

Original Article

Parental Involvement Status in the Education of Children with Disabilities: The Case of Tabor Primary School, Debre Tabor, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Using Epstein's theoretical framework, this study examined parental involvement status in the education of children with disabilities at Tabor Primary School in Debre Tabor Town, Ethiopia. A qualitative case study design was utilized, involving six participants. Through purposive sampling, six participants were chosen from the school for in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data from interviews focusing on six dimensions of parental involvement: parenting, communication, learning at home, volunteering, decision making, and collaborative partnership. Results indicated that parents of children with disabilities are relatively more engaged in parenting activities to support children's education. However, their communication with teachers and school principals was limited. While some parents provided learning support at home, many were unable to do so. Moreover, parents had little direct participation in the decisions that were made about their children's education, even if they may have had some indirect influence through their involvement in parent-student-teacher associations. Lastly, parents were not actively involved in volunteering and collaborating activities to help children's education. Generally, the research revealed that parents of children with disabilities had limited involvement in their child's education. This limited involvement may hinder the education and development of children with disabilities. Therefore, it is essential for government bodies and others to provide training to help parents to actively play discharge their diverse roles in the education of their children.

Key words: Children with disabilities; Collaboration; Decision making; Parental involvement; Volunteering

1. Introduction

Parental involvement (PI) refers to the active participation of parents in their children's education and development. It involves parents engaging in various activities that support their children's learning, both at home and at school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). PI encompasses a wide range of activities that parents engage in supporting their children's education (Epstein, 2009). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2003), parents who communicate regularly and meaningfully with their children's teachers about their education are considered to be fully involved. PI is increasingly recognized as crucial for the academic, social, and emotional development of children with diverse abilities (Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding and Walberg, 2005).

According to Ngwenya (2010), Kavanagh (2013) and Hornby (2011), parents' involvement in their children's education at home refers to various activities that have an impact on the success of children with different needs. These activities include assisting children with homework, providing encouragement, engaging in discussions about school activities, reading stories at home, creating conducive learning environment, and ensuring the availability of necessary learning materials and proper care. School-based involvement requires parents to physically participate in activities at school, such as volunteering, joining field trips, attending conferences and workshops, discussing their children's progress with teachers and principals, and participating in decision-making processes within the parent-student-teacher association (PSTA) (Ngwenya, 2010; Ibrahim, 2012). Therefore, parental involvement is a stronger predictor of children's academic success compared to other factors (Fan & Chen, 2001), and it is also crucial for the academic achievement of children with disabilities in inclusive settings (Xu & Filler, 2008).

Similarly, Dereli & Türk-Kurtça (2022) explained that the participation of parents is vital for children's education success and a key factor in early childhood. Parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's lives, fostering qualities like interest, creativity, and tolerance through active participation in their learning journey. Moreover, PI contributes to improved learning outcomes, enhanced self-esteem, and increased motivation and aspirations toward education (Epstein, 2001). Concerning the benefits, the government of Ethiopia stated that PI has several benefits, including improved self-esteem and academic achievement for children, stronger

relationships between parents and children, and positive attitudes and a better understanding of the schooling process for parents (MoE, 2016).

Vanderpuye (2013); Afolabi (2014) and Monika (2017) stated that in a child's life, parents are among the most significant and enduring figures. With their positive involvement in the learning process and educational activities, they have the power and ability to shape, sustain, and develop their children into curious, creative, and tolerant individuals. More specifically, active PI enhances students' academic performance, social skills, and attendance at school, according to research on special needs education (Lalvani, 2015). Because they offer a variety of experiences that promote learning, parents are therefore their children's most important teachers (Fan & Chen, 2001; Washington, 2011).

More specifically, parental involvement is especially important for the education of children with disabilities because children with disabilities often have unique needs that require additional support from their parents and teachers. Parents can play a vital role in helping their children with disabilities succeed in school by advocating for their child's needs, providing support at home while doing homework and assignment, and collaborate with the school to implement a plan for their child's education. Or all of these reasons, it is essential that parents of children with disabilities be involved in their child's education. It also provides emotional support and motivation to children with disabilities, boosting their confidence and encouraging them to succeed. Thus, parental participation can ensure that children with disabilities have the support they need to succeed (Johnson & Brown, 2023).

Epstein (2001) introduced a theoretical framework that was suggested for the examination of parental involvement in their children's education, which was utilized in this research. This framework is widely used, tested, and accepted, consisting of six parental involvement responsibilities that are crucial for children with varying abilities, including those with disabilities. These responsibilities are (1) parenting- focuses providing basic needs, setting boundaries, and fostering personal development. (2) communication- maintaining regular and open dialogue with teachers and principals of schools. (3) Volunteering- assisting in classrooms, fundraising, and other school activities. (4) Home Learning- Helping with homework, setting goals, and engaging in learning activities at home. (5) Decision-Making- refers to parents' involvement in school decisions and governance activities through school improvement teams, committees, and

participation in parent-student teacher association (PSTA); and (6) community Collaboration-networking with other parents and community stakeholders to access resources and help students with disabilities.

In relation with parenting, studies such as (Monadjem, 2003 and Ibrahim, 2012) revealed that parents did not actively support their children's education and did not give them access to the supplies they needed for school, such as stationery and uniforms. In addition, parents did not supervise their child's bedtime or assist in establishing a favorable learning environment at home. Moreover, a study by Mauka (2015) noted that parents were not fulfilling the basic necessities and stationaries to help children's education. Conversely, studies carried out by (Mwaikimu, 2012; Cetin & Taskin, 2016) in the public primary schools of Kenya reported that parents actively participated by ensuring their children basic parentings such as providing necessary school supplies, and creating conducive learning environment at home.

