



Understanding Learning Differences Across Schools 2030 Contexts

Country profiles | Pakistan

COUNTRY PROFILES

Pakistan¹

Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

Pakistan follows a decentralised system of education with the central government developing the overall policy framework, curriculum and accreditation. Under this structure, the Ministry of Education (MoE) oversees the majority of national approaches to supporting students with disabilities. Pakistan currently has the second highest number of out-of-school children in the world, with an estimated 22.8 million children aged 5-16 not in school², a considerable number of whom are thought to be children with disabilities.

The government reports that ‘a rapid transition of integration, mainstreaming, and inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools has taken place over recent years’.³

The 2017 National Education Policy endorses UNESCO’s definition of inclusive education as ‘a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through

increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies.’ It describes inclusion as beneficial ‘not merely for children with special needs only; it applies to all children.’⁴

At present, the most common terms found in the literature used to describe learning differences are ‘specific learning disability’ and ‘slow learners’. While the term ‘slow learner’ appears to be widely used in research on education in Pakistan, there is concern about the lack of specificity in the term.

It can include anyone from those who have learning differences to those who come from conditions of poverty that prevent them from reaching their potential in school.⁵

¹ Interviews were conducted with an Education & ECD Advisor to the Schools2030 programme in Pakistan, and an inclusion specialist at The Aga Khan University Human Development Programme (AKU-HDP). A questionnaire gathered views from a member of AKF Pakistan. | ² UNICEF Pakistan, retrieved Nov 2022 | ³ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017 | ⁴ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017 | ⁵ Who Is a ‘Slow Learner’?, Daily Times, retrieved May 2022

Views from teachers and programme staff

Those consulted did not perceive inclusion to be a topic given due importance in the education agenda in Pakistan. To date, policies haven’t had much of a focus on inclusive education, though the new curriculum may make more mention of inclusive practice and special needs. That said, the level of challenge in the context is felt to be significant. In terms of the understanding of inclusion, it was reported that this is often thought of narrowly to mean only disability, with most recognition of physical disability, and is often equated with special education. Since there is low awareness of learning differences, specific conditions such as dyslexia and ADHD may not be considered. Terms often used to refer to children with disabilities are ‘special children’, ‘handicapped children’ and ‘slow learner’, which are sometimes used interchangeably with ‘children with special educational needs’.

Through their inclusion programmes, Aga Khan University (AKU) aim to promote people first language and the adoption of using the term ‘children with SEN’.

‘Generally speaking when they hear inclusive education they think disability – they think visible physical disability or a mental condition/ challenged mentally.’

AKF Advisor

‘Even if there was mention of learning differences and disability and including in mainstream schools it has stayed on paper and not found its way into implementation.’

AKU-HDP Faculty Member



Country profiles | Pakistan



Quantifying learners with learning disabilities

The Pakistani Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is the largest citizen-led, household-based initiative that aims to provide reliable estimates on the schooling status of children aged 3-16 years residing in all rural and few urban districts of Pakistan. It collects information on schools and students which includes disability status. The most recent report published in 2019 shared that just over 20% of schools in Pakistan serve students with disabilities.⁶ Based on answers from primary caregivers on six functioning areas assessed, less than 1% of children aged 3 to 16 (with

information on difficulties) reported difficulties with seeing, hearing, walking, self-care, understanding or remembering.⁷

It has been noted that the national census of 1998 and 2016 failed to incorporate a realistic instrument to gather data on special needs and inclusive education.^{8,9} Statistics testify to the alarming number of disabled learners who are out of school, with less than 5% of school-aged disabled children enrolled in special education institutions and the remaining 95% not in school.¹⁰



Policy and legislative commitments

The [National Education Policy 2009](#) made little mention of inclusive education and offered little in the way of clear strategies to achieve this.¹¹

The [2017 National Education Policy](#), however, includes a chapter on Special and Inclusive Education, and has amongst its objectives to promote and expand access to special and inclusive education by providing the necessary

facilities and infrastructure, and to universalise enrolment for students with special educational needs.¹² It goes on to specify that teacher education should prepare teachers to 'adapt to a variety of student learning styles to cater for individual learning differences.'

