Learnings from use of Washington Group Short Set questions to identify functional difficulties among children in Pakistan's Annual School Census

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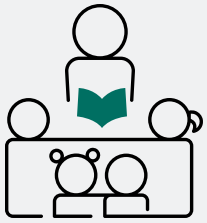
Global background



Children with disabilities are more likely to have poor educational outcomes, or experience educational exclusion, than children without disabilities (UNICEF, 2021; UNESCO, 2020).

There are no standardised, practical approaches for collecting and reporting disability among children attending school in low and middle income countries.

Global background

The Washington Group Short Set (WGSS) questions:

- Standardised tool to collect internationally comparable disability data (survey/population census).
- Assess level of difficulty with daily activities on a four-point scale.
- Six domains: seeing, hearing, walking/climbing, remembering/concentrating, self-care, communication.
- Age 5+ years, but known to underestimate child disability prevalence.
- Typically answered by parents or caregivers.

Context in Pakistan

Pakistan has one of the world's largest schooling systems.

- Nationally, 152,891 public schools, educating over 21 million children (Pakistan Education statistics 2021/22).
- Delivery of education is a provincial responsibility.

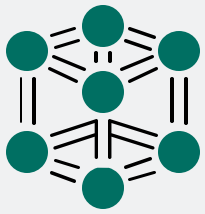
Context in Pakistan

Children with disabilities remain extremely educationally vulnerable in Pakistan

(Kamran and Bano, 2023; Malik et al, 2022; Singal et al, 2018).

- Estimates for prevalence of childhood disability among school children are limited and variable. Accurate data is urgently needed.
- Prior to 2023/24, disability data collection in Annual School Census (ASC) at the discretion of provinces – meaning high variability in approaches and data generated.

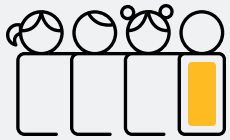
Context in Pakistan



Pakistan’s government is prioritising strengthening data on the educational system, including for children with disabilities:

- Approval of Data Standardisation Framework (DSF) in 2023.
- DSF includes four of the WGSS questions (seeing, hearing, walking and cognition), plus variables on school accessibility, resources, and staff training.

Context in Pakistan



2023/24 Annual School Census was the first to use these four WGSS questions consistently across all provinces, in alignment with the DSF

- Data covers mainstream public schools only.
- WG-SS data is school level, disaggregated by class, and sometimes sex.

Research objectives

Understand challenges and learnings from the Pakistan ASC's use of the WGSS:

- Explore implementation of data collection and analysis.
- Understand data quality and data use (schools and system).

Study outcomes:

- Support ongoing refinement and strengthening of disability data collection in future ASCs, and broader Education Management Information Systems (EMIS).
- Contribute to global learning on disability-inclusive ASC and EMIS.

Funded by FCDO, through Data and Research in Education (DARE) Research Consortium, July 2024 to April 2025.

Methodology

Mixed method study:

- Documentary review covering technical support for ASC, guidelines, training materials, ASC forms and reports.
- Secondary analysis of ASC data.
- In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with:
  - stakeholders (federal and provincial)
  - headteachers and teachers at four purposively selected schools per province.

Analysis:

- Quantitative analysis in Excel and Stata
- Qualitative data thematically analysed

Findings

The inclusion of WGSS within DSF demonstrates a strong commitment to the importance of collecting disability data.

- Largest-scale use of this tool outside of a population census (that we are aware of).

Findings

Broadly positive response from stakeholders country-wide.

