

## **Exploring the Role of Parental Barriers in Hindering Inclusive Education in South Punjab, Pakistan**

**Dr. Muhammad Anwar ul Haq**

[anwarbhutta786@gmail.com](mailto:anwarbhutta786@gmail.com)

Department of Sociology, PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

**Dr. Hamad Khan**

Department of Sociology, PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

**Dr. Amna Afzaal**

Department of Sociology, PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

**Dr. Muhammad Ateeq-Ur-Rehman**

Department of Sociology, PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

**Corresponding Author: \* Dr. Muhammad Anwar ul Haq** [anwarbhutta786@gmail.com](mailto:anwarbhutta786@gmail.com)

Received: 09-03-2025	Revised: 10-04-2025	Accepted: 07-05-2025	Published: 30-06-2025
----------------------	---------------------	----------------------	-----------------------

### **ABSTRACT**

*This study explores the parental barriers to inclusive education in District Muzaffargarh, Pakistan. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected from parents of children with disabilities through the use of structured questionnaires. The findings reveal that lack of awareness, financial constraints, social stigma, and inadequate school infrastructure are major barriers to inclusive education. The study highlights the importance of policy interventions, increased parental engagement, and improved educational facilities to foster inclusivity.*

**Keywords:** *Inclusive education, parental barriers, children with disabilities, Muzaffargarh, Pakistan*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Inclusive education ensures equal learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their abilities. However, in developing countries like Pakistan, several barriers hinder the full inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education. Parents play a crucial role in facilitating or obstructing inclusive education. This study investigates the parental barriers to inclusive education in District Muzaffargarh, aiming to provide insights for policymakers and educators.

#### **Lack of parental awareness about inclusive education**

This lack of awareness leads to misunderstandings, like the idea that you cannot educate a child with a disability in a classroom where there are also children without disabilities. Alternatively, the idea that an 'inclusive classroom' is not sufficient support for the learning that a child with a disability needs to truly learn (Forlin et al., 2013).

The successful implementation of inclusive education greatly depends on parental awareness, yet the adequate dissemination of knowledge regarding its principles, benefits, and practices is lacking among many parent groups. Research has found that parents in developing countries, due to social and educational barriers, have restricted exposure to the idea of inclusive education (Sharma & Loreman, 2017). Moreover, many parents do not know about their rights and the laws in place that back inclusive education, which stops them from pushing for the right kind of educational services for their kids (UNESCO, 2020).

### **Poverty and the low socioeconomic status of households**

Financial limitations additionally lead to under-nutrition and poor health. This also negatively impacts cognitive growth and school performance (Walker et al., 2011). Research shows that children from low-income families are far more likely to drop out of school. Their families are more likely to struggle with financial difficulties, and these hardships tend to be transmitted across generations. At the same time, the parents of poor children are less likely to have graduated from college themselves, which often translates into reduced parental involvement in and support for their children's schooling. Likewise, poor children have much less access to the kind of quality educational resources, school, teachers, and materials that wealthier children usually do. In sum, dropping out is a serious and likely outcome for these children (García & Weiss, 2019).

### **Parental illiteracy is the root cause of barriers to inclusive education**

Parents with little formal education may find it difficult to maneuver through the educational system, fight for their children's rights, or reach support services with the necessary skills to ensure their children succeed (Singal, 2019). Illiteracy in parents has a widespread impact on the ability of their son or daughter to achieve an education that is in line with societal norms. This is true whether we refer to the parents' ability to read and write or to understand the better forms of communication (e.g., verbal communication, sign language, etc.), which societies often use to implement and maintain inclusive education. Words like these, written on a wall, express a key part of inclusive education: Everyone understands that to have a wall to lean on, the wall must first have a foundation on which to stand (UNESCO, 2020).

### **Parental illiteracy as the root cause of barriers to inclusive education in Pakistan**

In addition, many parents in Pakistan are not aware of the educational opportunities and support services that exist for children with disabilities because they are not educated. As a result, very few children with disabilities enroll in school, and far more fail to learn even the basics (Ahmed et al., 2020). When it comes to children with disabilities, the illiteracy of their parents poses a huge barrier to inclusive education in Pakistan, at both the macro and micro levels. On the macro level, the high rate of parental illiteracy, especially in the rural, low-income part of the country, means that there just is not much awareness of the existence of inclusive education policies or the rights of children with certain types of disabilities (UNESCO, 2021).

