

Cultural Contexts and Methodological Rigor: Examining the Tensions in Qualitative Research Pedagogy for Special Education in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The research investigates how cultural norms clash with methodological guidelines for teaching qualitative research skills in special education in Pakistan. Since most of qualitative methodologies originated in Western culture, Pakistani researchers face serious hurdles when integrating them into their educational framework. The research involves studying the philosophical disagreements, moral concerns, and language barriers encountered during attempts to teach qualitative research methods at Pakistani special education institutions. Critical pedagogy, cultural competence, and social constructionism are the three theoretical frameworks used to analyse these tensions. The main issues related to Pakistan's special education programs, such as curriculum development, critical thinking ability building, and resource adjustment efforts, are highlighted in the analysis. Suggestions for pedagogical strategies and training approaches for Indigenous research methods are provided. In this way, innovative policies at the level of educational practice should be enforced to ensure harmony between international academic standards and local cultural traditions. This paper contributes to the debate in special education pedagogic research regarding research decolonization in developing countries.

Keywords: qualitative research, special education, Pakistan, cultural context, methodological rigour, pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research methods creates a sophisticated field in special education and a very fertile field in culturally diverse environments such as Pakistan. The academic community knows that qualitative research methods take into the picture the peculiarities of the life experiences of people with special needs, which is why effective teaching methodology becomes important (Nind & Lewthwaite, 2020). However, several barriers work against the adaptation process of foreign qualitative research frameworks to Pakistani educational settings. The evaluation necessary for these barriers is complete.

Research regarding special education today has proven to be essential as it can furnish contextualised knowledge about the experiences of living for people with disabilities, their families, and teachers (Trainor & Leko, 2014). These ethical principles from special education perfectly match up with qualitative research methods

that employ narratives phenomenology and grounded theory because they share individualised intervention approaches ([Brantlinger et al., 2005](#)). The research about the complexities regarding the teaching methodologies, especially in non-West environments, remains nascent.

Due to the diversity of economic class differences and cultures, and policies continue to transform ([Hameed & Manzoor, 2019](#)), Pakistan's educational sector faces different challenges. In Pakistan, the discipline of special education has continued to develop, but problems, including inadequate resources, societal prejudices and inadequate training programmes hamper the field ([Pasha, 2012](#)). Together, these factors create an environment where the proper place and necessary adaptation of qualitative research pedagogy must be defined.

This paper investigates how Pakistani special education programmes should address the methodological precision needs of qualitative research teaching against the local cultural and institutional realities. The primary research question is whether or not there is any way Pakistani special education programmes can bring international academic standards to bear against local cultural protocols for teaching qualitative research methodologies.

This study contributes to the decolonising educational research methodologies ([Tuhiwai Smith, 2021](#)). It offers insights that are useful for teacher educators in Pakistan. This study advances discussions on how to adapt teaching to meet the needs of students with disabilities in higher education settings ([Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016](#)).

Teachers of Pakistani special education programmes must educate students on qualitative research by introducing innovative ways to practice standard methodologies through dialogues between international research standards and cultural epistemological perspectives so that students can do rigorous cultural research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive research opportunities exist for academic researchers in areas with a convergence of qualitative research methodologies, special education theory, and cultural background. This review attempts to collate recent academic studies to show that teaching qualitative research poses difficulties for special education teaching in Pakistan.

Qualitative research in special education: Global perspectives

Since it provides rich knowledge of the lived experiences of people with disability, qualitative research has been found to have some value in special education fields worldwide ([Trainor & Leko, 2014](#)). Applying ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory approaches gives students specific value because these techniques offer another perspective to this (education) research area ([Brantlinger et al., 2005](#)). By employing these research methods, social scientists get an in-depth understanding of the world surrounding disabled communities, thereby disproving deficit-based understandings of disabled people and giving voice to the marginalised people ([Ferri et al., 2019](#)).