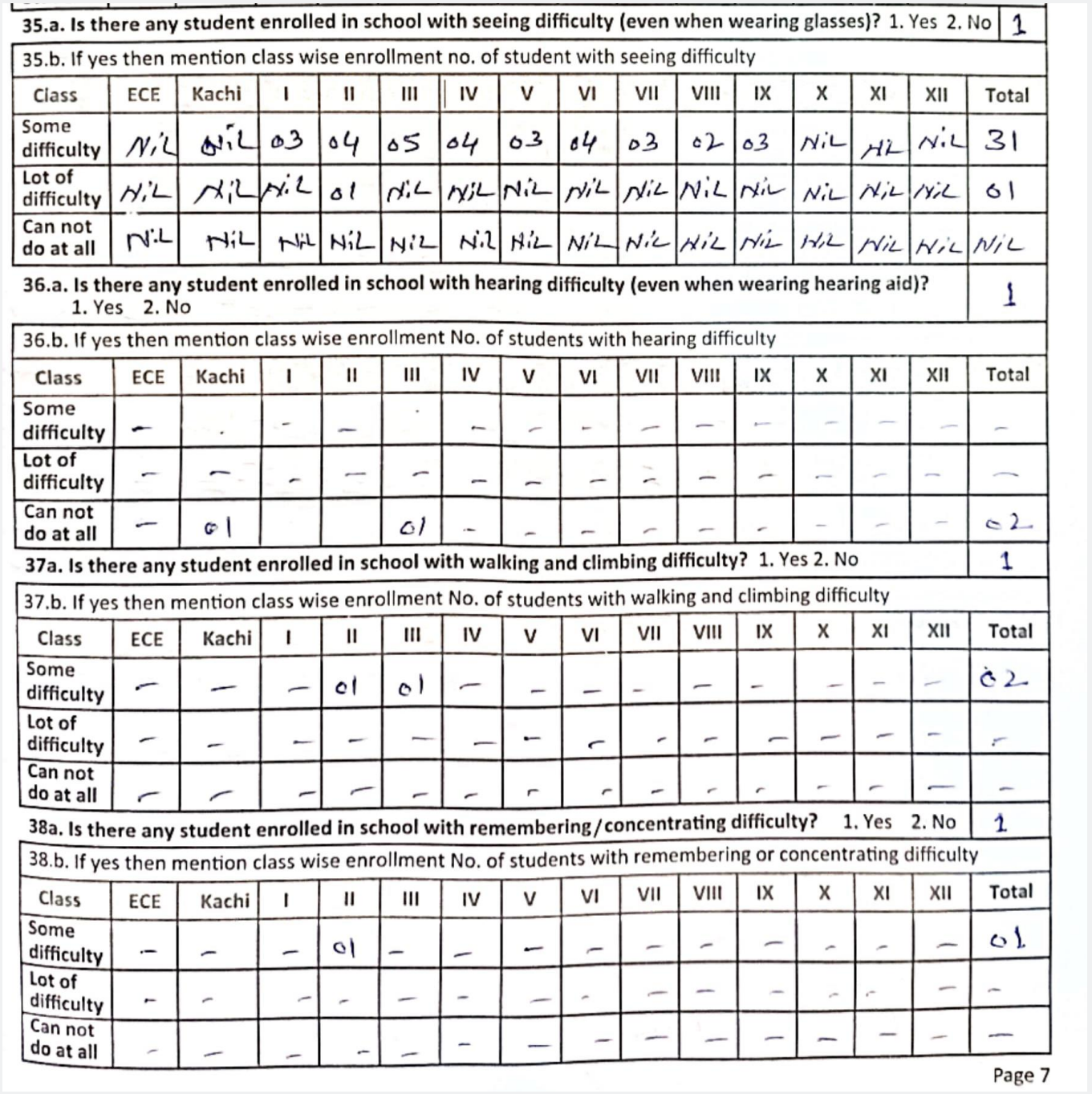
- Acceptance of the importance and value of collecting disability data, and appreciation of the government initiative to do so.

However, frustration with inadequate preparation:

- Short timelines, not well-aligned with the main ASC activities.
- Technical challenges in ASC forms.
- Cascading of training and documentation was limited.
- Substantial provincial variations in data collection implementation

Findings

Example ASC form: Sindh Province



35.a. Is there any student enrolled in school with seeing difficulty (even when wearing glasses)? 1. Yes 2. No — 1

35.b. If yes then mention class wise enrollment no. of student with seeing difficulty

Class	ECE	Kachi	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	Total
Some difficulty	Nil	Nil	03	04	05	04	03	04	03	02	03	Nil	Nil	Nil	31
Lot of difficulty	Nil	Nil	Nil	01	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	01
Can not do at all	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

