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RESEARCH PAPER

Community Participation with Schools: Towards Equitable and Inclusive Education for All Children with Special Needs

Mishal Fatima[1]   Dr. Ghulam Fatima*[2]   Ayesha Raza[3]

1. M.Phil. Institute of Special Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.
2. Associate Professor, Institute of Special Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Ph.D. Scholar, Institute of Special Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

| Corresponding Author | fatima.dse@pu.edu.pk |

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the community participation with schools, towards equitable and inclusive education for children with Special Needs. Quantitative method was used to collect data empirically through questionnaires. The researchers developed a questionnaire consisting of three sections and each section contained 12 items so questionnaire consisted of 36 items. The data was collected from 120 teachers of Sahiwal, Bahawalnagar and Lahore district. After this, percentages of responses were calculated through descriptive statistics using frequencies. The mean and standard deviation were also calculated. The research has shown the community participation towards equitable and inclusive education which resulted in creation of inclusive community where stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities (PWDs) do no longer have place. To effectively promote inclusive education all over the country and consequently create inclusive society, the Government of Pakistan, through its ministries in charge of education, local governance, and family protection should adopt, improve, and implement the community involvement considerations as revealed in this research.

Introduction

Inclusive education guarantees all disabled pupils and children a right to participate in all forms of mainstream education with appropriate support (UNCRPD, 2006). Making sure that all students receive fair treatment and equal opportunities is the goal of an inclusive learning environment. Student diversity and individuality should be valued in an inclusive learning environment without prejudice. The most effective strategy for educating disabled children is to place them in the least restrictive environment possible, which advocates to include disabled children in regular classrooms with their peers. In international scenario Salamanca Declaration has opened new avenues for special education (Nilholm, 2021).

To ensure quality and inclusive education, both within and outside the classroom, it is the key element to include parents and the community in schools. It is even more pertinent in the context of inclusive education, which goes well beyond formal education and this shouldn't just take place inside a classroom but outside the classroom. Inclusion provides them the opportunities for peer interaction (Haakma et.al, 2021). Children benefit from parents, community and schools working together such as: parents take interest in the child learning, parents spend more time with their child, try to overcome their challenges, are more attentive to their needs, and are more self-assured in their parenting

abilities. Teachers have a deeper appreciation for the diversity, accommodate teaching style according to their needs, feel more at ease at work, and consider them as a part of the class like other students. The handling difficulty in diverse group is also reported by researches (Aas, Uthus & Lohre, 2023). Schools tend increase their reputations in the community through involving parents and the community.

According to Willems and Gonzalez-DeHass (2012), school-community partnerships are dedicated to cooperating and working toward the advancement of students' intellectual, social, and emotional well-being. This has a favorable impact on student achievement and post-secondary results, as well as the community as a whole. School-community partnerships encourage relationship development, communication, and power sharing" (Auerbach, 2010). Effective school-community collaborations need the growth of genuine, trustworthy relationships. For students to succeed, community participation in schools is essential (Anderson, Houser, & Howland, 2010; Bryk, 2010; Coleman, 1988; McAlister, 2013; Sanders, 2006). Research show that Community participation in schools increased students' performance and test scores increased the number of students performing in class, increased students' attendance and learning opportunities for them. It increased parental participation in school education and backed the attempt to improve schools.

The inclusion of individuals with disabilities and their behavior may be affected by attitudes regarding disability. Interactions and educational experiences boost favourable attitudes regarding disability and strengthen the portrayal of the person with disability. The negative attitudes of community can artificially confine people with disabilities, impose artificial limitations upon them, deprive them of equal chances for learning and flourishing, and unfairly relegate them to the shadows to be pitied. In many facets of communal life, attitudes toward people with disabilities play a significant impact. Negative community views manifest as social exclusion, oppression, and discrimination towards PWDs when they are present (Avramidis et al. 2002). The exclusion of persons with disabilities is a result of various attitudes and beliefs about impairments, Trimblay (2007), Karangwa, Miles and Lewis (2010) and Sorisi, Nota & Wehmeyer (2011). For a very long time, communities discriminated against and isolated children with disabilities, especially when it came to their education. The community supports the view that "once disabled, always disabled" and that disability was originally considered to be "retribution from gods" (Trimblay, 2007).

