

Attitude Of Parents Towards Educating Children with Special Needs in Rural Assam

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Abstract

Attitude of parents plays a fundamental position in the lives of children. The development of attitudes, values and capabilities, both of knowledge and skill comes from appropriate education. The present study focuses on analysing the attitude of parents towards educating the children with special needs in mainstream schooling and tried to know the role played by the parents in the life of their special need child and the study also tried to find out the Challenges faced by the parents in bringing up their special child. The research methodology applied for the study is qualitative with analysis of five case studies from the Hapjan block of Tinsukia district of Assam. The tools adopted for the study is semi structured interview guide for the parents of children with special needs. And the secondary data is collected from various e-resources, books, journals and magazines. Educating a child with special need according to their special requirement needs a comprehensive understanding of the Childs' disability. For which parents vigorously have to work on knowing their child along with their special abilities. For the education of children with special needs the Right to (Free and Compulsory) Education Act, 2009 mandated inclusive education in all the schools under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan where the children have a right to get admissions regardless of their caste, religion, social and economic status and any kind of impairment or disability in the child. The parents of the children with special needs confront many challenges. From the study it has been found that some of the parents still have the attitude that children with special need does not need education as they think it is insignificant for them. They also mentioned that by admitting their child in the school, the parents have to be busy in teaching them and they do not have sufficient time as they all are wage labourers and farmers. But apart from those parents some of the parents have shown a positive interest towards educating their child and empowering them with sufficient skill and training along with education. Hence, it is seen that there is lack of sensitisation towards the importance and role of education in the life of children with special needs among the families in rural areas. Thus, the study has explored the attitude of parents towards educating their child with special need in a rural Assam.

Keywords: Parents, attitudes, children with special needs, Education, challenges, rural .

Introduction

The 86th constitutional amendment has made free and compulsory elementary education a fundamental right and this has brought new thrust to the education of children with special needs (CWSN) in mainstream schools regardless of their nature of disability (khan 2014). The inclusive setting of schools has led an open platform for the children with special needs to freely access education in any ordinary

school. The Kothari commission (1964-66) first education commission of India who brought up the issue of education of children with special needs.

Education is the most essential ingredient for the development and empowerment of individuals and the nation. And inclusion in education, irrespective of the varied socio-cultural differences and the differences in abilities and disabilities, undoubtedly makes this foundation much stronger (Ahmad, 2014).

Inclusive education is an approach in which children with special needs learn together with the other non disabled children within the same roof. This leads to the holistic development of the disabled or the special need child to overcome their disabilities and develop themselves by seeing their peers around them in the same school or class. Thus inclusive education is an umbrella term to include children with special needs in the mainstream or regular schools. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the “World conference on special needs education: access and quality” (Salamanca, Spain 1994) and was restated at the World Education Forum

Parents play the most vital role in the lives of children with special needs. Parents and the family is the first primary institution for a child. They are the first teacher for a new born. Therefore when we say parental attitude it determines the involvement of parents’ in the life of children with special need or without. Attitude of parents plays a fundamental position in the lives of children. Family and home is the primary learning institution in a non formal way whereas school is the formal institution of learning. The development of attitudes, values and capabilities, both of knowledge and skill comes from appropriate education. Educating a child with special need according to their special requirement needs a comprehensive understanding of the Childs’ disability. For which parents vigorously have to work on knowing their child along with their special abilities. From the history of educating the children or the people with disabilities it is found that disability is always termed to be a curse on the lives of people. The people with disability were abandoned by their families and neglected by the society because of their abnormalities in behaviour or deformed physical structure or any physical impairment. But gradually after the movements on disabilities started in 1990s, people started recognising the persons with disability and later in 1995 an Act was passed as the Persons with Disabilities (Equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation) Act which stood as a benchmark towards the inclusion of people with special needs in the mainstream society. Soon after India also became the signatory of United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) in 2007. The union government of India also came up with a National Policy on disability in the year 2006. And the most recent disability law that has been passed is The Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2016 with extending the number of types of disability from seven to twenty one. Working on the education of children with special needs the Right to (Free and Compulsory) Education Act, 2009 implemented inclusive education in all the schools where the children will get admissions regardless of their caste, religion, social and economic status and any kind of impairment and disability in the child. The parents of the children with special needs face many difficulties in the society as well as in the family as these children need special care and attention to bring them up.

