

Readiness for Inclusion in Pakistani Schools: Perceptions of School Administrators

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Abstract

This study attempts to explore the awareness and attitude of primary school principals or administrators in Karachi, towards disabled children in mainstream classroom. The ultimate aims were to find out the level of awareness, to analyze the attitudes and teaching strategies towards disabled children in mainstream classroom. This study also looks into the challenges and hindrances faced by the teachers and management. Phenomenological paradigm was used for data collection. Samples were selected from all the three categories (public, private & madrasa) of educational system exist in Pakistan. Total 15 principals / administrators were selected through purposive sampling. As an instrument semi structured questionnaire used for (In-depth) interviews by principals / administrators. The results demonstrated three major issues associated to the aims of the study. First, majority of the administrators had a lack of awareness of specific disabilities and the special needs of disabled children and require proper training. Second, 100% administrators notified that they face problems in handling disabled children in mainstream classrooms; it might be because of lack of awareness, lack of resources or the strength of students. At last, there were no such special strategies to accommodate disabled children in mainstream classroom. It was concluded that the entire school principals and teachers exhibited a positive approach. If the policy is properly implemented, have trained teachers, average strength classes, adequate resources including aids, equipments and support staff, it would be more beneficial for both children with or without disability.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Disabled Children, Mainstream.*

2. Introduction

Providing high-quality education especially for children from different circumstances and varying capacities has been a great challenge not only for countries like Pakistan but also for the entire well develop countries of the world. Different education initiatives required to provide disabled children with the necessary information and skills through education. The government of Pakistan is devoted to accommodate the needs of all children without any prejudice and will persist to update its policies and programs to accomplish particularly to bring all children with mild mental or physical disabilities into mainstream education institutions of the country at all levels of education. (Govt. of Pakistan, 2008).

The Federal Ministry of Education constantly draws attention that all schools throughout Pakistan should become more inclusive and child friendly. They recognize that all children have an equivalent right to freedom of expression, quality education and have access to a safe and healthy environment. In 2006, National Plan of Action illustrated the areas of action necessary to implement the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2002. (Govt. of Pakistan, 2006) It is also suggested that a school should focus on equal measure on children, social, emotional, physical and educational development and make possible to make physically, economically and socially and academically accessible for children with a diverse background, need, abilities and disabilities. Curriculum and assessments techniques for disabled

children should be flexible to encourage rather than to create a barrier to learning, development and participation.

Addressing the needs of diverse students is a challenge for general teachers in schools nowadays. Teachers experience inclusive education with dissimilar attitudes and opinions. All the time they have to manage with large numbers of diverse learners in the classroom, a lot of administrator and paperwork and an unyielding curriculum. Therefore, these states of affairs make implementation of inclusive education difficult. All students suffer when teachers are unskilled and lack the ability and time required to work effectively with the diversity of educational needs in their classrooms. A report by UNICEF identify that the vast number of disabled children never go to schools, and a large proportion of the ones that do soon drop out due to inaccessible school infrastructure and an unfriendly school atmosphere (UNICEF, 2003).

One of the foremost problems faced by the Pakistani educational system is the issue of quality. Nearly all of our mainstream educational institutions, the widespread teaching approach are that of transmission where the teacher is not concerned with the change of students' lives but only with transmission of existing knowledge. (Siddiqui, 2008)

According to Schulz & Carpenter (1995), three qualities are essential to set up a successful inclusive setting: *Teacher attitude, teacher expectations and teacher competence.*

Hence, it is essential that a teacher's encouraging and positive attitude is important to understand and accept the child, possess the child and support the child to explore areas of interest.

Another essential component of successful inclusive settings is a set of classroom practices conducive to learning for students with a range of needs. These practices include four elements: successful classroom management, effective instructional techniques, appropriate accommodative practices, and instructional flexibility

Policies and Legislation clearly show the keen interest of Government of Pakistan in providing inclusive education in mainstream schools, therefore, each and every child with or without disability can attain the appropriate education. These goals need proper implementations and necessary accommodations in the regular education system.

According to Haider (2008), Pakistani teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusive education. They agree that it enhances social interaction thus minimizes negative attitude towards students with special needs. Collaboration between the mainstream and the special education teachers is important and that there should be a clear guideline on the implementation of inclusive education. Haider (2008), also pointed out that more efforts are needed for teaching students with special education needs in Pakistan.

