Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy (JSSRP)

Understanding Stakeholders' Knowledge and Attitudes Towards Inclusive Sports Practices in Peshawar, Pakistan: A Qualitative, Multi-Stakeholder Study

Khush Bakht
Institute of Education and Research, University of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Cite This Article: Bakht, K. (2026). Understanding Stakeholders' Knowledge and Attitudes Towards Inclusive Sports Practices in Peshawar, Pakistan: A Qualitative, Multi-Stakeholder Study. *Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy. 4 (01), 1142-1150.*
DOI: https://doi.org/10.71327/jssrp.41.1142.1150

ISSN: 3006-6557 (Online)
ISSN: 3006-6549 (Print)

Vol. 4, **No.** 1 (2026)
Pages: 1142-1150

Key Words:
Inclusive sports; coaching attitudes; Disability inclusion; sports policy; Stakeholder triangulation; Peshawar; Pakistan

Corresponding Author:
Khush Bakht
Email: khushisaeed24@gmail.com

License:

Abstract: *This study explores the knowledge, attitudes, experiences, and challenges of multiple stakeholders regarding inclusive sports practices in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Inclusion in sport requires a wider network of administrators, athletes and policymakers, who all have different experiences and patterns of sport inclusion. Four stakeholder groups, consisting of six coaches, two sports administrators, two athletes with disabilities, and one sports policymaker, were interviewed using a qualitative descriptive design. Themes were identified through the application of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach, and then triangulated across stakeholders. The attitudes of coaches were found to be positive, and that they primarily had experience-based (informal) knowledge rather than formal training. Respondents explained their views about institutional engagement that includes dedicated annual budgeting, an accessibility initiative that began in 2022, and large-scale adapted sports events. The policy maker singled out the lack of an institutional campaign for the rights of people with disabilities in the provincial decision making process as the main structural deficit and suggested a reserved seat in the Assembly as well as a low to national competition pathway. The study concludes that there is a push for inclusion in the sports landscape of Peshawar, but that there are areas where there are still weaknesses in coaching attentiveness, the availability of fair equipment and political representation, which are impeding lived experience on the ground. Approaches recommended are formal coach training, reserving a representation policy for persons with disabilities, extending the competition pathway and making accessibility standards more enforceable.*

Introduction

Inclusive sports practices aim to give equal opportunity to everyone, including individuals with disabilities, to take part in sport and physical activity. Sport is not just a physical activity in inclusive education, but it is also seen as a medium through which to learn social interaction, confidence and belonging (Fitzgerald & Stratford, 2021). However, coaches cannot solely be responsible for achieving true inclusion. It is reliant on a larger system of stakeholders (sport administrators, who oversee the facilities and budgets; disabled athletes who are experiencing the reality of inclusion; and policy makers,

who have the power to influence the rules and resources available at a provincial level).

Coaches' knowledge and attitudes play a pivotal role in the way programmes are accessible and inclusive and institutional decisions around accessibility, transport and budgeting have a part to play in whether coaches' goodwill can manifest itself in real opportunity. The lived experiences of the athletes demonstrate if these efforts are being felt on the ground and policymakers' perspectives will influence the trajectory of inclusive sport provincially and nationally over time. Based on feedback from the experts who reviewed this study, the scope of this study was expanded to investigate the views of a sports administrator, athletes with disabilities and sports policymaker in addition to the six coaches.

Many coaches lack adequate knowledge or training in inclusive sports practice; administrators face logistical and resource constraints even where budgets exist; athletes report inconsistent attention and continuing access barriers; and policymakers highlight a lack of dedicated representation for persons with disabilities in decision-making. Limited researches examined these interconnected perspectives together particularly in Pakistan. This present paper addresses that gap by exploring all four (4) stakeholder groups for the purpose to support more coordinated, evidence-based improvements to inclusive sports practice in Peshawar.

