

School Sab Ke Liye (School for All)

**Capacity Needs and Training Assessment Report: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province**

Produced by Inclusive Development Partners (IDP) authors Cat Jones, Latifa Sebti, Hayley Niad, and Jacole Douglas with extensive support from the SSKL team.

Agreement Number: 72039124CA00002

Disclaimer: This report was made possible by the support of the American people. The contents are the sole responsibility of Catholic Relief Services and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development.

Contents

[Acronyms iii](#_Toc1051381038)

[Glossary iv](#_Toc1405812125)

[Executive summary v](#_Toc376003808)

[1. Introduction 8](#_Toc1244343631)

[2.Purpose, Methodology, and Research Tools 8](#_Toc342920158)

[2.1Purpose 8](#_Toc662538840)

[2.2 Methodology 8](#_Toc607992479)

[2.3Limitations 10](#_Toc629517283)

[3. Review of the Pakistani Education System 11](#_Toc1873998342)

[3.1 National Education Policies 11](#_Toc1092081762)

[3.2 KP Provincial Education Policies 11](#_Toc1334715615)

[4.Findings 12](#_Toc849765493)

[4.1 Status of Policy Implementation 12](#_Toc1545567252)

[4.2 Educator Background & Beliefs 12](#_Toc904880671)

[4.3 School-level practices 18](#_Toc1870910058)

[4.4Teacher Training & Support 23](#_Toc1227593129)

[5. Recommendations 25](#_Toc829201266)

[5.1Multi-Pronged Approach 26](#_Toc839562719)

[Bibliography 29](#_Toc1775959525)

# Acronyms

AV Audio-Visual

CPD Continuous Professional Development

CRPD The Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities

DCTE Directorate of Curriculum and Teacher Education

DEO District Education Officer

E&SE Elementary and Secondary Education

EIP Education Improvement Program

EMIS Education Management Information System

ESP Education Sector Plan

FGD Focus Group Discussion

GESI Gender Equity and Social Inclusion

GPE Global Partnership for Education

IDP Inclusive Development Partners

KII Key Informant Interviews

KP/KPK Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province

NGO Non-governmental Organization

OPD Organization of Persons with Disabilities

PTC Primary Teaching Certificate

SDG Sustainable Development Goals

SEL Social Emotional Learning

SNC Single National Curriculum

SSKL The USAID *School Sab Ke Liye* Program

TLM Teaching and Learning Material

TEO Taluka Education Officer

UDL Universal Design for Learning

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

USAID U.S. Agency for International Development

# Glossary

**Disability**

As stated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), disability is defined as “an evolving concept resulting from the interaction between individuals with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (OHCHR, 2006). This definition emphasizes the impact of societal barriers on individuals with impairments, highlighting the need to address the individual’s condition and the environmental and attitudinal factors that restrict their participation.

**Equity**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017) defines equity as “ensuring that there is a concern with fairness, such that the education of all learners is seen as being of equal importance.” This may require providing different supports to different students according to their unique barriers and challenges.

**Gender**

According to USAID (2007), gender refers to “the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, and relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis.”

**Inclusion**

UNESCO (2008) considers inclusion “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, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.”

**Inclusive** **Education**

The inclusive education approach requires that children with disabilities be in the same schools and the same classrooms and provided the same educational opportunities as children without disabilities, and the contributions of all students—those with disabilities as well as those who are culturally and linguistically diverse and come from backgrounds that historically have been excluded from educational and career opportunities—are being valued and celebrated (USAID, 2021).

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**

CAST defines UDL as a “framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn.” Its three main principles are multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action and expression.

**Social Emotional Learning (SEL)**

Social and emotional skills are defined as “a set of cognitive, social, and emotional competencies that children, youth and adults learn through explicit, active, focused, sequenced instruction that allows them to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (USAID, 2021b).

# Executive summary

The USAID School Sab Ke Liye (SSKL) initiative is a five-year program dedicated to enhancing Pakistan’s education system by fostering inclusive, sustainable access to quality education for marginalized children, particularly girls and those with disabilities, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Sindh provinces. In December 2024, SSKL undertook a comprehensive Capacity Needs and Training Assessment to evaluate the readiness of provincial and district education authorities, educational institutions, and teachers to implement inclusive education policies and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies. The assessment employed a mixed-methods approach, including teacher surveys, stakeholder interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations to identify existing capacities, gaps, and training needs.

This Capacity Needs and Training Assessment in KP province revealed critical gaps and opportunities in implementing inclusive education. Despite an Education Sector Plan (ESP) that reflects a strong awareness of the importance of inclusive education, the absence of common definitions and a standalone inclusive education policy, along with limited financial and human resources hinder effective implementation. Educators exhibit low awareness of existing inclusive education policies – likely because no standalone policy exists at provincial level – and lack an understanding of the support that students with disabilities need. Significant barriers such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and societal stigma further impede access to quality education for marginalized children. Support from education officers is often perceived as inadequate and inconsistent, hindering the effective implementation of inclusive education practices. However, promising practices were identified, including innovative use of locally available resources, the adoption of inclusive teaching methods such as small group work and visual aids, some awareness of non-visible disabilities, and strong leadership from some headteachers who foster inclusive environments. Additionally, there is a high demand for targeted professional development, particularly in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Social Emotional Learning (SEL), to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Addressing these challenges through comprehensive policy development, enhanced training programs, community awareness campaigns, and strategic resource allocation and financial support is essential for advancing inclusive education and ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all students.

**Summary of Findings**

### 1. Policy Implementation

* KP’s ESP mentions inclusive education, but lacks clear definitions for disability or inclusive education, and there is no standalone inclusive education policy.
* Implementation barriers include limited financial and human resources, inadequate infrastructure, and societal stigma.

### 2. Educator Awareness and Beliefs

* Educators have low awareness of inclusive education, UDL, and disability rights policies.
* Educators have a limited understanding of disability and some use of derogatory terminology.
* Teachers demonstrate a low level of comfort in teaching students with disabilities.
* Headteachers show a better understanding of societal barriers than classroom teachers.

### 3. Barriers to Equity and Inclusion

* Poverty limits access to learning.
* There is a shortage of trained inclusive education teachers.
* There is a lack of accessible facilities and teaching materials.
* Assessments are inflexible and there are limited data collection capabilities.

### 4. Promising Practices and Bright Spots

* There is rising awareness about non-visible disabilities.
* Some teachers utilize UDL-aligned practices even without formal training.
* Teachers demonstrate innovative resource use through locally-made materials and peer learning strategies.
* Headteachers’ positive leadership helps foster inclusive environments.
* Educators have a strong interest in professional development on inclusive education.
* There is a new data collection system (i-EMIS) that has the potential to improve access to data to support inclusive education.

### 5. School-level Practices

* Teachers self-reported small group work and visual aids as commonly used teaching strategies.
* There are implementation gaps of inclusive education due to a discrepancy between reported and observed practices, lending to predominantly teacher-centered instructional practices.
* There are insufficient school and classroom resources, contributing to a reliance on teacher-made and personal resources.
* There is limited access to audio-visual aids and a lack of assistive technologies and devices.
* Teachers indicate inconsistent support from headteachers.
* There is minimal and ineffective support and monitoring from education officers.

### 6. Teacher Training & Support

* Teachers and educational stakeholders lack specialized training on teaching students with disabilities.
* In-person workshops and school-based mentorship are preferred teacher training modalities.
* Educators need ongoing, practical training on the integration of UDL and SEL.
* There are institutional training needs on UDL, SEL, and comprehensive inclusive strategies.
* An institutional call for integrating inclusive education into curriculum development and policy frameworks is needed.

**Summary of Recommendations**

Develop Inclusive Education Policy

Create comprehensive provincial inclusive education policy, linking implementation to curriculum, training, and school implementation reforms.

Provide Comprehensive Training

Implement structured, hands-on training programs for educators focusing on practical, inclusive strategies and skills, including UDL and SEL. 

Raise Community Awareness

Conduct awareness campaigns to educate parents and communities about the importance and rights associated with inclusive education. 

Allocate Resources Strategically

Allocate necessary resources and materials to support inclusive education initiatives and data management, ensuring equitable access across all schools. 

Secure Adequate Financial Support

Ensure embedded, inclusive planning and budgeting approaches to sustainably allocate the needed resourcing for inclusive education implementation.

# Introduction

The USAID *School Sab Ke Liye* (SSKL) activity is a five-year education program in Pakistan that aims to improve Pakistan’s education ecosystem to enhance inclusive, sustained access to quality education for marginalized children, especially girls and children with disabilities. SSKL will promote local leadership and decision-making while building and strengthening the capacities of key education actors and stakeholders to become more resilient and inclusive to foster enabling environments for inclusive education through three expected outcomes:

* Outcome 1: local education authorities implement education policies that bolster inclusive education, particularly in the face of disasters and conflict;
* Outcome 2: communities are mobilized to support inclusive education for girls and children with disabilities; and
* Outcome 3: schools integrate inclusive education learning techniques into the classroom, improving learning outcomes, particularly for girls and children with disabilities.