Therefore, this study made an effort to explore the barriers behind the pace of implementation, the level of awareness, attitude and strategies towards disabled children in mainstream classroom generally used in Primary level schools of Karachi city.

Purpose of the Study

The major objectives of the study were:

- To analyze the level of awareness and attitude of primary school administrators towards disabled children in mainstream classroom.
- To investigate the strategies to incorporate disabled children into the mainstream classroom.
- To find out the challenges and hindrances faced by the management and teachers and how they overcome it.

2. Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive research design with phenomenological approach was used for data collection.

Population

All the primary schools (public, private and madrasa sector) principals / administrators who deal with disabled children in mainstream schools in Karachi.

Sampling

In the educational system of Pakistan, schools are classifying into three major categories i.e. Public schools (run under government policies), Private schools and Madrasas schools (both have their own policies). In this study samples were selected from all the three categories of educational system exist in Pakistan. The target population of this study was Karachi city; as it is major divide into five main districts. Thus, samples were selected from all five districts of Karachi.

For qualitative phenomenological approach purposive sampling technique was used to select principals / administrators. Total 15 mainstream schools were participated in this study. Of these, 15 principals or administrators were involved in this study.

Research Instrument

In this descriptive phenomenological approach study, semi structured questionnaire, contained demographic information included gender, qualification, specialization and year of experience, and 13 major research quires, used to reveal the specific and objective information about disabled children and their special strategies for accommodating these children in mainstream classroom.

Analysis of Data

The qualitative analysis of the interview protocol was followed. After transcribed each interview, catalogues the emerging codes, create the themes and developed the structural synthesis.

3. Results and Discussion

Analysis of In-depth Interview with Administrators / Principals

In this section fifteen different in- depth interviews of principals or administrators of primary level mainstream schools (n=5 each categories) were analyzed to find out their perception about the existence of disabled children in mainstream schools. The area covered in these interviews included the admission policies of schools, their teaching strategies, how they deal disabled children, challenges encountered by teachers while handling disabled children and how they cope up these difficulties.

Admission Policy Regarding Disabled Children

Generally, at the time of admission, there were some common requirements necessary for admission a child in school such as birth certificate, personal and family data of child, previous educational assessment report, if transfer from another school and the result of the test made by particular school for admitting a child. Findings of this study revealed entirely contrast policy of admission regarding disabled children in mainstream schools. All the public schools accepted the admission of disabled children; because of the educational policy imposed by government, entitled “*Education for All*”. A public school principal pointed out:

“I have no right to refuse the child at the time of admission, as in public schools children belong to lower income families or slum areas and their parents are willing to admit their child in school so I am bound to give them admission whether they have severe or mild disability. I preferably avoid severe mental disability”.

Generally in public school interview of child and their parents was taken, and if they satisfied that the teachers handle the child at ease, they essentially give admission, but if not or the disability is severe, suggest their parents for special schools.

On the other hand majority of the private and madrasa schools avoided taking admission of disabled children. Usually they avoided visible mental or learning disability. Conversely few private and madrasa showed the positive response regarding disabled children.

Mostly private and madrasa schools reported that generally they had physical, visual, behavior and learning disabled child. No one reported that they had severe disability except one madrasa who had totally blind child in Hifz-e-Quran section. Along these disabilities public schools had some deaf and dumb children.

- Response regarding awareness of disability at the time of admission, frequently all schools principles responses were identical that they totally aware of the physical disability of the child and some sort of mental ability through written test taken at the time of admission and by the interview of the child and their parents. The main difficulty occurred when the child admitted in school from nursery level, at that stage they were not able to judge his/her mental ability, some time disability discover later. Another difficulty they pointed out that sometime parents cannot informed the true status of mental ability and medical problems of the child, they already have.
- At the time of admission, generally public and madrasa school get no specific medical information but majority of the private school take medical information through parents' teachers interactive sessions. Whereas, some private schools have detailed medical form attached with the admission form.

Awareness of Disability and Disabled Children

- Majority of the school principals elucidated that to some extent teachers had awareness of disability. They were not fully aware of; only one or two teachers had full knowledge about disability of children.
- Not any schools arrange workshop or training by its self. However, in public schools sometime one or two day workshop arranged by government or NGOs. Where as in madrasa school they didn't got any training or attend workshop. But various private schools did some efforts to handled disabled children. One of the private school principal pointed out:

“Yes we inform and provide information to the teachers. We have dossiers of every child. When the child shifts in next class, the dossiers move to the next class teacher and other subject teachers, they thoroughly study these dossiers before beginning the new session, so they easily manage the class of diversity”.

