

Understanding Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in School from the Eyes of Parents' of Children without Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Schools reflect the attitudes, stereotypes, cultural and social practices prevalent in the society at large. As a miniature society, school may be perceived as representing what exists or may be lacking in the larger society. As a learning community, school has students, parents, educational administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff and local significant adults as its members. The most active and contributing members of this learning community i.e. school are everyone listed earlier, except the parents and the local significant adults. The parents are rarely asked their opinion about the practices and policies adopted in the school, despite them being the major financial contributors, in school, except for government run schools, complying RTE Act 2009. Within the communities of parents and students, the students with disabilities and their parents were the most marginalized. The parents of children without disabilities may or may not be aware of the situations faced by them. In an inclusive society, distribution of resources and opportunities should be equity based and each member should be active partner and collaborator in the progress of the other members.

With this background the present paper studies the perception of parents of children without disabilities towards the inclusive schools and their willingness to make their child attend the same class as the child with disabilities. The data was collected through survey and parents opinion with respect to inclusion of children with disabilities in the school, was studied keeping in mind their educational status, gender and profession. The findings indicated that more mothers as compared to fathers were involved in the education of children, majority of the responding parents were in favor of inclusive schools, a small percentage of parents opined that they will drop the idea of getting their child admitted to nearby inclusive school and majority of the respondents were found to be aware that special needs may arise due to disabilities as well as disadvantages.

Key Words: *Children with Disabilities, Children without Disabilities, perception of parents*

INTRODUCTION

The scenario of education at present, is witnessing a gradual shift in the consciousness of educational planners, administrators and policy makers towards

realizing that special needs may not always be caused by the individual attributes of the child with disabilities rather the genesis of special needs may lie in the social and environmental factors, on which children

with disabilities have little or no control. This conscious realization has acted as foundation for inclusive education (Narumnachi & Bhargava 2011)¹. Inclusive education means a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities².

For an inclusive school working under inclusive education system catering to the needs of children with and without disabilities, the most important stakeholders in education are the parents. The group of parents constitutes both the parents of children with disabilities and parents of children without disabilities.

In various countries, inclusive education was advocated and started by parents of children with disabilities with the expectations and hope that presence of their children in the regular schools along with children without disabilities may gradually lead to their social inclusion, within the peer group (Anke de Boer, 2010)³. The research has indicated that children with disabilities in inclusive education settings face issue of acceptance by their peers without disabilities which might be influenced by parents' perception of children with disabilities and other factors related with disability conditions (Duhaney & Salend, 2000)⁴.

Peck et.al. (2004)⁵ studied parents' perception on the impact of inclusion on their children without disabilities and found that significant number of parents had unfavorable attitude towards inclusive education and expressed concern about loss of teacher time. Anke et. Al. (2010)³ studied the available literature review on parental perception and found that majority of the parents had either favorable or neutral attitude towards inclusive education. The factors like age, gender, socio-economic status, education level, experience with inclusive education and nature of disability influence parents' attitude and perception towards inclusive education. Hilbert (2014)⁶ studied perception of parents of young children with and without disabilities attending inclusive preschool programs and found that parents of children with disabilities were less likely to favor the inclusive education wherein children with severe disabilities such as behavior disorders and autism study along with children of other disabilities and children without disabilities.

Aim of the study

The present paper studies the perception of parents of children without disabilities towards the inclusive schools and their willingness to make their child attend the same class as the child with disabilities.

Methodology

Survey was used to gather opinion of parents, whose children were attending an aided primary school in Delhi. The parents were carefully chosen by the regular teachers without any interference by the researcher. These were not necessarily the parents of children who had child with disability in his/her class.

No. of survey sent=25

No of survey received back=17

General Information

The survey began with the collection of some general information like who was the responding parent (Father/Mother), educational qualification of parents, student’s name and class etc. the tables below summarizes the general information collected.

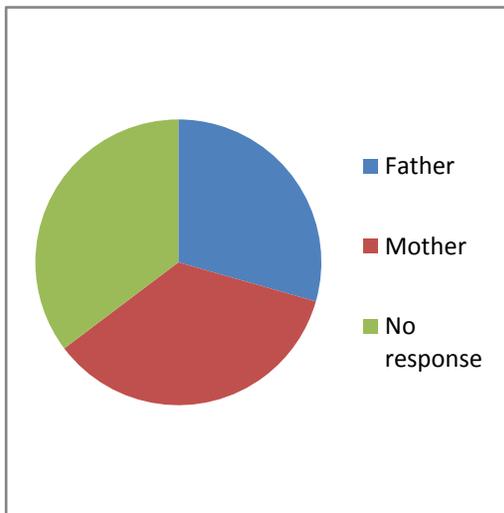


Figure 1: Responding Parent

The figure above indicates that 35 percent parents forgot to answer who was responding to the survey. The number of mothers and fathers responding to the survey was found to be almost equal.

