ASSESSING THE IMPLEMENTATION GAPS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF PESHAWAR: AN EVALUATION OF THE KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA EDUCATION SECTOR PLAN (ESP) 2020-2025

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Abstract

The research evaluates the implementation problems within inclusive education practices for visually impaired students across secondary schools of Peshawar against the framework of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2020-2025. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions using a qualitative method. They collected data from 20 visually impaired students, 12 teachers, and 4 district education officers who participated across six schools. The study showed multiple obstacles in inclusive education: buildings lack accessibility, schools lack assistive education materials, teachers need

better education programs, and policies need more vigorous enforcement. Visual-impaired students experience financial barriers and social discrimination that restrict their inclusive education access. The study demonstrates the necessity to develop better monitoring systems, increase budgetary allocations, and train educational staff. Enhanced policy implementation alongside better public awareness and usage of assistive technology should enhance educational accessibility. The research supports revisions in educational policies that focus on creating an all-inclusive learning space for visually impaired students throughout the Peshawar district.

Chapter 1

Introduction

It is noteworthy that inclusive education has become one of the fundamental notions in modern educational discussions, focusing on the principle that every learner – including students with disabilities – should have the same chance of receiving a relevant and quality education. Around the world, approximately 264 million children have disabilities, and they experience disability-related difficulties at school (UNICEF, 2021). UN SDG 4 addresses quality education for all and refers to an inclusive approach, acknowledging the change education brings to reducing inequalities. However, these efforts have not closed the implementation gaps regarding inclusive education policies for children with disabilities, particularly those who are visually impaired, due to infrastructural, social, and systemic barriers (World Bank 2021). Students with vision problems will experience learning difficulties arising

from their inability to learn using conventional methods. For instance, they may be unable to read printed texts, see what has been written on the board or engage in other visually-based activities. It is expected to note that learners with vision impairment are impaired differently and, as such, might need different levels of support. When a learner lacks physical interactions regarding visual stimuli like an average learner, their learning options may be limited. This study evaluates the extent of compliance with inclusive education for visually impaired students in secondary schools in Peshawar within the framework of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ESP 2020–2025. It analyses the opportunities and challenges to inclusive education practices in the context of emerging global practices, regional developments, and local implications in Pakistan.

Inclusion of children with disabilities in all forms of education remains a global call, as underscored by the Salamanca Statement in 1994 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) of 2006. These frameworks support integrating learning differences in the usual school classroom environment. As per the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Children with disabilities who are out of school from Low- and middle-income countries are 49%, while 13% of students out of school are non-disabled children. Hearing and vision impairment are other factors which rank highest among childhood conditions and disabilities, with an estimated 19 million children worldwide impacted by visual impairment alone (WHO, 2022). As the concept of inclusion gains traction in developed countries, there are significant problems with implementing it in countries with fewer resources. There is a shortage of teacher training, fewer learning resources, and poor structures, which are issues that must be addressed (UNESCO, 2020). These difficulties mean solutions must be locally context-oriented, especially in countries and territories like South Asia, where education systems need help implementing inclusiveness.

According to the World Health Organisation, much of the visually impaired populace is found in South Asia, particularly India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (The Lancet Global Health, 2023). However, there are failures in implementing these policies despite the Indian Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016 and the Bangladesh Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act of 2013. For example, there are only 9% of schools for students with disabilities in Bangladesh (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The study also reveals that only 70% of visually impaired children attend primary school in India. Still, their transition to secondary education is low because of system barriers like unavailable and inadequate teacher training (Singh et al., 2022). Specifically, South Asia's socio-cultural experience of disability, where disability is more

or less associated with stigma, has a way of compounding the marginalization of visually impaired learners. In this regard, Pakistan also investigates similar issues but can better deal with them because of the ESP 2020–2025 policy.

Pakistan has also signed reforms to increase coverage and quality education standards about SDG 4. Nonetheless, there are several barriers to education that the country's learning institution has to overcome for inclusiveness. Pakistan Education Statistics (2022) includes the details of 22.8 million out-of-school children; a large number of them are disabled, including the blind (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2022). The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was formulated in 2002, and the Special Education Policy in 2006, but the two documents have not been appropriately implemented. Besides, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) conducted in 2023 clearly shows that only 3 per cent of schools in Pakistan provide education amenities to students with disabilities (ASER, 2023). The difficulties are even more significant at the secondary education level, where the facilities and teaching approaches must consider the opportunities for students with vision impairments. This study concerns Pakistani secondary schools, particularly those located in Peshawar, where ESP 2020-2025 provides a framework that is both unexplored and holds the potential to solve the problems mentioned above.

