

The Evolving Role of Teachers and Mentors in Inclusive Education: From Facilitators to Champions of Diversity and Sustainability in Line with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality)

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Received: 16-01-2026

Revised: 31-01-2026

Accepted: 14-02-2026

Published: 01-03-2026

ABSTRACT

This data-informed research is rooted in the United Nations 2030 Agenda exploring pathways for transformational change amongst educators from passive academic completers to resilient equity-upholding advocates of diversity, informed by Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) SDG4: Quality Education & SDG5 Gender Equality. Settings Pakistan 4 administrative clusters: Lahore, Rawalpindi/Islamabad, Faisalabad and Narowal N = 500 (quantitative psychometric data) n = 48 (qualitative reflections) Mixed-methods convergent parallel design Multiple linear regression analyses indicated Administrative Support Frameworks were the strongest positive predictor of inclusive instructional self-efficacy ($\beta = .412, p < .001$), while the other architecture-top-down compliance pressures put upon departments caused a corresponding drastic drop ($\beta = .345, p < .001$). In tech-induced fatigued cohorts, analysis of variance (ANOVA) metrics indicated that this reach peaked strongly within urban metropolitan areas currently undergoing uncoordinated smart-education rollouts — while semi-urban and rural tracts were isolated by deficits scaffolding physical accessibility and the adoption of assistive technology. Also, independent-samples t-tests indicated that staffing volatility through short-term contract models (i.e., School Teaching Interns) resulted in higher rates of professional isolation ($M = 4.25$) than permanent faculty, which jeopardized long-term mentoring continuity. Furthermore, rigid EMI structures triggered strong classroom language anxiety and depleted corresponding equity-oriented instructional confidence ($\beta = -.188, p < .001$). Qualitative thematic analysis confirmed these findings, illustrating how administrative "groupthink" reproduces policy-practice gap widening in an insular manner. This dissertation suggests employing permanent civil service recruitment to stabilise the workforce, improving structural barriers through integrated multilingual translanguaging with instructional scaffolding, targeting capital funding for physical and digital accessibility, and institutionalising continuous locally-based Teacher Support Programmes (TSPs) in order to fulfil a genuine vision of pedagogical equity.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, SDG 4, SDG 5, Teacher Support Programs, Instructional Self-Efficacy, Tech-Fatigue, Psycholinguistic Anxiety*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Modern world-wide teaching and learning are experiencing a relevant paradigm shift; definitively leaving behind passive models of traditional knowledge transfer into the high active, equity-promoting models of education as advocacy. Traditionally, the classroom instructor was treated as a facilitator focused on mechanically delivering a standardized curriculum. But, in the aftermath of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, classroom teaching and ongoing mentoring has been fully reconceptualised as fundamental vehicles for profound systemic cross-generational social transition. In particular, this study situates ongoing validated classroom teaching and administrative practices of contemporary classroom implementation in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) that prescribes inclusive, equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all as well as Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) requiring full gender equality and eradication of patriarchal structural systems.

When classroom leadership shifts away from the enforcement of a politically neutral curriculum, and becomes an identity-affirming, psychologically safe, student-centered mechanism that goes beyond short-term cognitive or academic benchmarks. It radically transforms latent models of psychosocial, cognitive and cultural development. In contexts characterized by extreme diversity, socio-economic stratification and traditions of education the teacher, their mode of speech and pedagogical choices represent either an historical compulsion to exclusion or a counter-narrative that necessarily empowers and normalizes the oppressed. Recent scholarship underscores the importance of implementing such an identity-affirming and safeguarding learning environment by way of a school-wide initiative that supports classroom behaviors as safe havens for students so they feel respected and protected (Mehmood, Rehman et al., 2025).

In addition, this pedagogical shift occurs amidst a non-institutional void wherein it is distinctly entwined with the psychological aspects of language acquisition and cognition through culture. Since English still is the world best global lingua franca—a gatekeeper for socio-economic mobility in Global South causal linkages exist between learners' mental and cognitive health which become interconnected with negotiation of language/curriculum at classroom ecosystem level (Mehmood, Jamal et al., 2025). Similarly, the extent to which indigenous traditions and cultural identities are adapted within early and K-12 education influences a wide range of cognitive growth for young learners (Mehmood et al., 2025; Goraya et al., 2030). In summary, the transition of modern educator from classroom manager in a passive role to active leader and proponent for diversity in practice ought to best tracked at the intersection where leadership meets WITH structural equity AND digital adoption AS WELL AS psychological safety.

Problem Statement

More than a decade after the global and national commitment to inclusive education, there is still something of an aspiration gap between policy on one hand and classroom realities on the other. For years, systematic injustice has impeded the learning outcomes of marginalized, neurodivergent (Collett et al., 2023), socio-economically disadvantaged and female students due to rigid culturally homogenized curricula; learner-centered education can help mitigate these barriers (Mehmood, Bano et.al. These adversities add to poor accessibility and ICT infrastructure for children with disabilities (Mehmood, Qamar-u-Zaman et al., 2025; Rehman et al., 2026), patriarchal social cultural norms of the society, unstable enrolment policies (Masood et al., 2025) and teacher burnout due lack of support system/resources.

Research Aim

This study aims to explore, define and synthesize the changing operational definitions of teachers' and mentors' roles in public and private educational systems as they evolve from basic curriculum facilitators to proactive, strategic champions of diversity, intersectional equity, and sustainable development on a large scale.

Research Objectives

Here are objectives of the study:

1. To evaluate how ready educators are to implement inclusive pedagogical frameworks.
2. To identify the structural, resource, and gender challenges teachers face under SDG 4 and SDG 5.
3. To design decentralized institutional strategies and support programs that reduce teacher burnout.

Research Questions

1. How do modern teachers change from neutral facilitators into active champions of classroom diversity
2. What systemic, pedagogical, infrastructural, and socio-cultural barriers block the integration of SDG 4 and SDG 5 parameters
3. How do staffing volatility and digital infrastructure divides impact teacher burnout, self-efficacy, and student mentorship?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global education has rapidly moved from simple knowledge transmission models to more adaptive, learner-centred and equity-focused pedagogies. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a strong symbol of this transformation and in particular SDG 4 Quality Education and: Gender Equality which ensure access to inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all learners. Today's educational discourse recognises that teaching is not only about curriculum content, but about identity affirmation (self-esteem), social inclusion (he or she feels included with peers like him/her) and equitable participation as part of a diverse population of learners. However, despite the ambitious policy commitments and international agreement promoting inclusion at a systems wide level there is still an enormous gulf between what can be promised by educational policies (global arbitrary lists outlining the various components necessary for equitable education) versus how learning experiences are actually realised there is generally accepted to exist a significant gap between classroom realities such as Horn et al., 2025.

Higher education's policy statements often espouse the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), while failing to address the systemic issues that continue to drive vulnerable groups of students out. We know that socio-economically disadvantaged learners, students who are neurodivergent (ND) and children with disabilities (CWDs), linguistic minorities have to negotiate oppressive systemic barriers that keep them out of education in a cumulative sense, or under-perform when they enter the system. The policy-practice gap indicates the need for structural change at the university level in order to realise the legislative promises of educational reform (Biesta, 2025).

The greatest challenge for inclusive education is probably that it is guided by a curriculum that is too uniform and rigid. Local cultural contexts, psycholinguistic abilities, cognitive ability or the development of learning styles are not taken into account in traditional teaching models. Linguistic anxiety and cognitive overload are thus amplified particularly in vulnerable learners and those with low self-efficacy (Mehmood et al., 2025). Educational and Affective Systems Theory Research shows that marginalised and Neurodivergent students are further marginalised by educational systems built for conformity, not flexibility. It calls for curricula to acknowledge diverse cognitive and socio-cultural backgrounds, while strengthening learner agency and belonging (Srivastava & Hopwood 2025).