The value of qualitative methods for special education practice is multiple-dimensional. Such approaches enable studying complicated situations that cannot be quantified, such as disability identity building or inclusive classroom interactions ([Cosier & Ashby, 2016](#)). Qualitative methodologies help special education connect perfectly with the principles of person-centred planning because such research approaches use individual stories and environmental aspects ([Shogren et al., 2017](#)).

Although the practical benefits of allowing students to learn qualitative methods exist, it is not easy to teach them. [Nind and Lewthwaite \(2020\)](#) outline several challenges students experience in learning reflexivity, theoretical sensitivity and interpretive analysis skills. However, as such research training processes are typically focused on positivist paradigms ([Mertens, 2019](#)), the learning barriers become even more difficult. Qualitative inquiry has a subjective character that gives students a difficult time who hold objective methods associated with scientific rigour and, hence, the need for different perspectives on valid knowledge definitions ([Tracy, 2010](#)).

Special education landscape in Pakistan

Major developments in the country's approach towards special education have occurred since its inception in 1947 under international declarations and domestic policy of special education ([Pasha, 2012](#)). National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2002, has been implemented inconsistently as it introduced rights-based approaches

([Hameed & Manzoor, 2019](#)). National acknowledgement of the values of inclusive education is intensifying in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT); the Islamabad Capital Territory Rights of Persons with Disability ACT (2020) is serving the goals of the. There is a long way to go to implement it at the community level compared to the official policies ([Ahmad et al., 2022](#); [Kim & Park, 2020](#); [Rashad et al., 2023](#)).

The cultural beliefs about disability in Pakistan amalgamate religious values with socio-economic background and customary traditions (Fazil, 2015 #9; Waqar, 2025 #822). [Khurram et al. \(2022\)](#) put forth that disability prejudice can often be found in South Asian rural communities where such states of disability prejudice can still be found because of a continued lack of understanding about disability rights. Researchers need to respond to special education research and the delivery of education with sensitive responses because the cultural attitudes of Pakistan directly influence both.

Pedagogy of qualitative research in developing countries

Challenges and learning opportunities are created when qualitative research methods are employed in developing nations. Due to resource limitations, having the resources to access the requisite software and current research is challenging for teaching qualitative research ([Hsiung, 2016](#)). It prevents teaching contemporary data collection and analysis methods in institutions where digital resources are unavailable, mainly affecting rural, underfunded education facilities.

Developing nations' diverse social structures and cultural backgrounds make it the right location for qualitative research ([Chilisa, 2020](#)). It allows researchers to conceptualise new methodologies that attempt to rectify the Western-biased research approach ([Tuhiwai Smith, 2021](#)).

The scholarly debate focuses on the all-important point dealing with the challenge of adapting Western qualitative methodologies to non-Western situations. Decolonising research methodologies are, therefore, supported by experts in research who recommend methods of recognition of indigenous knowledge as well as epistemological systems ([Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014](#)). Based on the suggestions by [Shah and Lovat \(2014\)](#), incorporating the Islamic traditions of learning and indigenous narrative procedures in research methodologies in Pakistan can produce qualitative methodology sensitive to the context.

During the process, adaptation implementation involves multiple conflicts. Conflicts between academic standards and the cultural needs of campuses lead to difficulties in teaching and research practices for educators and researchers alike ([Crossley & Vulliamy, 2010](#)). It is special education that experiences the greatest strain because that is where Western interpretations of disability and intervention occur, and they typically set out the global agenda.

However, the literature demonstrates that teaching qualitative methods in special education programmes is also complex in Pakistan educational settings ([Muhammad, Safdar, & Saif, 2024](#); [Muhammad, Waqar, & Anis, 2024](#)). Based on an evaluation of local institutional elements and cultural and epistemological background, these must be adapted to Pakistani conditions to make the worldwide importance of qualitative methods for disability research. Resource limitations and the local cultural views of disability, among other things, serve as barriers to research and enable the development of research methods suitable for the present cultural views. In order to develop researchers with advanced abilities to produce such rigorous research from cultural frameworks in special education, future education in this field demands teaching approaches that address and provide possible resolution to these tensions.

