

Parental Involvement in the Education of their Children with Disabilities: the case of Primary Schools of Bahir Dar City Administration, Ethiopia

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine practices of parental involvement in the education of their children with disabilities in inclusive government primary schools. Qualitative case study design was used to investigate the problem. A sample of six parents of children with disabilities and two teachers were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide and analyzed thematically based on Epstein's (2001) framework of parental involvement with six dimensions. Results indicate that parents of children with disabilities involved better in parenting activities to support the education of children with disabilities. However, communication of parents with teachers and school principals was found to be minimal. They did not visit the schools regularly and discuss with school teachers and principals on their children's learning. In addition, while few parents of children with disabilities provided learning support for their children at home; most parents of children with disabilities were unable to do so due to time constraints, wrong perceptions and skill deficits. Findings also revealed that parental direct involvement in decision making process was low although their indirect participation via parent-student-teacher association was better. Finally, parents of children with disabilities in the study area did not involve at all in volunteering and community activities to support their children's education. Thus, the schools are required to organize discussions and trainings that would enable parents of children with disabilities recognize and discharge their multifaceted roles.

Keywords: Children with disabilities; Epstein's framework; Ethiopia; Parental involvement

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1. Introduction

Parental involvement (PI) denotes the multidimensional nature of parents' activities that influence children's learning and development (Epstein, 2009) and a key factor to maximize the full potential of students with and without disabilities (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). According to Ngwenya (2010), PI in education refers to the participation of parents in a wide range of school and home-based activities to improve children's education which is a shared responsibility of the schools and parents. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education (2003) defined PI as the participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving children's education. Thus, PI in the education of children with diverse abilities is becoming an area that is considered important not only for children's schooling, but also as an essential support for children's psychological and social development (Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding and Walberg, 2005).

Parental involvement is recognized as a major strategy for successful education of children and is an important ingredient for effective practice of inclusive education (Vanderpuye, 2013; Monika, 2017). One of the most important contributions of parents in the education of their children is actively partaking in their children's learning to augment their academic success. PI helps children to learn and achieve better, develop self-esteem, and show higher aspiration and motivation towards schooling (Epstein, 2009). Patrikakou *et al.* (2005) also stated that PI helps to motivate schools improve teaching and learning, and hence contributes towards better learners' achievement. More specifically, research on special needs education and disability revealed that active PI improves students' school attendance, social skill and academic success (Lalvani, 2015). Thus, parents are the most essential educators of their children who provide a multitude of experiences that encourage learning (Fan & Chen, 2001; Washington, 2011).

In order to understand PI in education, several theoretical frameworks have been developed. Some of these are more popular and practical than others. For example, Epstein's (2001) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's frameworks are the two prominent in the field (Tekin, 2011). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's framework provides important guidance to researchers who want to study the psychological factors of PI in the education of children with diverse interest. According to this framework, the three fundamental factors that make parent's decision to involve are: parents' motivational belief, parents' invitations from schools and teachers, and parents' perceived life perspectives.

Epstein (2001) proposed a theoretical framework used to examine parental involvement practice in the education of children that is employed in this study. It is the most commonly used, tested and accepted framework that consists six family involvement obligations which are equally important for children with different capabilities in schools. These obligations are: (1) parenting- which includes all of the activities that parents engage in for supporting children's education to meet the basic needs of the child for successful education; (2) communicating- which implies a frequent two-way communication between parents and teachers; (3) volunteering- which refers to the participation of parents voluntarily in the school so as to help teachers as assistants and participating in field trips; (4) learning at home- which refers to parents' participation in children's learning at home such as helping and supervising in homework, goal setting, and other related activities; (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) collaborating with community- which refers to parents network with each other and community stakeholders to solicit resources.

Parents' home-based involvement as explained by Ngwenya (2010), Kavanagh (2013) and Hornby (2011) refers to education related activities that parents perform at home that impact the success of children with different needs. Home involvement consists of activities such as supporting children with homework, encouragement, discussions with children in school activities, reading stories at

home, creating quiet home environment for learning, providing the necessary learning materials and proper care at home. On the other hand, school-based involvement requires parents physically engaging in activities in school, such as volunteering, participating in field trips, attending conferences and workshops, discussing with teachers and school principals on learning progress of children, participating in decision-making process in PSTA (Ngwenya, 2010; Ibrahim, 2012).

