SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW ARCHIVES

Parental Silence and Withdrawal in Inclusive Education: A Qualitative Exploration of Non-Participation in Pakistani Schools

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Abstract

Parental engagement is often considered as a pillar in the effective inclusive education, but not much attention has been paid to some parents who continue being not engaged or even disengage with the process of engaging. This paper examines the parental silence and withdrawal in inclusive primary and secondary schools in Pakistan paying attention to non-participation as a social phenomenon to be practiced but not a lack of interest. The study issue revolves around the fact that the discourse of inclusive education always focuses on interpreting the aspect of parents non-involvement as disengagement, which does not take into consideration such structural, cultural, and emotional determinants that predetermine participation. The main aim of the paper was to study the meaning of parental silence as perceived by teachers and school administrators and meaning of withdrawal as perceived and rationalized by parents. A qualitative research design was used in gathering the data which followed the semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers and school leaders of both the public and private schools in Pakistan. This study had its assumption that parental participation is mediated socially and culturally with the boundary conditions being influenced by power relations, institutional norm, and disability stigma. This finding shows that parental silence is usually a sign of fear of being labeled, distrust of institutions, and a sense of powerlessness and not apathy. These findings are based on new global findings on silent participation and bring in country specific findings in Pakistan. The research paper finds that the concept of silence as a communicational event is critical to creating more inclusive and sensitive family-school partnerships.

Keywords: *Parental engagement; Inclusive education; Silence and withdrawal; Disability advocacy; School–family relations; Qualitative research; Pakistan*

Introduction

Parental engagement is not only acknowledged extensively as an essential ingredient of effective inclusive education, but also helps learners to increase their well-being, progress in their studies, and remain included. The collaboration between schools and families is prioritized in international studies, where researchers consider the partnership practice as the key aspect of inclusive practice (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). Both engagement is not even and the interactions between parents and the schools are influenced by social, cultural, and institutional backgrounds. Parents of disabled children frequently experience a complicated set of emotions,

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power and expectations during their relationships with schools in the sphere of inclusive education (Runswick-Cole, 2008). Parental involvement in the context of Pakistan, which is characterized by the stigmatization attitudes towards disability and a highly hierarchical system of schooling, is commonly presented in the form of a formal meeting and a compliance approach to communication (Singal, 2008; Shah, 2015). It is these conditions that make parental silence and withdrawal visible characteristics of inclusive schooling.

One of the dominant assumptions within the educational discourse is the fact that parental silence reflects disengagement, lack of interest or low ability to support education of their children. The lack of such is however argued against by critical scholarship which has examined the approach to see silence as stifled agency, opposition, or even self-defense in unequal institutional relations (Croteau and Davies, 2007). Although barriers to involvement among parents have been investigated internationally, very few have come up with a conceptualized non-participation as a proactive and forceful reaction to the format of schooling (Runswick-Cole and Hodge, 2009). In Pakistan, studies of inclusive education have mostly centered on teacher related practices and policy execution, whilst few studies have addressed the lived experiences of parents, and communicative strategies (Ehsan, 2018; Hayat, 2016). The research question that arises out of this flat is as follows; How do parents of inclusive Pakistani school children experience and interpret silence and withdrawal, and how is this practice construed by schools?

This research is aimed to investigate parental silence and withdrawal as a social construct that is practiced in an inclusive secondary and primary school in Pakistan. The study is conducted in qualitative approaches to look into what parents, teachers and administrators make out of non-participation, which anticipates the meanings ascribed to silence as opposed to considering it as absence. The results indicate that the stigma, fear of labeling, distrust of institutions, and beliefs of powerlessness during school decision-making influence parental withdrawal. This research paper can add to the literature on inclusive education and family-school partnership, especially in the Global South by redefining silence as a communicative act. The paper then moves on to a literature review of pertinent works and then onto the methodology, results, discussion and conclusion.

Literature Review
Introduction
The parental participation is strongly considered a key to inclusive education, however, the trends of non-participation have not been theorized. The given literature review looks at the scholarship connected with parental involvement, silence, withdrawal, and power relations, as well as with stigma concerning disability in inclusive schooling. The guiding question that the review covers is the following one; How is parental silence constructed, interpreted, and experienced in the context of inclusive education? Based on international, South Asian, and Pakistan-based literature, this review plays a critical synthesizing role and unveils inconsistency in defining parental engagement and also reveals major gaps and presupposes that the study of non-participation in Pakistani schools of primary and secondary level should be done qualitatively.