Theoretical framework

Theoretical support for qualitative research education in Pakistani special education is strong because it integrates how knowledge is shaped with cultural texts and instruction practice. The framework combines three theoretical frameworks, including social constructionism and critical pedagogy with cultural competence.

Social constructionism argues that knowledge and reality are actively generated during social contact to formulate common meanings ([Berger & Luckmann, 1966](#)). [Creswell and Poth \(2018\)](#) found that qualitative research followed the same paradigm as this one, targeting personal experiences and contextualised understanding. Social constructionism based on the sociocultural factors within Pakistani special education explains how disability concepts become integrated into educational practices and research approaches. It looks

into how important it is to accept many realities and multiple ways of knowing while questioning Western monolithic thinking ([Chilisa, 2020](#)).

The educational framework proposed by [Freire \(1970\)](#) helps researchers find power imbalances in educational contexts and offers students transformative learning. At the viewpoint level of special education pedagogy research, this is a means of teaching educators how to develop students' critical consciousness and to look critically at the current stories while at the same time forming liberation-conscious approaches to research ([Kincheloe, 2008](#)). [Nazneen and Sultan \(2019\)](#) provide critical pedagogy in Pakistan as researchers a framework to evolve methodologies that confront system inequities and empower marginalised communities.

For cross-cultural research, professionals are expected to develop awareness, specific competencies, and cultural knowledge to carry out efficient cross-cultural research. This analysed framework is important in Pakistan because of its peculiar mix of cultural backgrounds that are in line with international academic practice. Academics must formulate scientific methods that augment the established local knowledge systems if the research methodology is adopted ([Liamputtong, 2020](#)). This framework creates a proper method for researchers to negotiate academic global standards with nationally distinctive approaches to shape a better understanding of special education fields.

The proposed theory is a complete framework for researchers to analyse complex (qualitative research training) issues in Pakistani special education settings. The educational method has to be dictated by the teaching methods which adopt the local cultures based on critical approaches and tough research methods.

Methodological Tensions in the Pakistani Context

There are several conflicts related to Pakistan's special education, which are of epistemological foundations of special education, ethical rules, and linguistic diversity. The cultural peculiarity of this environment implies the need to pay attention to multiple research practice dimensions to teach and implement qualitative methodologies.

Epistemological conflicts

Western qualitative research frameworks run the risk of colliding with fundamental native Pakistani perspective systems, and a basic conflict emerges. These locally rooted systems of collective understanding based on collective knowledge and understanding conflict with the belief systems from post-Enlightenment Western thought founded on empiricism and individualism ([Shah & Lovat, 2014](#)). These two overlapping competitive systems of understanding present significant obstacles to teaching qualitative research methods where the instructor has to manage Western academic criteria and methods that chime with local cultural understandings.

The current Western research paradigms that have, by default, become a common denominator to global academia cause epistemological erasure, as Connell ([2014](#)) described, by marginalizing or delegitimizing local knowledge systems. The obliteration in Pakistan is a problem because the country has a lot of traditional wisdom about understanding disabilities and special educational requirements. Ghaly ([2016](#)) indicates that Western-centric research methods fail to uncover Islamic beliefs about disabilities, which are supported by the community and spiritual care approach.

However, the shift of qualitative research from modernism to postmodernism creates dilemmas for Pakistani special education since it supports different truths associated with specific contexts. Even though the multicultural features of Pakistan are compatible with the postmodern research methods, while the traditional positivist research methods dominate Pakistani academia, they encounter problems.

Teaching students to handle numerous truths requires careful adjustment of the process. Teachers in regular education must be able to value diverse viewpoints as much as they can adhere to strictly research-oriented methods. However, teaching reflexivity in qualitative research is a difficult task since self-reflection is given the least priority in the traditional educational systems of the region ([Qureshi, 2018](#)).