Another language barrier really adds to inequities in education . Understanding the dominant languages means access to education and jobs as more and more people live in a globalised world. However, the students from marginalised linguistic backgrounds have low confidence, disengaged in academic learning and psycholinguistic stress while getting education through unfamiliar language of instruction (Mehmood et al., 2025). Research shows that language anxiety remains one of the most powerful, least visible barriers to academic success especially for minority and non-native speakers (Kyriacou 2025). Hence, effective inclusive educational settings necessitate communicators to remain flexible while ensuring identity affirmation, culturally relevant language instruction based on a framework that supports cognitive development.

Another major obstacle is the vast gap in physical and technological infrastructure. Digital technologies can improve learning opportunities and availabilities, but many public schools, especially in the less developed parts of the world, still face challenges such as the lack of infrastructure, poor internet connectivity, an indeterminate number of technological resources available for teaching students with disabilities in classrooms (generally only tangible devices such as laptops or tablets), and lack of access to assistive technology . These challenges impact children with disabilities more negatively because they need adaptive technologies and accessible learning environments so that they can fully participate in education (Mehmood, Qamar-u-Zaman et al., 2025; Rehman et al., 2026). This “digital diversity divide” only exacerbates systemic inequities and erases progress towards equitable educational outcomes. There is no one technology that will bring inclusion (UNESCO, 2024). But there must be sustained investment in the potential to develop teacher training that includes these elements, as well as universal design principles and adaptive learning infrastructures.

Gender inequality is another continuing challenge to inclusive education. Historically, conservative socio-cultural practices and entrenched patriarchal norms have been detrimental to the educational engagement, psychosocial well-being and future employment prospects of female students, particularly in resource-scarce settings. Research shows that the gendered nature of the structural barriers often intersect with poverty, disability and cultural marginalisation resulting in cumulative disempowerment for female learners (Unterhalter & North 2025). Mentorship programmes are needed to address academic and socio-cultural barriers to educational equity and effective implementation of gender-sensitive institutional support mechanisms remains to be realised. Hence, the need for deliberate mentoring programs for sustained progress on all these aspects. Research suggests that strategic mentoring can improve retention in education and reduce the risks of marginalisation for disadvantaged female students in restrictive educational settings (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2024).

Another added factor to educational inequity is institutional instability. Short-term, contract-staffing arrangements such as STI (School Teaching Intern) programmes are being used increasingly by a number of education systems and risk undermining sustain in teaching, mentorship and educational leadership. These precarious employment arrangements undermine institutional stability, hamper long term education planning and displace the supportive teacher-pupil relationships on which learner success is based (Masood

et al., 2025). Globalisation and effective inclusive education require stable, professionalised teaching workforces capable of building long-term relationships with diverse learners.

And that makes it an even tougher fight for teachers themselves. Today's educators are being asked to be social change agents, champions of inclusion, mentors for growth, helpers in the implementation of technology. But these expectations are often put on the backs of badly paid, underprepared teachers with little professional development or administrative support and no specialised materials. Teachers, therefore, face heavy workloads, emotional fatigue and burnout (Rehman et al., 2026). Existing and recent research continues to show that high levels of administrative burdens, lack of support from institutions, and poor working conditions continue to restrict teachers' capacity to create supportive inclusive learning environments (Mehmood & Parveen 2024; Darling-Hammond & Podolsky 2024).

Teacher burnout has particularly dire consequences for marginalised learners who often require additional emotional academic and psychosocial support. The emotional toll on teachers of managing linguistically, culturally and cognitively diverse classrooms is high (Kyriacou, 2025). They do not construct strategic frameworks to support teachers in balancing the rigour of instruction with the compassion needed for inclusive practice. Then, teacher well-being has to be understood not only as a matter of recruitment and retention but – especially in low-income contexts – as an existential condition for sustainable education.

There is a growing body of research that advocates the use of whole Teacher Support Programmes (TSPs) and peer-mentoring models to address these issues. Formal support systems available to teaching professionals can play a significant role in teacher efficacy, reducing professional anxiety and increasing the pedagogical capacity of inclusive classrooms (Mehmood & Parveen, 2025). The most important factor in long-term pedagogical innovation might be whether schools introduce peer-to-peer learning and emotional support through professional learning communities that work. Teachers want to share problems of practice with other professionals (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2024). But sustainable inclusion requires transformational leadership styles which empower teachers rather than compliance management models (Biesta, 2025).

Finally, real educational inclusion must be based on change in systems. Inclusive education is about more than policies and number of enrolment. Importantly, it demands culturally relevant curricula, equitable access to technology and gender-bias sensitive services, and proper infrastructure stability over time. The importance of social justice, diversity and sustainability in education, offers educational establishments the opportunity to change the focus from symbolic commitments to real change. If education systems are to fulfil the aspirations of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and provide all learners with an equal chance for a productive future – irrespective of background or ability – achieving this is no mean feat.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter articulates the framework and method used in exploring the role of educators as agents to advance diversity, equity and inclusion within a social justice context in support of SDGs 4 & 5. We used a mixed-methods convergent parallel design, which integrated the findings from quantitative surveys and qualitative semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data regarding teacher workload, work life stress across various teaching environments (onsite vs online), technology overload and psycholinguistic challenges were paired with in-depth qualitative analysis of educators lived experience during the pandemic along with institutional barriers to successful implementation. The two data sets were analyzed independently, but drawn together through interpretation to form a triangulated understanding of the policy-practice gap (or lack thereof), linguistic anxiety, infrastructural deficiencies and systemic factors which influence instructional self-efficacy as well mentorship/supervision practices and inclusive educational practice.

Geographic Scope and Targeted Clusters

In order to acquire a complete cross-sectional view of the educational ecosystem, the geographic scope of this research was intentionally diversified, focusing on four regions with diverse social-economic structures and cultural context, institutional arrangements, as well as development of local digital infrastructure:

Lahore: As a very large mega city and provincial capital this cluster aids details in regards to the extent of public-private school networks, early adopter functioning integrated academic transformation initiatives, and caseload smart learning environments from the metro classroom to enable best practice working models across ultra competitive high density urban clusters.

Rawalpindi / Islamabad: This cluster of twin-cities embodies a more complex and mixed interplay of federal institutional landscapes, private-public partnerships, and distinctive socio-cultural contexts. Where urban centers blend into the conservative semi-urban fringes, highly visible gendered structural challenges and institutional coordination issues coexist in a continuum of development settings.

Faisalabad: A major industrial region, this part of the country offers crucial data about socio-economic divides and access to education. It enables the new commercial and industrial analysis of student retention, resource allocation, and professional welfare with regards to heavy workload for educators.

Narowal: This group not only helps document challenges faced in the infrastructural and digital infrastructure, as well as availability of assistive technology gaps but it is also critical to provide context regarding strong socio-cultural practices that impede educational access for female students and CWDs in this predominantly rural/semi-urban border district.

Population and Sampling Techniques

The target study population includes regular basic and secondary school teachers, special education teachers, school principals and district/cluster educational administrators within the public and semi-private sectors from the four selected-pool clusters (ghettos). Representativeness was achieved in the sampling by using two different strategies for the two phases of quantitative and qualitative data.