Preponderant Formulations of Parental Involvement.
In conventional paradigms of parental engagement, visible involvement, which includes meeting with teachers, participation in activities of schools, and support of school activities, are stressed (Epstein, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). These frameworks tend to believe that, the more parents are involved the better their educational results to be. It however, has been criticized that these models are skewed in favor of the middle-class standards of participation and unfairly discount the existence of families who participate in different ways (Croteau, 2001; Vincent, 2012). It has been studied that the schools often impose the notions of engagement on institutional levels, making parents passive consumers, instead of the participants of the educational process (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). The assumptions do not permit the acknowledgement of other forms of participation, such as silence

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and withdrawal.

Silence, Power and Non-Participation.
Critical sociological research views the concept of silence as the socially constructed and significant reaction to power relations rather than absenteeism (Mazzei, 2007; Scott, 1990). Parental silence in the education environment has been associated with intimidation, distrust and perceived powerlessness in in-scholar structures (Croteau and Davies, 2007). Researchers find that the parents with disadvantaged backgrounds have the possibility of going on the defensive to avoid the conflict or stigma (Reay, 1998; Lareau, 2011). This literature disputes the deficit approaches to non-participation and demands that silence should be acknowledged as a type of communication and politics.

Disability, Stigma and Parental Engagement Stigma
Parents of children with disabilities also encounter another engagement barrier, which is stigma, labeling and fear of negative evaluation (Runswick-Cole, 2008; Goodley, 2014). Studies show that the processes of inclusive education usually place parents as lobbyists who may need to strike a compromise in the messy systems, which maybe very emotionally demanding (Todd and Jones, 2003). In other situations, the parents retreat to safeguard their children against labeling and discriminations (Hodge and Runswick-Cole, 2008). Such dynamics indicate that silence can be a resistance mechanism or self-protection and not disengagement.

Cultural Contexts and the Global South.
Cultural studies within the Global South have reinforced that the engagement of parents is positively influenced by cultural norms, institutional power, and socioeconomic limitations (Miles & Singal, 2010; Grech, 2011). Parents can also abide by the position of the teachers and avoid open discussion in hierarchical systems of schooling (Shah, 2015). South Asian research suggests that in most cases parental silence is interpreted by the schools as a non-interest-based scenario irrespective of the contextual circumstances like literacy, language barriers, and social stigma (Singal, 2008). The research mentioned above demonstrates that culturally inclusive studies of parental non-engagement are necessary.

Pakistani Parental Silence
The study of inclusive education in Pakistan has involved policy implementation, attitude among the teachers, and infrastructural barriers in its studies but gave fewer insights on parental experiences (Ehsan, 2018; Hayat, 2016). The available literature indicates that parents of children with disabilities usually feel sidelined when it comes to school decision making (Shah, 2015). Cultural values like respect of authority and nonconfrontationalism are also some of the contributors of silence and withdrawal. Nonetheless, there has been a critical gap in the literature on the relevant research on the positive silent practice by parents in the context of inclusive education in Pakistan.

Synthesis and Research Gap
The literature reviewed has paneled five intertwined themes which are: (a) dominance of visible participation frameworks, (b) silence as a reaction to the relationship of power, (c) stigma as a determinant to parental involvement, (d) the cultural mediation of participation, and (e) lack of Pakistan specific qualitative research. Although non-participation is gaining credibility in the international scholarship, there is little empirical research in Pakistan. The current research fills this knowledge gap by qualitatively exploring the socially situated expression of parental silence and withdrawal in Pakistani comprehensive schools as an inclusive school, which offers rich perspectives to the discussion of inclusive studies and family-school collaboration scholarship.

Research Methodology

The paper discussed parental silence and withdrawal in inclusive primary and secondary schools in Pakistan, aiming to have an insight into non-participation as a socially and culturally contextual practice. The study was concerned with the experience of the parents having the children in inclusion settings who feel silent and withdrawn and the perception of such kind of actions by teachers and school officials. Since the research questions were exploratory and the focus of the research was lived experience, meaning-making and power relation, the method used in the research was qualitative interpretive research approach. The study was based on primary data and descriptive and exploratory research design that allowed taking a deeper look at the involvement of parents beyond apparent involvement. The qualitative inquiry was chosen due to its effectiveness in addressing marginalized voices and implicit type of communication that is usually ignored in quantitative studies (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The study was able to gather data in public and privately owned primary and secondary schools in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa aimed at representing the various socio-cultural and institutional contexts. The sample consisted of [approximately 30-45] individuals, such as parents of children attending inclusive classrooms and teachers as well as school administration. The sampling technique adopted was purposive whereby identified schools selected parents who were not attending school activities or on a limited number. Semi-structured interviews were used in data collection as they were carried to help the participants feel more at ease and understand the questions in languages of their choice. Interview guides revealed lifestyles of school communication, feelings of belonging, complaints of silence or withdrawal, understanding of power and stigma. Informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation were ensured and ethical approval was obtained in the course of the research.