Ethical considerations

The ethical principle of informed consent, central to Western research ethics, encounters complexities in Pakistan's predominantly collectivist society. Family-related decision-making processes, with the help of representatives like community leaders, are against the concept of individual autonomy in many Pakistani communities ([Fazil et al., 2015](#)). In the context of Pakistan's culture, traditional family decision-making norms

exist; therefore, in qualitative research with subjects who might embody dependence on their families, new consent approaches should be developed.

Students should be taught the research ethics principles and shown how the principles should be adapted to local cultural traditions when assessing them. According to local cultural norms, researchers must build consent protocols that respect community-based choices and protect individual rights ([Zaman & Nahar, 2011](#)).

In contrast to the research ethics requirement to keep the data confidential, peer-to-peer information sharing is expected in Pakistani society. Rural, ethnically Pakistani communities view communal information sharing as important, which conflicts with the organisational view of personal information. Because many people with disabilities have negative feelings, there is a greater need to keep their data private in these special education studies.

For students to make conflicting obligations, they need to have advanced knowledge of ethical frameworks and local community traditions. Teachers must provide methodologies to protect research participant privacy in such a way that respects cultural norms, such as community consent procedures or methods where stories are anonymously shared in groups of people ([Liamputtong, 2020](#)).

Language and communication barriers

Most of the difficulties in teaching and applying qualitative research approaches in Pakistan arise because more than 70 languages are spoken ([Rahman, 2011](#)). This is because there are no direct translations of many qualitative concepts and their terms in the local languages, and the researchers need to conduct very careful translation and adaptation in order for them to be understood. This is especially difficult for special education research, as it demands a detailed description of the experience.

Thus, it is necessary to develop strategies for bridging linguistic gaps responding to the teaching practice, i.e. to unite experts for glossary creation and to provide adequate metaphorical explanations for complex methodological terms. Some research methods provide knowledge from indigenous perspectives and adapt particular methodological language to fit distinct stretches of local environments. ([Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014](#))

Therefore, nonverbal communication methods are very important in Pakistani culture since Western analytic approaches often cannot interpret these meanings. Because special education research must work with diverse populations of students, the communication requirements of participants can span a wide spectrum, and it becomes essential to have strong abilities to read and understand nonverbal indicators.

The challenge is to develop students' capacity to decode and understand nonverbal cultural communications. The cultural sensitivity of teaching staff has to be improved concerning folk signs in education, as well as strict standards for collecting and studying data. For educators to study nonverbal behaviour, they should employ visual ethnographic methods with culturally specific coding protocols ([Pink, 2021](#)).

More general educational issues in postcolonial research settings are articulated through the conflicting methodological aspects of teaching qualitative research in Pakistani special education programmes. Such an approach in teaching to help researchers with these conflicts requires knowledge of the conflicted research dynamics of cross-cultural studies and the development of methodological techniques that are not only advanced but also grounded in methods. Resolving existing methodological tensions in Pakistan's special education sector advancement will result in the development of researchers that will produce ethical and robust qualitative research in a cultural context appropriate to the field.

Pedagogical Challenges and Strategies

The specialised educational problems in teaching qualitative research methodologies to special education students in Pakistan necessitate new teaching techniques. In this part, we investigate the existing difficulties and develop research-supported suggestions to improve the teaching efficiency of the qualitative research methods in this environment.

Curriculum design for qualitative research in special education

The main difficulty in developing the curriculum design appears to be in achieving the appropriate ratio between theoretical concepts and practical methods of qualitative research. On the one hand, education needs

theoretical foundations; on the other hand, it becomes necessary to use practical research methods when dealing with applied special educational settings. According to [Nind and Lewthwaite \(2018\)](#), a cyclic method of handling theoretical knowledge in practical projects may lead to successful qualitative teaching methods. Additional challenges for Pakistani research environments are its scarce resources and minimum access to field studies, making it hard to build this theoretical and practical stability.

[Hmelo-Silver \(2004\)](#) recommends that educators use problem-based learning by providing their students with real-world special education scenarios that will necessitate qualitative inquiry. It allows researchers to eliminate theory limitation barriers and develop the necessary skills for critical thinking in qualitative research. [Trainor and Leko \(2014\)](#) share that real research practice and advancement of field knowledge occur when students collaborate with local special education institutions through joint research initiatives.