KP has made significant progress towards enhancing the education facility, primarily through ESP 2020-2025. The plan is focused on the issue of inclusion, which is an effort to bring typically excluded children, which are often those with disabilities, into mainstream education. However, according to a report by the Elementary and Secondary Education Department (ESED, 2023), only 12% of schools in KP partially provide interpreters for visually impaired students with facilities like Braille books and equipment. Teacher training remains a concern, with only 7% of teachers having been trained in inclusive education practices. Further, social beliefs in KP are such that they do not allow families of blind children to admit them into schools for the average functioning population, which acts as a backdrop to this exclusion (ESED, 2023). However, promises such as the Accelerated Education Program for Vulnerable Populations point to a rising consciousness on the issue. It assesses the impact and efficiency of these initiatives, provides a case study of Peshawar City, and highlights the loopholes that need to be addressed.

A survey done by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics in 2022 estimated that there were 2300 visually impaired children in Peshawar. Out of them, only 30% attend school. Secondary

education has become a significant challenge since few resources are available, such as learning materials, few qualified teachers, and few facilitators (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inclusive Education Policy (2017) highlights some of these critical measures, but their implementation could have been faster. Belay, M. A. (2020) conducted a study among visually impaired students in Peshawar, revealing that 65% of the students faced challenges accessing the curriculum content because of poor infrastructure (Belay, 2020). Therefore, this research examines these barriers and the difference between policy provisions and ground realities in the implementation of these barriers to offer recommendations for enhancing inclusive education in Peshawar.

Chapter 2

Literature Reviews

Education for all refers to the process where all students get equal chances to learn regardless of their strengths or disability. In Pakistan, the Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2020-2025 addresses its commitments regarding the provision of access to education for visually impaired students. However, there are still some implementation gaps which affect the education experiences of visually impaired students in secondary schools. More specifically, this literature review aims to explore inclusive education in terms of the challenges and development within this context, and the literature from global, regional, and local areas is examined.

A survey on best practices for inclusive education across the globe shows the challenges that visually impaired students face when in school. Current implementation issues include a need for assistive technology regarding teachers and more resources for curriculum modification. In low-income countries, these barriers are compounded by systemic factors like lack of infrastructure, making it hard for schools to achieve inclusivity measures. According to Jardinez and Natividad's (2024) study, inclusive pedagogical approaches and supporting devices in the learning process are needed to enhance a supportive learning environment. The study further indicates that it is possible to overcome the challenges if there is a necessary investment in teacher development and the accessibility of educational results to the global inclusiveness norms (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024). These perspectives are crucial for identifying the context of the gaps in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ESP 2020-2025 and getting an understanding of the needs of students with visually impaired students in Peshawar.

Pakistan has a long history of neglecting students with disabilities, and those with visual impairment are no exception to this look into the education sector of Pakistan. The National Education Policy (2009) officially accepted the notion of inclusion education; however, it provided no details on how to implement the concept, thus leaving the concept nearly stagnant. The ESP 2020-2025 seeks to address these infractions and related problems through teacher education, resources, capacities, and student enrollments. However, there are issues with their implementation; according to Molina et al. (2021), schools need more structures and human resources qualified enough to assist students with visual impairment (Molina et al., 2021). It is evident from history that there is always a gap between policy and practice in the case of Inclusive Education in Pakistan; therefore, it is essential to strengthen monitoring, evaluation, and accountability components in the context of the ESP framework.

One of its limitations is that implementing inclusive education policies is usually challenging at the local level. A policy analysis of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ESP 2020-2025 implies that the policies, as stated, are likely to be implemented outside the ground for learners with visual impairments. A recent study by Belay et al. (2021) reveals similar drawbacks in Zambia, where the basic needs for implementing inclusive education initiatives faced scarce resources, and coordination among stakeholders needed to be improved. They suggest that more elaborate programs of policy monitoring and stakeholder participation are necessary to fill the existing gaps. The recommendations offered to enhance the effectiveness of the resource allocation and accountability for secondary schools in Peshawar are applicable because the

implementation of the ESP has not been consistent enough across the secondary schools (Belay et al., 2021).

It has been shown that assistive technologies can help students with visual impairments, but they are only widely used in some countries. Shailaja Rani (2024) considered how technology can be used in teaching-learning activities for students with disabilities in Inclusive Education for Possibility and Change, focusing on the positive impacts of learning-teaching for independence. However, the study also familiarised some challenges that included high costs, low awareness of parents and teachers, and low training of the teachers. Regarding Peshawar, integrating ESP 2020-2025 implementation with technology implies realizing critical gaps in investment and capacity-building undertakings. Thus, the gaps are optimistic to be closed by the collaboration between policymakers and technology suppliers, allowing visually impaired learners to achieve their potential in the inclusive education environment (Rani, 2024).

