



MIXED-METHODS CASE STUDY OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS OF ISFAHAN CITY, IRAN



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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to investigate parental involvement of students with severe disabilities in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process and their communication with school staff. This study uses an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, where fifty-two parents of children ranged in age from 7 to 15 years old provided data regarding their involvement in IEP process and communication with school staff in a questionnaire. A face-to-face interview was also performed with 26 parents of children with severe disabilities which study in special education schools in the Isfahan, Iran. The study composed of two main themes related to the parent involvement and communication with school. The result demonstrated that most of the parents mentioned that they are completely involved in the IEP process and high degree of involvement was observed for children 7 to 10 years old. It should be mentioned that most of issues is related to the information sharing, questions and concerns. In addition, it was revealed that the most communication occurred between parents and general/special education teacher, parents and consoler/school psychologist on a regular basis. However, less amount of the communication occurred between parents and principal.

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Contribution/ Originality

This study is one of very few studies which have investigated the nature of parent-teacher collaboration and communication in IEP process for students with disability in several primary schools in Isfahan, Iran and thus provide vital information about parent-teacher collaboration and communication in the Iran IEP process.

1. INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement is recognized to effect school environment, students and teacher's performance, and associated matter related to the school's educational perspectives, performance and academic criteria [1, 2]. The impact of parental involvement and its adverse or favorable guidelines on student's success, inspiration, truancy and on actions in class is complicated and relies on various factors such as age and the developing level of the college student, the class and college they are participating, parents' education and learning, parents' ambitions for their child, interaction between instructors and family, and parents' involvement with their child's learning at home and at

school [1-6]. For children with disabilities, study also revealed that the essential role parents play in their children's characteristics [6-11]. Parents of students with special need desire to be more engaged compared to the parents of students without special need, and usually they provided more contribution in the school activity [12]. They imagine they have higher chance to impact their child's academic program and they also imagine that these chances are vital. Most parents desire to be involved in the IEP process, but some desire other kind of involvement such as attending in parent groups. Last but not least, the majority of parents of students with special need want regular communication with the school [12]. Obviously, evidence demonstrated that high parent participation encourages students' educational accomplishment and social modification [13, 14] and low participation resulted in lower accomplishment [15]. Involvement mediates the influence of family features (e.g. income, race) on student accomplishment, indicating that communication is especially crucial for insecure family members [16].

Parent involvement in their child's education encourages emotions to the school, improves accomplishment ratings, enhances the child's social development, and enhances the relationship between parent and teacher [17-19]. Parent involvements also improve student's outcomes and generate beneficial benefits for the parents. Parents who involve in the school climate are more informed of student requirements and, hence, are better able to address those requirements [20, 21].

Furthermore, parents who involved demonstrated more optimistic perceptions toward the school compared to parents who exhibited lower involvement rate [22, 23]. In addition, parents who more involved had children who shown more good feeling to school [17]. Further parental collaboration leads to teachers have better feeling about teaching, and being more familiar with the home environment, and improve in resources and materials to apply in class [24].

Enhanced family-school collaboration encourages both teachers and parents as well as lessens emotions of isolation which frequently claimed by teachers and parents. The involvement of parents in school has a significant effect in their collaboration, communication, and consequently, the academic success of students with disabilities. Greenberg [25] revealed evidence assisting the view that parent participation impacted the child via its effect on children's performance and inspirations associated to school, compared to their academic skill achievement. They describe parent collaboration as the devotion of resources of the parent to the child within a given domain. They are emphasis on the significance of the child's phenomenological experience in the process of parent collaboration. It is recommended that the child should know his/her parents' collaboration due to the parental resources to have an influence.

The qualitative research showed that the degree of collaboration of some involved and uninvolved parents of students with special needs about their functions as collaborative in the IEP process [26]. The result indicated that they did not imagine they were equal members in their children's IEP process. Family environments also have substantial effect in children's school accomplishment compared to the input from schooling itself [26]. Other studied also revealed that the poor involvement of parents in IEPs may resulted in lower student achievement [27, 28].