The difficulty in conducting research in Pakistan is large due to the extensive use of Western cases in qualitative research literature. To make it relevant to the students, both relevant local research examples and case studies should be integrated by curriculum designers so that the content being shared is taken from the contemporary education system. This approach is based on culturally responsive pedagogy because culturally responsive pedagogy considers that educational content should reflect students' cultural perspectives ([Gay, 2018](#)).

Both local research journals and unpublished theses should be used to establish a database of Pakistani special education research cases for use by educators. Teachers can use this resource to produce methodological principles and review research design methodologies and ethical standards in familiar educational settings. Using local researchers and practitioners as guest speakers in their studies, the students learn practically what qualitative research applications are in Pakistani special education settings.

Developing critical thinking skills

Educators need to demonstrate reflexivity in educational contexts where teacher-led learning methods dominate. To this end, teachers need to experiment with changing their approach to pedagogy ([Berger, 2015](#)) in that teachers demonstrate to students how to study their research biases and personal role in these processes.

Journaling activities for reflection should be established for their research methods class throughout education practitioners' duration. These journals can serve as places for students to develop real-time knowledge about qualitative research procedures and their emotional responses to them. According to [Nind et al. \(2019\)](#), students develop important viewing skills of their work and that of their peers through structured feedback sessions following the research proposals and the fieldwork reports.

When conducting special education research in the Pakistani community, researchers need to explore the power dynamics operating between research participants and investigate very carefully. Students must be taught how to handle ethical and productive relationships in this field while doing qualitative research ([Liamputtong, 2020](#)).

Role-playing activities which reproduce research interviews with people with disabilities and their families enable students to develop skills in handling difficult power relations. Debriefing sessions is a necessary consideration in this regard in order to analyse both methodological and ethical aspects after such exercises. Researchers need to evaluate real-world cases that demonstrate ethical challenges during the special education research process to inquire about learning more effectively ([Mertens, 2019](#)).

Technology and resource limitations

As many Pakistani institutions lack access to advanced qualitative data analysis software, the barrier to introducing contemporary research method instruction in many institutions is great. Even though it is not mandatory for qualitative research, most international academic communities require some experience using these analysis tools ([Paulus et al., 2017](#)).

To solve this problem, educators must teach students the basic principles of qualitative data analysis using open-source or free alternative software. Students can learn methods of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis by having the capabilities of QDA Miner Lite and TAMS Analyzer without the cost of being forced to buy a licence for expensive software. Manual coding methods do not rely on specialised software, so this is the reason why students can master analytical skills through this ([Saldaña, 2021](#)).

The available resources are small, so a new creative way to manage and analyse the research data is required. [Gale et al. \(2013\)](#) consider that educational staff should train students to perform thematic analysis using the standard spreadsheet applications through the framework method. This approach enables students to gain insights into analytical methods without depending on expensive software programs.

Peer auditing methodologies and group coding sessions... can foster a community of practice associated with the researchers and can be used to maximise student resource utilisation ([Richards & Hemphill, 2018](#)). This includes partnership analysis methods appropriate to cultures with an emphasis on collectivism due to bolstering the research quality by combining methodology expertise and trust-building methods.

An integrated solution is needed for teaching qualitative research in Pakistani special education programmes through novel curriculum patterns, critical thinking assistance and creative adaptation of technological barriers. The presented strategies allow educators to train their students to perform rigorous cultural research in special education to advance knowledge in Pakistani special education and other related fields.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Infusing qualitative research pedagogy into special education in Pakistan has important implications for educational practice and policymaking. This research study goes beyond teaching methodology in research and reaches Pakistan's educational structures, encouraging teachers' development to improve cover provisions for special education.