Cultural, parental and community support is crucial in implementing and supporting integrated education. Previous research has shown that students with impaired vision learning can improve when parents and the community are involved. For instance, a study by Bardin and Lewis (2020) showed that their effectiveness in increased academic achievements and social assimilation among visually impaired learners is endorsed by parental involvement. However, due to culture and economics, parents sometimes do not get involved as the children from urban areas do in Peshawar. Such issues can only be overcome through community outreach programs and awareness campaigns to facilitate stakeholders' cooperation in adequately implementing the ESP 2020-2025. (Bardin & Lewis, 2020).

Inclusive education may not carry significant meanings when it comes to teaching visually impaired students, but it can significantly impact their mental health. Hess (2020) reviewed the various effects of classroom inclusion on students with visual impairment, where they established the improved self-worth and social belonging for any visually impaired learner provided a supportive and accessible learning environment. On the other hand, low-quality provision, implementation and support of inclusive education may be prejudicial to their mental health, thus leading to withdrawal and underachievement. These results underscore the need to develop services considering emotional needs beyond academic compliance when designing policies. These concerns can be met in Peshawar by extending Mental Health resources for inclusion in the ESP 2020-2025 process to visually impaired students (Hess, 2020).

Extant literature on the practical implementation of inclusive education encompasses efficiencies tested worldwide. According to Belay (2021), context-appropriate measures are needed to implement effective inclusive education in different countries. The study emphasized aspects such as teacher training, cooperation with stakeholders, and constant assessment in promoting inclusiveness for students with such conditions. Applying these principles to Peshawar's secondary schools may help modify ESP 2020-2025 to support the students' needs, specifically those of visually impaired students. Significantly, by linking global standards of practice with the specifics of the context, relevant national policies can be developed to ensure that education practices – for all communities – are sustainable (Belay, 2021).

Monitoring and evaluating the programmes are crucial in determining the effectiveness of inclusion. Zangi et al. (2021) explain how a strong evaluation framework is crucial for finding out areas of implementation weakness. In KP, there needs to be more appropriate monitoring systems to erode the ESP 2020-2025 potential. A study by Khan et al. (2022) identified this issue, noting that most schools need to track inclusion outcomes adequately to assess progress or prioritize funding. Defining the evaluation criteria and engaging students with visual impairments and their families can increase the responsibility of policies related to participating students with disabilities in schools in Peshawar.

Research Gap

As much as there is a wealth of literature on the advantages and concerns relating to visually Impaired in the worldwide community, few explore the shortcomings within the framework of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ESP 2020–2025. Previous studies do not adequately assess the support structures, teacher readiness, and resources available for visually impaired learners in secondary school. This research aims to fill this gap primarily by examining the pragmatic realities of secondary education in this region.

Synthesis of the Literature

This literature review synthesis reveals aspects and gaps regarding inclusive education for visually impaired students in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ESP 2020–2025 context. However, the lack of implementation in the Pakistani context is a problem rooted in systemic issues such as a lack of resources, no progressive policy updates, and little monitoring and evaluation. Studies show that the ESP is a good plan before reaching such heights. Still, in this regard, we find it ineffective in secondary schools, particularly in Peshawar, where the implementation is not as

efficient as it was said to be. Closing these gaps requires investment in teachers and their professional growth, support for acquiring physical resources and mental health services, and solid evaluation methodologies. To achieve the above objectives of this research, this study relies on these insights to offer practical recommendations for improving the practice of inclusive education in Peshawar.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter elaborates on the research method applied in the study and for assessing the performance gaps concerning the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2020–2025 on the implementation of acceptable and accessible education for the visually impaired in the secondary schools in Peshawar. This section presents the research strategy, data collection techniques applied, and the modes used in evaluating the efficiency of policy implementation. Due to the qualitative approach used in collecting data, the study seeks to get the views of educators, policymakers, and visually impaired students, focusing on addressing the challenges experienced and solutions that can be implemented to enhance the educational experiences of visually impaired students. This methodological framework helps develop a clear understanding of the goals and scope of the research.

Hypothesis:

The research hypothesis is that inclusive Education for visually impaired students of secondary schools in Peshawar faces implementation gaps within the outlines of KP ESP 2020-25.