- Majority of the schools didn't have additional man power at primary level. Some of the private school provided additional teacher in early classes of Primary level i.e. Class I or II.
- Some of the private school had full time medical doctor, one school had full time qualified child psychologist for counseling the child. No one madrasa and public school had medical doctor or related facilities except one model public school that had full time doctor available in school.

Strategies to Accommodate Disabled Children in Mainstream Classroom:

- The findings of the study revealed that there were no such special strategies to accommodated disabled children in mainstream classroom.

- Majority of the schools modified the seating arrangement if the child had visual problem. These children usually sat near the black board.
- Initially all of the schools discussed the problem of child with their parents and advised for glasses or other needed device.
- Majority of the private school provided extra time to cover the studies of learning disability children. They facilitated students in break time, library time or in sports period. One of the school principal notified that they arrange special classes in Saturdays when school is generally off.
- Few public schools revealed that they cannot give extra time in school. They advice child to complete their remaining work in home.
- Some of the principals notified that they motivate, encourage and lenient to these children. Provided peer friends and used multi disciplinary strategies for teaching.
- Regarding the information about curriculum all of the school principals informed that they used same curriculum for all children and it is necessary to complete this syllabus for all type of diverse ability child.
- The entire school principal had opined that they provide some leniency at the time of assessments of disabled children.

Challenges Faced by Teachers

- Majority of the principals complained that the teachers faced many challenges because of unavailability of resources needed and the low level of awareness.
- They need more patience, sometime they feel disturb, had extra burden. One of the private school principles argued:

“Obviously we have multilevel classroom in which teachers must faced a challenges. At one end they try to cover the curriculum and another end they cope up the disabled children, this situation is difficult for teachers to manage all”.

- A finding also showed the non - cooperative behavior of the parents of disabled children especially illiterate parents or who belonged to the slum areas. The attitude of the parents disturbs the children and makes them non – responsible.

Availability of Physical Facilities

- No special physical facilities were available in the schools of all sectors in terms of both human and financial resources.
- In public schools government provided some funds but principals were afraid of to spend it. A public school principal clarified:

“We have some budget to maintain the school or purchase the needed resources but we afraid of to spend it because of the process of audit”.

Cooperation of Parents

- Majority of the private and madrasa schools notified that the parents are highly cooperative. They show higher level of cooperation with teachers; while some public schools criticized that the level of the cooperation of parents is extremely low.

Incorporation of Disabled Children in Mainstream Schools

- The entire school principals showed positive attitude towards disabled children in main stream schools. One principal commented:

“If there is proper implementation and schools have adequate resources, thus it is more beneficial for both children with or without disability. In this environment disabled children

acquired better and quick learning. Children give respect with each other. So we encourage these disabled children in mainstream classroom”.

4. Discussion of Results

After approval of first National Policy for Persons with Disabilities in October, 2002, a National Plan of Action was developed in 2006. One of the main goals of this action plan was inclusive educational opportunities are available to large number of children with moderate and mild level disabilities from kindergarten to class 10 in cost effective ways. To achieve this goal, action plan focus the step taken by Ministry of Education Provincial Education Departments, District Governments with in the period of January 2006-June 2009. The major areas of focus were:

- Initiate modifications in physical environment of regular schools to make them less restrictive for special children.
- Sensitization, orientation and training of regular school teacher on the special educational needs of children with disabilities.
- Provision of resource material and specialized aids in selected districts to be followed by wider expansion.
- Incremental provision of IE in regular schools from kindergarten to class 10.

At one side Policies and Legislation shows the keen interest of Government of Pakistan in providing inclusive education in mainstream schools, therefore, each and every child with or without disability can attain the appropriate education. But in reality the results, as found in this study, showed totally a different picture from what government policies and reports says. Based on the results of the study, four main issues could be drawn from this study.

