



Sociology & Cultural Research Review (SCRR)
 Available Online: <https://scrrjournal.com>
 Print ISSN: [3007-3103](#) Online ISSN: [3007-3111](#)
 Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)



Policy Analysis of Punjab's Special Education Policy 2018: Implementation Gaps and Reform Agenda

Dr. Latif Ahmad

Principal, Govt Special Education Institute for HI, Kasur, Pakistan

lak104@yahoo.com

Sarfraz Ahmad Khan

Lecturer, Govt Training College for the Teachers of Blind, Lahore, Pakistan

sarfraz.09148@gmail.com

Sidra Bukhari

Instructor, Govt Training College for the Teachers of Blind, Lahore, Pakistan

sidrasyed747@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Punjab Special Education Policy 2018 is the most ambitious Provincial Policy on Special Education for children with disabilities in Pakistan's history, outlining bold promises for inclusion, quality improvement, expanding institutional capacity, improving the professionalization of the workforce, and engaging families. However, the years since the policy was announced have shown a significant disparity between the vision and visionary intent of the policy and the lived experience of its implementation – a disparity that directly impacts the rights, opportunities and quality of life of children with disabilities in Punjab. The present qualitative study uses a critical policy analysis methodology that is situated in an interpretivist research paradigm to analyze the coherence, comprehensiveness and implementability of the Punjab Special Education Policy of 2018, identifying critical gaps in its implementation in five thematic areas: inclusive education and mainstreaming, teacher workforce development and professionalization, institutional quality assurance and accountability, early identification and intervention infrastructure, and inter-departmental coordination and resource mobilization. The data collected involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key policy makers and institutional administrators, teachers, parents, and disability rights groups, focused group discussions with special education practitioners, and systematic documentary analysis of the policy document, implementation reports and other related legislative instruments. The study uses the Framework for Policy Analysis, designed by Hogwood and Gunn, which offers a systematic analytical structure for examining the conditions that contribute to or detract from the success of public policy implementation, and that together account for the overall implementation gap identified in the study. A detailed reform agenda for the Government of Punjab, Directorate of Special Education, Punjab Institute of Special Education and international development partners follows.

Keywords: Punjab Special Education Policy 2018, critical policy analysis, qualitative methodology, implementation gaps, inclusive education, Hogwood and Gunn's framework, disability policy, Pakistan, teacher development, accountability, inter-departmental coordination

1. Introduction

The status and impact of public policy in children with disabilities education within the overall framework of education governance is unique. Disability education policy, unlike mainstream educational policy, does not work within a structured institutional context nor does it draw on common pedagogical traditions, but rather it must challenge the entrenched

cultural stigma, negotiate across professional and bureaucratic domains, build capacity in an institutional context not yet established and, importantly, meet the expectations of international human rights obligations which include specific and enforceable expectations of education provision. Implementing such policy is much harder, and much less often successful, than elaborating it is politically and administratively (Dye, 2013).

The rollout of the Punjab Special Education Policy 2018 was another milestone in the province of Punjab's efforts towards disability-inclusive education in Pakistan. The policy has committed the Government of Punjab to the full-fledged comprehensive vision of quality inclusive and rights based special education with specific goals in the domains of institutional expansion, workforce development, curriculum reform, early intervention, inclusive mainstreaming and inter-departmental coordination (Government of Punjab, 2018). The policy explicitly referenced the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) and the general principles of the Salamanca Statement on inclusive education, which suggested a desire to go beyond the segregated, medically defined special education approach that had been the hallmark of the provincial provision.