In the case of parent involvement, the general problem was inadequate parental involvement in developing and implementing an IEP which hinders the effectiveness of the program for a student with disabilities in class [29-31]. The specific problem in Iran was poor involvement of parents and inadequate collaboration between parents and teachers in the IEP process may impede the development of effective IEPs for Iranian students with disabilities. Several researchers assert that there are a variety of influences on parent involvement include characteristics of families and parents, communities, teachers, schools, and children [10, 30-32]. Family status factors (e.g. salary, education, marital status), social support, age and personality of child, teachers' years of instructing, and school size are all particular factors may have impact on the parent involvement [32]. Because there is a limit study is available in Iran about parental involvement in the IEP process. Therefore, the main aim of the present study was to examine Iranian parents' level of involvement in the IEP process regarding their child's age. Another aim of this study was to examine the level of parental communication with school staff.

1.1. Parent Involvement Theory

Epstein [33] suggested a model of partnership between families and schools showing three overlapping spheres of impact with regard to students' learning: family, schools, and community. Epstein [17] showed six types of parent involvement: (1) Parenting, (2) Communicating, (3) Volunteering, (4) Learning at home, (5) Decision making, and (6) Collaborating with community. Parenting activities refer to parental support at home that supports the child's success at school. Communicating pertains to communication about school programs and the student's academic progress and achievement between home-school and school-home. Newsletters from the school, telephone conversations between parent and teacher, parent-teacher conferences and other such activities embedded in this group. Volunteering activities refer to involve families as volunteer participants in programs. Learning at Home procedures support homework and curricular-linked involvement. Decision making activities is include parents as collaborative partners. Hebel [31] in the process of collaborating with community, parents looking for reinforce school programs via links with other organizations. Epstein [33] also suggested an important instruction for conceptualizing parent-teacher collaboration and communication in IEP process. Epstein [34] showed that when a teacher listens to parent's dilemma and is able to obtain constructive collaborative outcomes, the parents are able to have strong impact in their children's education achievement. Additionally, parental assistance of a child's education is an important issue in student academic achievement [35]. Useful collaboration with parents can be facilitated children's educational achievements Epstein [36]. Epstein [37] demonstrated that the collaboration between parent and teacher may predict higher student success regardless of the family's socioeconomic condition. Both theoretical and conceptual research indicated that parent and teacher collaboration and communication affect student academic achievement [35]. When teachers motivate and assist parental involvement, students indicated better academic success in reading than to teachers who did not report parent involvement [38]. Parents also may involve at school in several manner, such as volunteering in school activities, attending in parent-teacher meeting and school decision-making, participating school or class events, and participating parent-teacher conferences [36, 39, 40]. Yet Epstein [36] has exhibited that family-school communication is crucial to achieve family-school partnerships. Clearly, there is a need for schools to focus on more positive communication activities rather than focusing only on students' problems. Parents communicate to teacher is essential by focus to school activity and questioning and talking about their children's school day [41]. Discussions about regular classroom events or homework assignments indicate that education is appreciated and can be a significant predictor of student success [42]. Motivating students to do their assignments and assisting with assignments can enhance the quality of students' academic work and their perspective to school [13, 43].

Family-school assist is especially essential for students with special needs who are mainstreamed into general education classes; due to the fact students with special needs encounter more problems with homework in those types of settings [44]. Generally, children with disabilities need additional assist with school and assignments [7, 45]. Despite the fact that many studies emphasis the advantages and importance of parent involvement in their children's academic activities [36] while others have observed the relation between homework help and lower degrees of achievement [46]. This most likely is attributed to the fact that students who have academic issues are generally need parental assist with assignment [46].

2. METHOD

2.1. Sample

The explanatory sequential mixed methods design was examine in the present study, where quantitative data collection and analysis was performed in Phase I and subsequently in Phase II qualitative data collection and analysis was carried out, leads to results from the qualitative strand contributing to the results from the quantitative strand, with each phase conducted sequentially [47].

