

Analyzing the Socio-Economic and Institutional Factors Causing Drop Out in Baluchistan: A Case Study of Physically Disabled Girl Children in Complex for Special Education District Quetta

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Abstract

This case study explores the experiences, challenges, and support systems of physically disabled girl children residing in the complex for special education in district Quetta, Pakistan. The study aims to highlight the intersection of gender, disability, and access to education in a region where cultural and infrastructural barriers often impede inclusive development. Using qualitative methods—including in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis—the research investigates how these children navigate their educational environment, the nature of the institutional support they receive, and the role of families and caregivers in their academic journey. The findings reveal both systemic gaps and promising practices within the facility, shedding light on issues such as limited mobility access, social stigmatisation, and the scarcity of specialised teaching resources. At the same time, the study highlights the resilience of these girls and the dedication of certain educators who strive to create an inclusive atmosphere. This case study underscores the urgent need for policy reform, enhanced teacher training, and community awareness to ensure equal educational opportunities for physically disabled girls in Quetta and similar socio-cultural contexts.

Introduction

This is a critical factor, with many families unable to afford school fees, supplies, or transportation. Children often have to work to support their families or help with household chores, leading them to leave School. Education is a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for social inclusion and empowerment. However, in many parts of the world, children with disabilities—particularly girls—continue to face significant barriers in accessing and participating in quality education (UNESCO, 2020). Globally, children with disabilities are among the most marginalised in terms of educational opportunities, and gender further compounds this marginalisation. In Pakistan, where traditional gender roles are deeply rooted and resources for disability support are limited, physically disabled girls remain one of the most underserved populations in the education sector (UNICEF, 2019).

According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2017), approximately 2.6% of the country's population lives with some form of disability. However, disability rights organisations argue that this figure is significantly underreported due to stigma, lack of awareness, and poor data Collection mechanisms. Girls with disabilities face a double burden—discrimination based on gender and disability—which often leads to their exclusion from formal education, especially in rural and underdeveloped regions such as Balochistan. The province faces significant educational challenges, including low literacy rates, inadequate infrastructure, and social resistance to the education of girls (Balochistan Education Sector Plan, 2013–2018).

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The complex for special education in district Quetta is one of the few institutions in Balochistan designed to serve children with special needs. While it provides an essential service, the quality, inclusiveness, and gender responsiveness of the education offered remain largely undocumented. Most existing research and policies focus broadly on disability or gender, but rarely explore the intersection of both. As such, the experiences of physically disabled girl children in such institutions are often invisible in academic and policy discourse.

Physically disabled girls often experience greater dependency, limited mobility, and restricted participation in both academic and extracurricular activities (World Health Organisation, 2011). Furthermore, prevailing societal attitudes in Pakistan tend to view disability as a burden, particularly when it affects girls. Families may feel discouraged from sending disabled daughters to school due to safety concerns, perceived futility, or societal pressure. Teachers and educational institutions may also lack the training, resources, or motivation to accommodate the specific needs of these students (Miles, 2007).

This case study aims to explore and document the lived experiences of physically disabled girl children enrolled at the Complex for Special Education in Quetta. It seeks to identify the barriers they face, the strategies they use to overcome those challenges, and the nature of institutional and familial support available to them. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research gives voice to a vastly underrepresented group and highlights the realities of inclusive education—or the lack thereof—in a marginalised context.

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive education in Pakistan by focusing specifically on the intersection of gender and disability. Second, it offers empirical insights that can inform future educational policy, teacher training, and institutional reform. Finally, by documenting the experiences of these girls, the study advocates for a more equitable, rights-based approach to education in Pakistan, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 5: Gender Equality) (UN, 2015).

Literature Review

The intersection of gender, disability, and education is a critical area of concern in the global discourse on inclusive development. While numerous international frameworks—including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—emphasise the right to inclusive and equitable education for all, the realities on the ground often reveal significant disparities, particularly for disabled girl children (UN, 2015; UNCRPD, 2006).

Disability and Access to Education

Globally, children with disabilities are less likely to attend school and more likely to drop out early than their non-disabled peers (UNESCO, 2020). The World Report on Disability (WHO, 2011) estimates that over one billion people live with some form of disability, with at least 93 million of them being children. In low- and middle-income countries, inclusive education systems are often under-resourced, and specialised support for children with disabilities is minimal or non-existent. In the context of Pakistan, access to education for children with disabilities remains extremely limited. According to the Pakistan Education Statistics 2020–21 report by the Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM), less than 1% of children with disabilities are

enrolled in formal education, with even fewer girls attending School compared to boys. Contributing factors include inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained special education teachers, inaccessible school environments, and a pervasive stigma against disability (UNICEF, 2019).