### **Parental concerns about the education of children with special needs**

As stated by Avramidis and Norwich (2002), parental concerns often arise from doubts about whether teachers have the requisite skills and attitudes that are needed to effectively support children with disabilities. Frequently, parents of children with special needs experience high levels of anxiety about their children's education. They fear that their children are being placed in mainstream schools that will not support them adequately, such that they can achieve something like the academic and personal success that more typical children are more likely to achieve. These parental worries are not without foundation. Some rather sobering research findings about the general inadequacy of teacher training, resources, and learning environments for special needs children underpin these fears.

### **Education costs and parental preferences for schooling girls over children with disabilities**

Schooling of girls rather than children with disabilities stands as a preference choice for parents in South Asia and other low- and middle-income regions due to combined cultural alongside economic as well as systemic conditions. The traditional cultural norm in Pakistan and India places value on sons because males become future providers, while females do not receive equivalent value for education. Some

parents do not prioritize girls' education since they expect women to perform household duties, which they perceive to be less essential. Society exists with the belief that providing education to girls has the potential to endanger traditional values, either by making them more independent or by challenging traditional practices (Sharma & Nair, 2022).

### **Insufficient parental interest and its impact on the schooling of children with disabilities**

Insufficient knowledge means that children miss opportunities for early intervention and the chance to reach their full potential. The situation is aggravated by the fact that many parents, owing to their finances, are forced to view their child's education as secondary and not as important as a stable income. (Alquraini & Gut, 2012). A primary reason why parental interest is insufficient is a lack of awareness about the educational rights and needs of children with disabilities. Many parents, especially in low-income contexts, are not knowledgeable about the services that are available to help their children or about the policies that are in place to ensure that their children are educated in inclusive environments (Sharma et al., 2019). On the other hand, if parents show no interest at all, children are more likely to skip school, fail their classes, and hang out with the wrong crowd. (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2020).

### **Lack of parental involvement and information about the benefits of inclusive education**

When parents are uninformed about inclusive education, they may have the wrong ideas about it. They may not realize that their children have the same potential to succeed in inclusive settings as they do in any other educational setting. They may think that their children are incapable of achieving at a high level, that they are performing at the level they are performing at because of their special needs, and that they would be achieving at that level in any setting. They may not think that their children would be achieving at much higher levels if they were in an inclusive setting (Sharma & Salend, 2016).

### **Fear of harassment as a barrier to the education of girls with disabilities in Pakistan**

In Pakistan, educational chances for disabled girls are restricted by a climate of fear. It is hardly conducive to study when one is constantly worrying about the possibility of being harassed or assaulted. However, that is the situation in Pakistan, especially for girls. Moreover, it is certainly not what the founders had in mind when they established Pakistan as a society built on egalitarian principles (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The education system in Pakistan has structural problems that make it hard to provide a safe and inclusive setting for girls with disabilities. Many schools do not just lack proper facilities and learning materials; they also lack oversight. There are too few female teachers and security personnel in schools to provide for female students, and that lack makes schools less secure and more prone to harassment (Batoool & Jamil, 2020).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework serves as the foundation for understanding how parental barriers influence inclusive education. The conceptual framework presents these barriers as independent variables affecting the dependent variable, which is access to and participation in inclusive education. In this study, parental barriers refer to the challenges faced by parents that hinder the education of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. These barriers are categorized into:

#### **Socioeconomic Barriers**

- Low family income
- Unaffordable school fees and transportation costs
- Lack of government financial support for inclusive education

- Lack of parental involvement in school decision-making
- Unavailability of inclusive education programs in local schools
- Poor teacher-parent Collaboration and communication

### Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework maps out the barriers affecting inclusive education, while the theoretical framework provides a lens to analyze these barriers from multiple perspectives. Bronfenbrenner's theory helps to understand systemic influences, and Bourdieu's theory highlights the role of parental education and advocacy. This study is based on the following theory:

#### 3.1 Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital (1986)

Bourdieu argues that parents' social and cultural capital (education level, knowledge, and social connections) affect their children's access to education. Relevance to the study, parents with higher education and awareness are more likely to advocate for their child's rights in inclusive settings. In contrast, those with limited cultural capital may face more barriers.

### METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the parental factors affecting inclusive education in District Muzaffargarh. Data were collected from 369 parents of children with disabilities using a structured questionnaire. The sample was selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across various demographic and socioeconomic groups. To assess the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated, yielding a value of 0.810, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the eight items of the questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques in SPSS. Univariate analysis was conducted to summarize the data distribution, while linear regression analysis was employed to examine the relationships between parental factors and inclusive education outcomes.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on parental factors as independent variables and inclusive education as the dependent variable. The analysis is divided into two parts: 1. Univariate Analysis – A descriptive summary of parental factors affecting inclusive education. 2. Linear Regression Analysis – Examining the relationship between parental factors (independent variables) and inclusive education (dependent variable).

