

The Partnership Between Families and the School in Enhancing the Integration Process for Students with Special Needs

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Abstract

This paper explores the most important and satisfactory aspects of collaborative partnership from the point of view of parents of children with special needs. The descriptive survey method was utilized to suit the purposes of the study and its objectives. The study sample in its final form consisted of 761 parents of students with special needs (658 fathers, 103 mothers) who had a child with a disability. A questionnaire was used for information collection from the participants to reach conclusions on the questions of the study. The findings showed that the results regarding child-centred relationships revealed the presence of some aspects that mothers and fathers consider to be of high importance and enjoy a high degree of satisfaction. Results revealed differences between the average scores of families of children with special needs, according to the educational level variable, in favour of the educational level (secondary school and below) compared to other age levels. Activating aspects of cooperative participation in the field of special education may predict the quality of life of the disabled person and his family.

Keywords: students with special needs, parents, satisfaction, importance, partnership, schools.

1. Introduction

The school is one of the institutions of society that accommodates the community members in its spaciousness. It prepares students to take part as enlightened residents of the community (Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020). The school helps in developing good attitudes as an integrated person. It develops abilities, such as skills to face obstacles and to get along with the rest of the members of society. Education reform, like its development, requires building a partnership with society from all its segments to obtain help and support and to achieve continuous, authentic interaction between all parties: the school, the family, and the local community (Ferreira et al., 2020). Therefore, the Ministry of Education encouraged and informed others of the importance of cooperation between the community and the school through

establishing the Community Participation Committee in schools as an urgent necessity to connect the school with the family and the surrounding community.

The approach to community participation in contemporary educational systems is based on the philosophy that the school alone is not responsible for education (Al-Amrat & Khasawneh, 2022). However, it has become a societal issue that depends on support, such as the participation of the family and the local community surrounding the school, and is considered one of the factors that lead to achieving many benefits, such as protecting students from corruption and continuous communication between the family and the school (Garner et al., 2021). Community participation is essential in the educational process. The family, like all sectors of society regardless of their differences, was considered essential partners in the educational process, sufficient to experience direct positive aspects that affect the school, as reflected in the educational process.

The participation of parents of people with special needs stems from the basic component of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act and the Special Education Law (P.L. 94-142) (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). When the law was reformulated, emphasis was placed on increasing the parents of people with special needs participation in the education of their children and ensuring that each child's family has real opportunities to be included in their children's education at school and home (Hidayati et al., 2020). The school principals must be followed by parents of children with special needs and disabilities regarding referral, testing, accommodation, and planning programs and their evaluation, in addition to the right to resort to the law if they feel that their children's needs have not been met.

The concept of cooperative participation is an integral part of special education and the services provided to its categories, and the development of the concepts associated with it has become linked to the role and extent of the family's participation with specialists or vice versa in the educational program for the child with special needs (Khasawneh, 2021; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). The family is considered a clear source of natural support for all individuals with special needs. Special needs and the strength of the family and its participation in school may reflect positively on the characteristics of the child. A child with special needs is the responsibility of a professional specialist, such as a special education teacher, a psychologist, a communication disorders specialist, or a school (Alkhawaldeh & Khasawneh, 2023). Indeed, raising and educating students with special needs is a shared responsibility for all. Therefore, achieving the goals of special education depends to a large extent on the quality of collaborative participation between the child's family and school specialists in planning and implementing the various educational goals. This requires that specialists have confidence in the family and in its ability to make decisions related to the child.

1.1. Problem statement

Despite what community participation has achieved in terms of its advantages and benefits, the beginning of participation practices in Jordan is still limited, and within narrow scopes. There is a shortcoming in the practices of partnership between the school and the family, limiting it to holding parent councils and inviting them to graduation parties. There is no full participation in the success of the entire educational process. Despite this lack of attention from those drafting

laws and legislation regarding people with special needs, participation between the family and specialists is considered an important factor within the framework of service delivery, and may even become the focus of informal discussions among those interested in participating in the field of special education. Several studies have focused on the importance of aspects of cooperative participation for families of people with special needs, and that there is a strong relationship between participation between the family and specialists and the quality of family life. Participation contributes to providing informational support to parents, improving the academic performance of people with special needs, and raising parents' acceptance of the decisions and efforts of specialists. Cooperative participation is very important and the family of a child with a special need needs it to confront the child's disability and the associated pressures.