SSKL aims to strengthen the capacity of provincial and district education departments, educational institutions, and stakeholders in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Sindh provinces. At the provincial level, both in Sindh and KP, policy guidelines for inclusive education are described in provincial education sector plans. One major objective of SSKL is to implement inclusive education effectively and improve classroom participation for all students using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) approaches, especially among girls and children with disabilities. To achieve this, in December 2024, SSKL conducted a data collection exercise to assess existing capacities and identify areas needing targeted interventions.

# 2. Purpose, Methodology, and Research Tools

## 2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this Capacity Needs and Training Assessment report is to identify key actors, determine the project’s capacity needs, assess existing capacity within the region, and identify capacity gaps. The primary objective of the data collection exercise was to assess the preparedness of provincial and district-level educational bodies, teacher education institutions, headteachers, and teachers to implement inclusive education policies and teaching strategies. This assessment will inform the development of training and policy implementation frameworks for inclusive education in the target regions, with an initial focus on using UDL strategies to include all children in learning.

## 2.2 Methodology

### 2.2.1 Data Collection Methods

SSKL collected data on capacity needs through the following methods:

* + **Existing data sources:** Earlier in 2024, the SSKL team undertook a comprehensive Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment which included extensive field-based data collection related to inclusive education capacity and training needs. The team reviewed these primary data sets and triangulated them with newly collected data. Additionally, the team is in the process of conducting a literature review in preparation for the quasi-experimental research design that will take place during the pilot phase. This literature also informs the objectives of this study, particularly related to the status of policy implementation.
  + **Surveys:** a quantitative training needs survey was administered to all stakeholders, which included 3 teachers per school and 4 schools per district, to ascertain their prior background and future support needs related to inclusive education.
  + **Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD)**: SSKL engaged government education officials, teacher educators, headteachers and teachers to understand their challenges, successes, and future support needs in implementing inclusive policies.
  + **Classroom Observations**: Observations in primary school classrooms focused on instructional strategies currently employed by teachers to understand existing practices and areas needing improvement, with a focus on UDL strategies in general education settings.

The needs assessment exercise provided small-scale data that will continue to be augmented through significant research in subsequent years. Specifically, following this needs assessment will be a larger-scale quasi-experimental pilot study in 2025 and research on the impact of UDL interventions at a larger scale in 2026.

### 2.2.2 Sampling Design

It is essential to note that SSKL intends to collect a wide range of data in Year 1 implementation, including a mixed-methods quasi-experimental research design of the UDL pilot activities. Therefore, this exercise did not duplicate the broader school-based data collection that will soon take place in the UDL pilot. Instead, this assessment focused on government capacity needs and the training needs that will inform the immediate design of the UDL pilot training package. This was not intended to be a representative or statistically significant sample, but rather a purposive sample that selected key stakeholder populations according to the utility their responses could provide to the project’s ongoing implementation.

The initial needs assessment was rolled out in a multi-stage process that mobilized the necessary resources in schools while they were in-session.

### 2.2.3 Stage 1: School-Level Data Collection

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Data Collection Approach** | **Details** | **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa** | **Total Sample Size** |
| Classroom teacher survey | 3 teachers surveyed per school visited  4 schools per district | 3 districts x 4 schools x 3 teachers = 36 respondents (in-person) | 84 Respondents to Teacher Survey |
| Classroom teacher observation | 2 teachers (Grades 3 and 5) per school visited | 3 districts x 2 schools x 2 teachers = 12 observations | 28 Classroom Observations |
| Classroom teacher FGD | 3-5 available teachers per school visited | 3 districts x 2 schools x 1 FGD per school = 6 FGDs | 14 FGDS with teachers |
| Headteacher Key Informant Interview (KII) | 1 head per school visited | 3 districts x 2 schools x 1 KII per school = 6 KIIs | 14 KIIs with Headteachers |
| **School totals** | **4 schools per target district** | **12 schools visited** | **28 schools** |

### 2.2.4 Stage 2: Provincial-Level Data Collection

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Data collection approach** | **Details** | **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa** |
| **FGDs District-level** | 1 FGD per district. Include up to 6 persons from District Education Officers (DEOs), Taluka Education Officers (TEOs) Secondary, and TEOs Primary | 3 x 1 FGD per target district + 1 FGD in a district not part of project sample = 4 FGDs |
| **FGD OPDs** | 1 FGD per province, from multiple Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (OPD) | 1 FGD |
| **KII Curriculum Directorate** | 1 KII per province | 1 KII, Directorate of Curriculum and Teacher Education (DCTE) |
| **KII Director Training** | 1 KII per province | Director, Professional Development |
| **FGD Teacher Trainers** | 1 FGD per province | 1 FGD |
| **KIIs Senior Government** | 3 KIIs per province | 3 KIIs e.g. Special Secretary Elementary & Secondary Education (E&SE); Additional Secretary E&SE; Deputy E&SE; Director Education Management and Information System (EMIS) E&SE; Director E&SE |
| **NGOs** | Organizations Focused on inclusive education / teacher training |  |

The rationale for including one district-level FGD in non-target districts was to ensure the capacity needs assessment considered other regions not currently supported by project interventions.

## 2.3 Limitations

SSKL took care to conduct a rigorous needs assessment; however, there were still certain limitations and delimitations to the study. The assessment was conducted under a tight timeline to adhere to project deadlines and ensure data collection could occur while schools were in session and teachers were available to participate. The time constraints for data collection meant that there was limited time to train enumerators and pilot the data collection tools. While the project conducted a thorough training, more time was needed for enumerators to practice using the tools prior to data collection. Additional practice would have been particularly useful for enumerators to become more familiar with the classroom observation tool, as some data collectors had limited experience with conducting classroom observations. Furthermore, there was variability across enumerators in the level of detail they collected through KIIs and FGDs. A longer and more intensive training would have contributed to greater data consistency across enumerators. Finally, a delimitation of the study was the sampling approach. While utilizing purposive sampling allowed the team to target participants who would be able to provide the most insightful and impactful data in a short amount of time, this approach means that the sample is not representative. Ultimately, as this assessment was intended to inform future project priorities and needs, including support needed by government, the desired result was still achieved despite these limitations.

# Review of the Pakistani Education System

The following section offers a brief overview of the national and provincial policy context related to inclusive education. It helps to foreground the findings from the primary data collection, shared in a later section.

## 3.1 National Education Policies

The inclusive education policies in Pakistan have been influenced by legislative policies, amendments in laws, and the ratification of international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, and the Salamanca Statement of 1994. As a signatory party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and CRPD, Pakistan has made efforts to put in place legislative frameworks responsive to the goals set out in the international conventions. Key elements of the Pakistan Vision 2025 include investing in human capital and focusing on the most marginalized groups, such as children with disabilities. The National Education Policy 2017 also includes a dedicated chapter on Special and Inclusive Education, setting the stage for further adoption at provincial levels.

Since the 18th Amendment of the Constitution of Pakistan was passed in 2010, provincial governments have become autonomous in developing their education policy and have streamlined these policies to account for the educational rights of all students. In particular, Article 25A of the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (amended in 2012) states: “The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law” (Zaka & Munir, 2019). This means that the provincial governments are responsible for delivering free education to all students, including girls, students with disabilities, students from low-income families, and other students from marginalized communities.

## 3.2 KP Provincial Education Policies

The KP Government collaborated with UNICEF in 2020 to launch a five-year Global Partnership for Education (GPE) approved program titled: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Improvement Program (KP-EIP) 2021-2026. The goal of KP-EIP is to ensure access to equitable and inclusive education and lifelong learning opportunities for children including a) efficiency ensuring evidence-based planning and efficient use of resources, b) improved access to pre-primary and primary education, and c) establishing quality pre-primary education and developing teacher training programs (KPESED, 2020/21-2024/25).

The priority areas of the KP Education Sector Plan (ESP) (2020-2025) include 1) improving access, retention, and equity in education; and 2) enhancing the quality and relevance of education such as utilizing quality textbooks, training general educators on inclusive education and relevant teaching methods, and providing equitable education and lifelong learning opportunities for all children from marginalized groups (KPESED, 2020/21 – 2024/25). In line with the expectations outlined in the education sector plan, KP has developed an Inclusive Education Policy that outlines the province’s commitment to:

* Providing inclusive education for students with disabilities and diverse learning needs.
* Establishing inclusive classrooms in regular schools (an aspiration that KP shares with the other provinces).
* Developing special resource centers for students with disabilities that offer specialized support, assistive devices, and educational materials as steps towards the inclusion of children with special needs in schools.

KP's education sector plan also prioritizes:

* Teacher training in inclusive teaching methodologies to ensure that classrooms are welcoming and supportive for all students.
* Working on creating accessible school infrastructure, including ramps and toilets, to accommodate students with disabilities.