As outlined in the School Improvement Program (SIP), the government of Ethiopia recognizes that learners with special educational needs and disabilities acquire extra support from their peers and parents so as to improve their social and academic achievement (Ministry of Education, 2012). The SIP stresses that parents play critical roles in educating and supporting their children and can be potential partners in designing and implementing educational programs for their children's success in education. As an itinerant teacher at a primary school, the first researcher observed that collaboration between the schools and parents in the education of children with different needs seems unsatisfactory. It was not unusual to hear parents blaming the school for not involving them and the schools blaming parents for keeping themselves at distance from the school and for not attending meetings to which they are invited.

So far, empirical studies have been conducted internationally on PI and psycho-educational achievement of children with special educational needs (SENs). For example, Balli (2016) and Monika (2017) in regular schools of Albania, El Shourbagi (2017) in Omani regular schools of Botswana studied PI in inclusive schools by using Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model as a framework. The studies revealed that PI in inclusive school settings plays a pivotal role for psycho-educational development of children with special educational needs including children with disabilities. However, the researchers could not demonstrate the specific PI activities because the model they used (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's model) focused on psychological factors that facilitated parental decision-making than exploring the practice of parental involvement. Besides, the researchers did not focus on the dimensions in which parents involved in the education of their children with disabilities. Therefore, this research was conducted to understand the involvement of parents in the education of children with disabilities by taking Epstein's model as a framework.

Local researchers (E.g. Biramo, G/silase and Koyra, 2017; Tadele, 2006; Demiesie, 2006) have done research on PI and children's academic achievement using quantitative approach in different parts of Ethiopian primary schools and indicated that parental involvement and learner's academic achievement were positively related. But, the focus of these researches was on examining the relation between PI and academic achievement of general student population. Most of these studies did not focus on children with disabilities and address majority of the issues specified in the six dimensions of Epstein's framework regarding the involvement of parents in the education of children with disabilities.

Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the involvement of parents in the education of children with disabilities based on Epstein's typologies of PI in education. The study attempted to answer the following research question: How do parents of children with disabilities involve in their children's education in the study area?

Scholars across the globe define PI in different ways with many inconsistencies. That means PI has multiple definitions consisting confusing terms with a range of activities, goals, and outcomes making it hard to clearly understand (Fan & Chen, 2001). There are two major types of PI in the education of children with special educational needs. These are: home-based and school-based involvement to support children's learning. Balli (2016) posited that school-based involvement includes but not limited to parents participating in PSTA, volunteering at school events or extracurricular activities for encouraging academic success of children. Furthermore, parental involvement has been referred to as a multidimensional construct that includes activities carried out by parents at home and school to enhance academic achievement of learners (Patrikakou *et al.*, 2005).

A framework consisting of six important dimensions with regard to parental involvement in education has been developed by Epstein. These dimensions are stated as follows.

Parenting: refers to parental responsibilities in fulfilling basic necessities for their children such as housing, health care, nutrition, clothing, as well as creating home conditions that support children's learning such as purchasing necessary books, stationeries and being responsive in communicating with and supporting good behavior for children's school success (Epstein, 2001). Concerning parenting, Mwaikimu (2012) stated that the basic obligations of parents in their children's education were their participation by ensuring that children attended school, providing their children's necessities supplying school stationery and books; and ascertaining home conditions to be conducive for learning and development.

Communicating: It is the second fundamental obligation of PI into their children's learning. This mainly takes into account the relationship of parents with schools concerning the educational plans and their children's achievement within the different communication methods (Epstein, 2009). Communication also involves the "rate," "paths," and "causes" of communication (Patrikakou *et al.*, 2005: 8). In relation to the rate of communication, Monadjem (2003) found that parents were involved regularly in meetings with school teachers and participate in conferences at least once in a month to interact with teachers. Also, the reasons for parental communication were related to evaluation of the academic progress of the student and other issues regarding the school.