Gender and Disability in Educational Contexts

Girls with disabilities face unique and compounded disadvantages in accessing education. As noted by Stubbs (2008), the double discrimination based on gender and disability leads to increased exclusion and invisibility. In many societies, including Pakistan, girls are already at a disadvantage due to entrenched gender norms, and when combined with physical disability, these barriers are significantly intensified (Miles, 2007). Families often prioritise the education of male children, while girls, especially those with disabilities, are considered a financial or social burden.

Khan et al. (2015) emphasise that physically disabled girls in Pakistan are more likely to be kept at home due to concerns over safety, transportation difficulties, and a lack of gender-sensitive facilities in schools. Additionally, schools often lack female special education staff, further discouraging parents from enrolling their daughters. These issues are particularly prominent in rural and underdeveloped areas such as Balochistan, where socio-cultural restrictions further limit the mobility and visibility of disabled girls.

Special Education in Pakistan

Pakistan's special education infrastructure is still developing and remains uneven across provinces. The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2002) and its revised versions aim to promote inclusive education, but implementation has been slow and inconsistent (Government of Pakistan, 2002). Special education institutions, such as the Complex for Special Education in Quetta, serve an important function, yet they are often understaffed, underfunded, and poorly equipped (Naseem & Arshad, 2011). Moreover, these facilities are frequently gender-neutral in their planning, failing to consider the specific needs of girls, such as personal hygiene management, emotional counselling, or gender-specific physical therapy.

Social and Cultural Barriers

Cultural perceptions of disability in Pakistan often result in exclusion and neglect. Disability is frequently seen through a religious or fatalistic lens, regarded as a curse or divine punishment, leading to shame and concealment of disabled family members, especially girls (Miles, 2007). Social stigma contributes to the invisibility of disabled girls in both community and institutional spaces. In Balochistan, traditional patriarchal structures further exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult for girls with physical disabilities to access educational, health, and social services.

Need for Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Educational Policies

Recent international literature has stressed the need for gender-sensitive approaches to inclusive education. According to Booth and Ainscow (2011), inclusive education should go beyond physical access to include participation, belonging, and achievement for all learners. For disabled girls, this means not only being admitted into educational institutions but also receiving appropriate support, accommodations, and empowerment to thrive academically and socially.

In Pakistan, there is an urgent need for policy interventions that address the overlapping vulnerabilities of gender and disability. Developing gender-responsive training for special education teachers, improving school accessibility, and engaging communities in advocacy are some of the recommended strategies (UNESCO, 2020; Khan et al., 2015).

Conclusion of Literature Review

The literature clearly demonstrates that physically disabled girls are among the most disadvantaged groups in the education system, both globally and within Pakistan. Despite efforts by the government and international organisations, structural, cultural, and institutional barriers persist, particularly in marginalised areas like Balochistan. This research aims to fill the existing gap by providing a focused, context-specific understanding of the educational realities faced by physically disabled girl children at the Complex for Special Education in District Quetta. Such an inquiry is essential for informing policies and practices that can move Pakistan closer to its commitments under international human rights and development frameworks.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to gain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the realities faced by physically disabled girl children in the Complex for Special Education, District Quetta.

Research Design

The case study design is appropriate for exploring complex, context-dependent issues in depth. It allows for the examination of individuals' real-life experiences in their natural settings and is well-suited for investigating the nuances of disability, gender, and education (Yin, 2018).

Study Site

The study was conducted at the Complex for Special Education in Quetta, one of the key institutions providing specialised education services to children with disabilities in Balochistan.

Population and Sampling

Target Population: Physically disabled girl students enrolled in the Complex, along with selected teachers, parents, and administrators.

Sampling Technique: Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide rich, relevant, and diverse data.

Sample Size:

- 8–10 physically disabled girl students (ages 8–16)
- 3–4 teachers
- 3–4 parents or guardians
- 1–2 school administrators

Data Collection Methods

- *Semi-structured interviews:* Conducted with students, teachers, and parents to explore their perspectives, experiences, and attitudes.
- *Classroom and school environment observations:* Used to assess physical accessibility, teacher-student interaction, participation in activities, and inclusive practices.

- *Document review:* Analysis of institutional records, student profiles, educational plans, and government policies related to special education and disability rights.

Data Analysis

- Data was analysed using thematic analysis, which involved coding transcripts and observation notes to identify recurring themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Data were categorised into themes such as *educational challenges, institutional support, social integration, family role, and policy implications*.