But systematic evidence of progress in implementing the policy six years after its promulgation is anything but clear cut. The policy's more complex and transformative commitments, such as the implementation of inclusive education, teacher professionalization, development of a quality assurance system, development of early intervention infrastructure, and coordination between departments have progressed more slowly and unevenly than the policy's timeline would suggest (Saeed et al., 2020). Ambition for social sector reform is a hallmark of social sector reform in low- and middle-income country contexts where the political and administrative context for effective policy implementation often is incomplete (Grindle, 2004). Punjab's situation is unique on two counts: its size (more than a million children with disability) and the need for developmental and rights-based measures for which effective policy implementation will provide a solution. The current study is qualitative and uses a critical policy analysis methodology to account for the implementation gap in Special Education Policy 2018 within the context of the internal design of the policy document as well as the external conditions of policy implementation environment in the Province of Punjab. The study uses an interpretivist, qualitatively oriented policy analysis method that includes perspectives of policy actors in implementation (including policy officials, administrators, teachers, parents, and disability rights advocates) and systematic documentation of the policy and the policy context for implementation. The article is followed by the following: Section 2 is theoretical background. A literature review of relevant documents is presented in section 3. The research methodology is reported in detail in section 4. The results are discussed in Section 5. The findings are discussed in section 6 using the framework of Hogwood and Gunn. Section 7 identifies limitations. The reform agenda is presented in Section 8. Section 9 concludes.

2. Theoretical Framework: Hogwood & Gunn's Framework for Policy Analysis

The framework for this study is based on Hogwood and Gunn's Framework for Policy Analysis which they articulate in their book *Policy Analysis for the Real World* (1984). This framework has been widely used to assess the impact of public policies in various national and regional contexts, and builds a multi-stage analytical structure, from the design and drafting of the public policies, to the system of requirements for their implementation, to the evaluation of the outcomes of the policies. It is its particular analytical strength that it is able to separate

policy failures due to design failure (Hogwood and Gunn's term) from implementation failures, which is of critical practical importance when developing a policy reform agenda. Hogwood and Gunn (1984) have devised a list of conditions that must exist for effective policy implementation and which can be used to evaluate actual implementation. These involve, that external conditions to the implementing agency do not impose crippling constraints; that enough time and sufficient resources are made available; that required combination of resources is available at every stage of implementation; that the policy is based on a valid theory of cause and effect; that there is complete understanding of and agreement upon the objectives to be achieved; that there is perfect communication among and coordination between various elements or actors involved. Although Hogwood and Gunn recognize that there are never conditions in which everything is optimal, the framework provides a checklist which can be used to evaluate the implementation of specific policies and can indicate which of the conditions is least often fulfilled and therefore where to focus reform efforts (Parsons, 1995).

The framework enables analytical focus on four aspects relating to the implementation of Punjab's Special Education Policy 2018: adequacy of policy causal theory – do policy objectives correctly identify the mechanisms by which they will be achieved?; the resource sufficiency of the implementation environment – are the resources sufficient to implement the policy?; clarity and measurability of policy objectives – are the policy objectives clear and measurable?; the requirements for inter-agency coordination – are there requirements for coordination between agencies, and is coordination sufficient?; the organizational and political conditions that facilitate or inhibit implementation actors from complying with policy directives – what are the organizational and political conditions that allow or hinder implementation actors from complying with policy directives? In this analysis, the policy's goals are structured by several implementing agencies (the Directorate of Special Education, the Punjab Institute of Special Education, the Departments of Health and Social Welfare, district governments, and school administrations), one of the most frequently difficult implementation situations, as described by Hogwood and Gunn.

3. Literature Review

An evidence base has developed, through the international literature, that outlines the characteristic gap between the idealistic policy commitments and the day-to-day realities of provision for people with disabilities in service delivery, especially in low and middle income country settings. Grindle (2004) offered a basic theoretical framework for successful social sector reforms, showing that the mere presence of a technical policy design is not enough to achieve implementation success: the political will of senior decision makers, the administrative capacity of policy implementing agencies, and organized advocacy coalitions demanding accountability for implementation must all be present. The basic idea of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) is that the failure to implement is a common result of complex multi-actor policy programs, and the most important effect of multiple veto points along the implementation process is a progressive erosion of policy intentions.

For the disability policy context specifically, Ainscow and Miles (2008) documented the typical disconnect between the policy commitment to inclusive education and its prevalence in practice across the developing country context, with the lack of teacher preparation, inadequate resource provision and cultural attitudinal barriers as the most consistently prevalent implementation barriers. Singal (2010) examined the challenges of implementing disability inclusive education policy in South Asian settings and found that the use of language

of rights-based policy often exceeds the institutional capacity and political will to enact concrete implementation of the policy, that is, symbolic compliance.

