

Early Childhood Education Services Offered by Special Schools for Parent Empowerment

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Abstract—Parents play a crucial role in the achievement/progress of their children. In case of children with disabilities, parents' role is expanded to include them as an information seeker, problem solver, advocate, spokesperson for the needs of their children, mentor. Early intervention centers therefore have a dual responsibility of not only ensuring the child's progress, but also make the parents responsive and involved in the habilitation process. Hence parents need to be made aware of their role and needs to be empowered to undertake a multitasking. This is to be ideally done by the special education schools. The purpose of the present study is to find out services offered by special schools for parent empowerment. The article based on a survey conducted, reports services provided by special schools for parent empowerment. The report also presents the frequency and the modes used by special schools for parent empowerment.

Index Terms—Early Childhood Education, responsiveness, habilitation, parent empowerment

I. INTRODUCTION

All learning for every child begins at birth and the first four-five years of life are the greatest learning years (Tracy, 1983). Evidence-based research and multi-country experiences make a strong rationale for early childhood development, especially for children at risk of developmental delay or with a disability. Based on this premise and the greater malleability of early development, a system of services and supports for the vulnerable children and their families is gaining grounds in many countries under the umbrella term of early intervention. Early intervention refers to services that are delivered to children 3yrs of age or younger who are discovered to have or to be at risk of developing a handicapping condition or other special need that may affect their development (Mishra A. 2012). There are three primary reasons for intervening

early: to enhance the child's development, to provide support and assistance to the family, and to maximize the child's and family's benefit to society.

A large body of evidence suggests that effective intervention with young children depends upon parental involvement (Desforjes, 2003). This is because parents have the most significant influence on children, and parenting has profound consequences for the future of the child. It is therefore imperative to persuade parents that engaging in their child's development can make a significant difference in the child outcomes. A need is therefore articulated globally to build positively on parents existing strengths and actively involve them in decisions making and implementation of strategies for early intervention.

Family and parenting support includes a wide range of actions and services that help parents develop the skills they need to carry out their parenting role and that support children within families and the responsibility of making parents aware of their role comes to special schools. Thus, the success of early intervention lies in effective parental empowerment. Special schools hence offer parent empowerment programmes along with other services.

II. NEED OF THE STUDY

According to Murray M., Handyside L., Straka L., and Arton-Titus T. (2013), due to the multifaceted role required of parents in raising a child with a disability, educators should work to empower parents. Special schools in India offer an array of services ranging from awareness to procurement of aids to early intervention as well as support services for inclusion & vocational training. The present researcher has personally

experienced and been a part of some of the services for parent empowerment while working in a special school. In the present workplace at AYJNISHD(D), the present researcher has conducted a parent-to-parent networking program for the capacity building of parents. The areas covered during these were promoting digital literacy and the formation of support groups of parents. In order to expand the activities under the forum of a parent-to-parent networking group, the researcher felt the need to explore from other special schools the areas in which they are providing services for parent empowerment. This is further aimed at developing a module for parent-to-parent networking. Therefore, the present investigation was undertaken.

III. AIM

The Study aimed to find out the services offered by special schools for parent empowerment.

IV. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were

1. To study the services offered by special schools for parent empowerment
2. To study the modes used by special schools for parent empowerment
3. To find out how frequently special schools offer parent empowerment services.

V. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey with a purposive sampling technique was used. 10 Principals of Special schools having early intervention centers for children with hearing impairment were selected as the participants of the study. Researcher-made tool comprising closed & open-ended questions & a rating scale was used. The experience of working in early intervention centers, review of literature pertaining to outcomes of early intervention, and discussions with the experts gave key inputs to the present researcher for developing a tool for data collection. 3 prominent areas that emerged essential to obtain special schools' initiative for parent empowerment were: preparing parents as partners, parent advocacy & parent literacy. A draft survey tool was prepared, which comprised 1) Closed-ended questions to know the services offered

by special schools for parent empowerment, 2) A 3-point rating scale to find out the frequency of these services and 3) Open-ended columns to indicate the strategies, i.e. modes used by schools to empower the parents. The face validity of the tool was established with the help of judges, and the tool was finalized, comprising items. The Researcher personally visited the special schools for data collection. Principals of schools were informed about the purpose and the objectives of the study they were also guided to indicate their responses. The obtained information was later compiled, tabulated and analyzed.

VI. RESULT

In order to study the services and the frequency of services offered by special schools for parental empowerment, the following Research Questions were framed.

Research question 1: What are the services offered by special school for parental empowerment?

To study the services offered by special schools, the services were divided into three areas namely (a) parent as a partner, (b) parent advocacy, and (c) parent literacy.

