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Parental Involvement: A Response to Children with Disability's Education

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Abstract

Drawing on the fact that education of children is a human right issue, the study explored parent's involvement in the education of their children with disabilities. Using quantitative research methodology, 166 respondents were sampled from two selected basic schools in Koforidua, Ghana. Results indicated that, often the demand on parents such as time, work, house chores, and many other commitments impede their preference to be involved in their children's education. The school activities most parents involved themselves in are the Parent Teachers Association's (P.T.A.) meetings. This is because parents do not see themselves as having interest in many of the other activities children in school are involved in. Equally, though some parents from poor background may want to educate their child with disability, the cost involved in educating the child is high. Evidence showed that there was a moderate level of parents' involvement in the education of their children with disability and that the level of involvement is associated with the socio-economic status of such parents. The study concluded that parental involvement in their children with disabilities education leads to positive learning outcomes and academic achievements. It was recommended among others that parents should get involved in decisions concerning the education of their children with disability; parents must honour invitations from schools and speak with school staff and teachers. Again, parents should disabuse their minds of the perceptions that taking their child with disability to school is of no benefit and a waste of resources.

Key Words: Parents, children with disabilities, education

Introduction

The home and school are perhaps the two most sustaining and influential contexts in which children develop today (Rogers, Theule, Ryan & Adams, 2009). As such, researchers have

been turning with increasing frequency in recent decades to the role of families, namely parents, in the school achievement of children (Rogers et al, 2009).

Parental involvement takes many forms including good parenting in the home, including the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance (Desforges&Abouchaar, 2003).

Parents can impact children's academic results through active involvement in learning in the home. According to Evans, Shaw, & Bell (2000), this usually includes activities such as engaging in cognitively stimulating tasks, such as reading together and dealing with children's school-related conducts, such as organizing and monitoring children's time (Finn, 1998). Such active involvement from parents at home can support children's educational accomplishments and give inspiration to learn (Seginer, 2006). Many researchers indicated that parent involvement would enhance students' academic achievements (Fan & Chen, 2001), prevent school dropouts and behaviour problems (Jimerson, Sloane, Alvarez, & Carlson, 2001).

However, according to Rogers et al (2009), previous studies showed a variety of inconsistent and conflicting findings. Some studies, according to the researcher, found that parental involvement had no effect whatsoever on pupils' achievement or adjustment, others found striking, positive effects whilst yet other studies found a negative relationship. These inconsistencies are relatively easy to explain. First, different researchers used different definitions of parent involvement. Some took it to be 'good parenting' which went on in the home. Others took it to be 'talking to teachers' while yet others defined parental involvement as a thoroughgoing participation in school functions and school governance (Rogers et al, 2009).

It has been realised that, a key to children with or without disabilities doing well in school is for parents to be involved in their education. For instance, Hunt and Goetz, (2004) stated that the involvement of parents of children with special educational needs is highlighted as a vital factor in inclusive schooling. Teachers believe they cannot do it alone and for effective educational processes to occur in classrooms, parental help in partnership with educators is needed (Wilson et al, 2014). The involvement of parents in the education of their children has attracted a lot of attention over the past years and it was one of the major educational issues to enhance quality education. Parental involvement can range from providing meaningful learning experiences at home to volunteering to help with school activities.

According to Turnbull and Turnbull (2001), some parents are more comfortable with certain types of involvement than others. Schools have different philosophies of parent involvement, which basically falls into three categories: school-to-home transmission, interactive learning and full partnership for school success. Some parents enjoy volunteering at their child's school; others have work or family responsibilities that make volunteering hard. Some parents like serving on school improvement teams that make policy recommendations; others prefer to work directly with their own child's learning activities. One type of involvement is not better than others. The important thing is that parents become involved to help their children succeed in school. For instance,Conger, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, (1994); McLoyd (1990) stated that the inability of parents to get involved in the education of their children could be

