



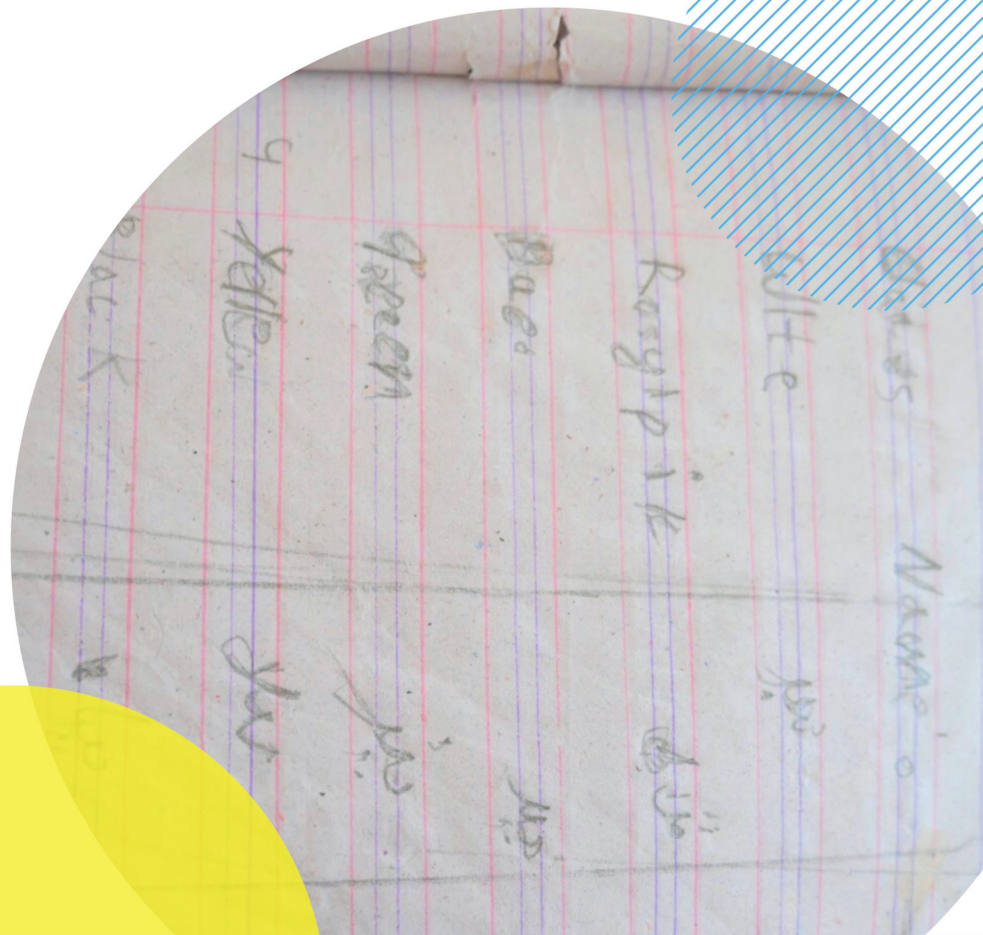
INTERNEE ENGAGEMENT FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

REPORT - 2024



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BACKGROUND

Learning difficulties are a cluster of symptoms that lead children to struggle with certain language skills, particularly reading, writing, and mathematics. It affects people throughout their lives, but its effects can vary at various stages of an individual's life. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there exists a notable lack of awareness among parents and the community regarding these challenges, as well as limited access to counseling services for identified students and formal assessment services for screening individuals with learning difficulties. The prevalence of Learning Difficulties in Pakistani public schools is notably high, estimated at 40%, surpassing the already concerning rates of 15% in South Asia (India, 2011) and the global average of 17%, highlighting the urgent need for increased awareness and support services. To address these challenges, the Implementation Support Unit - Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education (ISU-DoE&SE), under the Education Cannot Wait's Multi-Year Resilience Programme (ECW-MYRP), established a Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) comprising leading experts in psychology. This group collaboratively formulated recommendations to enhance interventions for children facing Learning Difficulties, aiming to scale up support services effectively. Following recommendations from SAG members and education department officials, ISU, with technical and financial support from UNICEF, initiated a program to employ fresh graduates as Psychologist Interns for providing support to teachers in districts Peshawar, Mansehra, and Kohat, specifically focusing on assisting students experiencing Learning Difficulties.