Though it doesn't make explicit mention of inclusive education, the [National Education](#)

[Policy Framework 2018](#) mentions that special focus is required on 'disadvantaged areas, minorities, girls and children with disabilities'.¹³ It highlights four priority policy actions to ensure that 'all children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive a high quality of education to achieve their full potential'. These priorities encompass reducing the number of out-of-school children, achieving uniformity in the education system, improving the quality of

education, and enhancing access to skills training and higher education. Education laws on disability have also been developed at the province level. The 2018 Sindh [Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act](#), for example, supports education in special schools for children with disabilities, though it also calls for the inclusion of those with disabilities in mainstream settings.



Teacher training provision on inclusive education

The [2017 National Education Policy](#) states aims for teacher education that should prepare teachers to 'adapt to a variety of student learning styles to cater for individual learning differences.'¹⁴ Though it is reported there are relatively few institutions offering special education training to teachers, provision is available at some universities, as well as through the Directorate General of Special Education and the National Mobility and Independence Training Centre based in Islamabad.¹⁵ However, interview respondents felt the current teacher education offering to be somewhat archaic and theoretical, and that this in turn was contributing to a low sense of morale and professionalism amongst teachers.

'We're still trying to get teachers to learn about learning and using appropriate teaching methodologies, let alone learning differences and differentiation [...] Before teachers can change in the classroom they need to be aware and know about their own biases and what role they play as a teacher.'

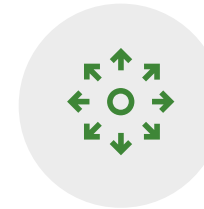
AKF Advisor

⁶ Grimes, 2021 | ⁷ Annual Status of Education Report Pakistan, 2018 | ⁸ Who Is a 'Slow Learner?', Daily Times, retrieved May 2022 | ⁹ Malik et al., 2022 | ¹⁰ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017 | ¹¹ Ministry of Education, 2009 | ¹² Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017 | ¹³ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2018 | ¹⁴ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017 | ¹⁵ Pakistan - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>, Retrieved May 2022 (Hereafter: Pakistan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022)

Country profiles | Pakistan

Policy ambitions for further teacher education in special education is starting to be realised with the establishment of training academies such as the teacher training academy working under the Department for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in Sindh. Aga Khan University is aiming to respond to a variety of teacher profiles by offering training in inclusive

education through an MEd programme, as well as through short and custom designed courses. In Gilgit Baltistan and Chitral, 400 teachers have been trained on inclusive education through training provided by AKU, which included the provision of assistive aids.



Current attitudes and awareness of inclusive practice and disability

Interview respondents noted that large numbers of the children who are out of school are kept at home due to negative attitudes towards disability. Disability is considered by some as a punishment and some parents would forego their child's education because of a sense of shame and a belief that they wouldn't be able to learn. In some cases children with special needs end up leaving school because of bullying.

Although teachers know that some children learn at different paces, children with

differences are frequently labelled as 'slow learners' and are relegated to the back benches of the classroom.

'Schools are a microcosm of society and teachers are part of that society. They will also unconsciously imbibe stereotypes.'

AKF Advisor



Diagnosis of learning disabilities

Some evidence points to teachers at a variety of schools using 'whole learner' curricula in support of 'slow learners'. Interview participants also referenced the way teachers are learning to be more aware of children with difficulties, such as those with visual or hearing impairments. In general, if the difficulty is presenting a problem, teachers will refer a child on to a medical professional, however governmental diagnostic facilities tend to be of low quality and there is limited knowledge

of learning disabilities. Good services are available in the private sector with specialists that are able to diagnose conditions such as dyslexia, autism and ADHD, though this comes at a cost. In Punjab province, there currently exists a referral mechanism for children with disabilities. District Disability Assessment Boards are in place at each district headquarter hospital, which are overseen by the Department of Social Welfare.¹⁶



Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

Whilst schools cannot refuse admission to any child, children with disabilities have very little support in school, largely because teachers are poorly trained and are under prepared to support learners with special needs.

'Teachers teach a class not an individual child – even if the child is present they don't give them adequate attention.'

