

# Special Education Teachers' Competency and Challenges in Teaching Children with Intellectual Disabilities: Narratives from Afghanistan

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the proficiency of special education (SE) teachers and the challenges they face in educating children with intellectual disabilities (CIDs), as reported by primary school teachers in Afghanistan. This study utilized a qualitative narrative research approach. A total of five special education (SE) teachers who teach children with intellectual disabilities (CIDs) from different primary schools in Kabul, Afghanistan participated in this study. The schools where the special education (SE) teachers work were under the management of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The five teachers were interviewed in the Afghan language, Dari, as well as English, based on the participants' choices, and subsequently transcribed and translated accordingly. The data was analysed using thematic analysis and resulted in the identification of three main themes: the competencies of teachers in fieldwork; pedagogical and professional knowledge; and the behavioural issues of children with intellectual disabilities (CIDs) as well as the difficulties encountered by special education (SE) teachers. They have indicated their requirement for professional development programs and modern instructional tools, both of which are considered necessary skills for instructors working in the field of special education. Ultimately, the results of this study suggest that special education (SE) teachers should possess extensive knowledge in their specific areas of expertise and consistently strive to improve their professional expertise and level of teaching proficiency. This can be achieved by enhancing their knowledge, engaging in specialized training programs for the field of special education, and actively seeking further information on the instructional skills required to support students with cognitive impairments who require individualized educational planning.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, children with intellectual disabilities, narrative research, special education; special education teachers; teacher competency

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## INTRODUCTION

Children with intellectual disabilities (CID) have a significantly slower rate of learning and generalisation compared to average learners with appropriate development. They struggle in school and take longer to learn how to walk, talk, and take care of their basic requirements like feeding and clothing. In addition to struggling with cognitive activities like combination, subtraction, abstraction, and classification, CIDs often have trouble forming opinions, engaging in debate, and doing tasks that call for instruction. They need skills and knowledge that apply to day-to-day living (Esomonu and Ezenwosu, 2023). With this knowledge, educators who deal with CIDs must be able to provide them with the guidance and assistance required to improve the academic courses' real-world applications.

In schools, teachers teach a wide range of subjects to their students. However, in addition to the basics, qualified and competent educators are needed in the field of special education (Frogh, Nakata, and Nozawa, 2007) to teach

and guide CIDs. The term competence has been used with varying definitions by various educators, including those specializing in teacher training and professional development. For example, Medley, and Crook (1980) described teacher competence as:

*“A characteristic of the teacher independent of the situation in which the teacher is practicing. Competence is what the teacher brings to the situation, and what the teacher takes along when he or she leaves it. The effect of teacher training on how well a teacher performs the teaching task, and (through it) on how effective the teacher is, is mediated by the competence of the teacher. Developing more effective teachers, then, is a matter of developing teachers better able to perform the teaching task; that is, developing more competent teachers.” (p. 295).*

More recent literature, like Nessipbayeva (2012) and Alsolami (2022), refers to competencies as knowledge, skills, and attitudes that a teacher must exhibit to effectively complete a teacher education course. In general, to teach CIDs, teachers are expected to be trained and competent with specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes in addition to being effective in their roles as special education teachers. In this regard, special education can be considered as competency-based teacher education. Nessipbayeva (2012) clarified that there are four key competencies involved in competency-based teacher education: professional competence, social competence, personal competence, and organizational competence. Each key competency is made up of one or more skills that teachers as professionals need to master to reach their capability to teach. Other than competencies, special education teachers also need to possess soft skills such as empathy, problem-solving, adaptability and such which are observable and measurable (Fernandes et al., 2021).

Naghdi and Ghobari (2017) highlighted that to succeed in their work, special education teachers need to possess strong communication skills, enthusiasm, patience, and tenacity. Similarly, motivation, determination, involvement, openness for transforming teaching methods, and enthusiasm in helping each student succeed are all associated with special education teachers' efficacy (Shaikat and Iqbal, 2012). In a study by Asgharinkah, Kazemi, Bahmanabadi, and Somayeh (2013), it is noted that having adequate experience and skills is one of the needs of educators of hearing impaired and other disabled children in the educational rehabilitation programme. In their 2007 study, Golparvar, Nasry, and Malekpour underlined the significance of teachers' engagement and commitment to their jobs.