# 4. Findings

## 4.1 Status of Policy Implementation

The 2020/21 – 2024/25 KP Education Sector Plan (ESP) works to build on and enhance the quality of teaching and learning outcomes. It identifies the importance of mitigating stigma for children with disabilities, accessing specialist resources, and improving curriculum and instruction. While the ESP outlines the objective of increasing access for marginalized children – including girls, refugees, children with disabilities, and others –, there is no substantial roadmap laid out to accomplish this goal. And while the policy indicates awareness of international policies and conventions around inclusion, no target standard is set across access, quality, and governance for the education of marginalized students, refugees, and other disadvantaged groups. As the educational directorate noted, “An inclusive education policy is also lacking. While it is mentioned in the Education Sector Plan, there is no standalone policy in place. Since the directorate is directly involved in implementation, we have limited involvement in policy-making. Our role is to share recommendations and lessons learned with the secretariat, as policy formulation falls under their mandate.”

While the KP ESP outlines various goals to support inclusive education implementation, certain challenges persist. Some of these barriers include a lack of common understanding of definitions and terms, limited financial and human resources, such as a shortage of trained teachers, limited collaboration with stakeholders, and inadequate infrastructure. Importantly, there is no clear definition of what constitutes disability or inclusive education within the KP ESP, compelling doubts about consistency in implementation. There is also a need for integration among stakeholders, as evidenced by an OPD representative who shared, “The government should collaborate with OPDs to develop policies and action plans that prioritize inclusive education, ensuring adequate funding and resources for their implementation… By integrating OPDs into decision-making processes and providing consistent financial and technical support, governments can create a sustainable and equitable education system in KP.” Inadequate infrastructure may limit students’ access to classrooms, libraries, and accessible restrooms, making it difficult for students with disabilities to attend school (Hammad & Singal, 2015). As one DEO/TEO within a focus group discussion noted, “There is an urgent need for more funding to improve infrastructure, especially for schools that are still not accessible to students with disabilities. Investing in proper facilities and resources will go a long way in ensuring inclusivity." Similarly, the stigma and prejudice within society lead to social segregation of children with disabilities (Shaukat, 2023). Such stigmatization, along with other social and cultural barriers, further complicates the push for inclusion.

## 4.2 Educator Background & Beliefs

### 4.2.1 Knowledge of Existing Policies

The majority of educators are unaware of any policies related to inclusive education in KP. Only five out of 36 teachers shared in a questionnaire that they knew about policies related to the rights of persons with disabilities, and of those five teachers, only three knew of policies related to inclusive education. Given the absence of any standalone policies on inclusive education in KP, these findings are unsurprising. A few classroom teachers mentioned specific policies, such as the Single National Curriculum (SNC), which was a government initiative established in 2020 to provide quality education for all learners in grades 1-3.

While educators shared that they support equal opportunities for all learners, many mentioned the hollow ‘one nation, one curriculum’ messaging and the lack of integration within the school or classroom. As one headteacher shared during an interview, “while there are policies promoting inclusive education, the actual implementation is often inadequate due to a lack of resources, training, and commitment from educational authorities.” Without the integration of policies at the school and classroom level, children with disabilities aren’t able to access school. One classroom teacher echoed this sentiment when she shared, “in other countries, governments facilitate such children [with disabilities]. But here, there is no policy to provide such facilities for them.” Teachers highlight that the lack of governmental support is felt most heavily by marginalized students, such as students with disabilities.

*“*Inclusive education is treated like a mere spice in a soup – the soup can still be good without the spice, which means it is not given the focused attention it deserves. Instead, it is only a small part of the broader training.”

– Curriculum Directorate

There is a difference in comfort levels between teachers who are aware of inclusive education policies and those who are not. Among the small group of teachers who are aware of these policies (5 out of 36), 80% reported feeling comfortable teaching students with disabilities. In contrast, only 32% of teachers who were unaware of these policies felt comfortable in this role. This highlights the critical need to enhance educators’ knowledge of existing policies and the rights of persons with disabilities to improve their confidence and effectiveness in inclusive education. OPDs shared a similar perspective that there is no comprehensive inclusive education policy in KP, a sentiment also expressed at the government level. A governmental training director stated, “we only hear about policies in meetings and don't have any dedicated orientation or sessions on them. There should be a monthly orientation on policies and latest trends.” Teacher trainers acknowledged that they do not have proper knowledge or information of policies and none of them had orientation on inclusive education policy. A curriculum directorate highlighted the notion that although there is some general understanding on the importance of inclusive education, and that there are some documents that exist, there is no clear policy. The current integration of policies into training programs remains superficial and emphasizing the need for more dedicated training sessions.

Despite limited training background, stakeholders uniformly recognized inclusive education as an approach that ensures equal access and opportunities for all students by adapting educational practices to accommodate diverse needs. Teacher trainers focused on practical implementation and adapting teaching strategies, with one respondent stating, “inclusive education is a concept which meets the requirements of all children.” Headteachers emphasize the integration of students with disabilities and the adaptation of teaching techniques to meet their needs. As one headteacher explained, “inclusive education is the education in which disabled children are also included with the already regular children. Teaching techniques should be according to their needs.” DEOs and directorate officials emphasized systemic changes and comprehensive policy frameworks. One directorate official highlighted, “we must expand the scope of inclusive education beyond disabilities. It should encompass social, economic, and cultural factors, as well as issues like backwardness and poverty.” OPDs highlighted the importance of accessibility and support systems, with an OPD official stating, “inclusive education means to enroll all the children which are out of school due to any reason/disability and provide them an inclusive environment and to make the education system accessible for everyone/every child.” These perspectives collectively underscore the necessity of a multifaceted approach to inclusive education, encompassing practical teaching strategies, systemic policy reforms, and comprehensive support systems.

### 4.2.2 Barriers to Equity and Inclusion

Students with disabilities face a wide range of barriers in trying to access education within their community, stemming from all levels, from poverty to inadequate teacher training, limited resources, and more. These common themes are summarized below.

**Poverty:** Systemic poverty is entrenched within a multitude of factors, from limited resources to parental inconsistencies and child labor, that affect families and students around the region. Families from low-income communities struggle to provide their children with the learning materials they need to succeed. As one headteacher shared, “Students in our school are very poor. Rich students get admission to private schools, but all poor students from this locality get admission to our school. Their parents are daily wagers, and they cannot afford to buy stationary for their children, such as notebooks, pencils, and sharpeners.” Teachers highlighted that “poverty prevents children from affording necessary school supplies,” and absenteeism due to domestic issues disrupts students’ academic progress. Another headteacher noted the many financial burdens students face when trying to attend school, stating “These students require financial assistance for uniforms, bags, stationery, and other essentials.”

Classroom teachers also noted a lack of parental engagement, which they linked to low-income parents not having the means to support their child to regularly attend school, not having the time to support their children due to long days working, and not having the communication skills needed to explain challenges and find sustainable solutions. As one classroom teacher shared, “one of my students returned to class after being absent for 58 days. When I inquired, his father explained that the child had been unwell for the past 12 days and that he hadn't informed the school administration. Unfortunately, some parents have a similar attitude, thinking, ‘If my child doesn’t attend school, what problem is it to you?’ This lack of communication and responsibility can negatively impact the child’s education and the teacher’s ability to support their progress.”The cumulative effect of poverty thus negatively impacts communities, schools, teachers, and students.

“*Teachers are not motivated, mobilized, and trained to address the needs of the marginalized community/learners*.”

– OPD Representative

**Teacher Shortages & Lack of Expertise:** Educators face significant barriers in trying to support students with disabilities or struggling learners. There are teacher shortages around the region, and those who do teach face overcrowded classrooms. Teacher shortage was mentioned by a DEO/TEO who shared, "Inclusive education requires specialized teachers who understand how to cater to children with different needs. Unfortunately, we are already facing severe teacher shortages in regular schools. Adding these responsibilities without addressing resource and staffing gaps is unsustainable." The instability is further exacerbated by a limited understanding or expertise in inclusive education. This shortage of expertise was mentioned by a curriculum official, stating, “We need specialists who can collaborate with us to develop new content and review existing materials to identify strengths and gaps in addressing inclusive education.” An OPD representative echoed this sentiment that a lack of awareness and understanding about the needs of persons with disabilities is a huge barrier that affects not only students but the entire school community, “leading to stigma and exclusion within communities and schools. Additionally, insufficient funding, untrained teachers, and a lack of accessible infrastructure and assistive technologies further impede the progress.”