The gap between policy and practice in disability education has been gradually documented in the policy literature in Pakistan in a more specific and concrete way in the last decade. Ahmad (2008) cited the lack of reliable prevalence data of disability, poor intersectoral coordination and low level of professionalization in special education workforce as the most significant systemic challenges faced by Pakistan's special education system. The gap between what the Punjab Special Education Department is saying in terms of the quality objectives and what is actually happening with the instruction in government special schools has been documented by Akhtar and Yasmin (2011) and this is an accountability deficit that remains in the post-2018 policy environment. In Pakistan, legislative frameworks and policies on disability have been consistently formulated without infrastructure for implementation, as reported by Mian (2012) for which the Punjab Special Education Policy 2018 has followed suit in salient respects.

The policy implementation literature has also highlighted the importance of street-level bureaucrats as the first line of implementation, the professionals who must implement the policy at the front lines. Lipsky (1980) found that frontline workers have a great deal of discretion in how public policies are applied, and that their professional values, organizational constraints, and workload affect the implementation of the policy in ways that can vary significantly from the intent of policy makers. For the purposes of the special education policy, the street level bureaucrats who are tasked with making policy implementation decisions, such as special education teachers, principals of institutions, and district education officers, make the policy's commitments to inclusive education, to quality assurance, and to early intervention manageable or intractable, and operational or aspirational text. This qualitative policy analysis study (Lipsky, 1980) aims to have the actor understand the context of the dispositional decisions they make in their practice, that is, their professional, institutional, and attitudinal context.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 The Researcher as an Interpersonal Communicator

The study follows a critical interpretivist research paradigm that incorporates the interpretist perspective on the importance of subjective meanings and context into the critical perspective on the examination of power relationships and institutional structures as well as the ideology that underlies the formulation and implementation of policy (Creswell, 2013). Because policy is always created in the context of power dynamics (created by people who have greater or less authority, implemented through a bureaucratic hierarchy, and experienced differently by people with different capacities to influence implementation outcomes), the critical interpretivist paradigm is especially appropriate for policy analysis research. To gain insight into the working of the Special Education Policy 2018, it is essential to be interpretive about how actors in the policy interpret it, as well as to critically examine the interests that the policy addresses, the voices that were represented and included, and the power dynamics that account for the discrepancy between policy intentions and reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The ontological stance taken is that of a critical realist, who recognises that subjective meanings and interpretive frameworks of policy actors affect policy implementation, but who also recognises that structural realities – the decisions made about resources, the distribution of power in the bureaucracy, the political economy of policy, and institutional capacity – are material facts from which qualitative inquiry can illuminate, but cannot remove.

4.2 Critical Qualitative Policy Analysis Design

The design of this qualitative policy analysis was a critical approach based on the framework of Yanow (2000) and Bacchi (2009). Qualitative policy analysis involves the interpretation of documents, processes of policy implementation, and experience of various stakeholder communities using an interpretive and critical analytical lens to grasp not only the meanings of policies, but also how they are understood, challenged, enacted and lived by stakeholder communities. Critical policy analysis takes this approach further to investigate the power dynamics, ideology, and structures that underlie policy texts and processes of implementation (Bacchi, 2009).

The design was realized in three combined analytical approaches. Firstly, the language, conceptual frameworks, and implicit assumptions in the document of the Punjab Special Education Policy 2018 was studied using critical discourse analysis, which highlighted the inconsistencies between the rights-based and the welfare perspective of the policy, in terms of language and conceptual frameworks, and the lack of enforcement mechanisms in the stated commitments. Second, implementation process analysis was used to explore the issues of conditions, actors, resources, and coordination which have been encountered in the process of implementing the policy, with the analytical framework of Hogwood and Gunn (1984) as the key analytical structure. Third, stakeholder perspective analysis analyzed the experiences, interpretations, and evaluations of the policy and its implementation by various stakeholder groups—policy officials, administrators, teachers, parents, and disability rights advocates—to produce a multi-perspectival account of implementation dynamics (Yanow, 2000).