For sampling the researcher was taken two steps in choosing appropriate respondents to answer the question. The first stage was involved making selections on special education schools in the Isfahan province in Iran. Second stage was involved selecting the real sample from the selected special education schools in the Isfahan. In this study, stratified random sampling is used for selecting parents who are involving IEP process in Iran. In quantitative phase 26 parents were selected through stratified random sampling. All the parents were members of non-profit organizations for families of children with disabilities in Iran. The majority of the parents were from middle- to upper middle-class socioeconomic families. All of the students were elementary school-aged children who were receiving special education services primarily. The children ranged in age from 7 to 15 years of age, and each had an IEP. **Table 1** provides demographic data including parent type, student disability and student age.

Table-1. Summary of Parents and Children's Characteristics

| No | Parent | Age of Child | Type of children disability |
|-----|--------|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| P1 | Mother | 11 | Mental retardation |
| P2 | Mother | 9 | Multiple disabilities |
| P3 | Mother | 11 | Severe Learning disabilities |
| P4 | Mother | 10 | Speech or language impairments |
| P5 | Mother | 10 | Autism |
| P6 | Mother | 9 | Autism |
| P7 | Mother | 10 | Severe Learning disabilities |
| P8 | Mother | 11 | Speech or language impairments |
| P9 | Mother | 8 | Motor and communication disabilities |
| P10 | Mother | 8 | Multiple disabilities |
| P11 | Mother | 9 | Multiple disabilities |
| P12 | Mother | 9 | Severe Learning disabilities |
| P13 | Mother | 9 | Motor and communication disabilities |
| P14 | Mother | 11 | Mental retardation |
| P15 | Mother | 11 | Mental retardation |
| P16 | Mother | 10 | Emotional disturbance |
| P17 | Mother | 10 | Emotional disturbance |
| P18 | Mother | 8 | Developmental delay |
| P19 | Mother | 8 | Developmental delay |
| P20 | Mother | 8 | Speech or language impairments |
| P21 | Mother | 7 | Severe Learning disabilities |
| P22 | Father | 10 | Motor and communication disabilities |
| P23 | Father | 11 | Speech or language impairments |
| P24 | Father | 7 | Multiple disabilities |
| P25 | Father | 7 | Developmental delay |
| P26 | Father | 11 | Emotional disturbance |

2.2. Data Collection

In-depth and face-to-face interview was performed to gather the information, idea and their experience of parents who were involved in IEP process. Interviews in qualitative research method imply to conversations in discovering a few general topics to gather participants' opinions with regard to their thinking and structures of the responses [29]. According to Creswell [47] interviews give access to other people's perceptions that lie behind 'their behavior in order to obtain higher degree of collaboration and communication of a situation. The interview sessions were carried out to address the following issues:

1. The degree of parental involvement in the IEP process
2. The main person for communication for status of children with disabilities
3. The reason for parents contact with teacher and school staff
4. The frequency of parents contact with teacher and school staff

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was begun with recording and subsequently transcription of each taped interview that was then translated from Persian into English. Recording parents' responses permitted discreet data collection and prevented suppressing participants' responses [48]. Employing a digital-recording device assured participant responses to questions were precisely reflected in the data transcript and assisted data analysis. Each interview took 30 to 45 minutes to complete. All interviews were carried out with one parent, tape-recorded, and subsequently summarized at a later time. The data were analyzed using NVivo software to collect rich, editable text to explain the research questions.

2.4. Research Design

This study was performed based on explanatory sequential mixed methods design. In using mixed methods design, quantitative results are complemented by the qualitative results. Mixed method is the mixture of qualitative and quantitative method in various phases of the research process and shows the way of the collection and analysis of data. In addition, using quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination, offers a better understanding of research problem than using one approach. Mixed methods design was used in this study because collecting both qualitative and quantitative types of data provides a better understanding of the research problem. Mixed methods designs assist compensate deficiencies that can appear when only applying qualitative or quantitative approaches alone [47]. Quantitative data offer particular numbers via questionnaires in the research that are statically analyzed and provide valuable numeric data. However, the qualitative data can provide an entire new various viewpoints on the topic and research problems. In addition a quantitative method matches the explanatory and understanding-oriented aim of the research.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Parent Involvement in IEP Process