This study is mainly focusing on the rural parents of children with special needs. The significance of the study is that it is always acceptable to say that rural people of India is still undergoing a life of despondent. In rural areas mostly the schools are government undertaken and difficult to get required access towards education. There are numerous problems prevailing in the education system of rural India. According to NSSO data of 2014 showed that literacy rate is 71% in rural areas where as 86% in

the urban area. It is a major concern to recognize their lived situations experienced by the rural population in terms of getting good education as education has turned to be the fundamental right of every citizen. Despite of being in rural and having a child with disability or special needs is much greater problem in the lives of those families. Children with special needs are always termed to be a burden in the family as they are mostly dependent. And if the family is poor and unable to afford better medical treatment as well as educational facilities to them it's difficult for a disable child to grow. Rural people are not much aware of the disabilities and their causes due to lack of sensitization and awareness that to be provided in the community level. They do not understand the importance of education in the lives of those children with special needs. Most of them term it as worthless instead those children need to be kept at home and train them in household works.

In the contemporary education system of India, it is easily accessible for free education in all the government schools. A number of schools have been setup in every corner of the villages. This has increased the enrolment of children from the rural villages. Education is one of the main sources of contribution towards human capital. So the government have paid attention towards increasing schools although there is an increase in schools but it has been found in studies that schools have lack of teaching aids, insufficient practically qualified and trained teachers, lack of adequate educational infrastructure fail to make human capital to a required extent in our country which ultimately acts as one of the factors of poverty and unemployment (Kro 2017). Inclusion of children with special needs in education will bring over all inclusion in the system of education. But there exist a big space in access of education of children with special needs. Parents also play a major role in facilitating children with special needs a better platform towards education.

Literature Review

Singh and Agarwal (2015) found that inclusion can only be realised by motivating and involving family in the process. Khan (2014) mentioned that the greatest barriers to inclusion is the '*attitude*' of parents and teachers towards children with special needs. it was also found that the parents of differently able children have real interest in inclusive education and they want their children to get education with normal children in inclusive settings. The study also found that there is a significant difference in the attitude of parents of normal children and parents of children with special needs towards inclusive education. Gulyani (2019) mention in the study that there are still pressing issues in front of the government in the form of access and participation in education that is imparted, and the financial contribution to the development of education. Julka (2007) analyses that the benefits of inclusive education are as follows: Inclusive Education: can help break the cycle of poverty and exclusion; enables disabled children to stay with their families and communities; can improve the quality of education for all; can help overcome discrimination; and promotes wider inclusion. Children with disability study either in a special school or in a regular mainstream school. Exclusion from the mainstream schools and from society on the basis of disability is a striking example of inequality. On the other hand, the social model of disability views disability, as a socially created problem. Narumanchi & Bhargava (2011), the purpose of the following was to explore the perceptions of parents of typical children towards inclusive education and children with special needs by using the exploratory and descriptive research method. From the study the researcher found that parents showed positive reaction towards inclusion but suggested separate classrooms for children with special needs.

From the reviewed literature it has been found that there are a very few studies conducted on northeast India regarding the education of children with special needs. It is important to bridge the gap of research in the field of special needs children education. This research will help to find the attitude of parents of children with special needs in educating their child with all the challenges they had to face. As parents participation is important for a child to grow in different aspects of life. As parents participation is important for a child to grow in different aspects of life. As parents participation is important for a child to grow in different aspects of life.

Objectives of the study

- To analyse the parental attitude of children with special needs towards educating them in mainstream school
- To understand the role of parents in the lives of children with special needs.
- To assess the challenges faced by parents in educating children with special needs

Research methodology

The methodology applied for the study is qualitative. The primary data was collected through case studies using semi structured interview guide and observation. The participants were the children with special needs, teachers, parents and resource teachers. The secondary data were collected through e-resources, books, articles and journals.