The information acquired in interviews was recorded by audio recording, transcribed word-to-word, and analyzed with the help of the thematic analysis. The analysis was done based on the six steps procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006) and starts with familiarization and initial coding, then proceeds to theme development and refinement. Coding was concentrated on silent forms, definitions of the non-participation meaning, stigmatizing experiences, and the sense of power between school and parents. The qualitative data analysis software (e.g. NVivo) was applied to organize and regulate the data. A high analytic exhaustion was achieved by the constant comparison of different groups of the participants and the use of reflexive memo writing to explain the position of the researcher.

The qualitative interpretative method was selected because it is the most effective technique to discover hidden, in most cases, unseen facets of parental involvement in an inclusive process of education. Semi-structured interviews allowed parents to provide narratives of being silent and withdrawn without having to express them to fit institutional accounts. Triangulation was facilitated by the inclusion of the teachers and administrators, which increased credibility. Some of the weaknesses are that it depends on self-reported data and does not have a long ethnographic follow up. These constraints were dealt with by close probing, cross-group/comparisons and reflexive analysis. Regardless of these limitations, the methodology can be used to analyze parental silence as a practice of making sense and socially relevant in Pakistani inclusive schools.

Results

This part offers the findings of semi-structured interview methodologies based on parents, teachers, and school administrators of both public and private primary and secondary schools in Pakistan. The findings aid the research focus on parental silence and withdrawal in inclusive education and are offered in major themes which replicated over the groups of participants and in-store situations.

Forms of Parental Silence

Respondents narrated various types of parental silence in the school family relationships. During

parent-teacher meetings, parents said they participated the least and avoided direct communication with school personnel, and rarely questioned instructional or placement choices. Teachers also showed that there were parents who came to the meetings, but they were quiet, giving only short answers or referring to authority in schools. Administrators indicated that silence was easily understood as either assent or contentment. This kind of silence was also noted in both public and private schools and was not specific in the grade level. On top of silence, the subjects also indicated withdrawal tendencies in school engagement activities. There was a description of parents attending less frequently or not at all, not continuing to communicate with their followers and not participating in any decision-making process regarding inclusion. Increased parental responsiveness was observed to decline over time especially after the teacher had previous talks with the parent regarding assessment outcomes or support services. According to the administrators, withdrawal was not usually sudden. These trends were documented in various schools and provinces which means that there are institutional experiences that happen and are not isolated cases.

Reasons parents had Silence and Withdrawal.
Parents cited a number of reasons as to why they needed to be silent or avoid engagement. The most common statements were fear of negatively labeling their child, being uneasy when talking about disability related matters and feeling that they do not have a say in the school. Parents also mentioned that they are unsure about the norms of appropriate communication as well as being perceived as being mean. These causes were found to be reported with regard to socio-economic backgrounds and type of school. Participants did not report any formal mechanisms of dealing with parental discomfort.

School Constructions of Non-Participant Parenting.
Reports of parental silence and withdrawal had different meanings by teachers and administrators. Non-participation was perceived by some participants as indifference or unawareness, whereas other respondents referred to structural and cultural limitations to participation. Silence was often seen by administrators as assent and thus they used it to make decisions on placement or instructions. The review of the documentation revealed a weak support of parental perspectives in the records of inclusive education. These meanings were identical in schools but varied depending on experience and training of individual staff.

Emotional Projections of Parental Withdrawal.
According to parents, one of the emotional experiences was related to silence and withdrawal, such as anxiety, frustration, and helplessness. Other parents explained that it was a conflict inside them that they wanted to protect their child and are afraid of being punished by the institution. Some parents were also observed with emotional distress, about which teachers indicated that they were unsure of how to intervene within the activities of the school setting. These emotional aspects were described in words and did not pass any formal examination using standardized tests.

Limitations in the Data Observed.
The findings are to be addressed on the background of some limitations. Information was based on reports made by the participants which are subject to changes depending on how the participants perceived it to be. Classroom observations or meetings were not undertaken and no cardiac verification was provided to reported interactions. Moreover, although the research involved several provinces and types of schools, results can be biased to all experiences of parents in Pakistan. There is no interpretation of these limitations, which are answered in the Discussion section.