Volunteering: It aims at recruiting and organizing parent help and support in assisting teachers in the classroom, on class trips; assistance in the library, cafeteria, supervising pupils' sport and cultural activities and assisting in fund raising (Monadjem, 2003). In this regard, a study by Erlendsdóttir (2010) revealed that parents were not in a position to involve in fundraising activities for the school. Also, parents did not involve in the classroom volunteering and in sports and cultural activities due to unavailability of structures that allow parents to volunteer in such activities (Mwaikimu, 2012). Consistently, as to Epstein (2001), the situation of PI in parenting activities was at low level accounting only to 4% in terms of active involvement.

Learning at home: Epstein (2001) defines learning at home as parents' participation in helping children in doing homework, setting goals, and carrying out other curriculum-related activities. Research shows that homework can be either positive or negative for both parents and teachers. In relation to this, the U.S. Department of Education (2003) explains that homework has been a part of learners' lives since this is the beginning of formal schooling in the United States of America. However, the practice has sometimes been accepted and other times rejected, both by professionals and parents.

Decision making: As Epstein & Sheldon (2005) state, decision making is the fifth domain in PI which refers to taking decisions, governance and encouragement in participatory roles regarding PSTA, other concerned partners at the school, woreda/district, and the regional level. According to Erdogan and Demirkasimoglu (2010), parents did not have opportunities to participate in the process of decision making due to the centralized structure of the educational system. However, Cetin and Taskin (2016) found out that parents involved in the activities to be organized at school trips and basic requirements at school.

Collaboration with community: refers to school having connections with agencies, business representatives, religious groups and other groups that share responsibility for the children's education and future successes. This type of involvement includes identifying and integrating the community resources and services in order to strengthen school programs, family practices, and children's learning and development (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005). Epstein (2001) reported that parents inform their children about all the relevant activities that the schools organize and only involved in the activities to be carried out during the summer holidays. As to Mwaikimu (2012), primary schools in Kenya had an activity committee comprised of teachers from schools that determined the amount of financial contributions to be collected from the parents to cater for sports, drama, cultural

activities, and concerts during the year. However, the above stated researches focused on PI in the education of typical student population.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Description of the Study Area

This study was conducted in Bahir Dar city administration, the capital of Amhara National Regional State. In the city administration, there are 39 government and 24 private primary schools. The study was carried out in second cycle government primary schools as inclusive education is practiced at this level. There are six government inclusive primary schools that include children with disabilities. These schools are Yekatit 23, Dona Berber, Dilchibo, Shimbit, Tsehay Gibat and Atse Sertse Dingil primary schools. From the six inclusive schools, Yekatit 23 and Atse Sertse Dingil government primary schools had better experience in inclusive education practice than the others and therefore, the two schools were focused in this study.

2.2. Research Design

This study examined the practices of parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities in inclusive government primary schools. To answer the research question, qualitative approach with case study design was employed. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to interact with the participants in their settings. The case was the involvement of parents in their children's education. According to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer the "how" questions in which the current study attempted to address, (b) the study covers contextual conditions in which the researchers do not have a true picture which refers to parental involvement in their children's education in the case of the present study. Similar to this study, the study conducted by Wulandary & Herlisa (2017); and Mafa and Makuba (2013) on parental involvement in education used qualitative case study design.

2.3. Sources of Data

In this study, data collection was done through consulting primary sources. Primary data sources were parents of children with disabilities and teachers. Secondary data sources mainly covered government publications, technical documents, and annual reports of the companies in which the current research did not consider this.

2.4. Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study was conducted in government primary schools that enrolled children with visual impairment (totally blind) and hearing impairment (totally deaf) from grade five to eight. Participants of the study were parents of children with disabilities and teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms from grade five to eight. They were selected purposively. The two schools were Yekatit 23 (S1) that enrolled children with hearing impairment and Atse Sertse Dingil (S2) enrolled visually impaired children in the mainstream setting. The two schools were selected purposively with the support of the special needs education experts at the regional education bureau with the view that the schools had better experiences in practicing inclusive education than the remaining schools. Next, three parents of children with disabilities from each selected school (total 6 parents) were selected purposively with the support of itinerant teachers working in the respective schools considering their prior experience of closely communicating issues related to their children with the schools. In addition, two teachers (one from each selected schools) who were teaching in inclusive classrooms from grade five to eight with a minimum of two years' experience in teaching in an inclusive classroom were selected purposively. Parent 1 is female from S1, parent 2 is male from S1 and parent 3 is female from S1. And parent 4 is male from S2, parent 5 is male from S2 and parent 6 is female from S2. Finally, teacher 1 is male from S1 and teacher 2 is female from S2. Therefore, a total of six parents of

children with disabilities (3 male and 3 female) and two teachers were interviewed to get relevant information for the study.

