

Exploring Parental Involvement in Providing Education to Children with Disabilities in Nepal.

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Abstract

This study aims to explore parental involvement in community schools for providing education to children with disabilities. It is based on qualitative with phenomenological research design. Three schools conducted with resource classes were chosen purposively from the Nawalparasi district. Interviews and questionnaires were used as research instruments to collect the data. The semi-structured interview schedule was applied for resource teachers and parents; whereas, questionnaire forms were used for teachers. The results demonstrate that parents' attitudes toward these children are gradually moving positively; and they accept, respect and value their differences. Further, the results show that schools have not adequately involved parents in activities such as planning, monitoring and decision-making processes. Parents are less familiar with inclusive education policy and legal instruments. Although they are supportive of providing education for their children, their efforts are hindered by knowledge gap, poverty and inaccessibility of schools from their residence. Finally, Epstein's framework of parental involvement partially fits with the parental involvement in community schools in Nepal. This study is equally important for policymakers and programmes designers at the federal, provincial and local level to ensure parents involvement in school education.

Keywords: Children with disabilities, collaboration, community school, resource teachers, parents' involvement

Introduction

Parental involvement is essential in delivering education to children, both within and outside the school environment (Sunarso et al., 2024). Parental involvement includes different dimensions as parental engagement in their children's learning, involving in school activities, advocating for educational policies, presenting parents teachers meetings, and volunteering at school activities (Eden et al., 2024). When a child is born, s/he starts growing up with his/her family at home. A child starts learning from their parents, and home is considered as their first school. So, parents are their first teachers and are responsible for shaping their characters. Likewise, parents are equally responsible for imparting education to children with disabilities. Disability is a multifaceted, dynamic, complex, and contested concept (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011). United Nations (2006) mentioned that persons with disabilities encompass individuals experiencing long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments that may hamper their full and equitable participation in society. These children have individual differences. So, parents understand their children's abilities so that they can easily discuss with teachers and school for providing better education for them.

Resource classes for children with disabilities were introduced during the implementation of the Basic and Primary Education Project I (BPEP I) in Nepal (Kafle, 2002). In practice, there are 380 resource classes in operation for imparting education to children with visually impairment, children with deaf, and children with intellectual disabilities (Centre for Education and Human Resource Development, 2023). The intent of the establishment of resource classes was to promote their transition to inclusive education (Department of Education, 2017). These children get residential scholarships to continue their education (Centre for Education and Human Resource Development, 2022). Resource teachers, who are trained in the specific areas of disabilities, facilitate for their children's learning. The study focuses on the involvement of those parents whose children are studying in the resource classes.

Children with disabilities need constant support and collaboration, both at home and school. Mann (2017) includes that children with intellectual disabilities have lower expectation and poorer school outcomes than those without disabilities (as cited in Mann et al.,2024). This shows that children with disabilities have different abilities and they are completely different from those with non-disabilities. Conversely, parents often lack a clear understanding of the nature and types of disabilities. They lack education, which prevents most of them from addressing their children's needs. Consequently, it is essential to involve parents in every step of school planning, as they play fundamental and lasting role in their child's life. The success and the failure of the strategies developed for the child depend on understanding their priorities, strengths, and competencies (CBSE, 2020). Additionally, it is emphasized that parents should proactively create a conducive learning atmosphere at home and establish ongoing communication with teachers to increase a better understanding of the educational progress of these children (CBSE, 2020). This demonstrates that parents should actively engage in their children's learning, both at home and at school. Without providing educational support to these children, their learning will not be meaningful.

Likewise, school needs to foster better collaboration and direct communication with parents which enables teachers to gain insights into each child's development. UNESCO (2009) states that regular meetings between schools, and parents need to be organized to discuss the child's progress, action plans, and challenges. Furthermore, UNESCO (2009) emphasizes the importance of community leaders, families, parents, women's groups, religious organizations, and organization for people with disabilities in raising awareness and fostering acceptance of these children. Likewise, the family serves as the primary source of education for a child with much of learning taking place within the home environment; parents often play an active role in creating educational opportunities for their children; making it essential to engage them in facilitating an inclusive process (World Health Organization; the World Bank, 2011). UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that inclusion requires societal commitment. Moreover, inclusive societies

necessitate a social and political transformation where every individual respects the rights of others and believes in fulfilling the potential of all members.