Regarding parental communication and its importance in establishing a strong connection between parents and schools, it is crucial for parents to fulfill their basic obligations. This includes actively engaging in two-way communication with teachers through various means such as conferences, dialogues, and meetings. By doing so, the gap between parents and the school community can be significantly reduced. Effective communication methods may involve the use of memos, notes, phone calls, and student report cards on a semester basis (Epstein, 2001; Patrikakou et al., 2005; Hornby, 2011; Cleophas, 2014). In addition, a study conducted by Ibrahim (2012) examined parental involvement in parenting areas of communicating for their children's educational achievements. The study indicated that parents were actively involved via parent-teacher association and by attending meetings and conferences with teachers. Similarly, Monadjem (2003) examined the communication dynamics between parents and teachers in high schools in Swaziland and it revealed that parents did not regularly meet and discuss their children's progress with teachers.

Jigyel *et al.* (2018) conducted a study on parental communication and collaboration in schools with special educational needs (SENs) programs in Bhutan. The findings revealed that majority of parents reported infrequent communication, either once every two or three months or not at all, depending on when teachers requested meetings, conferences, or discussions. Interestingly, almost all parents (n = 22/26) stated that they did not have direct communication with other staff members

in the school, as they believed it was unnecessary. However, in cases where their children faced academic difficulties, parents occasionally resorted to phone communication.

Using Epstein's framework, Flemmings (2013) examined parents' experiences of volunteering for their children's education. The findings entail that parents' involvement in volunteer work is restricted because teachers view parent volunteers as a way to oversee their instructional strategies, methods of assessment, and classroom management. Parents also say they think instructors should be the only ones doing these kinds of things. Additionally, because there were no systems in place to permit parental involvement in these activities, parents were unable to volunteer in ways like helping in the classroom, going to school functions, and fundraising. Consistently, the level of parental involvement in parenting activities, as stated by Epstein (2001), was found to be poor, with only 4% of parents actively engaged (Erlendsdóttir, 2010).

Learning at home refers to the active involvement of parents in their children's educational activities at home, including assisting with homework, setting goals, and engaging in curriculum-related tasks. Research has shown that when parents participate in these activities, it leads to improved academic outcomes for students (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). However, Maluleke (2014) highlighted that some parents neglect to monitor and supervise their children's work at home, which can negatively impact their academic performance. The reasons given by parents for this lack of involvement include the belief that teachers are more capable of teaching their children and that they themselves are not qualified to assist. Additionally, many parents admitted to not helping their children with homework or monitoring their activities at home (Mwaikimu, 2012).

In terms of the decision-making process, Cetin & Taskin (2016) examined parental participation in making decisions about their children's education. The study found that parents were not regularly directly engaged in the decision-making process. However, a few parents participated through the parent-student-teacher association. Additionally, parents were excluded from the decision-making process because they were not invited to participate in governance and budget allocation. Consequently, meaningful parental involvement in decision-making was found to be beneficial and crucial for children's education.

Erdogan and Demirkasimoglu (2010) conducted a similar study to assess parental participation in decision-making. The findings revealed that parents faced structural and economic barriers that

limited their opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, participants acknowledged that PTAs played a significant role as the primary decision-making bodies in addressing school-related matters and bridging the gap between schools and parents.

Ibrahim (2012) conducted a study in Nigeria using a qualitative case study approach. Parents were found to be actively involved in PSTA meetings, recognizing the importance and benefits of such gatherings. Some parents, however, faced obstacles like time constraints or work commitments.

Jigyel *et al.* (2018) explored parents' involvement in collaborative activities for the education of children with special needs in both partial and fully inclusive classrooms. The study revealed minimal collaboration between parents and schools due to economic, commitment, and time constraints. Additionally, the findings showed limited collaboration between urban stay-at-home mothers of partially included children and teachers. Overall, the study highlighted the importance of parents collaborating with the school community, particularly teachers, to ensure a successful inclusive classroom environment (Adams, Harris & Jones, 2016).

According to the Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (Ministry of Education, 2012), parents have crucial roles in educating and supporting their children, especially those with disabilities. They are valuable sources of information and assistance, and can also contribute to designing and implementing educational programs. Therefore, it is essential for parents to be part of the Parent-Teacher-Student-Association (PTSA) or similar structures, and to be consulted when creating and executing individual education plans. Additionally, the School Improvement Program (SIP) in Ethiopia recognizes the importance of parents in supporting children with disabilities (CwDs) to enhance their academic performance. Teachers are encouraged to engage with parents regularly, at least twice per semester, through various means such as volunteering, conferences, communication, supporting learning at home, providing materials, participating in PTSA, and contributing to fundraising activities for the school.

Furthermore, as described in the Education Sector Development Programme, the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) agrees that students with disabilities receive additional assistance from their parents to enhance their academic success. It also clarifies that teachers need to discuss with parents at a minimum of twice per semester through volunteering, conferencing and communicating, support their children at-home, contributing learning materials, participating in PSTA, and participating in fundraising for the school to help the education of

children with SENs (MoE, 2010). In addition, In Ethiopia, the Education Development Roadmap (EDR) emphasizes the importance of involving parents in education. It is crucial to motivate parents to actively monitor their children's academic development and general welfare. The policy highlights that parents' involvement should extend beyond financial and material assistance to primary schools and occasional visits during school breaks. Rather, parents are encouraged to share responsibilities in school activities such as teaching-learning, discipline maintenance, and fostering a conducive environment (Tirussew; Amare; Jeilu; Tassew; Aklilu, and Berhannu, 2018).