Discussion
This paper investigated the concept of parental silence and withdrawal in inclusive Pakistani primary

and secondary schools. The results show that parent non-involvement had been found to occur in the form of lack of verbal interaction, slow loss of interest in school activities, and lack of any feeling of involvement in the decision making processes. According to parents the argument of fear of labeling, distrust in institutions and perceived lack of influence were given as reasons why people remained silent whereas schools would often presume that non-participation was implied to mean disinterest or agreement. These practices were accompanied by emotional distress thus showing the affective aspects of parental withdrawal. Collectively, this sums up to the idea that silence and withdrawal are institutional and cultural pattern responses that are developed based on their institutional and cultural settings, and are not unique individual actions.

The results indicate that parental silence is a contextually significant reaction to the power imbalance that is inherent in school-family relationships. At the hierarchical level of schooling, parents might find it risky or ineffective to speak out, so silence may work as a protective mechanism. Withdrawal seems to be the sense of cumulative experiences of having been marginalized but not necessarily immediate in being disengaged. These interpretations do not hold the deficit-based assumptions that participation is synonymous with care and non-participation synonymous with neglect. Rather, silence comes out as a coping mechanism to institutional conditions that restrain parental agency.

These results are consistent with the critical school of thought which views silence as a kind of communication that is constructed based on the relations of power (Mazzei, 2007; Scott, 1990). The studies on parental engagement also warn against the concept of parental engagement being hard to reach without considering institutional practices that limit engagement (Croteau and Davies, 2007; Vincent, 2012). Stigma and fear of labeling have been found to be influential factors of parental behavior in inclusive education (Runswick-Cole, 2008; Goodley, 2014). The research provides a contribution to the current literature since it empirically provides the dynamics of the functioning of these dynamics in Pakistani schools, inserting Global South views through the lenses in the discussion on family-school relations (Singal, 2008; Shah, 2015).

A number of restrictions must be admitted. The experiment based on self-reported interview data, and these data could be based on the interpretations of the participants, but rather not direct observation of interactions. Real-time analysis of silence in school meetings is restricted by the fact that lack of ethnographic observation does not allow investigators to conduct their study. Also, the qualitative sample restricts the generalizability, despite the fact that the participants were selected in several provinces and school types. Such limitations indicate that more studies need to be conducted with supplementary methods.

In theory, this research paper will be relevant to the scholarship of inclusive education and parent engagement in connection with its redefinition of silence as a socially constructed practice, rather than a weakness. In a practical sense, the results can imply that issues of communication structures, decision-making, and professional authority need to be critically studied in schools to formulate parental participation. To formulate the inclusive operation of engagement, it is necessary to develop dialogic areas that recognize the imbalance of power and actively promote the use of parental voice without chastisement. Relational and culturally responsive practice of engagement should be taught to teachers and administrators in Pakistan.

Another way in which parental silence could be explained is that, the non-participation could be due to logistical reasons like time, work-load, or transportation issues. Also diversity in the school leadership practices might affect the level of parental inclusion or empowerment in involvement. These opportunities indicate that there is no one cause of silence and withdrawal, but a number of converging factors exist.

Returning to the research question, which is how can parents feel and make sense of silence and withdrawal in Pakistani inclusive schools and understand how these practices are conceptualized by schools, the results indicate that silent is a contextually relevant strategy and reaction to the institutional power, stigmatization, and even lack of trust. The research proves that to understand parental non-participation, it is necessary to reach beyond the assumptions on the surface-level and

see into the depth of the relationship and cultural interaction in new inclusive education.

Conclusion

It was proposed that this paper would conduct an investigation into the phenomena of parental silence and withdrawal in Pakistan inclusive primary and secondary schools, looking at the propensity to define non-participation as a lack of social meaning and significance that only disengagement takes place. The study involved the necessity to comprehend the affectless of silence and withdrawal experiences on the side of parents and the interpretation of such practices in the school setting of the hierarchy, stigma, and power relations. Once again supporting the main point of the study, the results are that the silence of parents is not just the lack of voice but a context-related reaction to the feeling of marginalization and the lack of agency.

Its essential results are that fear of labeling, the lack of trust in the institutions, vacuity of emotions, and imbalanced decision-making systems precondition silence and withdrawal. The findings contribute to the literature on inclusive education and family-school partnerships since they disprove deficit-focused models of parental engagement. Restoring the links with the concerns voiced by the introduction, the study stresses that inclusive education is impossible to achieve without racism being addressed in relation to relational and communicative discrepancies between schools and families.

This research is important as it has implications on inclusive policy and practice in Pakistan. To build any form of meaningful family-school partnerships, it is important to understand silence as communication, recalibrate the engagement structures, and create a forum of trust-based conversation. Future directions of research should address the research on models of interventions that can underpin the voice of parents, especially in low-income families and investigate longitudinal shifts in engagement practices in systems of inclusive education.

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