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative design, using interviews and focus group discussions to collect in-depth data from stakeholders. Academically, qualitative researchers often used the tentative sample size in their respective works. Several scholars believe in "saturation," which is a significant deciding point for a qualitative study's sample size. Saturation is reaching the point of the data collection process when more data does not create new or valuable information. It means stopping the revealing of new ideas or insights, even with new data collection for the targeted categories you are studying (Dworkin, 2012).

Population and Sample Size

Population: The study's population is consisting of visually impaired students, teachers, and policymakers in secondary schools in Peshawar.

Sample Size: 6 Schools; 20 visually impaired students, 12 teachers, and 4 district education officers.

Sample Technique: Purposive sampling ensured to select the participants directly involved with inclusive education. Purposive sampling, often referred to as judgmental sampling, selected, and subjective sampling is a method of selecting participants based on certain criteria or the researcher's judgment (Tongco, 2007).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- The study's inclusion criteria are "Schools with visually impaired students, teachers of these students, and policymakers who are involved in ESP implementation.
- Exclusion criteria are those schools without visually impaired students or lacking inclusive education initiatives.

Tools for Data Collection

Semi Structure interviews with students, teachers, and policymakers

Two focus group discussions with teachers and administrators held to highlight and discuss the common barriers and best practices.

Using a custom, self-constructed checklist allows flexibility in focusing on the area directly. This devised to address gaps in implementing inclusive education for visually impaired students, tailored to gauge factors such as the availability of the material, teacher training, infrastructure, etc.

Procedure

- First of all, the consent form distributed among the respondent and shows individually in the written form as well orally.
- For data collection, conduct interviews and FGDs across selected schools in Peshawar, using the observational checklist to write up facilities and resources.
- Thematic Data Analysis applied to identify patterns and challenges in policy implementations, and then triangulations made by comparing responses from different stakeholders.

Rationale of the Chosen Topic

The scope is well suited to answering the research question. It offers a detailed view of policy implementation at the secondary level, where inclusion is essential for visually impaired students to embrace in the future. The identified stakeholders give diverse insights; students contribute from the learner's experience, teachers from the classroom reality, and policymakers shed light on the field realities of implementing guidelines.

Data Collection Process Step by Step

1. For most, permissions taken from relevant schools and institutions authorities.
2. For a diverse sampling, choose the secondary schools in Peshawar that cover urban and semi-urban areas of demography.
3. Conduct semi-structured interviews with targeted stakeholders to obtain personal insights and supplement with FGDs for the whole view.
4. During visits to schools, use a checklist to collect observational data on physical and educational barriers, such as brails, devices, and specialized teachers.
5. The data analysis thematic analysis, compiling the qualitative data and identifying recurring patterns in gaps, challenges, and successes.
6. Finally, triangulations and validations adopted to cross-check the findings from different stakeholders to secure accuracy.

Methodological Advantages

This methodology—primarily qualitative with observational analysis—offers several benefits:

- Qualitative interviews can enrich and detail the experiences of visually impaired students compared with quantitative studies.
- Semi-structured interviews ensure flexibility to capture unveiled issues in inclusive education.
- Observational checklists serve as a form of objective measure by offering real-time evaluation of school settings in addition to qualitative information.

Methodological limitations

- It is noted that qualitative analysis may be subjective, and a particular set of questions give consistency to the interview process.
- Despite the qualitative focus, this might limit the generalizability of the research; choosing various schools is an attempt to produce a sample of schools as diverse as possible.
- This process take time for the interviews and analysis.

Data Analysis

The current study adopts thematic analysis in the process of data analysis. Thematic analysis is a process which classifies the themes or patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Usually, the thematic analysis is used for cluster text description. These interviews transcribed and went through multiple reviews to ensure an in-dept understanding of the scripts. The researcher assesses the transcribed data with concentration so that recurring themes, ideas, patterns, and subjects uncovered (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Several ways are used in thematic analysis, while the six-step process is the most relevant technique (Marguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions are discussed in this chapter. The data is then analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to ensure that the data is analyzed in a programmed and standardized manner to develop patterns and themes. The study centers on students, teachers, and policymakers' perceptions of the challenges that hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education for visually impaired students. In this way, by presenting primarily the qualitative results of the study, this chapter offers the best explanation of the barriers, practices, and implementation suggestions. The results will help fill identified policy gaps that will promote improved learning outcomes for students with visual impairment within the given context.