It was also found that teachers' participation in decision-making, their level of job involvement, the presence of job alternatives, and their perceptions of organizational justice interact and impact their experiences and attitudes within special education settings. This shows that teachers who demonstrate a greater degree of practicality and self-efficacy illustrate a strong desire to enhance the ways they teach. Teachers who are highly committed to their teaching establish comprehensive planning stages and task sequencing, explore innovative teaching approaches that effectively attract their students, and create motivating objectives that are both captivating and effective (Aldridge and Fraser, 2016). This would directly or indirectly link to the students' commitment, desire, and accomplishment.

## **BACKGROUND OF STUDY**

Afghanistan presently aspires to be included as a part of progressive education nations (UNESCO, 2009). Examples of countries that are often associated with progressive education approaches include Finland, Singapore, Canada, and New Zealand, among others. These nations are known for their focus on holistic development, student-centered learning, and fostering 21st-century skills essential for success in a rapidly changing world. The international community reaffirmed access to public education as a fundamental right of all individuals at the UNESCO Summit in Dakar on April 28, 2000. The declaration emphasizes that all children, irrespective of their gender, age, ethnic origin, disability, or other distinguishing characteristics, are entitled to enroll in educational institutions and acquire knowledge (UNESCO, 2009).

Considering the necessity for differentiated instruction and special education programs, Afghanistan's education policy and legislation tend to adopt a more general approach to schooling. However, in light of the UNESCO 2000 definition of quality education, it is imperative that viable avenues exist to ensure that children with special needs and struggling learners have access to such programs. Afghanistan has experienced a multifaceted crisis encompassing cultural, political, social, economic, and educational domains. Additionally, the population of individuals with disabilities and CIDs has witnessed a surge. As a result, it is critical to provide special education training for teachers of children with disabilities to improve their competency, attitudes, and pedagogical knowledge so that they are prepared to engage with CIDs, have the patience to help them, and teach these students with various disabilities in an educationally friendly environment (Bayan, 2013; Buckler and Creech, 2014).

In Afghanistan, educational success is measured by the number and quality of instructors, as well as their accessibility in many areas of education, including general education and education for individuals with disabilities (Samady, 2001; 2013). The same may be said for other developing nations. According to Sharma, Shaikat, and Furlonger (2015), educational services in Pakistan encounter numerous problems, with 8.23% of students being disabled. Due to economic insecurity in Pakistan, there are less educational chances for educating children with disabilities, fewer resources for instructors with disabilities, and fewer teachers who are fully equipped for the classroom.

Nessipbayeva (2012) highlights the need for research on professional teachers who are talented, skilled, creative, problem solvers, critical thinkers, and culturally competent for schools to be updated with new, easily used technologies that encourage critical thinking in their students. Aftab et al. (2022) reported in another study that students with specific disabilities receive supplementary special education services, such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, language therapy, and speech therapy, within the general education classroom, based on their education programme. Students can learn new abilities, but it takes a long time due to their learning limitations.

Taneja-Johansson, Singal, and Samson (2021) found that teachers were willing to engage with disability concerns, recognizing the importance of education for all, in a study that investigated the ideas and actions of mainstream teachers in rural government schools in India concerning the context of more diverse students, with a focus specifically on how teachers understand the needs of children with disabilities and how they respond to those needs. However, they struggled to meet the diverse requirements of their students and excluded kids with disabilities. Teachers were hesitant to accept responsibility for the learning of children with disabilities, citing a lack of resources and concerns about their preparation. The study also showed that effective teacher professional development and other forms of assistance are required for high-quality education.

