

Factors why children with disabilities go to regular or special needs education

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Executive summary

Education is a basic human right and an important step towards participation in society. However, 50% of school aged children with a disability in low- and middle income countries is out of school. Even less children with disabilities are enrolled in regular education. This study researched individual and contextual factors why children with disabilities are going to regular or special needs schools. Insights into these factors can contribute to the enhancement or referral of more children with disabilities into inclusive forms of education. The study shows that the type and severity of a disability, the role of local organizations and the facilities and attitude of schools are of most influence on whether a child with a disability goes to a regular or special needs school.

Introduction

150 million children worldwide below the age of 18 have a disability. 80% of them are living in low- and middle income countries. Having a disability and living in poverty declines the chance for children to enroll in education. This causes for inequality in comparison to those who do not have a disability. Besides the fact that education is important, the type of schooling is relevant for the future prospects of children with disabilities as well. Special needs schools were originally designed to help children with extra needs and specific disabilities (such as blindness). In many countries, this led to a special school system for those children who needed special attention and care. Nowadays a shift to inclusive forms of education is seen as more beneficial and endorsed by many international agreements (e.g. UN Sustainable Development Goals). The concept of inclusive education broadly means providing meaningful learning opportunities to all children *within the regular school system*¹.

Special Needs Education	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to give extra and individual care • Specially trained teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes segregation • May have stigmatizing effects (e.g. social-withdrawal behaviors) • Generally only located in rural areas (while most children with disabilities live in rural areas)

Inclusive Education	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves social skills • Promotes interacting between children with disabilities and non-disabled peers • Tackles biases and stigmas about children with disabilities and brings acceptance of children with disabilities • Increases possibilities to go to a school nearby • On the long term more cost-effective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough staff • Not properly trained staff • Not able to provide the right facilities to educate children with all sorts of disabilities (such as braille for blind children)

¹ UNICEF (2013). The state of the world's children 2013: Children with disabilities. New York, NY: UNICEF.

Research design

The research was conducted on the education programme of The Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI), Strategic Partner Organisation of Liliane Foundation. India is a remarkable country considering the disability prevalence among children in India aged 0-19 is estimated at 7.9 million². Furthermore, India has the second largest educational system in the world. Data was gathered in rural areas in the states of Telangana and Kerala. Quantitative data was gathered through a document analysis on child- and school characteristics from 827 children. Qualitative data was gathered through a focus group with members from CHAI, interviews with four local partner organizations³ of CHAI and 17 interviews with parents of children with a disability.

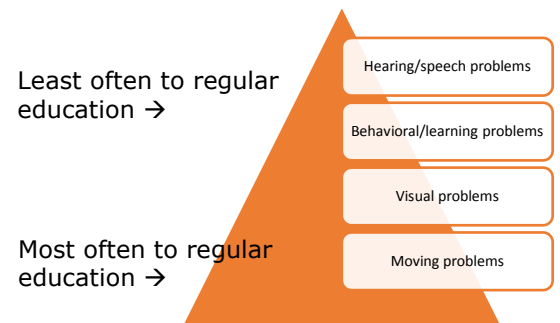
Research Outcomes

Child Factors

Type of disability:

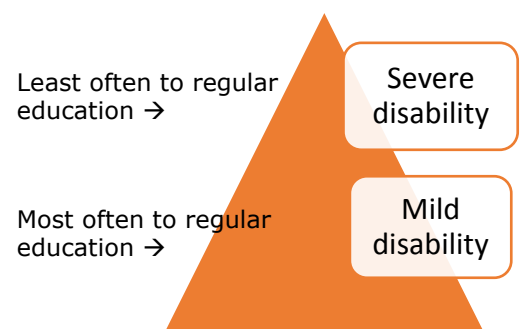
The type and severity of disability is an influencing factor in the referral to either regular or special schools. Children with hearing and speech problems least often go to

a regular school whereas children with moving problems mostly go to a regular school.



Severity of a disability:

Generally, it can be stated that the more severe a disability, the more likely the child is to go to a special needs school. Children who are blind or deaf, and therefore need braille or sign-language, are also more likely to be referred to a special needs school.



School factors

Several factors at school level explain as well why children with disabilities are enrolled in regular or special needs schools. Influencing factors to attend to a regular school are the open and accepting attitude of a school, the fact that regular schools are generally nearby, which means no transportation costs. And lastly, if other children with disabilities are already enrolled in the regular school. Influencing factors to attend to a special needs school are the availability of braille or sign-language, the ability of the school to provide more individual care, the availability of specially trained teachers and the smaller classes.

The role of local organizations

Local organizations are an important factor and are therefore an important role in the process of a child with a disability going to a certain type of school.

- The role of local organizations is: guiding, supportive, being the link between the family and education.

² Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (2017). Disabled persons in India. New Delhi, India: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

³ The Liliane Foundation is cooperating with 27 countries in a partner model. The autonomous 'strategic partner organizations' are responsible for the budgets, programs and selection/screening of the executive 'partner organizations'.

- They make a suggestion for a suitable school to the parents about an individual child.
- According to parents, without the help and guidance of partner organizations, education would not have been possible for their child.

The role of parents

- Parents generally agree with the suggestion from the local organizations, they feel responsible but lack the right knowledge and need the guidance from the local organizations.
- However, parents always have the final decision with regards to the school of their child.

To Conclude

Overall, this research shows that there are numerous individual and contextual factors that explain why a child with a disability is going to a regular or a special needs school. The child's disability and severity are of individual influencing factors. The location, attitude and facilities of schools and the respectively major role of local organizations are contextual factors of influence.

Influencing factors:

- Type and severity of disability
- Location, attitude and facilities of schools
- Major role of local organizations

Recommendations

To improve the referral of more children with disabilities to inclusive forms of education, the study provides a couple of recommendations for the professional field. Local organizations are advised to focus more on structural changing the attitude of local regular schools and creating awareness, instead of focus on seeking for a right school for an individual child. Furthermore, since the local organizations have a major role in the referral process of a child with a disability going to a certain type of school, it is recommended to focus on the needed capacities for the partner to make a right decision for a child. Lastly, the role of the parents is very small and outbalanced, compared to the role of the local organizations. It is advised to restore this balance through more focus on parental participation.

Implications

- More focus on creating structural awareness among school instead of only individual child help.
- Focus on needed capacities for local organizations to make a right decision.
- Focus on parental involvement, bring back the balance.

Further reading

Bout, I (2018). Individual and Contextual Factors Influencing the Placement of Children with Disabilities in Regular or Special Needs Education. *MA Research Thesis*. Utrecht: Utrecht University. *Full research report available upon request with the Liliane Foundation.*