Further, prioritizing learners and achieving inclusion in education necessitates genuine engagement with parents and families in the educational journey of students with active participation from the broader community (UNESCO, 2021). Parents of these children need to be familiar with inclusive education policies and legal instruments that support their children's studies. Likewise, every parent requires assistance in selecting the most appropriate educational environment for their children, ensuring access to a higher-quality education. Epstein (2001, 2011) includes to enhance parental involvement in school, it is essential to establish a partnership culture. Collaboration can enhance school initiatives and foster a positive school environment, offer family services and assistance, enhance parents' skills and leadership opportunities, facilitate connections between families within the school and the wider community, and provide valuable support to teachers in their professional roles.

In relation to parental involvement, Epstein (2011) clearly presents the following frameworks, which are important for providing education to these children: (i) Parenting: It refers to assisting all families in creating a home environment which facilitates the learning of their children. (ii) Communicating: It shows the essential dual communication between school and home which is crucial for sharing student progress. (iii) Volunteering: It refers to encouraging parents to contribute their time to support the school in enhancing the learning of these children. (iv) Learning at home: School can offer strategies to assist parents with homework, curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning for their children. (v) Decision making: It refers to the engagement of families in schools' decision-making process through school committees and parents-students-teacher associations. And (vi) Collaborating with the community: It refers to recognizing and including resources to enhance school programmes and promote student learning and development. The framework presented above is equally important to enhance parental involvement in school's activities which contributes to promoting education of these children.

In this regard, parents are eager to support their children's learning because they understand their actual learning level better than others. They also understand how to motivate their children and which teaching and management strategies are effective for them. In this context, Singer (2011) presents an example of the USA where parents are required to actively participate in developing individual educational plans, and they possess due process to ensure the implementation of these plans (as cited in Mitchell, 2015). Schools need to work with parents to enhance children's learning at home and at school. Moreover, children are more motivated to learn if they find their parents involved in school activities.

It is equally important to note that parents and school need to be actively involved in learning process of children with and without disabilities. Enhancing collaborative culture between school and parents is essential. In this context, Ginanto (2018) states that parental involvement demands stronger commitment, requiring proactive efforts from both parents and schools to engage in children's education. Further, Ginanto mentions that parental involvement largely depends on the socio-economic status of the parents, parental educational background, gender, family structure, culture and language. Similarly, Gedfie et al., (2021) stated that some obstacles hindering parental involvement in school activities include parents' limited education and income levels, their negative attitudes, negative attitudes among principals and teachers, unfriendly environment, and children's reluctance to share information to their parents.

Observing the practice of Kenya on parental involvement, Oranga et al. (2022) found that parents didn't actively participate in their children's school activities, did not provide volunteer assistance at school, and did not communicate with the school to inquire about their children's progress. Gedfie & Negassa (2019) assert the involvement of parents in Ethiopia as communication between parents and teachers and principal was observed to be infrequent; parents didn't make regular visits to the schools to engage in discussions about their children's educational progress; only a limited number of parents provide

learning support to children with disabilities; and parents participation in the decision-making process was limited.

Observing the practice of parental involvement in their children's education, national and international practices seem to be similar. Parents do not like to visit school frequently; majority of parents are poor and illeterate; and they are not well informed about their roles and responsibilities towards their children's education. Likewise, some parents have negative attitudes towards their children and don't involve them adequately in their education. They are not actively involved in the decision-making process at school. In conclusion, this indicates that parents involvement in school activities is minimal to enhance the learning of their children.