**Table 1: Univariate Analysis of Parental Factors**

Sr#	Statement	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
1	Parents have a lack of awareness about inclusive education	30.6	21.7	14.9	16.5	16.3
2	Poverty and the low socioeconomic profile of households impede the fundamental rights of children, i.e., education.	30.4	26.0	25.2	7.6	10.8
3	Parental illiteracy is the root cause of inclusive education at the macro and micro levels	33.9	39.6	4.6	11.4	10.6
4	Parents fear children with special needs will not receive proper education	28.2	37.1	14.6	8.7	11.4
5	Education is expensive, and parents prefer girls with special needs to go to school.	42.5	24.7	5.7	15.2	11.9
6	Insufficient parental interest impedes the schooling of	45.0	22.5	7.3	10.8	14.4

	children with disabilities					
7	Lack of Parental involvement and information about the benefits of inclusive education.	41.5	29.0	3.5	14.6	11.4
8	Fear of harassment does not let parents get their daughters with disabilities educated	37.1	29.8	10.8	13.0	9.2

Table 1: Generated by the researcher.

Table 1 presents survey results on parental factors that may hinder inclusive education in District Muzaffargarh. The responses are categorized into five levels: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (DA), and Strongly Disagree (SDA). The percentages represent the proportion of respondents selecting each option for each statement. Lack of Parental awareness (SA: 30.6%, A: 21.7%). More than 50% (52.3%) of parents agree that a lack of awareness about inclusive education is a significant barrier. This highlights the need for awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives to educate parents about the benefits and availability of inclusive education programs. Impact of Poverty and Socioeconomic Status (SA: 30.4%, A: 26.0%) A substantial 56.4% of respondents agree that poverty and low socioeconomic status hinder children's right to education. Notably, 25.2% remained neutral, suggesting that some parents might see other factors as more critical. This underscores the economic challenges that families face in sending children, especially those with disabilities, to school. Parental Illiteracy as a Root Cause (SA: 33.9%, A: 39.6%) A majority (73.5%) of parents believe that illiteracy is a major barrier to inclusive education, both at the macro (policy and system level) and micro (household level). This indicates that educated parents are more likely to support their child's education, reinforcing the importance of adult literacy programs. Parental Fear Regarding Education Quality (SA: 28.2%, A: 37.1%). Around 65.3% of respondents agree that parents fear their children with disabilities will not receive proper education. This suggests a lack of trust in the quality of inclusive education available, pointing to the need for improved teacher training and resource allocation in inclusive schools. Preference for Educating Girls Over Children with Disabilities (SA: 42.5%, A: 24.7%) A significant 67.2% of respondents agree that, due to financial constraints, parents prioritize girls' education over that of children with disabilities. This reflects deep-rooted gender and disability-related biases, emphasizing the need for financial support programs (such as scholarships and stipends) for children with disabilities.

Lack of Parental Interest (SA: 45.0%, A: 22.5%). Around 67.5% of parents acknowledge insufficient parental interest as a key obstacle in educating children with disabilities. This suggests a possible cultural or attitudinal barrier, requiring community outreach and engagement programs to emphasize the importance of inclusive education. Lack of Parental Involvement and awareness of Benefits (SA: 41.5%, A: 29.0%). A total of 70.5% of parents agree that they lack involvement and awareness about inclusive education benefits. This indicates a pressing need for parental education programs, workshops, and school-community partnerships to enhance participation. Fear of Harassment for Daughters with Disabilities (SA: 37.1%, A: 29.8%). 66.9% of parents agree that the fear of harassment prevents them from educating daughters with disabilities. This highlights a serious social issue where families feel that schools are not safe for girls with disabilities. It calls for stronger policies on school safety, awareness programs, and stricter laws to protect children with disabilities.

**Table 2 Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.395 <sup>a</sup>	.156	.153	5.55355

a. Predictors: (Constant), Parental Factors

Table 2 is a Model Summary from a regression analysis, which provides key statistical measures indicating how well the independent variable, Parental factors, predicts the dependent variable. R (Correlation Coefficient): The value of 0.395 indicates a moderate positive correlation between the independent variable, Parental factors, and the Inclusive education dependent variable. The Adjusted R Square (0.153) slightly adjusts the R Square value to account for the number of predictors in the model. Since there is only one predictor in this case, the difference is minimal. This adjusted value ensures a more reliable estimate of the model's predictive power when applied to a larger population.