**Poor School Infrastructure & Limited Resources:** Teachers noted the lack of school infrastructure, such as ramps, toilets, and transportation options, as well as limited resources and inadequate quality teacher training programs. All of these obstacles negatively impact a teacher’s ability to effectively educate. As one headteacher shared, “Schools often lack trained staff and resources to provide the necessary support for children with disabilities, such as individualized education plans or specialized teaching methods.” One classroom teacher illustrated the impact that a lack of accommodations and support can have on a child, explaining “There was a boy with a hearing impairment who showed a keen interest in learning but often felt isolated because the school lacked a sign language interpreter. During an interactive lesson, he could not follow along and eventually became disengaged. Despite the teacher’s efforts, he struggled to keep up and later stopped attending classes. He required tailored support, such as sign language or visual aids, to thrive in his education”.

Another headteacher noted that even if teachers are provided with teacher training support through a professional development program, they aren’t trained on specific strategies or interventions to build their capacity to address the needs of struggling learners. Many teachers noted the lack of resources available to engage students effectively. One Classroom teacher shared, “We try our best with the resources we have, but they're not enough for children who may struggle. We rely on visuals like charts, pens, chalks, and blackboards to help them learn.” Another Headteacher noted that the standard textbooks provided are inadequate and necessitate supplemental material to support learners of various learning levels. Many teachers shared that they create their own material utilizing local materials to supplement limited access to teacher learning materials, including handmade charts, handouts, and activities. A Classroom teacher illustrated just how sparse their classroom is with resources, “The only thing in the classroom is the blackboard, which is in such a condition that half the class can see it, while the other half cannot read the written answers on it. I brought a gas cylinder from home to perform an experiment on the states of matter. Students take an interest in practical things.”

**Ineffective Assessment & Few Data Collection Tools**: Educators face the challenge of assessing students with disabilities using standardized approaches that are inflexible to diverse learners. A curriculum directorate official shared, “I believe the major challenge lies in assessing these students effectively. Differentiated assessment remains a significant hurdle. When students with disabilities are part of the formal education system, we cannot expect them to perform equally well on standardized assessments designed for all learners.” Educators thus need support in developing and utilizing assessment tools that are accessible to all students. One classroom teacher illustrated the devastating impacts caused by the denial of basic testing accommodations to students with disabilities, recalling “In our school, there was a girl whose hand was accidentally cut off. She used to take a great interest in her studies, and we even helped her by writing her classwork for her. However, during her final Grade 5 assessment at the high school, the examiners did not allow her to take the exams because she had no right hand to write with. Even though we requested that another girl write for her, they did not permit it. She never returned to school after that." This compelling case study illustrates how the denial of basic testing accommodations for students with disabilities, an act that is non-compliant with international conventions such as the UNCRPD to which Pakistan is a signatory, promotes exclusion and school drop-out.

Additional challenges related to data collection on students with disabilities arose as one education directorate official shared, “We have designed a form that covers a wide range of data fields related to disabilities, from physical to [cognitive] disabilities.” However, there is limited rollout of the training needed in the province, and even then, there is a lack of clear understanding of disability terminology. This was clearly evident when the SSKL research team reviewed the current disability categories and observed outdated terminology still in use, including categories such as “dull” and “lame.” One respondent highlighted a key barrier related to reliable data collection, particularly when there is a lack of technical expertise around identifying and measuring disabilities in contexts without specialist resources. For example, categories such as Dyslexia and Autism Spectrum Disorder would require extensive specialist resources to furnish reliable diagnoses, which are likely absent in most regions where data collection is conducted. Given some of these limitations, this raises significant doubt on the reliability and quality of existing data being collected, but also offers a clear opportunity for additional technical support.

### 4.2.3 Beliefs about Students with Disabilities

"*Inclusive education can only succeed if there is a shift in mindset towards viewing all students as capable of learning and contributing, no matter their disability.*" – District Education Officer

Percentage of Teachers Comfort working with Struggling Learners vs Students with Disabilities
- 58% comfortable teaching struggling learners
- 39% comfortable teaching students with disabilitiesThere is limited knowledge among educators about what disability means, and therefore the various types of disabilities that affect student learning and how disability limits access to learning. While almost all classroom and headteachers understood that disability wasn’t just physical, very few mentioned any invisible disabilities that affect learning. An education directorate official confirmed this idea stating, “In our society, disability is often perceived as being limited to physical impairments, such as dysfunctional arms or legs. However, [cognitive] difficulties are also a significant aspect of disability.” There is a big difference in understanding of the term disability between classroom teachers and headteachers. Many classroom teachers used inappropriate and hurtful terms to identify learners with disabilities, such as ‘dumb’ or ‘lame’. One classroom teacher placed blame on the student themself for their disability rather than on the lack of support within society, as evidenced by their comment that the amount a student learns is based on the child’s acceptance of their disability. She said, “It depends on the child and how they perceive their disability. If the child has accepted their disability and is attentive to me, I cannot say their learning outcomes will necessarily be affected. However, if the child has not accepted their disability, it will definitely impact their SLO (Student Learning Outcomes)." Headteachers had a better understanding that students with disabilities face societal barriers that create obstacles, and the goal of achieving inclusive education means educating all children. While many classroom teachers shared various types of disabilities, most were unaware of how each type of disability limits access to learning. An education directorate official shared the need to address **misconceptions among teachers: “For example, students writing from the opposite side were often labeled with derogatory local terms, such as 'Bacha,' implying a [cognitive] disability. Teachers misunderstood these challenges, believing them to be related to poor eyesight or other unrelated issues.**”

The effect of limited knowledge about how to support learners with disabilities seems to come with a sense of discomfort. In a questionnaire to 36 teachers, 58% shared that they felt comfortable teaching struggling learners or students with learning difficulties, but only 39% felt comfortable teaching students with disabilities. While teachers may be inexperienced with teaching students with known disabilities, the fact that many teachers were also uncomfortable teaching struggling learners is concerning, since they can be presumed present in most classrooms. Of those teachers who responded they don’t feel comfortable teaching students with disabilities, the years of teaching were equally spread, suggesting that discomfort towards teaching students with disabilities cannot be overcome by simply accumulating more years of teaching experience – comfort is gained through trainings directly focused on specific strategies, interventions, and activities to support struggling learners and students with disabilities.

### 4.2.4 Bright Spots and Promising Practices

While it’s important to highlight the gaps in access and understanding, it’s also beneficial to point out the opportunities to expand upon existing bright spots. Data across teacher questionnaires, FGDs, and stakeholder KIIs reveal several encouraging bright spots, such as awareness about disabilities and inclusive education, leadership and support from headteachers, implementation of UDL-aligned inclusive practices, and strong interest in professional development on UDL and inclusive practices. In the quantitative survey, a notable 89% of teachers demonstrated an understanding that many disabilities cannot be seen just by looking at children at first glance, creating a foundation for more nuanced support of diverse learners. Conversely, however, as noted in Section 4.2.3 above, few teachers who participated in FGDs and KIIs were able to articulate any types of invisible disabilities. An OPD representative corroborated this idea that understanding is increasing, saying, “The growing focus on education reforms, along with support from international organizations like (USAID Funded “School Sab Ke Liye”) and local advocacy groups, creates momentum for change.” Underscoring awareness about education, as one classroom teacher stated, “if there's awareness about inclusive education, then everything else falls into place,” shows promise in the successful implementation of inclusive education within the community. A governmental training director shared the promise of inclusive education implementation, “The opportunity lies in the fact that inclusive education is partially included in our training as a cross-cutting theme, and some activities are already present in our curriculum.”

*“Inclusive education is now a policy level priority, reflecting the government's commitment to this important cause.”*

– Governmental department official

Another bright spot is the implementation of a new data collection system in Pakistan. As an EMIS official stated, “The new i-EMIS includes more comprehensive data, particularly on marginalized groups, such as individuals in non-formal education setups, refugees, orphans, and those with various types of disabilities.” This system includes specific indicators for tracking enrollment, attendance, and academic performance that can facilitate access to support and interventions for students with disabilities. However, it is important to note that the disability categories are not aligned with international standards, data collection methods appear to confuse screening or prevalence-level data with identification data, and there are challenges faced in maintaining the quality and accuracy of data.

Despite limited knowledge about inclusive practices and UDL, some teachers are implementing effective inclusive strategies, promoting positive learning environments, and monitoring student understanding (as detailed in the next section). These promising practices could be scaled up to strengthen inclusive education. Teachers have developed effective peer learning strategies, with one teacher noting, "We often pair a slow learner with an intelligent student and encourage the intelligent student to cooperate with the slow learner. This collaboration helps the slow learner improve gradually over time." Teachers have also developed systematic approaches to monitoring student progress, with some creating separate sections within their classrooms to provide targeted support to struggling learners, while others conduct monthly performance monitoring. Despite the lack of resources, teachers show remarkable initiative in developing locally-made materials and adapting available resources to meet diverse learning needs. They use everyday objects as teaching tools, which is exemplified by one teacher who explained: "I use real-life examples to teach students. For instance, if a student is wearing a cap, I may take it and explain concepts like diameter, radius, and circumference." This creative approach extends to using school gardens for biology lessons and market scenarios for mathematics, all of which are consistent with UDL principles, whether named as such or not.