Thus, the present research aimed to explore the challenges teachers teaching students with CIDs have encountered while instructing their students. In general, special education teachers in Afghanistan have faced several problems while educating CIDs. Because CIDs are vulnerable, these teachers must be trained with and employ effective ways while educating CIDs to encourage, rehabilitate, and bring them from darkness to light. Teachers are critical to students' learning and growth. This research explored the knowledge gap concerning teacher competency and challenges in the context of SE in developing countries, particularly Afghanistan.

## **METHOD**

This research used a qualitative approach to exploring the competency and challenges of the special education (SE) teachers in Afghanistan when teaching CIDs in primary school and their perceived challenges. Previous studies indicate that researchers such as Ibrahim and Pang (2023) and Karim and Mashudi (2022) have employed a qualitative approach aimed at emphasizing teachers' perspectives, viewpoints, and beliefs concerning their own teaching experiences. In specific, this research employed a narrative research design. Creswell (2012; 2014) stated that in narrative research, researchers examine the lives of individuals through the collection and description of stories by retelling them. In a more recent work, Creswell and Guetterman (2019) suggest that researchers use narrative research designs to "describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of individual experiences" (p. 561).

This study embraced the key characteristics of a narrative research design (Creswell and Guetterman, 2019) by engaging the participants to voluntarily share their experiences as SE teachers in Afghanistan. Through the analysed stories, the researchers gained insights into the teachers' unique settings, their actions, and the resolution of the actions concerning their roles as SE teachers. This paper used the abbreviations SE for "special education" and CIDs for "children with intellectual disabilities", drawing reference from the works of Musa (2021) and Shaikat, Vishnumolakala, and Al Bustami (2021).

### **Research participants and settings**

In this study, purposive sampling was used where the participants were selected to obtain information about SE teachers' perceived competency and challenges while teaching CIDs at the primary school level. This study involved five participants from four different schools supported by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. Among the schools were Bahrawan Special Education Primary School located in multiple locations such as Darluaman, Dasht e Barchi, Qarabagh Special Education Primary School in Qarabagh district, and Pro Bumbini di Kabul (PBK) SE needs primary school located in Timany of Kabul. Table 1 summarises the profile of the participants who specialised in special education. These teachers either have a

bachelor's degree in special education or certification as master trainers after undergoing additional training in special education.

**Table 1:** Profile of Research Participants

Participants	Label	Age	Gender	Teaching Experience	Qualifications
Teacher 1	T1	22	Female	1 year 2 months	Bachelor's Degree
Teacher 2	T2	35	Female	10 years	Master Trainer
Teacher 3	T3	45	Male	5 years	Master Trainer
Teacher 4	T4	32	Female	5 years	Bachelor's Degree
Teacher 5	T5	43	Female	9 years	Bachelor's Degree

### Data collection procedure

Before beginning the research, the first author sought and secured ethical approval from the NGOs supporting primary special education schools in Afghanistan. Kabul Education University specifically granted the first author permission to conduct her interview sessions with the chosen teachers. Afterward, the first author secured informed consent from the teachers before beginning the face-to-face interviews. The interview protocol for this study consisted of questions that explored teachers' perceptions regarding competencies for successful special education teaching. Two main questions were formulated to align with the research objective and included the following:

- What are the competencies you perceive yourself to have as a special education teacher?
- What challenges have you experienced while teaching children with intellectual disabilities?

In-depth interview sessions were conducted face-to-face by the first author to explore respondents' perceived competencies and challenges faced while teaching CIDs in primary schools. Audio recordings were made to avoid any mistakes during the process of transcribing. To ensure the confidentiality of the SE teachers, all interview transcripts, informed consent forms, and related documents were securely managed on a password-protected personal computer.

### DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, the qualitative analysis employed thematic analysis, which, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), is an iterative procedure. In particular, the analysis adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2012) suggested six steps of thematic analysis. First, we familiarised ourselves with the transcripts of the interviews by doing multiple phases of reading. This allowed us to scrutinise the content and make the initial reflexive notes. We then proceed with the coding, which is the second step of the analysis. As we carefully read and re-read the transcripts, we manually tagged the parts that were related to the research questions. The next three steps were followed, which were theme development, refinement, and naming. During these three steps, we organised codes and coded data into possible themes, went over them, and changed those possible themes. This helped us create a detailed analysis of the data from which the finalised themes were derived. The finalised themes are presented in the next section of this paper, which marks the final stage of the thematic analysis.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through analysis of the data, three themes emerged, namely, teachers' competency in fieldwork, their pedagogical and professional knowledge, and the behavioral problems of CIDs and SE teachers' challenges.