The majority of the parents mentioned that they participated in their children IEP process as can be seen in the Figure1. The majority of parent of children 7-10 year old reported high degree of involvement (66%) and some of parents reported moderate degree of involvement (30%) and less amount of that presented low degree of involvement (4%). Parents also asserted that they had essential role on the preparing the IEP document and attending the IEP meeting. Similar degree of involvement was found for parents of children 8-11 and 9-12 year old. Conversely, parents of children 11-14 old stated that half of the parents (58%) reported high levels of involvement, while 28% and 14% indicated moderate and low degree of involvement, respectively. They believed that IEP is a good plan and appreciated the efforts made by the school and teachers. They acknowledged that IEP could provide to their children's individual needs as students in class have various abilities. Parents appeared to comprehend that IEP stresses on the different factors of development of their children prioritizing on their instant need to obtain specific skills to become independent. Parents were also informed that IEP for their children did not only provide the academic achievement. Self-help skills were also providing to base on their children's requirements. Parents realized that their children have limitations in their learning abilities and thus focused on the requirement for them to learn to become more independent rather than pushing them to do assignment [49].

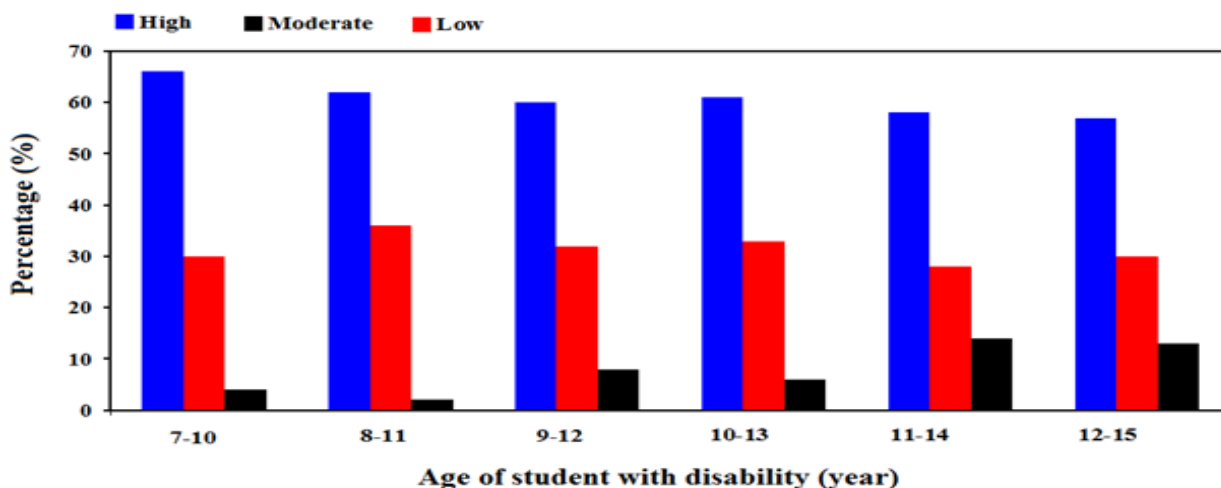


Figure 1. The level of parent involvement in the IEP process with respect to the age of student with disability

3.2. Parental Communication with Teachers and School Staff

The result indicated that the entire of parents demonstrated that they contact with their child’s general/special education teacher as can be seen in **Figure 2**. The graph presented that the majority parents of children 7-10 (100%) and 8-11 (98%) year old was contact with their child teacher. Similar amount of contact was observed between parents and counselor/school psychologist, for example, contacts with counselor for children 7-10, 8-11 and 12-15 year old were 96%, 92%, 94% respectively. However less significant amount of parents contact with principal was found. In this regard, contacts with principal for children 7-10, 8-11 and 12-15 year old were 25%, 18%, 34% respectively. Contacts with general/special education teacher was frequent (daily) for most parents of children 7-10, 8-11 and 12-15 year old were 68%, 50%, 35% respectively (**Figure 3**). They also presented regular base contact (1 to 4 times per week) for the majority of parent of children 9-12, and 12-15 year old were 40% and 37% respectively. However, a few amount of parent contact with school staff, for example, rare contact for parents of children 7-10, 8-11 and 12-15 year old were 1%, 4% and 15%. In this view, parents of the children in the first grade demonstrated the highest level of concern and the most time of contact with the teachers and staff for information sharing. Most of the parents about 95% to 100% of children 7-10, 8-11, 9-12, 10-13, 11-14 and 12-15 year old expressed their share daily experience and talk with other parents and children teacher (**Figure 4**). Almost similar number of parents about 72 to 91 % talks with school staff to solve problems and social interaction. While, some of parents of children in the range of 7 to 15 year old mentioned that they had disagreements in their contacts with teacher and/or school staff.