The results obtained are as follows

Table:1.1: Majority services offered by special schools for parent as a partner are as follows:

Sr. No.	Services offered by special schools	No. of schools offering services
1.	Involving parents in decision making for the child	9
2.	Involving parents in discussing progress of their child	9
3.	Having constant communication with parents	9
4.	Guidance about care & maintenance of hearing device	8
5.	Guidance about child's rights	8
6.	Assigning follow up lessons ay home	7

Table:1.2: Majority services offered by special schools for parent advocacy are as follows:

Sr. No.	Services offered by special schools	No. of schools offering services
1.	Linking with other organization who can offer help & support	5
2.	Guidance from experienced parents to new parents	5
3.	Developing voluntarism amongst parents to support other parents	4
4.	Giving voice to parents	4

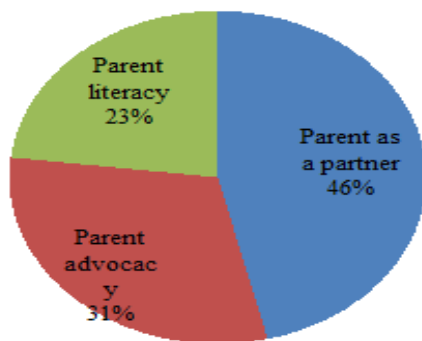
Table: 1.3: Majority of services offered by special schools for parent literacy are as follows:

Sr. No.	Services offered by special schools	No. of schools offering services
1.	Involving parents in learning process along with their children in same classroom	4
2.	Sensitizing about reading readiness	2
3.	Conducting English literacy program	1

Pie diagram1.1: Based on table 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

From the Figure 1.1, it can be seen that the special school focus for services under parent empowerment is mostly for ‘Parent as partners in education’ as compared to other services of Parent Advocacy & Parent literacy. That means not much attention is given by the special schools for parent advocacy & parent literacy.

Research documents that family literacy programs provide opportunities for parents (or children’s primary caregivers) to discover their own strengths; to



enhance their parenting skills and life competencies; and to learn more about children’s cognitive, literacy and developmental growth. So this is an important area of parent empowerment. Studies also reveal that advocacy efforts could be helpful to push system changes at school & community. It can also bring out networking throughout community & state to improve linkages between agencies & smooth out disconnections between organizations that resulted in service gaps for families & children, Mian wang, Mannan H., Turnbull A. & Summers J.(2004) From the review of studies it can be gathered that Parent literacy & advocacy can enhance the effectiveness of parent as a partner in education. That means in order to achieve the outcome of parent as a partner in education more efforts have to be put in parent literacy and advocacy while as the present study seems to be focusing only on the outcome. To confirm the above a descriptive statistic was undertaken, which is reported below.

Table 1.4: Descriptive statistics for Total scores for Activities Empowering Parents

Total Score for Activities Empowering	Minimum	Maximum	Percentiles		
			25	50 (Median)	75
Parents as a Partner (out of 24)	0	22	14.75	17.5	22
Parents’ Advocacy (out of 12)	0	12	0	5.5	8.5
Parents’ Literacy (out of 6)	0	4	0	0	4

The descriptive statistics in Table 1.4 show that the median for “Parents as a Partner” is 17.5 (very close to 75% of 24, which is 18). In other words, more than 50% of the schools under investigation have almost 75% of the total score or above for empowering parents as partners. In contrast to the empowering parents as partners, for “Parents’ Advocacy” the median is 5.5 (lower than 75% of 12, which is 9). Thus, in less than 50% of the schools, the

empowerment of activities related to Parents' Advocacy has a total score not even 50%.

Research question 2: What are the modes used by special schools for the parent empowerment services? To study the modes used by special schools for the parent empowerment services under 3 areas Principals were asked to write the modes used by them in their schools.

Table 2.1: Preferred category of mode reported by Principals for services of parent empowerment are as follows:

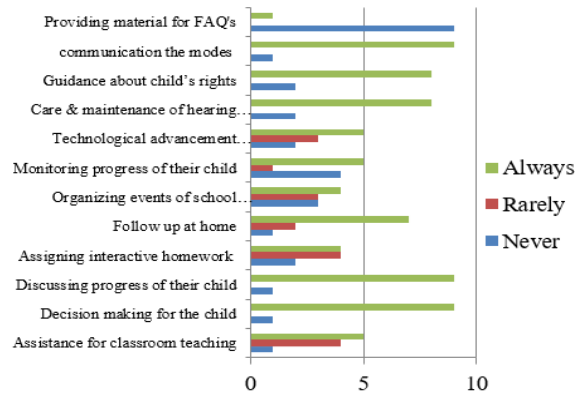
Categories	Face to Face	Third Party mediation	Referrals	Others
Modes	Class parent meeting, Individual meeting, demos, observation in the classes, classes of English literacy	Workshops, lectures, guidance from experienced parents,	Referring to other organizations, literacy programmes	Diaries, Phone calls and suggestion box

Content analysis of the responses in the questionnaire shows that class meetings & writing diaries are most preferred modes.

Research question 3: What is the frequency of services offered by the special school for parental empowerment?