In the quantitative phase, a stratified random sampling technique was utilized to recruit a total sample size of $N = 500$ educators in all regions ($n = 125$ per cluster). Sampling strata were structured by institution type (Mainstream Elementary Schools vs. Government Special Education Centers) and gender in order to achieve a balanced evaluation of gendered structural dynamics and administration workloads on the basis of gender. The -size of this sample provides appropriate statistical power to evaluate the associations among job stressors, technology-related workloads, and instructional self-efficacy across various regions.

Qualitatively, purposive sampling (4 clusters $\times$ 12 participants = $n = 48$ semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted) was then employed to select the key influencers. This purposive cohort was selectively drawn from 16 head teachers/administrators to capture the institutional management lens, 16 regular classroom teachers who contend with active inclusive integration and 16 special education specialists. This selective sampling ensures that the qualitative narratives are from seasoned stakeholders who can articulate their experiences with top-down departmental pressures, collective decision-making dynamics, and the emotional labor of diversity promotion.

Data Collection Instruments

There were four instruments used to collect data, each one capturing both the statistical and narrative components of the overall study: piloted before being applied across the clusters targeted during either phase.

Quantitative Instruments

The quantitative component included two main standardized psychometric measures:

Sixty-three items on 5-point Likert-scale score were derived from comprehensive versions of indices to test the teachers' perceived confidence level on UDL expression, linguistic anxiety and tech-induced fatigue from smart educational tools as © The Inclusive Instructional Self-Efficacy and Work load Scale(IISEWS).

The Organizational and Departmental Stress Index (ODSI): This index takes a different approach, measuring how often these systemic stressors occur (e.g., top-down departmental compliance demands that come with imposed “extra non-teaching duties”, financial burdens in a life in academia, as well as the professional isolation of stemming change from volatile short-term contract interventions e.g.

Qualitative Instruments

Qualitative field tools: flexible open-ended protocols

Semi-Structured Interview Guides: Teachers and headies (head-teachers) were scientifically questioned on the emotional labor of assisting kids through socio-cultural/language anxiety, practical issue of insufficient resources, as well as institutional "groupthink" among rose in leadership teams.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Protocols: Guided towards identifying followed by documenting locally-improvised curriculum adaptations and assessing community norms representations on the ethical and cultural perspectives related to social inclusion of children with special needs.

Data Collection Procedures

Both the Punjab School Education Department and Special Education Directorates granted administrative approval prior to data collection. Surveys and interviews were carried out over six months in Lahore, Rawalpindi/Islamabad, Faisalabad and Narowal. Quantitative information was collected in the form of digital and printed questionnaires, while qualitative interviews that involved audio-recordings were carried out with consent-based measures taken up at private places.

Data Analysis Framework

The datasets concurrently were separately processed through specialized analytical software packages and then thematically integrated in final format.

Quantitative Analysis

Data were processed in SPSS v.28 A summary of descriptive statistics for demographic characteristics, organizational and technology-related fatigue. Independent-samples t-tests and ANOVA were used to test for gender differences across geographic clusters. We used multiple linear regression models to examine

the associations between workload, staff stability and administrative support with perceptions of educators' capacity for diversity and inclusive practices.

Qualitative Analysis

All qualitative data were transcribed, validated and analysed thematically using NVivo v.14. The analysis was then conducted according to Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic framework. To start, transcripts were given to the researchers for reading in order to become immersed in data before generating systematic open codes. These codes were combined into higher-order, analytical themes that correspond directly with the principal aims of the study: infrastructural policy-practice gap, Psycholinguistic consequences of language barriers and organizational distress of inconsistent contracts, as well as embedded Teacher Support Programme (TSP) initiatives.

Methodological Integration and Triangulation

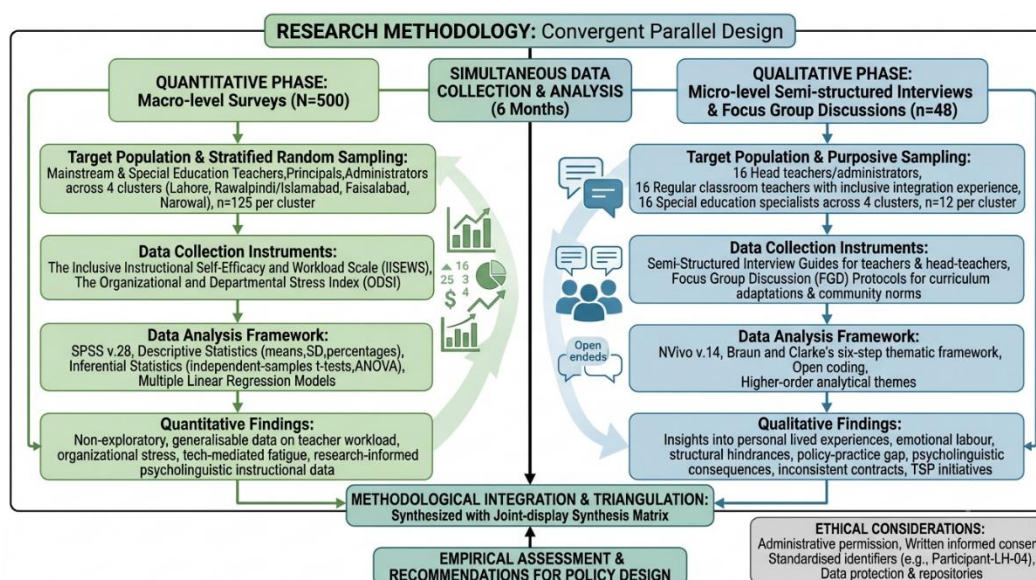
Integration of the quantitative and qualitative datasets at the final interpretation stage is synthesized using a joint-display synthesis matrix. A descriptive, narrative reporting of systemic barriers and emotional exhaustion is then triangulated directly against statistical correlations for teacher burnout, workload stress, and digital exclusion. Qualitative descriptions of substandard hardware maintenance and the absence of assistive technology in areas such as Narowal and Faisalabad contextualize high statistical scores on the tech-fatigue index. Triangulation is imperative to ascertain validity, reduce mono-method biases, and ensure that the final recommendations for policy design are empirically based on both quantifiable institutional trends as well as the lived experience of practitioners in the field.

METHODOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS MATRIX

The matrix below outlines how the structural components of this methodology are operationalized across the targeted clusters to address the primary objectives of the dissertation.

Cluster Zone	Primary Socio-Economic & Structural Profile	Quantitative Sample (N=500)	Qualitative Sample (n=48)	Dominant Methodological Focus & Triangulation Variables
Lahore	High-density urban metropolitan capital; advanced smart classrooms; active digital platforms.	n = 125 Mainstream & Special educators.	n = 12 Teachers, Heads, and Specialists.	Triangulating high AI-driven workloads and tech-fatigue scales against narrative accounts of professional isolation.
Rawalpindi / Islamabad	Twin-city administrative hub; mixed urban-fringe populations; public-private alliances.	n = 125 Mainstream & Special educators.	n = 12 Teachers, Heads, and Specialists.	Assessing the alignment of SDG 4 and SDG 5 metrics against institutional "groupthink" scales in policy planning.
Faisalabad	Major industrial and commercial center; severe urban socio-	n = 125 Mainstream & Special educators.	n = 12 Teachers, Heads, and Specialists.	Evaluating how administrative stress and extra non-teaching duties predict overall

	economic gaps; high class stratification.			instructional self-efficacy scores.
Narowal	Predominantly rural and semi-urban border tract; severe infrastructure deficits; conservative norms.	n = 125 Mainstream & Special educators.	n = 12 Teachers, Heads, and Specialists.	Documenting the physical and digital access barriers for CWDs; mapping localized curriculum adjustments against language anxiety.



