

Perceptions on Inclusive Education Held by Parents of Children Living with Down Syndrome.

M.M.N. Vanshani¹, Lasanthi Daskon-Attanayake²

¹ Department of Disability Studies, Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya

² National Disability and Programme Advisor, International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Colombo

Parental perceptions are regarded as a crucial factor for the successful implementation of inclusive education of children living with disabilities. Previous literature reveals that the perceptions of parents of children with Down syndrome toward inclusive education and their effect on the education of those children were varied.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of parents of children with Down syndrome toward inclusive education. It also briefly examined whether parental perceptions have an impact on the access to inclusive education gained by children with Down syndrome.

A qualitative phenomenological study design was used. The semi-structured interview was conducted with 15 parents of children with Down syndrome who were within the age range of 06-18 years. The data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Result: Overall, parents demonstrated a positive perception toward inclusive education despite the barriers their children confront in accessing inclusive education. They were aware of benefits of inclusive education. Taken as an isolated factor without giving consideration to the other contributory elements, the perceptions of parents could be identified to have a positive effect on the access to inclusive education gained by their children with Down syndrome. The outcomes are organized under three (03) key themes; a) Perceptions on the learning capacity; b) Self-reliance; and c) Barriers to accessing inclusive education

The parent perceptions are encouraging and support the inclusion of children with Down syndrome in the mainstream classrooms. However, the external barriers to inclusive education are complex. There needs to be more exploration of these barriers in order to understand how children with Down syndrome could be successfully integrated into the mainstream classrooms and are enabled to study in an inclusive environment.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Down syndrome, Parent perception