There's also a strong interest in professional development opportunities, particularly in UDL and strategies for supporting struggling learners. This commitment to growth is reflected in one classroom teacher's statement: "We aim to receive training that enables us to effectively educate slow learners and children with disabilities." The teachers' willingness to innovate despite constraints, combined with their eagerness to learn more effective inclusive practices and their creative use of available resources, suggests a strong foundation for improving inclusive education practices more broadly.

Headteachers play a pivotal role in fostering inclusive education, and their impact is felt not just among teachers but also in fostering an inclusive environment. A headteacher's commitment to inclusion is evident in their guidance, "I instruct teachers to teach in a way that meets the learning needs of every child. I provided them with tips to speak clearly and keep their voices audible so that children with hearing difficulties can hear. I also advised teachers to seat children who need the most care in the front rows." Another one connected her responsibility as a headteacher to “fostering a culture of acceptance and understanding among students, staff, and parents.” Headteachers shape school culture and are integral to school success and positive student outcomes.

## 4.3 School-level practices

### 4.3.1 Teachers’ Educational Background

The educational background of teaching staff is a critical factor influencing the successful implementation of inclusive education practices. The teacher questionnaire was conducted with 36 teachers from 3 districts of Swat, Nowshera, and D.I. Khan (3 teachers each from 12 schools) in KP province (note: this is an illustrative group of teachers but not a representative sample). The demographic profile of the respondents (50% male and 50% female) reveals a predominantly young and relatively experienced group of educators. Most teachers fall within the 26-35 age range, accounting for approximately 61% of the sample, while a smaller proportion (14%) are between 40-50 years old. In terms of teaching experience, a significant majority had 1-5 years (42%) of teaching experience, followed by 6-10 years (33%), 11-15 years (14%), and a small percentage (6%) possessing 16+ years of experience. This distribution indicates that the teaching staff is predominantly early to mid-career educators, which presents opportunities to be more adaptable and open to adopting new inclusive teaching strategies, such as UDL.

*“Pre-service training does touch on disability, but it is very basic and doesn’t delve into the specifics of different disabilities and how to address them in the classroom*.”

– District Education Officer

Furthermore, educational qualifications among the teachers are notably high, with the majority holding either bachelors degrees or similar (64%), followed by graduate degrees (33%), and a minimal number with only secondary education (3%). This high level of academic attainment suggests that the teachers possess a strong theoretical understanding of educational principles. However, the diversity in diploma topics indicates varied areas of specialization. Approximately 28% of teachers have degrees in education, while 26% come from non-educational fields, and 17% in higher education (29% in other topics), which reflects a broad range of academic backgrounds within the teaching staff. This diversity can enrich the educational experience by bringing varied perspectives and teaching methods into the classroom, in line with UDL, but may also necessitate targeted training to align all teachers with inclusive education strategies.

Despite the high level of academic qualifications, there are significant gaps in training and resources necessary for effective inclusive education. While the majority of teachers surveyed have participated in literacy training, none of them has received any training/coaching on how to teach students with disabilities. One teacher highlighted this gap, stating, “Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training series only focuses on student learning outcomes related to some of the subjects. They repeatedly deliver the training on the same conventional topics of teaching techniques. CPD should also focus on inclusive education.” A DEO/TEO emphasized teacher training limitations, "In-service training can be beneficial, but it needs to be more specific. Teachers need to understand the various disabilities, how to modify teaching methods, and how to use assistive technology." As for SEL, one challenge in the classroom is the lack of knowledge and capacity among teachers. But teachers have expressed a considerable interest in future training topics, including SEL, UDL, inclusive teaching strategies, and general introductions to inclusive education. This enthusiasm underscores the teachers' recognition of the importance of continuous professional development in enhancing their capacity to support diverse learners effectively. By enhancing their capacity in integrating SEL with UDL, educators can foster an inclusive learning environment that not only meets diverse academic needs, but also supports the emotional well-being of all students.

### 4.3.2 Teaching methods Used

Teachers utilize a variety of different strategies to engage with and meet the learning needs of all students, with some inherently incorporating UDL principles without explicitly naming them. According to teacher self-reporting, the most common strategy used was small group work or pair work (72%), and the second most heavily used strategy was the use of visuals, real objects, and images (58%). Classroom teachers also noted role-playing, conducting activities that spark students’ interest, using examples from daily life, and making learning fun (see Figure below). These methods align with UDL principles by providing interactive and enjoyable activities, utilizing visual aids and real objects to present information in diverse formats, and enabling students to collaborate to engage with classroom activities and demonstrate their understanding in various ways.

*“If teaching is activity-based, it will be better, using models and charts to make them understand*.”

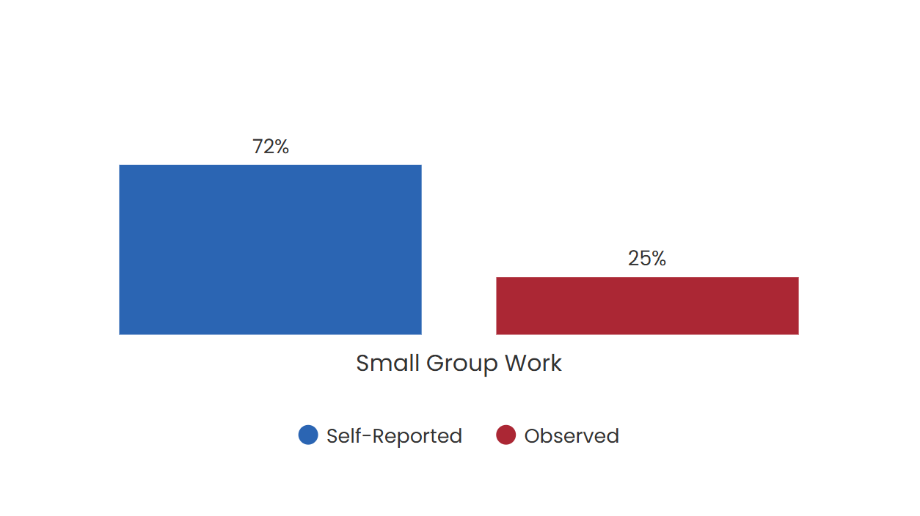
– Classroom Teacher

"Teaching Strategy Used by Teachers" bar graph in red. 
Small group work or pair work = 72%
Use of visual, real objects, images, etc. = 58%
Allowing struggling learners close to the teacher, or where they learn best = 50%
Seating struggling learners close to the teacher, or where they learn best = 31%
Providing detailed instructions, or breaking complex tasks into smaller steps = 28%
Providing additional lessons or attention for struggling learners = 25%
Modeling (I do/we do/you do) = 14%


Further insights from FGDs indicate that teachers also use multimodal approaches, in line with UDL, to ensure learning reaches all students, combining visual, practical, and collaborative methods. One teacher noted, “I show students topic-related videos to enhance their understanding and engagement.” Activity-based learning features prominently in their self-reported approach. Teachers also show flexibility in their instructional methods, adapting to individual student needs and interests: "In the individual method, every student gets equal attention." The use of real-life examples and storytelling emerges as another key strategy, particularly in mathematics: "We give daily life examples in the form of stories in math class. For example, in subtraction, we give examples of markets, buying things, and counting and subtracting using hand fingers." Some teachers emphasize the importance of language accessibility, noting that "We explain lessons in the mother tongue, making it easier for children to understand." These varied approaches demonstrate teachers' commitment to finding ways to reach all learners using UDL approaches, despite resource constraints and large class sizes.

In addition to teacher self-reporting, 12 classroom observations revealed that teachers employ a range of effective classroom management strategies to create a positive and inclusive learning environment. Notably, 58% of teachers ensured that students remained on task and focused for at least 80% of the lesson time, demonstrating for some their ability to maintain student engagement and minimize distractions—a key UDL principle of sustained engagement. Additionally, 58% of teachers provided opportunities for all students to participate, accommodating diverse abilities and fostering an inclusive atmosphere where every student feels valued and involved. A significant majority, 75%, consistently checked student understanding throughout the lesson by calling on students and actively monitoring their work, which aligns with UDL’s focus on multiple means of action and expression. Furthermore, 42% of teachers offered additional support to struggling learners through methods such as one-on-one checks and extra practice, ensuring that all students have the necessary assistance to succeed. Lastly, in line with UDL’s engagement principle of fostering belonging and community, 67% of teachers promoted a positive and respectful classroom environment by encouraging participation, providing praise, and fostering mutual respect among students. These classroom management practices demonstrate some foundational skills in engaging and supporting students, though there remains room for improvement in providing comprehensive support to all struggling learners.

