

POLICY DIALOGUE REPORT

22 June, 2023

SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
GOVERNMENT OF PUNJAB

POLICY DIALOGUE ON

DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY TO PROMOTE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

GOVERNMENT OF PUNJAB

22 June, 2023, Lahore

Message of Secretary Special Education



The Department of Special Education Government of Punjab holds the responsibility for safeguarding the **"Right to Education"** of special children in the region. With a passionate commitment to enhancing their quality of life, the department initiates efforts to achieve positive outcomes in rehabilitation and education. As we recognize the significance of the issue, the Government Special Education Department Punjab is proud to introduce a groundbreaking Autism Resource Centre, the first of its kind in the public sector. This institute will serve as a hub for leadership, policy guidelines, research, training, and professional assistance in the domain of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Additionally, we aim to establish exclusive Autism Units at divisional headquarters within existing special education schools. The first Autism Unit in Lahore is already operational in Johar Town, providing specialized services through a team of trained professionals, including psychologists, special educationists, and speech therapists, catering to children with ASD of different age groups. We are fully committed to formulating a strategic plan and comprehensive policy framework to promote education for children with ASD. Our belief lies in the importance of inclusivity and providing access to education through both regular and special education systems. To achieve our goals, we advocate for an integrated approach that involves collaboration with various sectors, such as universities, health departments, school education departments, industries, labor, tourism, and child protection departments, ensuring that every out-of-school child gains access to education. Together, we can make a significant difference in the lives of these young children, embracing them and providing them with the education they deserve.

SAIMA SAEED
SECRETARY

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

1.2 ASD Prevalence

1.3 Educational Management of ASD

1.4 Measures Taken by the Government of Punjab

2 ASD DOMAINS TO GUIDE POLICY FRAMEWORK

2.1 Thematic Focus Area 1: Early Identification and Intervention Planning

2.2 Thematic Focus Area 2: Enabling Environment-Teachers Parents Training (TPT)

2.3 Thematic Focus Area 3: Educational Model and Curriculum Approaches

2.4 Thematic Focus Area 4: Assessment and Monitoring System

2.5 Thematic Focus Area 5: Transition and Future Planning

3 KEY CONCERN

4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Component 1: Health & Education as Main Pillars

4.2 Component 2: Academia & Practitioners' Shared Responsibility

4.3 Component 3: Therapeutic & Curricular Approaches

4.4 Component 4: Transitional System Strengthening

5 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

6 SIGHTS FROM POLICY DIALOGUE EVENT

7 ANNEXES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to give my sincere gratitude to all the participants, session moderator, and chairpersons for their valuable contributions to the Policy Dialogue in Lahore on June 22, 2023. A special thanks to Ms. Saima Saeed, Secretary Special Education Government of Punjab, for her visionary leadership, continued support, and instrumental participation. The high-level representation of stakeholders highlights their dedication to ensuring the rights and well-being of children with Autism in Punjab.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the representatives of the international forum, including Ms. Shaheen Pervaiz from Odessa Infant School UK, Ms. Haleema Sadia, the Autism Educationist from the US, and Ms. Maheen Khan from KPK. I also extend my gratitude to the distinguished experts from national forum including Prof. Dr. Shazia Maqbool, Ms. Rukhsana Shah, Dr. Aniqa Sohail, Dr. Nazish Imran, Dr. Laila Khalid, Dr. Maria Sohaib, Dr. Amna Arif, Ms. Nabila Chauhdary, Dr. Zahida Perveen, Mr. Faisal, Ms. Sobia Orang zeb, Dr. Nayab, Ms. Fatima and Ms. Shumyla. Their expert knowledge and experience sharing have been invaluable throughout this journey. We are confident that this collaborative effort will lead to essential discussions and the development of a comprehensive provincial and area-based strategic plan for the education and rehabilitation of children with ASD.

I further extend my gratitude to UNICEF, our esteemed strategic partner, for their generous financial and technical support for this event. Our commitment to this partnership remains unwavering as we strive to ensure quality education for the marginalized segments of Pakistan, particularly children with special needs and disabilities. The presence of a diverse and experienced panel of national and international experts from the field was truly a privilege. I am especially grateful to Ms. Sehr Raza Jafri, Education Specialist from UNICEF, Pakistan, for sharing her invaluable insights. The knowledge and ideas shared on how to address the challenges of ASDs and improve services for the most disadvantaged children and their families are greatly appreciated. Together, we can make a significant impact in creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for these children.

I am deeply thankful to Dr. Saima Daood, Director of the Center of Applied Psychology, for her skillful moderation, which ensured fruitful discussions and exploration of experiences. The coordination efforts of the DGSE team, led by Mr. Zahid Majeed, Director Planning & Development and Ms. Khaula Munawar Minhas, Deputy Director (Curriculum) were essential in making this event a resounding success.

Creating an inclusive society for children with special needs and disabilities is our top priority, and your commitment to this cause is greatly appreciated. Together, we can make a significant impact in ensuring a brighter future for these children in Pakistan.

DIRECTOR GENERAL,
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PUNJAB.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASD:	Autism Spectrum Disorder
SpED:	Special Education Department
DGSE:	Directorate General of Special Education Department
SEND:	Special Education Needs and Disabilities
SED:	School Education Department
NGO:	Non-Profit Government Organization
UNICEF:	United Nations International Children's Emergency Funds
UN:	United Nations
AUL:	Autism Unit Lahore
UDL:	Universal Design for Learning
TEACCH:	Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children
SCERTS:	Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support
ABA:	Applied Behavior Analysis
ABBLS:	Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills
PECS:	Picture Exchange Communication System
MICS:	Multiple indicators Cluster Survey
TEVTA:	Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority
PVTC:	Punjab Vocational Training Council
VTCDP:	Vocational Training Center for Disabled Persons
M-CHAT:	Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers
IEP:	Individualized Education Program
CCTV:	Closed Circuit Television
SLOs:	Student Learning Outcomes
MoA:	Memorandum of Agreement
IDAP:	Infrastructure Development Authority of the Punjab
P & D:	Planning and Development

Executive Summary

Autism Spectrum is a complex neuro-developmental disorder that emerges in children during their early developmental period, typically between 18 months and three years of age. It is a lifelong condition, affecting boys four times more frequently than girls. Children on the spectrum face challenges in developing social interactions, language, communication skills, and exhibit repetitive behaviors. Over the past two decades, there has been a significant 178% increase in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) cases. While reliable data on its prevalence in Pakistan is lacking, the Pakistan Autism Society estimates around 400,000 children living with the condition. Fortunately, awareness about Autism Spectrum Disorder has improved gradually in Pakistan over the last decade. Numerous NGOs and parent support groups have been actively conducting awareness programs, including seminars, workshops, conferences, social media campaigns, awareness walks, and social events, to promote understanding and support the rehabilitation and provisions for individuals with autism.

Special Education Punjab Department, recognizing the emerging need, has directed heads of special education schools to accommodate students with ASD. However, this isn't a permanent solution as the existing system lacks an autism-friendly learning environment, resources, and trained teachers to fully cater to these children's unique needs. A comprehensive action plan is essential, taking into account the challenges, unique learning requirements, and therapeutic needs of these children. Under the leadership of Ms. Saima Saeed, Secretary Special Education Punjab, consultative sessions with national and international consultants and stakeholders have been conducted. Visits to targeted schools were made to identify gaps and available services for educating children with ASD in the local context. A series of policy dialogues have been planned to seek viable solutions for this serious issue.

The Special Education Department Punjab organized a second Policy Dialogue, titled "Developing the Strategy to Promote Education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)," aiming to recognize and tackle the existing challenges faced by children with autism and their parents in the country. The dialogue witnessed participation from over 30 stakeholders representing various relevant sectors, such as government, medical & psychiatric, special education, NGOs, therapeutic service providers, civil society, academia, and media groups.

The dialogue comprised opening, discussion, and closing sessions, fostering a one-day intensive exchange of ideas. Participants delved into the current situation and charted a path towards inclusive participation, promotion of education, and rehabilitation of young children with ASD. Emphasis was placed on supportive measures for families in Punjab. Stakeholders shared global and local experiences and practices, promoting holistic development for youth with autism. Analyzing policy implications, the focus was on formulating an effective and productive ASD education policy framework. Viable information on national and global best practices, scientific evidence, and academic research was exchanged among participants. The discussion culminated in identifying following strategic pathways for the development of a multi-sectoral ASD Education in Punjab:

Component 1: Health & Education as Main Pillars:

The diagnosis and management of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) call for a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach, with medical, psychiatric, and education systems forming the main pillars. It is crucial for these pillars to work collaboratively to ensure effective support for individuals with ASD. Addressing the issue of medical quackery is essential, advocating for accurate diagnoses of ASD to provide appropriate interventions. Early screening facilities must be made available in both hospitals and educational institutes to detect and address ASD at the earliest stage possible. Creating awareness among parents and the general community is a shared responsibility that can positively impact the lives of those with ASD. This requires multi-sector coordination between health, special education, and school education departments, whether in the public or private sector, with the Special Education Department leading the coordination efforts. Incorporating early screening mechanisms and raising awareness among parents and the community should be given top priority within the framework to foster a supportive environment for individuals with ASD.

Component 2: Academia & Practitioners' Shared Responsibility:

Academia and practitioners bear a shared responsibility in providing crucial support for children with autism. It is essential for educational institutes to prioritize training teachers and professionals to effectively cater to the unique needs of autistic children. Implementing hands-on experience courses, lasting a minimum of three months, for teachers already working in the special education department can significantly enhance their skills and understanding. Following a Western Model for teachers' professional development is imperative, as it encourages them to avoid labeling a child as "autistic" until a proper

diagnosis is made by a professional. Moreover, teachers should receive training to provide basic-level therapy, and specialized training is also required for those responsible for screening out ASD cases. Clear definitions of the roles of universities and private organizations within the framework are necessary to ensure coordinated efforts in addressing quality issues. The certificate registration mechanism and training should be overseen by the Special Education Department for effective control. Furthermore, it is crucial to carefully define shared roles and responsibilities within the framework to ensure accountability and foster a collaborative approach in supporting children with autism.