attributed to their limited economic resources. Emphasising further on this point, the works of Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, &Mariato (1997); Conger, Conger, & Elder, (1997) indicated that, financial hardship which is more prevalent in single-parent families do not only circumscribe options for leisure time activities and investments in education, but also normally brings about strains in the family system that undermine parenting. These strains in the family could therefore serve as a disincentive for the parents to be engaged in the education of their children. Secondly, regarding marital status, Zinsmeiter (1996) maintained that due to the rise in single parents' households and the breakdown of marriage, children receive less care and oversight from their parents. He contended that teachersare overloaded, and that the burden of raising children is being placed on schools, with less time spent teaching core subjects and more time spent teaching things traditionally left to parents, like personal guidance and ethical instruction.

More so, Davis-Kean's (2005) study, proved that the amount of schooling that parents received influences how they structure their home environment and how they interact with their children to promote academic achievement. These studies portray that parents of higher financial and educational status get much involved in their children's education because, it is believed that, lack of income and education limit the effectiveness of parental involvement. According to Lee & Bowen (2006), parents from less privileged minority backgrounds may not have the resources or time to become involved in their children's schools in ways that are valued by the school. Involving families in student's education benefits both children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

In Ghana, studies on parental school involvement have been less, but there are a few studies conducted. For instance, Nyarko, (2011) noted that, Ghanaian parents have often engaged in their children's schooling in one form or another. Their involvement historically has been limited to school related activities at home such as ensuring the completion of homework. More Ghanaian parents are somewhat involved than absolutely detached from their children's education, but the extent of involvement is low overall, (Chowa, Ansong, & Osei-Akoto, 2012). Other studies have focused on community participation in school activities, a study conducted in a village community named Akurase in the Ashanti region of Ghana, most parents showed less interest in the schooling of their children. These parents lacked interest in education and for that matter did not bother to engage in the learning activities of their children, (Pryor &Ampiah, 2003a, 2003b). This may be as a result of socio-demographic factors such as economic situations, personal priorities and self-interest. Besides, other studies conducted by Addae-Boahene&Akorful, (2000), Boardman & Evans, (2000), Nkansah & Chapman, (2006) focused on community participation in school activities. They found that involving the community in school is a useful activity due to its beneficial effects in improving the infrastructure of the schools and making resources available for the educational success of the students.

Lastly, the benefit of parental involvement has been further emphasised by Garrick and Duhaney, Salend (2000). They believe that parents generally support inclusion because it promotes acceptance, which is crucial to their children's social and emotional development.Clearly, it can be pointed out that the effect of parental involvement in their children's education cannot be overstated; parental role has a tremendous impact to enhance the child's school progress and educational achievements in school.

Most of the studies above indicated that parental involvement is very important in the education of children. In the background and review above, it can be briefly stated that

children including children with disabilities perform better in school if parents are involved in their schooling. This means that failure of parental involvements leads to most of these children dropping out of school and lacking the basic skills and knowledge to participate in society.

Literature reviewed indicated that there are many studies exploring the parent involvement in the education of their children, however, few studies explored parental involvement in children with disability's education and development, particularly in the Ghanaian context. This study investigated the extent of parental involvement in the education of their children with disabilities. Specifically, to find out the effect of socio-economic status on parental involvement in children with disability's education.

Methodology

Research Design

This study is quantitative in nature. The rationale for using quantitative analysis is to quantify the extent of parental involvement with children with disability. Relying on statistical tools for findings, questionnaire was the instrument used for collecting the data for this study. In order to meet the objectives of this study, various themes were enshrined in the questionnaire such as demographic of respondents, level of parental involvement and ability of parents to take care of children with disabilities. The Likert scale was used to assess the extent to which parents involved themselves in the education of their children with disabilities.