However, classroom observations highlighted discrepancies between self-reported inclusive strategies and actual practice. While 67% of teachers used lesson plans as their primary teaching and learning materials (TLMs), the use of supplementary materials like flashcards (8%), workbooks (25%), and visual charts (25%) was limited, and no pictorial books or educational videos were observed. Additionally, the majority of teachers reported using small group work, while only a quarter were observed implementing such strategies (see infographic), suggesting informal implementation and challenges in practical application due to classroom management concerns, time constraints, or resource limitations. Teachers may need more practical support, coaching, and structured opportunities to develop skills in implementing UDL and inclusive strategies effectively rather than just theoretical knowledge about its importance.



Teachers' self-reported practices in using group work as compared to observed practices in the classroom.

Classroom observations also revealed varying levels of UDL implementation across teaching practices. In terms of multiple means of representation, 42% of teachers presented information beyond traditional text and speaking, incorporating pictures and illustrations, suggesting again that despite self-reporting, this may not be a common practice. Additionally, 75% of teachers used at least one form of visible or tactile text in the learning space. Regarding multiple means of action and expression, half of the teachers offered diverse ways for students to interact with content and demonstrate understanding, including writing, drawing, and two-way interactions. Student choice in learning activities - a key UDL principle - was evident in 50% of classrooms, where students could select their reading texts or exercises. However, student participation and interaction appeared limited, as teacher voices dominated 58% of observed lessons, where student voices accounted for only 10% or less of classroom time. This suggests a predominantly teacher-centered approach rather than the interactive, student-centered learning environment promoted by UDL. A teacher trainer corroborated this approach stating, “teachers are still using lectures or dictation methods, which lack students’ engagement.” Furthermore, differentiated support for struggling learners, another crucial aspect of inclusive education, was observed in less than half of the classrooms, indicating a potential area for strengthening inclusive practices through access and support.

58% the percent of lessons observed where the teacher spoke 90% or more of class.

The data reveals a notable implementation gap between teachers' pedagogical knowledge and classroom practice, where reported understanding of inclusive teaching methods often exceeds their practical application. Barriers such as resource constraints and possibly insufficient practical training may impede teachers' ability to translate their theoretical understanding into daily teaching practice. To bridge this gap, targeted professional development focused on practical UDL strategies, enhanced resource allocation, and support for effective classroom management are essential.

### 4.3.3 Resources & Materials Utilized & Needed

Teachers do not have sufficient classroom resources to support learners. Of the 36 teachers who completed a questionnaire, only 28% strongly agreed (19% somewhat agreed) that they have the material resources they need to effectively implement inclusive education in their classrooms, despite 98% sharing that there are many children who struggle to learn in the classroom. A teacher mentioned in the FGDs that inclusive education will only succeed “if our school gets the necessary resources for these children.” This indicates that the currently available resources are insufficient to respond to the needs of existing students.

98% of teachers shared that there are many children in their classrooms who struggle to learn.

Almost all classroom teachers described utilizing locally-made resources in light of these constraints. One classroom teacher shared, “We don't have the tools to properly educate these children. We try our best with the resources we have, but they're not enough for children who may struggle. We rely on visuals like charts, pens, chalks, and blackboards to help them learn.”Teachers sometimes bring items from home and use mobile devices to show children educational videos to enhance learning, as mentioned by headteachers. While this demonstrates resilience among some teachers, this also increases the gap between teachers who have the means and creativity to find resources to engage students and those that do not. A government training director emphasized the need for more material support to teachers by stating,“There is a need for a universal package to be provided across the province, ensuring consistency and widespread availability.” There are also limited audio-visual (AV) materials available in the classroom, and almost all headteachers (five out of six) noted the need for AV aids, such as projectors or screens. Additionally, a headteacher noted the lack of assistive devices, such as text-to-speech software, speech recognition programs, and other assistive technologies that cater to students with disabilities or learning difficulties, which impedes UDL’s goal of providing multiple means of action and expression through accessible materials.

72% of teachers feel they don’t have enough material resources to effectively implement inclusive education in their classrooms.

Teachers create flashcards and worksheets to provide students with a hands-on learning experience, but there is an expressed need to provide a more engaging learning experience that aligns with UDL’s emphasis on optimizing student choice and autonomy; making learning relevant, valuable, and authentic; and nurturing joy and play. Furthermore, headteachers called for "multisensory learning resources," including "tactile learning kits, sensory tools, and visual aids," as well as "resources for social-emotional learning" to address the cognitive health needs of students. The current lack of sufficient resources hinders teachers' ability to implement inclusive education effectively and underscores the necessity for targeted resource allocation to support UDL- and SEL-aligned practices.

*“We make use of any available resources in the school to support our teaching and enhance the learning experience for students.”*

– Classroom Teacher

Moreover, a classroom teacher stated that “one of the challenges is the lack of time. If we spend too much time with struggling learners, the other children will be neglected, and the course remains incomplete," illustrating the perception that individualized instruction demands significant time. This viewpoint overlooks the UDL framework, which emphasizes the proactive provision of multiple learning pathways and strategies within the existing curriculum, thereby accommodating most student learning styles and fostering an inclusive environment without requiring extra time.

### 4.3.4 Support from HeadTeachers & Educational Officers

There are some discrepancies between headteacher accounts of their support to classroom teachers, and the classroom teachers’ own perceptions of this support. Specifically, headteachers described providing routine support to classroom teachers. Some claimed they visit daily and provide hands-on support to teachers by providing direct feedback on methods and teaching style, but also ensuring that teachers have the materials needed for lessons. They shared that they provide comprehensive support to classroom teachers through regular observations, feedback, and resource management. They frequently recommend practical strategies such as changing the classroom set-up by moving struggling learners to the front of the class and providing extra time for these students to achieve better results. Despite these efforts, teachers expressed that support from school administration, peers, and education officers is often inadequate or inconsistent. While some headteachers “pay visits to every class on a daily basis,” others perform observations once in a month or occasionally, with one headteacher noting that teachers are "typically observed 6 to 10 times a year." This variation highlights inconsistent monitoring practices, potentially affecting the quality and effectiveness of support provided to teachers across different schools.

*“There needs to be a more structured approach to these monitoring visits****.****”*

– District Education Officer

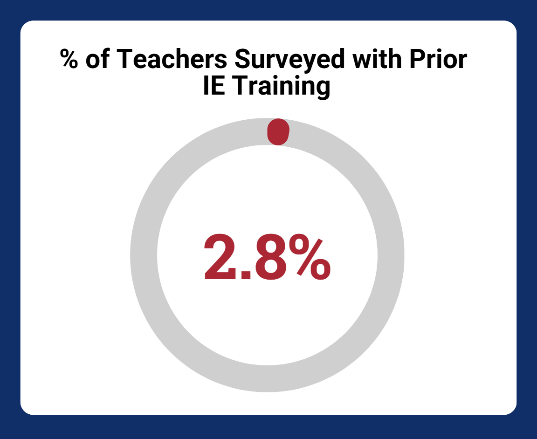
Classroom teachers said they feel they can rely on each other and headteachers for support but can’t go further up as “no such support is received from high authorities.” While many classroom teachers shared that they go to either the headmaster or parent if an issue needs to be resolved, almost all shared the same belief that Education Officers don’t provide any support. Officers visit once a month and “often visit and leave without taking any meaningful action. It would be more effective if they dealt with us in a friendly and approachable manner.” Many shared that it’s unclear what support they provide, as they don’t provide meaningful feedback nor any financial support. One teacher noted that if a child needs financial support, “teachers help from their own pockets. Currently, there is no support from education officers in this regard.” A DEO/TEO confirmed shortcomings in current monitoring and support practices, stating, "The government education officers do visit, but the visits often lack depth in terms of addressing accessibility needs or providing recommendations on how to improve inclusive education." These comments highlight a significant gap in the support system, emphasizing the need for more consistent and effective assistance from education officers to truly benefit the teaching staff and enhance the educational environment.

Moreover, a governmental training director confirmed the need for capacity building of educational officers saying, “If experts and resources are provided, we can integrate inclusive education into our entire education program. There is also a need for capacity building for education administration, as well as for those involved in training and curriculum development.” This suggests that a comprehensive and systemic approach grounded in UDL is essential for inclusive education implementation, ensuring that headteachers and educational officers are adequately trained and supported to provide consistent and effective guidance to classroom teachers.

## 4.4 Teacher Training & Support

### 4.4.1 teacher training background and training needs

In a survey to 36 teachers, none had received training or coaching on teaching students with disabilities, in comparison to the 69% who had received in-service training related to teaching literacy in the primary grades. Only one out of the 36 teachers surveyed had received in-service training on inclusive education. All respondents shared that they had not received any training or coaching on how to teach students with disabilities. Almost all classroom teachers and headteachers shared that they had not received formal training on teaching struggling learners. No classroom teachers participating in FGDs had heard of UDL previously, and one classroom **teacher** stated, “**We have not received any formal training on teaching struggling learners, disability inclusion, or inclusive education. Teachers' Professional Development programs do not cover inclusive education, nor do they include any topics on it.**” All six headteachers interviewed had no formal training on teaching struggling learners, disability inclusion, or UDL, and only one had heard of UDL. Similarly, the term ‘Inclusive Education’ was new to teacher trainers, who revealed in a FGD that they never had an opportunity to participate or deliver training on inclusive education. One of them acknowledged that “our teachers have no technical capacity to meet children with disabilities’ learning needs.” The **lack of structured training** significantly **limits the ability of teachers** to implement inclusive practices effectively, as they **are in need of formal guidance and specialized inclusive strategies**.