#### Theme 1: Teachers' competency in fieldwork

All special education teachers believe that every teacher should be capable of his or her fieldwork, and they pointed out that if a teacher is not patient and does not have knowledge in the SE field, they cannot adequately teach CIDs. They replied that with patience, every teacher could easily find a good path to teach CIDs student and work with them compassionately. SE teachers gave their views about the competencies of teachers. They explained that all teachers should have control of what they teach based on the knowledge and information about special education and their students with intellectual disabilities. As emphasised in the following excerpts, teachers believed that they should have adequate knowledge about CIDs. One of them felt that:

*We should have full control over our field. We need to inform ourselves about children with intellectual disabilities and study their behaviour and what they do and which categories they are*

*divided into. Then we will be able to work with them properly. We should behave very affectionately as a mother, then we can slowly teach them daily activities. (T1)*

Moreover, teachers felt that an exceptional teacher should have enough knowledge about ID children. They also mentioned that, as special education teachers, they also play additional roles to ID children such as a mother, counsellor, trainer, and psychologist. The teachers mentioned:

*We need to inform ourselves about intellectual disability children, study their behaviour, what they do? Which categories they are divided in to? Then we will be able to work with them properly. (T2)*

*We should behave very affectionately as a mother, then slowly teach them daily activities. (T5)*

*I think a teacher should be an experienced counsellor, trainer, and psychologist. (T1)*

### **Theme 2: Psychological and professional knowledge**

To recognise ID children's skills, there is a need to involve them with the natural things around them. Teachers believed that the use of further natural techniques was necessary during their rehabilitation or training phase to help improve their learning. Moreover, they said the first aim was to capture the child's attention so that they became accustomed to teachers and more likely to listen to words.

*I was working with an ID child; he liked colourful things. I could get his attention through colourful things such as toys, threading beads, and balls with different colours that captured his attention. And flower leaves help them to feel the softness and to know the difference between barbed ones. I think skills such as storytelling or one-on-one skills can help a child become accustomed, well-mannered, and well-behaved, such as making them feel that their mother is by their side, not a stranger, and feel comfortable with us. (T1)*

Teachers also mentioned that they helped students using environmental materials to improve their skills.

*Mostly, I have worked with them through crafting skills and creating projects using environmental materials. (T2)*

From their viewpoint, teachers facilitated students to familiarise themselves with different skills to be comfortable with them during classroom activities and more relaxed in their daily communication with teachers. The other participants did not acknowledge this issue. They said if teachers should have enough knowledge in their fieldwork, then they would be a good psychologist or a good trainer to train ID students in the way they need. In addition, he or she can easily understand students' demands and problems and overcome their challenges.

*We should have full control over our field, then we should be good psychologists and trainers. (T1)*

They further mentioned that there is a need for teachers to have qualifications in counselling and be good counsellors to help parents regarding their ID child.

*We must be good counsellors because our counselling and homework should help parents improve their mentally retarded child. (T1)*

Teachers also said they should know and have knowledge about counselling to give good advice to parents of CID students about their children's behaviour and daily activities.

### **Theme 3: Behavioural problems of CIDs and SE teachers' challenges**

Most teachers noted that some students have physical problems and cannot do their activities without the teacher's help and instruction. Therefore, all SE teachers should have enough knowledge about these ID children and better understand their problems.

