

Key Factors Shaping Families' Views About the School Enrolment of Children with Disabilities

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Summary

All children deserve the right to receive an education regardless of race, ethnicity, or ability. Many children worldwide are deprived of attending school due to various issues, such as marginalization, economic conditions, and social problems. Statistics indicate that the school enrolment rate for children with disabilities is low, and the dropout rate is increasing. One way to address this issue is by studying families' views on the school enrolment of their children with disabilities. Understandably, parents' views on schooling impact their children's school enrolment. Therefore, this literature review explores the factors that influence families' views on the school enrolment of their children with disabilities. It is crucial to examine these influencing factors to understand what precisely impacts the decision to send their children with disabilities to school. Previous literature on this subject revealed that families' views about the school enrolment of their children with disabilities were significantly affected by the quality of institutions, accessibility, inclusive practices, availability of professional staff, attitude of society, community support, and a family's economic conditions. Additionally, families that experienced self-stigma formed negative views regarding the school enrolment of their children with disabilities. This knowledge will assist educators, policymakers, school leaders, and families in recognizing the importance of certain key factors and the need to adjust specific actions accordingly.

Keywords: Views, Disabilities, School enrolment, Families

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1 INTRODUCTION

Education provides values for life and guides us to treat others respectfully by creating equitable practices. Article 23 of the “Convention on the Rights of the Child” grants the right to educate all children with disabilities (International Committee of the Red Cross, n.d). However, children face exclusions based on factors such as religion, race, ethnicity, and disability (Babić et al., 2018). A disability is any condition of the mind or body that makes participation in certain activities difficult for a person (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d). It results from interacting with factors such as health conditions and personal or societal views (World Health Organization, n.d.).

There are around 2.4 billion children worldwide (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, n.d.). Among this number, around 240 million children are experiencing some disability (UNICEF, 2023), and 251 million children are out of school (United Nations, 2024). According to an estimate indicated in “The Global Monitoring Report” (UNESCO, 2016), one-third of all out-of-school children at the primary school level have a disability. When a child with a disability does not attend school, the chances of them being exploited will increase (Oberge et al., 2022). For example, they will be unskilled and unable to land a job providing a comfortable environment and health coverage; they will be forced to work in harsh labour conditions. Thus, if children with disabilities remain without schooling, they will be exposed to a vulnerable environment (Mizunoya et al., 2018b). However, the decision against school enrolment may often come from parents. Studies project the family as an important unit responsible for making decisions for children, including school enrolment (Li et al., 2023). Admittedly, every decision should be supported by a fair reason in the best interests of their child.

Despite UNESCO’s mission to bring every child to school by 2030, a significant number of children with disabilities are out of school (UNICEF, 2021). The problem is evident in countries with struggling economies, especially for girls, who face additional barriers (Trani et al., 2012). School dropout rates are alarming, specifically from primary to secondary education. Therefore, this literature review investigates the factors that shape families’ views about the school enrolment of children with disabilities, with the following research question:

What are the factors that affect families’ views about the school enrolment of their children with disabilities and their subsequent actions?

In this literature review, “views” mean the way families interpret, perceive, and respond to the concept of sending their children with disabilities to formal schooling. These views may include their beliefs about the importance of education, their thoughts on inclusive and special education, concerns about their children’s health and well-being, as well as their expectations for the future. Importantly, these views are not static; they may evolve over time due to changes in support systems, accessibility, and personal circumstances.

In this literature review, I am using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model to understand factors that shape families' views about the school enrolment of their children with disabilities.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) asserts that human development is influenced by several interconnected layers, each of which uniquely affects an individual. This point of view offers a thorough perspective that may demonstrate how several layers, referred to as a microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, combine to influence views. Understanding that families' views are the product of a complex web of interrelated influences rather than being formed in a vacuum would be easier with the help of Bronfenbrenner's model.