Several international studies have explored the relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievement of children with special educational needs. For example, researchers such as Afolabi (2014), Balli (2016), Monika (2017) and El Shourbagi (2017) examined parental involvement in inclusive education using Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model. However, their studies focused on the psychological factors influencing parental decision-making rather than specific parental involvement activities in education. Additionally, Bariroh investigated the impact of parental involvement on the motivation and learning outcomes of students with special needs, finding a positive correlation between parental involvement and academic success and motivation. However, this study did not assess the involvement of parents in the education children with disabilities.

A published article by Esaaba (2020) explored the extent of PI in the education of their CwDs quantitatively in Ghana. The study focused on school-based involvement activities, excluding home-based involvement activities. The study showed that the general school-based involvement of parents seems to be moderate; however, most parents were prevalently involved in parent-teacher association meetings. Although PI is seen as six dimensional, the above studies used three dimensions of PI and did not clearly articulate the dimensions by integrating multiple perspectives from different participants (e.g., teachers and parents). Hence, the current study explored the six dimensions of PI through multiple perspectives in better detail by involving parents of CwDs, and teachers in Tabor primary school.

Moreover, Ethiopian researchers Assamnew (2006); Demiesie, (2006); Tadele, (2006); Temesgen, (2006); Yohannes, Bereket and Hailu (2017) have conducted quantitative studies examining the relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement in primary schools. Their findings consistently indicate a positive correlation between PI and academic achievement

of general student population. However, a study by Sintayehu (2015) in primary schools run by the Bahir Dar City Administration found that parental involvement at home was not significantly correlated with academic achievement, while parental involvement in school was positively correlated with student academic achievement. Additionally, they have not addressed the six dimensions of Epstein's PI framework for comprehensive parental involvement, which include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the specific dimensions of parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities, in both home and school settings.

1.1.Theoretical Framework of the study

In this study, Epstein's Theoretical Framework is used to guide the research. This framework is chosen for its relevance to the topic of parental involvement in education, especially in the education of CwDs. Below are brief explanations of the nature, assumptions, and applications of the model.

1.1.1. Epstein's Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework is developed by Joyce Epstein (1987). The basic assumption of this framework is that partnerships between families and providers (schools) are as an opportunity for shared responsibility for facilitating the growth and development of children. To that end, Epstein (2001) suggests that the relationships and interactions among family members, educators, community and students are similar to partnerships. This theoretical framework as explained by Epstein (2001) is based on the definitions of six major dimensions including parenting skills, communication, volunteering, learning at home, participation in the decision-making process, and collaboration with the community.

Parenting: includes the basic responsibilities of families such as providing housing, health care, nutrition, clothing, and safety and creating home conditions that support children's learning, for example, purchasing the necessary books and being responsive to their children and communicating with them and supporting good behavior development.

Communicating: refers to the basic responsibilities of schools, including establishing two-way communications between the family and the school; based on the assumption that schools keep

parents informed about school matters by sending them newsletters or progress reports, visiting parents and employing other means to communication.

Volunteering: parents can make significant contribution to the environment and function of a school; schools can get the most of this process by creating flexible schedule, so more parents can participate, and by working to match the talents and interests of parents to the needs of students, teachers and administrators.

Learning at home: is, the type of involvement where parents can help their children in school-related activities with the guidance and support of teachers. Parents can involve in curriculum-related activities, assisting their children with homework, assignment, project works etc.

Decision making: schools can give parents meaningful roles in the school-decision making process, and help them make the most out of it; this opportunity should be open to all segments of the community, not just people who have the most time and energy to spend on school affairs.

Collaboration with the community: schools coordinate the work and resources of the community, businesses, colleges or universities, and other groups to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning and development; schools can help families gain access to support services offered by other agencies such as healthcare, cultural events, tutoring services and after-school child-care programs.

Regarding its application to guide studies on PI in education in general and parent-school partnership in particular, extensive literature documented that this theory is by far the most used to guide studies on parent/family involvement in education. Stelmach (2009) also reported that much of the literature on parent involvement in education cites the work of Joyce Epstein since it is the most referenced, tested, and widely-accepted on PI research. As a result of this, the researchers employed this framework to guide the study.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Study Area

The study was carried out at Debre Tabor Town, which is the capital city of south Gondar Zone administration in the Amhara Region, North central Ethiopia. It is located 666 km from Addis Ababa, the country's capital, and 100 km southeast of Gondar, as well as 50 km east of Lake Tana.

During the data collection period, there were six government primary schools within the city administration. These schools are: Tabor, Gafat, Dagmawi Tedros, Gebrye, Kechin Mesk, and Tsegur. These schools provide education from early childhood up to grade eight to students in the town. The study was basically conducted in Tabor Primary School. The school was selected considering its experience in practicing inclusive education for CwDs. In this research, the term “children with disabilities” refers to children who have a visual impairment (VI) and hearing impairment (HI) who have attended their education in Tabor Primary School.

2.2. Research Approach and Design

A qualitative research approach of a multiple-case study design was employed to answer the research questions for different reasons. A case study is a research approach used to gain an in-depth understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. It is widely employed across various disciplines, particularly in the social sciences (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Case studies are used to explain, describe, or explore events or phenomena in their everyday contexts, aiding in understanding causal links and pathways resulting from new initiatives or developments (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018). Since the current study focused on describing and exploring parental involvement, this design could be taken as an important one. It also allows researchers to gain in-depth insights and understanding of real-life situations and help to examine the detailed contextual situation of parental involvement. Thus, considering the nature of the study, the researchers examined the how parents of children with disabilities get involved in their children’s education considering the six dimensions of PI with the reference of Tabor primary school using a case study design.

