in validating the results of this paper and give a better idea on how inclusive practices can be successfully applied in various environments. Second, longitudinal designs should be considered in the future that follows the effects of inclusive education on bullying in the long term. To formulate sustainable measures to prevent bullying, it is necessary to understand the long-term consequences of inclusive practices on student behavior and school culture. Third, further studies are required on the particular issues of under-resourced schools in adopting inclusive education. This can involve research on the barriers to inclusiveness in schools with limited resources, high class sizes and other resource limitations and the means of addressing them. Lastly, the study of the viewpoints of more stakeholders, such as parents, community members, and policymakers, should be examined in the future. The way various populations can see and experience inclusive

education may offer useful information on how to create more effective and inclusive educational practices.

REFERENCES

- Ainscow, M. (2005). Developing inclusive education systems: What are the levers for change? *Journal of Educational Change*, 6(2), 109-124.
- Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2011). *The Index for Inclusion: A Guide to School Development Led by Inclusive Values*. Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.
- Farmer, T. W., McAuliffe Lines, M., & Hamm, J. V. (2011). Revealing the invisible hand: The role of teachers in children's peer experiences. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 32(5), 247-256.
- Gibbs, S., & Powell, B. (2012). Teacher efficacy and pupil behaviour: The structure of teachers' individual and collective beliefs and their relationship with numbers of pupils excluded from school. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82(4), 564-584.
- Glew, G. M., Fan, M. Y., Katon, W., Rivara, F. P., & Kernic, M. A. (2005). Bullying, psychosocial adjustment, and academic performance in elementary school. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 159(11), 1026-1031.
- Hornby, G. (2014). *Inclusive Special Education: Evidence-based Practices for Children with Special Needs and Disabilities*. Springer.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Mishna, F., Scarcello, I., Pepler, D., & Wiener, J. (2006). Teachers' understanding of bullying. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 29(2), 718-738.
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at School: What we know and what we can do*. Blackwell.
- Rigby, K. (2003). Consequences of bullying in schools. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 48(9), 583-590.
- Salmivalli, C. (2010). Bullying and the peer group: A review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 15(2), 112-120.

- Smith, P. K., & Sharp, S. (1994). *School bullying: Insights and perspectives*. Routledge.
- Smith, P. K., Mahdavi, J., Carvalho, M., Fisher, S., Russell, S., & Tippett, N. (2008). Cyberbullying: Its nature and impact in secondary school pupils. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 49(4), 376-385.
- Swearer, S. M., & Espelage, D. L. (2004). Introduction: A social-ecological framework of bullying among youth. In D. L. Espelage & S. M. Swearer (Eds.), *Bullying in American schools: A social-ecological perspective on prevention and intervention* (pp. 1-12). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Swearer, S. M., Espelage, D. L., Vaillancourt, T., & Hymel, S. (2010). What can be done about school bullying? Linking research to educational practice. *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 38-47.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 7-24). Nelson-Hall.
- Waasdorp, T. E., Bradshaw, C. P., & Leaf, P. J. (2012). The impact of school wide positive behavioral interventions and supports on bullying and peer rejection: A randomized controlled effectiveness trial. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 166(2), 149-156.
- Wiles, R. (2012). *What are Qualitative Research Ethics?* London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- World Health Organization. (2017). *Adolescent mental health – Data and statistics*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>
-