*We need to have information, previous knowledge, and research on what type of child she or he is. Because intellectually disabled people can be divided into different categories, in*

*addition to being intellectually disabled, some children also have movement and sensory behaviour problems. All their problems need to be taken into consideration. (T1)*

*We had a student; her father brought her to us. As her father was leaving, the child was bending herself like a lizard; she was not sitting and did not open her hands. I was sitting in front of her very calmly and treating her gently. Believe me, I worked with this child for one week. I was bringing [her] everything, like dolls... I was showing everything to her. I told her, Dear Husna, I have a wound in my hand, and then I was crying... I gave her instructions then, such as: take the pen; slowly she developed; she could sit up; and she was my student for 3 years. After a few days, she started talking, though initially she did not talk. At the end of the third year, she had learned the alphabet and was able to write and read up to the number '50' with her tiny tongue. She had some habits that her parents were unable to control. I behaved like a mother to her. As a result, she learned the alphabet and was able to write some sentences. She got better and has graduated. (T5)*

These children need more love and consideration from their parents and the teachers who teach them daily and threaten them all day and night. Furthermore, teachers noted that they stammer or cannot talk at all.

*Then, we try to understand what method should be used for this child to be properly. Some of them just sleep and do not talk, or they just stare at us silently. One child does not talk with any teacher. Just one teacher talks to this child very kindly, records his voice, and speaks quite accurately. This student does not talk to us, whereas this child has been our student for three years. We have faced such problems. (T4).*

Several teachers felt that it is difficult for us to work with CIDs because some parents do not tell us the real age of their children; therefore, we face problems with them, she asserted.

*I experienced a child named Bakhsh who was suffering from autism. The early stages of rehabilitation were practiced with him in Iran. He was given massage therapy. When his sensitive parts were massaged, his sexual arousals increased, and he expressed unethical behaviors. His mother said that he is 9 years old, so we accept that, whereas he was 12 years old. When we tried to teach and work with him, he expressed very unethical behaviours, and it was tough for me. Then we understood the case. (T1)*

Some special needs teachers said that they have specific problems with ID students. One of them was related to the aspect of the student's personal hygiene. If students do not know how to go to the washroom and use it, then teachers must assist them in this regard.

*Only with some of them who have difficulties going to the toilet; if they are not able to understand what a toilet is or how to use the toilet, then, of course, that causes trouble for us, and then we have to take them to the toilet. Moreover, we have taught them the basics. It takes some time for parents to teach these things to their kids at home. They also viewed that if we train them to get better, at least we cannot be more backward; that is, they can solve their daily problems. At least they can solve their daily problems, such as eating, dressing, going to the bathroom, and observing their cleanliness. The family can get rid of them as much as their child, because a mother cannot have her child if it is two years old or three years old. However, if he is ten or 15 years old and every day he goes to the toilet and brings it back, covers his clothes, and feeds him, it is a big problem. (T2)*

Therefore, teachers mentioned that it is good for CIDs to become independent and learn how to clean themselves without anyone's help.

Some teachers pointed out that in Afghanistan, learning difficulties are increasing day by day. Because they are the underprivileged generation in society, not much has been done about these people.

*We were able to make people aware that these are also human beings and that they also have a future. If we train them to get better, at least we cannot be more backward; that is, they can solve their daily problems. (T3)*

Teachers believe if CID students have communication problems talking, e.g., stammering and difficulties working their tongue, they need to have daily verbal therapy during classroom instruction. They try to practice word by word or letter by letter, then merge them and repeat by sounds and separate the words into syllables to make them memorable. Ongoing practice by students aims to make this interesting, as they will become capable of word-building.

*We used verbal therapy if a child had problems with communication, had a tongue tie, or could not speak. For example, we played anthems for them. At first, we taught them simple words such as yes or no. Then, we divide words into syllables, such as He—llo. We encouraged them to repeat, and by repetition, they could learn how to say 'hello'. Then, we changed the location, and we practiced with the child in the counsellor's room. When the child learned to say hello, we brought him to another room to say "hello" to someone else practically, and the child did it. Moreover, we recorded and played some interesting sounds for them to listen to, and such practices were effective. We mostly made them do things in practice by themselves. And in lessons, we were mostly repeating things with them again. When we teach the letter A, there should be a fruit, a house picture, or something that we can show. For example, if we relate the letter A in the Dari (main language) to the name of a pomegranate, we say 'this is a pomegranate', or 'this is one pomegranate', or 'pomegranate has seeds'; 'this is a fruit', and 'it is sweet'. We can also talk about hygiene, sleeping, washing, and eating; we make many things very practical, and we continue this system. (T1)*