Component 3: Therapeutic & Curricular Approaches:

In addressing therapeutic and curricular approaches for autism, it is essential to prioritize a holistic developmental program as a major concern. Recognizing that no single approach can universally benefit autistic children, it is crucial to adapt to their changing needs as they grow. The implementation of an "Eclectic Approach" in ASD education proves to be a practical and effective method. Introducing the concept of "Itinerant Teachers" who offer direct services and support to children with autism in various settings, as specified by their Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and objectives, can be valuable. To establish a cohesive foundation, a baseline curriculum for children with autism should be developed, and the Special Education Department (SpED) may take the lead in creating and certifying this comprehensive curriculum.

Component 4: Transitional System Strengthening:

Transitional system strengthening acknowledges neurodiversity as a lifelong and dynamic process of growth. Smooth and effective transitions from one age group to another and from one stage to the next are essential. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on teaching a variety of skills, including art skills, occupational skills, soft skills, and hard skills. Practical steps to ensure future support for autistic children should be emphasized within the framework. We must strive to facilitate interactions between individuals with ASD and potential employers, enabling them to access job opportunities. The role of TEVTA in imparting trainings to autistic children needs clear definition, as it currently falls short in providing vocational training to these individuals.

The policy dialogue's overarching goal was to enhance the well-being of children with autism and their parents in Punjab. Stakeholders emphasized the critical need for contextually based identification, placement, and management services to cater to the educational and

rehabilitation needs of children with ASD. As a result of the second policy dialogue organized by the special education department, Punjab, promising suggestions and solutions emerged, offering a positive outcome in addressing this vital challenge.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Policy Dialogue on Developing a Strategy to Promote Education & Rehabilitation of Children with ASD took place on 22nd June 2023 at the Directorate General of Special Education Punjab, Lahore. Spearheaded by Ms. Saima Saeed, Secretary Special Education Department Punjab, in collaboration with UNICEF, this high-level multi-stakeholder gathering served as a platform for renowned ASD experts to share their invaluable experiences, laying the foundation for the country's first-ever multisectoral ASD Education Strategy.

The event brought together national and international ASD experts, Professionals, government officials, civil society, development partners, practitioners, academia, private sector representatives, and participants from other countries, fostering an exchange of global best practices. The primary focus was on deliberating strategic pathways to drive an effective, inclusive, and sustainable ASD Education Implementation Framework.

Comprising three main sessions, namely the opening remarks, focus group discussions, and the closing remarks, the Policy Dialogue centered around five thematic focus areas thoughtfully addressed by the ASD experts. This endeavor aimed to create a collective force that would contribute wholeheartedly to enhancing the lives of children with ASD, fostering their development and integration within the society.

The Roundtable gathered representatives from both public and private sector organizations to deliberate on the challenges, barriers, and opportunities in ensuring equitable access to quality education for all children with autism. The focus was on meeting their individual needs, maximizing their strengths and abilities, and preparing them optimally for adulthood. The discussion revolved around key areas that warranted attention and consideration.

1. Early Identification and Intervention: This agenda, centered on the importance of early screening for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and creating awareness among parents and the community. During the session, crucial awareness-raising points were identified, and responsible sectors were designated to establish an effective implementation system. Moreover, the significance of parental involvement and training for the trainers responsible for screening out ASD were strongly emphasized.
2. Enabling Environment & Teachers Training: The provisions for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) begin with the creation of an autism-friendly environment. During the discussion, a focus was placed on enhancing the existing environment by empowering teachers, parents, and caregivers in the current schools. This

empowerment aims to cultivate an inclusive and supportive setting that caters to the specific needs of children with ASD, fostering a nurturing space for their growth and development.

3. Educational and Curriculum Approaches: During the discussion, a deeper understanding was gained regarding various educational models and curriculum approaches, spanning from the global to the local context. This insightful exploration served as a foundation for the development of a comprehensive framework that can effectively cater to the diverse needs and aspirations of the children.
4. Assessment and Monitoring System: The discussion brought to light the significance of implementing an overarching controlling mechanism to prevent quackery and exploitation of families with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This emphasized the need for a vigilant system that safeguards the well-being and rights of these families, ensuring they receive accurate and reliable support and services.
5. Transition and Future Planning: The fifth agenda, Transition and Future Planning, revolved around post-school employment and skill-based training for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). During the discussion, speakers shared their experiences, shedding light on key possibilities and exploring the role of TEVTA (Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority). They also discussed available resources and challenges at various levels that need to be addressed for the effective implementation of ASD services, aiming to pave a path for these children's successful transition into adulthood and their meaningful contribution to society.

During the closing session, the dialogue was concluded and key strategic pathways in areas of Multisector Coordination and Governance, Strengthening Existing System, Monitoring Mechanism and Advocacy were discussed.

ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT

This report follows a structured approach, commencing with an overview of the background concerning ASD prevalence, the Government's management efforts, and measures taken. Subsequently, it delves into an in-depth analysis of global best practices and their implications within the context of our local realities, considering the existing institutional infrastructure in Punjab Province. The second half of the report accentuates the significant discussions held during the discourse, which have laid the foundation for the pillars of the ASD education strategy framework. In conclusion, key strategic recommendations are compiled to guide

stakeholders in the development of the ASD Education Strategy Framework, aiming to empower and enrich the educational journey of children with ASD in Punjab.

1.1 PURPOSE

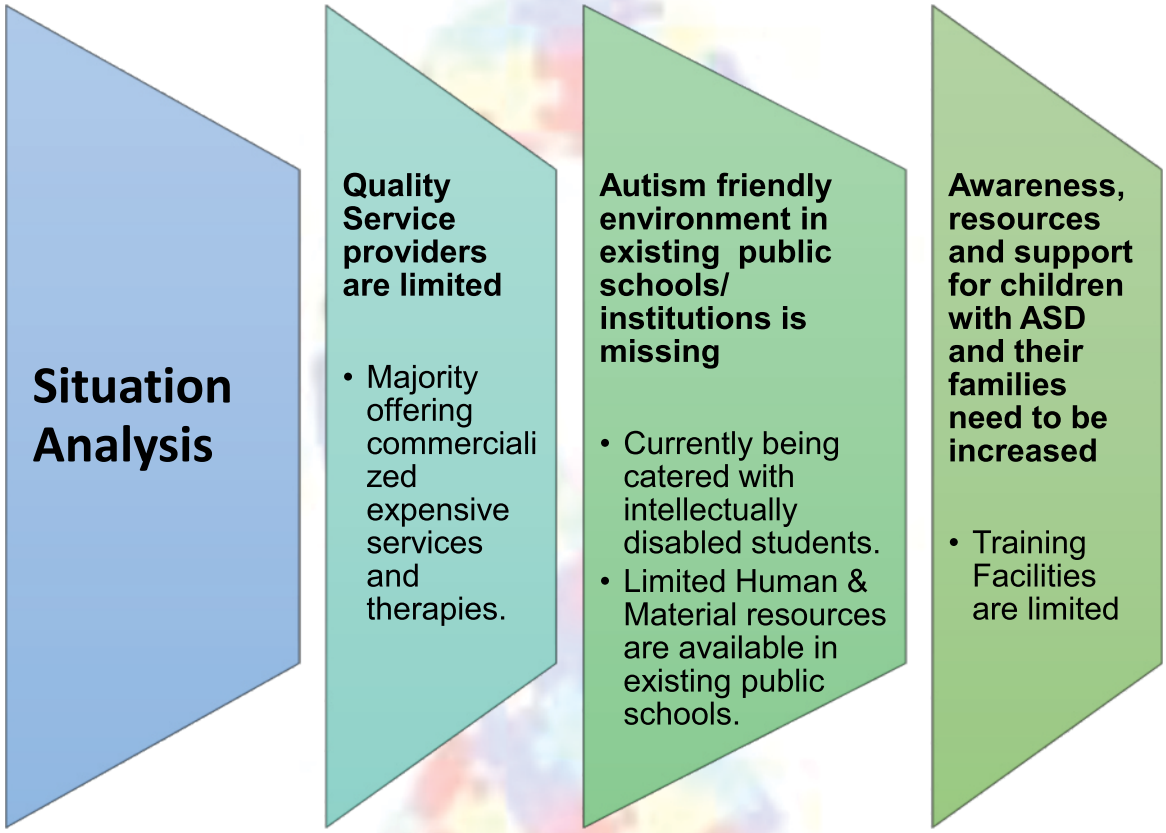
The Department of Special Education Government of Punjab bears the profound responsibility of safeguarding the "Right to Education" for special children in the province. Driven by a passionate commitment, the department diligently endeavors to introduce initiatives that will enhance the quality of life for these children, fostering positive outcomes in both rehabilitation and education. With the implementation of the Special Education Policy 2020, the department has embarked on various initiatives to expand its services, addressing the evolving trends and challenges in the realm of special children's education and rehabilitation. As a major policy concern, the department has initiated a series of dialogues, seeking to incorporate specialized understanding and programming to cater to students with invisible disabilities, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, and to address their unique issues and challenges. The first of these dialogues, titled "Reforms to Enhance Quality Education and Quality of Life of the Children with Special Needs and their Families: Innovative Solutions," was held on December 3, 2022, in commemoration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. During this significant event, key discussions centered on the management and rehabilitation of children with different disabilities including neurodevelopmental disabilities, particularly Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The second dialogue served as a continuation of the ongoing series conducted by the Special Education Department, with a specific emphasis on addressing more prevalent issues and challenges pertaining to the educational management of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Building upon the insights garnered from the previous dialogue, which focused on overall reforms, this session delved deeper into actionable plans presented by esteemed keynote speakers, seeking a progressive way forward in effectively supporting and empowering children with ASD in their educational journey.

The purpose of this dialogue was to address the pressing issue of ***"developing a strategy to promote the education and rehabilitation of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)".*** These children, being the most neglected and vulnerable segment of society due to their unique needs, distinct learning patterns, and the involvement of multidisciplinary teams for their management, require comprehensive and tailored support. Following the dialogue, a series of consultative sessions and visits to schools and autism setups were conducted to

gain deeper insights and perspectives. Through extensive deliberations, consultations, and firsthand observations, a path towards crafting a well-informed and effective strategy began to emerge.

SITUATION ANALYSIS



Need analysis performed by Directorate General of Special Education Punjab through conducting a focused group discussion with parents of ASD, special education teachers and experts from the private sector in 2022.

