



Inclusive Education and Disability Rights in Pakistan: Bridging the Gap between Constitutional Guarantees and Social Realities

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ABSTRACT

It is the right to get an education and is provided in Pakistan as given in Article 25-A of the constitution, free and mandatory education to children aged 5-16 years, of normal aptitude, as well as those with special needs. Other international obligations that have been ratified by Pakistan include the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which states that the state must offer an inclusive and accessible education. Children with disabilities are often marginalized by their social practices, having been labeled with stigmas, misconceptions, and ignorance. The families also usually face discrimination and social opposition, leading to a lack of elements that may allow them to integrate. To tackle these problems, the key steps would be a strong enforcement of policies, greater investment, and socialization to make the constitutional guarantee of inclusiveness in education come to life, just like it is a reality for the majority.



Introduction

It is universally recognized that education is a universal human right that is, in fact, a key to individual, societal, and country development (Iftikhar, 2024). The Constitution of Pakistan has given this right in Article 25-A that the states are obliged to educate all children between the ages of 5-16 years of age without discrimination (Jahanzaib et al., 2023). Moreover, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires children with special needs to have inclusion and equal access to education (Shaukat, 2023).

These laws impose a tight burden on the state to create an equal footing in access to education (Akhtar, 2025). However, Children with disabilities are pre-empted from gaining access to

education due to the lack of inclusive provisions, lack of special institutions, and a huge lack of experts who are trained teachers (Kamran & Bano, 2025). Other obstacles are the social ones, when families and communities fail to promote the enrollment of children with special needs, the result is commonly associated with cultural misconceptions, stigma, and negative attitudes (Hussain & Akhter, 2025).

It thus excludes some of them from the mainstream educational system, continuing patterns of marginalization and inequality further (Kamran et al., 2023).

Research Justification

Education is a fundamental human right, and providing equal access to children with special needs is key to the development of an inclusive society. However, Article 25-A of the constitution guarantees that individuals with disabilities are provided with special education and that Pakistan has signed the international agreements requiring it. This study is warranted since it aims to close the gap between policy commitments and the reality among children with disabilities. Little academic attention has been given to the issue of legal framework diffusion into practice in the context of the Pakistani multi-ethnic society. It also targets the expansionary goals of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 4, which promotes equal education for everyone. This study on both legal and social levels can make Pakistan an equal place to learn and help improve the existing conditions of marginalized populations.

Research Objectives

1. To discuss the historical context of the right to special education in Pakistan
2. To highlight the theoretical context of the right to special education in Pakistan
3. To analyze the laws regarding the right to special education in Pakistan.
4. To identify the key challenges regarding the right to special education in Pakistan
5. To explore the opportunities for the right to special education in Pakistan
6. To propose effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Research Methodology

This study employed a systematic review methodology, with research objectives established accordingly. A comprehensive literature review was conducted (Komba & Lwoga, 2020). Research findings were categorized based on their content (Hiver et al., 2021; Petticrew & Roberts, 2006), and classified information was incorporated into the study by organizing it into headings (Gan et al., 2021; Pawson et al., 2005). The evaluation of classified information and titles formed the basis of the study (Page, 2021; Rahi, 2017), ensuring the integrity of the research subject and its contents (Egger et al., 2022; Victor, 2008). The criteria for selection are listed.

Relevance: Researches that directly addressed the questions posed by this study are included.

Quality: Studies that meet a certain quality threshold (e.g., methodological rigour, bias risk) are included. Most of the research is from Scopus-indexed and Clarivate Analytics journals and reputed publishers.

Recency: Consideration of the publication date to ensure that the review reflects the most current evidence. Most of the studies are from the last three years.

Language: Only studies published in English are included.

Data Completeness: Previous studies must provide sufficient data on outcomes of interest for practical synthesis; this is also ensured in this research.

This study did not use primary data from human participants; therefore, no ethics clearance letter from the ethics committee was required.

Literature Review

The right to education of all children has become widespread all over the world, particularly in international activities that focus on inclusive and equal education opportunities (Kamran et al., 2025). As a member of such international obligations, Pakistan has committed to educating children with special needs. Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan provides free and mandatory education to all children between the ages of 5 and 16 years (Akhtar, 2025). There is limited practice. The policies also have a tendency to fail in achieving their objectives, and many children with disabilities are unable to access quality learning opportunities (Hussain & Akhter, 2025).

Pakistan's education system is still severely challenged, in spite of its legal commitments (Jahanzaib et al., 2023). Even when special schools have been instituted by some of the provinces, they are still inadequate and mostly located in the urban centers (Shaukat, 2023). The results in no education whatsoever. This disparity of policy and practice indicates poor institutional capacity and unequal distribution of educational resources (Kamran & Bano, 2025).