2.3. Sample and Sampling Techniques

Considering the experiences that Tabor primary school had with resource center and inclusive education practice and enrolled children with disabilities in the mainstream classes, the researchers selected the school purposively. The study involved 6 (six) participants with the recommendation of the resource center coordinator of the school. These were two teachers and four parents of children with disabilities. The researchers selected the respondents purposively because the researchers believed that the participants were assumed to provide in-depth information on the issue under study. Teacher participants were selected by considering criteria like teachers working with CwDs and having a minimum of two years of experience in teaching. The other basic criterion for determining the teacher participants was their willingness to state their own perception.

Besides, parent participants were selected with the support of special needs education teachers working in the respective schools considering their prior experience of contacting and working closely with schools. Parent 1 is female with 12 completed in her education, parent 2 is male who had BA degree, parent 3 is female who had diploma in accounting and finance and parent 4 is male who completed grade 8 complete. Finally, teacher 1 is male who had and teacher 2 is female. Therefore, a total of four parents of children with disabilities (2 males and 2 females) and two teachers were interviewed to get relevant information for the study.

2.4. Methods of Data Collection

To address the study's research question, a semi-structured interview guide was utilized. This aided in eliciting insightful and detailed reflections from participants, as qualitative interviewing is commonly used for in-depth exploration and enables researchers to delve deeper into gathered information (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). Consequently, thorough semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with 6 participants until reaching data saturation. Such interviews facilitated the researchers in posing additional questions to better comprehend the issue at hand (Yin, 2018).

Interview protocols, consisting of question lists and prompts, were prepared prior to interviewing participants. These protocols have been crucial in maintaining interview consistency across all individuals. They have also aided in addressing study-relevant issues systematically. The authors sought clarifications, additional details, and probing follow-up questions when needed. The interview questions were developed following an in-depth literature review in the field.

Following pre-arranged schedules concerning participants' availability, interviews were conducted to ensure credibility. Each interview session lasted approximately 30-40 minutes on a one-to-one basis, conducted in Amharic for clarity and later translated into English. Field notes and a phone device were used to record interviews, which were then transcribed. Subsequently, researchers reviewed and analyzed the texts and transcripts, allowing participants to verify the accuracy and authenticity of their reports.

2.5. Dependability and Credibility

To ensure the dependability of the interviews, interview items were organized to have the same structure, sequence of words and questions for each respondent. Also, the probes were the same for all interviewees to elicit further information. Furthermore, all the transcripts were crosschecked

to ensure that there was no apparent mistakes. Lastly, the data were crosschecked by professional in the area. Furthermore, to establish the credibility, the interview items were given to experts in the field (professionals in special needs and inclusive education) for their review, since face or content or wording of the survey was determined by expert judgment. In doing so, two experts in the area of Special Needs and Inclusive Education and Educational Psychology were involved. Additionally, a summary of responses was read to the interviewees to get their consent on individual responses after every interview.

2.6. Methods of Data Analysis

The thematic analysis was used in the analysis of data obtained from individual interviews since it is a widely used qualitative data analysis technique that involves identifying patterns or themes within a dataset (Crswell, 2014). Through the systematic study of qualitative data, researchers can spot patterns and trends and produce insights that might guide the creation of new theories or useful applications.

Thematic analysis typically involves some important conventional steps including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and defining themes, naming and defining themes, and writing up findings (Yin, 2018). As a result, to fully understand the content, researchers needed to immerse themselves in the data by reading transcripts multiple times. This helped in identifying important concepts, ideas, or phrases that are relevant to their research question, which are called codes. The themes were then thoroughly reviewed and refined to ensure that they precisely reflected the data content and relevance to the research question. Finally, quotes or data examples were used to highlight each subject and substantiate the conclusions drawn from the key findings. The themes as per to this study were parenting, communicating, learning at home, volunteering, decision making, and collaborating with community members to help the education of CwDs.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations prior to the commencement of data collection, a formal letter from Debre Tabor University, Department of Special Needs and Inclusive Education was delivered to the sample school in order to get permission from their esteemed offices. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the benefits of the study, the rights of the participants and confidentiality. Thus, they were requested to give their consent to participate in all aspects of the

study, i.e., being interviewed, and being recorded. In addition, they were assured that any information they would provide remains confidential and only be used for the research purpose.

3. Results

3.1. Parental Involvement in the Education of Children with Disabilities

Most of the activities in which parents' involvement were categorized and thematized within Epstein's six typologies of parental involvement practice in education of children with diverse abilities based on the research questions stated in the introduction section of this study. That is, analysis of interview data from parents and teachers revealed that the involvement of parents in the education of their children with disabilities generally fall within the typology set forth by Epstein.

3.2. Parenting

According to the literature, parenting involves providing basic necessities for children with disabilities, such as clothing, food, and a clean home environment. It also includes setting expectations for children's education and success, purchasing necessary materials, reading with children, and having high expectations for their academic achievement (Epstein, 2001).

In line with this, parents of children with disabilities were asked about their parenting practices and how they support their children's learning in inclusive schools. The interview results indicated that parents were actively involved in most aspects of parenting to promote their children's success. Specifically, they were asked about their involvement in providing basic learning materials for their children. In relation to this, parent 1 explained that:

I provide my child with all the basic learning materials they need, such as pens, pencils, exercise books, a sign language dictionary, and a uniform. I even provide more materials to my child with disabilities than I do to my non-disabled child who attends the same school.