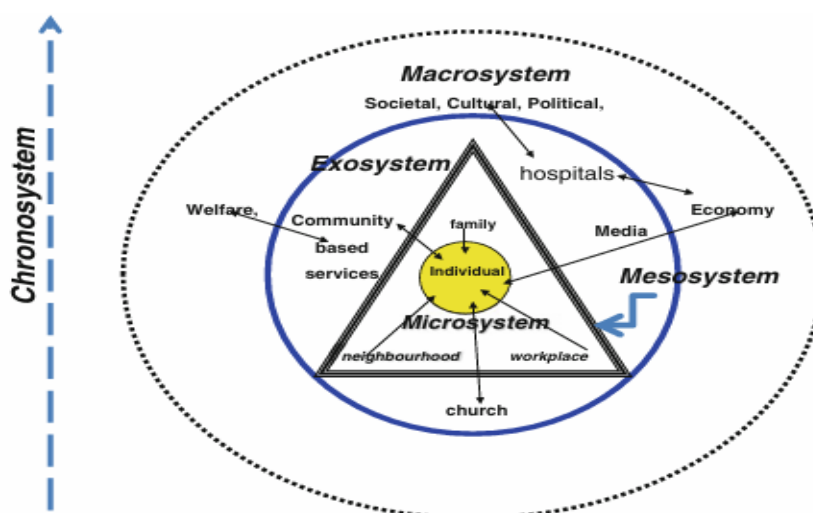


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model for community resilience (Boon, Cottrell, King, Stevenson, & Millar, 2011, p. 390).

In Figure One, five layers are seen that surround individuals and jointly impact their development, including thinking and views. The following is a brief description of how I have used these layers to understand the formation of families' views.

The *microsystem*, consisting of the immediate circle, will explain the first environment, such as home, siblings, peers, and school's impact (Hayes et al., 2017). For example, family dynamics such as finances, workplace environment, school, and neighbourhood will impact families' perception of school enrolment. The second layer, the *mesosystem*, will show how the interaction

between environments, such as home-school communication, impacts shaping views (Boon et al., 2011). The *exosystem* describes how settings indirectly impact individuals (Hayes et al., 2017). For example, moving to new places would impact the views of families related to school enrolment. Wider social impact will be understood by looking at the *macrosystem*, which shows how societal norms and policies shape views (Hayes et al., 2017). For instance, how the treatment of society and awareness impact parental views. Finally, the *chronosystem* is connected to historical or time-based influences and how any developments in society might affect views (Boon et al., 2011). For instance, families' views towards school enrolment will change if scientific discoveries make society more inclusive.

All the layers enable us to comprehend how human society is constructed and how its many branches influence our choices. Every decision regarding a child is influenced by these experiences and how these layers interact (Hayes et al., 2017).

3 FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE SCHOOL ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

In this section, I have gathered information from previous literature about factors influencing families to form views about school enrolment. The description considers factors such as institutions, societies, families' economic status and future aspirations, and parental awareness. The following is a detailed analysis of how these factors shape families' views about the school enrolment of their children with disabilities.

3.1 Institutional Factors

The availability of special education schools assures parents that their children are in a better place, surrounded by empathetic people. These schools are equipped with special aids and trained staff, making families believe that teachers and the school are considerate of children's needs (Roll-Pettersson, 2004). Families trust that attention will be provided to children and that their specific needs related to school sites, equipment, staff, and transportation will be considered to ensure mobility (Kameyama, 2019). In addition to the availability of quality special schools, families require access to schooling from early childhood education to form positive views about school enrolment (Kameyama, 2019). This means that early integration, such as from the preschool level, makes families hopeful and creates positive thoughts about school enrolment.

However, schools have complex processes for dealing with children with special needs. For example, in the United States, parents are expected to explore the available resources by themselves without communicating about how to access or request those resources within schools, which causes parents to form assumptions that there are not enough resources for their child (Phillips, 2008). Parents feel like they are entering a courtroom, where they must know the right terms and navigate the education system very well (Phillips, 2008). Therefore, there is a need for strong collaboration, support for the school enrolment process (Babić et al., 2018b), and communication for a positive caregiver experience, while parents must not be expected to navigate the system flawlessly.

