



Perception of Inclusive Education among Parents of Special Needs Children in Ampara District

A.M.Jazeel

Lecturer,
Government Teachers College,
Addalaichenai

A.C. Fathima Fazmina

AK/AL-Muneera Girls High School,
Addalaichenai

Abstract

All human being have equal rights in the world. Ensuring the equitable access to the differently abled is the theme discoursed currently among the higher ups in Sri Lanka. The disabled, the poorest and the marginalized are neglected in the society and that most of them are unaware of the opportunities available for them. In this backdrop, Perception among the parents of the disabled regarding inclusive education is *inter alia* required appropriate interventions to ensure that the barriers to access to education encountered by certain sections of population, particularly the differently abled are overcome through a well-orchestrated strategy. Accordingly, substantial steps were taken in to ensure equalization of rights and opportunities for differently abled persons in Sri Lanka. Nonetheless, a large number of differently abled persons are confined to their homes without access to formal education. Though there could be a number of reasons the denial of access to education for the disabled, the factor of perception among the parents of the differently abled are significant in mainstreaming the differently abled to the formal school in the setup of access to inclusive education. The major objective of this study is to find out the perception of the parents of special needs regarding inclusive education. The target population of the study is the parents of the differently abled living in Sri Lanka. The sample of 50 parents living in Ampara district of Sri Lanka was selected at random from the list of parents of the differently abled from the census of 2012. Data were collected by using the tool of questionnaire and personal data sheet. The data were analyzed by using 't' test.

Key terms: Inclusive Education, Perception, Parents, Special Needs

Introduction

In Sri Lanka, equitable access to education for sustainability suggests more than equal opportunities and it means ensuring additional and particular support for the

disabled, the poorest and the marginalized. Equity in education, *inter alia* require appropriate interventions to ensure that the barriers to access to education encountered



by certain sections of population, particularly the differently abled are overcome through a well-orchestrated strategy. Recently, substantial steps were taken in the international arena to ensure equalization of rights and opportunities for differently abled persons (Rajapaksa, 2011). Of them UN conventions on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is quite significant. Nonetheless, there are still a number of concern and obstacles to mainstreaming the people with disabilities into the society and accessing to many aspects in equalization such as education, employment, rights, technology, dignity, etc.

In this context, Sri Lanka too has a long convention of nurturing and caring of the disabled members of the society. Both the government and civil societies have undertaken significant initiatives for the welfare of the differently abled persons. Assuming full responsibility for the education of students with special needs, the government had adopted the model of integrated education in 1968 (Weerakoon, 1994), and the voluntary social services, agencies and private citizens for that matter took an interest in establishing special schools for children with special needs (Lopez, 1996) in addition to other welfare activities provided.

It is common truth that education is the path way for success in life. The students with special needs too should be given equal access to education, access to inclusive education and other opportunities. Access to inclusive education or inclusion in education insinuates all students attend and are welcomed by their neighborhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school (Jazeel,

2013). This is one of the basic rights of the differently abled person.

The mainstreaming the children with special needs into regular schools inspired Sri Lankan Educational authorities to get into the concept of access to inclusive education. In this line, compulsory education regulations for the 5 – 14 age group and proposals for the establishment of a well-equipped quality school in each of the 324 local administrative divisions to ensure on equitable distribution of educational opportunities were approved in 1997 (Ministry of Social Welfare. (2003). Moreover, the Salamanca Convention of 1994 and the Educational Reforms of 1997 supported the philosophy and practice of access to inclusive education in Sri Lanka. Based on these premises, National Institute of Education has taken several initiatives related to professional and curriculum development and research into the promotion of access to inclusive education in Sri Lanka (Jazeel, Fazmina and Saravanakumar, 2016).

Nonetheless, there still remain a large number of differently abled persons either bereft of access to school or are dropped out of regular schools. The parents and relatives have kept most of these ‘un-reached’ or ‘excluded’ children with disability confined to their homes so that they are denied their right to education, their right to live in society with dignity and other social, economic and political benefits (Jazeel and Saravanakumar, 2016). It is pathetic that they are even barred to expose their latent potentialities to the outer world and to develop their skills and abilities for seeking an earning source.

In spite of all such effective institutional measures adopted in Sri Lanka for the benefit of the differently abled persons, there are still



questions raised about the extent to which parents are aware of such institutional mechanism of access to inclusive education prevalent in Sri Lanka

Objectives

The following are the objectives of the study.

- To find out the level of perception of inclusive education among the parents of Children with Special Needs.
- To find out the differential influence of the following selected factors on perception of inclusive education among Parents of Children with Special Needs.
 - Parent's gender
 - Parent's residence
 - Parent's educational qualifications

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated in the study.

- There is no difference regarding the level of perception of inclusive education among the parents of children with special needs
- There is no significant difference between the mean score in respect to residence of parents towards inclusive education
- There is no significant difference between the mean score in respect to educational qualification of parents towards inclusive education

Method

In this study, a survey method was adopted.

Population of the study

The population of the study is all the parents of children with special needs living in Ampara district.

Sample of the study

A sample of 50 parents (male 20 and female 30) was selected by using random sampling technique from all the parents of the children with special needs.

Instruments:

1. **Questionnaire:** For collecting information from the parents, the investigator modified the English version of self-administered questionnaire of Panna Lal et al (1994) and got validated through experts' opinion.
2. **Personal Data Sheet:** The personal information of the parents of children with special needs were collected using personal data sheet. The investigator helped in filling in the personal data by discussing with the sample. These data were re-checked and found reliable.