1.2 ASD PREVALENCE

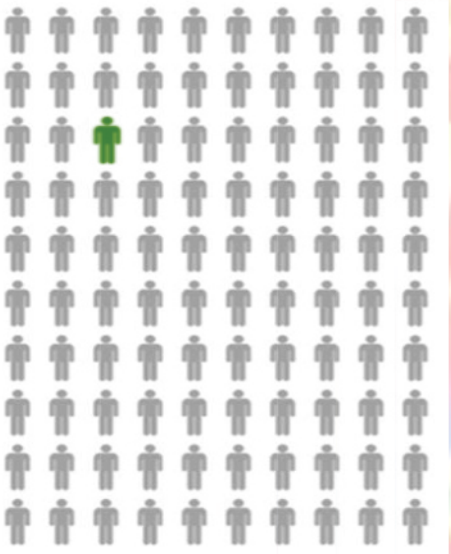
Autism is a lifelong condition that it is built into the fabric of the person who has it" (Murray 2011).

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neuro-developmental condition that arises from variations in the brain. It manifests in children during the earlier developmental stage, typically between 18 months and three years of age, and remains a lifelong condition. Individuals on the autism spectrum face challenges in developing and sustaining social interactions, language, and communication skills, often displaying stereotypical and repetitive behaviours.

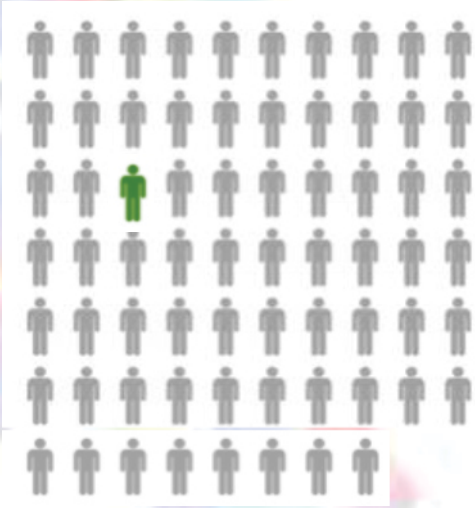
Over the past two decades, the prevalence of ASD has increased by 178%, highlighting its growing impact on communities.

In Pakistan, reliable data on the autistic population remains scarce. However, the Pakistan Autism Society estimates that approximately 400,000 children are living with this condition in the country. There has been a gradual improvement in awareness regarding autism spectrum disorder over the last decade, with various NGOs and parent support groups working diligently to spread understanding through awareness programs, including seminars, workshops, conferences, social media campaigns, awareness walks, and social events. Their efforts are focused on fostering awareness and facilitating provisions and rehabilitation for individuals affected by ASD, bringing hope and support to families facing the challenges posed by this disorder.

Estimated 1 in 66 Children have ASD in Pakistan.



1 in 100 in UK (Baio et al. 2006 Baron Cohen et al. 2009 cited in Prepa and Jordan (2019)



1 in 68 in USA (Baio et al. 2018 cited in Perepa and Jordan (2019)

The general public faces significant challenges in accessing proper rehabilitation and education for autistic children due to limited knowledge, information, specialized services, and financial constraints. To address this issue, it becomes the responsibility of the state, particularly the Special Education Department, to actively enhance advocacy, knowledge,

and awareness while extending comprehensive services for autistic children. In Punjab, the special education institutions currently enroll 294 students with ASD, and 430 special education teachers are tirelessly managing their needs alongside 7,539 students with intellectual disabilities, highlighting the importance of dedicated efforts and support to cater to this diverse and vulnerable population.

Enrollment position of students with ASD in Special Education Institutions:

Sr#	Divisions	ASDs In Schools	ASDs In Centers	Teachers In Schools	Teachers In Centers	No. Of Centers	Number Of Schools
1	Sahiwal	0	0	4	25	11	1
2	Gujranwala	8	6	10	62	28	2
3	Rawalpindi	2	53	11	39	24	2
4	Sargodha	6	10	3	24	19	1
5	Faisalabad	14	42	12	50	25	2
6	Lahore	10	75	9	68	25	1
7	Multan	0	38	14	33	17	2
8	Bahawalpur	0	4	7	29	15	2
9	D.G.Khan	0	26	4	26	19	1
Grand Total		**40**	**254**	**74**	**356**	**183**	**14**

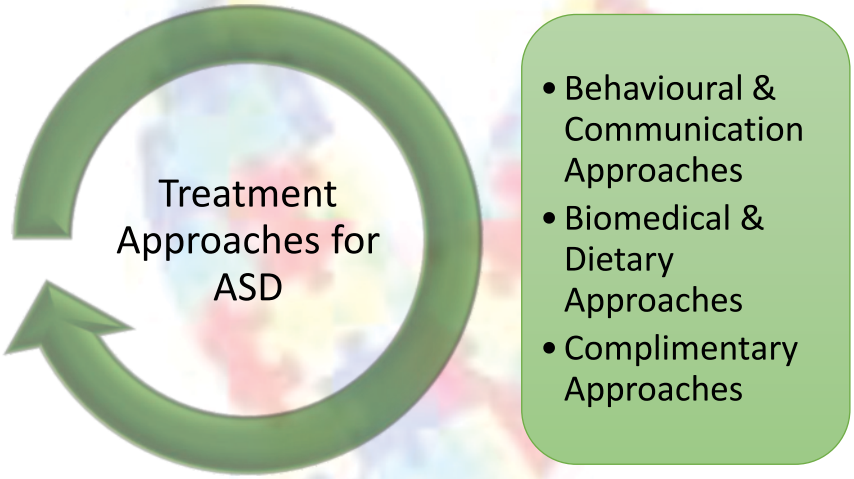
Office of Statistics, DGSE, 2022

1.3 Educational Management of ASD

The availability of organizations providing therapeutic interventional services for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) remains limited. The intervention plan for these children is intricately tailored based on the specific type and severity of their disorder. Interestingly, around 80-90% of the intervention treatment remains consistent across all ASD cases. The comprehensive treatment approach involves a multidisciplinary team, encompassing special needs educationists, speech and language therapists, psychologists, behavior analysts, occupational therapists, and other experts. Together, this collaborative team strives to provide the most effective and holistic support, meeting the unique needs and challenges faced by individuals with ASD and paving the way for their progress and development.

There are mainly three treatment approaches for ASD management:

- Behavioural & Communication Approaches: Include TEACCH, SCERTS, PECS, The Son-Rise Program, FLOOR TIME, ABA and other play based naturalistic therapies.
- Biomedical & Dietary Approaches: Include Medications, Vitamins & Minerals and Dietary Interventions
- Complimentary Approaches: Include animal therapy, music therapy, therapeutic listening, listening with the whole body, hippo therapy and art therapy.

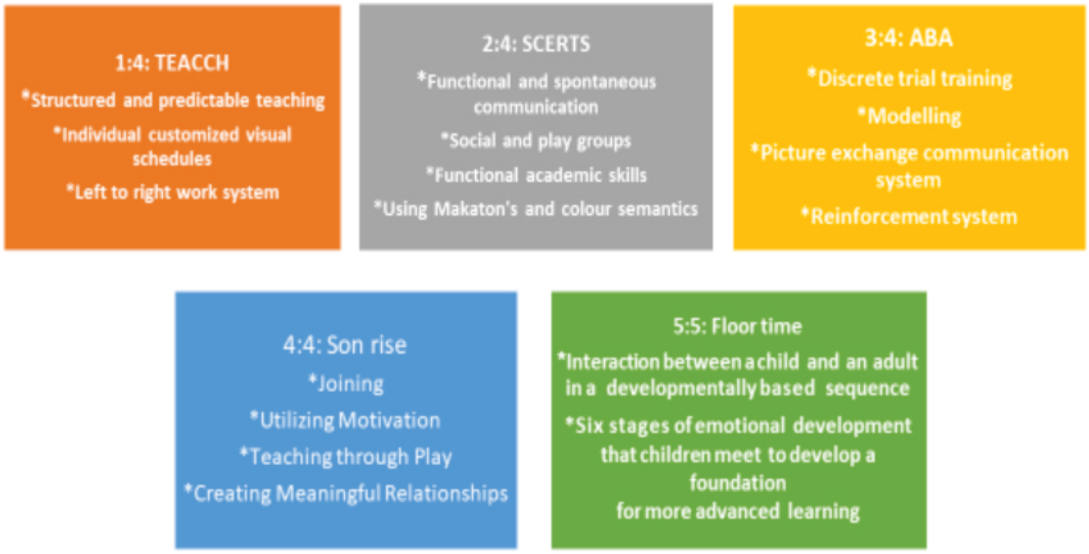


1.4 Measures Taken by the Government of Punjab

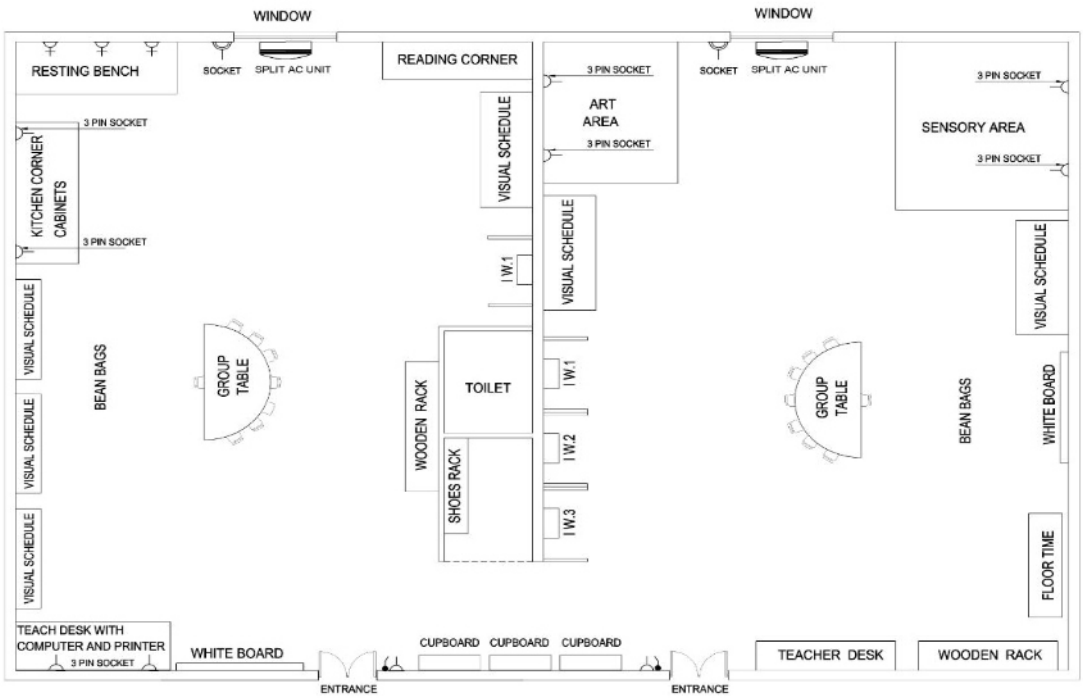
The Special Education Punjab Department recognized the growing necessity to include Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as one of the high incidence disabilities and took a commendable step by instructing the concerned heads of special education schools to accommodate students with such needs. However, it became evident that this initial measure wasn't a permanent solution as the unique needs of these children posed challenges for the existing system to fully accommodate them. Consequently, the department realized the urgency of devising a comprehensive action plan to effectively address this issue, taking into account the distinct learning needs and multiple therapeutic requirements of the children with ASD.