The study was guided by four research questions, addressed respectively to coaches, an administrator, athletes, and a policymaker: (1) What is the knowledge, attitude, and challenges of coaches regarding inclusive sports practices? (2) What is a sports administrator's institutional perspective on managing and resourcing inclusive sports programmes? (3) What is the lived experience of an athlete with a disability regarding access, coaching attention, and support? (4) What is a policymaker's perspective on the barriers to, and future direction of, inclusive sports policy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

Literature Review

Inclusive Sport is the deliberate design of sports settings to include people with all levels of ability to join in together. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) defines participation in sport as a basic right, and scholars differentiate between the two concepts of integration, which involves adding people with disabilities into the sport programmes, and inclusion, which involves changing the sport structures and attitudes (DePauw & Gavron, 2005). The present study is based on two theoretical frameworks. The Social Model of Disability (Oliver, 1996) emphasises that the barriers to disability are social and environmental, and so responsibility for adaptation falls with the coach, institutions and policy, not with the athlete. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control shape coaches' intentions to include athletes with disabilities, and has been widely used to examine coaches' self-efficacy in this area (Haegele & Sutherland, 2015).

International research shows that while coaches often recognise the concept of inclusion, many lack the technical knowledge to adapt training or assess athlete ability (Aydin, 2014; Rimmer et al., 2016). Attitudes toward athletes with disabilities are generally positive but tempered by uncertainty about instructional strategy, and are shaped by prior exposure: coaches with more experience of disabled athletes tend to be more accepting (Bacı & Çakır, 2024; Martin & Kulinna, 2020). Commonly reported barriers include insufficient resources, time constraints, limited administrative support, and fear of injuring athletes (Kudlacek et al., 2017), while inclusion policy internationally has tended to concentrate on elite disability sport rather than grassroots participation.

Training and professional development research suggests that early, practical exposure to inclusive-education content fosters durable inclusive mindsets among coaching students (Duhe et al., 2025), and that continuing professional development improves coaches' self-efficacy, though funding and

scheduling constraints limit uptake (Hanrahan & Carless, 2018; Morley et al., 2020). At the policy level, studies of frameworks such as Australia's Seven Pillars of Inclusion find that coaches often adapt or only partially implement formal policy to fit local organisational culture (Hammond, 2022), and UNESCO (2020) recommends mainstreaming inclusion across sport governance rather than relegating it to separate disability-specific bodies.

In Pakistan, the inclusive sport movement is a fledgling one. Rehman and Awan (2021) identified some of the previously identified issues by studying existing literature on physical education departments; teachers are aware of the importance of inclusion, but feel unprepared to teach in inclusive settings, infrastructure is not always accessible, and adaptive equipment is expensive. Similar studies conducted in India and Bangladesh also reveal low levels of formal coaching education among school coaches and ongoing dependence on community and non-governmental coaching provision (Rahman et al., 2019; Singh & Kumar, 2020), indicating a lack of system support in coach education, infrastructure and policy in South Asia.

Combining the literature reveals four gaps that motivate this study: Localised empirical studies with coaches, the institutional perspective, and the policy perspective, that connect the three; Limited integration of the three perspectives with the athlete's lived experience; Limited investigation of the policy-practice gap, with rhetorical commitment to including athletes, but without resourcing, monitoring, or representation; and Limited evidence of interdisciplinary collaboration between coaches, administrators, policymakers and the athletes they serve. This study is unique in this regard, as it seeks to incorporate first-hand voices along the entire stakeholder value chain in view of addressing these gaps.

Methodology

Research Design

In this paper a qualitative approach was used. Descriptive, multi-stakeholder design, appropriate for exploring stakeholders' views, experiences, and opinions in their natural settings rather than measuring them numerically. As in this paper multi-stakeholder scope adopted through expert reviewers feedback that recommends a triangulated approach capturing multiple vantage points rather than coaches alone.