For effective implementation of the education system in schools, the Government of Nepal has made provisions to involve parents in the education system (Kunwar, 2023). The amended Education Act (1971) and Regulations (2002) include provisions for parents' involvement in educational planning and different school committees. Those provisions allow parents to select four members from among themselves to join the school management committee, which serves as the primary decision-making body of the school. Likewise, there is a provision for a parents-teachers association in each school, formed by the majority of parents to promote quality education for all children (Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, 2017).

Likewise, Kafle (2002) emphasized the importance of motivating and supporting parents to visit the school, showing concern for both their children's progress and the school's well-being. Similarly, CERID (2004) states that parental and community support is vital for inclusive schools, and structures should be established in the education system as a whole. Further, CERID (2008) states that parents of these children should regularly participate in the orientation programme and should be prepared to implement inclusive education. Likewise, Thapa (2012) indicated that some parents showed a positive attitude towards the girl's education and played an active role in the early identification of their abilities. Pokhrel (2020) reports that parents of these children in Nepal invest in their

education and seek to collaborate with teachers as partners. Furthermore, Pokhrel (2020) states that they also prioritize addressing their children's healthcare needs before they begin their schooling. The above-mentioned empirical studies emphasize the importance of involving of parents in school activities for their children's education.

Likewise, Flash Report I at the national level indicates that 7508 students have some sort of disabilities which comprise 0.2 percent of the total students in grades 1-5 and that there are 3470 students with some kind of disabilities in grades 6-8 which represents 0.1 percent of the total students at that level (Centre for Education and Human Resource Development, 2022). UNICEF (2021) includes the National Living Standard Survey (2011) data that 3.4 percent of the population never received schooling due to disability. The survey also highlights that children with disabilities continue to face barriers to accessing the education system and are excluded from school. Further, the report has also found that there is ineffective social support and stigmatization of both these children and their families (Barriga, 2011). In addition, the report presents that parents' low awareness level also hinders the learning of children with disabilities (DIRDPL, 2014). Parental involvement in school is important for delivering education to their children; however, their presence in schools is limited and learning is not taking place as expected.

Based on the above literature review, it was found that the involvement of parents in school was found to be minimal particularly, in the resource classes. Resource teachers strongly asserted that parents don't come to school to familiarize themselves with their children's learning. The literature also shows that the low awareness of these parents, learning of children with disabilities has been hampered. The above data reveal that the majority of these children are out of school due to disability. These gaps are evident in both the literature review and current practices. So, this study is relevant and contributes to addressing the gaps by providing real status of parents' involvement based on Epstein's framework.

The main objective of this study is to explore how far parents of children with disabilities are involved in the school in providing education for their children with

disabilities. The research questions were: (a) How do parents perceive children with disabilities? (b) For what reasons do schools involve parents of children with disabilities? (c) How familiar are parents with the policies and legal instruments of inclusive education? and (d) How do parents support their children's learning at home and at school?

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research study utilizing a phenomenological research design. This study follows interpretive paradigm and brings lived experience of the parents on how they are experiencing the education of children with disabilities.

The resource classes conducted in community schools of the Nawalparasi districts were the population of the study. Out of them, three schools with resource classes for children with visually impairments, deafness, and intellectual disabilities were purposively chosen as samples for applying the study tools. The intent of applying purposive sampling was to gather rich and relevant information from the participants. Semi-structured interview schedules and questionnaire forms were developed based on the research questions as research instruments to collect data and information from the field. Interview schedules were used for parents and resource teachers (RT); whereas, questionnaire forms were used for teachers. Six participants (three resource teachers, and three parents) were chosen from sample schools for the interview, while twelve teachers from the same schools were selected for filling up the questionnaire forms.

Furthermore, I visited headteachers of the sample schools to organize field visits. With the help of headteachers, I met resource teachers, parents and teachers and informed them about my objective of the study. After that, I got their consent and started recording their voice on my mobile phone and other participants filled up the questionnaire forms. After collecting data, I started organizing them for analysis. In this context, Best and Kahn (2011) mention that "the first step of analyzing qualitative research involves organizing the data" (p. 270). Data were transcribed, grouped and categorized to analyze and interpret them according to the themes created manually based on research questions. In order to ensure reliability and validity of the data and information, they were checked by listening

to the interview records and contacting the participants for further clarification and verification. Similarly, ethical considerations were maintained by ensuring the confidentiality of the research participants, such as by using pseudonyms.