Under the visionary leadership of Ms. Saima Saeed, Secretary Special Education Punjab, a series of consultative sessions were conducted, involving national and international consultants and stakeholders. These sessions, along with visits to targeted population schools, played a vital role in enhancing the understanding of the complexities involved in addressing the needs of children with ASD. After dedicated efforts, the DGSE (Directorate General of Special Education) team successfully established the first Autism Unit Lahore (AUL) within one of the special education centres in Lahore, marking a significant milestone in providing tailored support and education to children with ASD in the region.

Synthesising the Behavioural and Communication Models: Main Features of Autism Unit Lahore



The inaugural of the first Autism Unit took place on 26th May, 2023, operating in two rooms and boasting a green play area. This unit was primarily established to cater to the needs of 16 students with autism, and it is situated in the Government Special Education Centre, Nishter Town, Lahore. Given the rising number of students and their unique requirements, there are plans to replicate the same layout by establishing Autism Units at divisional and district levels. Furthermore, recognizing the growing demand, the already established Autism Unit Lahore (AUL) will be extended to accommodate even more students with ASD, providing them with the specialized support they need.



Layout AUL

Following Assessment Protocols would be used for Skills Assessment at Autism Unit Lahore:

- Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program VB-MAPP (Sundberg, 2008) and the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills®-Revised ABLLS-R (Partington, 2010) will be used by Psychologist.
- These criterion-referenced assessment tools assess various skills to determine future curricula and interventions.
- Under the supervision of a psychologist, a paraprofessional will be trained to run and collect data using these assessments. The psychologist will then review the results and design programs to address the necessary skill deficits.

A few factors should be contemplated before we pick a treatment technique:



Things to consider while choosing treatment option

- Early Intervention
- Highly Structured
- Skill Oriented
- Data Based for Evaluation
- Skilled Staff
- Waiting Time Minimized
- Multiple Settings
- Consistent & Systematically Tailored to specific needs
- Distraction free environment Individualized Motivational System

Opening Remarks

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Pakistan faces challenges due to the lack of awareness, resources, and specialized institutions. The absence of a dedicated national policy framework further compounds the situation. While private organizations offer support, the public sector lacks specific schools or institutes for autistic children.

To address this crucial issue, the Department of Special Education Govt. of Punjab has taken practical steps, engaging with stakeholders and international consultants. We are proud to have established the Autism Unit Lahore (AUL), catering to the needs of 16 students, with plans for further progress.

Our goal is to establish the Punjab Autism Resource Centre (PARC), providing dignified lives and appropriate education for children with Autism, aligned with the UN's Development Agenda 2030.

Today's dialogue has highlighted the importance of advocacy, awareness, and quality education for individuals with Autism. Challenges remain, including social stigma and the need for tailored teaching methods. However, our commitment to free and quality education for all children with special needs, especially those with Autism, remains unwavering.

Let us work together to ensure acceptance and inclusion of all children with disabilities in the society, fostering a brighter future for those with Autism.

Thank you all for your participation.

NABILA IRFAN
DIRECTOR GENERAL
SPECIAL EDUCATION PUNJAB

2. ASD DOMAINS TO GUIDE POLICY FRAMEWORK

2.1 Thematic Focus Area 1: Early Identification and Intervention Planning

Autism demands a multidisciplinary approach, with parents as core members of the team. Building a strong and supportive bond with the child fosters a deeper understanding of their unique requirements and enables effective care and support tailored to their specific challenges and strengths.

However, uneducated parents often face challenges as they lack access to information about Autism, leaving them underprivileged in understanding the condition. On the other hand, educated parents possess more knowledge about this Spectrum Disorder. It is essential for parents and caregivers to be aware of the early signs and symptoms of ASD to provide appropriate support and care for their special needs child.

> The caregiver's relationship with a child having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is of utmost importance in understanding their needs. "Emphasis should be given on Raising Awareness of Early Signs & Symptoms of ASD among Laypersons and Parents "
>
> Sehar Qazilbash,
> Education Specialist, UNICEF

The importance of involving parents and caregivers in this process cannot be overstated, as they play a vital role in their child's education. By providing them with resources and workshops, we empower them to better understand their child's needs and actively participate in their education journey. Their support and engagement are key factors in ensuring the success and growth of their children with special needs.

> "Empowered parents play a pivotal role in nurturing their child with ASD, as therapy centers undoubtedly contribute, but most of the time, children are with their parents."
>
> Shumyla Noreen
> CEO, Trusted Support Therapeutic Clinic

Two strategies were presented under the theme early identification and intervention for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):

Strategy 1: *Provide Specialized Training for Educators*

Implement targeted training programs to empower teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively support students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). These

programs should focus on adapting teaching methods, implementing accommodations, and creating a conducive classroom environment to cater to the unique needs of students with ASD.

Strategy 2: *Engage and Educate Parents and Caregivers*

Extend specialized training initiatives to include parents and caregivers, enabling them to actively participate in their child's education and advocate for their needs. By equipping families with a deeper understanding of ASD and effective support strategies, a collaborative partnership between home and school can be nurtured, fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational experience for children with ASD.

The importance of collaboration between health and education sectors was emphasized, particularly in providing early screening facilities for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Both hospitals and educational institutes should offer these services. It was suggested that a comprehensive approach should be followed that involves collaborative efforts among general education teachers, parents, and family physicians to support this cause, with a specific focus on enhancing the knowledge and expertise of family physicians in understanding and addressing the needs of individuals with special needs.

Malpractice of False Diagnosis

Practitioners without having sufficient knowledge label child ASD rather than labeling communication disorder.

Prof. Dr. Shazia Maqbool,
Dean Medical Faculty & Allied,
The Children's Hospital, Lahore

An important concern raised during the discussion was the issue of practitioners mislabeling children as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) instead of accurately diagnosing them with a communication disorder. This misdiagnosis can have significant implications for the child and their family. It was emphasized that practitioners must have sufficient knowledge and expertise to differentiate between different developmental disorders, ensuring accurate and appropriate diagnoses. This way, children can receive the specific support and interventions they truly need, leading to better outcomes for their overall development and well-being.

The panelists also discussed the significance of raising awareness about genetic testing. Although a definitive ASD diagnosis cannot be made before age 3, there are red flags in a child's early years that parents may observe. Sharing awareness about these developmental

red flags (developmental milestones) with parents is crucial, enabling them to seek assistance from relevant professionals promptly. By fostering this collaborative approach and early intervention, we can better support children with ASD and their families.

> "The presence of false positives and false negatives is inevitable."
>
> Nabila Chauhdary
> CEO, Rising Sun, Lahore

The critical importance of early diagnosis for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was highlighted during the discussion. However, it was acknowledged that false positives and false negatives may occur in the diagnostic process, making proper training and expertise crucial in ensuring accurate diagnoses.

To aid in diagnosis, recommended tools such as The Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT) were discussed. This screening questionnaire, specifically designed for ASD, can be accessed online and used by parents with children aged 18-24 months. Another valuable tool mentioned was Red Flags, which pediatricians at hospitals can use to identify potential cases of ASD.

By employing these diagnostic tools and ensuring proper training for practitioners, we can enhance early detection and intervention, providing children with ASD the support and resources they need for optimal development and well-being.

> "Parents are not trained and skilled to screen out children with ASD. Even special training will be required of those trainers as well who will screen out ASD."
>
> Dr. Laila Khalid,
> Assistant Prof. UMT, Lahore

Promoting awareness and acceptance of ASD in the wider community is crucial. While using lady health workers to screen for autism in rural areas may not be feasible due to their existing workload, they can be trained to perform this task effectively. Workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns are essential in reducing stigma and fostering inclusivity.

To achieve this, campaigns can be launched through various channels, including print and electronic media, reaching a wider audience. Consensus was reached on the importance of Early Identification and Interventions, which can be accomplished at different levels through the collaboration of multidisciplinary teams. By focusing on following strategies, we can create a more supportive and inclusive environment for individuals with ASD, ensuring they

receive the timely support and care they deserve for their overall well-being and development.

- Early intervention should be started as early as possible.
- School teachers can be resource persons in identifying early signs of ASD.
- Lady health workers can assist with screening in rural areas after receiving appropriate training.
- Freely available diagnosis tools like M-CHAT and Red Flags can be used for early identification by trained staff.

"The role of media is inevitable, especially in rural areas, and should be taken as seriously as during the pandemic situation. It's a multi-pronged strategy where media, school teachers, and lady health workers collaborate to make parents aware and educate them about the early signs and symptoms of ASD, utilizing mobile messages, TV aids, TikTok, and more."

Prof. Dr. Nazish Imran
Head Child and Family Psychiatry,
Department KEMU/Mayo Hospital Lahore.

- Specialized training is essential for those involved in screening for ASD.
- Media can play a significant role in creating awareness. Platforms like TikTok, voice calls, telephone, and message services can be effective in spreading information.
- Arranging awareness seminars and campaigns with the involvement of different professionals can further promote understanding and acceptance of ASD.

2.2 Thematic Focus Area 2: Enabling Environment-Teachers Parents Training:

Creating an inclusive and autism-friendly learning environment is crucial for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to access education and thrive. By tailoring spaces to be friendly to their senses, utilizing visual tools, and adopting flexible teaching methods, we can ensure that everyone feels included and can learn in the most effective ways. Encouraging exposure to mainstream schools on specific days enables children to generalize their skills and gain independence. Special education teachers must receive in-service training and prioritize daily living skills, crucial for a child's development and well-being. Incorporating visual schedules, sensory supports, and providing opportunities for individualized learning further enhance engagement and success for students with ASD. This holistic approach not only fosters a nurturing environment but also empowers individuals with ASD to reach their full potential by addressing their unique needs and promoting overall well-being.