Population and Sample

The population included coaches, administrators, athletes with disabilities, and sports policymakers from sports programmes in Peshawar; total population in Peshawar City was found to be around fifty coaches across various sports in Peshawar City, and a few administrators, registered athletes with disabilities, and provincial-level policymakers were found in Peshawar City. A purposive sample of nine participants was drawn across four stakeholder groups: six coaches (four male, two female; C1–C6), two sports administrators affiliated with the Directorate of Sports, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (AD1, AD2), two athletes with a disability (A1, A2), and one sports policymaker holding the position of Director, Establishment of Sports (P1). Participants were selected based on availability, experience, and willingness to participate.

Instruments and Procedure

Four separate semi-structured interview guides were used, one for each stakeholder group, each built around open-ended questions covering knowledge and understanding, attitudes and experience, challenges, and recommendations. The coaches' guide contained ten questions; the administrator, athlete, and policymaker guides each contained five. Interviews lasted between 15 and 45 minutes depending on stakeholder group, were conducted face-to-face, by phone, or by voice message, and were recorded with consent before being transcribed; interviews conducted in Urdu with the

administrator and athlete participants were translated into English by the researcher. Participants were assured of confidentiality and informed that their responses would be used for academic purposes only.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: reading each interview carefully, highlighting important statements, generating short codes for similar ideas, grouping codes into themes and sub-themes within each stakeholder group, and finally comparing themes across the four groups to build a cross-stakeholder synthesis.

Results

Coaches (C1–C6)

All six coaches reported having some knowledge about inclusive sports, but they had acquired knowledge primarily through personal experience, three having learned through personal experience, one via an embassy event, one via a course they took in England, and one via workshops and online material.

> *"We have not done any official course, but with time and experience we learned how to include special athletes." — C1*

All six coaches had positive, athlete-centred attitudes, with three reporting some first-hand experience of modifying sessions for partially deaf, visually impaired or wheelchair users (by changing signals or the length of fields etc.).

> *"We keep the environment friendly and loving so that disabled athletes don't feel different." — C3*

All participants agreed that facilities were inadequate and that no official government policy or dedicated training course for inclusive sport existed in Pakistan, with some also noting that parental fear or student hesitancy limited participation.

> *"We don't have ramps, wheelchairs or special equipment." — C4*

Coaches recommended government-run training courses and workshops, dedicated funding, national inclusion policy, and multidisciplinary teams of doctors, physiotherapists, and psychologists to support athletes with disabilities.

> *"We need adaptive courses and financial help to build better facilities." — C5*

Sports Administrators (AD1, AD2)

AD1 and AD2, affiliated with the Directorate of Sports, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, provided an institutional, budget-and-infrastructure-level account. Disabled sports are included every year in the Directorate's annual Planning Commission (PC-1) budgeting process, with a dedicated allocation covering roughly 36 to 38 adapted games, including Bocce, Archery, Wheelchair Cricket, Standing Cricket, Blind Cricket, and Athletics.

> *"Our Directorate always includes disabled sports in its annual planning, with a specific amount allocated for persons with different abilities." — AD1*

Administrators described inclusive sport as a core departmental purpose, with a stated priority of holding dedicated events for athletes with disabilities twice a year; a February event at Kohat Sports Complex drew 400 athletes, about 350 of them wheelchair users, for which the entire complex was made accessible. A province-wide accessibility initiative, adding ramps and adapted washrooms across sports complexes, began in 2022.

> *"In February we had an event at Kohat Sports Complex with 400 athletes, of whom about 350 were on wheelchairs. We made the entire sports complex accessible for it." — AD2*

The main reported challenge was logistics: transporting athletes required specially equipped vehicles, each accompanied by four to five volunteers, alongside provision of kits, tracksuits, allowances, and prizes. Administrators noted that four to five athletes with disabilities now attend daily athletics practice, including one who recently won an international medal.

> *"We are happy that now four to five disabled athletes come daily to our athletics track for running practice." — AD1*

Athletes with a Disability (A1, A2)

A1, a wheelchair-using athlete with over a decade of intermittent involvement in competitive sport, and A2, a wheelchair cricket player, provided first-hand accounts that complicate the administrators' institutional picture. A1 first joined a sports complex in 2009, experienced a 16-year gap following an accident, and returned after a senior coach visited his home to invite him back.