Sampling

For the study five government elementary schools were selected purposively among which three cases from lower primary schools and two cases from upper primary schools were selected as the samples from Tinsukia district of Assam. The schools were purposively selected through the information gathered from the Block Elementary Education Offices of the Hapjan Block in the same district. From the block, five elementary schools were selected where Children with Special Needs are enrolled in it.

Case studies

The cases studied were from elementary schools of Hapjan block of the Tinsukia district. On request of the participants the names are being kept confidential and mentioned a false name. Below mentioned are the two major cases studied out of the five studied cases. The five cases studied were under different category where four from mental retardation and one case of down syndrome.

Case 1:

Rishi is a boy of 9 years with mental retardation. He is admitted in the nearby government school. His parents are daily wage labourer. There are five members in the family three children, two boys and on younger baby girl of 6 months old. The parents are having a tough time in bringing up three children as their income level is low Rishi is the second child. His parents have not yet applied for his disability certificate neither went for any medical assessment due to financial issues.

The mother is just 24 years old and his father is 28 years old they got married at a very early age of 13 and 17 respectively. All the children are born at home without medical treatment. Rishi was born without birth cry and his mother once injured during her pregnancy as she slipped off and fell on her stomach. The parents are much worried regarding Rishi's health condition. Despite that they are sending

him to school. The resource person of the particular block identified Rishi to be mentally retarded. But the parents always avoid taking him for medical assessment required to apply for his disability certificate. The parent sends him to school so that he is not left alone at home. Rishi is quite hyperactive and difficult to manage by the parents as well as teachers. His parents also mentioned that they want him to go to school instead seating idly at home. His parents said that Rishi often gets angry and starts beating up people including family members even in the school he fights with other children and hit them. Teachers regularly complain them regarding his behaviour but parents find themselves helpless as Rishi is unable to understand the situations. Rishi's father aggressively says during the interview that sending a child like Rishi to school is useless and waste of time and money. His mother has no time for Rishi as she have got a six months old baby and also have to go for daily work. Their grandmother use to look after their baby when the mother goes for work. The elder son is 11 years old he also studies in the same school with Rishi. It is always a disturbance for their elder son too as Rishi has to be looked after by him in the school hours. The teachers of the school are unable to manage Rishi and let him seat in the same classroom for atleast thirty minutes. Teachers in the schools are not trained on managing children with special needs. Parents of the child has shared their future expectation by saying that they want Rishi to be trained in household work and look after his parents in the old age. They also said that they would be very grateful if Rishi get some special training in handicrafts. It would empower him to live an independent life.

From the above case it has been seen that parents of Rishi is more interested in vocational training than academic studies. They think it to be useless for a child with mental retardation. The parent sends him to school so that he is not left alone at home when they are out for work. And to escape of his activities and nuisance caused by him. For the parent it's getting difficult to manage a child with mental retardation and hyper activity. The parents are illiterate for which they cannot help their children in studies. .

Case 2:

Nisha is a 11 years old girl with down syndrome. She belongs to a middle class family her father is a government servant and mother is house wife. Her parents have migrated from their own village to the village nearby town so that they can avail the facilities of better education which cannot be found at rural villages. They have three children two boys and one girl. Both the boys are elder to Nisha. Nisha use to go to the nearby government school whereas the other two boys study in private school in the town. The parents want Nisha to study in a good school and get better education but in getting admitted in a good school with a disability is difficult. The parents of Nisha have shared their struggle they faced during admission of their down syndrome child in school. Her mother at first tried to admit her in a nearby school at the age of six in their village but she was not admitted by the school authority because of her disability. Then her mother approached to a non-governmental organisation at the town who is working on the field of rehabilitation of disabled people. There she was admitted for a year then the NGO asked to admit her to a mainstream school. Her parents tried seven schools for her admission but none accepted. Among those schools they have approached one of the school accepted her admission but the school authority have requested her parents to keep it confidential and they will only enrol her in the school record but would not let her sit in the classroom as the other students of the class will be disturbed and the parents of other non disabled children studying in the school would question them. This has turned to be a major problem. Her parent never complains regarding any issues to the school

authority as well as they do not even discuss any with the teachers. Because they have got the fear of losing the seat of Nisha if they approach the school authority regarding any issue.