Promoting acceptance, understanding, and accommodating their specific needs fosters an empowering educational setting that nurtures their growth, well-being, and overall

development. By sending children with ASD to mainstream schools on specific days and at designated times, we can provide exposure to different environments, preparing them for independence in society. Special education teachers need in-service training in following specialized models tailored to the needs of individuals with ASD, with a particular focus on daily living skills, which are essential aspects of their development that cannot be overlooked.

The better prepared the parents are, the better the results are achieved by working with the child at home, which has a positive effect not only on the child, but also on the whole family well-being.

Prof. Dr. Shazia Maqbool,
Dean Medical Faculty & Allied,
The Children's Hospital,
Lahore

Training of Parents / Caregivers

Parents can undergo training in various ways to enhance their involvement in their child's education. Implementing visual learning strategies, conducting a series of training workshops, and offering online sessions through platforms like Zoom are effective approaches. Providing pre-recorded information sessions on utilizing everyday routines as learning opportunities for children and engaging with them through play and problem-solving can be beneficial.

Such training programs not only support parents and caregivers in improving their child's well-being but also contribute to their own well-being. To facilitate parental training, creating "Tasveeri Kahanian" (picture stories), print materials, and comprehensive booklets can be valuable resources. These materials will empower parents with the necessary tools and knowledge to better support their child's development and education, fostering a supportive and nurturing environment for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

By implementing a visual learning strategy, active parental engagement can be facilitated as well for home-based sessions.

Rukhsana Shah
CEO, ASD Welfare Trust
Lahore.

Training for parents offers a support network and empowers them to become advocates for their children. Connecting parents with other caregivers who share similar experiences provides valuable knowledge and resources, ensuring their child receives the necessary education and services, promoting overall well-being and development. With proper training,

Teachers play a key role in addressing parents' emotional needs for children with ASD. Comprehensive training in empathetic communication, active listening, and creating a supportive environment empowers teachers to navigate the emotional complexities parents of special children face.

Prof. Dr. Nazish Imran
Head Child and Family Psychiatry Department,
KEMU/Mayo Hospital Lahore

parents can learn effective strategies to support their child's development and navigate challenges. Equipped with knowledge and skills, parents can reinforce learning and support progress at home. "Home Sessions" arranged by school teachers can further enhance parental training, improving the quality of life for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Through these collaborative efforts, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for individuals with ASD, fostering their growth and enabling them to reach their full potential.

Improving the communication skills of special education teachers emerged as a significant concern during the discussion. It was emphasized that training should be provided to enhance their ability to effectively communicate with parents and offer counseling. Adopting an effective communication approach can facilitate better collaboration between teachers and parents, ultimately benefiting the child's development and progress. Additionally, there is a wealth of resources available, such as early child development books with visuals, articles, booklets, and other materials, which can be adapted to provide training to parents and caregivers about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Utilizing these resources can empower parents to better understand and support their child's needs, contributing to a more inclusive and supportive environment for individuals with ASD.

Training of Teachers

Teachers' training is crucial as it enables effective communication and collaboration with parents. Following the Western Model, teachers should avoid labeling children as "autistic" and provide basic level sensory therapy until a proper diagnosis is made by a professional. To address concerns of quackery, the Department of Special Education Punjab has planned a fifteen-month diploma in collaboration with the

A trained teacher can communicate and deal more effectively with parents. Positive outcomes in autistic child can be achieved through mutual cooperation by parents and teachers.

Dr. Amna Arif
Assistant Professor, UMT, Lahore

University of Education, Lahore, to train teachers for working with autistic children. Ongoing training, especially in behavior management, is essential to cater to the specific needs of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is vital for teachers and professionals to have updated knowledge about ASD and avoid labeling a child before the age of 3, observing and addressing delayed milestones under the term "Communication Behavioral Disorder." By providing orientation and training, we can enhance the support and care provided to children with ASD, ensuring their betterment and overall development.

2.3 Thematic Focus Area 3: Educational Model and Curriculum Approaches

> Structured teaching methods work best to promote behavioral changes and skill development in children with ASD.
>
> Shumyla Noreen
>
> CEO, Trusted Support Therapeutic Clinic

During the discussion on the model of education and rehabilitation for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), various approaches were recommended. The Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Model, a scientific approach focusing on behavior and learning principles, was highlighted to promote behavioral changes and skill development. Multi-model approaches like TEACCH and PECS were also discussed. The TEACCH program aims to support learning and development, including communication, social skills, and daily life tasks. PECS, a non-verbal communication method, was explained for individuals with autism.

Emphasizing the importance of a holistic developmental program, it was recognized that no single approach universally benefits autistic individuals. A multidisciplinary team is essential to address their diverse needs, as their responses vary with growth and development. The Floor Time technique, a relationship-based therapy involving parent-child play, enhances communication and social skills.

> Holistic Academic Program Development is necessary for an educational institution for Autism including:
>
> 1- all therapies which work best for the child following "ECLECTIC APPROACH"
> 2- Academic focus with access to regular curriculum
> 3- Family empowerment
>
> Nabila Chaudhary
> CEO, Rising Sun, Lahore

Participants agreed on adopting Eclectic Approaches for ASD education, encompassing strategies like PECS, music therapy, auditory training, and customized sensory approaches, all implemented with structured teaching methods. Family and

individual empowerment were highlighted, with a focus on providing training, opportunities, and workplace access.

Sharing the latest teaching strategies with parents and caregivers was deemed crucial. The Montessori Approach and community-level schools were seen as beneficial for children with ASD. Nutritionists' availability in schools would address food allergies and nutritional deficiencies impacting daily functioning, along with behavioral and academic issues.

Involving parents in interventions, allowing observation through CCTV coverage or designated spaces, was encouraged. A specified diagnosis week would enable special education teachers to enhance their knowledge for effective intervention implementation.

Curriculum and Specific Teaching Approaches

In the discussion on curriculum and specific teaching approaches for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), it was acknowledged that a personalized curriculum is necessary, considering the individual needs of each child. This curriculum should encompass academic learning, socialization, adaptive skills, language, and communication.

There is a demand for a specific ASD curriculum spanning eight grades, with government certification to facilitate job opportunities for completing students. Children with mild to moderate features of autism can attend general education schools, where a baseline curriculum for autistic children should be in place. While the curriculum content remains consistent, the teaching strategy can be adapted to cater to each child's needs.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- No single approach universally benefits autistic individuals.
- Eclectic Approach
- Family Empowerment
- Personalized curriculum tailored to the specific needs including academic learning, socialization, adaptive skills, language & communication skills
- UDL Approach
- Differentiated Instructions Approach
- Structured Teaching Environment
- TEACCH
- ABA
- Play Based Therapies
- Sensory Integration Approach

Itinerant Teachers' Model

Itinerant teachers play a vital role by delivering specialized services to children with disabilities across a diverse range of environments, encompassing homes, schools, early childhood centers, community-based programs, and even hospitals.

Implementing the TEACCH method, independent workstations with visual cues enable children to work on tasks independently.

"Whatever the teaching approach is used for the education of autistic children, structuring the environment, creating an autism-friendly environment, and providing visual support are vital"

Dr. Maria Sohaib Qureshi
Assistant Professor, PU, Lahore.

Decisions were made to develop an "Individualized Curriculum" and utilize "Differentiated Instructions" based on age and severity levels, enabling children to pursue their educational goals inclusively. Improving student learning outcomes (SLOs) to align better with age appropriateness was highlighted. An Itinerant Teacher was recommended to provide direct services and support to children with autism in various settings, as specified in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Adopting a team approach involving educationists, school psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and parents aims to enhance educational planning and maximize positive outcomes for autistic children.

2.4 Thematic Focus Area 4: Assessment and Monitoring System

The discussion emphasized the importance of cautious monitoring when differentiating between autism and virtual autism, which is caused by excessive screen exposure. To ensure accurate monitoring, external professionals trained in this field should be involved, and a standardized baseline should be used. Alternative assessment procedures, including observational methods, IEP reviews, learning and support plan revisions, and progress monitoring in curriculum areas, should be employed in a holistic and collaborative process over time. It was suggested that assessment modes should align with the child's preferences for comfort and safety skills training must be provided to both students and service providers. Setting academic and developmental goals for skills tracking and using video recordings for monitoring purposes were also discussed.

To ensure effective monitoring, a time duration should be specified for assessment or skill tracking procedures, considering the challenges of daily tracking. Emphasizing the significance of data recording and continuous monitoring and supervision, it was decided that these aspects must be made compulsory in the monitoring agenda. Keeping in mind the child's communication level during monitoring was highlighted to facilitate the best possible response.

Regular monitoring of the child's progress with a six-month gap was recommended, considering the changes and challenges that occur as children grow and their curriculum develops. Trained supervisors should conduct this monitoring and maintain proper data recording for accurate assessments and tracking. Overall, effective monitoring and assessment play a vital role in supporting children with ASD and enhancing their development and well-being.

2.5 Thematic Focus Area 5: Transition and Future Planning

The discussion centered on transition planning and future support for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The Department of Special Education is set to sign an MOA with TEVETA to ensure a separate segment/quota for training students with special needs, a move appreciated by all participants.

Transition in neurodiversity is a continuous process, focusing on teaching various skills like art, occupational, soft, and hard skills. Practical steps for future support were suggested, such as facilitating interactions of individuals with ASD with potential employers to secure

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Ensure clear timeframes for assessment or skill tracking, specifying either a 3-month or 6-month duration.
- Engage external professionals with specialized training to enhance the effectiveness of the monitoring process.
- Establish a centralized reporting authority, with SPED taking a prominent role.
- Maintain meticulous data recording procedures for accurate monitoring and evaluation.
- Continuous monitoring at every stage

- Enhance emphasis on early prevocational training and skills development.
- Clearly define and allocate shared roles and responsibilities of departments like TEVTA, PVTC, and others.
- Establish essential sheltered workshops to facilitate effective transition from pre vocation to vocational skills.

jobs and raising public awareness to create a more accepting society.