4.3 Study Setting and Participants

The study was carried out in the context of the special education policy and institutional framework of the province of Punjab in its entirety, from the provincial government to the family level. The principal site for policy level data collection was the Directorate of Special Education (DoSE), Government of Punjab. Five government special education institutions were selected in Lahore, Kasur, Multan districts and provided institutional level sites, based on diversity in institution type, geographic and size. The multi-level data collection architecture (Yin, 2014) was completed by three district education offices, one district health office, two parent associations and one disability rights NGO in Lahore.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants from 5 categories of stakeholders (Patton, 2002). The first category included eight senior policy officials from the Directorate of Special Education and the PISE — directors, deputy directors, and program officials with first-hand knowledge of the policy formulation process, planning for implementation, and progress monitoring. The second category included 10 institutional administrators (five case institutional principals and vice-principals) who were invited because they were knowledgeable about the implementation of the policy at the institutional level. The third group included twenty-two special education teachers on the frontline, who were purposively selected to capture variation in disability specialization, number of years in the field, and geographic location, and who make day-to-day decisions that have the most direct impact on the outcomes that children with disabilities experience as a result of policy. The fourth category included sixteen parents of children in case institutions, varied in socioeconomic status, geographical location and in terms of disability. The sixth group consisted of six disability rights activists and representatives from civil society who had previous experience in monitoring the implementation of special education policy outside of government. Fifty-

two participants made up the total sample. Sampling was continued until thematic saturation was reached for all stakeholder categories.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

Four complementary qualitative data collection methods were used. In-depth semi-structured interviewing was the main approach adopted. Individual interviews were held in both Urdu and English and Urdu English to participants, at their convenience, for fifty – ninety minutes duration and were audio recorded with informed consent, with a total of fifty-two interviews. Interview guides were created for each stakeholder group for the policy formulation, planning for implementation, resource allocation, monitoring mechanisms, quality assurance, family engagement, and advocacy priorities (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The second method used was focused group discussion. The four FGDs were held separately with teachers, administrators, parents and civil society representatives, respectively, for a duration of about ninety minutes each, in Urdu and audio-recorded with additional researcher field notes (Morgan, 1997). The third method used was a systematic documentary analysis of the Punjab Special Education Policy 2018, National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, provisions of UNCRPD, annual reports of the Directorate, documents on the implementation of PISE, inspection reports and annual reports of the institutions, in accordance with Bowen's (2009) framework of examination of document authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. The fifth method was non-participant institutional observation conducted at all five case institutions to gather triangulation evidence against documentary and interview data (Stake, 1995) and to include measures of resource room adequacy, IEP availability, inclusive education materials, evidence of professional development and physical accessibility indicators.

5. Findings

The critical discourse analysis of the Punjab Special Education Policy 2018 showed that there was a fundamental design tension between the high and lofty goal of inclusive education as a rights based entitlement and the construction of inclusive education as 'gradual' and 'phased', dependent on the creation of enabling conditions – a temporal qualification which, in the absence of explicit timelines and accountability processes, effectively shifts the burden of justiciable obligations to implement inclusive education to the government. The data from the interviews with all categories of stakeholders confirmed this design ambiguity has become a design inaction in practice: Policy officials talked of 'the future' of inclusive education, while teachers and administrators talked about the resource rooms that were set up within mainstream schools often being under resourced, under staffed, and unadministratively supported.

Teacher participants shared that none of the five case institutions provided any training, coaching, or curricular guidance for implementing inclusive education in resource room contexts, but one experienced teacher in Multan reported, 'We were told that resource rooms would be opened and children would be included. Nobody told us how. Nobody trained us. Nobody came to see if it was working.' Parent participants reported that their children's experiences in resource room placements were inconsistent and often unsuccessful, and that when resource room teachers indicated they were not able to provide support, their children were placed into segregated special education center placements. One disability rights advocate commented 'the policy says inclusive education,' and the civil society participants' concerns were the most critical. What is happening in practice is that children with disabilities sit in a separate room in a mainstream school building. That is not inclusion! That's called "segregation."