The population for the study comprised parents who have children with disabilities and teachers in New Juabeng and Ga East basic schools. The study used a sample of 166 respondents. Thus, 88 parents with children with disabilities and 88 teachers from three schools in the study areas. The study used random and purposive sampling techniques to select participants for the study. Purposive sampling was used to select the schools and parents with children with disability whereas random sampling was used to select the teachers.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation were used to explore respondents' demographics and the extent of parental involvement. Inferential statistics such as Chi-square was used to analyse the association between demographics and parental involvement. The data were analysed using SPSS version 20.

Results

Demographics

Table 1 below shows that 67% of the respondents were females whereas the remaining (33%) were males. Thus, majority of the respondents were females.

Table 1: *Gender Distribution of Respondents*

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	112	67.47
Male	54	32.53
Total	**166**	**100.00**

Source: *Field data*

Majority of the respondents ($n= 86$, 51.81%) were within the ages of 31 and 43 years whereas only a few respondents ($n= 18$, 10.84%) were at least 57 years. See table 2 below.

Table 2: *Age Distribution of Respondents*

Age group (years)	Frequency	Percent
18-30	32	19.28
31-43	86	51.81
44-56	30	18.07
57-70	18	10.84
Total	**166**	**100.00**

Source: *Field data*

Data solicited on the educational background of teachers revealed that the teachers mainly comprised individuals educated up to Diploma level ($n= 54$, 61.4%). This was followed by those who had attained a first Degree ($n= 16$, 18.2%) whereas 15.9% had gone up to Teachers' Training School, and 4.5% educated up to Senior High School level. The results are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: *Educational Background of Teachers*

Educational Level	Frequency	Percent
Senior High School	4	4.55
Teachers Training School	14	15.91
Diploma	54	61.36
First Degree	16	18.18
Total	**88**	**100.00**

Source: *Field data*

It was found that most teachers ($n=36$, 40%) have taught for 11 to 20 years, this was closely followed by 34 teachers representing 38.6 percent who have taught for 1 to 10 years and 12 (13.6%) with 21 to 30 years of practicing teaching. Only 6 of the teachers reported to have taught for 31 to 40 years. See the table 4 below for details.

Table 4: *Numbers of Years Taught by Teachers*

Years Taught (Years)	Frequency	Percent
1 to 10	34	38.63
11 to 20	36	40.91
21 to 30	12	13.64
31 to 40	6	6.82
Total	**88**	**100.0**

Source: *Field data*

Most of the parents sampled were married ($n= 50$, 75.76%) while only a few were single, divorced or widowed. See table 5 below.

Table 5: *Marital Status of Parents*

Marital status of parents	Frequency	Percent
Single	2	3.03
Married	50	75.76
Divorced	6	9.09
Widowed	8	12.12
Total	**66**	**100.00**

Source: *Field data*

It is evident in table 6 below that, majority of the parents worked in the informal sector (*n=* 44, 56.41%) while only 38.46% worked in the formal sector. Four (4) of the parents constituting 5.13% were unemployed. This is illustrated in table 6 below.

Table 6: *Occupation of Parents*

Sector	Freq	Percent
Formal sector	30	38.46
Informal sector	44	56.41
Unemployed	4	5.13
Total	**78**	**100.00**

Source: *Field data*

Nature of Child Disability

The kinds of disabilities in the selected areas of study was explored. The result obtained from parents with children having disabilities indicated that, intellectually challenged children formed the commonest type of disability among the children. In the home setting, most parents with children having disabilities described those children as intellectually challenged (*n=* 24, 30.8%). In other words, their children had disabilities associated with cognitive impairments. About one-quarter of the parents with disabled children (*n=* 20, 25.6%) indicated that, their children had physical disabilities whereas 15.4% and 12.8% of the parents revealed that their children had visual disabilities and hearing impairment, respectively. A notable aspect of the findings is that, most of the children with disabilities have been categorized as intellectually challenged individuals. Table 7 below gives an overview of results from parents with disabled children.