> "Address the transition needs of children on spectrum during puberty period"
>
> Dr. Aniqa Sohail
> Founder and Project Director,
> HELP Autism Pakistan

Efforts by organizations like Gosha-e-Aafiyat, with sheltered homes and workshops for autistic adults, were acknowledged, leading to discussions on the need for legislation to safeguard children with autism in shelter homes. Collaboration with public and private entities, including transportation companies, all Pakistan restaurant associations and Banks was encouraged to support individuals with autism during travel and outings and job accommodations. Puberty transition was highlighted as a critical phase, requiring appropriate support to handle physiological changes and interpersonal dynamics.

The importance of pre-vocational training, involvement of other departments, and collaborative efforts with TEVTA and PVTC were emphasized for better future prospects for special children. Creating posts for teachers specializing in working with children with ASD was proposed. Overall, transition planning should prioritize fostering independence, self-advocacy, and community integration through skill acquisition, meaningful goal-setting, and ongoing support. It was suggested to arrange recreational trips to different environments to help individuals generalize learned skills, and staff at hotels and restaurants should receive training to cater to the needs of children with ASD.

Building Partnerships, Coordination, and Collaboration

Building partnerships, coordination, and collaboration with other departments is an important component while planning an effective transition. Collaboration between general education schools and special education schools are essential to provide opportunities for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to experience a mainstream setup. Empowering the cooperation between parents and mental health professionals is crucial as it forms the cornerstone of care systems for individuals with ASD. By working in a coordinated fashion, all stakeholders can contribute to smoother transition processes for autistic children, whether it be from special schools to general education schools or from school to work placements. The unique knowledge and experience brought by each collaborator enhance the quality of services provided to children with ASD.

3. KEY CONCERN

A pivotal and pressing concern revolves around the glaring absence of dependable and precise data regarding the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the Punjab region of Pakistan. This lack of accurate statistical insights poses a significant impediment to the strategic formulation and effective execution of interventions tailored to address the distinct requirements of children with ASD. The deficiency in concrete figures creates a notable ambiguity in the planning process, impeding the development of targeted initiatives crucial for the advancement and well-being of this specific demographic.

To tackle this substantial challenge head-on, the Special Education Department of Punjab has proactively initiated a collaborative partnership with the Punjab Bureau of Statistics, aiming to integrate Autism as a distinct disability category in data collection. This strategic step will help including ASD-related indicators within the established questionnaire utilized for the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), a well-recognized instrument for data collection.

By integrating Autism as a distinct disability category and including pertinent indicators within the MICS questionnaire, the initiative seeks to establish a comprehensive and accurate database that encapsulates the caseload of individuals with ASD in Punjab. This undertaking holds the promise of not only filling the current void in reliable data but also paving the way for informed and targeted interventions that can substantively impact the lives of children with ASD. Ultimately, this concerted effort stands to enhance the planning, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives aimed at supporting the unique developmental journey of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Punjab, Pakistan.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conclusion and Recommendations section encapsulates the essence of our comprehensive discussion, highlighting the interconnected components that collectively contribute to the holistic development and well-being of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

4.1 Component 1: Health & Education as Main Pillars

This component emphasizes the fundamental roles of Health & Education as cornerstone pillars, underscoring the vital need for seamless collaboration between these domains. This collaboration ensures the provision of optimal support and intervention for individuals with ASD, enhancing their overall development.

4.2 Component 2: Academia & Practitioners' Shared Responsibility

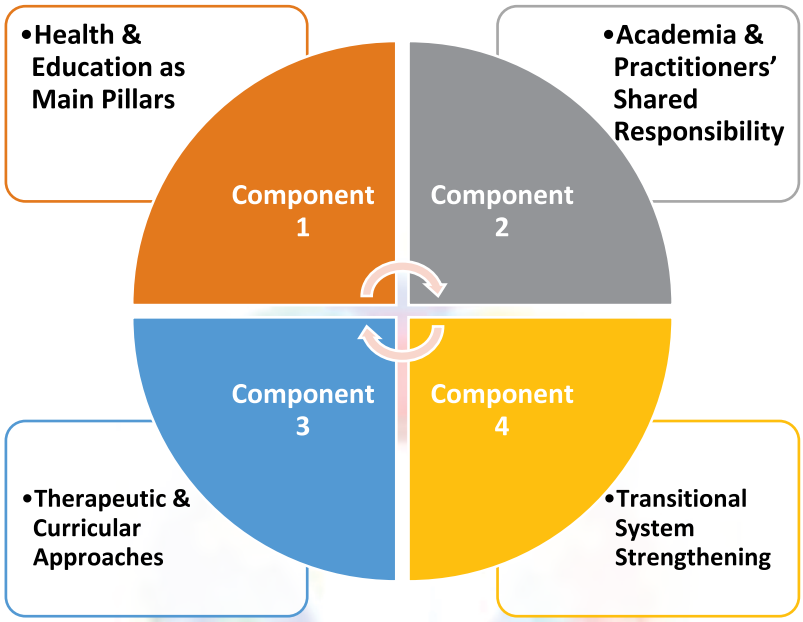
The shared responsibility of Academia & Practitioners is emphasized here, stressing the importance of equipping educators with specialized training through hands-on experience courses. These courses empower educators to effectively cater to the distinct needs of autistic children, thereby fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

4.3 Component 3: Therapeutic & Curricular Approaches

This component highlights the significance of Therapeutic & Curricular Approaches, advocating for a flexible and personalized framework that accommodates diverse learning styles and preferences. Such an approach ensures interventions that are tailored to the unique needs of each individual, resulting in improved educational outcomes and holistic development.

4.4 Component 4: Transitional System Strengthening

The importance of Transitional System Strengthening is discussed, exemplified by the establishment of Autism Units across various regions of Punjab. These units serve as beacons of hope, providing specialized care and support and ensuring a promising future for children with ASD.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations reflect the consensus reached by the panelists during the discussion, paving the way for the finalization of the implementation framework:

- Raise awareness through media platforms about early diagnosis and intervention plans for children with ASD and their parents/caregivers.
- Establish training programs for parents/caregivers and teachers, equipping them with practical skills and knowledge.
- Strengthen cooperation between parents and mental health professionals to enhance care systems for individuals with ASD.
- Adopt an eclectic approach when selecting evidence-based interventions, including ABA, TEACCH, SCERTS, and PECS with visual cues. Develop tailored Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) following differentiated instructional approaches.
- Customize the curriculum to address the specific needs of autistic children, considering the need for a baseline curriculum.
- Define clear timeframes for assessment or skill tracking, specifying 3-month or 6-month durations.
- Foster collaboration among the Special Education Department, school education department, health department, and other relevant departments.
- Establish effective transition processes for children with ASD, ensuring smooth transitions between schools and work placements.
- Continue the establishment of Autism Units to provide specialized care and support.

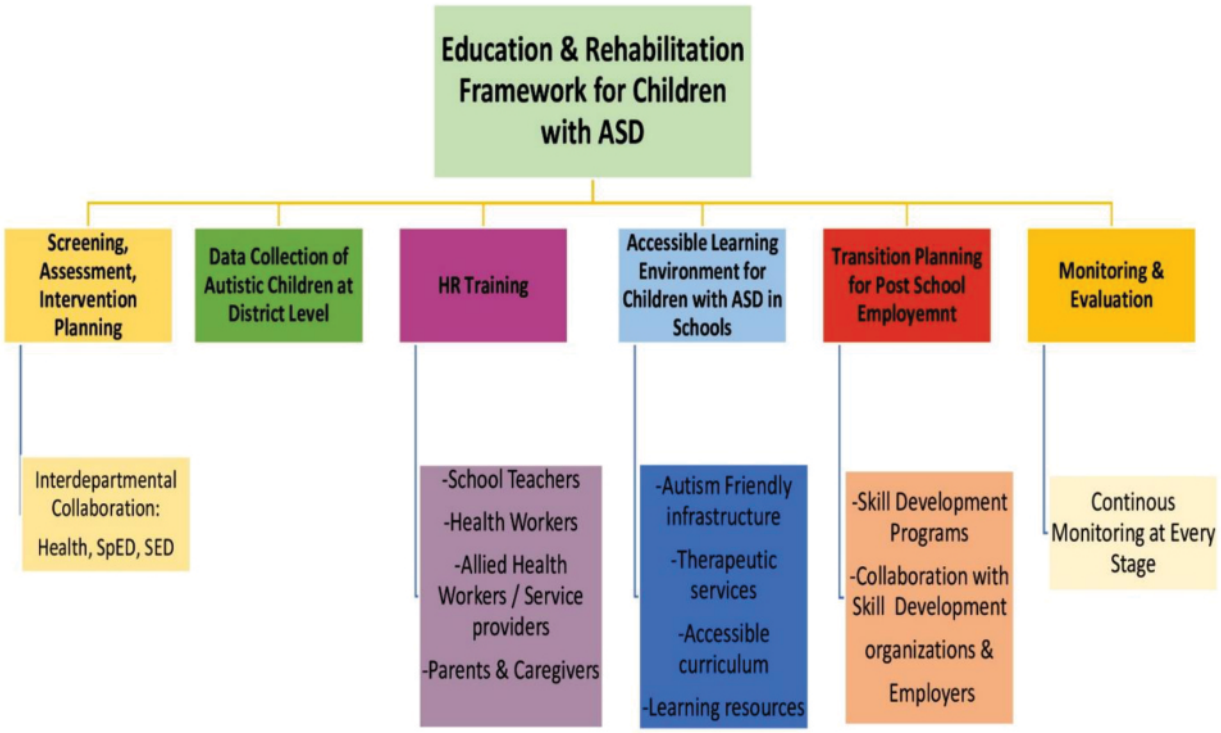
5. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The journey towards an inclusive and supportive educational landscape for individuals with ASD is built upon several key pillars. Central to this endeavor is the role of trained educators specialized in autism education. Implementing targeted three-month hands-on experience courses enhances their capacity to address the unique needs of autistic children. Collaborative efforts and investments in parent and teacher training contribute to an environment that fosters better educational outcomes and overall development for children with ASD.

The foundation of this transformation lies in a comprehensive framework for ASD education. Designed to provide a structured roadmap, this framework ensures consistency and accountability in delivering interventions and support. Embracing a personalized and flexible approach, the framework caters adeptly to diverse learning styles and preferences.