36.a. Is there any student enrolled in school with hearing difficulty (even when wearing hearing aid)? 1. Yes 2. No — 1

36.b. If yes then mention class wise enrollment No. of students with hearing difficulty

Class	ECE	Kachi	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	Total
Some difficulty	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lot of difficulty	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Can not do at all	-	01			01	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	02

37a. Is there any student enrolled in school with walking and climbing difficulty? 1. Yes 2. No — 1

37.b. If yes then mention class wise enrollment No. of students with walking and climbing difficulty

Class	ECE	Kachi	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	Total
Some difficulty	-	-	-	01	01	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	02
Lot of difficulty	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Can not do at all	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

38a. Is there any student enrolled in school with remembering/concentrating difficulty? 1. Yes 2. No — 1

38.b. If yes then mention class wise enrollment No. of students with remembering or concentrating difficulty

Class	ECE	Kachi	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	Total
Some difficulty	-	-	-	01	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	01
Lot of difficulty	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Can not do at all	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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Findings

Teachers play a crucial role in the collection of functional difficulty data, based on their knowledge of the children they teach:

- They are not typically involved in collection of other ASC data.
- Training and guidance was not adequately cascaded to teachers.
- Teachers found the work burdensome, and requested more support.

Teachers and school stakeholders were demotivated by the lack of feedback based on the data submitted:

- Disappointed in lack of follow-up regarding the support needs of children with disabilities.
- Suggested ASC forms should collect more actionable data on schools' specific needs (infrastructure, aids, referrals).

Findings

Across different contexts, teachers highlighted a need for broader actions to strengthen disability-inclusive education:

- They need additional training on disability-inclusive education.
- Schools need access to resources to support disability-inclusion.
- Disability stigma and discrimination remains a substantial problem in schools, families and communities.

Findings ASC prevalence estimates are low

Province	Data source: ASC and MICS (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey)	Children with functional difficulty per 10 000			
		Vision	Hearing	Mobility	Cognition
Balochistan	**ASC 2023/24**	**9**	**4**	**7**	**15**
	MICS 2019/20*	230	20	1 730	--
KPK	**ASC 2023/24**	**--**	**1**	**1**	**0**
	MICS 2018/19*	30	30	320	--
Punjab	**ASC 2023/24**	**4**	**3**	**3**	**38**
	Singal et al, 2020	50	10	10	10
	MICS 2017/18*	20	20	260	--
Sindh	**ASC 2023/24**	**2**	**0**	**1**	**5**
	Somani et al, 2020	105	66	158	350
	MICS 2018/19*	40	10	660	--

Singal, N., et al (2020), International Journal of Inclusive Education 24(13): 1410-1430 – ASER 2015; 5-16y

Somani, R. et al (2020). Global Health Action, 14(1) – Hyderabad; Grade 7 children

*MICS figures are for children aged 5-17 attending school; cognition data is not comparable

Findings

Data analysis and use

- Analysis and use of data at provincial level has been limited and is variable across provinces.
  - Guidance on analysis and reporting did not reach relevant stakeholders.
- Only one provincial ASC report covered WGSS data fully, and reported on other DSF disability indicators.
- Additional work to support data analysis and reporting will be crucial for data use.

Conclusions

Inclusion of the WG-SS questions in the ASC is an opportunity to generate data and the evidence needed for inclusive education in Pakistan.

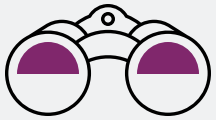
Future ASC disability data collection can be strengthened by:

- Stronger integration of disability data collection with a broader ASC.
- Capacity building among authorities and stakeholders, enumerators and teachers.
- Stronger quality control and feedback mechanisms.

Conclusions

Additional activities at multiple system levels are essential for inclusive education:

- Data is crucial, but addressing it in isolation is insufficient (and ineffective).



Ongoing analysis will provide further insight:

- Variations in functional difficulty levels across schools and different groups of children.
- Reasons for variations in data at all levels, and implications for data interpretation.
- Strategies to strengthen future data collection, analysis and use.

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