Only 1/36 teachers had previously received inclusive education training.

The questionnaire reveals a strong preference among educators for **in-person workshops and training sessions (69%)** and **school-based mentorship programs (47%)** as the most helpful training modalities. This indicates that teachers value direct, hands-on training and personalized support within their school environments over virtual or community-level networking options, which had only 25% interest each. Regarding training topics, there is unanimous enthusiasm for foundational and strategic areas, with **all teachers expressing interest in "General introduction to inclusive education," "UDL and inclusive teaching strategies”, and "Teaching strategies to help struggling learners,"** underscoring the critical need for inclusive strategies and effective methods to support diverse student needs. Other topics such as **"Inclusive assessment strategies" (75% very interested)** and **"Whole school and community collaboration for inclusive education" (67% very interested)** also received substantial interest, highlighting the importance of comprehensive approaches to inclusion. However, **"Inclusive multi-grade teaching approaches"** showed a lower interest.

*“Training is very important for the future. Professional training especially on teaching slow learners is essential”.*

– Headteacher

As one teacher trainer shared, “training impact does not happen just by giving one time training. We need to design refresher trainings based on evidence that could be classroom observation, student assessment, and regular monitoring.” Similarly in FDGs, classroom teachers expressed a desire for practical training that focuses on real-life challenges, the utilization of classroom resources, and best practices for the integration of UDL into existing programs. A DEO/TEO shared the importance of integrating not just UDL, but also SEL, saying, “An all-round approach is essential for creating an inclusive environment. We need to integrate principles of SEL and UDL to cater to diverse student needs and create a more supportive education system.”

There is a recognized need to integrate SEL into all levels of training to address the emotional and social dimensions of inclusive education and support the mental health needs of students. One teacher requested the support of psychological counselors in each school, and another teacher noted that some children have psychological challenges. Embedding SEL into training materials enables teachers to more effectively address the psychological stressors that students face, and support them in being more present in the classroom. There is little existing knowledge about SEL, so there is ample opportunity for support. As one teacher noted, “Recently, SEL has been added as a cross-cutting theme. However, there is no dedicated training program on this topic. We believe SEL should be integrated into all levels of training—Induction, CPD, and Leadership—to enhance effectiveness while being cost-efficient.” Other teachers noted the importance of incorporating other inclusive pedagogies into trainings, such as gender responsive pedagogy and culturally-responsive pedagogy. Additional training requests included utilizing assistive technologies and collaborative teaching strategies. These insights underscore the urgent need for targeted training programs that equip headteachers and classroom teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to support all students effectively.

4.4.2 Institutional training background and training needs

Effective inclusive education requires comprehensive training not only for school-based personnel, but also for non-school stakeholders who play pivotal roles in shaping educational policies, providing resources, and supporting the broader educational framework. Most of the educational stakeholders confirmed the absence of formal training in inclusive education and their reliance on self-learning and readings. **The** existing training that some teachers received had utilized a cascade model, where a pool of 7,000 master trainers disseminate training content. While prior training on inclusive education was received by some respondents, it never provided clear definitions, causing training participants to come to their own conclusions on the meaning of inclusive education. As one DEO/TEO shared in an FDG, "Inclusive education policies are complex and require tailored training. Unfortunately, we are often left to interpret the policies ourselves, which leads to inconsistent practices across schools." As a teacher trainer summarized, CPD is “more focused on content rather than pedagogy.” When inclusive education was included in previous trainings, it was a general theme spread across other trainings leaving participants to have a vague understanding of inclusion, lacking a practical understanding. A training director acknowledged, “**While we do not have a specific module on inclusive education, it is integrated as a cross-cutting theme in all our training programs.**”

*“Leaders in education should be properly equipped, both with knowledge and resources, to guide teachers in implementing inclusive practices.”*

- District Education Officer

Despite some attempts to embed inclusion into existing training packages, there are significant gaps. As noted by a director, “Specifically on UDL, we have not received any training, but we do have similar concepts, such as Technically Synergized Pedagogy, which includes eight types of intelligence. It addresses the needs of students with disabilities, such as hearing disabilities, visual disabilities, reading disabilities, and practice disabilities. We encourage our teachers not to rely on a single method but to adapt to meet the needs of all learners.” This indicates that while some inclusive principles are being addressed, there is a lack of specialized training on key frameworks like UDL, which are essential for meeting diverse learning needs effectively.

Furthermore, in an FDG with education directorate officials, an initiative called *Education Cannot Wait* targeted teacher training to identify and support students with learning difficulties: “Teachers were trained to address mild learning difficulties by adopting simple strategies such as seating students in the front row or dedicating extra time to support their individual needs.” However, there is an urgent need for specialized traineeswho can implement more advanced and evidence-based strategies including UDL, moving beyond these basic interventions. There is a notable absence of other dedicated modules, such as SEL. A training director highlighted, “To date, no specific training on UDL, SEL, or Disability Inclusion has been conducted. However, SEL training is particularly important, given the current challenges we are facing.” This statement underscores a significant gap in targeted training programs that address the comprehensive needs of inclusive education.

There is fear about this gap by other leaders, as officials need current and updated training on inclusive pedagogies and practices. As a DEO/TEO stated, "We need better guidance and consistent training on inclusive education. Most of us have not received any formal instruction on this, which leaves us unsure how to address the diverse needs of students in the classroom effectively." **Trainings for educational stakeholders must incorporate strategies to mitigate broader challenges, ensuring that inclusive education initiatives are comprehensive and responsive to the diverse needs and interests of all learners,** while also cultivating an inclusive mindset among educators and administrators to promote a culture of equity and respect within the educational system. A governmental department secretary underscored the critical role of fostering an inclusive environment where students with disabilities feel integrated rather than marginalized, “Teacher training should also emphasize creating an environment where students with disabilities do not feel defined by their condition, either from a biological or social perspective. They should not feel marginalized or 'disabled.' Rather, they should feel like integral parts of the educational system, just as other students do.”

When asked whether training on inclusive education awareness is needed, it was clear that training at the directorate level is required. An education directorate official stated, “There are different levels of training that could be implemented: one could focus on teaching methods for inclusive education, another on developing an inclusive curriculum, and another on designing inclusive schools. Additionally, there should be awareness training for school administration and those overseeing education as a whole.” A curriculum directorate official expressed their own training need, “This is a major concern for me because, if we are expected to develop content without proper training, how can we effectively create it? How will we stay updated on the latest trends and practices in this field?” Curriculum developers need substantial training on inclusive curriculum design. At all government levels, training on inclusive education is vital to the successful implementation and integration of inclusive strategies policies and practices.

# 5. Recommendations

## 5.1 Multi-Pronged Approach

It is possible to integrate inclusive education into KP’s education system, and many foundations exist, such as strong individual and institutional will for implementing more inclusive practices. As a governmental training director noted, “If experts and resources are provided, we can integrate inclusive education into our entire education program.”There is also considerable hope among teachers that real change can be made through the SSKL program. In the words of one classroom teacher, “I see this banner with the words ‘School Sab Ke Liye’ on it, and I pray to God. May all children become equal.” To make this teacher’s moving vision become a reality, it will take a multi-pronged approach to incorporate inclusive practices at all levels. Recommendations include inclusive policies development, targeted capacity building, awareness raising among parents and families on the rights of students, strategic resource allocation, and more.

5.1.1 Developing Inclusive Policies & a Common understanding

There is a lack of integrated policies on inclusive education at both the provincial and national levels. Among government officials, there is limited clarity of how these policies support inclusion efforts, and therefore, a dire need to gain a better understanding of how the curriculum is being implemented. As one governmental department official shared, “Given its novelty, we need to conduct a thorough and professional analysis of the existing curriculum to assess whether it adequately integrates inclusive education. At present, I believe this aspect is not explicitly addressed, but it must be included moving forward.” Once there is more clarity on what policies address inclusive education and how specifically these policies will support inclusive strategies, there can be better integration of those policies in the curriculum so that there is more cohesion between policies and practice. As a training director shared, “If inclusive education becomes an integral part of the entire system, rather than just focusing on teacher training or training a few teachers, it should be embedded in the curriculum, training programs, and our indicators as well.” Currently, inclusive education is vacant from provincial policies, most trainings, and curricula. As one curriculum directorate official stated, “The attention that inclusive education requires is lacking in both the training programs and material development, including training manuals and curricula.” A comprehensive and systemic approach is essential for truly inclusive education, where inclusive practices are seamlessly integrated into the curriculum, professional development programs, and evaluation indicators. Educators’ knowledge of existing policies directly impacts learners and creates a positive learning environment, and mitigates further breading of discomfort and segregation.