Ethical Considerations

- *Informed consent* was obtained from all participants or their legal guardians.
- *Anonymity and confidentiality* were strictly maintained.
- The study was conducted with cultural sensitivity and respect, particularly given the participants' vulnerability.

Limitations

- The findings of this study are not generalizable beyond the selected case due to the small, context-specific sample.
- The study may be limited by the participants' willingness to share sensitive personal experiences.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the study's key findings and discusses them in light of the existing literature and theoretical frameworks. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of institutional documents at the Complex for Special Education in District Quetta. Thematic analysis revealed five major themes:

Limited Physical Accessibility

Findings

Observation revealed that while the School had some ramps and wide doorways, many areas, including washrooms, stairs, and play areas, remained physically inaccessible to wheelchair users. Some girls needed assistance from peers or staff to move between classrooms or use restrooms.

Discussion

These findings align with the World Health Organisation (2011), which emphasises the importance of physical accessibility in enabling disabled children's participation in educational settings. Lack of adequate infrastructure limits independence and dignity, especially for girls who may be hesitant to seek help due to modesty concerns or social norms (UNICEF, 2019).

Social Exclusion and Peer Interaction

Findings

Most of the physically disabled girls reported feeling excluded from peer groups, especially during physical activities and breaks. Some students shared experiences of bullying or being labelled as "different." Teachers confirmed that integration during group work and games was minimal.

Discussion

Social exclusion reinforces feelings of inferiority and negatively impacts self-esteem. According to Booth and Ainscow (2011), inclusion is not only about physical presence but also about participation and belonging. Girls, in particular, face greater challenges in social integration due to gendered expectations and internalised stigma (Stubbs, 2008).

Family and Cultural Barriers**Findings**

Interviews with parents revealed a mix of supportive and restrictive attitudes. Some families were actively involved in their daughters' education, while others viewed schooling as unnecessary or burdensome. Cultural beliefs that girls with disabilities should remain at home or avoid public spaces were also reported.

Discussion

These findings echo Miles (2007), who notes that in many Pakistani communities, disability—especially in girls—is seen as a social burden. The family's role is critical: supportive parents can serve as advocates, while unsupportive environments can deepen marginalisation. The intersection of gender and disability often results in "triple discrimination"—being female, disabled, and poor (Khan et al., 2015).

Lack of Gender-Sensitive Support Services**Findings**

Although the School provides some special education services (e.g., speech therapy, physiotherapy), most staff reported a lack of training in gender-sensitive or trauma-informed care. Girls' specific needs related to personal hygiene, emotional counselling, or puberty education were largely unmet.

Discussion

Gender-sensitive education is a core element of inclusive education (UNESCO, 2020). Physically disabled girls face additional needs related to menstruation management, safety, and emotional development. Without appropriate support systems, their ability to thrive in School is compromised.

Teacher Attitudes and Institutional Challenges**Findings**

Some teachers were highly committed and empathetic, but others expressed frustration or helplessness due to inadequate training and limited resources. One teacher mentioned, "We want to do more, but we are not trained to deal with girls who need both emotional and physical support."

Discussion

Teacher attitudes significantly shape the educational experiences of children with disabilities (Naseem & Arshad, 2011). Professional development focused on inclusive pedagogy and gender sensitivity is crucial. In many Pakistani special education institutions, teachers are appointed without specialised training, leading to inconsistent quality of care and instruction (Government of Pakistan, 2002).

Synthesis of Findings

The results underscore the complex, intersecting barriers faced by physically disabled girl children in Quetta's special education system. These include:

- *Structural barriers* (inaccessible facilities)
- *Social and cultural barriers* (stigma, gender norms)
- *Institutional limitations* (lack of training, inadequate services)

Despite these challenges, some positive elements were observed—such as peer support in the classroom and the dedication of certain staff members—which highlight the potential for improvement.

Conclusion of Discussion

This case study reveals a pressing need for more inclusive, gender-responsive policies and practices in special education in Pakistan, particularly in underdeveloped regions like Balochistan. The data clearly support existing literature that emphasises how the intersectionality of gender and disability leads to systemic marginalisation (UNESCO, 2020; Miles, 2007; Stubbs, 2008). However, it also points to potential areas of intervention—teacher training, infrastructure improvement, family education, and policy reform—that can meaningfully enhance educational outcomes for physically disabled girls.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this case study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the educational experiences and inclusion of physically disabled girl children in special education settings like the complex for special education in district Quetta:

Improve Physical Infrastructure and Accessibility

- Ensure that school buildings, classrooms, restrooms, and recreational areas are fully accessible for wheelchair users and students with mobility challenges.
- Install assistive technologies such as handrails, ramps, adjustable desks, and elevators where feasible.