In current situation in Pakistan, Public and private institutions/schools, or charity-based organizations functioning in various parts of the country, carrying out activities relating to education as well as inclusive education. Unfortunately, in Pakistan inclusive education in Pakistan is hindered due to community negative attitudes, their thoughts about disability, lack of teachers' readiness to adapt strategies according to their needs, parental concern and access to resources. The community has a lack of awareness and role in providing inclusive education where students with disabilities can communicate with other students and flourish their abilities. This research aimed in assessing the role of community participation towards inclusive and equitable education. The study was conducted to understand that how much community has participated in inclusive education and to which extent it has created a positive impact in inclusive education practices.

Material and Methods

This type of research is descriptive. The quantitative method was applied. Questionnaire was used to assess the attitudes of community towards inclusive education

and the extent to which community members participate in promoting inclusive and the impact of their participation.

Population of the study: In every research a large group of people from which the sample is taken is called population. The population of the research was parents and teachers of students with disabilities, local leaders and community health workers from three districts Sahiwal and Lahore and Bahawalnagar of province Punjab.

Sample size and sampling strategies: The method which collects data from members of population who conveniently participate in the research. The research can collect the data in a very short period of time. The data was collected from 120 teachers of children with disabilities from different schools of Sahiwal and Lahore city.

Name of Schools in District Sahiwal

1. Govt. Institute for the Blind, Sahiwal
2. Govt. (Primary) Special Education Centre, Sahiwal
3. Govt. (Primary) Special Education Centre, Sahiwal
4. Govt. Institute for Slow Learners, Sahiwal
5. Govt. Higher Secondary School of Special Education for HIC, Sahiwal
6. Govt. Special Education Centre, Chichawatni
7. Govt. Special Education Centre, Harappa

Name of schools in District Lahore

1. Hamza Foundation Academy for the Deaf
2. Govt. National Special Education Centre
3. Pakistan Society for The Rehabilitation of The Disabled

Name of schools in District Bahawalnagar

1. Govt. Special Education Centre, Bahawalnagar
2. Govt. Special Education Centre, Haroonabad
3. Govt. Special Education Centre, Minchinabad
4. Govt. Special Education Centre, Chishtian

Instrument Development: On the basis of hypothetical framework and literature review, the researchers made questionnaire under the supervision of expert teacher. The researchers have made questionnaire, each having three sections and each section containing 12 items so questionnaire consisted of 36 items. Structured questionnaires provided to teachers and head teachers were used to gather data for this study. The questionnaire intended to study the Community participation with schools: Towards equitable and inclusive education for All Children with Special Needs.

Scale

Semantic differential scale was used. Each statement consisted of four options. They were:

To a great extent, Some What, Very little, Not at all.

Data Collection Procedure

Researchers personally visited different special education schools; the questionnaire was distributed among parents of head teachers and teachers of children with disabilities in the schools. Before distributing the questionnaire among the teachers of children with disabilities the nature and purpose of study was discussed to them. They were assured strongly that their responses will be kept confidential and only used for research purpose.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to analyze and interpret the data gathered through questionnaire. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the resulting frequency, tables and charts provided data that was interpreted using the theoretical framework of this research. The mean and standard deviation were calculated and the tests were also applied.

Validity and reliability

During the research endeavor the content validity was ensured through judgment of the experts. Moreover, to ensure reliability test and retest were used.

Delimitations of the Study

Following were delimitations of the study:

1. Due to shortage of time and resources, the study was conducted in only three cities of Punjab: Sahiwal District and Lahore District and Bahawalnagar District.

2. Due to shortage of time, limited financial budget, and inaccessibility sample was delimited to the teachers and head teachers of the schools.

Results and Discussion

In this research, the respondents were 120 teachers and 17.5% of the teachers were between age of 21 to 30 years, 58.3% of the teachers were between age of 31 to 40 years and 24.2% of the teachers were between age of 41 to 50 years.