2.5. Methods of Data Collection

To answer the research question of the study, semi-structured interview guide was used. The instrument was developed based on comprehensive review of literature which was raised similar issue in the current study like from the work of Mwaikimu (2012) and El Shourbagi (2017). Some of the major topics addressed in the interview were how parents communicate with teachers and principals and how parents participate in the learning at home activities and collaborate with community to support the education of children with special educational needs. The issues of volunteering and decision-making process were also raised during the interviews. The interview schedule with parents of children with disabilities and teachers were arranged through the facilitation of special needs education teachers in the respective schools. An interview which took approximately 20 to 30 minutes was conducted on one-to-one basis and audiotaped. The interview was made in Amharic for clarity and later it was translated into English.

2.6. Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis involved transcribing, coding, and categorizing data from interviews and developing them into the six overarching themes. The themes were parenting, communicating, learning at home, volunteering, decision making, and collaborating with community for inclusion. Therefore, thematic analysis was used in this study.

3. Results and Discussion

In this section of the research, results from data collected in qualitative techniques are presented. The purpose of the study was to assess the involvement of parents in the education of children with disabilities in primary schools of Bahir Dar city administration. Most of the activities in which schools involve parents were categorized and thematized within Epstein's six typologies of parental involvement practices in education.

3.1. Parenting

As indicated in the review of literature, parenting refers to the basic responsibilities of parents of children with different abilities such as clothing, creating home conditions that support children's learning, purchasing the necessary books, stationery, and parents' expectation of their children in school success (Epstein, 2001). In relation to this, parents of children with disabilities were asked how they parented their children in terms of different activities of parenting to help their children become successful in their learning. The interview results revealed that parents of children with special educational needs involved better in most areas of parenting activities for their children's success in learning in inclusive schools. In relation to this, parent 1 explained that:

As far as possible, I provide the basic learning materials such as pens, paper, pencil, exercise book, sign language dictionary and uniform and even more than my non-disabled child who attended the same school. Besides, the school supports my child in providing learning materials in addition to my provision.

Parent 2 also stated that:

My child received the necessary learning materials so far like pen, paper, pencil, exercise book, uniform and others. However, these materials were given by donors. I can assure you that if the donor could not afford, I would try my best to give the necessary learning materials including clothing.

Furthermore, parent 4 stated that "Whatever the case, at least I could fulfill the necessary learning materials periodically and provide clothes."

Finally, parent 5 reported that "I provide the basic learning materials to my child by paying school fees when asked and buying everything that my child asks for his schooling."

Teacher 1 explained that “Parents of children with disabilities tried their best to fulfill their children’s learning materials. However, I have observed that some parents did not provide books and other learning materials on time because of financial problems.”

Therefore, as reported by parents and teachers, it was recognized that parents of children with disabilities involved better in parenting activities for their children’s academic success in the schools. For instance, parents provide the necessary learning materials like stationeries and clothes. The finding is consistent with what has been studied by Mwaikimu (2012) who explained that parents involved in the study asserted that their children attend school and they provided stationery and books for their children. Similarly, Cetin and Taskin (2016) indicated that most parents involved in areas of parenting particularly by providing the necessary learning materials for their children with disabilities. Besides, Ibrahim (2012) noted that parents involved in their children’s schooling by providing their children with good nutrition and ensured that their children wore suitable clothes in schools, supplied them with the necessary learning materials which are in line with the current study. This implies that parents of children with different types of disabilities involved in parenting particularly by providing basic stationeries and clothes.

The other issue that parents were asked was about their role in establishing positive learning environment like creating a quiet place for study and their expectations on what their children would do in school and about their children school performance. Accordingly, parents tried their best to create quiet place for study, and they had good expectation and hoped good things to happen both in education and their later lives.

Parent 4 explained that:

As far as possible, I tried to allow my child to read in most quiet place. Besides, I had a strong desire and expectation in her academic achievement including her future success since she aspires to become a lawyer. To your surprise, I wanted a better life for this child than what I desire to my second child who does not have disability. However, I did not monitor activities such as television watching and times the child goes to bed.