Recommendations for teacher educators

A culturally responsive pedagogy and specifically a culturally responsive research methods instruction must be implemented compulsorily according to teacher education standards. This approach necessitates a fundamental shift from traditional, Western-centric pedagogical models towards more inclusive, context-sensitive educational practices ([Gay, 2018](#)). It is, therefore, incumbent upon teacher educators to develop educational programmes by officially embracing all traditional knowledge systems, regional belief systems and cultural approaches towards disability in education.

Thus, culturally sensitive teaching methods must also be imperative in professional development programmes for research methods instructors. The training sessions should teach to draw Pakistani examples of combining local examples within studies, adding storytelling traditions to qualitative research (Khawaja, 2022 #240; Farooq, 2023 #294), and also teach Western research ethics modification by Pakistani societal expectations. According to [Nazneen and Sultan \(2019\)](#), culturally rooted research methods ensure student involvement and create an investigation that benefits and affects the local circumstances.

Because special education requires trained capacity to execute, developing native research methodologies in special education is an urgent requirement. Special education researchers must get beyond method adaptation from Western approaches to pioneering original qualitative methods congruent with Pakistani cultural values. While working with their students, teacher educators must encourage innovative research methods based on Pakistan's traditional knowledge ([Chilisa, 2020](#)).

If educational institutions are ready to enhance indigenous research methodologies, they should form research alliances with indigenous communities and engage with local disability rights organisations. A professional network with commitments to culturally appropriate solutions for special education research will be created by giving mentorships between new researchers and experienced practitioners of indigenous methodologies ([Wilson, 2008](#)).

Policy considerations for higher education institutions

To achieve qualitative methods throughout special education programmes from undergraduate to graduate levels, the educational sector of Pakistan needs to work. It goes beyond several research methods courses; the programme must seamlessly incorporate qualitative inquiry ([Trainor & Leko, 2014](#)). Educational institutions should be made to implement policies that make it mandatory for them to provide training in minimum qualitative research methods and special education context application courses before discharging their students.

Through policies, the special education department and social sciences faculties should work jointly to pool their expertise in qualitative research methods. Interdisciplinary partnerships improve teaching content and present other perspectives of qualitative research methods ([Mertens, 2019](#)).

The focus of the resources of higher education policies should build capacity and qualify faculty members to fill the research expertise gap in the special education departments. A possible solution is the establishment of funding mechanisms that allow faculty to attend international qualitative methodology conferences and workshops and develop exchange programmes with international universities that opt for the practice of high-level qualitative research ([Nind et al., 2019](#)).

Based on this, programmes should set up rewards in order to motivate local researchers to undertake and publish qualitative research studies. Establishing research funds for qualitative investigation in Pakistani special education and setting up specialised journals on qualitative investigation in Pakistani environments can be among the possible policy initiatives.

Pedagogical and policy-level intervention efforts will have to be conducted together to overcome the barriers to teaching qualitative research to students in Pakistani special education programmes. In Pakistan, culturally appropriate teaching strategies and training of indigenous researchers in using the indigenous research method and supportive administrative policies will create researchers to conduct special education research and contribute to increasing local and international knowledge on the phenomenon of education.

CONCLUSION

This paper underscores that it is essential to modify qualitative research procedures specifically for Pakistan's unique educational limitations while handling Pakistan's special education sector. The research illustrates why it is essential to create culturally specific teaching strategies through its handling of epistemological challenges as well as ethical and linguistic issues. The authors recommend implementing indigenous knowledge systems together with local narratives into qualitative research training protocols to develop research approaches that match Pakistan's cultural spectrum. Through their integration students develop essential critical thinking skills as well as reflexivity competency which enables them to execute detailed inquiries of their local research contexts.

The study shows that solving these obstacles needs multiple strategies consisting of revised curricula and training programmes and governmental policies to address them. Efforts to make improvements call for using local research examples and implementing free data analytics solutions along with building research partnerships that bring together professionals from education and social science departments. Support from funding institutions and education-based professional development initiatives will enable the linking between international academic norms and real-world practices. These initiatives seek to provide academic strength to researchers so they can generate research of significance that enhances understanding and special education practice while contributing to global knowledge from a culturally grounded perspective.

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