Attitudes of Educators:

In this study attitude was judged regarding admission policy and the perceptions of administrators or principles towards disabled children in mainstream schools. Results of this study revealed entirely contrast policy of admission regarding disabled children. All the public schools give the admission of disabled children; preferably they were not willing to take disabled children in public school but they cannot avoid because of the educational policy imposed by government, entitled “*Education for All*”. On the other hand, majority of the private and madrasa schools avoid giving admission of disabled children. Mostly they gave preference to take physical impairment child rather than the child showed learning disability in admission test. Wilezenski (1992), comments that the teachers were more accepting to students with physical disabilities than to those who necessitated academic modification (as cited in Mushoriwa Taruvinga, 2001). Students with a learning disability and/or behavioral problems pose more challenges to teachers than those with a physical difficulty. Teachers that had both types of special needs children in a class experience more problems in maintaining classroom discipline, have a greater workload and struggle to manage the disparate academic standards amongst students. (Pearson Veronica, et al., 2003) In Pakistan there is no such criterion to judge the mental ability, and other medical and psychological problems at the time of admission, that’s why these cases were commonly present in mainstream schools, not only in Karachi but in entire country of Pakistan.

However, conversely few private and madrasa showed the positive response regarding disabled children. They gave admission to these children. In their opinion this is a right of children to learn in mainstream schools along with mild disability or their physical disability.

Awareness Regarding Disability and Handling Techniques:

The findings disclosed that mostly school administrators and teachers had no familiarity with the concept of mainstreaming and inclusion. It is revealed in in-depth interview that some of the private schools provide awareness to their teachers according to the particular problem of children. All of the above facts

showed the lack of absolute awareness and they were in favor of providing proper training by the government or NGOs.

Strategies to Accommodate Disabled Children in Mainstream Classroom:

The findings of the study revealed that there were no such special strategies to accommodate disabled children in mainstream classroom. In general, schools modified the seating arrangement or discussed the problem of child with their parents

Majority of the private school provided extra time to cover the studies of learning disability children, somewhat modified their learning instructions according to the individual need of disabled children. Some of the private schools provided peer friends and used multi disciplinary strategies for teaching or provided additional teacher in early classes of Primary level i.e. Class I or II. Majority of the school had same curriculum for normal and disabled children and they must complete it. However, they motivate, encourage and lenient at the time of assessments of disabled children.

Challenges faced by Teachers / Administrators:

All of them pointed out that they faced problems in handling the disabled children. Results of this study also disclosed that the teachers faced many challenges and the major reasons, pointed out, were unavailability of resources needed and the low level of awareness. Teachers need more patience, sometime they feel disturb, had extra burden because of extra strength of students especially learning and behavior disability.

One of the major issues was non - cooperative behavior of the parents of disabled children especially illiterate parents or who belong to the slum areas. The attitude of the parents disturbs the children and makes them non – responsible.

No special physical facilities were available in the schools of all sectors. Except some of the schools had full time medical doctor and one qualified child psychologist for counseling the child. This facility was only available in private schools except one model public school that had full time doctor available in school.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, four main barriers were identified from the findings. First, the major reasons, pointed out, were unavailability of resources needed and the second was the low level of awareness. Third barrier which hinders in maintaining the classroom environment and teachers not give proper attention to each child was the additional strength of students in each classroom. No special physical facilities were available in the schools of all sectors especially for mobility impaired child like ramps or supporters.

However, the entire school principals and teachers had positive approach; had a spirit to enhance their teaching strategies; they were in favor that disabled children have the right to receive an education in main stream schools. If the policy is properly implemented, have trained teachers, average strength classes, has adequate resources including aids, equipments and support staff, it would be more beneficial for disabled children.

6. Recommendations:

Findings of the study suggested the following recommendations:

- All schools should become more inclusive and child friendly. Provide least restricted environment and generate universal design especially for physical / mobility disabled children.
- Class size should be average not more than 20 - 25 students in each class.

- Use technological support especially for learning disability or visual impairment children, e.g., multimedia, overhead projector.
- Curriculum, evaluations, assessment and testing for children should be flexible to encourage rather than to build difficulty in learning, improvement and involvement.
- Need for in- service training for regular classroom teachers.
- Create awareness and motivation in teachers of regular education system.
- All schools must support their regular teachers by special education teachers for counseling and expertise in mainstream classroom.
- Government as well as school managements could arrange workshops on motivating, assisting and guiding teachers to better accommodate disabled children in mainstream classroom.
- The government should be provided funds, relevant resources and equipment.
- The government of Pakistan, United Nations, international agencies with non government and disabled persons organization should mutually work; provide acquaintance, support and suitable guidance and trainings.

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