> *"A coach came to my home and asked what I was doing now. I said I was free, so he said come back and play with us, for our team." — A1*

A1 described a quieter, structural form of exclusion: longer waits for access to playing tables reserved for "professional players," and coaches who, in his account, focused more on athletes' personal lives than on coaching itself.

> *"They say these are for professional players, so we ask are we not players?" — A1*

A1 reported that a single access step at his sports complex went unaddressed for seventeen years, until athletes protested in 2024, after which it was removed — a concrete, dated counterpoint to the administrators' account of a 2022 province-wide accessibility initiative.

> *"There used to be one step here that had been there for seventeen years. We protested, and after that it was finally filled in." — A1*

A1 identified coaching attention, rather than equipment, as the single biggest barrier, but also described an informal practice in which coaches stock and resell equipment such as rackets to athletes at high markup; A1 personally paid approximately PKR 52,000 for a custom racket to remain competitive.

> *"These people buy and stock rackets for themselves and then sell them at expensive rates. I had my own racket made for 52,000." — A1*

Asked what single form of support would help most, athletes pointed not to training, equipment, or policy, but to attention and acknowledgment.

> *"A special person needs attention. You just look at them and smile, and they become happy, and their whole day goes well." — A2*

A1 also reflected on the difference between being called a "disabled person" in Pakistan and a "special person" abroad, suggesting that language itself shapes the attention and dignity afforded to athletes with disabilities.

> *"If someone chose the word special, there must be a reason — that is what we need too." — A1*

Sports Policymaker (P1)

P1 confirmed that dedicated institutes for athletes with disabilities exist in every province, with specific funds and facilities including provisions for wheelchair users and blind athletes, citing a recent world championship win by Pakistani blind athletes as evidence of the existing system's capability at the elite level.

> *"There are particular institutes for these special athletes in every province, with specific funds and playing facilities including wheelchair and blind athletes. Pakistani blind athletes won the world cup this year." — P1*

P1 identified the central obstacle as a lack of institutional priority for athletes with disabilities relative to able-bodied professional athletes, and, more specifically, the absence of dedicated representation for persons with disabilities within legislative and policymaking bodies, arguing that a policymaker who is themselves disabled would better represent the community's needs.

> *"People only think of pro athletes, they do not think for special athletes; there is no priority for special athletes. There should be minority seats for special athletes in the assembly, because a special policymaker will know more about special athletes." — P1*

P1's central recommendation was the creation of reserved assembly seats for policymakers with disabilities, paired with public awareness campaigns, and a long-term vision of a tiered competition pathway using the province's seven regional offices to move athletes from local to national-level competition.

> *"Our vision is to give them more chances in the year so they can play tournaments more and more. I suggest we start their games from low to national level." — P1*

Cross-Stakeholder Synthesis

Comparing the four stakeholder groups reveals both convergence and divergence in how inclusive sport is understood and experienced in Peshawar (Table 1).

Table 1. Cross-stakeholder comparison of themes

Theme	Coaches (C1–C6)	Administrators (AD1, AD2)	Athletes (A1, A2)	Policymaker (P1)
Knowledge source	Mostly informal / experience-based	Institutional / departmental planning (PC-1)	Personal, lived experience since 2009	Provincial policy and elite-tournament awareness
Attitude toward inclusion	Positive, athlete-centred	Framed as core departmental duty	Mixed — welcomed in principle, inconsistent in practice	Positive, but frames representation as the missing piece
Main barrier identified	Lack of training, facilities, policy	Logistics of transporting athletes	Coaching attention and equipment cost/exploitation	Lack of political representation for persons with disabilities
Recommendation	Formal training courses, government policy	Continued budget allocation, accessibility upgrades	More attention and recognition, not just resources	Reserved assembly seats, low-to-national tournament pathway

The most striking difference is between what administrators say about the progress made in institutions (province-wide accessibility since 2022, large dedicated events, budgeted equipment, etc.) and what athletes say about a 17-year-old access barrier only lifted with protest in 2024; and the lack of consistency in coaching attention continues. This implies that while institutional policy and budget commitment is an important first step, it is not necessarily a reflection of athletes' day-to-day

experience, highlighting the policy-practice disconnect in the literature.