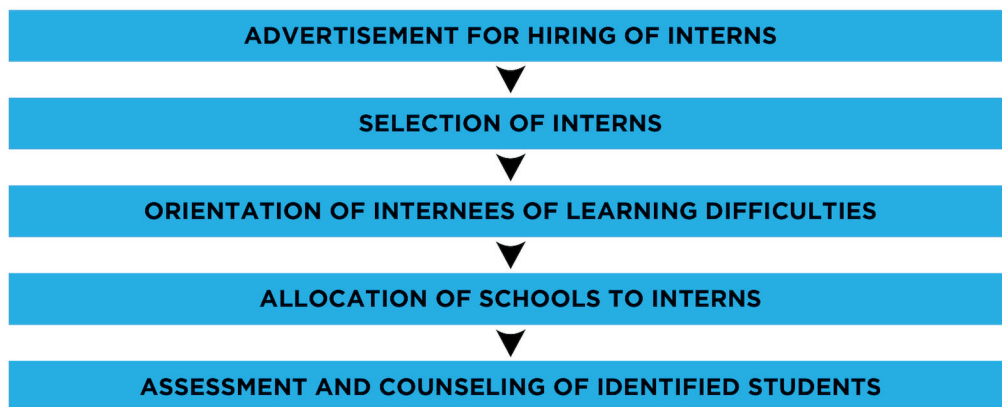


OBJECTIVES OF ENGAGING INTERNEES

- Interns will conduct comprehensive assessments at government schools to identify Learning Difficulties, including cognitive, academic, and socio-emotional factors.
- They will collaborate with psychologists and educators to develop and implement individualized intervention plans for students with Learning Difficulties.
- They will provide one-on-one counseling or support groups to help students cope with emotional and social challenges.
- They will coordinate with teachers, parents, and professionals to ensure a holistic approach to addressing Learning Difficulties.
- They will contribute to psychoeducational programs aimed at raising awareness and reducing stigma.
- They will engage in research projects to improve understanding of Learning Difficulties and enhance services provided to students.

METHODOLOGY

In close coordination with UNICEF, ISU-DoE&SE developed the following methodology for engagement of the Interns:



ADVERTISEMENT FOR HIRING OF INTERNS

In partnership with UNICEF, the ISU-DoE&SE strategically posted for Psychologist Intern positions on its official website and social media channels to enhance visibility and attract qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds.

SELECTION OF CANDIDATES

The ISU team efficiently conducted assessments and identified 100 prospective candidates who fulfilled the requirements and qualifications for the said positions. Following a thorough review of their academic backgrounds and expertise in Learning Difficulties, the panel selected 20 highly qualified candidates for further consideration.

ORIENTATION OF INTERNEES OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

An orientation session on the Learning Difficulties was conducted for newly appointed Interns to address prevailing teacher perceptions and practices concerning Learning Difficulties, particularly at the school level. The session aimed to achieve several distinct objectives:

- Impart comprehensive knowledge on identifying signs and symptoms associated with Learning Difficulties.
- Familiarize interns with the systematic process of screening students for potential Learning Difficulties.
- Provide practical guidance on effectively completing and scoring the Learning Difficulties screening tool for accurate assessment.
- Enhance interns' proficiency in identifying children experiencing Learning Difficulties using the appropriate scale.
- Emphasize the importance of maintaining utmost data confidentiality throughout the data collection process to preserve the integrity of sensitive information.

Overall, the orientation session was designed to equip Interns with the knowledge and tools necessary to better support students experiencing Learning Difficulties, thereby fostering a more inclusive and nurturing learning environment within their schools.



ALLOCATION OF SCHOOLS TO INTERNS

A total of 200 schools, including 75 boys' schools and 125 girls' schools, were allocated to Interns from Districts Mansehra, Peshawar, and Kohat. Selection criteria were based on a high prevalence of Learning Difficulties, as identified in a previous quantitative study done by ISU-DoE&SE. Schools were chosen specifically for their notably elevated incidence of Learning Difficulties compared to others.

ASSESSMENT AND COUNSELING OF IDENTIFIED STUDENTS

During their visits, Interns conducted detailed assessments with the students including interviews, administering various tests to gauge their cognitive abilities, and evaluating their motivation and personality traits. An orientation session was also conducted with school teachers by the Interns to brief them on Learning Difficulties and addressing such issues. During school visits, the Interns identified 2000 students facing Learning Difficulties and provided preliminary counseling and support to the same. The Interns then visited their assigned schools on a weekly basis to provide continued support to identified students.