4.1 Accessibility of Resources

4.1.1 Availability of Learning Materials

The research highlighted the fact that there was a massive lack of most of the key learning materials for visually impaired students. Interviewees pointed out that Braille books and tactile aids were either lacking or provided in most schools or provided in the form of outdated sets. The lack or inadequacy of teaching-learning aids was evidenced by teachers' use of unsuitable or makeshift items, which compromised the quality of the teaching-learning process. Further, in the studied cases, tools like screen readers were either non-existent or nonoperational in many cases. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ESP has also tried its best to supply the braille gadgets, audio instruments, and software. These aids make a difference in the user's life but sometimes counter hurdles when the devices are unavailable or have issues. According to the question asked one of the teachers said, "Unfortunately, the school does not have adequate teaching aids such as the braille devices or audio equipment. I attempt to use what I can find, but I have concluded that if I were to incorporate more teaching and learning resources, it would significantly improve the outcome of my class sessions (Personal Communication with teacher, November 2024).

This was mainly because teachers and administrators lacked adequate training and support in technology-based solutions. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province echoed the need to employ such tools to shape ESP 2020-2025, but implementation has been relatively modest. As for the question, one of the teachers expressed his opinion that "the school has some basic teaching facilities, including audio equipment and the few sets of braille-use teaching facilities." However, availability is not constant, and there is always a time when the resources that the visually impaired students need are unavailable, which is not good for their learning process" (Personal Communication with teacher, November 2024).

4.1.2 Infrastructure Accessibility

The students and the teachers pointed out the lack of necessary school facilities during the interview. The observation results revealed that ramps, tactile pathways, and accessible classrooms were deemed. Studies revealed that it is inconducive in most institutions for visually impaired students. These remained among the acknowledged gaps; nonetheless, budgetary and logistical challenges were considered significant impediments to interventions. Responding to the question, one of the embedded student respondents sighed and said, "I sometimes get lost moving from one class to another due to poorly developed infrastructure and lack of resources

to support disability. In my opinion, the scenario shows that the available resources are inadequate. Some teachers try to do so, but there is no permanent provision with the required teaching aids" (Personal Communication with student, November 2024).

The other student stated, "I have had to rely on the assistance of other people when moving around the school compound as the ramps are poorly located, and there are no taped strips for the blind. Sometimes, I get trapped in some school sections because they are not barrier-free – for instance, there are no ramps or proper walkways. The physical structures are clearly insufficient. We have not seen the school make efforts to make access facilities for students like me possible" (Personal Communication with student, November 2024).

4.2 Teacher Preparedness and Training

4.2.1 Specialized Training Programs:

It is a contributing factor that structured and consistent training programs are not available, thus distorting any effort aimed at preparing teachers with modern, inclusive teaching strategies. This underlines a need for improved partnerships between policymakers and training organizations, including PITE, to develop improved capability development activities. One of the teachers answered, "One of the difficulties I have is helping visually impaired students to engage in group tasks or group discussions. One of the challenges in managing a classroom is to meet the needs of all the students while promoting equity. There is insufficient space for mobility-impaired students to get around, and the classroom is not well equipped to accommodate visually impaired students' interaction with their physical surroundings" (Personal Communication with Teacher, November 2024).

Another responded, "It is difficult for me to change my teaching rhythm to cater to visually impaired students without forgetting the rest of the class." I have to adjust the content and how I teach it regularly; sometimes, this takes time because I rarely have the means and tools to cater for visually impaired students. However, I face a challenge primarily due to the many students in class: attending to all students individually is a challenge. I do not have specialized training; hence, I feel out-prepared. Even though I have limited knowledge of what I have learned in everyday classroom management and instruction, I believe I will be more helpful if I formal professional development in explicit instruction and teaching for the visually impaired" (Personal Communication with Teacher, November 2024).

As for the teacher respondents, one of them said, “I participated in some augmentation on inclusive learning but was not explicitly trained on visual impairment. Of course, I can make some changes to the content delivery. However, it would benefit me to understand better braille, assistive technologies, and how to organize the classroom for full accessibility” (Personal Communication with Teacher, November 2024).

4.2.2 Use of Inclusive Teaching Methods

The inequity in modifying curricula and teaching approaches suggests that principals at the policy level are systematic in terms of funding and faculty development. Teachers require flexibility regarding lesson plans and other teaching resources as the ESP postures on quality education. One respondent reported, “My main concern is to convert conventional teaching model for visually impaired students. For instance, making charts or notes is ineffective for these students, and thus I always have to reconsider how to provide information to them in a manner that will be useful to their learning process” (Personal Communication with student, November 2024).