Results and Discussion

The following section provides the data analysis and findings (results) and discussion according to the themes based on the data and information collected from the research participants.

Perception of Parents Towards Children with Disabilities

It is important to explore how parents perceive their children's involvement in the community. The majority of resource teachers claimed that, in the past, children with disabilities were discriminated, hated, and neglected by the community. However, the situation is improving and such children are gradually welcomed, respected, and accepted for their differences. A resource teacher shared, "some parents discriminate against their children with disabilities in comparison to children without disabilities" (RT, 3).

Both the parents and teachers affirm a positive outlook towards these children, and they are valued, welcomed, socially accepted, and their diversities are respected. The participants expressed their views that very few parents involve their children in social programmes such as weddings, worshipping and meetings to be organized in their communities. The result demonstrates that parental attitudes towards these children are progressively improving and acknowledging their differences. However, there remains a significant lack of involvement of these children in social and religious events within the community.

It is important to know how parents and community perceive children with disabilities, both within their households and in the broader community. Positive parental and community perceptions are vital for the inclusion of these children in educational, social and cultural activities. The result demonstrates a positive shift in parents' perception towards their children by accepting, respecting, and giving value to their diversity which promotes inclusionary practices. In this context, Tamang (2014) includes social inclusion

is the engagement of every member in the societal process where children with disabilities feel comfortable consuming their rights to education. Likewise, social inclusion focuses on eliminating institutional obstacles and strengthening incentives to broaden the accessibility of development opportunities for various individuals and groups (Asian Development Bank, 2010). Ultimately, developing a positive perception among parents and involving these children in the educational process promotes social inclusion.

Similarly, the resource teachers and participants articulated their views in the field that some parents do not involve their children with disabilities in the social and religious programmes due to their social prestige. Such parents, according to the participants, think that their social prestige in the community goes down. In the Nepalese socio-cultural context, there is a belief that disability is often attributed to past negative actions (karma), and as a result, individuals with disabilities are perceived as burdens within their homes and society (Aryal & Aryal, 2021). This clearly shows that these children are not adequately included in the community, which promotes social exclusion. Pierson (2010) mentions social exclusion is an ongoing process that denies individuals, families, groups, and communities essential resources needed for meaningful participation in the social, economic, and political facets of society. Further, the law concerning the rights of individuals with disabilities explicitly states that these children are entitled to maintain their dignity, foster self-reliance, and actively engage in society (Law Commission, 2017). Likewise, a disability report from Nepal indicates that individuals often conceal their disabilities due to various socio-cultural norms, values and societal pressures (Thapaliya, 2016). The legal provision makes these children participate in the community; whereas, in practice, they are excluded from the community because of discrimination. Schools and communities need to enhance inclusionary practices to support these children.

School Involving Parents of Children with Disabilities

Parents should be actively involved in the school activities to promote their children's learning. The resource teachers highlighted various ways to involve them in the school, such as participation in school management committees, school anniversary

celebrations, parents' gatherings, the development of school improvement plan, and the decision-making process. The resource teacher stated, "The schools where children with disabilities study are quite far from the parent's home, so they can't come to school frequently when school invited" (RT3). The majority of resource teachers noted that parents are generally not proactive in visiting the school, although some inquire about their children's progress.

Parents complained that school did not invite them to be involved in its activities (School 1 & 2); however, some of them visited school on their own to discuss their children's progress with head teachers, and resource teachers. Participants from teachers noted that parents only visit schools for information and progress reports of their children. The majority of teachers expressed their views that parents occasionally coordinate with schools, communities, and local bodies. Teachers observed limited parental involvement in the planning, monitoring, and decision-making process. Almost all teachers confirmed that poverty directly affects their involvement in school activities, and noted a lack of volunteering culture among parents for school activities. The result demonstrates insufficient involvement of parents of these children in planning, monitoring, sharing progress reports, and decision-making processes in schools; and there is a lack of coordination and collaboration among parents and school, community, and local bodies.