Parent’s Qualification

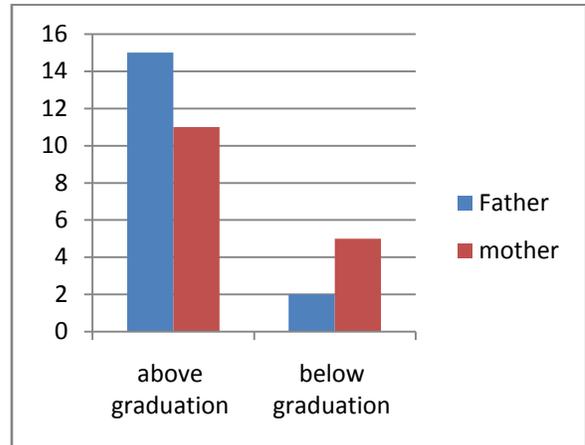


Figure 2: Responding parent’s qualification

The figure above revealed that number of non-graduate mothers was more than the fathers. The educational status of mother had a significant role in the education of child. Research has proved that educated mothers are more equipped to help in completing homework as well study for examinations, reducing behavior issues, having better attitude towards school and studies (Sutherland 2015⁷; Carneiro, Meghir, & Pary 2011⁸; Corwyn & Bradley, 2003⁹; Davis-Kean, 2005¹⁰; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997¹¹). Hence this information was sought from the parents.

Working Status of Parents

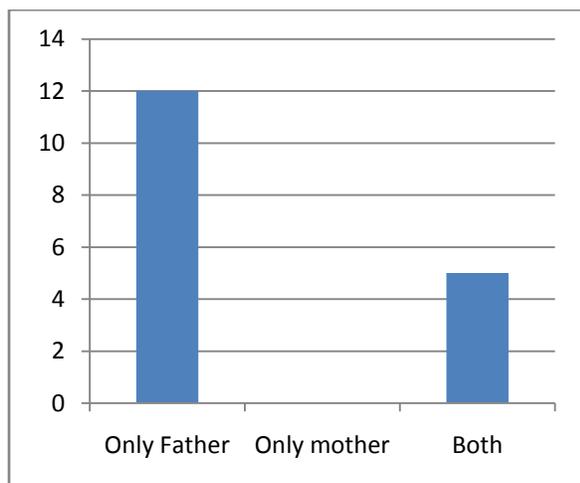


Figure 3: work 'to earn money' status of parents

This information was provided by every respondent. The majority mothers were house managers and didn't work outside the house, as in to earn money. No household with only mother working was reported.

Family Status

S. No.	Family Status	Frequency
1	Joint	5
2	Nuclear	12
3	Any other	--
4	No response	--

Table 1: Nature of Family

The school reflected society's trend of increasing nuclear families. The data analysis revealed that majority of children belonged to nuclear family. This reiterated the fact that responsibility of looking after the kids was predominantly with the parent

at home i.e. the mother. This involved the responsibility of academics also despite the fact that mothers might not be educationally very well off. Five out of 17 mothers were found to be non-graduate whereas only two fathers out of 17 were non-graduate.

Inference - The general information indicated that the survey forms were fairly distributed across the existing primary classes and their sections in the school, which in turn may be linked to the distribution of resources. As far as the involvement of parents in students look after was concerned mother's domination was apparent which might be due to their work status i.e. more mothers as compared to fathers were reported to stay at home.

The paragraph's below presents the item wise analysis of the parent's survey regarding their awareness about the general issues involving Inclusive education.

1. One day your child come back from school and tells you about a new admission in his/her class of a child who is visually impaired / speech and hearing challenged / Mentally challenged / uses crutches or calipers / from below poverty line. You will (choose as many as you like, and please number your choices)

S. No.	Response Options	Frequency
1	Appreciate the schools efforts to bring diversity in the classroom	14
2	Be worried about something "wrong" with the management/principal	3
3	Be afraid about the influence/effect on my child	2
4	Like to keep your child staying away from the new child	--
5	Not tolerate such nonsense and write a complaint letter to the principal	--
6	Make a decision to with draw your child from the school, if possible immediately	--
7	Any other (please Specify)	--

Table 2: Response analysis, survey item 1

The majority (82%) parents responded that they would appreciate the schools efforts to bring diversity in the classroom. The 12 percent of the responding parents were afraid that it would influence their children negatively whereas 18 percent parents opined that they would be worried about something being wrong with schools management. This indicated that the parents had positive attitude towards Inclusive Education.