This diagram depicts a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design for the analysis of educators' operating profiles. Conceptually, the study uses \$N = 500\$ educators sampled from four non-overlapping clusters selected via stratified random sampling and standardized indices to operationalise relevant variables (e.g. workload, organizational stress). In qualitative terms, \$n = 48\$ purposive sampling reports key stakeholder narratives through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Two datasets log transcriptions at the same time for separate analyses, after which they are synthesized to complement each other in a joint-display synthesis matrix. The methodological triangulation places quantitative trends against qualitative experiences grounding the data, strengthening the validity of the data that is used to design actionable policies.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

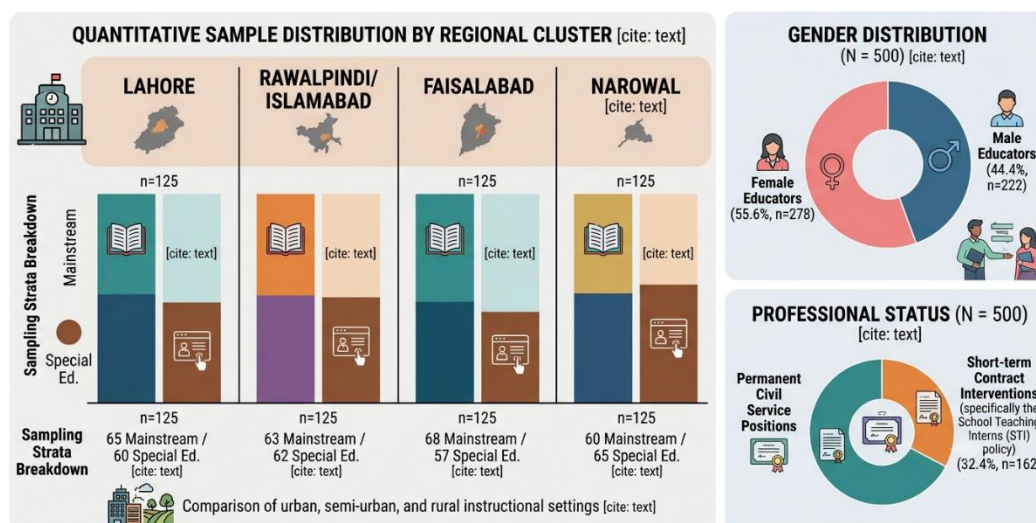
This chapter introduces findings from a mixed-methods research study in Lahore, Rawalpindi/Islamabad, Faisalabad and Narowal. Quantitative data (\$N = 500\$) evaluate workload, stress and self-efficacy; qualitative data (\$n = 48\$) capture the perspectives of educators with respect to their experiences and challenges. Using a mixed-methods synthesis, the two datasets are integrated to determine policy-practice gaps in inclusive education.

Quantitative Findings

Demographic and Operational Profiling

The quantitative sample (N = 500) was distributed equally across the four geographic clusters (n = 125 per cluster) to provide an empirical basis for comparing urban, semi-urban, and rural instructional settings.

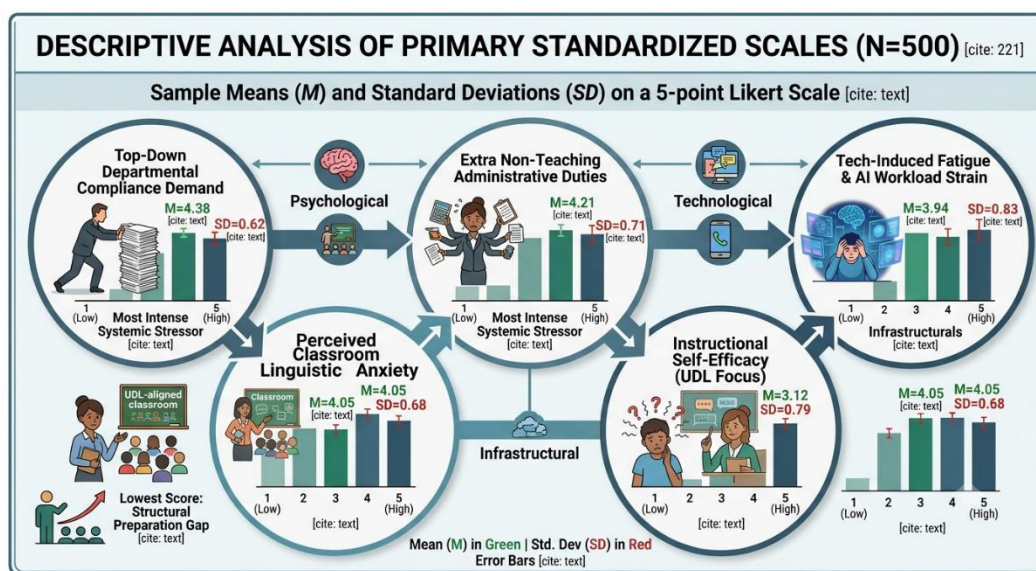
DEMOGRAPHIC AND OPERATIONAL PROFILING OF QUANTITATIVE SAMPLE (N = 500) [cite: text]



The sample consisted of 278 female educators (55.6%) and 222 male educators (44.4%), capturing the gendered operational dynamics that influence career retention and systemic mentorship under SDG 5 parameters. In terms of professional status, 32.4% (n = 162) of the respondents were operating under short-term contract interventions, specifically the School Teaching Interns (STI) policy, while 67.6% (n = 338) held permanent civil service positions.

Descriptive Analysis of Primary Standardized Scales

Data from the *Inclusive Instructional Self-Efficacy and Workload Scale* (IISEWS) and the *Organizational and Departmental Stress Index* (ODSI) were aggregated to calculate sample means (M) and standard deviations (SD) across core operational dimensions on a 5-point Likert scale.

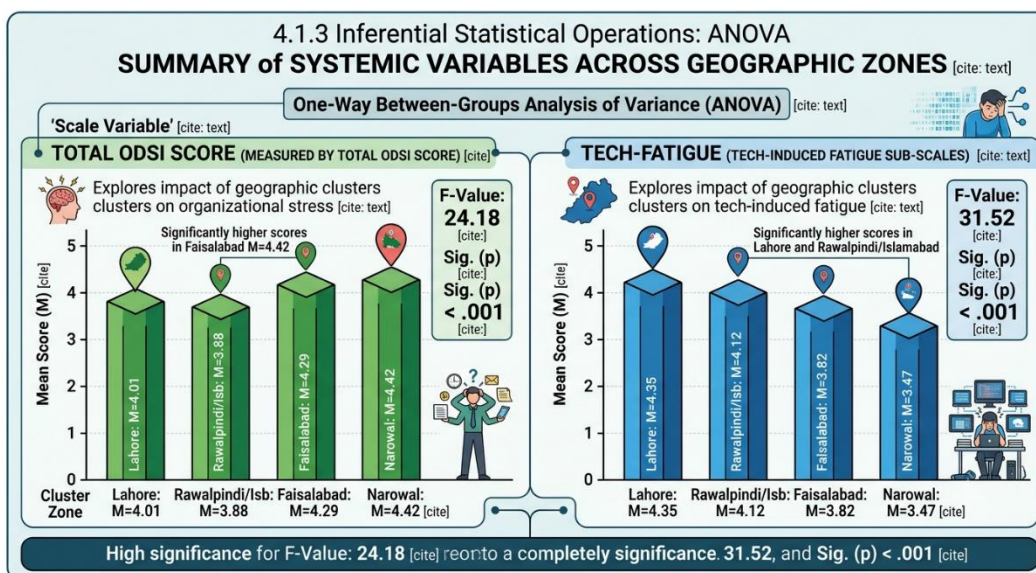


The descriptive data indicate that top-down departmental compliance demands and extra non-teaching administrative duties are the most intense systemic stressors reported by educators. Conversely, self-efficacy regarding the deployment of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) frameworks scored the lowest, pointing to a distinct structural preparation gap.