5.1 Teacher Workforce Development: Episodic and Misaligned

The triangulated findings from the documentary analysis of the PISE curriculum documents and the records of in-service training of the Directorate's trainers showed general stagnation of pre-service curriculum and the fragmentation of in-service training that directly contradicted the policy's human resource development commitments. During the documentary analysis, it was found that the curricula in the reviewed PISE diploma programs experienced few changes over time from the pre-2018 period, and none of the reviewed programs had evidence of systematic benchmarking against international special education teacher competency frameworks, as required by the policy's commitments to quality improvement. All the teacher FGD participants agreed that in-service was rarely held, content was not relevant to classroom problems, and in-service was conducted in passive lecturing: 'We sit and listen for one day and then we go back to our classrooms'. Nothing changes. No changes are possible from one day listening' (focus group participant, Lahore institution). Such constraints were acknowledged through policy official interviews, with budget constraints and lacking a qualified faculty of professional development at PISE to address the full array of disability specializations and evidence-based practice areas the policy pledges to develop cited as the reasons for these limitations.

5.2 Quality Assurance: Accountability Systems Absent

Documentary analysis of Directorate records and interviews with policy officials revealed no systematic validated institutional quality assessment tool was developed and deployed throughout the SEC network in the six years after promulgation of the policy in Punjab. Administrator participants confirmed that the inspection function of SEIs was poorly applicable to the evaluation of the quality of the disability-specific programs and that it was not generic school quality measures. Case level outcome data systems were still not established, and most of the case institutions did not have a system of registering student enrollment level or systematically tracking student developmental and academic progress. According to the administrator participants, the quality assurance clause of the policy was the most poorly implemented pillar of the policy with one Kasur institutional principal commenting: 'We complete the forms which are given from Lahore. No one visits to find out what's going on with children. The forms and the reality are two different things.'

5.3 Effective early identification and intervention is the most overlooked pillar.

Based on these findings, documentary evidence of implementation records and information gathered through interviews with policy officials revealed that the least implementation progress had been made in the early identification and intervention aspects of the Punjab Special Education Policy 2018 as compared to the other five strategic pillars. There was no universal developmental screening program in place. There was no formal intersectoral coordination mechanism between the Department of Health and Special Education in place. No change was reported by practitioner interview participants in the accessibility of the pathway for referral or early identification of children with needs since 2018 in case institutions. Parent participants whose children had developmental delays identified at the time of birth reported using private specialist hospitals, not being referred by the government, and one mother from rural Kasur saying: 'My son was diagnosed by chance, there was no referral support from the government, I was informed by a neighbor about a private clinic in Lahore. The Government had no word for me. They have yet to enlighten me on anything. This discovery directly demonstrates the violation of what Ramey and Ramey (1998) describe as the most important principle for determining the effectiveness of early intervention: developmental timing.

5.4 Inter-Departmental Coordination: Structural Fragmentation Unaddressed

The lack of effective inter-departmental coordination mechanism was the most basic implementation gap which was found in all data sources. Interviews with policy officials indicated that there has been no inter-departmental interaction (joint planning committee, shared monitoring system, or co-funded program) between the Departments of Special Education, Health, and Social Welfare in the post-2018 period. The policy's coordination obligations were not entrenched in anything more than an aspirational statement; they were not accompanied by a structure of memoranda of understanding, joint accountability protocols, shared data systems, or anything else to bring them to life. One person who works for a disability rights organisation said: 'Each department waits to "take the lead"'. The child with a disability is caught between them. The policy is "coordinated" but there is no mechanism, no budget and no accountability for coordination. It is a wish, not a plan.'

6. Discussion

The pattern observed in the qualitative data, captured within a systematic framework of Hogwood and Gunn (1984) implementation conditions, shows both design failures and implementation failures, which in combination help to explain the implementation gap in the context of the Punjab's Special Education Policy 2018. Failure to have a costed implementation plan is a sign of design failure, as there is no ability to meet Hogwood and Gunn's requirement for sufficient resources when there is no specification of necessary resources and their sources in the policy. The timeline and accountability systems associated with the establishment of resource rooms to promote inclusive education are also missing, as are the causal mechanisms that would support this. A policy statement with a clear and valid theory of cause and effect would include these.