2. You are researching about various schooling options available for your child and you find a good school near

your home which is like the dream school. You make up your mind to get your child admitted to that school; suddenly someone tells you about the schools policy to keep the children with special needs and other children together. You will(choose as many as you like, and please number your choices).

S. No.	Response options	Frequency	Remarks
1	Will try to find more information about the whole thing	11	Decision will not get affected(1)
2	Drop the idea of getting your child admitted to that school.	5	
3	Decide to have a talk with the school personal	3	
4	Get the child admitted to the school but will request the teachers to keep the child with special needs away from your child.	1	No relation of it with admission
5	Feel cheated, frustrated and shocked about the schools policies		
6	Any other (please Specify)		

Table 3: Response analysis, survey item 2

Parents chose more than one option but they didn't number their choices despite of clear instruction regarding this. A small percentage (29%) of parents responded that they would drop the idea of getting their child admitted to that school whereas 65% parents responded that they would try to find more information about the whole issue. Only one parent remarked that the decision about admission would not get affected whereas another parent opined that though admission decision would not get affected but he would request teachers to keep his child separate from child with challenges.

The data analysis for the first and the second question revealed a contradiction. If such an initiative was taken by the child's existing school, the parents appeared to be very supportive whereas if the situation occurred at the time of admission of the child to a formal school than the support became very thin. The data analysis for the second item revealed that majority parents would try to find more information about the entire issue.

3. A child with special needs is

S. No	Response options	Frequency	Remarks
1	Mentally Challenged	12	
2	Visually Impaired (VI)	11	
3	Speech and Hearing Impaired(handicapped)	10	

4	Slow Learner	8	
5	Learning Disabled	7	
6	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Child	6	
7	Having problem in learning	6	
8	Talented/gifted/creative/intelligent	5	
9	Disadvantaged section of society	5	
10	From economically weaker sector	3	
11	None of the above	--	
12	Any other please specify	--	
13	No response	1	

Table 4: Response analysis, survey item 3

59 % to 70% of the responding parents identified VI, speech and hearing impaired and MR as special child. 29% parents had identified children belonging to disadvantaged section of the society as well as talented/gifted children as a child with special needs. The response spread across all category of the CWSN indicated that parents had more or less some degree of awareness about the concept of child with special needs.

This was very interesting as despite being not very educated the parents had shown awareness about the concept.

4. I think it is a *good/bad* idea to keep children with special needs and other children together in the same class.

S. No.	Response Options	Frequency	Remarks
1	Good	10	
2	Bad	4	
3	Any other	1	Can be both good as well as bad
4	No response	2	

Table 5: Response analysis, survey item 4

The analysis of response justification had been done by content sifting. The table below presented the same -

S. No.	Response Justification	Frequency
1	Will facilitate becoming part and parcel of society	3
2	Opportunity to interact with diverse group	3
3	Other children will feel neglected	2
4	Equality in education will be achieved	2
5	Except for MR	1
6	My child may get distracted	1
7	Both group may get affected	1

Table 6: Response justification analysis, survey item 4

5. The 59 % of the responding parents opined that it was a good idea to make the children with and without challenges study together. Only one parent was indecisive about the whole issue whereas only 2 (12%) chose not to answer this question. Only 24% parents thought it was a bad idea to make the children with and without challenges study together in the same class.

The justification for favoring Inclusion involved the ideas that this would help them become part of society, children without challenges would get opportunity to interact with diverse group, and educational equality would be achieved. On the other hand the opinion against were based on the fear that children without challenges may--get affected, felt neglected or situation would be of no benefit to both the groups. Only one parent expressed that as far as MR children were not included the situation was acceptable. This might be due to the prevalent myth about MR and their portrayal in the media. Most of the laymen could not distinguish between mental impairment and mental illness.

5. Have you heard of any school which is teaching children with special needs and other children together in the same classroom(Y/N) if yes; please mention the name of the school along with the place i.e. whether it is in Delhi or outside Delhi?

S. No.	Response Options	Frequency	Remarks
1	Yes	2	Gyan Dham High School Vapi Gujraat
2	No	15	
3	Any other	--	
4	No response	--	

Table 7: Response justification analysis, survey item 5

The majority (88%) parents hadn't heard of any school which was practicing Inclusion, only two parents heard about such schools; from a friend who informed about one such school located outside Delhi, whereas other parent hadn't mentioned the details in this regard.