A convergence also became apparent, one that was described by athletes as a need for recognition and attention, as well as a need for material resources, and by the policymaker as a need for dedicated political representation so that concerns are represented. Coaches and administrators, on the other hand, saw the deficit entirely in terms of training and equipment. Practical (training, facilities, funding) and relational and representational (attention, dignity, political voice) are two aspects of an extended, inclusive sports policy that should be given consideration within Peshawar.

Discussion

These findings extend prior research on coaches' knowledge and attitudes (Aydin, 2014; Bacı & Çakır, 2024) by situating coaches within a wider stakeholder chain. Coaches' intentions to include were also reported as positive, but were not supported by high levels of perceived behavioural control, consistent with previous research in Turkey (Aydin, 2014) and Europe (Rimmer et al. 2016) which reported a similar pattern where coaches' positive attitudes did not match high levels of perceived behavioural control.

Contrary to the general perception in the regional literature that the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is in the stage of neglecting policy development (Rehman & Awan, 2021), meaningful investment is going on in the province through the process of dedicated budget allocation, creating accessibility infrastructure and organising large-scale events. Yet, the Social Model of Disability's key tenet, that barriers arise from environment and institutions not from impairment (Oliver, 1996), is retained in the areas where there may be a formal commitment on the part of institutions to be inclusive, despite a 17-year-old barrier and an informal, exploitative equipment market.

The policymaker's focus on the lack of representation of persons with disability in decision making bodies is consistent with UNESCO's (2020) call on mainstreaming disability inclusion in sport rather than as a parallel and separate organisation. In the context of the athletes' focus on attention and recognition, this indicates that representation and relational attentiveness are two ways of the same lack: the lack of the voice of the disabled person, in the policy arena or in the day-to-day coaching relationship. The international coach attitude literature reviewed above, which concentrates on training and resourcing, is relatively lacking of this relational dimension – a contribution of this multi-stakeholder design

Conclusion and Recommendations

Inclusive sport in Peshawar is not the product of a single group's willingness or unwillingness; it is the outcome of interaction between four groups whose experiences do not always align. Coaches are motivated and empathetic; the administrators' institution has made genuine, budgeted, dated progress on accessibility and dedicated events; the policymaker recognises systemic gaps in political representation; yet athletes' own accounts show that these efforts have not yet closed the gap between policy and daily lived experience. Knowledge is informal among coaches but institutionalised among administrators and the policymaker, and experiential and hard-won for athletes; attitudes are broadly positive across all four groups; and challenges range from training gaps and logistics to inconsistent attention, equipment costs, and a lack of political representation.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that: (1) regular training programmes and certification courses on inclusive coaching, safety and adaptive methods should be organised by universities, sport boards and government departments; (2) sport curricula in universities and schools should include content on inclusive sport; (3) consistency of accessibility audits be implemented, building on the 2022 initiative, which should permit athletes to report non-solved barriers without the need to protest; (4) dedicated seats or provision of an advisory seat with provincial sport offices should be created for

persons with disabilities in the provincial sport governance; (5) a structured and tiered competition pathway should be organised using provincial sport offices, with inclusive-sport content; (6) formal provision or subsidy of adaptive equipment to reduce the informal resale of adaptive equipment; (7) relational and attentiveness training of coaches should be implemented, alongside technical training; (8) multi-disciplinary support teams, combining coaches, physiotherapists, doctors and psychologists; (9) public awareness programmes on the existence of persons with disabilities in sport; (10) further research with larger sample sizes of administrators, athletes, and sport policymakers, ideally using mixed methods to track how training and policy changes

When these goals of coaching training, institutional accessibility, athlete-centred attentiveness and policy representation are implemented together and not in isolation, Peshawar's sports institutions can be models of inclusion and not of its representation.