**Table 3 ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2087.349	1	2087.349	67.679	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	11318.981	367	30.842		
	Total	13406.331	368			

a. Dependent Variable: Inclusive Education

b. Predictors: (Constant), Parental factors

Table 3, the ANOVA table, provides statistical evidence regarding the overall significance of the regression model in explaining variations in the dependent variable, inclusive education. The Regression Sum of Squares (SS) is 2087.349, indicating the variation in inclusive education that is explained by the predictor variable, Parental factors. The Residual Sum of Squares (SS) is 11,318.981, representing the unexplained variation in inclusive education due to other factors not included in the model. The Total Sum of Squares (SS) is 13,406.331, which is the total variation in the dependent variable.

The degree of freedom (df) for regression is 1, as there is one predictor, Parental factors, and the residual df is 367, which corresponds to the sample size minus the number of estimated parameters. The mean square values are obtained by dividing the sum of squares by their respective degrees of freedom, resulting in a Mean Square Regression of 2087.349 and a Mean Square Residual of 30.842. The F-statistic of 67.679 (computed as  $2087.349 / 30.842$ ) is quite large, indicating a strong relationship between the predictor and the dependent variable.

The p-value (Sig.) is 0.000, which is highly significant (typically below 0.05). This means that the predictor of Parental factors has a statistically significant effect on inclusive education, rejecting the null hypothesis that the predictor has no influence. Overall, the regression model is significant, suggesting that Parental factors contribute meaningfully to explaining variations in inclusive education.

**Table 4 Coefficients**

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	10.025	.807		12.419	.000
	Parental factors	.330	.040	.395	8.227	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Inclusive education



Table 4 presents the results of a regression analysis examining the relationship between Parental factors (predictor variable) and inclusive education (dependent variable). The constant (intercept) in the model is 10.025, which means that when Parental factors are zero, the predicted value of inclusive education is 10.025. The standard error for the constant is 0.807, and the t-value is 12.419, with a significance level (p-value) of 0.000, indicating that the intercept is statistically significant. The unstandardized coefficient (B) for Parental factors is 0.330, meaning that for every one-unit increase in Parental factors, inclusive education increases by 0.330 units, holding all other variables constant. The standard error for this coefficient is 0.040, suggesting a low level of variability in the estimate. The standardized coefficient (Beta) for Parental factors is 0.395, indicating the strength of the relationship between the predictor and the dependent variable in standardized terms. This suggests a moderate positive effect of Parental factors on inclusive education.

The t-value for Parental factors is 8.227, and the p-value is 0.000, which means that the predictor variable is statistically significant at a 95% confidence level. This confirms that Parental factors have a significant impact on inclusive education. In summary, the regression analysis shows a significant positive relationship between Parental factors and inclusive education, where an increase in Parental factors is associated with an increase in inclusive education. The model suggests that Parental factors explain a moderate portion of the variation in inclusive education, and the results are statistically significant. The findings align with previous research indicating that financial constraints and social stigma are significant barriers (Sharma et al., 2019). The lack of awareness among parents highlights the need for targeted awareness campaigns. Moreover, improving school infrastructure and providing financial assistance to parents can significantly enhance inclusive education in Muzaffargarh.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research has evaluated parental challenges that prevent inclusive education from succeeding in Muzaffargarh, Pakistan. Multiple parent-related challenges prevent children with disabilities from receiving inclusive education. Parental illiteracy, insufficient parental interest, and lack of involvement proved to be the leading barriers that hinder inclusive education, along with existing social concerns related to daughter harassment and higher educational value placed on girls. The research findings indicate that parental illiteracy stands as the main barrier, according to 73.5% of respondents, together with similar barriers such as insufficient parental interest and involvement, and danger-related fears that affect more than two-thirds of participants, so these obstacles prevent many disabled children from reaching educational opportunities.

