

Research Article

Parental Support in the Education of Their Children with Impairments: In the Case of North Wollo's Primary Schools

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore parental support practices in the education of children with impairments in primary schools in north Wollo, Ethiopia. The study utilized a qualitative research approach and case study design, involving seven parents of children with impairments and four teachers. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews based on a parental involvement framework with six dimensions. Findings revealed that parents of children with impairments were more involved in parenting practices to support their education. However, communication between parents and teachers was limited, and while some parents provided learning support at home, many were unable to do so due to constraints such as lack of time, misconceptions, and inadequate skills. The study also noted that direct parental involvement in decision-making was limited, while indirect participation through parent-student-teacher associations was more substantial. Additionally, the study revealed that parents did not participate in volunteering or community activities to aid their children's education. As a result, the schools should facilitate discussions and provide training to empower parents in fulfilling their diverse roles.

Keywords

Children, Impairments, Parental Support

1. Introduction

Parental Support encompasses the diverse range of parental actions that impact children's education and overall growth. [5] And a key factor in maximizing the full potential of children with and without impairment [3]. According to [15] parental support in education refers to the participation of parents in a wide range of school and home-based activities to improve children's learning which a collective responsibility of the schools and parents is. Similarly, the [20] defined Parental support as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving children's learning. Thus, parental support in the education of children

with different impairments is becoming an area that is considered significant not only for children's schooling but also it is as essential support for children's development in any direction [18].

Parental support is acknowledged as a critical approach for ensuring children's successful education and a key element for the effective implementation of educational practices [21]. One of the most significant assistance of parents in the education of their children with impairment is actively partaking in their children's learning to augment their academic success. Parental support helps children to learn and achieve better,

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develop self-esteem, and show higher aspirations and motivation toward schooling [5, 18] et al. [2005] also stated that Parental support helps to motivate schools to improve teaching and learning, and hence contributes towards better learners' achievement. Parental support improves students' school attendance, social skills, and academic success [11]. Thus, parents are the most crucial educators of their children who provide a multitude of experiences that encourage learning [7, 22].

According to [2], establishing effective and constructive communication between special education teachers and the parents of students with impairments is advantageous for parents, students, and teachers. Regular and informative communication and interaction with the children's school can positively impact parents' efforts at home to support their children's learning. Increased school support allows teachers to offer guidance on working with children at home and helps parents become familiar with the school's academic program and its functioning. Enhancing the communication quality between special education teachers and parents benefits students by boosting their motivation to learn, fostering improved behavior, promoting regular attendance, and cultivating more positive attitudes toward homework and school overall [2]. Additionally, when teachers take the time to involve parents in their children's learning, parents perceive that to mean that the teachers have their children's best interests at heart and that the teachers themselves are skilled in their field. Additionally, parental support means additional oversight of teachers in the schools. [2].

Understanding parental support in the education of children with impairments requires the exploration of various theoretical frameworks. Among these, [4] Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's models stand out as two prominent and practical frameworks in this field [19]. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's framework offers pivotal guidance for researchers investigating the psychological factors underlying parental support in the education of children with diverse impairments.

This framework emphasizes three foundational factors influencing parental involvement: parents' motivational beliefs, invitations from schools and teachers, and parents' perceived life perspectives. On the other hand, [4] presents a widely used and accepted theoretical framework employed to examine parental support practices in the education of children. This framework consists of six family support obligations, each equally important for children with varying capabilities in schools:

Parenting: Encompassing activities that support children's education and address their basic needs for successful learning. Communicating: Involving frequent two-way communication between parents and teachers.

Volunteering: Refers to parents' voluntary participation in school activities, assisting teachers, and joining field trips.

Learning at home: Parents' involvement in their children's at-home learning, including homework assistance, goal setting, and related activities. [16].

Decision-making: Parental engagement in school decision-making and governance, involvement in school improvement teams, committees, and parent-student-teacher association (PSTA). [2] *Collaborating with the community:* Involving parents networking with each other and community stakeholders to acquire resources [4]. Moreover, [17, 10], and Hornby define parents' home-based support as educational activities carried out at home that impact the success of children with different needs.

Such support includes assisting with homework, providing encouragement, engaging in discussions about school activities, reading stories at home, establishing a conducive learning environment, and ensuring the availability of necessary learning materials. Conversely, school-based support requires parents' physical engagement in school-related activities, such as volunteering, participating in field trips, attending conferences and workshops, communicating with teachers and school principals, and participating in the decision-making process [19].