Inferential Statistical Operations

Comparative Cross-Cluster Analysis (ANOVA)

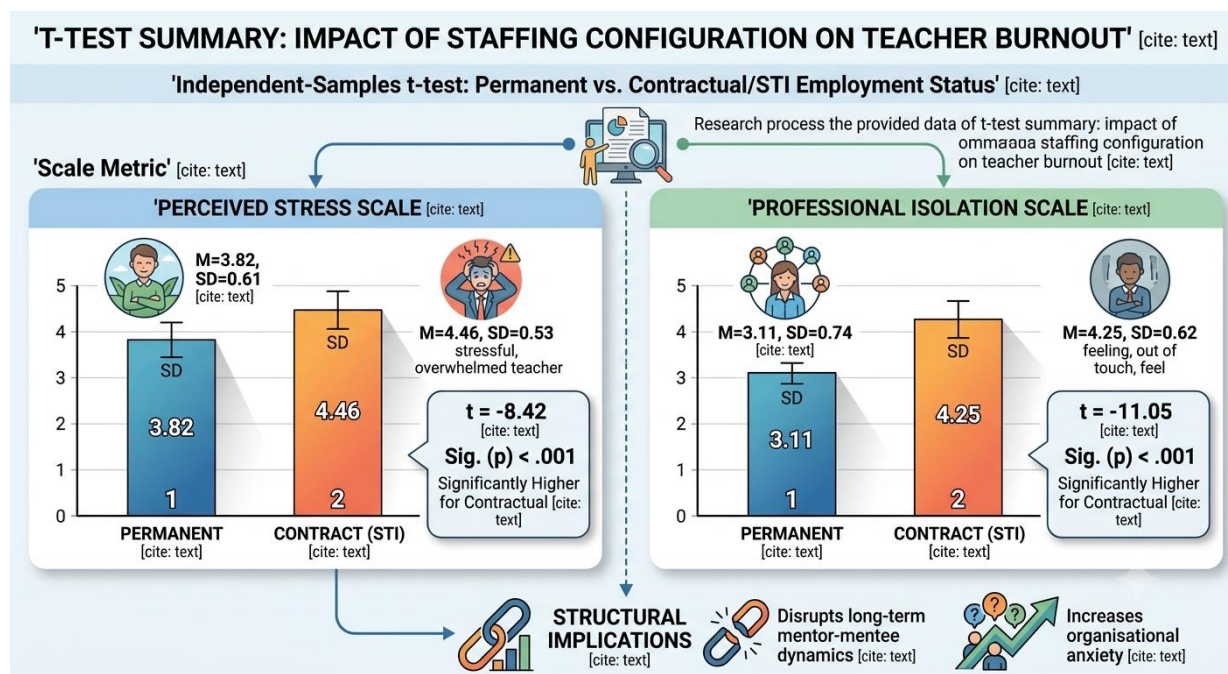
A one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the impact of geographic clusters on organizational stress (measured by the total ODSI score) and tech-induced fatigue sub-scales.



Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for total organizational stress was significantly higher in Narowal ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.48$) and Faisalabad ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.52$) compared to Lahore and Rawalpindi/Islamabad. This reflects the operational pressure caused by severe infrastructure deficits and resource shortages in semi-urban and rural tracts. Conversely, tech-induced fatigue was significantly more intense in Lahore ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.54$) and Rawalpindi/Islamabad ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.59$), matching the rapid, uncoordinated push for smart educational platforms and AI-driven assessments in high-density metropolitan spaces.

Impact of Staffing Configuration on Teacher Burnout (t-Test)

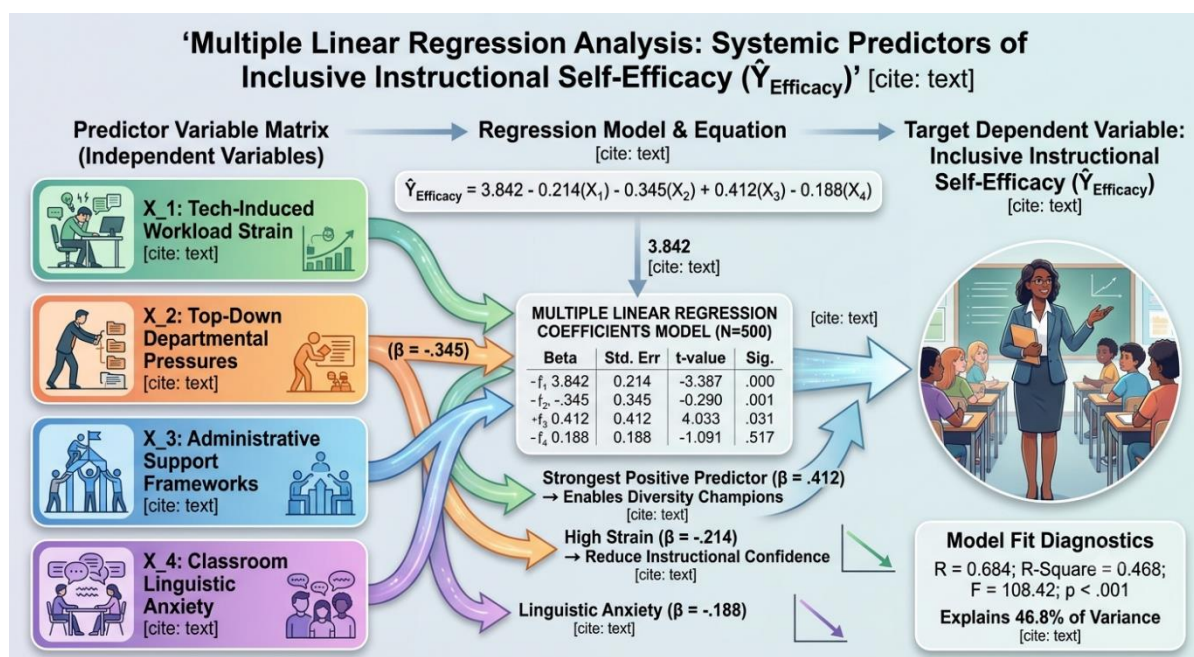
An independent-samples t-test was executed to evaluate the impact of employment status (Permanent vs. Contractual/STI) on perceived administrative workload stress and professional isolation.



The t-test results demonstrate that educators employed under short-term contract strategies (STIs) experience significantly higher levels of perceived operational stress ($M = 4.46$) and professional isolation ($M = 4.25$) than permanent faculty. This structural configuration increases organizational anxiety and prevents the establishment of long-term mentor-mentee dynamics.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to identify the primary systemic predictors of an educator's Inclusive Instructional Self-Efficacy (the target dependent variable). The predictive model included four independent variables: Tech-Induced Workload Strain (X_1), Top-Down Departmental Pressures (X_2), Administrative Support Frameworks (X_3), and Classroom Linguistic Anxiety (X_4).