Table 7: *Parents with children with disabilities and the nature of their disabilities*

	Yes		No		Total	
Types of disability	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**
Physical disability	20	25.6	58	74.4	78	100
Visual disability	12	15.4	66	84.6	78	100
Hearing impairment	10	12.8	68	87.2	78	100
Intellectually challenged individuals	24	30.8	54	69.2	78	100

Source: *Field data*

Parental Involvement and Impact on Children with disability

The study attempts to assess the extent of parental involvement in their children's education and its impact on children with disability accessibility. Here, teachers only were required to rate their approval in this area on the extent to which parents have been involved in the activities of their wards who are disabled. This was done on a maximum scale of 5 wherein 1 – Very Little, 2 – Little, 3 – Somehow, 4 – Much, and 5 – Very Much.

The assessment revealed that the rate of involvement of parents in their wards welfare ranged between 2.93 (close to Somehow) and 3.49 (approximately 4 - Much). The overall rate of involvement was 3.24 indicating that parents were somehow involved in their child (ren) with disabilities school welfare. The teachers most strongly agreed that parents visit the schools to find out how their children with disability are faring, but much lower approval was given to the view that the school involves parents in the identification of special education needs of their disabled children. Table 8 below presents the detailed results.

Table 8: *Parental Involvement in School Welfare of Disabled Children*

Statements	N	Mean	Standard Dev.
Parents visit school to find out how their children with disabilities are faring	86	3.49	1.61
The school authorities consult parents on whether their children with disabilities should be promoted to next class or repeated.	86	3.19	1.22
The school involves parents in the identification of special education needs of their disabled children	86	2.93	1.32
Disciplinary measures taken against disabled children are done in consultation with their parents	86	3.44	1.26
There is support available in the school to help parents with children with disabilities	86	3.23	1.46
Parents of non-disabled and children with disabilities are given equal educational rights	86	3.19	1.14
Total		**3.24**	**0.83**

Source: *Field data*

Socio-economic Status and Parental Involvement.

In an attempt to inquire from parents having child (ren) with disabilities whether they are able to take proper care of their disabled child (ren) as they deemed best, the majority (*n*= 42, 53.8%) indicated "No". Thus, they are not able to cater for their disabled children to their level of satisfaction, while less than half (*n*= 36, 46.2%) of the parents saying that, they are able to take proper care of their disabled children to their level of satisfaction. Table 9 below presents the statistical details.

Table 9*: Ability of Parent to Take Proper Care of Child with Disability*

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Yes	36	46.2
No	42	53.8
Total	**78**	**100.0**

Source: *Field data*

Occupation

Cross-tabulation and Chi-Square test of significance analysis between employment category of parents with a disabled child (as independent variable) and their ability to take proper care of their disabled children (as dependent variable). The result from the cross-tabulation analysis indicated a significant relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. Majority of the respondents who are formally employed, 73.3%, indicated they are able to take proper care of their children with disabilities, while 26.7% indicated they are unable to do so. On the other hand, as many as 68.2% and 100% of informal employees and unemployed, respectively, reported they could not take proper care of their child (ren) with disabilities. This shows a pattern of cross-over relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. Thus, parents who are formally employed are more likely to have constant income to enable them take proper care of their children with disabilities than their counterparts in the informal sector and the unemployed. From the exhibits of the Chi-Square test, at a significance level of 0.02 with its degree of freedom (df) at 2, produced a chi-square (x^2) value of 7.99 where (P < 0.05). This indicates a statistically significant relationship between respondents' occupation (as independent variable) and the ability to take proper care of their disabled children (as dependent variable). See table 10 below:

Table 10: *Ability to Take Proper Care of Disabled Child by Occupation*

Employment Category	Yes	No	X^2	df	sig (P Value)
Formal	22 (73.3%)	8 (26.7%)			
Informal	14 (31.8%)	30 (68.2%)	7.99	2	0.018
Unemployed	0(0%)	4(100%)			