Parent 2 has also similar opinions that:

My child received the necessary learning materials so far like pen, paper, pencil, exercise book, uniform and others. I am very grateful for the support that my child has received from donors. However, I want to assure you that if the donors were unable to provide these materials, I would do everything in my power to ensure that my child had everything they needed to succeed in school.

Furthermore, parent 3 stated that “Whatever the case, at least I could fulfil the necessary learning materials periodically and provide clothes.”

Furthermore, regarding to parenting teacher 1 stated that:

I have noticed that some parents are unable to provide their children with books and other learning materials on time due to financial problems. Fortunately, schools and non-governmental organizations often provide learning materials to parents who cannot afford them.

Participants were also asked to what extent parents of children with disabilities send their children to school well-fed and keep their children clean. In this regard, Teacher 1 acknowledged that:

Many parents of children with disabilities struggle to provide for their children's basic needs, such as food and clothing. This is often due to financial constraints. As a result, many children with disabilities do not receive the same level of care and support as their non-disabled peers.

In addition to providing a quiet study space, parents expressed positive expectations for their children's academic performance and future endeavors. They held high hopes for their children's educational attainment and overall well-being. Parent 1 explained that:

I provided a quiet study space for my child and had high expectations for her academic success and future profession as a lawyer. I prioritized her well-being over that of my other child, but I neglected to monitor her extracurricular activities and bedtime.

Besides, teacher 1 reported that:

When I discuss with parents of children with disabilities in my school, I understood that they wish bright future in terms of success in learning. Since I worked with parents, many times they discussed with schools about their children's success in education.

Generally speaking, parents of children with disabilities generally fulfill basic parenting obligations, such as providing food, supplies, guidance, a conducive environment, and safety. However, teachers often blame parents for their lack of involvement in feeding and hygiene, which negatively impacts their children's learning. Despite these challenges, parents of children with disabilities have high expectations for their children's academic and career success.

It is important to note that the lack of parental involvement in these areas may be due to various factors, such as the challenges of parenting a child with a disability, limited resources, or cultural norms. Nevertheless, it is crucial to address this issue, as it can have a significant impact on the child's academic progress and overall well-being.

3.3. Communicating

The second dimension of parental involvement focuses on communication between parents and schools about their children's education. This includes discussions about educational plans and

progress reports, using various communication methods (e.g., verbal, written) to support the child's schooling (Epstein, 2009).

In the sample school, both teachers and parents observed that some parents of children with disabilities were highly engaged in school activities and their children's education. For instance, Parent 1 remarked:

I even did not know the name of my child's teachers teaching schedule, time table and daily routines. However, I participated in trainings and conferences organized by the school at least once per semester to discuss on disability issues and our children's learning.

Teacher 2 also explained that:

During my six years as a teacher here, I've noticed that only a small number of parents regularly meet with teachers and school principals to discuss their children's education. Despite sending out meeting invitations, few parents attend. When I inquire with students why their parents don't come, they typically respond that their parents are too busy. However, I've observed that parents of children with disabilities are more likely to attend conferences when a daily allowance is provided by sponsors.

The researchers argued that most of the parents of children with disabilities come to school in two times per year. One is at the end of the first semester. The other is in the end of the academic year of the school since parents are familiar with these events and notice was posted at school and also invitation letter sends to parents' home.

Parents were also asked about what forms of communication they used to communicate with the schools. They responded that they communicated through letter and by phone. Besides, data from interview items by parent and teacher participants showed that different ways of communication are employed by parents to communicate with teachers and school administration in general. Accordingly, parents many times communicate with schools through letter, telephone calling, others would prefer face-to-face communication, still for others written notes or home-school diaries suited for the contact with schools.

In relation with this, parent 2 responded that:

Though it was not frequent, one of the good teachers of my child calls me and asks about my child's condition like how my child communicates with family members. I like these teachers while they called and send letters for invitation of meetings and workshops with school communities since they were with me.

Similarly, teacher 1 reported that “In my opinion, most parents of children with disabilities do not involve in meetings and conferences if there is no daily allowance. We teachers invited parents to talk about their children’s learning but mostly they did not come to take part in the discussions and we sometimes heard that students did not give the invitation letter at home.”

This study found that parents of children with disabilities did not frequently discuss issues related to their children's education with teachers or principals. Parents justified this lack of communication by stating that they believed it was the responsibility of a few parent representatives (PSTA members) to communicate with school staff about issues affecting all students. As a result, many parents rarely visited the school and did not feel the need to communicate directly with their children's teachers about their education. However, parents did participate in school-organized conferences.

This lack of communication between parents and school staff may have implications for the education of children with disabilities. Parents are important partners in their children's education, and their input can help teachers and administrators better understand the needs of their students. When parents are not actively involved in their children's education, it can be more difficult for schools to provide the necessary support and services.

Regarding knowledge of school policies, rules, and regulations, parents of children with disabilities in this study reported having low levels of knowledge. They were not familiar with the school's plans, policies, and laws, including disciplinary measures. Parents also reported that they were not typically involved in discussions about disciplinary measures taken to correct their children's behavior.

Moreover, parents of children with disabilities in this study reported that teachers would call them whenever there was a disciplinary problem. However, parents often did not come to school to participate in discussions about their children's education. This lack of involvement may be due to a number of factors, including parents' lack of knowledge about school policies and procedures, as well as their belief that it is the responsibility of a few parent representatives (PSTA members) to communicate with school staff about issues affecting all students.