Similarly there is a failure of implementation on a number of Hogwood and Gunn conditions. There is no full consensus and understanding of policy goals: interviews with stakeholders show that there are differing understandings of the policy goals of inclusive education, quality assurance and early intervention commitments across institutional levels and stakeholder groups. The situation of inter-agency coordination has been grossly breached by the sectoral siloing reported in Section 5.5. The political economy of disability in Punjab, with low political salience of disability rights, limited organizational power of disability advocacy movements, and cultural stigmatization of disability which lessens the public accountability pressure to implement, has compromised the condition. The street-level bureaucracy analysis, based on Lipsky's (1980) analysis, finds that teachers and administrators working under conditions of shortages of resources and time in comparison to the expectations of policy, use their discretion to implement policy in a manner that defaults to the pre-policy institutional practices, which are largely the source of the informal non-implementation found in the literature.

The multi-stakeholder qualitative methodology used for this study creates a significant contribution to the analysis: it shows that the implementation gap is not felt equally among stakeholder communities. Policy officials tend to focus on implementation progress and the extent to which this is hindered by resource constraints and/or time limits; institutional administrators describe the gap between the policy directives and the institutional capacity, in more detail; frontline teachers describe the gap between their professional preparation and the policy expectations, and show more frustration; parents and civil society advocates describe the gap between the policy promises and their children's day-to-day experience, and bring greater moral urgency to the rights-based framing of the policy. To create reform strategies that address varying gaps in implementation, it is important to develop an

understanding of these divergent gap experiences, not just the dimensions that can be seen from any one stakeholder perspective (Yanow, 2000).

7. The limitations of this study are as follows:

Explicit attention needs to be given to several methodological limitations of this study, which is a qualitative critical policy analysis. Several methodological limitations of this study, a qualitative critical policy analysis, should be noted. First, the study's data collection took place at a particular time point (six years after promulgation of the policy) and implementation could have changed in some areas since data were collected. Therefore the findings reflect implementation as it was observed at the point of data collection and should be treated as a contextually informed judgement of implementation at that time, and not as a definitive evaluation of the implementation process over its entire life cycle. Second, the purposive sampling of policy officials drawn from the Directorate of Special Education (the key implementing agency) raises the possibility of socially desirable response patterns in which officials focus on progress in implementing, and downplay any failures, so as to preserve the institutional image. The multi-stakeholder triangulation and perspectives of the civil society participants were very important in providing counter-balancing perspectives; however, reflexive approaches to policy evaluation interviews are a methodological challenge that cannot be fully overcome by the possibility of self-serving official accounts. Third, the geographic focus of the study in Lahore, Kasur and Multan districts results in findings that may be under-representative of implementation experiences in other districts in Punjab which are geographically more distant and educationally less well developed, where implementation may be more challenging and institutional capacity less, and where the findings may be more limited. Future studies should focus specifically on districts located geographically on the periphery where there may be the greatest challenges to implementation. Fourth, the critical interpretivist paradigm employed in this study acknowledges the need to uncover power relations and structural inequities in the policy implementation process, which might bring in orientations to failure rather than success and may give too much weight to the genuine successes in implementation that the policy has produced in specific areas. Different research groups with different paradigmatic interpretations can draw different and weighted conclusions about the same evidence.

8. Reform Agenda

Punjab Special Education Policy 2018 must be reviewed and revised in a structured manner and timely process through an independent expert committee consisting of a cross-section of disability rights scholars, international special education policy experts, working professionals in special education and representatives of established parent and disability organization. The review should help to evaluate implementation progress by referring to the indicators set out, highlight key design weaknesses in terms of impact, and amend provisions where design weaknesses have been identified, and outline a detailed, costed implementation plan identifying financial investments required for each strategic pillar, sources of such investments, multi-year budgets commitments, implementation milestones with responsibilities and measurable indicators of outcomes. The most significant design deficit in the existing policy is the costed implementation plan; if there were none, then the condition of resource adequacy identified by Hogwood and Gunn (1984) could not be addressed, nor held accountable (Dye, 2013).