According to [4], the Ethiopian government, as articulated in the School Improvement Program (SIP), acknowledges that learners with special educational needs and disabilities require additional support from their peers and parents to enhance their social and academic achievements [14]. The SIP emphasizes the critical roles of parents in educating and supporting their children, presenting them as potential partners in developing and executing educational programs aimed at ensuring their children's success in education.

As an itinerant teacher in a primary school, the primary researcher noted that the collaboration between schools and parents in the education of children with diverse needs appeared to be inadequate. Instances were common where parents would blame the school for insufficient involvement, while schools would, in turn, attribute the distance between them and parents, citing a lack of attendance at invited meetings. While several international empirical studies examine parental support and psycho-educational achievements of children with impairments in regular schools, for instance, [1] in Albanian regular schools [23] in Omani regular schools of Botswana, using Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, the focus of these studies didn't particularly delve into the dimensions of parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities. Therefore, this research aimed to understand parental support in the education of children with disabilities by employing Epstein's model as a framework.

2. Theoretical Framework

The conceptualization of parental support is marked by discrepancies in its definition, encompassing a plethora of activities, goals, and outcomes, leading to a lack of clarity in its comprehension [7]. In essence, two primary forms of parental involvement (PI) related to Students with special educational requirements are recognized: Support provided at home and school. School-based support, as noted by [1],

involves parents participating in parent-student-teacher associations (PSTA), and volunteering during School gatherings or supplementary activities aimed at promoting the academic achievement of children. Parental support, often viewed as a multidimensional construct, involves activities carried out by parents at both home and school to bolster learners' academic achievement [18] et al. Epstein's framework outlines six crucial dimensions of parental support in education, namely:

Parenting: This dimension encompasses the responsibilities of parents in meeting their children's needs, including creating conducive home conditions that support children's learning. It also involves ensuring children's attendance, providing necessary school supplies and books, and maintaining a favorable home environment for learning and development [7]. **Communicating:** This dimension highlights the interactions between parents and schools regarding educational plans and their children's academic performance. Moreover, it underscores the rate, paths, and causes of communication, as well as the reasons behind parental communication, such as evaluating student progress and addressing school-related issues [15]. **Volunteering:** Aimed at organizing parental assistance to support teachers in various school activities, including but not limited to classroom assistance, library support, and involvement in fundraising and cultural events [15]. However, it has been noted that parents faced limitations in participating in fundraising activities and classroom volunteering due to structural constraints [7]. **Learning at home:** Involves parental involvement in assisting children with homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities, a practice that has been a subject of discussion among experts and parents [20].

Decision making: This aspect pertains to parents taking part in decision-making processes related to parent-student-teacher associations and collaborative governance at school and district levels [6]. It has been observed that centralized educational systems can restrict parental involvement in decision-making processes.

Collaboration with the community: This dimension emphasizes schools' connections with community stakeholders and groups to enrich the educational experience and future success of children. However, studies have shown limitations in parental involvement in some of these activities, primarily due to structural and systemic barriers [5, 4].

3. Methods and Materials

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the nature of parental support in the education of children with impairments, focusing on primary schools in North Wollo, Ethiopia. To address the research question, a qualitative research approach with a case study design was employed, fostering interaction with participants in their natural settings, considering the study's focus on answering "how" questions and exploring contextual conditions [26]. Case study designs have been similarly utilized in past studies focusing on parental

support in education [21, 12]. Data collection primarily involved consulting primary sources, involving parents of children with disabilities, and teachers.

The study focused on primary schools enrolling children with visual, hearing, and physical impairments from grades one to four. The participants, including parents and teachers, were purposively selected from three specific schools, each catering to different types of special needs, facilitated by experts from the woreda education office. A total of seven parents of children with impairments (3 male and 4 female) and three teachers were interviewed one-on-one using a semi-structured interview guide. The interview covered various aspects, such as parental communication with teachers and principals, involvement in learning activities at home, and collaboration within the community to aid in the education of children with special educational needs.

The interviews, lasting approximately 20 to 30 minutes, were conducted in Amharic, audio-recorded, and later translated into English to ensure accuracy and clarity. Data analysis included transcription, coding, and classification of interview data, leading to the identification of six overarching themes: Parental involvement, communication, home-based learning, volunteering, decision-making, and community collaboration for inclusivity. This thematic analysis allowed for a comprehensive exploration of various facets of parental support in the education of children with impairments.

Additionally, the choice of thematic analysis in this study provides a robust framework for deciphering and categorizing data, ensuring a detailed examination of parental support practices in the context of special education.