5.1.2 Providing Comprehensive Inclusive Education Training

All parties within the education system, from government officers to educators, need capacity building in inclusive education practices to support every learner in the classroom. A clear path towards mitigating the discomfort many teachers currently face while working with students with disabilities is to provide training on inclusive education practices. Providing educators with hands-on skills to support students with special needs increases their comfort and confidence. A DEO/TEO corroborated the practical approach to training stating, "We need more structured teacher training programs that focus on inclusive teaching strategies and the practical aspects of working with students with different abilities." Trainings should cover a wide array of subjects that address the barriers that the KP region faces.

**A training director** proposed several strategic recommendations as a path towards developing inclusive trainings, “**We suggest conducting a Training Needs Assessment (TNA) for the Management, Education Administration Staff, and training staff. Based on the needs identified during the TNA, you can then train our staff. You can develop training materials in collaboration with our teams.**” Additionally, there is a recognized need to incorporate digital tools into training levels: “**We can introduce interactive video content for training, which we are currently using for such purposes. We have a WhatsApp group that can be utilized for sharing these videos. Each trainer then works with a group of 20 to 30 teachers, who can play the videos on their mobile devices and engage in interactive sessions based on the content.”**

Teachers have indicated that they value direct hands-on training and personalized support, and are interested in regular trainings that utilize real-life scenarios that cover topics such as inclusive education, UDL, teaching strategies to help struggling learners, and inclusive assessment strategies. As one teacher expressed, “[Training] should address how a teacher can effectively teach sixty students in a multigrade setting. Additionally, the training should emphasize pedagogical skills that are realistic and implementable in the classroom.”

5.1.3 Supporting Community Awareness Raising

Educators highlighted the importance of community awareness campaigns to educate parents and community members on the rights of students with disabilities, and the importance of education for all children. When asked whether they feel parents and community leaders are supportive of the inclusion of children with disabilities in their schools, almost all teachers responded negatively (69% answered “not at all supportive,” 25% answered “not very supportive”). Parents play a crucial role in reinforcing inclusive practices at home and it is vital to equip them with the knowledge and skills to support their children's educational journeys effectively. At the community level, there is little being done, so there is tremendous opportunity and therefore potential to garner support for students with special needs. An interview with an OPD representative revealed that, “Unfortunately, community is not mobilized enough and it needs proper and effective strategy on district level to arrange seminars, workshop etc. to make them fully aware and then support parents or community to enroll students with disabilities and provide them quality education in schools… Specifically, awareness sessions on inclusive education policyat district level, workshops for primary teaching certificates (PTCs) to mobilize and motivate them to support students with disabilities, and accessibility audits in every school.” The impact of community awareness campaigns are profound as students begin feel a sense of belonging. An OPD representative called for “awareness campaigns [that] can help reduce stigma, while scholarships and incentives for children with disabilities encourage school enrollment… OPDs, civil society organizations, and government stakeholders should collaborate to raise awareness among communities and policymakers about the importance of inclusive education.”

There is a significant ripple effect when the community is mobilized to support all students – everyone benefits and communities thrive. Building awareness externally will greatly impact a student’s direct experience in the classroom as they will be welcomed by a more inclusive environment. As one classroom teacher eloquently stated, “The provision of a friendly environment is crucial, and its absence becomes a barrier.” Another classroom teacher shared that her son has thalesmia, and his belly is swollen due to treatment. She shared his challenging experience with bullying, explaining “When he comes home from school, he says, 'My friends call me fatty (kheta).' He examines his abdomen in the mirror and says, 'Mom, my belly is now flattened.' When I see this, I think every child with some disability must face similar situations. Parents need to encourage their children, but today’s parents seem unaware and unconcerned.” Raising awareness among parents will greatly impact the lives of students in the classroom as they are met with greater kindness, understanding, and compassion. Belonging is created and shared – but it first must be built through understanding.

5.1.4 Resource Allocation and System Strengthening

Educators need more resources within the classroom to support students, as well as data collection tools to measure student success. There is a dearth of sufficient teaching and learning materials available across KP classrooms, and educators highlighted the critical requirement for education resources, such as pictorial books, educational videos, and interactive tools to support UDL-aligned practices. Teachers also shared their desire to leverage technology to further engage students and the need for assistive devices in the classroom to better meet the learning needs of students with disabilities. Though many teachers are resourceful and utilize locally available resources and materials they create themselves to support student learning, their admirable efforts are still not sufficient to adequately meet the learning needs of students in their classrooms. Furthermore, relying on teachers to create their own materials fosters unequal access to learning opportunities since some teachers may have more time, resources, and creativity to create materials than other teachers. Rather, one director suggested the need to develop and provide a standard package of materials to support teaching and learning across all schools. Creating such a package that is aligned with the curriculum as well as UDL and SEL principles would help ensure that all students have at least a minimum access to quality and relevant materials to support their learning. Providing further classroom resources would also help adjust their instruction away from teacher-centered approaches to more engaging instruction that integrates UDL and SEL and better meets the individual learning needs of all students.

In addition to providing further classroom resources, there is also a need for improved educational data. An EMIS official expressed the need for training on data interpretation and manipulation stating, “there are significant capacity issues at the local level in data collection, which could be improved through a targeted capacity-building program focused on ensuring data accuracy and quality.” Such capacity strengthening would help foster the collection of quality data that can help inform the allocation of resources and support to schools. Beyond data collection on student learning outcomes and school- and classroom-based indicators, gathering data on disability, poverty, gender, and other dimensions that are barriers to equitable educational access and opportunity could help identify schools or areas that may need more targeted support to help improve educational equity across KP. Supporting DEO/TEOs, headteachers, and other officials in understanding how to interpret data and apply data will foster an evidenced-based approach to improving education in KP and developing relevant policies and plans that respond to existing challenges and build on successes.

5.1.5 Secure Adequate Financial & Resource Support

Financial constraints significantly hinder the development and delivery of comprehensive training programs. A training director highlighted, “We rely on project-based initiatives for teacher training. Financial resources are needed to design manuals. Often, we are asked to begin training the next day without the necessary resources, which raises the challenge of how to proceed without adequate funding.” This financial barrier not only affects the consistency and quality of training, but also limits the capacity to scale up inclusive education initiatives across the province. Financial constraints pose a significant barrier, and has a long-reaching impact. As noted by a director, “Although mechanisms are in place, a lack of financial resources prevents their implementation. As a result, the CPD program was not conducted at all for one year.” The reliance on project-based initiatives without sustainable funding further exacerbates education gaps, limiting the effectiveness and reach of existing training programs. Supporting officials in identifying and building sustainable funding streams is important for promoting a robust educational system that provides adequate training, materials, and other support to schools. Encouraging the application of inclusive planning and budgeting approaches to determine financial and resource support needs will help center the needs of marginalized learners and ensure that inclusive educational practices are accounted for in planning and not viewed as an additional needed expense in the future.

# Bibliography

Goal 4: Quality education. (2024). The global goals. <https://www.globalgoals.org/goals/4-quality-education/>

Hammad, T., & Singal, N. (2015). *Education of Women with Disabilities in Pakistan: Enhanced Agency, Unfulfilled Aspirations*. International Journal of Inclusive Education 19 (12): 1244–1264. doi:10.1080/13603116.2015.1043962.

KPESED (2020/21 – 2024/25). Khyber Pakhutunkhwa Education Sector Plan 2020/21-2024/25). <https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/pakistan-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-esp.pdf>

OHCHR. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.* <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

Shaukat, S. (2023). Ch*allenges for education of children with disabilities in Pakistan*. Intervention in School and Clinic, 59(1), 75-80.

UNESCO (2008). *Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future*. International Conference on Education. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000161565_eng#:~:text=What%20definition%20for%20inclusion%3F,exclusion%20within%20and%20from%20education>.

UNESCO (2017). *A Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education.* <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254>

USAID (2007). *Gender Terminology*. <https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadl089.pdf>

USAID (2021). Guidance for Promoting Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility in Educational Materials. <https://www.edu-links.org/sites/default/files/media/file/Guidance_for_Promoting_Diversity_Equity_Inclusion_and_Accessibility_in_Educational_Materials.pdf>

USAID (2021b). *Integration of Social and Emotional Learning into Basic Education Programming: Findings from eight Case Studies*. <https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00Z2SQ.pdf>

Zaka & Munir (2019). *Handbook on Article 25A: Right to Education. Participants’ Book.* <https://itacec.org/document/2020/6/Handbook_on_Article_25_A_Right_to_Education_and_SDG_4.pdf>