Besides, parent 2 stated that:

I had a strong wish to my child’s success in education and tried to make my child in a safe area while studying and doing homework. Besides, I prayed to God for my child’s success in the future.

Teacher 2 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.

Based on personal accounts of the respondents, it could be argued that parents of children with disabilities have high expectation and wish their success for their children in academic achievement and their future career. Similar to this study, Erdogan and Demirkasimoglu (2010) indicated that parents have high expectations in their child’s education. Thus, these two findings are similar in explaining parent’s expectation and possible to say parents experience positive expectation for their children’s learning. The parents expressed their desire, and expectations, for their children to do well in school and to become something good in the future. However, the finding of the current research revealed that parents of children with disabilities did not involve better in the areas of monitoring activities like watching and listening to TV; and the time at which their children go to bed which is consistent with the study finding by Erlendsdóttir (2010) who explained parents did not monitor activities such as television watching and at times when their children go to bed. Thus, the studies imply that parents participate better in some activities like experiencing good expectation about their children’s success while they record low level of participation in monitoring their children when they watch TV and go to bed.

3.2. Communicating

The second dimension of parental involvement is communicating for the education of children with disabilities. This mainly takes into account the relationship of parents with schools in relation to

educational plans and their children's achievement using different mode of communication. Communication can take many forms such as verbal, written, and can be done through different types of methods to promote children's schooling (Epstein, 2009). As noted by the interviewees, most of the parents of children with disabilities did not regularly meet and talk about their children's education with the school teachers and principals in the study area.

In connection to this, parent 4 reported that:

I even did not know the name of my child's teachers, 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.

Besides, parent 6 stated that "Parents communicate with teachers and school communities during annual school day only. During this meeting, parents had discussions with the school principals and PSTA members regarding the teaching and learning process, and parent's role in the education of children."

Teacher 1 explained that:

In my stay as a teacher here for more than five years, I observed only some of the parents meet and discuss with teachers and school principals regularly. When we send letters for meeting, only few parents participated in different occasions and meetings. When I asked children why their parents did not come to school, they responded that the parents are busy. However, I have observed that parents of children with disabilities participated in conferences when the organizer could provide daily allowance.

Similarly, teacher 2 reported that "In my opinion, only few parents of children with disabilities involved 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."

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. Similarly, Monadjem (2003) found that parents were involved regularly in meetings with school teachers and participate in conferences at least once in a month to talk about their children learning. Besides, Erlendsdóttir (2010) explained that parents of children contacted schools regularly to oversee the success of their children in learning which was contrary to the finding of the present study. Mwaikimu (2012) was one of the researchers who examined how parents communicate with schools regarding the learning progress of their children in Kenya. The researcher found that parents had no understanding or awareness about meeting or contacting teachers to discuss their children's schooling, and the majority of the parents rarely visited schools to talk to the teachers which are consistent with the findings of the present research.

Parents of children with disabilities were also asked about what forms of communication they used to have with the schools though the communication was infrequent. They responded that they communicated through letter and by phone.

In relation with forms of communication, 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 since the child is deaf. I like this teacher since he is with me. This is through phone calling.

Besides, parent 6 explained that "When the school organizes sign language and life skill trainings, the teachers communicate me in the form of official letters. Also, the teachers communicate me using phone calling for meeting."

Furthermore, one of the activities of communicating in children's education was parent's familiarity about school policies and regulations. Parents of children with disabilities were not

familiar with the school policies and regulations like disciplinary measures, classroom discipline issues and others. As they responded, teachers make a call to parents whenever there was a disciplinary problem though parents did not involve. This finding is consistent with a study finding by Monadjem (2003) who stated that parents were familiar with school policies but have poor communication with schools. However, it is inconsistent with what has been said by Erlendsdóttir (2010) who stated that all parents understood the school policies and regulations carefully.

From these, the researchers ascertained that there was a weak communication between the school and parents of children with disabilities regarding the education of their children. Similarly, Girma (2017), who conducted his PhD dissertation on experiences of parental involvement in the management of primary schools in Oromia National Regional State, came up with similar findings. The study suggested that there was poor communication between parents and schools. In addition, a study conducted by Jigyel, Miller, Mavropoulou and Berman (2018) confirmed that parents had no direct communication with staff and school community in the school. These parents felt it is unnecessary to communicate with other members of the school. Clearly speaking, most studies implied that parents did not communicate with teachers and principals more frequently.