Moreover, accessibility remains a grave issue, especially in underdeveloped countries. According to Singal (2016), there is a lack of support in India for travelling to school and receiving help within schools, such as toilet assistance and specialized care. Many parents in India, for example, reported that their child was asked to stay home until the required specialized

help became available (Singal, 2016). Furthermore, teachers' professional training needs to be improved to enable them to work efficiently with children with disabilities. Although most families are pleased with teachers' interpersonal skills, they show concerns about teachers' professional competence (Babić et al., 2018b).

Additionally, as indicated by Currie and Kahn (2012) in the United States, several special education schools have significantly lower expectations of children with disabilities than their peers. Schools focus on teaching basic skills without pushing the child to attain their full capacity. Children have limited access to the curriculum and are not expected to compete in competitive exams, which makes them lonely, with lower self-confidence, and unprepared for the twenty-first-century skills required for a better future. Similarly, in India, some schools do not have an assessment of learning for children with special needs and only require them to copy from the board, while children cannot solve simple arithmetic questions (Singal, 2016). Hence, schools practice conventional methods and lack proactiveness in creating meaningful targets for children (Babić et al., 2018b). This indifference shapes families' views about their children's potential and the available opportunities because parents form views about their children based on school feedback (Devolli & Zabeli, 2024). As parents are the key stakeholders in ensuring school enrolment of children with disabilities, schools must strive to make positive experiences for parents with schools (Devolli & Zabeli, 2024).

As children grow, parents also wish to participate in their learning at school and desire to be asked to join in on decision-making and other school activities (Roll-Pettersson, 2004). Additionally, Kendall and Taylor (2014) explain that parents in England become unhappy with some state-run schools because school administrators do not listen to the suggestions given by parents about how to manage their children with disabilities at schools. However, only organizing collaboration is scarcely supported by research; instead, the quality of how well these collaborations work is important (Cameron & Tveit, 2017). For example, while collaboration between teachers and families has been arranged, parents and teachers must perform their roles effectively for the best of the child. In other words, only arranging collaboration events does not form positive experiences; including families in the decision-making process makes parents feel that they are heard or considered (Phillips, 2008). Therefore, the performance of individual teachers and parents should be optimized to ensure that the results of collaboration work for the child in question (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

In conclusion, special education schools and preschools for children with disabilities help families feel confident about their children attending school. Yet, parents have unfavourable opinions about the systems that make it difficult to find available support. Schools also need to have educational goals and trained staff to provide purposeful and productive teaching practices to make every child feel included and ready for future challenges. Therefore, clarity about navigating the school resources, effective home-school communication, and the presence of competitive educational targets affect families' perspectives and views.

3.1.1 Social Factors

Society criticizes and disapproves of families having children with disabilities, considering them as the “cause” of a disability (Eaton et al., 2016). In the United States, the number of abused children is higher for children having disabilities in comparison to those who do not have disabilities, which significantly reduces their chances of enrolling in school (Phillips, 2008). People even cite religious sources that prove that disability is a burden to bear. For example, Henderson and Bryan (1984, as cited in Rose, 1997) quote the Bible to say that physical ability represents purity and cleanliness, while a disability is linked to God's anger; they contend that although most Western countries do not practice disability, it nevertheless remains an evil embodiment. This results in forming self-stigma, which has negative effects on families with children having physical, behavioural, and cognitive conditions that require prolonged support in education and care centres (Alexander, 2009). Internalizing such criticism by mixing it with their value system (Corrigan et al., 2006), parents prefer isolation and social withdrawal, fearing judgment and difficulty in school adjustment for their children with disabilities (Serchuk et al., 2021).

Moreover, taking care of children with disabilities without support from society takes a toll on the psychological well-being of parents. Studies carried out in Finland and Sweden show that mothers who have children with disabilities, especially those with psychological or neurological disabilities, exhibit more aggression than mothers with children without disabilities (Koivula et al., 2018). For example, these mothers might think that managing school will be difficult because they need help with household chores, and sending their children to school, who require extra assistance in getting ready, might be challenging to manage. However, the availability of human resources within a family, such as siblings, strengthens families' positive views on facilitating children with disabilities (Kameyama, 2019). Additionally, the collective efforts of family

members, ranging from daily care to providing support in the educational journey, encourage parents regarding their children's ability to succeed in the school environment. Hence, although the initial hesitation in caring for children with disabilities might create frustration for parents, cooperation within families can produce positive reinforcements that school enrolment is an easy and achievable practice for any ability (Kameyama, 2019).