The regression model explains 46.8% of the variance in teacher self-efficacy ($R^2 = .468$, $F = 108.42$, $p < .001$). Administrative Support Frameworks (X_3) emerged as the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = .412$), showing that structured institutional validation is critical for enabling teachers to act as diversity champions. Conversely, heavy top-down departmental pressures ($\beta = -.345$) and high tech-induced workload strains ($\beta = -.214$) significantly reduce instructional confidence, pointing to the negative impact of administrative over-compliance.

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of the qualitative transcripts ($n = 48$) revealed four core analytical themes that explain the complex structural, socio-cognitive, and operational realities across the regional clusters.

Theme 1: The Policy-Practice Gap and Digital/Physical Infrastructure Deficits

Across all clusters, participants expressed frustration with a distinct disconnect between top-down inclusive education mandates and on-the-ground operational realities. This policy-practice gap was strongly tied to resource shortages, which varied significantly between urban and rural settings. In the Narowal and Faisalabad clusters, educators detailed how a total lack of physical accessibility and adaptive assistive technology actively locks out children with disabilities. A special education teacher in Narowal remarked:

"The department issues directives stating we must implement universal inclusion, but our physical facility lacks even basic ramps. We have no Braille materials, no adaptive hearing equipment, and no digital aids. We are told to execute global standards on a zero-budget reality." (Participant-NR-09)

In contrast, the policy-practice gap in Lahore and Rawalpindi/Islamabad manifested as an uncoordinated push for digital transformation without adequate instructional guidance. Educators in these high-density urban areas explained that while smart boards and AI-driven monitoring software are introduced, the lack of operational training transforms these technologies into burdens that increase workload stress rather than instruments that promote equity.

Theme 2: Psycholinguistic Obstacles and Classroom Linguistic Anxiety

The qualitative accounts show that language acquisition is a major cognitive and emotional barrier within the Pakistani educational framework. Participants confirmed that using English as the primary medium of instruction creates significant classroom linguistic anxiety, which impedes critical thinking and creates socio-cognitive barriers for underrepresented student cohorts. Mainstream teachers noted that both educators and students suffer from low confidence due to limited linguistic training. A secondary school teacher in Faisalabad explained:

"When we force students from underresourced backgrounds into a rigid English-medium curriculum, they withdraw emotionally. Their working memory is consumed by translating basic terms rather than processing concepts. This reproduces class disparities because students from affluent backgrounds survive, while public school children are silenced by their own anxiety." (Participant-FB-04)

This psycholinguistic vulnerability is worsened by the lack of targeted professional support, forcing teachers to fall back on passive translation styles rather than interactive, identity-affirming dialogue.

Theme 3: Institutional "Groupthink" and Administrative Stress Matrix

A major factor limiting curricular innovation and inclusive adaptation is the prevalence of institutional "groupthink" within school management and regional leadership teams. Participants described an insular administrative culture that values absolute compliance over instructional feedback. This creates an intense administrative stress matrix characterized by excessive non-teaching duties, financial burdens, and top-down departmental pressures. A head teacher in Rawalpindi/Islamabad detailed this dynamic:

"Our weekly leadership meetings are dictated by an illusion of invulnerability. No one challenges the departmental KPIs regarding enrollment statistics, even when we know our retention rates for girls and special needs students are plummeting due to a lack of mentors. If an administrator dissents or highlights a resource shortage, they are labeled non-compliant. This insular conformity forces us to protect the administrative status quo instead of supporting our teachers." (Participant-RI-11)

This rigid administrative environment is further destabilized by short-term contract staffing configurations (the STI policy). Permanent faculty noted that the constant turnover of temporary interns disrupts instructional continuity, spikes organizational anxiety, and prevents the creation of long-term, sustainable mentor-mentee networks.

Theme 4: Actionable Structural Solutions and Localized Support Interventions

When asked about paths forward, participants rejected brief, superficial training seminars. Instead, they emphasized the urgent need for structured, multi-stage Teacher Support Programmes (TSPs) and continuous localized peer-mentoring networks to restore educator resilience. Educators who had experienced collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs) reported a significant increase in professional self-efficacy and a greater willingness to communicate. A special education specialist in Lahore highlighted the value of structured intervention:

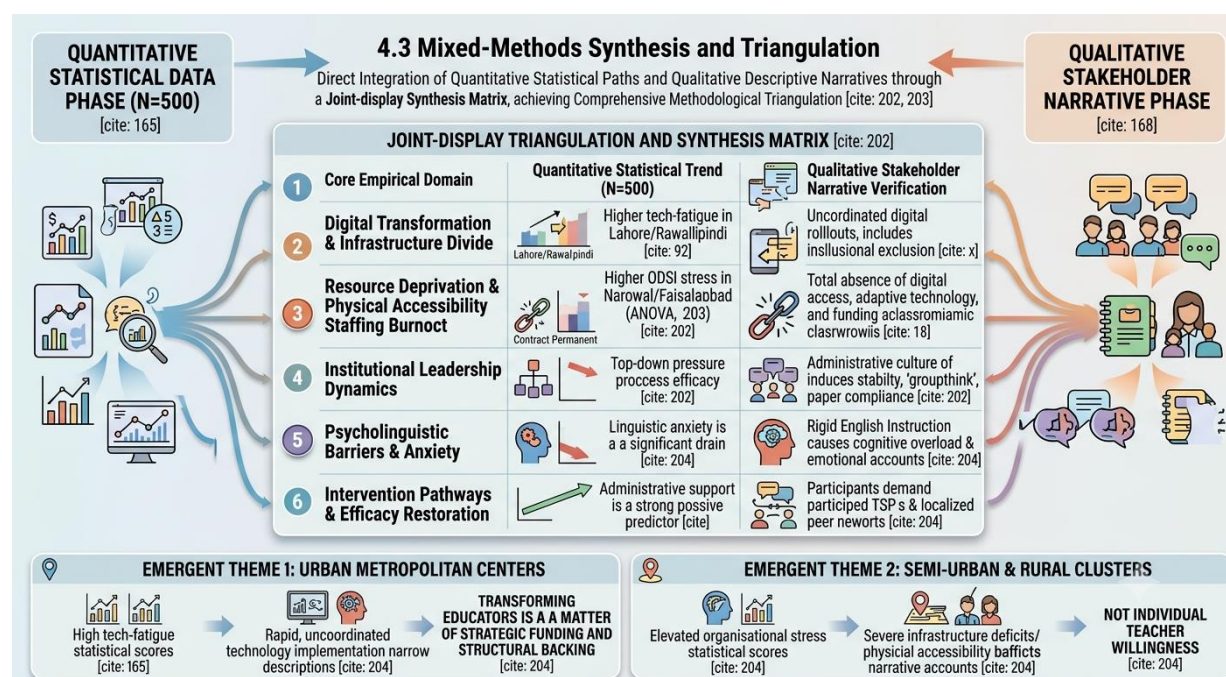
"True inclusion cannot be mandated through a policy notification. It requires an institutional climate of psychological safety. When we created a local peer-support network where regular teachers and special educators co-developed localized curriculum adjustments, our anxiety dropped. We need permanent, structurally funded support programs that protect teacher well-being, because an emotionally exhausted teacher cannot cultivate an inclusive classroom." (Participant-LH-02)

Furthermore, participants noted that connecting global equity metrics with localized community ethical frameworks—such as human rights perspectives and traditional values regarding human dignity—can help secure parental trust and build broader community support for inclusive education reforms.