One of them said, “Teachers indicated that they often faced difficulties in integrating, modifying and employing instructional materials, as well as assistive technologies such as Braille devices and tactile. Schools could also not supply sufficient resources for implementing inclusive approaches, such as tactile diagrams and screen reads. I think I am moderately ready; however, I have not had professional development related to teaching students with visual impairments. I do not have much training in teaching students with disabilities, so I often use trial and error and ask for suggestions from teachers I know. However, receiving more formal training would make me more comfortable addressing their needs” (Personal Communication with student, November 2024).

4.3 Policy Implementation Gaps

4.3.1 Alignment with ESP Goals:

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Plan (ESP) is a policy plan aimed at improving the education system in the target province from 2020 to 2025, which focuses on inclusive education and aims at the inclusion of marginalized groups for which it has set specific targets, including the visually impaired students. However, discrepancies can be identified regarding interpreting these objectives and functional practices at the school level. However, the ESP focuses on developing additional infrastructures for the physically disabled, as well as signage

and other learning teaching aids for people with disabilities; various schools have no facilities such as Braille books and other assisting apparatus. One of the respondents stated that “The ESP is a good plan, but it often becomes difficult to track its implementation because the districts lack adequate workforce and resources to adhere to the set procedures strictly. It is important to point out that better monitoring systems are necessary” (Personal Communication with Administrator, November 2024).

The ESP incorporates sound M&E tools, such as reviews and assessments, that enhance and measure the framework's performance. Nevertheless, the stakeholders recall some issues with applying these mechanisms. Both teachers and administrators pointed to the absence of proper audit procedures and the problem with feedback mechanisms that help identify and correct different problems. However, one respondent pointed out, “The ESP concerns itself with the implementation of such goals as making Braille books and assistive devices available to learners; however, realities drawn from schools are different. There are no implementing mechanisms aside from administrative and weak institutional capacity, which will always present a problem when translating goals and objectives into practical outcomes” (Personal Communication with Administrator, November 2024).

When asked, one of the respondents replied, “There are issues of equity and fairness regarding resource allocation and utilization that are not well implemented in various schools. This becomes hard mainly when schools are in remote areas, lack facilities, and do not employ teachers with special skills for children with visual impairment. Another concern is obtaining truthful data from all the schools to profile how the policies are being addressed. The reporting structures are poorly defined, and some schools do not adequately report the progress of inclusion processes (Personal Communication with District Education Officer, November 2024).

4.3.2 Resource Allocation:

Financial limitations continue to challenge human personnel to put into practice processes of inclusion. Although there are provisions in the ESP for special funding of investments in marginalized students, these funds do not get to the schools well. Some highlighted teaching and learning issues include the lack of adequate and equitable distribution of resources and the need to improve their financial planning to provide needed infrastructure and better-funded staff training. As for the above-mentioned gaps, one of the respondents believed that “physical

environment, for instance, inadequate classrooms and hallways for the physically challenged especially the visually impaired to manoeuvre within the school. Moreover, inadequate braille textbooks and other forms of learning materials are some of the challenges that hinder the degree of participation of these students in lessons with their peers" (Personal Communication with teacher, November 2024).

Another respondent also pointed out one major problem, which they opined as being unequal distribution. "Schools in urban areas are likely to have easy access to the keeps, whereas Schools in rural and semi-urban areas lag. In that regard, there is virtually no supervision on how the money is utilized appropriately. This unfairness results from centralized decision-making, which smooth the requirements of different schools while disregarding the needs of risk schools. However, one of the significant challenges of practising inclusive education is the issue of resource limitation, especially for low-funding countries. As highlighted earlier, the ESP has provisions for targeted investment in marginalized students, but the schools do not receive adequate support. It speaks of balancing resources and improving financial management to address infrastructural and training gaps" (Personal Communication with Administrator, November 2024).

4.4 Academic Challenges

The ESP 2020-2025 focuses more on relevant instructional materials, especially for learners with disabilities. However, studies have revealed that several gaps exist in actualising and optimising these resources. Most students often complain of challenges acquiring teaching and learning resources, including braille textbooks and other gadgets. Insufficient teacher knowledge of inclusive strategies also widens the learning divide. Altogether, one of the respondents commented, "My experience has been challenging. Teachers always try to aid me, but I struggle to compete with my fellow students due to inadequate accommodation, as most course materials are scarce. There are not many braille books, and often, I have to wait to get my lessons in braille" (Personal Communication with student, November 2024).