Table 1
Age of participant teachers

Age	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
21 to 30	21	17.5		
31 to 40	70	58.3	2.0667	.64474
41 to 50	29	24.2		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

The teachers had qualification from graduation to M.Phil. level and its detail is as under:

Table 2
Qualification of participants

Qualification	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Graduation	19	15.8		
Masters	90	75.0	2.9333	.49761
MPhil	11	9.2		

Total	**120**	**100.0**

From the teachers' opinion, it is found that, the community see the education of children with disabilities as their responsibility. Majority 71.7% of the teachers were agreed to a great extent that local community is also responsible of education of their members with disabilities.

Table 3
Local community is also responsible for the education of their members with disabilities

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	86	71.7		
Some what	28	23.3		
Very little	3	2.5	1.3583	.65844
Not at all	3	2.5		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

According to teachers' perception, the community leaders feel the onus of this responsibility and they are contribution to the welfare of children with disabilities. As majority 36.7% of the teachers were somewhat agreed that community leaders are concerned with educational needs of CWDs. They work for them and support them.

Table 4
Community leaders are concerned with educational needs of CWDs

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	35	29.2		
Some what	44	36.7		
Very little	34	28.3	2.1083	.89627
Not at all	7	5.8		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 5
Attendance of CWDs in schools increased after parents and community involved

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	48	40.0		
Some what	44	36.7		
Very little	25	20.8	1.8583	.83310
Not at all	3	2.5		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 6
Community members always work for children with disability to academically perform better

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	11	9.2		
Some what	34	28.3		
Very little	49	40.8	2.7500	.90051
Not at all	26	21.7		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 7
Community members always support to strengthen the ability of children with disabilities to live an independent life

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	11	9.2		
Some what	34	28.3		
Very little	49	40.8	2.7500	.90051
Not at all	26	21.7		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Furthermore, the study found a positive impact of community partnership on the students. It is in the provision of different services such as education, health, mobilization, sanitation, water, washroom and other facilities.

Table 8
Community participation has a positive impact on their performance

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	58	48.3		
Some what	43	35.8		
Very little	16	13.3	1.7000	.79494
Not at all	3	2.5		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 9
Community health workers strongly contribute to the improvement of CWDs conditions for better schooling

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	9	7.5		
Some what	45	37.5		
Very little	57	47.5	2.5500	.74303
Not at all	9	7.5		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 10
Community organize regular mobilization and sensitization meetings to improve lives of CWDs

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	5	4.2		
Some what	22	18.3		
Very little	46	38.3	3.1250	.85565
Not at all	47	39.2		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 11
Role of community is important in admission of out of CWDs

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	9	7.5		
Some what	40	33.3		
Very little	48	40.0	2.7083	.86380
Not at all	23	19.2		

Total	**120**	**100.0**

Table 12
Community members share different ideas to support CWDs through regular meetings

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	8	6.7		
Some what	29	24.2	2.7917	.79806
Very little	63	52.5		
Not at all	20	16.7		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 13
Parents believe that their children with disabilities can academically perform better

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	25	20.8		
Some what	72	60.0	2.0083	.69204
Very little	20	16.7		
Not at all	3	2.5		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 14
There are a number of community resources available that can be beneficial to CWDs

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	68	56.7		
Some what	46	38.3	1.4833	.59385
Very little	6	5.0		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 15
Community members and parents provide support to CWDs to access to clean water

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	24	20.0		
Some what	49	40.8	2.2333	.81718
Very little	42	35.0		
Not at all	5	4.2		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 16
Community works to improve the quality of roads to enable CWDs to move around safely

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	9	7.5		
Some what	22	18.3	2.8750	.82566
Very little	64	53.3		
Not at all	25	20.8		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 17
Class rooms, playground, toilet, etc. are accessible for children with disability after participation of community

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	28	23.3		
Some what	62	51.7		
Very little	26	21.7	2.0500	.76532
Not at all	4	3.3		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 18
Community members always take interest to inclusive education

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	17	14.2		
Some what	53	44.2		
Very little	39	32.5	2.3667	.83950
Not at all	11	9.2		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 19
Teaching normal children and CWDs contributes to enhance their abilities and social integration

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	84	70.0		
Some what	16	13.3		
Very little	15	12.5	1.5167	.86950
Not at all	5	4.2		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

The findings of this study show the changing negative perception and behaviors of community members towards the children with disabilities into positive perceptions and behaviors.