4. Results and Discussion

The researcher sees that including and explaining qualitative data in the research regarding parental support in the education of children with impairments in primary schools. Thematic categorization according to Epstein's six typologies for parental support practices sounds appropriate and solid in terms of research design and scope. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the various forms of parental support and involvement, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of parental participation in the education of children with disabilities.

4.1. Parenting

The findings presented in the interviews with parents and teachers illustrate the involvement of parents of children with disabilities in various parenting activities to support their children's education.

Parents reported actively providing necessary learning materials such as stationery, books, and clothing to ensure their children's academic success. Teachers echoed these sentiments, recognizing the efforts put forth by parents but acknowledging that financial constraints sometimes hinder the

timely provision of learning materials. These observations align with prior research, indicating that parents are committed to ensuring that their children have the essential resources for their education.

Moreover, the parents expressed strong desires and high expectations for their children's success in school and beyond, echoing a shared sentiment of positive expectations for their children's learning and future careers. This aligns with previous research indicating that parents maintain high expectations for their children's education.

However, it was also noted that parents did not consistently monitor activities like television watching and bedtime, as this aspect of parenting involvement was relatively low. This inconsistency in monitoring aligns with previous findings and implies that while parents are invested in their children's education, there are areas where their engagement could be further strengthened.

4.2. Communicating

The findings from the parents and teachers interviewed reveal several challenges related to communication between parents of children with disabilities and the school's challenges have implications for the support and participation of parents in their children's education. The participants reported infrequent communication and interaction between parents, teachers, and school principals. This infrequent contact was attributed to parents' perceptions that the responsibility for communicating with teachers lies with a few parents, often members of the Parent-Student-Teacher Association (PSTA). Similarly, the study revealed that parents of children with disabilities were not familiar with school policies and regulations, such as disciplinary measures and classroom discipline issues.

In terms of forms of communication, the interviews revealed that, although infrequent, some positive instances of communication were reported, including teachers calling parents to inquire about the child's condition and using phone calls and official letters to communicate about training initiatives.

Despite some positive instances, the overall picture indicates weak communication between the schools and parents of children with disabilities, which aligns with similar findings from other studies. [9] Reported poor communication and limited contact between parents and schools.

These collective findings suggest an urgent need to address the lack of effective communication between parents and schools, particularly concerning the education of children with disabilities. Improved communication is critical for fostering a supportive and inclusive educational environment, and for facilitating the active involvement of parents in their children's education.

4.3. Learning at Home

The responses from both parents and teachers underscore

the challenges experienced in supporting children with disabilities in home learning activities. They reflect a common belief among some parents that the responsibility for supporting their children's learning primarily falls on the teachers, which affects their level of involvement at home. Additionally, some parents cited a lack of understanding of subject matters as an obstacle to their involvement in their children's learning activities at home.

Parent 1 expressed

“Lack of habit in reading with their child, emphasizing the limitation stemming from not recognizing subject matters taught in school”. This sentiment was echoed by Teacher 2, who noted that “many parents struggled to understand subject matters, resulting in limited support for their children's learning at home”

Similarly, Parent 4 highlighted *“a lack of skill in Braille writing and reading, which hindered their ability to provide effective support in homework and assignments for their child”*.

Teacher 1 also *“communicated the challenges faced by parents of children with hearing impairment, noting that many parents were unable to communicate using sign language, limiting their ability to assist their children with homework and assignments”*.

These collective responses highlight various obstacles that parents of children with disabilities face in supporting their children's learning at home, from a lack of understanding of subject matters to specific skills required to effectively assist their children. These challenges emphasize the need for improved communication and support mechanisms, as well as educational resources to equip parents with the tools necessary to engage effectively in supporting their children's learning at home.

The responses from the parents of children with disabilities reflect a variety of challenges experienced by these parents when it comes to supporting their children's education at home. Parent 3 explicitly expressed that *“her busy schedule, primarily focused on domestic responsibilities, made it difficult for her to actively participate in supporting her child's homework and assignment”*. This sentiment indicates a perceived lack of time for parents to engage in these activities.

In contrast, Parent 6 shared their experience of supervising and monitoring their child's progress during homework and other activities, including communicating with the teacher when their child's scores were low. This demonstrates an active effort to support their child's education despite potential time constraints.