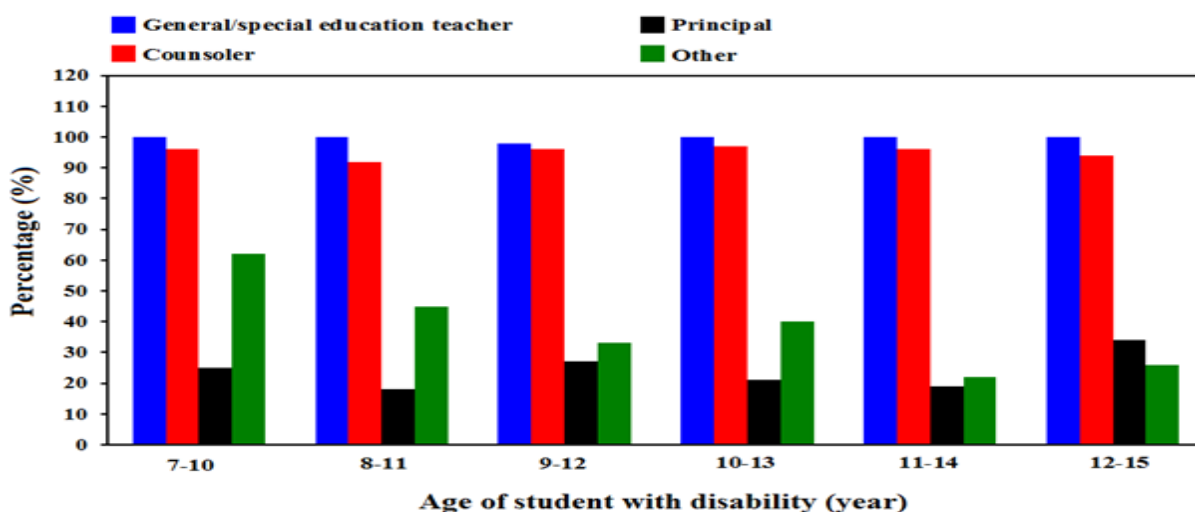


Figure-2. The main person for communication for status of children with disabilities