Overall, the lack of assistance and society's disdain for individuals with disabilities disrupt parental emotional and psychological well-being. Nonetheless, the availability of support within families, such as siblings, creates hope and positive views toward school enrolment.

3.1.2 Families' Economic Status and Future Aspirations

Families' social standing shapes views about the education of children with disabilities. Poverty makes managing school difficult for parents, and if the poor parents have children with disabilities, schooling becomes even more difficult for them. In Pakistan, a child experiencing some disability has higher chances to work rather than attend school if their parents are poor, unqualified, and reside in a remote area (Akram et al., 2024). This implies that parental poverty influences negative views on school attendance for children and promotes positive views on child labour. Conversely, parents with stable, long-term employment tend to feel content and confident, hold positive views about education, and spend more time with their children (Kameyama, 2019). This means, parents in the public sector are less likely to form views about education as a financial burden and have fewer out-of-school children compared to entrepreneurs or private-sector employees. This satisfaction in public sector jobs relates to the benefits associated with public employment compared to the private sector, particularly in underdeveloped countries (Kameyama, 2019), where social benefits may be lacking.

Additionally, having clear goals for success within families forms positive views about school enrolment. Thus, families are encouraged to set clear early goals for children with disabilities, more so than for those without disabilities (Gutman & Schoon, 2017), since a clear aspiration for a career can significantly alter how social status impacts education (Melugbo et al., 2022). When families are committed to creating career-oriented goals, they actively seek resources, facilities, and support systems to help their children thrive despite their disabilities (Gutman & Schoon, 2017). For example, a parent with a goal for their child to become a teacher is likely to engage with others, explore pathways, and overcome obstacles, unlike a parent without a specific career

aim for their child. Therefore, a lack of purposeful aspirations may lead families to feel unmotivated in pursuing educational opportunities for their children, believing instead that a child's disability inherently leads to unemployment (Melugbo et al., 2022). This mindset can create discouragement and reduce motivation to seek out educational programs that address mental health literacy and family empowerment in defending their children's basic rights (Kosyluk et al., 2022).

In essence, parental economic status shapes both positive and negative perceptions regarding the schooling of children with disabilities, as financial stability is crucial for parental support. Jobs that lack fulfilment often drive individuals to work longer hours, resulting in less time spent with their children and diminished engagement in their education. Nevertheless, children with disabilities require clearly defined career goals even more than those without, as these goals promote family optimism concerning education for achieving future aspirations.

3.1.3 Parental Awareness

Parental awareness influences positive or negative views about the enrolment of children with disabilities in school. Many parents in India recognize that education can lead to financial stability and independence for their child, regardless of their educational background (Singal, 2016). In addition to that, Kervick (2017) discusses from the perspective of one state in the United States and asserts that parents must also comprehend the rights of their children with disabilities to effectively advocate on their behalf. For instance, many parents in the United States are unaware of their legal rights related to school assistance availability, causing confusion over enrolment and the types of help accessible (Phillips, 2008). While some parents in the United States do not realize that they can request an enlarged examination to properly match their child's needs with the appropriate support, regardless of the level of their disability (Phillips, 2008).

Moreover, in the United States, families may also lack the medical knowledge necessary to identify specific needs accurately. For instance, parents might discern that their child requires assistance with reading but may struggle to determine if that's due to autism, reading difficulties, or a vision issue (Phillips, 2008). Additionally, parents often cannot assess the quality of support provided at school and tend to assume that the school knows best; they may remain quiet if they find the reading assistance insufficient, perceiving the school's staff as more knowledgeable and

authoritative than themselves (Valle, 2009). Ultimately, this silence can lead to desperation, making families assume schools fail to provide adequate support for special needs.

In conclusion, for families to cultivate positive experiences, they must grasp the legal rights of their children with disabilities and make better use of available school resources. At times, families may struggle to identify the specific areas where their children require help and may not be able to assess whether the teacher is qualified to meet their child's needs, which can result in feelings of hopelessness regarding the school's ability to address special needs.