Therefore, this study revealed that parents of children with disabilities did not frequently discuss issues linked to their children's education with both teachers and principals of the schools. The participants justified the reason why they did not meet or contact with their children's teachers. They believed that it is the responsibility of few parents who are members of PSTA to discuss with teachers and principals of the school regarding problems occurring in the schooling of children. Due to this reason, many parents visit the school occasionally and even they did not have the slightest idea of the need to deal with classroom teachers about their children education. However, parents did participate in conferences organized by the schools.

3.4. Learning at Home

The mutual effort of parents and school towards learning at home is the most important element to the success of children with special educational needs (Epstein, 2001). Regarding parents' involvement in learning at home activities, the interviewees explained that the practice of supporting children with disabilities at home learning activities like checking their homework daily, asking questions, monitoring activities and providing feedback to their children was not encouraging. However, parents of children with disabilities did not regularly monitor or check their children's home activities at home.

In this connection, parent 1 reflected that:

I believe that teachers are the only responsible one in supporting their children's learning. To be honest, I was not doing my best to help my child in different activities of learning at home. I did not have any habit to read with my child. The reason was I do not recognize the subject matter students learnt and that limited my involvement.

Consistently, teacher 1 reported that:

Though most of the parents of children with disabilities assumed not to have subject matter knowledge across different courses their children are engaged, I have observed that few parents assist their children with their homework and assignments. But, most parents of children with disabilities think that teachers should handle every aspect of education and they consider teachers as the only professional to their children's education.

Teacher 2 elucidated that:

Parents of children with disabilities are less likely to have the support and monitor their children while children tried to do their homework, assignment and project works at home. These parents do not provide any feedback regarding their participation in the education of their children with disabilities so far in our school. However, I have observed that some parents of children without disabilities have a tradition of monitoring and supervising of their children homework and giving feedback when homework is offered.

Participants also noted that many parents of children with disabilities are uneducated and low-income, which limits their involvement in their children's learning at home. These parents may not be able to assist their children with homework or provide support due to their own lack of education and skills. Additionally, they may not view helping their children with homework as their responsibility, especially if they do not have the necessary skills, such as Braille writing and reading. In the context of the current study, it is assumed that parents are not primarily responsible for their children's education at home.

3.5. Volunteering

The fourth type of parental involvement is volunteering to support the learning of children with disabilities. According to the respondents of this study, parents of children with disabilities had low levels of involvement in volunteering activities to support their children's education in inclusive schools. Related with this, parent1 stated his opinion as follows:

My child has stayed in this school for more than four years and I have never participated in volunteering activities like in classroom assistance, school trips and sport festivals. I did not have any time that teachers invite me to help my child's education till now.

Parent 4 also reported that “I had no reason in involving in volunteering to assist primary schools in the classroom because I believed that teachers who thought my child did not allow parents in assisting in classroom.”

Furthermore, teacher 1 reflected that:

Many parents of children with disabilities were initially hesitant to actively participate in their children's education. They believed that education was primarily the responsibility of schools and teachers once children were enrolled. Parents were unaware of their role in supporting their children's learning. When invited by school staff to volunteer in school activities, most parents cited attendance issues as a barrier, believing that organizations outside the school should address these challenges.

The parents were also asked whether they have done any fundraising for the school voluntarily.

However, they did not take part in this activity for the school. In this case parent 1 stated that:

I have never found myself involved in any fundraising event until now. Because this not my role expected to be handled. Further, such fundraising should be facilitated by the school than parents of children with disabilities.

Thus, participants argued that parents of children with disabilities did not participate in volunteering activities at school like assisting classroom teachers because parents totally did not

have such traditions in schools. Thus, it is possible to mark that voluntary involvement of parents in the education of children with disabilities was poor and misunderstood.

3.6. Decision Making Process

The fifth dimension of parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities is decision making in the key areas of learning. This type of involvement includes parents being involved in making decisions at school and developing parent leaders and representatives like in parent-student-teacher association and other related committees for involvement. In this research, parents of children with SENs were asked the extent of their participation in decision making process to the success of their children schooling. In relation with parental involvement in decision making process, parent 2 stated the following:

Parent-student-teacher association (PSTA) members are the most responsible bodies regarding school teaching and learning. Thus, I did not have any role in decision making process. Besides, I was not the member of the PSTA and other school related committee to support the education of children with disabilities in the school. Also, I believe that participating in decision making is not my role.

Parent-Student-Teacher Association is expected mostly to let parents know about decisions made in relation with the education of children. The association also asked parents to contribute money for the school purpose. In this regard, parent 3 reported that:

Most of the time, I did not know how PSTA members participated in decision making process. I and the members meet one time once per year at the end of the school year. Even, I was not aware of the roles of the members of the association and the areas of decision making till the end of the school year. I was not a member in any committee.

Most parents, including those with children with disabilities, generally participated in annual planning sessions. Additionally, they were involved in the implementation and evaluation aspects of school plans twice a year. During these sessions, parents of children with disabilities actively participated in decision-making processes related to various school activities, such as assessing strengths, identifying opportunities, and addressing weaknesses in the teaching and learning process.

Parents of children with disabilities in this study reported low levels of involvement in decision-making processes at their children's schools. The researchers argue that this lack of involvement may be due to policy gaps that limit the decision-making powers of parents. Parents reported that

decision-making was typically carried out by members of the Parent-School-Teacher Association (PSTA), and that sometimes decisions were made without involving parents at all.