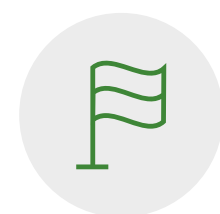
AKF Advisor

Separately established special schools for those with mental, visual and hearing impairments are run by the private and public sector, however enrolment at government special institutions tends to be low because of inadequate facilities and poorly trained staff. However, some private organisations have their own teacher training arrangement and have started integrating children with disabilities into mainstream classes.

16 Pakistan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022

Country profiles | Pakistan

There are many organisations providing remedial services for learners with disabilities, such as Kazim Trust who work with children with ADHD, READ who work with children with dyslexia, and NOWPD, which is a supporting organisation aiming to maximise efforts of organisations working on disability and inclusion. Such organisations are providing rehabilitation services and vocational services to children who may not be able to learn in mainstream schools in the current structure.



Challenges and priorities

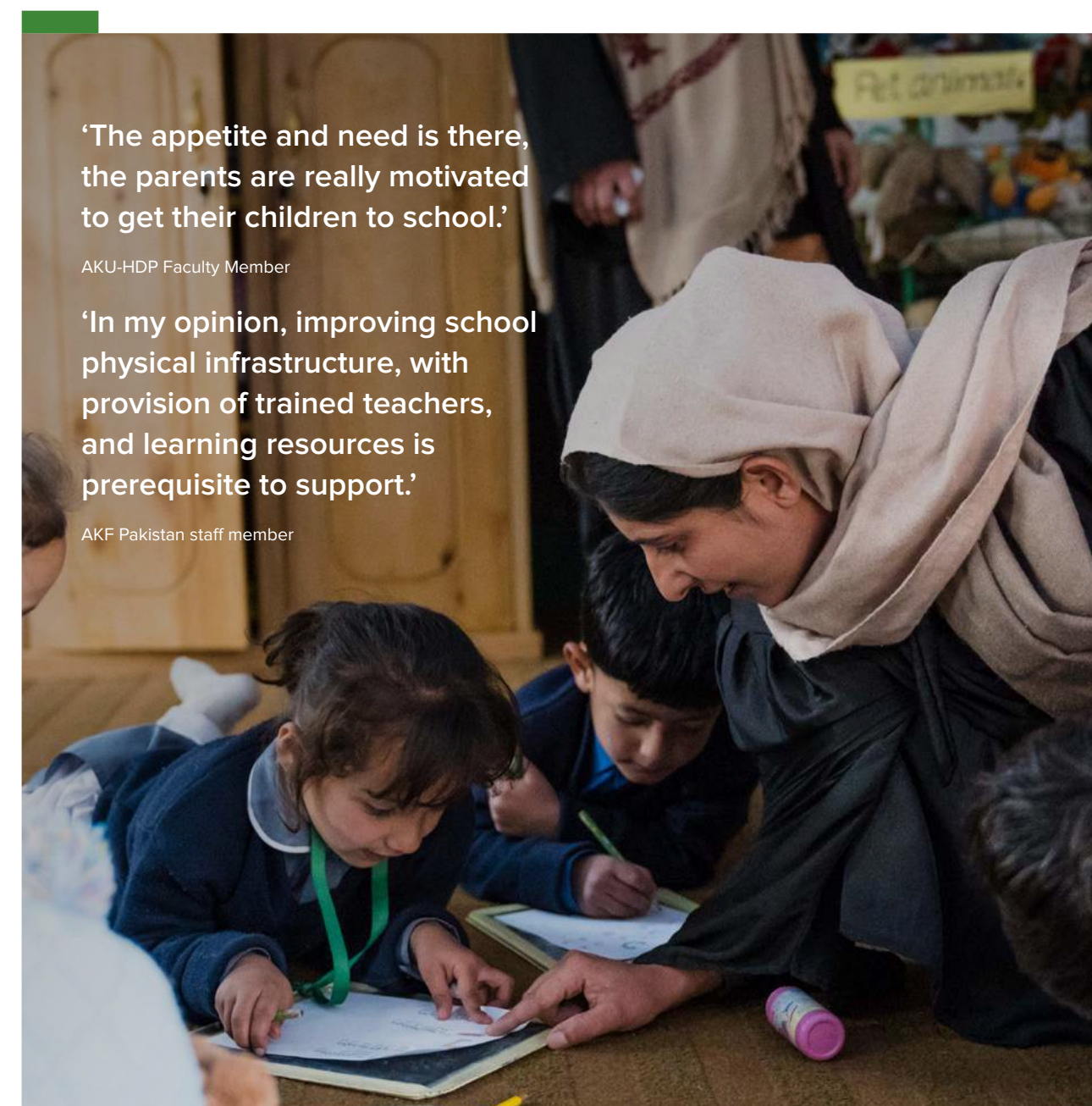
With tentative aspirations to develop an inclusive education system laid out in policy, evidence suggests that the challenges to effectively implement efforts moving towards inclusion are multiple and include; the shortage of adequate and accessible schools, of female teachers and of suitable learning materials, poor quality of teaching, unfavourable cultural beliefs towards girls' education and minorities, political unrest, environmental disasters and weak governance. Respondents felt that limited teacher capacity and negative beliefs about learners constitute some of the most significant barriers to implementing inclusive learning. They also spoke of an absence of reliable data on children with disabilities and the challenges encountered around language of instruction. Many children are not accessing education in a language they can understand, given the multilingual makeup of the country and the push for English or Urdu medium instruction.