In this case the parents are trying hard to provide better education to Nisha. This attitude of Nisha's parents has helped her in her studies. Her mother gives much attention towards her studies but Nisha finds difficult in writing. She recites poems and also she likes dancing. Her mother takes her to tuition classes. The effort made by her parents has helped her develop.

Findings and discussion

The result from the study has brought out many untouched facts experienced by the parents of the children with special needs in the rural regions.

Parental attitude of Children with special needs

Importance of education is yet to be made understood to most of the rural villagers. There is lack of sensitization and awareness regarding the educational facilities provided by the government in the schools. There is free and compulsory education system under the right to education Act 2009 but during the study it was found that few parents are unaware of it. Educating a child with disability is equally important with the child without disability. The attitude of parents towards education in the studied cases revealed that although they are sending them to the nearby schools but they are less responsible regarding the education of their child. Instead they send them only to keep them busy and away from home for few hours otherwise it gets difficult for them to manage. But only in one case it has been found that the parents are trying their level best in providing education to their down syndrome child. The parents want their child to get socialize with the other children without special needs. They want their child to learn any vocational courses rather than academic. The attitude found within the families is positive towards educating the child with special needs but the problem with the poor family is that they are unable to take much concern about their child since both the parents are mostly illiterate and wage labourers. In the case of Nisha her parents have migrated to the town for providing her better educational facilities.

Role of parents

The role of parents in providing education to their children is that the parents are mostly wage labourers and they do not find much time for their children whereas the child whose mother is a housewife has got enough time to look after her special need child. The elder brother or sisters at home without special needs are helping their brother or sister with special need. Most of the parents want their child to get educated but they also feel it to be of no use or waste of time and effort. This has led to the attitude to letting them stay at home rather than sending to school. The parents have insufficient finance to provide proper treatment or medical facilities to their child with special needs. Sometimes the child is also engaged in household work like baby seating, cleaning and all. Most of the parents find it insignificant to send their child to school because they believe that they cannot acquire the knowledge like the other children of the same age can do.

Challenges faced by the parents

There are many challenges the parents of those children with special needs have to face can be categorised into social, financial, educational and also health. When we look into the social issues the parents of these children conveyed that they have to undergo many hindrances like acceptance in the

society, participation in the social functions mostly faced by the parents of mental retarded children. Sometimes because of such causes they break down emotionally and avoid attending social functions. This has a negative impact on the families with children with disability. The people of the rural areas are mostly financially backward than the urban their income source is mostly agriculture and wage labours. The participants for the study are mostly wage labourers only one of the participant was government servant. Their daily wage is around three hundred rupees which is very less to run a family of four to six. The parents of the children with special needs with poor economic background cannot provide the required facilities required for their child to train them in different fields. As because the education is made free the children with special needs from poor families are able to attain education in the government school. As the parents are mostly from the rural village they are illiterate and do not give much interest in education of children with special needs. As the incomes of those families are low so they cannot avail adequate health facilities. This leads to difficulty during child birth for the women as well as the health condition of children with special needs as well. They are even ready to lose life but cannot get proper treatment for any disease. Communication and transport facilities are also a major concern. These are the major factors and challenges that the rural parents face.

Conclusion

Education plays a vital role in empowering the youth of nation. Being educated will bring overall development of the nation. Since the Right to Education Act 2009 was enacted the rate of increase in percentage of enrolment of children with special needs in elementary education and five years after its implementation is much less in North-eastern states in comparison to the national average (Sarkar & Kundu 2016). The attitude of parents towards educating children with special need is changing towards positive with the change in time. The parents want their children to get educated but for this the schools must be more active in delivering services to the children in an inclusive environment. The schools must be disabled friendly so that the parents feel secure to send their special need child to school. The government must pay special attention to bring more enrolment in the schools. Non- governmental organisations must also take initiative in conducting awareness and sensitizations in the community level so that more and more children with special needs come up and get better education. In a nutshell it can be said that there exist a wide gap in understanding the importance of educating a child with special need. Stereotypes still exist for which the problems are not yet been addressed, mostly in the rural areas. Awareness and sensitization of rural villagers towards education is utmost important.

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