In addition to structural weaknesses, social obstacles are a major impediment to inclusivity. Stigma and misconceptions of culture and discriminatory attitudes often make families unwilling to take children with disabilities to school (Iftikhar, 2024). Gender inequalities aggravate the situation, and girls are more hindered from receiving education. The only way to bridge this gap is through legal implementation as well as the transformation of the society (Altaf et al., 2023). Equality can be fostered by training teachers, creating awareness in the community, and also by enforcing inclusive policies (Zaman et al., 2025). Inclusive education in Pakistan requires a comprehensive solution that entails the integration of both legal duty and social acceptance in the sense that all children of all capabilities should be given a chance to learn and develop.

Historical Context of Right of Special Education in Pakistan

Special education in Pakistan has evolved gradually and almost entirely due to the influence of the international community (Shaukat, 2023). When the country received independence in 1947 (Kamran et al., 2025). The 1960s and 1970s saw some special schools begin in major cities by a handful of accountable and non-volunteer organizations, and the centers were confined and, as such, were hardly accessible to the rural communities (Altaf et al., 2023).

A more expert state-position started with the Special Education Ordinance of 1981, which granted the necessity of specialized services (Jahanzaib et al., 2023). It is also during this period that the introduction of government-funded special education centers by the Ministry of Social Welfare was established (Akhtar, 2025). But these institutions primarily encouraged segregation, and children with disabilities were not included in studies at regular schools (Hussain & Akhter, 2025).

The progress towards global commitments through the differences in international structures to decide the developing region like Pakistan (Iftikhar, 2024). The inclusion of Article 25-A to the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010) (Kamran & Bano, 2025). Nevertheless, these advancements cannot be tested without historical overlooks, ineffective execution, and the

elimination of the historical social defining barriers in Pakistan to ensure inclusive education (Zaman et al., 2025).

Theoretical Context of Right of Special Education in Pakistan

Pakistan's right to special education may be explained using various theoretical approaches explaining the legal framework of the right, as well as some potential obstacles to the delivery. The Central Lenses of human rights theory are applied in the fact that education as a fundamental human right is promoted internationally. In this concept, states can have the legal and moral duty of providing equality for children, even those with disabilities. It follows the constitutional dedication of the Republic of Pakistan in the constitution under Article 25-A. The other approach is that of the Social Model of Disability, which looks at the individual no longer as an impaired entity but at what hinders the developing of a disability in society.

This model doesn't distinguish children with disabilities based on their disability; instead, they are denied because of inaccessible components, nondiscriminatory policies, and adverse viewpoints of others. The stigma and cultural misconceptions are also very common in Pakistan, and this theory comes in handy to comprehend the stigma and cultures that are slightly frustrating in integrating. It emphasizes equality, involvement, and the breaking down of segregation. All these frameworks give a clear picture of the legal tenets and social instructional prohibitions that form special education in Pakistan.

Laws Regarding Right of Special Education in Pakistan

The Constitution of Pakistan, Article 25-A (2010): This article stipulates that provision of education to all children is free and compulsory between the ages of 5 to 16 years old, and consequently it is then the duty of the state to make provision of education accessible to children, even those with disabilities.

The Special Education Ordinance, 1981: It is considered one of the first formal legislations that addressed the issue of disability with the intention of sharing and ordering special educational institutions

Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance, 1981: This act, although mainly related to employment, also took into consideration the learning aspect of going through training as a means of rehabilitation and inclusion of disabled people into society.

The 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010): Devolution of education to provincial governments made this reform possible, so that after the reform, the provincial governments are able to make acts of legislation aimed at the development of inclusive education policies in the provincial governments

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2011: it is upon the invitation of CRPD, internationally binding on Pakistan, to be in a position to enroll children with disabilities in non-discriminative and inclusive education.

Challenges for the Right of Special Education in Pakistan

Limited Infrastructure: Ideally, a significant problem is the shortage of proper schools and places where children with disabilities can stay. Special education centers are largely found within the urban regions of the country, with minimal or no offered to the rural population.

Monetary Limitations: A lack of funds means that it is not able to develop specialized resources, assistive technologies, and learning materials. The state should provide the necessary support to the families who are unable to afford such services.

Social Stigma: The cultural beliefs and categorizations negatively affect the parenting practices, as parents do not want to enroll their children in schools. Stigma creates segregation and strengthens discrimination, rendering integration even longer.

The lack of trained teachers: Pakistan has a severe acuity of qualified teachers who can deal with the needs of special education students, as they have many and different needs. The new teachers do not get enough training to deliver effective and inclusive learning.

Weak Policy Enforcement: In spite of the existence of laws and policy-related international and worldwide commitments that guarantee inclusion in the education system, the realization of these factors is compromised by weak implementation, bureaucracy, absent monitoring mechanisms, and so on, in Pakistan.

Opportunities for Right of Special Education in Pakistan

Awareness of Necessity: Awareness of the need to have inclusive education is being created by civil society, the media, and other disability rights organizations. Such a perception is open to manipulation in order to avoid stigma and encourage acceptance.