Teachers believe that by practicing verbal therapy, students with CIDs will be able to focus more intently on their courses and activities in the classroom going forward and will be less reliant on other people in their daily life.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

According to a study compiled by the international community at the UNESCO Summit in Dakar, Senegal, on April 28, 2000, all children are entitled to enrol and attend schools (UNESCO, 2014; Bayan, 2013). Bringing this to the context of this study, there is a need for CIDs to have competent and capable teachers in the SE education field. Even though some teachers majored in special education and some were recognized as master trainers in the field, research indicates that teachers of CIDs had poor levels of competency in the SE sector in the context of special education in Afghanistan.

Teaching CIDs needs open-mindedness and a high level of knowledge to know these children's routine issues, desires, and needs. Teachers need to stay and support them in each step of learning, whatever CIDs want. For this reason, SE teachers are required to become masters of their knowledge in the special education area. Shaukat and Iqbal (2012) asserted that teachers' efficacy is correlated with their eagerness, their degree of determination, willingness, and engagement with different instruction procedures and interests to enable every learner to achieve. These results are in line with the research by Naqdi (2017) regarding the requirements of teaching: teachers must have good communication skills, interest, patience, and perseverance to be successful in work life. In addition, Asgharinkah, Kazemi, Bahmanabadi, and Somayeh (2013) stated that one of the needs of educators of hearing-impaired children in the educational rehabilitation programme is sufficient experience and skills to significantly reduce problems and increase students' abilities. In addition, the results are in line with studies by Golparvar, Nasry, and Malekpour (2007) and also by Shaukat, Vishnumolakala, and Al Bustami (2019) on the importance of teachers' interest in and attachment to their work.

Addressing the first research question (What are the competencies you perceive yourself to have as a special education teacher), findings suggest teachers believe that every teacher should have the capability to do fieldwork, and in this study, they point out that if a teacher is not patient and does not have knowledge in the SE field, they cannot teach CIDs in the ways that are essential for them. They also emphasised that being a teacher in the ID arena requires teachers who can work with them academically, patiently, and professionally. This was similar to the findings of the research by Kurnaz et al. (2018), who claimed that an essential point in educational activities is to be patient during difficult education procedures with students with disabilities. They also mentioned that teachers have to know and use different ways or methods that enable learners to learn easily based on their choices and preparation. The teachers' responses are similar to the past research findings reported by Samady (2001; 2013) conducted in Afghanistan. Samady (2013) also mentioned that education progress relates to the number and quality of teachers' capabilities and accessibility in various parts of the education system, including both general and special needs education. In addition, Navarro et al. (2016) believed that a teacher's professional development

programme would be beneficial for programme designers to use technology that supports SE and also to perform in an appropriate way towards reaching a wide range of learning objectives and outcomes.

Teachers also believe that it is essential in the rehabilitation and training phase to use ordinary techniques to ease learning for CIDs. In addition, as teachers explained, the first thing was to capture the attention of the child so they could get used to us and listen to our words. They helped students use environmental materials to improve their skills. From their viewpoint, teachers make students familiarise themselves with different skills to be comfortable with them during classroom activities and more relaxed in their daily communication with teachers. This finding is in accordance with those reported by Ford (2012), who suggested that the five main elements created to lead this research were administrative support, motivation, teacher morale, a teacher's teaching method, and teacher power. Teachers believed that if teachers have a high level of knowledge in their fieldwork, they will be a good psychologist or a good trainer to train CIDs in the ways they need. In addition, they can easily understand students' difficulties and overcome their challenges. They assume that teachers need a counselling qualification and are good counsellors to help parents with their CIDs. Teachers said that they should know and have counselling skills to give the parents of CIDs good advice about their children's behaviour and daily activities to help them care for their CIDs. In another two studies, Hutton (2009) and Aftab et al. (2022) claimed that learners with disabilities can learn new skills but need much time due to their learning deficiencies. Also, Sharma, Shaukat, and Furlonger (2015) asserted that in Pakistan, educational services faced widespread challenges, with 8.23% of students having disabilities. Due to instability in the economy in this country, there is a lack of educational opportunities for teaching CIDs, a lack of resources for teachers of CIDs, and a shortage of adequate teachers pre-programmed for preparation to work in the classroom.