The Government of Punjab should create a Special Education Reform Coordination Commission at the level of Secretary/Additional Chief Secretary, which must have formal membership of the following departments: Special Education, Health, School Education,

Social Welfare, Finance and Planning and Development. The implementation of the policy's multi-sectoral commitments should be spearheaded by this Commission, as should be the resolution of resource and authority conflicts between the various departments responsible for implementation; annual inter-departmental implementation plans should be reviewed by this Commission and approved; and cross-departmental implementation progress should be reported publicly by this Commission. Grindle (2004) has pointed out that Hogwood and Gunn's inter-agency coordination condition is the most urgent structural reform to enhance the coherence of implementation: this is one of the areas directly addressed by this senior-level body.

An institutional Quality Assurance System should be developed and implemented, and include: a validated Special Education Institution Quality Framework with performance standards, covering institutional leadership, curriculum and instruction, individualized planning design, availability of therapeutic services, family participation, and physical environment; an annual external inspection cycle and trained special education inspectors; a self-evaluation protocol for institutional leaders; and a public reporting system that disseminates the findings of the institutional-level inspection to parents, policy makers, and the public. Inclusive education requirements call for essential strengthening of the architecture of implementation, which involves the development of a provincial Inclusive Education Implementation Framework that sets minimum quality standards for the operation of the resource rooms, the development of a comprehensive mainstream teacher development programme, the establishment of a formal Inclusive Education Plan monitoring system and the development of a structured programme of community awareness (Ainscow & Miles, 2008).

A Disability Family Support Policy should be created to place priority on the psychological health of family members who care for children with disabilities as an issue for the special education system, and to include budget provision for caregiver support services and for maternal mental health to be integrated into the special education system service delivery. The quality of implementation of the policy should be monitored and advocated for by parent associations and disability organizations as independent groups, with a Special Education Advocacy and Accountability Civil Society Support Program that builds their capacity and who can exert a long-term pressure for a government to implement the policy vigorously, and who can provide a demand-side accountability mechanism that reduces the government's reliance on its own administrative accountability mechanisms. (Lipsky, 1980). All of these changes together represent the governance change required to close the gap between the noble goals of the Punjab Special Education Policy (2018) and what happens in schools in Punjab for children with disabilities.

9. Conclusion

The current qualitative critical policy analysis study has provided a systematic study, theoretically grounded and multi stakeholder analysis of Special Education policy implementation gap in Punjab. The study has used the critical qualitative policy analysis methodology, which includes semi-structured interviews with five broad groups of stakeholders, focused group discussions, systematic documentary analysis, and institutional observation, to highlight internal policy design problems as well as external implementation environment failures that together account for the significant disconnect between the policy's grand ambitions and the uneven implementation situation.

The results indicated that PSEP 2018 is a significant document in the disability and education policy field in Pakistan, as it contains innovative content on Rights-based policies, inclusive

education, human resource development plans and Multi-sectoral coordination plans, which are departing from the previous welfare model approach in the province's disability provision. However, the challenge is not to replace this policy, but to tackle the design shortcomings and failures of the implementation environment that have hindered it from realizing the transformation it aspires to achieve, as identified by the mid-term review and costed implementation planning, the inter-departmental governance reforms, the institutional quality assurance architecture, and the civil society accountability investment outlined in Section 8.

Indefinite continuation of the policy promise to the children and families of the special education system of Punjab is not a luxury the children and the families can afford. The voices of teachers who lack adequate preparation; parents who see their children's needs not fulfilled; civil society advocates whose accountability expectations are unmet; and policy officials who feel constrained both institutionally and financially — all these are qualitative voices that can be documented in this study, and all of them tell a powerful story of what a rights-based policy transformation requires in operational terms. The reform agenda outlined in this article is based on that evidence, constrained by international standards, and aimed at the specific institutional actors whose actions will be the deciding and determinant factor in whether or not Pakistan's Special Education Policy 2018 materializes into a transformative instrument as it implies in its text or remains a statement of well-intentioned intention that falls short of action.

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