Constitutional Guarantees: The Constitution, in Article 25-A, guarantees free and compulsory education to all children. It provides a sufficient legal ground to expand inclusive and special education at the local level across the country.

International Obligations: It is possible that some opportunities to reform some of her policies, receiving international funding and technical help, could be realized under the international obligations of Pakistan to the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

Provincial Autonomy: The 18th Amendment decentralized the whole education system to provincial governments, which left room to develop local based policies. The provinces are now able to come up with local inclusive education programs according to the needs.

Technological Advancement: Digital learning tools and assistive technologies have given children with disabilities a new chance. The obstacles of access and accessibility to less served areas can be addressed by E-learning systems/sections and modification gadgets.

Discussion

The discussion of Pakistan's special education shows that there is a considerable disparity between the sounds and the above-ground principles. Although these are codified by the constitution, and these international obligations provide a solid base, their application is hampered by weak results. Children with disabilities are unable to enjoy their right to education due to a number of challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained teachers, and money, among others. Social barriers (such as stigma and cultural misconceptions) are also crucial to discourage the pursuit of education opportunities by families. Meanwhile, new forms arise, and they allow a possibility of improvement. The reform opportunities can be presented in the constitutional and international system, in the growing advocacy and technological development. However, the only

way of breaking the gap between them is a multi-dimensional approach that should consider implementing the policies as well as the society.

Conclusion

Pakistan is constitutionally and internationally obligated to provide a right to special education, yet they have yet to be able to offer it. One of such provisions of the law is Article 25-A, but reluctance to change still lies in the form of cultural barriers, such as mediocre performance, ineffective resource supply, and stigma. Appropriate policies, resources, and culture must be enforced to ensure inclusive education. This right must also be fulfilled by the common good and the development of individual nations and even social justice itself.

Recommendations

Application of Technology: Use of technology, e learning systems, and assistive equipment to increase accessibility between children with disabilities.

Campaigns focused on Awareness: Give be-campaign So-nation-a-ware-an-go. Reducing the stigma of children with disabilities, building inclusiveness, and motivating families to enroll children with disabilities.

Community Engagement: Involve the parents, the local leaders, and the Non-Governmental Organizations in the decision-making process to establish favorable learning conditions.

Data Collection: Prepare good databases regarding the disabled child to help in drawing evidence-based policies that will also be used to track progress.

Improve Infrastructure: Newer and more specialized and inclusive education centers must be initiated and predominantly in rural and underserved populations.

Increase funding: Greenbelt View: sufficient budgetary allocation of funds in the development of infrastructure, teacher education and assistive technology to achieve inclusive education.

International Cooperation: Collaborate with international bodies in an attempt to adopt improved practices, obtain finances and also gain technical knowledge.

Inclusive Curriculum Development: Design a program of all-purpose curriculum that will allow the students with special needs to draw attention to regular learning.

Enforce Policy Implementation: Ensure that Article 25-A and other special education relevant laws are effectively implemented by effectively monitoring and successfully establishing accountability.

Training on Learning Disability: Initiate training of teachers on specific skills in addressing the needs of various learners.

Research Limitations

Despite the fact that it is possible that the study itself does possess some value when applied to specifically point out the legal requirements and the social, that are most common, hindrances that are present in the special education scene within the Pakistani context, the research has multiple shortcomings. Reports and literature that are available. It discourages firsthand experience on the

part of the students, the teachers, and even the families who may be directly affected by the problem. Second, there is not a lot of information regarding children with disabilities in Pakistan, and it is quite unreliable as well, which can also play a role in the quality of the analysis. Third, the locality of the achievement is the broad tendencies and laws covering a large part of the ground, perhaps owing to the lack of a small local representative of the provincialization or the country issue of accessibility to special education.

Research Implications

Awareness and Advocacy: The civil society organizations can use these findings to come up with campaigns that may result in reduced stigmatization and increased acceptance of children with disabilities.

Community Engagement: The paper identifies the role of parents, local authorities, and NGOs in the creation of favorable learning conditions.

Education Practices: The research presents the notion that teachers adopt inclusive pedagogies and integrate the application of digital tools to meet the needs of different students.

Future Research Directions

Field-Based Studies: Future research needs to include interviews, surveys, and case studies with students, parents, and teachers so that they can be able to capture firsthand related experiences of inclusive and special education.

Gender Dimensions: In further studies, the relationship between gender and disability, particularly the barriers to girls with special needs, should be explored.

Provincial Comparisons: It may also be studied on comparisons of the implementation of special education policies in different provinces after the 18th Amendment, with a focus on regional variations that the study about it.

Rural-Urban Divide: Future research should focus on the problem of access in rural areas, where the resource base and the level of awareness are extremely low.

Teacher Training Impact: Research that can be conducted is to understand how teacher training programs can be undertaken to enhance classroom inclusiveness and improve student performance.

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