3.7. Collaborating with Communities

Regarding educational activities outside the classroom, none of the parents of children with disabilities in the study area reported participating in educational trips or tours related to their children's education. Furthermore, neither parents nor teachers participated in community forums specifically dedicated to discussing issues and matters related to the education of children with disabilities. Additionally, parents of children with disabilities were not involved in community sports clubs or activities. In connection with this, teacher 2 reported that:

Parents of children with disabilities did not participate in local associations, religious institutions, non-governmental organizations to help their children with their education actively. To the best of my knowledge, I have never seen any parent of children with disabilities who participated in these activities done in collaboration with the community up until now.

The analysis indicated that parents were not actively engaged with community members to help the education of children with disabilities. Specifically, participants confirmed that parents of children with disabilities did not perform activities in collaboration with communities like religious institutions, local associations and business agencies like hotels.

4. Discussion

The results of the present study provide valuable insights into the topic of PI in the education of CwDs in primary schools and have important implications for endorsing school-parent partnership in the education system. The results also have implications for re-visiting parents' role in the education of their children both at home school. Hence, in this section, results are discussed in line with the research question of the study.

4.1. Status of Parental Involvement in the Education of CwDs

The findings were discussed based on the theoretical framework suggested by Epstein. Considering all dimensions of PI together (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community), the involvement of parents in the education of CwDs was minimal. Accordingly, each dimension is presented and discussed in the following sub-sections.

4.2. Parenting

Parents play a significant role in their children's education, particularly in providing basic support and nurturing a positive learning environment at home. This research found that parents are more actively involved in this "parenting" dimension than in other areas of educational involvement, likely driven by their high hopes for their children's future success. Interviews revealed that parents actively contribute by providing learning materials and creating a supportive home environment that encourages learning. Current research findings strongly support previous studies (Ibrahim, 2012; Mwaikimu, 2012) which emphasize the crucial role of parents in providing basic parenting activities within primary schools. These studies highlight that effective parenting extends beyond simply providing for a child's physical needs, and emphasizes the importance of consistent involvement and engagement in the child's educational journey. Similarly, Peiffer (2015) argued that parents were involved well in basic parenting provisions in secondary schools. Parents patronize that by supplying the learning materials to support children's learning at any time and cost. The report stated that parents had a good level of consciousness about their parenting obligations to facilitate the learning of children with and without disabilities.

The heightened involvement of parents in parenting activities could stem from a deep-seated understanding of their parental obligations. Parents may inherently perceive these activities as fundamental to their role as caregivers. Additionally, the increased engagement of parents with children with disabilities (CwDs) might be attributed to the concerted efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations (GOs and NGOs) in promoting positive attitudes towards inclusion. These initiatives, aimed at dispelling negative perceptions among parents and teachers, have likely played a significant role in empowering parents to actively support their children with disabilities.

4.3. Communicating

While effective communication between parents and school communities is crucial for enhancing children's education, interview data revealed a significant gap in this area for parents of children with disabilities (CwDs). The study found that most parents of CwDs were not actively participating in communication activities like meetings and discussions with teachers about their children's progress. This finding aligns with previous research by Yonson (2016) which indicated a decline in parental involvement in communication activities, including conferences and meetings

with the school community. Similarly, Zhang (2012) and Williams (2017) observed a lack of frequent communication between Chinese parents and teachers, encompassing discussions about social interactions, learning challenges, progress, and daily routines in kindergarten. These findings highlight a consistent trend of limited communication between parents of CwDs and school personnel, suggesting a need for targeted interventions to improve this critical aspect of parental involvement.

Previous research on parental involvement in communication activities paints a contrasting picture compared to the current study's findings. Studies focused on the general student population (Erlendsdottir, 2010; Hornby, 2011; Mwaikimu, 2012; Kavanagh, 2013) revealed a higher level of parental engagement in communication with teachers and principals. Vanderpuye's (2013) study on inclusive pilot schools in Ghana also documented regular parental involvement in communication about all aspects of their children's inclusive education (IE).

However, the current study's findings indicate a lower level of communication between parents of CwDs and school personnel. Several factors may contribute to this discrepancy. Firstly, previous studies may not have specifically considered parents of CwDs in their sample populations. Secondly, negative attitudes towards disability and the schooling of CwDs among some parents may contribute to their reluctance to communicate with school staff. Additionally, lower levels of education among some parents may create a barrier to frequent communication with teachers and principals.

The study's results highlight the need for educators and administrators to actively encourage and support the involvement of parents of CwDs in their children's education. Recognizing the importance of parental involvement, the Ethiopian government has emphasized its significance, underscoring the necessity for collaborative efforts between schools and parents to enhance communication and ultimately improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities.

4.4. Learning at Home

The current research revealed a low level of parental involvement in learning at home activities to support the education of children with disabilities (CwDs). This lack of engagement stems from barriers related to a lack of knowledge and skills among parents. The findings align with previous studies (Hornby, 2011; Williams, 2017) which also reported a low participation rate of parents of

CwDs in learning at home activities. These studies attributed this to a lack of familiarity with the challenges faced by their children and a deficiency in basic skills needed to support their learning. Furthermore, Strauss and Burger (2000) found that parents with limited education often struggle to assist their children with homework, suggesting a possible link between educational background and parental involvement.

While some studies (Deslandes and Bertrand, 2005) argued that parents perceive home learning activities as the sole responsibility of teachers, other research on the general student population (Washington, 2011; Van Voorhis, 2003) indicated a higher level of parental involvement in monitoring and supervising homework.