Number of Children

A cross-tab analysis was performed to check for relationship between number of children per parent and the ability of parents with disabled children to take proper care of their disabled children. This was done with an attempt to investigate whether the number of children by parents with disabled children affects their ability to take proper care of them. Out of the 78 parents who have disabled children, 30 (38.5%) had 1 to 3 children, this was followed by 26 (33.3%) who had 4 to 6 children, and 22 (28.2%) with 7 or more children. It can be observed from the crosstab analysis that as the number of children increase, the ability of the parents to take proper care of disabled children reduces. As many as 73 percent of parents who have from one to three children indicated they are able to take proper care of their disabled children with only 27 percent indicating they are unable to do so. With parents with children of 4 to 6 and 7 or more only 31 and 27 percent respectively indicated they are able to take proper care of their disabled children. Thus, larger family size is found to be associated with low tendency to take proper care of disabled children. See table 11 below for details

Table 11: No. of Children by Parents Having Child with Disabilities

No. of Children	Ability to Take Proper Care of Disabled Child		
	Yes	No	Total
1 to 3	22 (73.3%)	8 (26.7%)	**30 (100%)**
4 to 6	8 (30.8%)	18 (69.2%)	**26 (100%)**
7 and above	6 (27.3%)	16 (72.7%)	**22 (100%)**

Source: *Field data*

Discussion

Parents' levels of engagements are one of the important and strong factors in the education of their child with disability. Therefore, parents' participation in education of their children with disabilities is the objective of the studies. It is to find out the extent to which parents are involved in the education of their children with disabilities. Parental involvement in children education is very critical to the practice of inclusive education which should not be underestimated. Successful implementation of inclusive education programmes requires the involvement and support of the parents of children with disabilities at all school levels of progression. For example, Ebesold (2004) suggested the kind of relation between school and family could be an opportunity to reduce stigmatisation distinction between disability and normality, to recognise the rights of person and his/her family to experience in situations that reinforces the possibilities of choices and to express and emphasise the person's rights and needs. Parental involvement in this study is defined as a multidimensional task with regards to home based and school-based involvement.

The impact of social economic background of the parent is very important to the child's access to education and progress on the academic ladder of education. Inferring from the quantitative results, parents' demographic variables such as occupation and number of children show that, a majority of the parents were not able to take care of their children both in school and at the house-hold level. This may be as a result of low income and many mouths to feed. It is evident from table 9 that, those who said "yes" were 46.2% of the parents as opposed to 53.8% who were not able to take care of their children appropriately in school according to parents and the school standard. This means that inaccessibility to education for children with disabilities can be a cause of parental poverty though it is the right of every school going child to be in school. This indicates that the provision of their educational needs is borne by the parents which defeats the core focus of capitation grant policy aimed at reducing the cost of education to ensure children's stay in school. Parental inability to pay schooling costs increases child vulnerability to exclusion and drop out, particularly at the JHS level of education where some direct school fees are still paid (Casely-Hayford et al., 2009). Likewise, parents' financial status reflects in their responsibilities in the home with regards to the provision of basic needs for the children to survive. Thus, some of the children with disabilities' problems can be attributed to poverty based on the kind of work their parents are involved in, whether formal or informal.

Parents with children having disabilities who worked in informal sectors were the majority that is, 44 persons which is 56.4% as opposed to 30 people which is 38.5%, (see table 6). Out of these figures, 73.3% of parents in the formal sector are able to take care of their children as opposed to 26.7% informal sector workers (see table 10). A significant number of informal sector workers in Ghana are trapped in poverty as they do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families out of poverty (Robinson, 1995). Poverty amongst informal sector workers can be associated to the lack of access to productive resources especially capital to help them work. This is due to limited or unavailability of credit facilities since most of them rely on family members and friends for support and credit facilities.