The researchers noted that the majority of parents of children with disabilities did not participate in at-home learning activities to support their children's education due to time constraints, misconceptions about their role, and a lack of specific skills such as sign language and Braille. These observations align with [15] finding that parental support in the areas of at-home learning was weak. Similarly, [13] found

that a significant number of parents did not check their children's exercise books and homework due to language barriers and time constraints. These findings collectively suggest a need for improved awareness and support mechanisms to enhance parental involvement in at-home learning activities.

In contrast, some studies revealed that parents were actively involved in monitoring and supporting their children during homework at home regularly. This discrepancy may be due to differences in parental awareness about their role in their children's education at home. It emphasizes the need for educational institutions and support systems to actively engage and educate parents about the importance of their involvement in their children's education at home.

4.4. Volunteering

The responses from both parents and teachers indicate a prevalent perspective that parents of children with disabilities generally have a limited understanding of the value of their involvement in volunteering activities to support their children's education. There seems to be a belief among parents that the primary responsibility for educating their children resides with the teachers and the school. These parents expressed a lack of awareness regarding their potential role in assisting teachers in the classroom or getting involved in volunteering activities. Some parents reported a history of not being invited to participate in such activities by the school, while others expressed a perception that teachers might not welcome parental involvement in classroom assistance.

These collective sentiments reflect a broader need for improved communication and understanding between parents and schools regarding the potential impact of parental involvement, particularly in the context of volunteering activities, to support the education of children with disabilities. It highlights the necessity for schools to actively communicate the value of parental involvement and create opportunities for parents to engage meaningfully in volunteering activities. This process would be essential to foster a supportive and inclusive educational environment for children with disabilities.

The response from the parents of children with disabilities reflects a reluctance to actively participate in their children's education voluntarily. The prevailing belief among these parents is that once they have delivered their children to the school, the responsibility for education primarily rests with teachers and the school. Additionally, there seems to be a lack of awareness regarding the potential role of parents in supporting their children's education. When invited to participate in voluntary school activities, the issue of absenteeism among parents emerged, with many deferring the responsibility to governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Participants in the study suggested that parents of children with disabilities seldom engaged in volunteering activities at school, including assisting classroom teachers. This lack of involvement was attributed to the absence of a tradition for

parental engagement within the school. The results presented in this context align with the observations of [8], who noted poor parental involvement in volunteering activities due to concerns about parents being viewed as supervisors by teachers. Similarly, [8], found that parents did not volunteer in classroom and extracurricular activities, largely due to the absence of structures enabling parental volunteerism. Furthermore, [4] reported poor levels of parental support for volunteering in activities, with only 4% of parents actively engaging in this dimension of support.

These observations collectively underscore a significant gap in parental involvement in volunteering activities related to their children's education, with various factors contributing to this lack of engagement. This result may necessitate a reevaluation of the strategies and structures in place to enhance parental involvement within the educational context.

4.5. Decision Making

Based on the responses provided by the parents, it is evident that there is a lack of active involvement in decision-making processes related to the education of children with special educational needs (SENs), particularly within the framework of the Parent-Student-Teacher Association (PSTA) and other school-related committees.

Parent 2 expressed a belief that their role did not entail participation in decision-making processes and pointed out that PSTA members were primarily responsible for school teaching and learning decisions. Furthermore, they indicated that they were not a member of the PSTA or any school-related committees, emphasizing a lack of direct involvement in such decision-making activities.

Similarly, Parent 6 indicated a limited understanding of how PSTA members engaged in decision-making processes, highlighting infrequent meetings and a lack of awareness regarding the roles and activities of the association throughout the school year.

In contrast, Parent 5 mentioned their participation in an annual end-of-year meeting, during which school-related issues were discussed and the school's plan was approved and implemented. It appears that this annual meeting was an opportunity for parents to engage in decision-making processes by sharing ideas and contributing to the discussion of various school-related matters.

Overall, the responses indicate a limited and irregular involvement of parents in decision-making processes, with a primary emphasis on annual meetings as the primary venue for discussing school plans and contributing to school-related matters. The findings suggest the need for more active involvement and clear communication channels for parents in decision-making processes to facilitate the support for the education of children with disabilities.

The description of parents' participation in decision-making processes, as provided by the teacher, sheds light on the limited regular involvement of parents of children with

disabilities in various aspects of school decision-making. While most parents, including those of children with disabilities, took part in planning sessions and aspects of plan implementation and evaluation once or twice a year, their regular involvement in decision-making processes was reported to be significantly minimal. The researchers posit that this limited involvement may stem from policy gaps, which have constrained the decision-making powers of school parents.