1.2. Questions of the study

1- What are the most important and satisfactory aspects of collaborative partnership from the point of view of parents of children with special needs?

2- What is the effect of gender and academic qualification of parents of children with special needs on their views toward cooperative partnership in terms of its importance and satisfaction?

1.3. Significance of the study

The study provides a vision that can be used to establish a relationship and participation between the two parties, as developing such effective participation contributes to facilitating the upbringing and education of people with special needs. The challenges and obstacles that prevent this participation must be addressed if parents are to become active participants in the upbringing of their children. The distance between the two parties and the lack of a relationship between them lead to significant differences in the values and beliefs between families and schools. The goal of identifying the nature of cooperative participation is effective communication between families and the professionals who provide services to them and their children to provide opportunities for children, families, and their teachers to work together to improve the child and school's success.

1.4. Study limitations

The study was carried out in Jordan's capital, Amman. Only parents of special needs kids who work closely with students with disabilities were present. The first semester of the 2021–2022 academic year saw the application of the study. The correctness and sincerity with which the participants answered the research instrument's questions determines the extent of the results.

2. Literature review

Family support, which is defined as acts that uphold and build the family unit, particularly those that help families recognize their child's impairment, is what is meant by collaborative involvement (Wehman et al., 2018). Collaboration is characterized by competence, positive dedication, respect, and trust and is described as reciprocal interactions between families and experts aimed at addressing the needs of children and families. Collaborative participation

between school and home is usually described as a meeting and participation between family members and specialists to pursue shared knowledge and resources that will empower them to fully participate, and specialists receive information from families that help them be more effective teachers (Bryant et al., 2019). Collaborative partnership is the mutual interaction between the family of children with special needs and the school related to their child, in which the dimensions of participation are present: communication, commitment, equality, trust, skills, and respect, which enhance the family's growth and develop its skills in dealing with the child's problem (Oakes et al., 2017).

Participation allows parents to learn about what their children are learning in school, such as participating in providing what they need to care for and following them up with practical assistance, such as the difficult experiences that some students are exposed to (Mertens, 2023). It allows parents' participation in planning, organizing, and participating in some school programs to achieve the educational message and the goals that society seeks. Participation also enhances the love of teamwork, and cooperation, building friendly social relationships, and directing this relationship towards community service (Maier et al., 2017). To achieve a successful partnership, the following foundations must be taken into account, namely, competition based on mutual trust, mutual trust between the parties, the independence of the parties, and the unity of the complete conviction that partnership is a right for each party and is not a gift from the other party. It should be also built on common ground between the parties of the partnership, with complete conviction in the idea of partnership through interaction, and integration through innovative actions, and communication (Epstein, 2018).

Effective family participation is the cornerstone of long-term educational planning, and many studies confirm that it is effective for people with special needs. Educational programs for children with special needs increase when parents and families participate actively and effectively (Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020). Therefore, families' participation and communication with specialists enable their children to achieve what families do to help their children succeed in school, which is more important than the socio-economic status of the family, the cultural background, and the educational level of the parents. The reality is that parents often do not know what is expected of them or how to best help their children (Ferreira et al., 2020). Some families need more than others to play an important role in their children's learning, and some families need simple help in this academic area, in addition to information about specific tasks, so that they can participate as important supporters in their children's academic success.

Specialists are aware of the role that the family of a disabled child plays in raising and educating their child, and ignoring this role is considered short-sighted and would reduce the effectiveness of the family's role and its importance to specialists (Al-Amrat & Khasawneh, 2022). Therefore, specialists in general, and teachers in particular, can increase the preparation of families by providing several ways of communication between schools and families at home. However, some parents prefer face-to-face meetings with specialists. Establishing collaborative participation between the family and the school depends on the availability of several important dimensions, including open and continuous communication, the skills of the specialists in the schools centred on the child and the family, and the school philosophy that supports the participation of parents (Garner et al., 2021). Trust and communication are among the most

important factors in developing cooperative relationships between parents and teachers, and there is a relationship between parents' satisfaction with cooperative participation and confidence in the role of teachers. This is consistent with the results of a study that confirmed that respect is the basis of cooperative participation between the family of a child with special needs and specialists.