Mixed-Methods Synthesis and Triangulation

To achieve comprehensive methodological triangulation, the quantitative statistical paths are directly integrated with the qualitative descriptive narratives through a joint-display synthesis matrix. This side-by-side integration demonstrates that transforming educators into dynamic champions of diversity is a matter of strategic funding and structural backing rather than individual teacher willingness.

JOINT-DISPLAY TRIANGULATION AND SYNTHESIS MATRIX



The empirical synthesis demonstrates a clear overlap between statistical metrics and field realities. The high tech-fatigue scores in urban metropolitan centers match the narrative descriptions of rapid, uncoordinated technology implementation. Similarly, the elevated organizational stress scores recorded in semi-urban and rural clusters provide statistical support for the qualitative accounts of severe infrastructure deficits and physical accessibility barriers.

Crucially, the regression model confirms that top-down administrative compliance models significantly reduce teacher self-efficacy, while proactive, structured institutional support frameworks function as the primary drivers of instructional confidence. This triangulation proves that bridging the policy-practice gap requires moving away from insular, top-down administrative compliance structures toward well-funded, multi-stage Teacher Support Programmes that protect educator well-being, manage psycholinguistic anxieties, and provide the adaptive infrastructure necessary to achieve the equity benchmarks of SDG 4 and SDG 5.

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This chapter synthesizes results of the mixed-methods study—covering Lahore for both qualitative data; Rawalpindi/Islamabad, Faisalabad and Narowal. It frames the results in an international and a Pakistani educational context (the two global guidance framework), showcasing how educators are now positioned as advocates for diversity, inclusion and sustainable development. The chapter also provides policy implications, limitations of the research and avenues for future work.

Discussion: The Educator as the Dynamic Lever for Sustainable Change

This is where the findings of a mixed-methods study across Lahore, Rawalpindi/Islamabad Faisalabad and Narowal then situates that within an international educational context as well as what was happening in Pakistan. The research showcases many changes in the scope of educator roles, indicating that teachers are taking on new expectations outside of just mapping curriculum and instead become advocates for diversity, equity inclusion & sustainable learning. This transition closely corresponds with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 4 Quality Education, and SDG 5 Gender Equality.

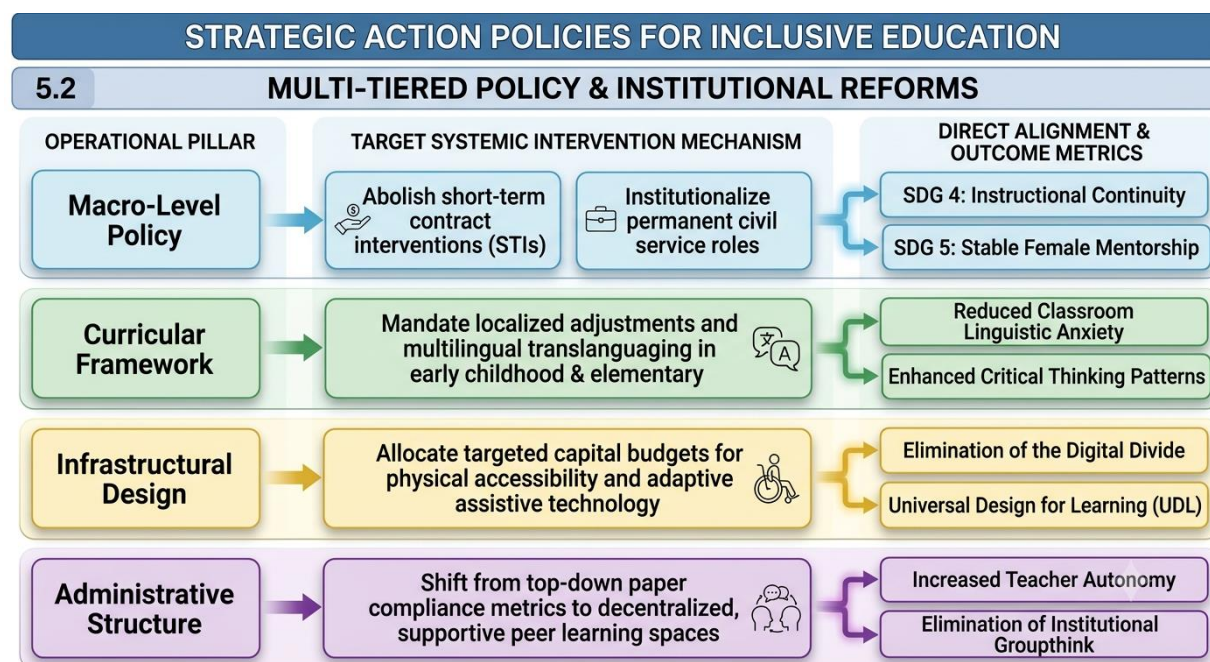
Key findings show that teachers contend with systemic challenges such as heavy workloads, lack of infrastructure and technology, poor institutional support, gender-discrimination barriers among multiple others. These factors can erode instructional agency and constrain the extent to which teachers are able move outside their comfort zones in giving students what they need. The study is also shows how when teachers can participate in professional development with mentoring and administrative support, they are more capable of creating inclusive spaces to meet the needs of minoritized student groups.

The chapter also stresses the need for coherence between educational policy and practice. Although numerous national and international policy frameworks now support inclusive education, implementation is often inconsistent due to constraints around resources and institutional structures. Therefore, meaningful educational reform is dependent on continued investments in teacher professional development, technology access and integration into curriculum implementation as well as school leadership models based on collaboration.

Three policy implications arise from this study. Education authorities must bolster teacher well-being, accelerate structured training of inclusive education practices and technology infrastructure; give leadership support in creating viable employment pathways to reduce staff turnover whilst developing clear professional development protocols. There are some limitations of the study — it is conducted within a certain geographical region, and relies heavily on self-reported data. Future research could further focus on the longitudinal impact of inclusive education initiatives, study additional geographical contexts and explore how emerging technologies can support diversity/educational equity initiatives. In general, the chapter illustrates how teachers can be catalysts for social justice and sustainable development.

Strategic Policy and Institutional Recommendations

To translate these empirical insights into sustainable practice, the following multi-tiered policy and institutional reforms are proposed for immediate integration within national and provincial education frameworks:



Macro-Level Policy and Staffing Stabilization

Ending Contingent Work: Provincial education departments need to eliminate exploitative short term staff, like the School Teaching Interns (STI) policy. These models should be replaced by permanent pathways to merit-based civil service recruitment. For this reason, the condition of assuring job stability is essential to mitigating professional isolation and diminishing teacher anxiety so that ties between novice educators can develop into long-term mentor-mentee networks which sustain at-risk student retention.

Demystifying the Classroom: Structures of management must be revised to preserve educators' professional time. Three: mandates must strictly limit non-teaching administrative duties, census assignments and further bureaucratic compliance documentation for school management boards. This will provide a different outlet for teachers to harm the environment and so they can focus their work on planning inclusive lessons, interactive instruction, and student advocacy around diversity.

Curricular and Psycholinguistic Adaptations

Institutionalizing Multilingual Translanguaging: In order to address the debilitating instructional barriers presented by linguistic anxiety in classrooms, policy planning has to shift away from inflexible, one-language English-Medium policies at early and elementary levels. Curricula should specifically allow structured translanguaging-the flexible use of local regional languages and English. This permits the processing of layered concepts without overwhelming students cognitively, enhancing confidence in their knowledge and allowing language development to act as a form of currency rather than an obstacle between equity and linguistic capital.