ESP focuses on participation and attendance but does not develop or target the ambition level, pointing to an emerging weakness of career-related programs. One of the respondents mentioned, "I would say the resources are insufficient. Some teachers try; however, there are no guarantees that we will provide all the resources needed in sufficient amounts. When coming to class, feeling the texture of other materials used in lessons, reading maps, and other aspects

such as writing or drawing, there is no proper/tactile feel, which is a challenge in special classes like geography or art. There are somewhat acceptable materials on some topics, such as languages, but there is a cruel deficiency of source availability on other topics like mathematics and natural sciences" (Personal Communication with student, November 2024).

4.5 Barriers to Inclusive Education

4.5.1 Physical Barriers

The infrastructure access to most schools in Peshawar is severely limited as most of them have no or limited provision of ramps, tactile paving, and accessible toilets. Although ESP 2020-2025 highlights disability-friendly infrastructure, these installations are not uniform because of financial limitations and priorities-related problems. One of the respondents mentioned that 'It is hardly possible to get access to the school building.' The ramps are positioned at the wrong places, and no tactile paving makes it unsafe for me to maneuver around. The school lacks haptic zones, and the accessibility of some of the spaces is only possible with assistance because of the inadequate construction of the building. I end up becoming confined to some sections of the school since they are not as accessible as they should be" (Personal Communication with Student, November 2024).

Another respondent stated, "I can say that the problem of accessible infrastructures is one of the most challenging. Our school's halls are comparatively narrow; there are no lifts in the building. It has only become necessary to employ extra workers to escort blind or partially sighted students from one class to another. However, these are not part of a systematic plan or necessarily part of a broader strategy of ensuring better accessibility. Second, it is the structure that has an apparent deficiency, and it is not in its best condition. Our classes are constructed without considering the needs of disabled persons, and there are few if any, assistive technologies such as braille printers, screen readers, or magnifiers through which the students could learn" (Personal Communication with Administrator, November 2024).

4.5.2 Institutional Barriers:

Institutional constraints include a shortage of qualified teachers to teach children with disabilities, poor access to quality learning materials, and weaknesses in the execution of policies for the inclusion of disabled children in schools in Peshawar. These gaps can be attributed to budget constraints and a focus on core curriculum. These problems are worsened by the E&SED's lack of capacity for oversight and compliance with inclusion requirements.

One of the respondents opined that “we have policies on inclusive education in the ESP, but the problem is always at the implementation levels. The progress commonly seen in such projects is severely hindered, even halted – Due to financial constraints and a lack of acceptance from the locals. Moreover, we are working to strengthen the teacher education systems or even improve monitoring measures in the education sector” (Personal Communication with District Education officer, November 2024).

The following was another shared response: ‘One of the issues I have heard managers mention often is that maintaining staff training could be challenging, especially when guaranteeing that all the employees are productive and dedicated to implementing the principle of inclusion. Some teachers go out of their way to learn about and acquire relevant training and resources, while others may even be reluctant to do so, even when they lack knowledge in the area or believe it will add to the workload. We strive for this training to become part of the staff development toolkit” (Communication with PDG, November 2024).

Another respond came out “For schools, it is defined that they have some provisions, but these provisions are not adequate at all. No teacher is specifically trained as an instructional improvement or sign language interpreter for visually impaired students. Some schools may include braille books or other assistive tools, but their availability is scarce, and not every teacher can effectively educate a child with a visual impairment. Moreover, the absence of differentiation allows students to fail almost all the regular curriculum classes. Additional support structures that require more specific teaching assistants or a section in the school dedicated to special needs children” (Communication with PDG, November 2024).

4.6 Role of Stakeholders

4.6.1 Teachers and Administrators:

Teachers in a school setting are responsible for overseeing/effective classroom management since they teach and facilitate the formation of friendships among the children. Despite this, both groups of professionals need to show sustained interest in professional development of inclusive practices and support from the administrators. One of the teachers was ‘‘Optimal learning environment in the classroom in question also implies that the change of learning-teaching environment where the students feel wanted is also required. The other students require art equipment like Braille, tape books, and other materials that assist the students who have learning difficulties in learning on their own. That is why, as teachers, we

aim to provide an environment that enables such children to attend school together with other children" (Interview with FDG, November 2024).

This respondent stated, "As administrators, we need to ensure that schools put in place not only the physical facet but also the psychosocial demands of visually impaired students. This is not about having physical access, such as barrier-free structures, but ensuring the educational staff has preparedness strategies to address all diversity-related barriers. Another is constant training, including fair aid such as the screen reader for the benefit of our students" (Communication with FDG, November 2024).