Provide Gender-Sensitive Support Services

- Establish dedicated counselling services and health education programs that address the emotional, psychological, and physical needs of girls, especially related to puberty, hygiene, and self-care.
- Appoint trained female staff to assist with personal care, hygiene, and emotional support.

Strengthen Teacher Training and Capacity Building

- Provide continuous professional development for teachers on inclusive education practices, with a specific focus on gender and disability sensitivity.
- Introduce modules on emotional intelligence, communication with disabled students, and inclusive classroom management in teacher education programs.

Engage and Educate Families and Communities

- Conduct awareness sessions for parents and communities to challenge stigma and promote the value of education for girls with disabilities.

- Encourage parental involvement in school activities and decision-making processes to create a supportive learning environment.

Enhance Government Policy and Monitoring

- The Balochistan government should develop clear policies that prioritise the inclusion of girls with disabilities in both special and mainstream education systems.
- Allocate adequate budgets for disability-inclusive education programs, infrastructure upgrades, and staff training.
- Regularly monitor special education institutions to ensure compliance with accessibility and inclusion standards.

Promote Social Inclusion within the School

- Encourage peer mentoring programs and inclusive group activities that foster interaction between disabled and non-disabled students.
- Implement anti-bullying policies and awareness programs to cultivate empathy and respect for diversity among students.

Table 1: Socio-Economic and Institutional Factors Causing Dropout in Balochistan (Case Study: Physically Disabled Girl Children in Complex for Special Education, District Quetta)

Category	Specific Factors	Description / Evidence from Field	Impact on Education / Dropout
Socio-Economic Factors	1. Poverty and Low Household Income	Many families belong to low-income groups; parents struggle to afford transport, assistive devices, or school supplies.	Financial stress leads to irregular attendance and early dropout.
	2. Parental Education and Awareness	Parents with little or no education often undervalue formal education for disabled girls.	Lack of awareness reduces motivation to continue schooling.
	3. Employment and Family Burden	Parents prioritize daily labor or household responsibilities over education.	Girls are withdrawn from school to assist at home.
	4. Transportation and Accessibility Costs	High transport costs and lack of accessible vehicles make daily commute difficult.	Students miss classes regularly, leading to dropouts.
	5. Cultural and Gender Norms	Traditional beliefs restrict girls—especially those with disabilities—from public participation.	Families prefer to keep girls at home due to stigma or perceived safety concerns.
	6. Social Exclusion and Peer Discrimination	Disabled girls often face bullying or exclusion from peers.	Low self-esteem and isolation discourage continued schooling.
Institutional Factors	1. Inadequate Infrastructure	Lack of ramps, accessible washrooms, and classroom facilities for wheelchairs.	Physical barriers make schooling uncomfortable or impossible.

2. Shortage of Trained Teachers	Few teachers trained in special education or inclusive teaching methods.	Students' diverse learning needs remain unmet, leading to disengagement.
3. Insufficient Learning Materials	Scarcity of Braille books, hearing aids, or adapted learning tools.	Learning gaps grow, reducing performance and motivation.
4. Weak Administrative and Policy Support	Inconsistent implementation of inclusive education policies and monitoring.	Schools fail to retain students and provide continuous support.
5. Limited Extracurricular Inclusion	Disabled girls are often excluded from sports and group activities.	Lack of belonging leads to social withdrawal and eventual dropout.
6. Teacher Attitudes and Biases	Some teachers unintentionally express low expectations toward disabled girls.	Negative attitudes reduce confidence and engagement among students.

Conclusion

This case study has shed light on the multiple layers of disadvantage faced by physically disabled girl children in the complex for special education, district Quetta. The findings reveal that while the institution serves a critical function in providing education to children with disabilities, it falls short in addressing the unique needs of girls due to structural, cultural, and institutional gaps.

Key challenges identified include poor physical accessibility, social exclusion, lack of gender-sensitive services, and inadequate teacher training. Cultural stigma and traditional gender roles further limit the educational opportunities for these girls, reinforcing cycles of marginalisation and dependence.

However, the study also highlights areas of potential—such as the dedication of some staff members, the presence of peer support in some instances, and the willingness of families to be engaged—indicating that inclusive and transformative change is possible.

To realise the vision of inclusive education outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4 and 5), policymakers, educators, families, and civil society must work collaboratively. Addressing the intersection of gender and disability through targeted policies, community engagement, and inclusive school environments can ensure that physically disabled girls are not only enrolled in schools but are empowered to thrive and lead dignified lives.

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