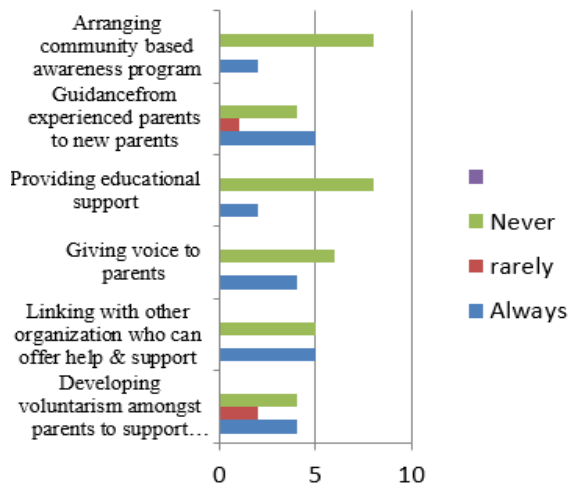
To study the frequency of services offered by special schools, the criteria were always, rarely, and never. The results obtained are as follows:

Bar graph 1.1: Frequency of services offered by special schools for empowering parents as partners



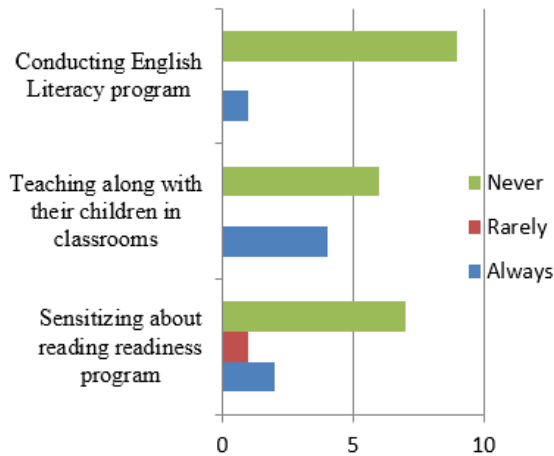
From the above graph 1.1 it could be noted that in 9 out of 10 special schools, services such as decision making for the child, discussing progress of their child and communication are carried out "Always". Whereas services such as care & maintenance of hearing devices and guidance about children's rights are carried out "Always" in 8 out of 10 schools. The third highest frequency for "Always" (in 7 out of 10 schools) is for follow-up of lessons at home. All the other remaining activities are carried out "Always" in 5 or less than 5 schools out of 10 schools. These services include assistance for classroom teaching, monitoring progress of their child, technological advancement about hearing devices, assigning interactive homework, organizing events of schools. Moreover, service related to provide material for FAQs is carried out in 1 out of 10 schools.

Bar graph 1.2: frequency of services offered by the special school for empowering parents' advocacy



The frequencies presented in graph 1.2 indicate that in all ten schools, services related to linking with other organization who can offer help & support, guidance from experienced parents to new parents are carried out “Always” in 5 schools out of 10. Whereas services such as developing voluntarism amongst parents to support other parents and giving voice to parents are carried out “Always” in 4 out of 10 schools. All the other remaining services are carried out “Always” in 2 schools out of 10 schools. These include providing educational support and arranging community-based awareness programs.

Bar graph 3.3: Frequency of services offered by the special school for empowering parents' literacy



The frequencies presented in graph 1.3 shows that service related to teaching along with their children in classroom are carried out ‘Always’ only in 4 schools out of 10 schools.

Sensitizing about reading readiness program is carried out “Always” in 2 out of 10 schools whereas conducting English literacy program is carried out “Always” in only 1 out of 10 schools.

VII. CONCLUSION

Parental empowerment plays a very important role in early intervention programmes (Nurhayati, 2021). Parents are the first teachers and caregivers of the child, and their involvement can make a major difference in the child’s development and learning. When parents are guided and supported properly, they become more confident in understanding their child’s needs, making decisions, and helping in the child’s

overall progress. Because of this, parental empowerment is considered an essential part of special education and early intervention services.

However, in many special schools, parental involvement is mostly limited to educational support, such as attending meetings, following teachers’ instructions, or helping the child with school-related activities (Sukys, 2015). Other important areas of parental empowerment do not receive equal attention. Parents are often not given enough opportunities to learn about their rights, government schemes, advocacy skills, or ways to independently support and represent their children. (Gillies, 2005). Similarly, programmes that improve parent literacy and awareness about disability and intervention are also limited.

Due to this, many parents continue to depend completely on professionals and may feel unsure while making important decisions for their children. Therefore, schools need to focus on all aspects of parental empowerment and not only on parents as educational partners. When parents are informed, confident, and actively involved, it benefits not only the child but also the family as a whole.

VIII. LIMITATIONS

The study was limited to special schools located in Mumbai city, and only 10 schools were included in the sample. Furthermore, the study focused exclusively on three selected areas of parental empowerment, which may limit the generalization of the findings to other aspects of parental involvement and empowerment.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

All schools should ensure that parent empowerment is promoted in all three areas through regular and meaningful activities. Schools should also organize programmes and interactive sessions that encourage parent-to-parent networking, helping parents share experiences, support, and information. In addition, schools should exchange and share successful parent empowerment practices with one another to improve the overall effectiveness of such initiatives. A common forum for parents may also be jointly created by all schools to strengthen collaboration, communication, and collective participation of parents in the educational process.

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