3.3. 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, some parents of children with disabilities monitor or check their children's home activities at home regularly.

In this connection, parent 1 reflected that:

I believe that teachers are the only responsible one in supporting 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.

Similar to parent 1, teacher 2 stated that "Most parents that met with me were not able to understand the subject matter to support their children's learning at home in many cases. Besides, parents did not consider supporting their children at home as their responsibility." Parent 4 reported that "As a parent need to monitor and supervise my child while doing homework and assignments but I could not give concrete support in doing homework since I did not have skill in Braille writing and reading."

Teacher 1 also shared parent 4 views and explained that parents of children with hearing impairment could not support while their children were doing their homework and assignments because many parents were not able to communicate using sign language.

Parent 3 explained that:

Since we mothers are too busy from morning to night worrying about home activities like cooking, support in homework and assignment was difficult to me. However, I tried asking my child whether he did homework and assignment or not in any time. Time constraints make me not involve in supporting my child.

On the contrary, parent 6 explained that:

I tried to supervise and follow my child's progress during homework doing and other activities given by the teacher. When my child took exams, I checked how much he scored and when there was low score, I communicate with his teacher for the case.

Thus, researchers learnt that most parents of children with disabilities did not involve in learning at home activities in supporting their children's education because of time constraints, wrong perceptions and lack of skill such as sign language, Braille related. This finding is consistent with the finding by Monadjem (2003) who stated that parental involvement in the areas of learning at home

was weak. Similar to the current study, the research by Mauka (2015) revealed that large number of parents did not check their children's exercise books and homework because they did not know English language which is the medium of instruction in secondary schools. Besides, some parents stated that parents did not have time to help children in their studies at home. This implies that parents of children with different needs were not able to participate in their children's education at home regularly. Contrary to the current study, Erlendsdóttir (2010) revealed that parents were involved in their children education by monitoring and supporting children while they were doing homework at home regularly. The contradiction may be due to differences of parents' awareness about their role in their children's education at home because in our context it is assumed that parents are not responsible for their children's education.

3.4. Volunteering

The fourth type of involvement in which parents need to participate is volunteering to support the learning of children with disabilities. According to the respondents of this study, parents of children with disabilities involved poorly in volunteering activities in supporting their children's education in inclusive schools.

Related with this, parent1 stated his opinion as follows:

I did not believe that my involvement has any value for the teacher and my child learning since I assume teachers are the only equipped professionals in educating my child. I believe that parents of children with disabilities are not responsible to assist the teacher in the classroom and parents did not have any information regarding this still now.

Besides, parent 2 explained that:

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:

Most parents of children with disabilities were reluctant to get involved in their children's education voluntarily because parents believed that it is the duty of the teachers and schools after delivering children to the school and they did not know the role of parents to support their children's education. When parents of children with disabilities were invited by the school teachers to participate in school activities voluntarily, most parents see the problem of absenteeism and they believe that it is the responsibility of governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

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. This result is confirmed by Flemmings (2013) who explained that parents involved poorly in volunteering activities because teachers viewed parent volunteers as supervisors who oversaw their teaching ways, assessing methods, and classroom managing strategies. Similarly, parents did not volunteer in the classroom and in sports and cultural activities since there were no structures to allow parents to volunteer in the activities (Mwaikimu, 2012). Consistently, the extent of parental involvement as to Epstein (2001) in volunteer in activities was poor which accounted only to 4% of the parents' active involvement in the areas of volunteering.

3.5. Decision Making

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 said 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 6 had the following to say:

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.

Besides, parent 5 explained that:

There is annual meeting at the end of the school year; I participated in the meeting to discuss different school related issues. This annual meeting offers us an opportunity to share ideas; parents meet to approve school's plan and discuss its implementation for the school's upcoming year and other subjects like contributing money to the school.