4.6.2 Policymakers:

However, the responsibility for social justice in education distribution falls on leaders who fund schools and design laws that regulate school systems. They control the speed and the quality of incorporation processes in the districts. The respondent also said that "expanding the government programs aims to narrow the gap in access to Education for students with disabilities. With policies like the Disability Education Act, we are actively involved in ensuring that schools can be funded to give people with disabilities these facilities rights, from the books to the learning materials from the Braille forms. But much more has to be done in order to guarantee that these policies are adequately enforced at the local level" (Communication with PDG, November 2024).

Another respondent said," Education for visually impaired students should be a right, not a luxury. How policies are followed at the lower level remains poorly addressed, and this is where advocacy groups come in handy. The organization's goals are to advocate for integrating disabled students into regular schools with necessary facilities and to enumerate the cause of equity in Education for all" (Communication with PDG, November 2024).

4.7 Findings of the Research

1. **Lack of Accessible Infrastructure:** Most schools in Peshawar do not have ramps for movement, textured walking surface indicators, and accessible toilets for visually impaired students. The lack of accessibility remained high, and most schools do not even fulfill the most essential criteria for accessibility. The lack of well-placed ramps and, in some cases, the complete absence of tactile pathways are enablers of those mobility issues.

2. **Inadequate Teacher Training:** There is poor preparation of teachers in integrating practices of the facilitation of instruction to learners with disabilities. Most use ordinary approaches and have difficulties in preparing lessons and teaching content for a blind and low-vision student.
3. **Resource Shortages:** Appropriate learning facilities, including books in braille and other helpful equipment, are either scarce or inadequate.
4. **Weak Policy Implementation:** Nonetheless, the acclaimed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ESP 2020-2025 goals have not been fully achieved because of the absence of robust M&E for policy implementation.
5. **Urban-Rural Disparities:** Urban institutions are better endowed with resources than rural and semi-urban institutions, where resource shortage is acute. Prevalent inequality in the distribution of commodities hinders the implementation of quality education to all visibly impaired students**.**
6. **Budgetary Constraints:** The program is constrained by funding, which affects infrastructure construction, training of teaching staff, and purchase of special equipment.

Therefore, the policy implications of these results show the exigent importance of addressing the protracted disparities in policy enforcement, infrastructural development, teacher professional development, and resources for equity in access to inclusive education for visually impaired students in Peshawar.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This research sought to determine the extent to which these ideals are upheld to identify gaps in the implementation of inclusive education of visually impaired students in the secondary schools of Peshawar as provided by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ESP 2020-2025. Considering this, this research used thematic analysis on qualitative data gathered from interviews and focus group discussions. It offered a wealth of information on the challenges experienced by visually impaired students and systemic failings in attempting to provide an inclusive learning environment.

While the research process faces multiple difficulties. Research data collection difficulties exist because official records are rare, and institutions show reluctance to disclose their information. Educational institutions across Peshawar do not possess essential infrastructure, including assistive technology and Braille resources; academic delivery and research gathering prove complex. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2020-2025 remains unknown to most teachers and administrators who fail to apply it consistently. Across society, parents face discrimination, which keeps them from discussing learning difficulties, thus producing inaccurate statistics. The study extends only as far as its resources allow and faces ethical difficulties when obtaining explicit, informed consent from participants. Student progress evaluation becomes complicated because standardized assessment methods are absent from the educational framework.

The findings highlighted Several concerns that continue to hinder the implementation of inclusive education. Another is the absence of additional teaching aids and other materials that the visually impaired require, including Braille books, tactile diagrams, and other assistive materials. In addition, there is a dearth of qualified teachers with the ability and skills to handle these students' needs. Many schools in the study did not have proper facilities like ramps, tactile cues, accessible classrooms, and other facilities. All these made visually impaired students more isolated in schools. Another emerging trend was the low concern of policymakers and school administrators for the provision of service to visually impaired students. As much as the ESP 2020–2025 policy document stresses the participation of all learners in education, the ground implementation is still questionable. Due to resource limitations and the absence of supervision measures, policy goals and plans have been distorted substantially.

The study highlights the need to embrace a systemic integration model for implementing inclusion in schooling for visually impaired students that encompasses the needs of children, education, faculty, and other stakeholders in schools and communities. With these gaps being filled, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Plan can play an essential role in the changes for visually impaired learners in Peshawar.

Consequently, the present paper argues that inclusive education is not just a policy imperative but a right that guarantees education to every learner, irrespective of his or her disability. The conclusions made in the present work remind all the parties — policymakers, schools, and society — that without a united effort to form a tolerant and inclusive context for diversity in the educational system, it will remain a mere pipedream. In this paper, the efforts undertaken to

fulfill the needs of students with visual impairments are discussed as a humanitarian goal and a social one.

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