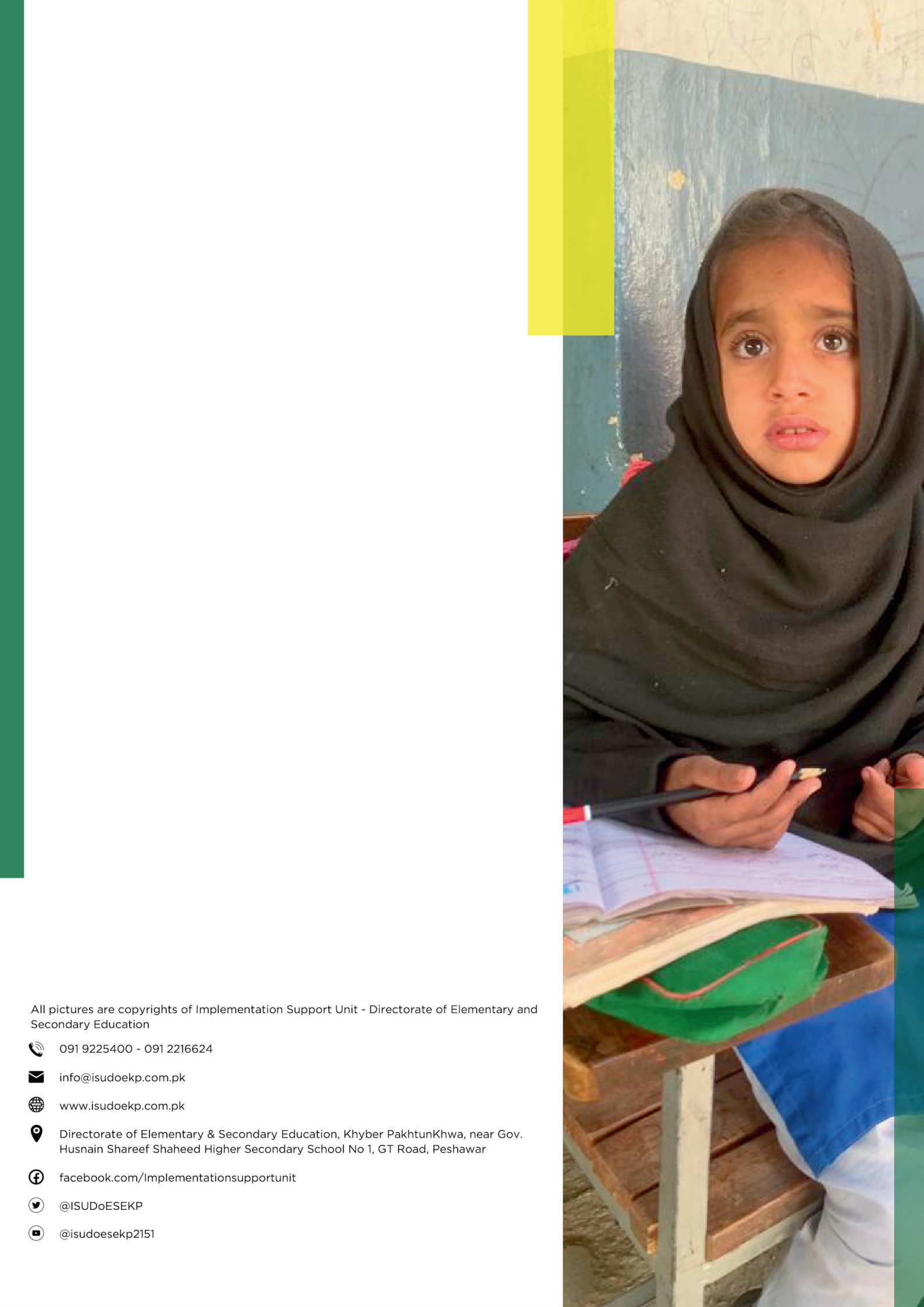
IMPACT

The Interns visiting schools have had a significant positive impact on the well-being of students. They have been able to provide support for students with Learning Difficulties and mental health issues, offer counseling services, and implement interventions to address behavioral problems. As per initial observations, these Interns have helped improve academic performance by identifying and addressing Learning Difficulties, providing strategies for studying, and promoting a positive learning environment. They have also supported teachers in understanding and managing diverse student needs, implementing effective classroom management strategies, and fostering positive relationships with students facing learning difficulties.

In addition, the engaged Interns have facilitated communication between schools and parents, providing guidance on parenting strategies, and offering support for families facing challenges. Lastly, they have contributed to creating a positive school climate by promoting inclusivity, addressing issues such as bullying and discrimination, and fostering a sense of belonging among students with and without Learning Difficulties.

CONCLUSION


In conclusion, the role of Psychologist Interns in supporting students with Learning Difficulties and orienting government primary school teachers on these challenges and mental health issues is pivotal in creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment. By providing specialized assistance to students facing Learning Difficulties, the Interns empower them to overcome obstacles and reach their full potential. Simultaneously, equipping teachers with the knowledge and tools to recognize, understand, and accommodate diverse learning needs fosters a more inclusive classroom culture where every student can thrive. This approach not only benefits individual students but also strengthens the overall educational system, promoting equality, empathy, and academic success for all. It is through such concerted efforts that we can truly make a meaningful difference in the lives of students with Learning Difficulties, ensuring that they receive the support and opportunities they deserve to succeed in their academic journey and beyond.



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 091 9225400 - 091 2216624

 info@isudoekp.com.pk

 www.isudoekp.com.pk

 Directorate of Elementary & Secondary Education, Khyber PakhtunKhwa, near Gov. Husnain Shareef Shaheed Higher Secondary School No 1, GT Road, Peshawar

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