During each school year, thousands of children miss out on opportunities because their parents lack the necessary awareness for success, adequate knowledge, and face the fear of harassment for their disabled daughters. Statistics show how social prejudices and safety concerns against harassment of disabled daughters create substantial barriers at a rate of 66.9% agreement in families. The results demonstrate an imminent requirement to involve parents as active partners during the development of inclusive learning programs. Inclusive interventions should extend outside classroom boundaries to create awareness programs for parents that provide information while overcoming their concerns and combating negative community attitudes toward children with disabilities. The transformation of an inclusive educational system in practice requires the removal of these parental barriers to provide equal access for all children regardless of their homes.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The following recommendations focus on legal, institutional, and community-based interventions to create a safer and more inclusive educational environment:

1. Strengthening Legal Protections Against Harassment. The government should establish child protection units in every district, ensuring that reports of harassment in schools are investigated promptly and confidentially.
2. The Ministry of Education should make it mandatory for all schools to have an anti-harassment policy that protects girls, especially those with disabilities, from any form of abuse.
3. Enhancing Security Measures in Schools The provincial education departments should ensure that schools are regularly monitored for safety compliance, including the presence of female security staff in girls' schools.
4. Increasing the number of female teachers and support staff will provide a more secure and comfortable learning environment for girls with disabilities.
5. Providing Safe and Accessible Transportation The government should introduce subsidized and disability-friendly school transportation, ensuring safe travel for children with disabilities.
6. Public-private partnerships can facilitate community transport programs where verified and trained drivers provide pick-and-drop services for CWDs attending school.
7. awareness Campaigns and Parental Engagement National awareness campaigns on the right to education for children with disabilities, their legal protections, and the importance of school safety should be launched.
8. Inclusive School Policies and Teacher Training, administrators, and support staff should receive specialized training on handling students with disabilities.

These measures could significantly improve access to and acceptance of inclusive education for children with disabilities in Muzaffargarh, Pakistan.

#### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

#### **Data Availability Statement**

This study utilizes primary data collected from the district of Muzaffargarh, Punjab, Pakistan.

#### **Ethical statement**

This research work was not previously published or submitted in any form.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Ahmed, M., Javed, F., & Saleem, M. (2020). Barriers to inclusive education in Pakistan: A systematic review. *Journal of Special Education Research*, 24(2), 87–102.
- Ahmed, R., & Khan, M. (2022). *Barriers to inclusive education in Pakistan: A parental perspective*. *International Journal of Special Education*, 37(1), 45–59.
- Alquraini, T., & Gut, D. (2012). Critical components of successful inclusion of students with severe disabilities: Literature review. *International Journal of Special Education*, 27(1), 42-59.
- Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 17(2), 129–147.
- Batool, S., & Jamil, A. (2020). Gender-based violence in schools: A barrier to inclusive education in Pakistan. *Journal of Educational Research*, 23(2), 78–95. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jer.2020.23.2.78>



- Forlin, C., Chambers, D., Loreman, T., Deppler, J., & Sharma, U. (2013). Inclusive education for students with disability: A review of the best evidence in professional development for teachers. *Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)*.
- García, E., & Weiss, E. (2019). *Education inequalities at the school starting gate: Gaps, trends, and strategies to address them*. Economic Policy Institute.
- Human Rights Watch. (2018). *Shall I feed my daughter, or educate her? Barriers to girls' education in Pakistan*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/12/12/shall-i-feed-my-daughter-or-educate-her>
- Lindsay, G., & Dockrell, J. (2020). The relationship between parental involvement and educational outcomes for children with special educational needs. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 35(4), 567–582.
- Sharma, R., & Nair, R. (2022). *Parental attitudes towards inclusive education*. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362058198\\_Parental\\_attitudes\\_towards\\_inclusive\\_education](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362058198_Parental_attitudes_towards_inclusive_education)
- Sharma, U., & Loreman, T. (2017). Teacher education for inclusive education: A research-based framework. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(5), 1–16.
- Sharma, U., & Salend, S. J. (2016). Teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 63(5), 563–568.
- Sharma, U., Forlin, C., & Loreman, T. (2019). *Impact of training on attitudes of parents towards inclusive education*. *Disability & Society*, 34(3), 456–478.
- Singal, N. (2019). Challenges and opportunities in addressing disability in South Asia. *Disability & Society*, 34(6), 878–893.
- UNESCO. (2020). *Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education*. UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO. (2020). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education—All means all*. UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO. (2020). *Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education – All means all*. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/gemreport/report/2020/inclusion>
- UNESCO. (2020). *Global education monitoring report: Inclusion and education*. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.
- UNESCO. (2021). *Global education monitoring report: Inclusion and education – All means all*. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2021/inclusion>
- Walker, S. P., Wachs, T. D., Meeks Gardner, J., Lozoff, B., Wasserman, G. A., Pollitt, E., & Carter, J. A. (2011). Inequality in early childhood: Risk and protective factors for early child development. *The Lancet*, 378(9799), 1325–1338.