Therefore, the importance of practicing indicators related to collaborative participation is vital to achieving the desired goals of raising and educating people with special needs. Schools can use these indicators to provide more training for professionals in the field of developing high-quality relationships with families (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Moreover, a series of conversations between parents may lead Professionals using these indicators to perceive greater progress toward more satisfied relationships. Therefore, the availability of these competencies in specialists is an incentive for the family to attend meetings and defend the rights of their child (Wehman et al., 2018). This does not diminish the emphasis that the family that can determine who provides the service to its child is the family that has the desire and motivation to care for its child and solve his problems early in a cooperative manner with specialists.

Previous studies

Haines et al. (2015) analyzed two original studies, one study looked at family members' perspectives, and the other looked at community partners' perspectives when forming partnerships with school staff at six inclusive knowledge development sites spread across five US regions. The present synthesis research examines the elements that overlap with the original studies to guide focused efforts toward enhancing family and community partnerships in inclusive schools. Positive, welcoming, and inclusive school cultures; strong administrative leadership motivated by a clear vision of inclusion; qualities of trustworthy relationships; and chances for reciprocal collaborations and engagement are among the themes of this synthesis research.

Kelley et al. (2020) explored how teacher self-efficacy was affected by the 70 hours of professional development that were given to educate three groups of teachers over three years. An experimental group and an untreated control group were included in the quasi-experimental nonequivalent control group technique used in the research design. Based on professional development and lesson execution, the science instructors' self-efficacy grew, according to the results. Possible conclusions from this study include that participating in science practices, learning in a community of practice, and applying science knowledge to address practical problems were all very beneficial to the science teachers who took part in it.

Saloviita (2020) investigated the Teachers' opinions towards Inclusion Scale and a sizable national sample to examine teachers' opinions toward inclusion. 1,764 basic school teachers in Finland answered the email survey. There were 365 special education teachers, 575 topic teachers, and 824 classroom teachers among them. The neutral midpoint of the scale was substantially below the scores of the subject teachers and the classroom instructors. The mean scores of the special education instructors were higher than average. Approximately 20% of educators strongly opposed inclusion, whereas 8% strongly supported it. The instructor type was the only variable with which the attitudes toward inclusion were weakly correlated.

Based on four criteria—scientific subject and pedagogical content understanding, special education courses and practicum given, multicultural pedagogy, and training in action research and reflection—Colley and Lassman (2021) evaluated thirteen secondary science teacher preparation programs. Data from the New York State Education Department website is cross-referenced with data from teacher preparation programs that are posted on institutional websites. The study demonstrates that, despite the greatest of efforts, there is a gap in the training of urban science instructors and the requirements and needs of the special education students they serve. The research recommends that urban science teachers demonstrate proficiency in planning, executing, and evaluating project-based science instruction in order to meet the needs of all students in the scientific classroom, including those in special education.

Smagacz-Poziemska and Bierwiazzonek (2022) examined how local communities are formed from the standpoint of parental participation practices. They rebuild the relationships between the spatial logic of housing and national education policies, and their influence on daily behaviours both inside and outside the estate, utilizing a practice-based approach to empirical research on six estates in three Polish cities. The findings demonstrate the intricate, long-term effects of local and state education policies on daily life and, consequently, on the processes of building or fragmenting territorial communities through the practice category of parental participation. Our qualitative research findings not only advance understanding of the relationships between governmental policies and customs but also may be to design effective public policies.

3. Methodology

The researcher used the qualitative survey method to suit the nature of the study and its objectives. This approach is defined as the type of research conducted on the research community, or a large sample of it, to describe the phenomenon studied in terms of its nature, degree, and effectiveness.