4 DISCUSSIONS

This literature review explores the factors that influence families' views on the school enrollment of their children with disabilities and their subsequent actions. The purpose is to inform key players, such as families, educators, society, and policymakers, about the hidden and overt actions that shape families' perceptions regarding school enrollment. This exploration will help these stakeholders recognize which actions should be repeated, which should be avoided, and what new measures need to be introduced. This section will describe how a theoretical framework was used to understand the factors influencing families' views and discuss the key factors impacting families' views on the school enrollment of children with disabilities.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory was employed for this literature review to select, organize, and understand previous studies. The aim was to find literature that could illustrate the multiple layers of interaction according to the theory, such as the microsystem, which represents a child's immediate contact with their home and school, and the macrosystem, which explains broader aspects like society and culture. This approach systematically categorized the findings from previous studies. For example, studies about the impact of preschool education were conducted by examining how the home-school relationship shapes parental views. Support within families was also explored through the microsystem, as it demonstrates how the direct relationship between a parent and child, along with their routine, influences parental perspectives; it can also connect with the mesosystem since external factors, such as social networks, can play a role. Parental stress resulting from caring for children with disabilities was analysed through the exosystem, as parents are not in direct contact with what causes the stress, such as lack of support at work, absence of resources within communities, and issues within healthcare systems. Societal pressure regarding having children with disabilities and parental awareness of policies were understood through the macrosystem, which highlights the effects of culture, social stigmatization, and how society influences people's decision-making. Parental financial problems were covered by both the exosystem and macrosystem since these issues arise from external factors as well as societal inequalities. Lastly, having goals and ambitions for children was interpreted through the microsystem at a smaller level to understand personal aspirations and hopes within families; however, it has broader implications that demonstrate how society normalizes and sets criteria for success.

The literature review found that, along with the availability of preschool education (Kameyama, 2019), special education schools are crucial (Roll-Pettersson, 2004). These schools provide parents with a sense of safety, care, and attentiveness toward their children, which builds their confidence in enrolling children with disabilities. However, it is equally important to address the operational aspects of these schools, such as ensuring efficient administration, clear communication with families, and access to resources that meet the specific needs of students. Additionally, parents in underdeveloped countries often face significant challenges in accessing schools (Singal, 2016). These include poor infrastructure and long travel distances. Schools also require well-trained and professional staff to effectively support children with disabilities. Moreover, when schools do not hold the same expectations for children with disabilities as they do for other students, it can negatively impact the children's well-being (Devolli & Zabeli, 2024). These students may feel excluded or discouraged, and without opportunities to develop 21st-century skills, they may struggle to secure employment in the future. This can lead families to question the value of education. Instead, parents expressed a desire for meaningful inclusion in their children's learning and key school decisions.

From the social perspective, at times, parents may internalize feelings of guilt, believing they are responsible for their child's disability. This can lead to self-stigma, negatively impacting parental views about school enrolment, because it holds families responsible for the disability of their child, and as a result, parents become reluctant to face society or the school community (Serchuk et al., 2021). However, parental engagement in policymaking proves fruitful. Indeed, some parents are socially disadvantaged to voice their concerns; thus, involvement in decision making and being consulted about what suits the child to allocate targeted support is viewed positively (Singal, 2016). Lastly, since all factors influencing parental views are interconnected, strong collaboration among schools, policies, government, and families is crucial (Pedaste et al., 2021).

Economic conditions also play a significant role in influencing parental views and their decision about the school enrolment of their children with disabilities. For instance, in underdeveloped countries, where government support is limited, the cost of specialized equipment and services can be overwhelming. This financial burden contributes to high dropout rates, particularly among families in the private job sector, which often lacks the support mechanisms, such as free medical services, that may be available in the public sector.