Results and Discussion

From the analysis, it is revealed that the first hypothesis of the study is the level of perception of inclusive education among the parents of the differently abled persons is low. In analysis of the data collected it was found that the calculated mean value of the entire sample is 17.38 and it is less than



percentile 75 value. Therefore, it is established the level of perception of inclusive education of whole sample is low.

This situation raises alarm among the educationalists that any educational policy implemented in Sri Lanka by the ministry of education, particularly focusing the disabled society has not reached the parents of the students. Though the educational level of Sri Lankans compared to the other South Asian countries is higher, the prominence given to Special Need Education in national curriculum is not adequate (Jazeel *et al.*, 2013). At the same time, Unicef (2003) indicated in the case study done in Sri Lanka that the government has taken early steps to implement inclusive education though there were slow progress. There are differences in the meaning and modes of practice of inclusive education among schools (Ibid). Similarly, NEREC in a research study mentioned teachers do not have satisfactory level of perception on inclusive Education (NEREC). The perception of level of students with need impact on the life of these children.

The second hypothesis of the study is ‘there is no significant difference between the mean score of male parent and female parent towards access to inclusive education’. The main findings of the data analyzed are given in the Table -1.

Table 1. Difference in perception of inclusive education due to gender of the parents

Variables	Nos	Mean	SD	t Value
Male	20	20.05	3.96	1.96
Female	30	13.65	3.54	

(Significant at 0.05 level)

It is found in the analysis that the calculated “t” value 1.96 at 5% level is greater than the table value 1.86 Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence there is significant difference in perception of inclusive education due to sexuality of the parents. It is also revealed that male parents have more perception than the female parents.

This trend could be due to the prevailing phenomenon of culture in Sri Lanka. Male parents have more access to media and other social activities than female. In general, culturally female parents are occupied with household work and that they have limited access to media and other social contact. As most of the parents were found to be aged, they were not much interested in the new trend introduced in education. Lopez (1996) argues that the females should be given more perception than males as most of the disabled children are more attached to the female parents in South Asian countries. It reflects that as compared to male and female, there are more perception among males than females in these countries (Jazeel and Saravanakumar, 2016). Prabavathi (2015) strengthens this notion that the overall perception about inclusive education in India is not up to the expected level according to researches and females are mostly ignorant of the system of inclusive education which is affordable.

The third hypothesis of the study is “there is no significant difference between the mean score of parents residing in rural area and urban area towards access to inclusive education” and main findings from the analysis are given in the table 2



Table 2. Difference in perception of parents due to residential area of the parents

Variables	Nos	Mean	SD	t Value
Rural	38	53.37	14.67	2.36
Urban	12	46.09	11.69	

(Significant at 0.05 level)

From the analysis it was found that the calculated “t” value 2.36 at 5% level is greater than the table value 1.96 Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. It was also found that the parents living in rural villages have less perception than the parents living in urban.

There is significant difference in the perception of parents between teachers residing in rural area and urban area towards inclusive education. Urban parents have higher level of perception towards inclusive education for the disabled than rural parents. In endorsing this findings, Rajapaksa (2011) reiterates those living in disadvantaged area should be given more access to the perception of the disabled and how they be treated in society. If parents have lack of perception on inclusive education, how illiterate parents of the disabled will come to know of the opportunities to equal access to education like other children in their surroundings. Pointing out the access to knowledge Jazeel *et al* (2013) argues that any educational system needs to be introduced in village level to achieve its outcome as most of the people in Sri Lanka live in rural areas.

The fourth hypothesis of the study is there is no significant difference between the mean score of parents studied less than GCE (O/L) and parent studied more than GCE (O/L) towards access to inclusive education” and

main finding from the analysis is given in table - 3.

Table 3. Difference in perception of parents towards access to inclusive education due to educational background of the parents

Variables	Nos	Mean	SD	t Value
Less than GCE (O/L)	32	13.51	3.46	1.31
More than GCE (O/L)	18	15.71	3.94	

(Significant at 0.05 level)

From the analysis it was found that the calculated “t” value 1.31 at 5% level is greater than the table value 1.26 Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. It was also found that the parents with less than GCE (O/L) qualification had less perception towards to access to inclusive education than the parents with more than the GCE (O/L) qualification. This result shows the connection between educational background of the parents and the level of perception in relation to inclusive education. More educated parents wanted their children with special need to be given an education in private schools as these schools look after these children better, while the parents without much educational background try to keep their children within homes due to the feeling of social stigma (*Ibid*, 2013)

Conclusion

It is concluded from the analysis of the data that the extent of perception of inclusive



education among the parents of differently able persons is low. It may be for the reasons that most of the parents are illiterate and do not much aware of programs designed for the differently abled introduced the government and other organizations. It could also be pointed out that most of the program, particularly introduced to give access to education has failed to consider the element of sustainability.

It is also concluded from the analysis that there is significant difference in the perception of the parents of the differently abled towards access to inclusive education due to gender of the parents. Male parents have higher level of perception towards access to inclusive education for the disabled than female parents. This could be due to the fact that male parents have more access to the media and other access to information regarding the access to education, particularly to the differently abled.

It is also concluded that there is significant difference in the perception of the parents of the differently abled towards access to inclusive education due to locality. Urban parents have higher level of perception towards access to inclusive education for the disabled than rural parents. Most of the urban parents might be more educated and have access to information as regards access to education for the differently abled.

It is also revealed that there is significant difference in the perception of the parents of the differently abled towards access to inclusive education due to educational background. The parents studied more than GCE (O/L) examination have higher level of perception towards access to inclusive education for the disabled than the parents studied less than GCE (O/L) examination.

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