3.1. Sampling

The study sample in its final form consisted of 761 parents of students with special needs (658 fathers, 103 mothers) who had a child with a disability (hearing, mental retardation, autism, learning difficulties, multiple disabilities, visual disability), and they received special education services in special education institutes, integration programs, or public school of Amman, Jordan. The following table presents the data on the participants.

Table 1. The information on the sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	658	86.5%
	Female	103	13.5%
Academic qualification	Secondary and less	389	51.1%
	diploma	102	13.4%
	Bachelor and above	270	35.5%
Total		761	100%

3.2. Instrument of the study

The study used a questionnaire to collect information from the participants to reach conclusions on the questions of the study. The questionnaire included 18 paragraphs with two dimensions, the first is related to the relationship focused on the students, and the second is related to the relationship focused on the family. The researchers presented the cooperative partnership questionnaire to a group of ten judges from university professors in Jordanian universities. The researchers took into account the linguistic modifications recommended by the arbitrators. The reliability coefficients for the dimensions of the questionnaire and the total score were calculated using the Cronbach coefficient. The following table presents the results.

Table 2. The Cronbach coefficient for the reliability of the questionnaire

Dimension	Number of paragraphs	Cronbach coefficient
the relationship focused on the student	9	0.76
the relationship focused on the family	9	0.84
Total	18	0.87

3.3. Data analysis

To answer the study questions, the study used Cronbach's alpha coefficient, mean scores, and percentages to measure differences in the sample's replies and answers according to the gender variable. To measure differences in the responses of sample members, one-way-ANOVA analysis was used to find the differences according to the years of academic qualifications.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results of the first question

In answering the first question, the mean scores and the standard deviations of the answers of participants to the items of the questionnaire were calculated. The following table illustrates the results.

Table 2. The results of the participants' responses to the dimensions of the questionnaire

Dimensions	Importance		Satisfaction	
	Mean score	St. Dev	Mean score	St. Dev
the relationship focused on the student	4.77	0.58	4.20	0.91
the relationship focused on the family	4.87	0.49	4.56	0.76

The table above shows that the results regarding child-centered relationships revealed the presence of some aspects that mothers and fathers consider to be of high importance and enjoy a high degree of satisfaction. These aspects include caring for the child, treating him with respect, and specialists' appreciation of the child's needs, and providing information to the family about their child and his needs. Regarding family-centered relationships, it is clear that there are some

aspects of cooperative participation that parents consider to be of high importance and receive a high degree of satisfaction. These aspects include maintaining family privacy and trust, using language that the family understands, listening attentively to what the family says, and respecting its values and beliefs.

The results of this question can be justified by the notion that the school specialists possess aspects of effective participation, especially trust, respect for the family's values and beliefs, and appreciation of its needs and the needs of its child. All these traits make it easier for the family of the disabled child to communicate with the child's program and for the teachers to receive feedback that helps develop a more positive relationship between them. The creation of suitable communication channels creates an opportunity for a better environment of collaboration to support the students.

4.2. Results of the second question

To answer this question, t-value calculations were used to indicate the differences between the average scores of parents on the two dimensions of the scale and the total score according to their gender, and the results are shown in the following table.

Table 3. The t-test results for the differences between the participants according to their gender

Dimensions	Male		Female		T value
	Mean score	St. Dev	Mean score	St. Dev	
Importance	85.2660	6.50190	85.4078	7.71481	0.200
Satisfaction	79.2973	11.6486	77.5825	12.4959	1.375

It is clear from the table above that there are no statistically significant differences in the average rating of fathers and mothers regarding the importance of cooperative participation and satisfaction with it on the two dimensions of the scale, except the dimension of family-centred relationships in terms of satisfaction with it. The absence of differences in parents' appreciation of the importance of collaborative participation and satisfaction with it between schools and families of people with special needs can be explained by the parents' awareness that collaborative participation, whether child- or family-centred, is important as social capital that can make a fundamental change in the life of a disabled child. The basis of cooperative participation is the quality of family life, in terms of providing the child's parents with information about the child, how to deal with him, and following up on his educational program. On the other hand, it helps specialists build bridges of communication with the child's parents.