Active parental involvement in school is important and it contributes to enhancing children's learning. The field data demonstrate that parents' involvement in school activities, mainly in school planning, progress sharing, and the decision-making progress, is inadequate. The Education Act (1971) and the Education Regulations (2002) emphasize involving parents in school activities, including school management committees and parent-teacher associations (Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, 2017). Although Education Act and Regulations have the provisions of involving parents in school activities, this has not been adequately materialized in practice. Research participants identified key factors to parents' limited involvement in school activities which include:

lack of knowledge, poverty, and distant location of schools from their homes. This result aligns with the findings presented by Gedfie et al., (2021) in the introduction section.

While analysing the field data, it clearly showed that some parents visit schools on their own, whereas others are not enthusiastic about visiting schools because schools are quite far away from their residence. It is evident that the more parents are involved in school activities, the more their children's performance enhances. In this connection, Topor et al. (2010) state that children whose parents exhibit greater involvement in their education achieve higher levels of academic performance compared to those parents who are less involved. It highlights the necessity for schools to involve all parents to improve their children's performance. It was also observed from the field data that coordination and collaboration of parents with school, community, and local bodies was lacking. Effective collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders and institutions are essential for enhancing children's performance.

Children, especially those with disabilities, require regular support from both teachers and peers, and they benefit from cooperative learning. Cooperative learning involves students collaborating in small groups to enhance both their learning and that of their peers (Jolliffe, 2007). Additionally, parents should be aware of their roles and responsibilities in providing educational support to their children.

This research study is also based on the parental involvement framework developed by Epstein (2011). Comparing the present results with Epstein's framework, it reveals that schools have not significantly involved the parents of children with disabilities in different activities carried out at the schools. According to Epstein (2011), it is important to involve the parents in school activities through parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making process and collaborating with the community. To promote the learning of these children, the community schools in Nepal should adequately involve them in all the activities, which ultimately contribute to the overall development of the school.

Familiarity of Parents with the Policies and Legal Instruments of Inclusive Education

The Government of Nepal has introduced policies of inclusive education to cater to the requirements of children with children (Department of Education, 2017). During interviews with resource teachers, they expressed their views that parents lack adequate familiarity with inclusive education policy and legal instruments. They reported that parents only know that the Government provides scholarship, textbooks and free residential facility for these children (RT 2&3). Similarly, parents and teachers presented their opinions that parents lack substantial information about the resource classes distribution across the country; and they are not adequately familiar with the policy of inclusive education and legal instruments. They agreed with the opinions expressed by resource teachers that the Government provides scholarships and residential facilities for these children. The result also presents that their involvement in planning and implementation of policy provisions is minimal.

It is important to highlight that, although policies and legal instruments are in place, they have not reached the school level, so the majority of parents are not familiar with them. When Parents are not familiar with these instruments, children with disabilities do not benefit from them. Pant (2018) rightly pointed out that inclusive education policy was only focused to the enrolment of children with disabilities in schools, and added that school level stakeholders (headteacher, teachers, parents) are not aware of these policies and there exists gaps between policies and practices. Likewise, Shrestha et al. (2020) include that existing educational policies are not effective to address the requirement of these children. This shows that the present policies are not useful for the well-being of these children and need revision to support their learning.

The field result shows parents' lack of awareness of inclusive education policy and minimal involvement in the policy-making process. In this regard, Regmi (2017) noted significant gaps between policies and practice of inclusive education. With this finding, it can be said that policies are developed at the central level with minimal participation of the local-level stakeholders and are not disseminated extensively with them. Likewise, the field

data show that parents were not familiar with the law concerning the rights of individuals with disabilities. This act has the provision to provide education to these children through various methods, including braille, sign language, information technology, and peer learning (Law Commission, 2017). It can be said that the more information the parents have, the more learning support their children receive.