Limitations

Due to time and access limitations, one individual was contacted for the policymaker category instead of the two that was originally intended. Interviews with the administrators and athlete participants were conducted in Urdu and translated into English by the researcher, where interpretation may add a little nuance to the translation but not be significant. The findings are not meant to be statistically generalisable, but provide a detailed account, informed by triangulation, of the nature of inclusive sport in this particular context and place, Peshawar..

References

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 50(2), 179–211.

Aydin, M. (2014). Assessing knowledge levels of secondary school physical education and sports teachers about inclusive education. Educational Research and Reviews, 9(21), 1115–1124.

Bacı, A., & Çakır, Z. (2024). Investigation of coaches' attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities. The Online Journal of Recreation and Sports, 13(3), 277–287.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101.

Cregan, K., Bloom, G. A., & Reeves, C. W. (2019). Coaches' experiences of athletes with a disability: A review of qualitative literature. International Journal of Coaching Science, 13(2), 45–60.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

DePauw, K., & Gavron, S. (2005). Disability and sport (2nd ed.). Human Kinetics.

Duhe, E. D. P., Haryanto, A. I., Hadjarati, H., & Kadek, I. (2025). Stepping into a world of inclusion: Sports coaching education students' perspectives on inclusive education. In Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Education Innovation (ICEI 2024). Atlantis Press.

Fitzgerald, H., & Stratford, B. (2021). Disability and youth sport (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Haegele, J. A., & Sutherland, S. (2015). Perspectives of students with disabilities toward physical education: A review of qualitative literature. Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly, 32(1), 60–82.

Hammond, A. M. (2022). The relationship between disability and inclusion policy and sports coaches' perceptions of practice. International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 14(3), 471–487.

Hanrahan, S. J., & Carless, D. (2018). Reflective practice for sport psychologists: Critical perspectives. Routledge.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Sports Policy. (2018). Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sports, Tourism, Archaeology, Museums & Youth Affairs Department.

Kudlacek, M., Ješina, O., Flint, A., & White, E. M. (2017). Attitudes of coaches toward athletes with disabilities in inclusive sports environments. European Journal of Adapted Physical Activity, 10(1), 20–33.

Magnanini, A. (2017). Inclusive coach between theory and practice. International Journal of Sport Culture and Science, 5(4), 364–374.

Martin, J. J., & Kulinna, P. H. (2020). Self-efficacy theory and physical education teachers: Influence on inclusive teaching. Physical Educator, 77(3), 621–637.

Morley, D., Bailey, R., & Tan, J. (2020). Inclusive physical education and coach professional development: Current literature and future directions. European Physical Education Review, 26(4), 732–749.

Oliver, M. (1996). Understanding disability: From theory to practice. Macmillan Press.

Rahman, M., Chowdhury, R., & Sultana, S. (2019). Challenges of inclusive physical education in Bangladesh: Teachers' perspectives. Asian Journal of Inclusive Education, 7(1), 51–66.

Rehman, M., & Awan, R. (2021). Teachers' perceptions about inclusive education in physical education classes in Pakistan. Pakistan Journal of Education, 38(2), 77–91.

Rimmer, J. H., Chen, M. D., McCubbin, J. A., Heller, T., & Peterson, J. J. (2016). Physical activity participation among persons with disabilities: Barriers and facilitators. American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 50(2), 258–268.

Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? Research in Nursing & Health, 23(4), 334–340.

Singh, S., & Kumar, R. (2020). Inclusive physical education in India: Present scenario and future challenges. Journal of Physical Education Research, 7(1), 1–10.

UNESCO. (2020). Quality physical education policy project: Promoting inclusive and equitable sport for all. UNESCO Publishing.

United Nations. (2006). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. United Nations.