Through united efforts and unwavering dedication, the collaborative implementation of this comprehensive framework holds the potential to empower individuals with ASD to unlock their full potential, make remarkable progress, and lead fulfilling lives

Implementation Framework for the Education and Rehabilitation of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder



SIGHT FROM POLICY DIALOGUE EVENT 22nd June, 2023


























PULL









ECTRUM DISORDER"




OLICY DIALOGUE










POLICY DIALOGUE








POLICY DIALOGUE


POLICY DIALOGU


POLICY DIALOGU



We are striving for
A world so different,
A mind so unique,
A journey so challenging,
A soul to seek,
A spectrum of colors that only they see,
A beauty so rare in every degree!



Saima Yousaf
(Psychologist)

Glimpses of First Policy Dialogue Held on

3rd December, 2022


















Special Education


GPE
unicef
International Day of




GPE
unicef
International Day of
Persons with Disabilities
3rd December, 2022


GPE
unicef


Reforms


Inclusion
Curriculu


unicef





GPE
unicef
International Day of
Persons with Disabilities
3rd December, 2022

with Disabilities
3rd December, 2022

International Day of
Persons with Disabi
3rd Decembe

sons with Disabilitie
3rd December, 202
Special Ed ion Department

Persons w

3rd December, 2

GPE
unicef
International Day of
Persons with Disabilities
3rd December, 2022

GPE
unicef
International Day of
Persons with Disabilities
3rd December, 2022

GPE
International Day of
Persons with Disabili
3rd December,

ANNEXES

I. Policy Dialogue Communiqué
II. Agenda
III. List of Participants & contributors
IV. Profile of panelists
V. Parental Voice

Annex-I Policy Dialogue Communiqué



NO. DGSE-AD(PSY)/PD/2023/ 3698
GOVERNMENT OF THE PUNJAB
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
31-Sher Shah Block New Garden Town, Lahore.

Dated Lahore, the 19th June, 2023.

To

Dr. Maria Qureshi,
Assistant Professor,
Department of Special Education,
University of the Punjab, Lahore.

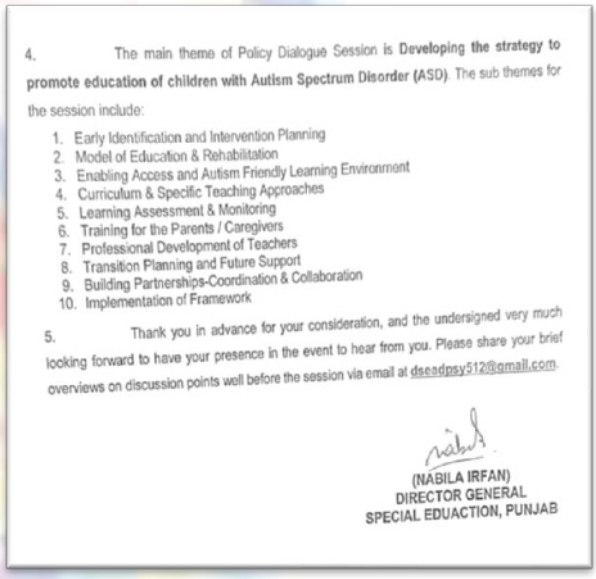
Subject: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN POLICY DIALOGUE "DEVELOPING THE STARTEGY TO PROMOTE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)".

Special Education Department envisaged to expand its services to children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) therefore established first Autism Unit in one of its Special Education Centres in Lahore. However, the Department intends to expand its network in other existing Special Education Centres across Punjab and to establish an exclusive state-of-the-art Punjab Autism Resource Centre (PARC) in Lahore to cater large number of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

2. In addition to infrastructural development, a strong and well-equipped institutional system is required to be developed, therefore, Special Education Department is in process of developing Strategic Policy Document to provide a nurturing environment, and develop the full potential of differently-abled students within the Autistic Spectrum Disorder using a multidisciplinary approach addressing individual needs.

Policy Dialogue: Developing the strategy to promote education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

3. The said event is scheduled for 22nd June, 2023 (Thursday) between 10:15 a.m. to 13:30 p.m. at Special Education Department, 31-Sher Shah Block, New Garden Town, Lahore. Policy Dialogue Session audience shall comprise speakers representing academia, developmental & behavioral pediatrics and, clinical and special needs practitioners. We believe your valuable discussion on this topic would be a significant addition while formulating Policy Draft with a vision of providing equitable learning experiences for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

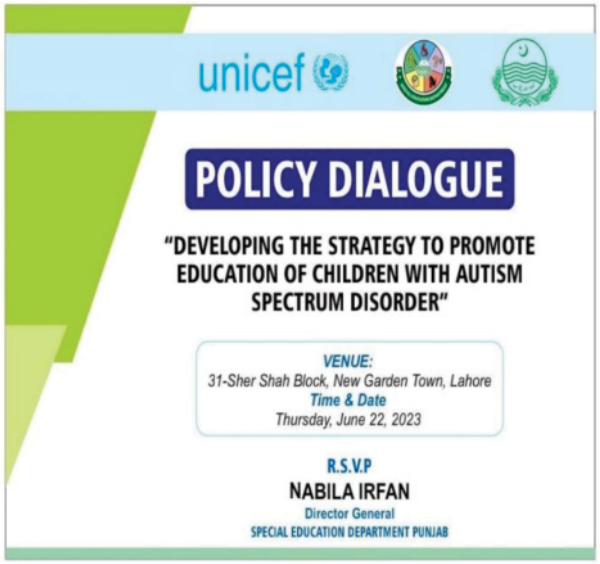


4. The main theme of Policy Dialogue Session is **Developing the strategy to promote education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**. The sub themes for the session include:

1. Early Identification and Intervention Planning
2. Model of Education & Rehabilitation
3. Enabling Access and Autism Friendly Learning Environment
4. Curriculum & Specific Teaching Approaches
5. Learning Assessment & Monitoring
6. Training for the Parents / Caregivers
7. Professional Development of Teachers
8. Transition Planning and Future Support
9. Building Partnerships-Coordination & Collaboration
10. Implementation of Framework

5. Thank you in advance for your consideration, and the undersigned very much looking forward to have your presence in the event to hear from you. Please share your brief overviews on discussion points well before the session via email at dseadpsy512@gmail.com.

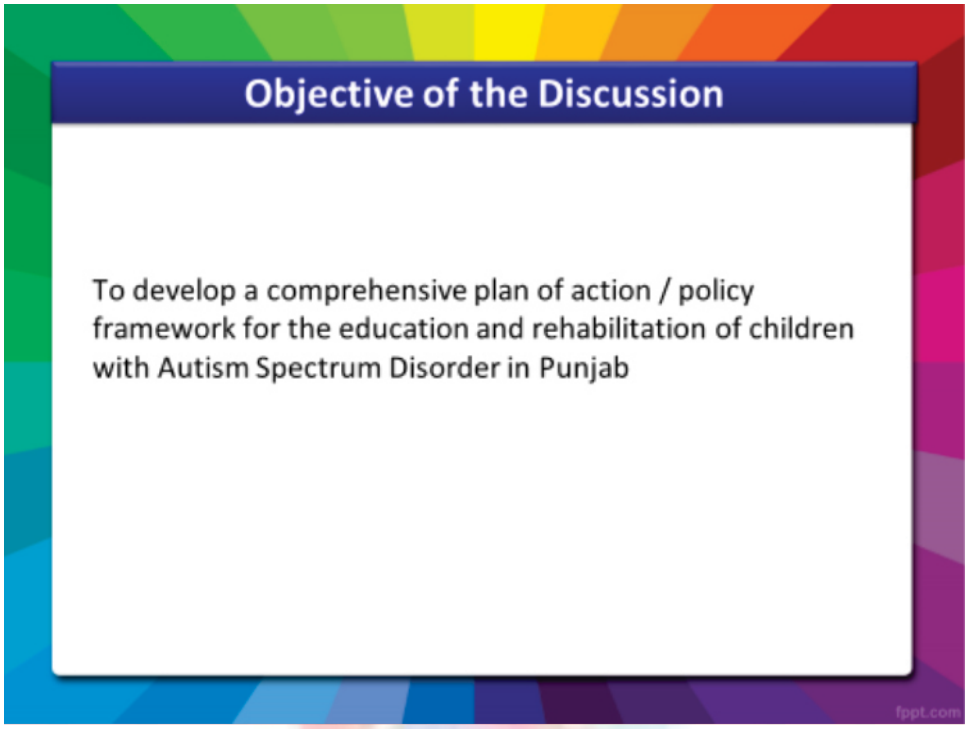
(NABILA IRFAN)
DIRECTOR GENERAL
SPECIAL EDUACTION, PUNJAB

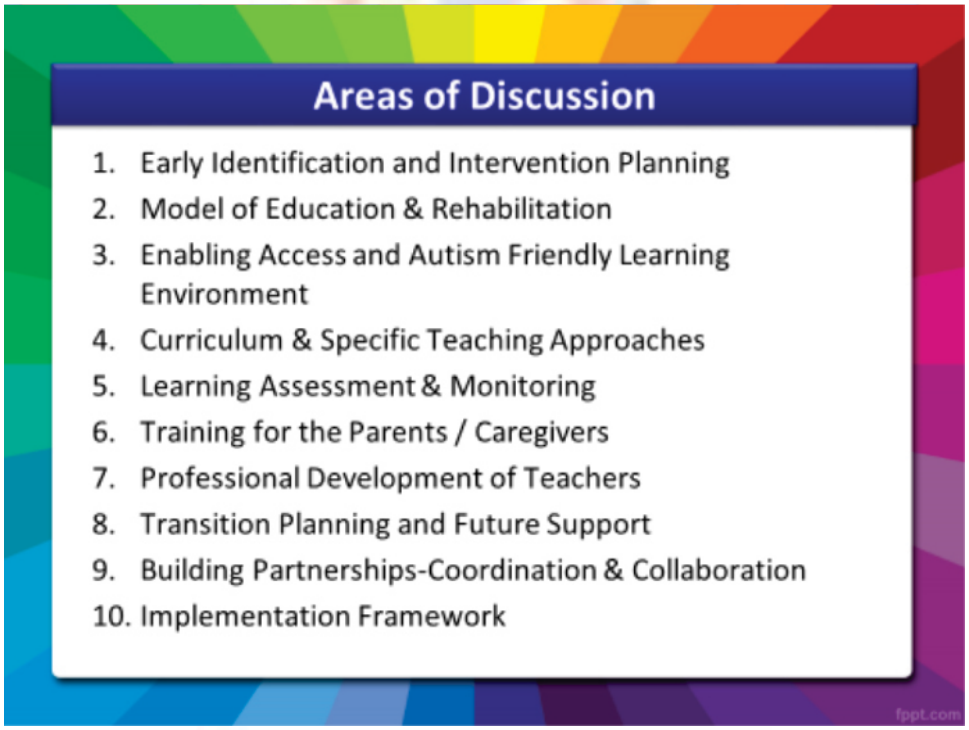


PROGRAMME

Time	Activity
10:15 — 10:45	Registration
10:45 — 10:50	Recitation from the Holy Quran
10.50 — 10:55	Video screening on establishment of Autism Unit at Lahore (AU L)
10:55 — 11:00	Welcome by Director General, Special Education, Punjab
11:00 — 12:30	Policy discussion on developing the strategy to promote education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder
12.30 — 12:40	Concluding remarks by Secretary, Special Education Department
12:40 — 13:00	Distribution of shields among the Participants
13:00 — 13:30	Lunch