The decision-making process was noted to be predominantly driven by members of the Parent-School-Teacher Association (PSTA), even though the study participants were not members of the association. This finding aligns with the observations of [15] who similarly noted that decision-making processes were primarily managed by members of PSTA rather than directly by parents themselves. This suggests the severity of the issue and calls for future intervention strategies designed to address the limited involvement of parents in the decision-making process.

The findings underscore the need to enhance the participation of parents, including those of children with disabilities, in decision-making processes within the school. The study suggests the implementation of mechanisms to increase parental involvement in decision-making, addressing the observed limitations.

However, the findings presented diverge from the observations of [25], who reported that parents were actively involved in school decisions, such as participating in trips, disciplinary measures, and other school-related matters, suggesting variability in parental involvement in decision-making across different settings.

4.6. Collaborating with Communities

The responses from parents regarding their collaboration with members of the community regarding the education of children with disabilities in the study area revealed a consistent lack of involvement in various activities. When asked about their participation in educational tours or visits linked to the education of children with special learning requirements, all parents responded in the negative, indicating a lack of engagement in such activities. Additionally, it was noted that neither parents nor teachers participated in forums that would allow them to discuss issues related to teaching children with disabilities in the local area. Furthermore, parents of children with disabilities in the study area were not involved in community activities, particularly in the context of a sports club. These findings collectively underscore a minimal level of participation from parents and teachers in community-related initiatives designed to support the education and overall well-being of children with disabilities in the study area.

The accounts provided by Teacher 2 and Parent 5, along with the findings from [24], indicate a consistent trend: parents of children with disabilities are not typically engaged in collaborative activities within their communities to support

their children's education. Teacher 2 specifically noted the absence of parental participation in various community-oriented organizations such as community organizations, religious institutions, non-governmental organizations, and hospitality establishments. Similarly, Parent 5 expressed a lack of involvement in community activities due to a belief, shared with other members of the community, the belief that children with disabilities may not have equal learning abilities compared to others was mentioned as a barrier to their participation in sporting activities and community field trips. These insights are consistent with the findings of (24), which also underscore the limited engagement of parents of children with special educational needs engaging in collaborative activities within the community. The researchers' observations, supported by this empirical evidence, reinforce the notion that parents of children with disabilities are not frequently involved in community collaborations to support the education of their children. This lack of involvement may be influenced by a variety of factors, including those related to the school environment, attitudes, as well as knowledge and skills. These factors may collectively contribute to the observed gap in parental engagement within the community for the benefit of their children's education.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

In this research, caregivers of children with disabilities demonstrated effective support in parenting activities at selected schools by consistently providing essential learning materials like pens, pencils, sign language and Braille books, papers, exercise books, and uniforms. Additionally, they made efforts to establish a conducive and quiet place for learning at home and exhibited strong aspirations for their children's success in both academic and life pursuits. However, it was noted that these parents did not consistently monitor their children's activities, such as their television viewing habits and bedtime routines. Moreover, the research indicated that parents of children with disabilities were not actively participating in frequent teacher meetings to discuss their children's education, with most interactions happening only during the annual school day event. Regarding parental support in facilitating learning at home, the majority of parents of children with disabilities did not consistently supervise their children's homework, monitor activities, or provide frequent feedback. Nonetheless, some parents in the study were actively involved in monitoring and supervising their children's homework and assignments at home. Also, while parents were not significantly involved in school decision-making, they did participate in decision-making processes through Parent-teacher Associations (PTA). Lastly, the study found that parents displayed limited engagement in volunteering and collaborating in community activities to facilitate the

education of children with impairments.

5.2. Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, it is suggested that schools, NGOs, and relevant stakeholders arrange seminars, conferences, and ongoing training sessions for parents of children with disabilities. These initiatives should concentrate on providing parental support, improving communication, encouraging volunteering, facilitating learning at home, engaging in decision-making, and fostering community collaboration to bolster their children's education. Additionally, given the reported lack of skills in areas like Braille and sign language, as well as a lack of awareness among parents of children with disabilities, it is advised that the North Wollo Education office and Woldia City education office organize regular training programs on sign language and Braille skills for these parents. Future research endeavors should focus on the practice of parental support and the factors influencing it in the education of children with special educational needs, utilizing a mixed methods approach to capture diverse viewpoints. Furthermore, additional studies are warranted to identify effective strategies and enhance parental involvement in the education of children with impairments.

Abbreviations

PSTA	Parent, Student, Teacher Association
SENs	Special Educational Needs
PI	Parental Involvement
SIP	School Improvement Program
NGO	None Governmental Organization

Availability of Data and Material

The data and material used in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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