Regarding parents' participation in decision making process, one of the teachers explained that:

Most parents participated in planning sessions once a year, including parents of children with disabilities. Twice a year, most parents (including parents of children with disabilities) involved in plan implementation and evaluation aspect of the school. During this time, parents of children with disabilities take part in decision making process in different events of the school such as strengths, opportunities and weakness of teaching learning process. Therefore, parents of children with disabilities were typically less or not involved regularly in various decision-making processes to support their children's education.

As a result, the researchers argue that parents of children with disabilities were not involved in decision making process effectively by themselves which may be due to policy gaps that made school parents to have low decision-making powers in their schools. However, they reported that decision making process was run by PSTA members though sometimes they decided without involving parents as all of the participants in this study were not the members of the association. The current finding is consistent with Cetin and Taskin (2016) who explained decision-making process were mostly done by members of PSTA than parents themselves. In fact, the above findings have implication for indicating how much the problem is a severe and suggesting intervention strategy that shall be designed in the future to address the problem. This implies that parents were not in a position to involve in decision making process in the school directly in which due attention has to be in place to increase their involvement in decision making through different mechanisms. In contradiction with the current finding, Mwaikimu (2012), however, confirmed that parents involve with school decisions such as participating in trips, disciplinary measures and other issue of the schools by themselves.

3.6. Collaborating with Communities

Finally, parents were asked if they worked in close collaboration with community members on the education of children with disabilities in the study area. One of the activities that parents of children with disabilities in the study area were asked was if they involved in visiting or educational trip of their children. But, all of the parents responded that they did not take part in any educational tour linked to the education of children with special educational needs. Besides, none of the parent and teacher participants participated in a forum in which they can talk about problems or matters especially of the education of children with disabilities with the community. In relation to their involvement in community activities, particularly about a sports club, parents of children with disabilities in the study area were not involved.

In connection with this, teacher 2 stated that:

Parents of children with disabilities did not participate in local associations, religious institutions, nongovernmental organizations and hotels 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.

Besides, parent 5 elaborated the following on collaborating with the community:

So far, I did not participate in various sections of the community in my neighborhood to support my child's education because I and other community members believed that children with disabilities could not have the ability to learn like others. Additionally, for example, I did not have the experience of participating in sports and field trips in collaboration with the community.

Similarly, Erlendsdóttir (2010) found out that parents did not participate in any activities in collaboration with the community. Consistent with the current research findings, El Shourbagi (2017) confirmed that parents of children with special educational needs did not perform activities in collaboration with communities like religious institutions, local associations and business agencies like hotels.

Generally, based on the researchers' observation from several empirical evidences, parents of children with disabilities are not collaborating with communities on the education of their children regularly. This may be due to different factors such as school, attitudinal, knowledge and skill related factors.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusion

In this study, parents of children with disabilities were found to have better involvement in parenting activities at selected schools. They supply the necessary learning materials such as pen, pencil, sign language and Braille book, papers, exercise books, and uniform adequately. Besides, parents of children with disabilities have tried to establish quiet place for learning at home and they have had good expectation and desire for their children's success both in school and life. However, parents of children with disabilities in the study area did not monitor their children's activities such as watching television and times for children to go to bed. The study also showed that parents of children with disabilities were not meeting with teachers regularly to discuss their children's learning. They met teachers only during annual school day.

In relation to parental involvement in learning at home, majority of parents of children with disabilities in the study area were not overseeing their children's homework daily, monitoring activities and providing feedback to their children with disabilities frequently. However, some of parents of children with disabilities in the study area were monitoring and supervising their children homework and assignment at home. Though parents did not involve effectively in school decision making, they partook in decision making through PSTA. Finally, parents were found to have low involvement in volunteering and collaborating in community activities regularly to facilitate the education of children with disabilities.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that schools, NGOs and other concerned stakeholders shall organize seminars, conferences and trainings regularly for parents of children with disabilities regarding their involvement in parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with community to support their children's education. The findings indicate that parents of children with disabilities did not involve actively due to lack of skills like Braille and sign language, and lack of awareness. Thus, the Amhara Regional State Education Bureau and Bahir Dar city education office shall organize trainings on sign language and Braille skills for parents of children with disabilities regularly.

Future research shall be conducted on the practice of parental involvement and factors affecting the involvement of parents in the education of children with special educational needs from multiple perspectives using mixed methods design. Besides, more studies need to be conducted to identify more appropriate strategies and increase the involvement of parents in the education of children with disabilities.

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