'I think teachers can get really overwhelmed and are used to a culture where the textbook is the guide. When you start talking to them about learning differences and learning disabilities this can become very overwhelming.'

AKF Advisor

The evidence points to various areas of opportunity for improvements including drawing on Pakistan's pre-existing commitment to constructive, child-centred pedagogy to engage teachers and school administrators.

Respondents reinforced this, recommending that steps to move forward must include developing a teacher training offering that is practice focused, builds awareness and encourages teachers to explore how they form their own values. This should be led by qualified instructors capable of modelling the behaviours. However, efforts must be multi-pronged and include awareness raising as well as systemic investment in service provision to ensure support is more consistently available and accessible across the country.



'The appetite and need is there, the parents are really motivated to get their children to school.'

AKU-HDP Faculty Member

'In my opinion, improving school physical infrastructure, with provision of trained teachers, and learning resources is prerequisite to support.'

AKF Pakistan staff member



Understanding Learning Differences Across Schools2030 Contexts

References

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) Pakistan 2018. (2019). http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2018/reports/national/ASER_National_2018.pdf

Farooq, MS., & Kai, YT. (2017). A review of Pakistan school system. *Journal of Education and Practice* 8(4), 97–101. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1133082>

Grimes, P. et al. (2021). Disability Inclusive Education Practices in Pakistan, UNICEF South Asia. <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/17011/file/Country%20Profile%20-%20Pakistan.pdf>

Idara-E-Taleem-O-Aagahi (ITA). Paper commissioned for the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report, Inclusion and Education. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373669>

Malik, R., Raza, F., Rose, P., & Singhal, N. (2022). Are children with disabilities in school and learning? Evidence from a

household survey in rural Punjab, Pakistan. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 52(2), 211-231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1749993>

Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training. (2017). National Education Policy 2017. https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/pakistan_national_education_policy_2017-2025.pdf

Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training. (2018). National Education Policy Framework 2018. https://aserpakistan.org/document/2018/National_Eductaion_Policy_Framework_2018_Final.pdf

Pakistan - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>, Retrieved May 2022

Pakistan Ministry of Education. 2015. Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Pakistan. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00000229718>

Turi, J. A., Ghani, M. F. A., Javid, Y., & Sorooshian, S. (2017). Teacher's instructional strategies to support slow learners in selected schools, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. O-JIE: Online

UNESCO (2020) Reviewing the Status of Inclusive Education in Pakistan: Where do We Stand <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373669>

UNICEF Pakistan, Education, <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education>, Retrieved November 2022

Who Is a "Slow Learner?". *Daily Times*. (2019). Retrieved April 2022, from <https://dailytimes.com.pk/453386/who-is-a-slow-learner/>