The discrepancy between findings may be attributed to several factors, including negative attitudes towards disability among some parents and the specific contexts of the studies. The current research highlights the need for teachers and principals to actively educate parents of CwDs about the importance of their involvement in their children's academic success. Collaboration between teachers and parents is crucial to foster a supportive learning environment at home, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes for children with disabilities.

4.5. Volunteering

This study investigated parental involvement in volunteering, specifically focusing on how it impacts children with disabilities (CwDs). The findings revealed a significant reluctance among parents of CwDs to engage in school-based volunteering. This aligns with previous research that observed a general underutilization of parent volunteering in education, both for CwDs and general student populations.

Researchers suggest that this reluctance stems from a lack of awareness and understanding surrounding the benefits of parent volunteering in supporting children with disabilities. Studies by Vanderpuye (2013) and El Shourbagi (2017) found that parents expressed a lack of enthusiasm for activities like classroom assistance, field trips, and fundraising, even when requested.

While Hornby (2011) highlights the value of volunteering in helping parents understand their children better, this potential benefit remains largely untapped. The study emphasizes a disconnect between parents and school staff, with teachers and principals not actively encouraging or

recognizing parental involvement. This disconnect leads to an underutilization of parental involvement, which parents often perceive as belonging solely to the school.

The study concludes with a call to action for the government and other relevant organizations to facilitate and encourage greater parental involvement in volunteering, highlighting its potential impact on children's academic success.

4.6. Decision Making

The results from the interviews gave further clarification on the issue. For example, it was reported that some parents participated in the decision-making process during the annual school meeting together with PSTA members. The current researcher supposed parents' low level of involvement might be due to a negative attitude of school communities towards parents and CwDs. This may be because schools mainly focus on parent representatives. If so, there will be the need to work on awareness-raising campaigns for the community at large and for teachers in particular, which may tackle the negative belief that parents and other community members have. In support of the finding, Zhang (2012) advised no Chinese immigrant parents of the elementary and secondary school students participated in school decision-making because of factors related to lack of invitation opportunities.

This finding is analogous with preceding findings that pronounced the involvement of parents in the decision-making process was under the anticipated level (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Mwaikimu, 2012; Flemmings, 2013; Dameh, 2015; Cetin and Taskin, 2016; Wakjira, 2017). The authors cited that parents were not involved in the decision-making process frequently. The study conducted by Erdogan and Demirkasimoglu (2010) further stated that parents never involved in the decision-making process because of the centralized school system that did not legitimize parents as part of the decision made by schools. The above findings have implications for indicating how much the problem is severe and suggesting to design intervention strategy to tackle the problem.

4.7. Collaborating with Community

This study found that parents of children with disabilities (CwDs) were generally inactive in collaborating with community organizations, such as media outlets, hotels, and local agencies, to support their children's education. Parents believed that these roles were primarily the responsibility of teachers and school principals. While most parents were hesitant to engage in

collaborative activities, a few parents showed initiative. Two parents from one school proactively invited NGOs and media organizations to help identify resources for their children's education.

The study suggests that the low level of parental involvement in collaborations could be linked to feelings of shame associated with having a child with a disability. This aligns with previous research, including Mwaikimu (2012), Wakjira (2017), and Ujudi (2018), which observed a general lack of parental engagement in community collaboration efforts. These studies indicate that parents often feel they lack the skills or knowledge to contribute to these initiatives. Additionally, a study by Adams et al. (2016) in Peninsular Malaysia echoed these findings, showing minimal parental participation in collaborative efforts within primary and secondary schools for children with disabilities.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

Parents of children with disabilities play a crucial role in their children's education. Their involvement can positively impact their children's academic, social, and emotional development. In the present study, it has been found that parents of children with disabilities have varying levels of involvement in their children's education. While they are involved in some aspects, such as in providing learning materials and creating a positive learning environment at home, they should improve their involvement in other areas, such as participating in school decision-making, monitoring their children's learning, and volunteering in school activities. Besides, parents were found to have low involvement in volunteering and collaborating in community activities regularly to facilitate the education of their children with disabilities.

This study has implications for theory, practice and policy. The study promotes policies that support and encourage active PI in the education of children with disabilities. This could include establishing clear communication channels between parents and schools, and ensuring that parents have a voice in decision-making processes. In addition, educators need to recognize and value the diverse ways in which parents of children with disabilities are involved in their children's education. Schools need to develop strategies to improve communication between parents and teachers. Lastly, the study reinforces the importance of parental involvement as a key factor in the education of children with disabilities.

5.2. Recommendation

The study's findings reveal a low level of parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities (CwDs) in Tabor Primary school, Debre Tabor city administration. To address this, the city's education office, school management bodies, and parent-student-teacher-associations (PSTAs) need to take action. They must educate parents of CwDs about their vital role in their children's education and development. This includes providing information about the various dimensions of parental involvement (PI) and highlighting the importance of areas where parental participation is currently lacking. In essence, the goal is to empower parents of CwDs with the knowledge and understanding they need to actively participate in their children's educational journey, focusing on areas where their involvement is most critical.

To foster parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities, teachers should make home visits to parents. These visits should not only assess the current level of parental involvement but also aim to build parental confidence and competence. Through these visits, teachers can provide valuable support, including counseling, guidance, and skill training, both for parents and their children. This targeted support can empower parents to play a more active and effective role in their child's education. By actively engaging with parents in their home environment, teachers can create a more collaborative and supportive relationship that enhances the educational experience for both parents and children.

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