Overall, I found that the findings of the studies address the importance of preschool-level education, the availability of special education schools, and home-school communication. I also learned that parents' views of their differently abled children are influenced by society and societal standards. Society makes parents think negatively about a child with a disability and disapprove of their condition. As a result, parents develop self-shame and believe they are to blame for the disability. However, parents' views are also shaped by their knowledge of the available policies and legal assistance, and their aspirations for future perspectives for their children. Without the required awareness of policies and assistance programs, parents will believe that their child may not be able to attend school or find a future career, and they have no right to request specialized assistance. Lastly, the impact of time-based changes, such as the effect of historical and technological changes, was rarely found in previous literature. For example, the literature is scarce on parents' perceptions of the vulnerability of children with special needs during COVID-19 and the influence of technological advancement on parental views about school enrolment.

Therefore, in light of the above, it can be claimed that the importance of establishing solid international plans for school enrolment is undeniable. For example, significant progress in overcoming child illiteracy has been observed over the past 35 years. These outcomes stem from educational laws and agreements, such as the Salamanca Statement of 1994, which focused on supporting children with disabilities, the UN Convention on the Rights of Children with Special Needs from 2006, and the promotion of education for all within the framework of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2025). However, in some developing countries, incentives targeting families must be introduced or maintained. Such incentives may include continued monetary support and school lunches, which parents in India have recognized as a positive factor (Singal, 2016). While these incentives may not be the sole motivation for enrolling their children with disabilities in school, they can help parents recognize that schools and policies regard their children's basic needs. Furthermore, there is a need to implement higher teaching standards and consistently apply special pedagogies to ensure inclusivity (UNESCO, 2025). This is essential because parents develop views about the enrolment of their children with disabilities through interactions with schools, society, and various other entities; these views are formed through ongoing efforts and require time and dedication to establish (Devolli & Zabeli, 2024).

4.1. CONCLUSIONS:

This literature review aimed to investigate the factors influencing families' views on their children with disabilities attending school. Since out-of-school children with disabilities are about one-third of all out-of-school children worldwide, their enrolment in schools is crucial. In addition to several other reasons, some families' views lead to presumptions regarding the school enrolment of children with disabilities, which prevents them from enrolling their children in school.

The treatment of all sections relevant to a child with a disability impacts the views of families regarding their school enrolment. In this aspect, major factors include institutions with access to preschool education, the availability of special education, trained staff, appropriate equipment, accessibility, ease of navigation, home-school communication, parental inclusion in decision-making, teacher autonomy, and school leaders' influence over the curriculum. All of these are factors that shape parental views and influence their decision for or against school enrolment. Other influential factors are social, such as stigma, lack of support, and parents' self-stigma. Additionally, economic challenges also shape parental views about enrolling their children with disabilities in school.

Moreover, there is a need to make concrete plans in policies, and small school incentives must be continued. Lastly, consistency in collaboration among key stakeholders must be evident to influence the views of families about school enrolment of children with disabilities over time.

Nevertheless, these findings are based on an analysis of earlier, sparsely published research studies. The outcomes may vary depending on society. For future research, it is suggested that the study be limited to a region where a significant percentage of children with disabilities are not attending school, and that families in that area be reached to have a deeper understanding of the variables influencing their views.

5 REFLECTIONS

I chose this topic for two main reasons. Firstly, for empathetic reasons, I have encountered many people in our society who are experiencing societal pressure due to having children with disabilities. Their children possess exceptional talent, and through such biased opinions, we are depriving brilliant minds of our society. Just a little support, and these families and children have so much potential to do better in society.

Secondly, I want to advocate for all children's right to education, regardless of their race, location, ethnicity, and ability. I want to support UNESCO's cause for education for all and spread awareness. It seems a distant reality at this time, but if every one of us at least talks about that, we must see positive results in improving child illiteracy in the world.

Studying the factors that shape the views of families has caused me to consider how, as a teacher, I might support the children and families in my class. Which parent-teacher communication style is most effective, and how should I improve professionally to help families, myself, and others around me avoid creating those negative experiences? From my writing experience, I believe that disengaging ourselves from what we are writing and giving an objective, fact-based opinion supported by research is challenging.

Use of AI: Occasionally, when I could not think of good vocabulary, I took help with QuillBot to replace repetitive words with alternative synonyms. Apart from that, no other use of AI has been utilized at any stage of my thesis writing.

For my future research, I found an interesting topic in a research paper that I read. It is related to investigating how advocating for differently abled children provides strength for families to cope with societal pressure.

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