The findings suggest that parents of pupils with special educational needs have important roles to play in identifying the academic and social needs of their children. Parental involvement assumes central role in their children with disabilities accessing education and attaining higher academic achievements. Moreover, parents' school-based involvement makes children with disabilities feel important and provides an environment of working relationship

between the school and the parents. More importantly, the school in a way advises parents on the importance of education to their exceptional children. Thus, it is helps parents to develop a positive attitude towards their children and conveys the importance of education to the children despite societal perceptions of educating children with disabilities in Ghana. Again, parents' positive attitude will have the potential to reduce or perhaps eliminate negative perceptions and ultimately improve and modify the special education needs service delivery in the school. Implicitly, parental involvement helps parents view their children with disabilities in a more appropriate and positive way. Alternatively, parents' home-based involvement is also very important because it creates a parent-child relationship and home learning environment, boosting the child's self-image in the society. Parents who get involved directly in the child with disability's education have effect on the teacher's attitude towards the child's situation and education. Thus, the teacher knowing that the parent is actively involved, makes them devote greater attention to relationship with the child and improves the child's school outcome.

It must be noted that in the traditional Ghanaian society, parenting involves every member of the family and the family usually suggests both the nuclear and extended family. Therefore, parenting or caring for members of the family becomes the responsibility of all the members especially the elderly. In the traditional family system, men were considered the bread-winners whiles women took responsibilities of the home. This arrangement has gone through changes and continues to undergo considerable changes in the past years with increased family demands; break down of the extended family system and educational opportunities. Traditionally, looking at the role of women and their income generating activities which was mostly confined to the informal sector, it will have offered them flexibility to get more involved in the education of their children. Unfortunately, because of family demands, economic hardship and economic transformation both parents have to work to earn wages to support the family. These lead to changes in gender roles in the family which poses challenges to the parents in meeting their parental demands such as getting involved in their children's education for better educational achievements. Traditionally, the responsibility to provide support to members was the role of the whole extended family. Now, the burden has shifted towards the nuclear family placing additional burden such as time demands to work extra hours to earn income. Thus, the extended family bonds which support family members has become less emphasised depriving the nuclear family of care with few resources and inability to help their children. In Ghana, there is limited or absence of family support from government for parents not employed and those earning less income, it restricts them from taking care of their children.

By logical extension, there would be negative effects on children with disabilities whose parents do not get involved in their education which may have long term consequences. Thus, they may not value the importance of education as a route out of poverty, reflecting in the child receiving less of it or being denied. Consequently, parents' involvement in their disabled children's education should be a priority, perceived positively and balanced to help these children to improve on their economic and social wellbeing in future. Over all, parents' role in the education of their child with disabilities is usually a passive process because most of them see it as the responsibility of the educators.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of the study support the view that parental involvement in their children with disabilities education leads to positive learning outcomes and academic achievements. Thus,

the findings of the study highlight the extents to which parents are involved in their child with disability's education which is due to parents' financial incapacity, lack of interest and many more. That is parents' financial incapacity makes it difficult for them to get involved in their children's education. To a large extent, due to parents' poverty and lack of interest in their children's education, children with disabilities, may not have access at all to school or those in school may drop out with little knowledge and perhaps no qualification. Therefore, the cycle of poverty becomes difficult to break hence the generational poverty on the part of children with disabilities trickling down to almost all generations.

Parental involvement should be given priority and the schools should reduce or eliminate barriers that prevent involvement. Also, parents should get involved in decisions concerning the education of their children with disability's education and parents must honour invitations from schools and speak with school staff and teachers. Again, parents should disabuse their perceptions of taking their child with disability to school as a result of poverty with the belief that, they may not benefit and it will be waste of resources. Parents should be educated about their children's potentials and should be given more autonomy in decision making concerning their children. Moreover, school staff and volunteers could conduct a follow-up with parents to determine reasons for involvement in their children school's activities.

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