Regarding the presence of statistically significant differences in the average assessment of fathers and mothers for aspects of satisfaction with cooperative participation on the dimension of family-centred relationships, the difference was in favour of fathers. This confirms mothers' awareness that they need more cooperative participation to gain satisfaction with them compared to fathers, given that mothers in the Arab environment are primarily responsible for the disabled child in light of the limited services provided to him.

To find the differences between the participants' views according to academic qualification, the one-way-ANOVA analysis of variance was used to understand the effect of educational level on the measure of cooperative participation, and this is what the following table shows.

Table 4. The one-way-ANOVA analysis for the effect of educational level

Dimension	Source of variance	Sum of squares	Freedom Value	Mean square	F value
the relationship focused on the student	Between groups	44.97	2	22.48	0.50
	Within groups	33802.15	758	44.59	
	Total	33847.12	760		
the relationship focused on the family	Between groups	1015.31	2	507.65	*3.68
	Within groups	104050.52	756	137.63	
	Total	105065.83	758		

*Significant at 0.01

It is clear from Table 4 that there are no statistically significant differences between the average scores of fathers and mothers of children with special needs, according to the variable of the educational level of the parents, except satisfaction with child-centred relationships and the total degree of satisfaction. To determine the direction of the differences between the variable of the educational level of the parents, using the Scheffé test, the results were as shown in the following table.

Table 5. Results of the Scheffe test to calculate the significance of the differences in the importance and satisfaction according to the educational level variable

Dimension	Variables	Mean score	Secondary and less	diploma	Bachelor and above
			39.22	36.88	38.60
Satisfaction with child-centred relationships	Secondary and less	39.22	-	*2.34	0.61
	Diploma	36.88			
	Bachelor and above	38.60			
Overall score of satisfaction with collaborative participation			79.79	76.25	79.06
	Secondary and less	79.79	-	*3.54	0.73
	Diploma	76.25			
	Bachelor and above	79.06			

*Significant at 0.05

It is clear from Table 5 that there are statistically significant differences between the average scores of families of children with special needs, according to the educational level variable, in favor of the educational level (secondary school and below) compared to other age levels. Families of people with special needs with an educational level of secondary school or below are more satisfied with child-centred relationships and the overall degree of satisfaction with cooperative participation compared to other educational levels. This result can be explained by the fact that parents with a low educational level in secondary school or below are more satisfied with collaborative participation with specialists. Their expectations are often within reasonable limits. Therefore, any level of participation from specialists is consistent with those expectations. In contracts, parents with a higher educational level have high expectations of their children, which makes them more susceptible to psychological stress. Therefore, they aspire for the participation of specialists to be more effective and meet those expectations, which can be reflected in the levels of support provided to the students and the families as well. The parents

of students with LDs are always seeking support and assistance from all possible parties to help them deal with the circumstances of their children's disabilities.

5. Conclusion

The issue of collaborative participation between families of people with special needs and specialists related to their child's disability is important to parents, whether that participation focuses on the child or his family, and that satisfaction with that participation depends on families' awareness of the specialists' efforts toward their child's disability. Activating aspects of cooperative participation in the field of special education may predict the quality of life of the disabled person and his family, and this depends on the culture of the family and specialists regarding the needs of the disabled person and his family and how to satisfy them. Collaborative participation between families and specialists in private schools is more effective compared to government environments, and this confirms that the government sector needs to reconsider activating the role of participation and the controls for its success. Despite the importance of follow-up records, reports, and phone calls in building communication between families and specialists, this deprives the educational process of people with special needs and their families of face-to-face interaction with service providers and the exchange of opinions and information that would enable collaborative participation.

6. Recommendations

The study recommends holding periodic or monthly meetings for parents of children with special needs and specialists to learn about the child's strengths and weaknesses and the responsibilities of each party. It is important to activate parents' councils and the role of fathers in the process of raising and educating their children. Studying the extent of the competencies or professional characteristics available to specialists related to children's disabilities is very important. The factors associated with cooperative participation and the obstacles to its activation in integration institutes and programs need to be examined.

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