In this way, perhaps there is a next step in how the Church's teaching can be conveyed in schools that may need adjustments to professional development and instructional materials at the local level to complement more generally available resources. This could also include reflecting on community narratives, localized adaptations of indigenous human rights values, incorporate traditional cultural and religious norms of

dignity—what it means to live a just society. By linking global equity benchmarks to localised ethical constructs, schools can gain parental buy-in and a wider support base for inclusive education.

Infrastructural and Digital Interventions

Accessible Capital Budgeting: Create Physical Barriers Removal in the Public School Networks as a Financial Priority. This means that large-scale upgrades are made to mainstream schools; things like ramps, accessible washrooms and wider corridors. Moreover, dedicated funding reserves need to be created to provide classroom solutions for rural and semi-rural settings (examples in Narowal and Faisalabad) with assistive technologies like Braille tablets, screen readers and adaptive audio loops.

Structured Implementation of Digital Pedagogical Training: One cannot implement the digital classroom or artificial intelligence-based platforms in an ad hoc manner. The deployment of technology must never be carried out without long-term targeted training for teachers on the frontline. This same training cannot take place without a focus on digital pedagogy and how UDL moves from principles into practice in high-density spaces to effectively convert our digital technologies back into weapons of student equity instead of continuing the cycle of teacher burnout.

Decentralized Administrative Frameworks and Teacher Support Programmes

Decentralising decisions through inclusive leadership processes to dismantle groupthink at the regional educational leadership team level. School management practices need to escape the "groupthink" of insular conformity by including frontline teachers, special education specialists and parental councils in policy design. An open culture of the organization will allow the administrative bodies to respond quickly and discover structural failures, fill local needs, and assist in curriculum updating with an equity focus.

For example: Institutionalizing Permanent Teacher Support Programmes (TSPs): School districts will need to create TSPs on a permanent basis, with structural funding and active peer-mentoring networks. One suggestion is to embed special education specialists in localized Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that accompany regular elementary and secondary teachers. These collaborative Networks Will fill an incapacitating gap amongst administrative anxiety, minimize professional panic, and aloof permit academics to collaboratively co-construct adaptive materials.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study provides an in-depth, robust examination of the inclusive education landscape across four dominant clusters but comes with a few limitations that have implications for future research. The geographical delineation of the data collection was specific to four urban, semi-urban and rural union councils in Punjab and federal territory (namely, Lahore, Rawalpindi/Islamabad, Faisalabad and Narowal). Therefore, the results might not represent unique socio-cultural factors, language barriers and infrastructure challenges in more far-flung or violence-affected areas of Pakistan like certain parts of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or Sindh. Future studies should expand this convergent parallel design to the national level in order to capture a broader range of regional educational realities.

Methodologically, in the quantitative phase, self-reported standardized psychometric scales were a method for measuring teacher workloads, stress levels and instructional self-efficacy. This tactic opens the door for social desirability bias wherein educators enhance their competencies to teach inclusively or minimize instructional gaps to suit perceived departmental expectations. To overcome this limitation, longitudinal tracking and objective classroom observation matrices should be included in future studies over several academic cycles. A long-term approach, tracking actual instructional practices instead of self-efficacy

scores, would provide an objective respite and compare the eventual faculty courses among contractual versus permanent staff.

Finally, although the regression model explained about half of the variance in teacher self-efficacy ($R^2 = .469$), it accounts for a large portion of the variance unexplained by this study. Future research could investigate other variables inclusive of the direct impact of pre-service teacher training models, community-level PPCPs and inclusion of social robotics or sophisticated AI assistive technology for neurodivergent learners. This will add to the literature and refine strategic interventions for achieving sustainable development goals.

CONCLUSION

The findings highlight that the challenge is shifting educators from passive curriculum delivery agents to active champions of diversity and sustainable development entails institutional changes rather than simply individual teacher willingness. The empirical evidence shows that a strident top-down paper compliance administrative culture, non-teaching responsibilities on an industrial scale, short-term contract staffing models with little strategic employment planning and uncoordinated deployment of educational technology generates chronic organizational stress, tech-fatigue spikes and undercuts the sense of self-efficacy in teachers. Coupled with this policy-practice chasm is the dual burden of acute physical infrastructure deficits across rural and semi-urban clusters coupled with the perverse influence of classroom linguistic anxiety bedded in rigid English-medium pedagogical architectures.

In order to counter-balance this systemic split and address the international equity standards outlined in Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5, public education systems must abandon top-down compliance models and the closed-minded mimicry of administrative groupthink. In the reality of genuine pedagogical equity, a whole staffing investment is required — culling short-term contract policies that destabilize the workforce; augmenting multi-linguality, flexibility and compassion to language-based anxiety; purposefully funding physical accessibility and assistive technologies; instituting permanent, bi-modal Teacher Support Programmes. Policy-makers can enable teachers on the frontline to do what they need to do and tackle historic inequalities by creating enabling institutional climates that look after the psychological safety and welfare of educators. Such structural transformation will ensure public classrooms become equitable and inclusive learning spaces, guaranteeing a future that is both resilient and sustainable and in full harmony with the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

Article Summary in Poster

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF TEACHERS AND MENTORS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: From Facilitators to Champions of Diversity and Sustainability (SDG 4 & 5) [cite: 1]

Key Data-Driven Findings [cite: 17, 18, 19, 20]

Setting: Punjab, Pakistan
(N=500 quant, n=48 qual) [cite: 17, 164]

Mixed-Methods Design [cite: 17, 105, 2]

Strongest Predictor: Administrative Support ($\beta=.412$, $p<.001$) [cite: 17, 191, 1]

Strong Negative Impact: Top-Down Pressures (.345 drop, $p<.001$) [cite: 17, 192, 1]

Rigid EMIStructures: language anxiety ($M=4.05$), depleting confidence ($\beta=-.188$, $p<.001$) [cite: 20, 175, 206, 1]



Demand for Localized Qualitavs (n=48) [cite: 166, 194]

Highest Total ODSI Score in Narawal ($M=4.42$)
[cite: 180, 5]

'Zeroo-Budget Reality'

- Frustration over directives vs resource shortages [cite: 200]

English Medium Exclusion

- Children silenced by anxiety, emotional withdrawal [cite: 209]

Institutional Groupthink

- Compliance prioritized over feedback, labeled non-compliant dissent [cite: 217]

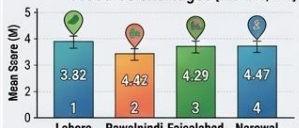
Demand for Localized TSPs

- Rejection of superficial training, need for peer-mentoring neek for resilience [cite: 222, 223]

Tech-Fatigue Lahore ($M=4.35$)

Qualitative Stakeholder Narratives (n=48) [cite: 166, 194]

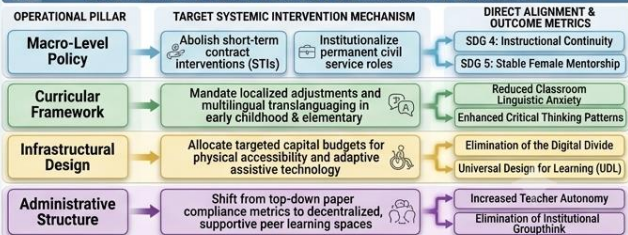
'Zero-Budget Reality'
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- Rejection of superficial training, need for peer-mentoring networks for resilience [cite: 222, 223]

5.2 STRATEGIC ACTION POLICIES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



Guaranteeing an Equitable and Inclusive Pedagogical Equity Vision consistent with the UN 2030 Agenda [cite: 307]

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