6. I have some experience of interacting with persons who are (You can choose more than one response).

S. No.	Response options	Frequency	Remarks
1	Slow Learner	6	
2	Talented/gifted/creative/intelligent	5	
3	Visually Impaired	4	
4	Speech and Hearing Challenged	4	
5	Mentally Challenged	4	
6	Learning Disabled	4	
7	Having problem in learning	4	
8	From economically weaker sector	3	
9	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Child	2	

S. No.	Response options	Frequency	Remarks
10	Disadvantaged section of society	1	
11	None of the above	3	
12	Any other please specify	--	
13	No response	3	

Table 8: Response justification analysis, survey item 6

Responding parents had opportunity to interact with almost all of the categories mentioned above yet the data table revealed that the majority had the opportunity to interact with the slow learners followed by talented/gifted. Equal number of parents had the opportunity to interact with the speech and hearing challenged, learning disabled, mentally challenged, visually impaired and with problem in learning. This opportunity to interact with persons with challenges might be the reason for responding parent's awareness about the concept of special needs.

7. The person mentioned above is/was

S. No.	Response Options	Frequency	Remarks
1	A neighbor	5	
2	An unknown person needing some assistance	5	
3	A friend	1	
4	A formal contact	2	
5	Any other (please specify)	3	Relative
6	No Response	6	

Table 9: Response justification analysis, survey item 7

The 35% of responding parents chose not to respond to this item which required them to provide detail about their interaction with the challenged person. 30 % parents had responded that the challenged person was a neighbor and equal number (30%) had informed that this was an unknown person in need of assistance.

8. If given a chance I would love to interact with persons who are

S. No	Response Options	Frequency	Remarks
1	Talented/gifted/creative/intelligent	7	
2	Visually Impaired	5	
3	Slow Learner	5	
4	From economically weaker sector	5	
5	Having problem in learning	4	
6	Speech and Hearing Challenged	3	
7	Mentally Challenged	3	
8	Learning Disabled	2	
9	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Child	1	
10	Disadvantaged section of society	1	
11	None of the above	--	
12	Any other please specify	--	
13	No response	2	

Table 10: Response justification analysis, survey item 8

As expected, if given a chance 41% of the responding parents would like to interact with the talented/gifted followed by visually impaired, economically weaker sections and slow learners (30%).

Inference : the parental perception survey aimed at judging parents awareness about the concept of special needs and their attitude towards Inclusive Education. The first was assessed through the item numbers 3, 5, 6 and 7 whereas the attitude was judged through item numbers 1, 2, 4 and 8.

The data analysis indicated that the parents had fairly good awareness about the concept of special needs despite of confusion about Inclusive Education. Responding parents were able to identify the children with special needs correctly from the list provided to them in item number 3 of the survey despite of their low educational status. Only two out of the 17 responding parents heard about a school in which challenged and non-challenged children were studying together. This showed that though the responding parents were familiar with the idea of special needs yet the majority were not aware of schools where both categories of children were studying together. Majority parents had some opportunity of interaction with the challenged persons, which had made them aware about special needs. This challenged person with whom the parents have had some opportunity to interact was not necessarily their relative or formal contact. From the data

analysis it could be safely assumed that the parents had some degree of awareness about the concept of special needs though they had no idea of Inclusive Education.

The data analysis revealed a very interesting fact as far as responding parent's attitude towards Inclusive Education was concerned. The data analysis for item number one indicated that parents supported Inclusion if the challenged child got admitted to their child's existing class but in item number two the same parents responded that while searching for a formal school for their child they would avoid Inclusive School though they might try to gather more information about the whole issue from the school authorities. Data analysis showed that though the majority parents thought that Inclusive Education was a good idea yet the justification provided by them for their choice hinted at their fears that their child might get influenced, or feel ignored in the class. The justification in favor of Inclusive Education was inspired by the ideal of bringing equality in education and better future prospects for everyone. The parents would prefer to interact with talented/gifted persons if given an opportunity. The data analysis revealed that parents support the idea of Inclusive Education and had positive attitude towards Inclusive Education as far as they were involved and kept informed about the whole process.

Conclusion :

Schools reflect the attitudes, stereotypes, cultural and social practices prevalent in the society at large. As a miniature society, school may be perceived as representing what exists or may be lacking in the larger society. As a community, school has students, parents, educational administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff and local significant adults as its members. Parents are the least active members of this community as far as academic decision making and its implementation is concerned. In any inclusive school, the parents of children without challenges are in majority and hence in situation to make their voice heard.

From the findings of the present paper, which was focused upon studying the opinion of parents, of children without challenges, about inclusion of children with disabilities in the school it can be concluded that more mothers as compared to fathers were involved in the education of children, majority of the responding parents were in favor of inclusive schools and were found to be aware of the fact that special needs may arise due to disabilities as well as disadvantages.

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