

# RESEARCH ON CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES INFLUENCES EDUCATION POLICY IN PAKISTAN

Children who face multiple disadvantages including those related to disability are among those least likely to be learning. Using large-scale household data together with qualitative data from classrooms in rural Pakistan, researchers from the University of Cambridge, UK and the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS), Pakistan have gained a picture of how many children with disabilities attend school, and what factors affect their learning. This research is shaping key policy debates on education, inclusion and disability.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

In 2010, the Parliament of Pakistan added Article 25A to the Constitution, which promises 'free and compulsory education' to all 5–16 year-olds. Since then, there has been steady progress in more children attending school. However, little was known about whether children with disabilities have benefited from this expansion, and if those making it into school are learning.

Furthermore, there is an uncoordinated approach to providing support to schools and teachers for children

with disabilities who are in mainstream schools. A separate Department of Special Education responsible for the education of children with disabilities has been insufficiently connected with the School Education Department that supports government schools.

## **THE RESEARCH**

In 2014, the ESRC-DFID-funded Teaching Effectively All Children (TEACH) project assessed around 1,600 children aged 8–12 years in rural Central Punjab on literacy and numeracy skills. The researchers combined the Child Functioning Questions developed



Cover photo: Punjab, Pakistan. A pupil practices her English at a government primary school in the remote Panchkasi village.  
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by the [Washington Group for Disability Statistics](#) with data on children's enrolment patterns and assessed their learning. In addition, information was collected from households on other characteristics, such as poverty and gender.

By gathering large-scale data, the researchers were able to gain a fuller picture of the prevalence of disability in Pakistan: around 10 per cent of children had some form of disability, much higher than previous estimates. A large proportion of children with disabilities were in mainstream (both government and private) schools, with around three quarters of those with moderate-to-severe disabilities in school in the sample. More boys than girls with disabilities were in school.

While some children with disabilities were benefiting from access to schooling, the data also showed that their learning outcomes in both literacy and numeracy were, on average, lower compared to children without disabilities. The findings highlight that the conditions of schooling are not enabling children with disabilities to achieve their potential.

## THE IMPACT

The TEACH project has shown that it is feasible to use internationally recognised and standardised questions to understand the schooling experiences of children with disabilities. And, by demonstrating that children with disabilities *are* in mainstream schools, the research is providing valuable new evidence on the types of strategies governments must adopt to support them in the classroom.

Recognising that better data is needed to identify children with disabilities in national surveys for more effective planning, Edward Davis, former DFID Pakistan Education Policy Team Leader, said: 'The research has been influential in training Punjab Special Education Departments on how to use the Washington Group child functioning survey tools.'

The research highlighted the need for better data on children with disabilities as well as improved links between different educational departments.

Drawing on TEACH findings, team member Dr Faisal Bari of IDEAS Pakistan provided expertise in 2018 for the Lahore High Court on a case about the rights of children with disabilities. He was also invited to be a member of a Child Care Commission tasked with writing a report on the status of children with disabilities, which included the research evidence and has since been submitted to the High Court.

Furthermore, the research team has been asked by the School Education Department to provide input on a new inclusive education policy and, according to its Special Secretary, Imran Baloch, the research findings are set to influence future education policies: 'Many of those with special needs who are enrolled in government schools don't receive the support they need to participate in appropriate educational activities. These [TEACH] findings are vital in helping to shape and inform Pakistan's new inclusive education policy – including helping to ensure that we can equip teachers to support children with diverse needs.'

Beyond Pakistan, findings from the project informed preparations for the [Global Disability Summit](#) held in London in July 2018. In collaboration with stakeholders from bilateral and multilateral agencies and international non-governmental organisations, the research contributed to a [Statement of Action on Inclusive Education](#), which informed the Summit's messages on the importance of better evidence and data to inform policy and practice on inclusive education.

## FURTHER READING

Bari, F. (2018) 'Ensuring Inclusion', *Dawn*, 10 August

Bari, F.; Malik, R.; Rose, P. and Singal, N. (2018) [Identifying Disability in Household Surveys: Evidence on Education Access and Learning for Children with Disabilities in Pakistan](#), Policy Paper 18/1, REAL Centre, University of Cambridge

Malik, R. (2016) 'Education's Missing Priorities', *Dawn*, 17 September

Singal, N. (2018) [Disability and Data: Need for Numbers and Narratives](#), Washington Group on Disability Statistics blog, 1 August

The Impact Initiative (ed.) (2017). [Disability and Education, ESRC-DFID Research for Policy and Practice](#). 2017. Brighton, IDS.



### Teaching Effectively All Children (TEACH) in India and Pakistan

The research team was funded by ESRC-DFID's Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, led by Principal Investigator Professor Pauline Rose, together with Dr Nidhi Singal and Professor Anna Vignoles, Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre, University of Cambridge. In Pakistan, the research was carried out in partnership with the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS), led by Dr Faisal Bari and Dr Rabea Malik.

## THE IMPACT INITIATIVE




### For International Development Research

The Impact Initiative seeks to connect policymakers and practitioners with the world-class social science research supported by the ESRC-DFID Strategic Partnership, maximising the uptake and impact of research from: (i) the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research, and (ii) the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Programme. We seek to identify synergies between these programmes and their grant holders, support them to exploit influencing and engagement opportunities, and facilitate mutual learning. The Impact Initiative is a collaboration between the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the University of Cambridge's Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre.

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### CREDITS

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