Table 20
To educate people with disability is wastage of time and resources for parents and family members

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	18	15.0		
Some what	43	35.8		
Very little	39	32.5	2.5083	.94376
Not at all	20	16.7		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table No.21
Students with disabilities create burden in their classes

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Some what	11	9.2		
Very little	46	38.3	3.4333	.65764
Not at all	63	52.5		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 22
Students with disabilities create extra work and responsibilities that teacher is not paid for

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Some what	11	9.2		
Very little	46	38.3	3.4333	.65764
Not at all	63	52.5		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 23
Teaching CWD is a challenge, as they cannot succeed in life

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Some what	23	19.2		
Very little	37	30.8	3.3083	.77564
Not at all	60	50.0		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 24
Community members think that they bring misfortune for society

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
Some what	15	12.5		
Very little	66	55.0	3.2000	.64300
Not at all	39	32.5		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Table 25
Community thinks that they are unable to work for benefits of society

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Mean	St. Deviation
To a great extent	23	19.2		
Some what	33	27.5		
Very little	52	43.3	2.4417	.91482
Not at all	12	10.0		
Total	**120**	**100.0**		

Conclusions

Evidences show that, in Punjab districts community members and local leaders participate in school activities, provide support to people with disability and they concerned with education of children with disability to some extent. The negative perceptions of community members towards the special needs children are changing now. But, local leaders and other community members are possessing very low interest in organizing sensitization and mobilization meetings. Their participation does not full impact in enrollment of CWDs. Thus, community has its place and role to play in the promotion of equitable and inclusive education. The second objective was to identify the impact of community participation towards equitable and inclusive education at local level. The study concluded that different community resources are beneficial for CWDs as health, education and mobilization. Community members voluntarily offer their support services to the school, and children with special needs are having access to classrooms and playground and clean water. Community works for the improvement of road conditions

for mobilization of CWDs. The study findings showed that community participation increased number of students in schools Community health workers provide health assistance to CWDS. The last was to find the attitudes and behaviors of community towards equitable and inclusive education. Parents and other community members have now positive attitudes towards their children with disabilities. They do not consider wastage of time and money to educate their CWDs. They do not feel shame of having a child with special needs. They think that their children with disabilities can perform better in the classroom like their normal children. Most of the teachers said that students do not create extra works and burden in the classrooms. The study concluded that teaching all the students together enhances special needs students' abilities and social integration. It is evident from study that a very a smaller number of community members think they bring misfortune for the society. Community members support and works for benefits of CWDs and to work independently in society. Now it is concluded that Community is participating towards equitable and inclusive education, though it still needs more efforts and actions.

Recommendations

The following specific suggestions are made for different stakeholders which are the implications of this research:

1- In order to establish a direct and effective system that can immediately address the requirements of students with special educational needs, inclusive education programs at all levels, they should be given a specific budget by the government. This money should be allocated primarily at the community and school levels.

2- The federal and provincial governments should give special training to all teachers (Primary, secondary and university levels) in inclusive education and special needs education whether in general education or special education departments.

3- Local leaders should have time in the activity plan to educate and engage the community about inclusive education and its advantages. Local Leaders could exhort their people to support equitable and inclusive education programs and help to promote them during public events like monthly meetings following community work or any other type of community meeting.

4- The awareness and rights advocacy campaigns in mainstream media and local level, for the inclusive education should be run by the parents, local leaders and government.

5- The parents of children with special needs, teachers, local leaders and non-government organizations should assist and contribute regional programs established to advance inclusive education in the country.

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