The second research question (What challenges have you experienced while teaching children with intellectual disabilities?) is addressed by findings that highlight the teachers mention that some students have physical problems and cannot participate and perform in classwork activities without their aid and guidance. As a result, it is practical for every teacher responsible for students with intellectual disabilities to take upon ownership of problem-solving and decision-making on these students relating to teaching and learning, as their students with intellectual disabilities require assistance in their learning, but also, they require emphatic attention, care, and support from others. In this study, teachers have also reported on the difficulties that their students as CIDs face in their daily activities. Teachers also expressed concern about parental dishonesty regarding their children's age. Not knowing a child's real age can be a big risk for teachers during therapy. Consequently, they face additional behavioural problems while teaching students with intellectual disabilities. In this regard, teachers are aware that managing behavioural problems is crucial in the teaching and learning process. This study's findings concur with the outcomes of a past study by Humre and Pianta (2001), which asserted that for students who start school with behavioural problems, a positive, close relationship between the teacher and the child leads to fewer disciplinary violations. On the other hand, Silver et al. (2005) and Nurmi (2012) believe that conflict and inappropriate communication with educators increase behavioural problems in CIDs.

Some SE teachers stated that CIDs have daily hygiene problems. There is tension between teachers if the family does not prepare children for their hygiene, so teachers have to assist them. Consequently, CIDs will gradually learn how to use the bathroom or washroom without the help of anyone. The finding was consistent with the results of many studies done in the past that teachers feel ineffectively trained to control challenges encountered in SE education (Frogh, Nakata, and Nozawa, 2007; UNESCO, 2016; and UNESCO, 2020). Teachers also believed CIDs had difficulty speaking during lessons. They need more rehearsals during the day and at home. They also need to practice word-by-word or letter-by-letter. Teachers viewed that verbal therapy helps CIDs communicate with their peers and teachers and equips them to focus on school activities involving reading, writing, and getting ready to participate in classroom discussions. The respondents' viewpoint was similar to the outcomes of research done by Kurnaz et al. (2018), who reported that students could learn reading and writing through written and verbal communication procedures in their own culture.

In conclusion, all children are entitled to enroll in and attend school, whether they are normal or intellectually challenged. Therefore, it is believed that all children have the full right to join schools free of the barriers of discrimination. Based on the findings of this study, there is a need for teachers to improve their competency in their professional careers when teaching CIDs. Finally, this research suggested that:

1. SE teachers must be knowledgeable about their field.
2. SE teachers must improve their professional experiences and competencies by increasing their knowledge.



3. SE teachers to be involved in continuous professional development training in the field of special education and learning more about the teaching skills required to teach CIDs.
4. Afghanistan is deprived of school for CIDs. In addition to the dropout rate, many CIDs are at risk of isolation and exclusion from the education system. To fight this problem, flexible education programmes for SE children should be provided to such people.
5. SE should be provided through public or private schools or training centres, with the support of the international community and the involvement of local people.
6. In SE programmes, pre-service teachers should learn special needs education skills based on their interests and the needs of the job market. This will provide the students with more skills to hire and retain. Simultaneously, the pre-service teachers' initial training programmes should incorporate special education components.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Samia Arjumandi contributed to the initial writing of the paper, data collection, and analysis. Narina A. Samah contributed to overseeing the research procedure while Hadijah Jaffri contributed to the reviewing and finalizing the article for journal publication.

## DECLARATION OF STATEMENT

The lead author confirms the manuscript's integrity, stating that it provides an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the reported study. No crucial aspects of the study have been omitted, and any discrepancies from the planned (and, if applicable, registered) study have been appropriately explained.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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