Annex-II **Policy Dialogue Agenda**





Annex-III List of Panelists and Contributors

List of key panelists:

1. **Ms. Saima Saeed**, Secretary Special Education Punjab
2. **Ms. Nabila Irfan,** Director General, Special Education Punjab,
3. **Ms. Khadija tul Kubra**, Additional Secretary, Special Education Punjab,
4. **Ms. Rukhsana Shah**, CEO Autism spectrum Disorder welfare Trust Lahore.
5. **Ms. Sehr Raza Jafri,** Education Officer, UNICEF, Pakistan.
6. **Prof. Dr. Shazia Maqbool**, Chairperson Developmental-Behavioral Paediatrics University of Child Health Sciences the Children's Hospital Lahore.
7. **Prof. Dr. Nazish Imran**, Head Child and Family Psychiatry, Department KEMU/Mayo Hospital Lahore.
8. **Dr. Aniqa Sohail**, Founder and Project Director, HELP Autism Pakistan.
9. **Dr. Saima Daood,** Director Centre for clinical psychology, University of the Punjab, Lahore
10. **Dr. Maria Sohaib Qureshi** Assistant Professor, Institute of Special Education University of the Punjab.
11. **Dr. Zahida Parveen** Chair Person of Department of Special Education, University of Education Lahore.
12. **Dr. Amna Arif**, Assistant Professor, UMT, Lahore.
13. **Dr. Laila Khalid**, Assistant Professor UMT Lahore
14. **Ms. Nabila Chaudhry**, CEO Rising Sun Education and welfare Society, Lahore.
15. **Ms. Shumyla Noreen**, CEO Trusted Support Therapeutic Clinic, Lahore & Karachi.
16. **Mr. Faisal Chaudhry**, Curriculum Director at Autism Institute of Pakistan, Lahore
17. **Ms. Fatima Jamshed** Manager (P & D) Infrastructure and Development Authority Punjab (IDAP).
18. **Dr. Nayab Iftikhar,** Assistant Professor, Centre for clinical Psychology, University of the Punjab.
19. **Ms. Sobia Orangzeb,** Senior Special Needs Educationist, the Children's Hospital, Lahore

List of Participants:

1. **Mr. Babar Suleman,** Deputy Secretary, Special Education Punjab
2. **Ms. Azmat Tahira,** Section Officer, Special Education Punjab
3. **Mr. Zahid Majeed,** Director (Planning), DGSE, Punjab
4. **Mr. Ghulam Murtaza,** Director (Administration), DGSE, Punjab
5. **Dr. Fouzia Khursheed,** Director (Monitoring), DGSE, Punjab
6. **Mr. Rao Abdun Nafay,** Director (Academics), DGSE, Punjab
7. **Ms. Khaula Munawar Minhas,** Deputy Director Curriculum, DGSE, Punjab
8. **Mr. Zahid Iqbal,** Program Officer, DGSE, Punjab

9. **Ms. Hanzala Ashfaq,** Assistant Director Psychology, DGSE, Punjab
10. **Ms. Khalida Perveen,** Assistant Director Budget, DGSE, Punjab
11. **Mr. Muhammad Yaseen,** Assistant Director General, DGSE, Punjab

Main Author & Chief Editor:

12. **Ms. Khaula Munawar Minhas,** Deputy Director Curriculum, DGSE, Punjab

List of Report Writers:

1. **Mr. Sajid Nadeem Khan**, (Principal) National Special Education Centre (Devolved) Faisalabad
2. **Dr. Nosheen Ramzan** (Psychologist) Govt. Institute for Slow Learners Nankana Sahib
3. **Mr. Javed Iqbal Leghari**, (Psychologist) Govt Special Education Centre Taunsa Sharif DG Khan.
4. **MS- Afia Nida Mumtaz** (Psychologist.) Govt. Shadab Training Institute for mentally challenged Children
5. **MS- Saima Yousaf** (Psychologist) Govt. Special Education Secondary School of Special Education for H.I Pakpattan
6. **MS. Sonia Fareed khan** JSET Govt. Special Education Centre Ravi Town, Lahore.

Design & layout:

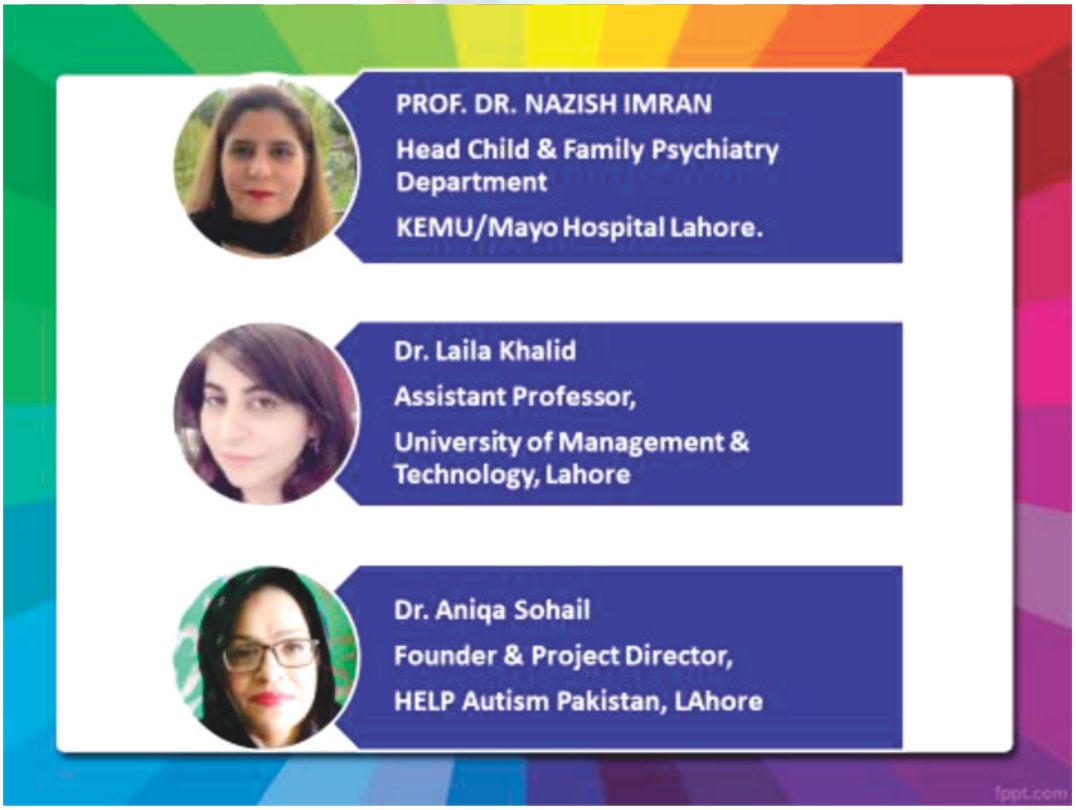
1. **Ms Khaula Munawar Minhas** Deputy Director curriculum DGSE, Punjab
2. **Javed Iqbal Leghari (**Psychologist), Govt. Special Education Centre Taunsa Sharif DG Khan.
3. **Naveed Iqbal Leghari** (BSCS – MNS UET Multan)

Technical Assistance:

1. **Mr. Muhammad Usman,** Junior Clerk, DGSE (Academics Wing), Punjab
2. **Ms. Saima,** Junior Clerk**,** DGSE, Punjab

Annex-IV Profile of Key Panelists






Dr. Maria Sohaib Qureshi
Assistant Professor, Institute of Special Education, University of the Punjab,
Dr. Zahida Parveen
Chairperson of Department of Special Education, University of Education Lahore
Dr. Amna Arif
Assistant Professor,
University of Management & Technology, Lahore


Ms. Nabila Chauhdry
CEO, Rising Sun Education and Welfare Society, Lahore
Mr. Faisal Chauhdry
Curriculum Director at Autism institute of Pakistan, Lahore
Ms. Shumyla Noreen
Special Needs Educationist (BCaBA,IBA-US)
CEO, Trusted Support Therapeutic Clinic
Ms. Fatima Jamshed
Manager (P&D)
Infrastructure & Development Authority Punjab (IDAP)

Annex-V

Parents' Voice



"As a parent, I understand the unique needs of my child, which require the expertise of specialized therapists such as psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and special needs educators. Unfortunately, finding all these services under one roof in the private sector is both challenging and costly. I urge the government to take proactive measures to address the needs of children like mine with special requirements. I am grateful for the services offered at the Autism Unit in Lahore, and it gives me satisfaction to see my child receiving the support and care he deserves."

Mr. Talha (father of Muhammad Ibrahim, a child on spectrum)

Parents' Voice



"My daughter is making wonderful progress at the Autism Unit in Lahore. I can see her learning and growing each day, and it fills my heart with gratitude. I want to express my sincere appreciation to the Government of Punjab for providing this invaluable opportunity for our children. The fact that these services are offered free of cost is a true blessing for families like ours who cannot afford expensive therapeutic services available in the private sector."

Mrs. Shazia Waqas (Mother of Bisma, a child on spectrum)


"A child with autism
is not ignoring you, they are
simply waiting for you
to enter their world."

GPE Transforming Education

unicef for every child

SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
GOVERNMENT OF PUNJAB