In conclusion, while developing policies and legal instruments, wider participation of the local stakeholders should be ensured and developed policies and instruments need to be disseminated and implemented at the local level.

Parents' Support for Learning of Children with Disabilities

Parents play an important role in ensuring their children's education by creating a conducive learning environment at home and at school. They have a comprehensive understanding of their children's overall development. In this regard, resource teachers were interviewed to assess parental support for their children's education and the learning environment, both at home and at school. They stated that some parents support their children's studies at home; however, their support has not been encouraging due to a lack of knowledge in sign language communication and braille scripts (RT 1 & 3). On the other hand, the resource teacher shared the view that only the parents who are well educated teach their children at home (RT 2). All the resource teachers reported that parents rarely visit school to support their children. Two resource teachers stated that the learning environment at school is more favourable than at home.

Likewise, two parents clearly stated that they provide learning materials and facilitate their children's learning at home (School 2 & 3). However, one of the parents said, "I find it challenging to assist my child at home because I lack knowledge of how the braille script is taught to children with visual impairments" (School, 1). Likewise, all parents confirmed that they don't go to school to support their children, and the learning environment at home and school is supportive for their children. Moreover, teachers noted that parents enroll their children in school and rarely manage learning materials for them. They asserted that parents provide a learning environment at home and are interested and

supportive of their children's education but they lack pedagogical knowledge to support them.

Parents' involvement of children with disabilities in the learning process is important. Parents identify their children's strengths and weaknesses because they observe their children very closely. The result presents that parents are supportive of providing education to their children; however, their support is not properly managed due to lack of education, poverty and remoteness of the school. Parents should actively participate in every aspect of their children's education. Vanegas and Abdelrahim (2016) include that parents provide support to these children by assisting the enhancement of life-skills and advocating for better services outside the home. So, parents have greater roles to develop their children, not only by supporting their education but also supporting them in their lives beyond education. Similarly, World Health Organization and World Bank (2011) state that the family serves as the child's initial source of education, and a significant portion of learning takes place within the home. This statement also highlights the importance of family members to support children's education at home.

Some parents struggle to support their children due to poverty and limited levels of pedagogical knowledge. Teaching children with disabilities is complex, requiring an adapted teaching-learning process due to their individual differences. Easy availability of learning materials for these children is necessary; however, Pokharel (2021) reported that there is a lack of timely availability of learning materials as textbooks in braille scripts for children with visual impairment. Children with disabilities require scaffolding learning support. In this regard, Gibbons (2015) states scaffolding as a temporary support given by a teacher to guide a learner in completing tasks independently in the future. Learning should facilitate these children to make them independent learners.

Likewise, Lamichhane (2013) reported that financial constraints can hinder these children's education significantly. Parental understanding of their children and the belief in their abilities positively impact their education. In conclusion, schools should involve and encourage parents to actively participate in school activities to enhance their children's

learning. On the other hand, parents should be more aware of their roles and responsibilities and engage in school activities.

Conclusion

Parental involvement is instrumental in enhancing the learning of children with disabilities at home and at school. These children are gradually welcomed, accepted and respected by the community; however, their involvement in the social and religious programme is still minimal. Parents' involvement in planning, monitoring, decision-making process and follow-up of education of these children is lacking. Parents are not invited to the schools' activities adequately. Some parents visit schools to inquire the progress of their children on their own. Further, parents are still unfamiliar with the inclusive education policies and legal instruments, so they have not performed their responsibilities effectively. The support provided by parents to their children is not encouraging due to a lack of pedagogical knowledge and their ignorance.

While comparing present findings with Epstein's framework, as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating, it seems useful for the Nepalese context to get involved parents in the school activities. Based on the field experience, this framework is found to be minimally used. Parents and schools need to work together to provide better educational opportunities to children with disabilities.

Policy makers and programmes implementers should actively involve parents in school activities to support children's learning. Moreover, central, province and local governments should train parents in braille and sign language, so they can assist their children at home.

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