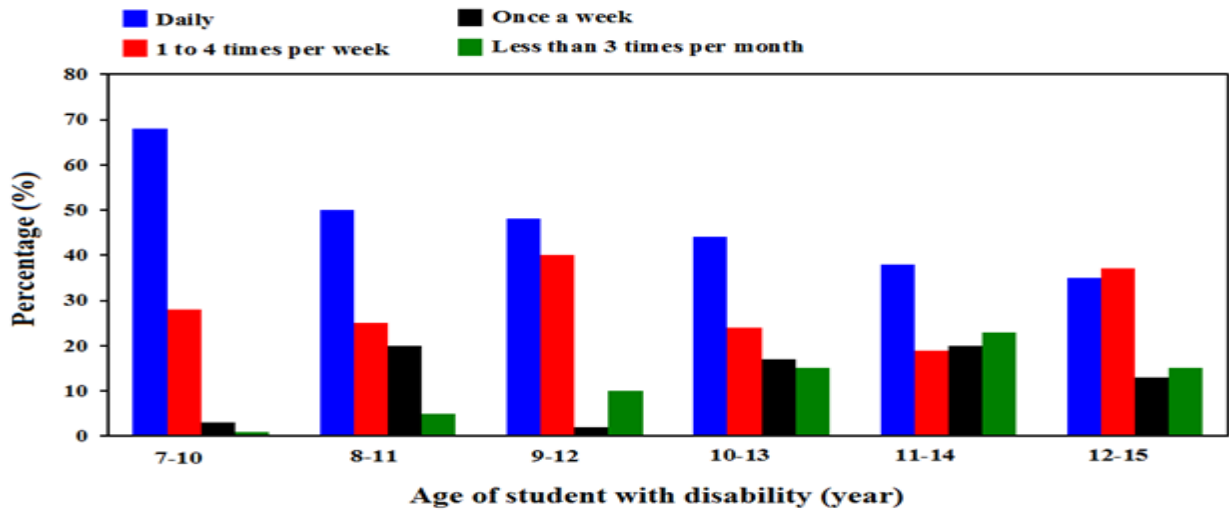


Figure-3. Frequency of parent contact to school staff with respect to the age of student with disability

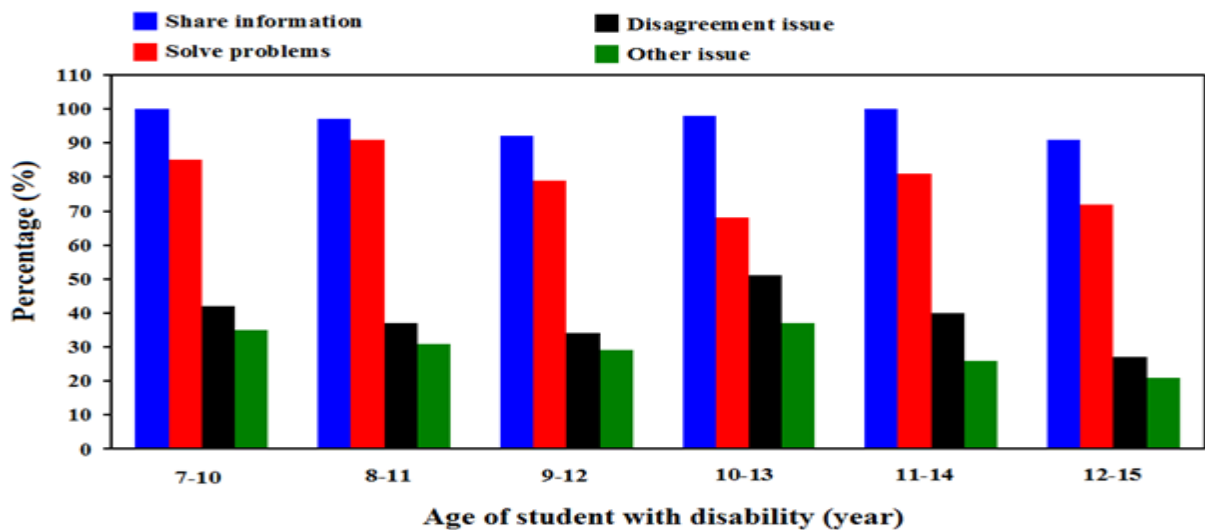


Figure-4. The main reason of communication between parents and school staff

4. DISCUSSION

The result showed that the communication occurred generally between parents and general/special education teacher, parents and consoler/school psychologist on a regular basis. However, less amount of the communication occurred between parents and principal. In many cases, parents used normal daily events, such as meals, car rides, and trips to the play area, as chances to assist their child with special needs and practice communication, social, self-help, and other skills [50]. Parents reported considerable contact regarding their daily information, experience and child's need for special help. The result of interviews conducted by Vaughn, et al. [51] indicated that this communication pattern, for the most part, was founded with the classroom teacher. The special education teacher and the school psychologist made considerably fewer contacts, 23% and 8%, respectively. The importance of schools' communication with parents has been mentioned by Hoover-Dempsey [52].

Chopra [53] revealed five types of relationships between parents and paraeducators: close and personal relationship, common limited interactions, common extended interactions, aggravating relationship, and poor relationship. Their results also indicated that it is essential for paraeducators and parents to communicate due to paraeducators devote more time with the students and obtain insight into their behavior and academic success. In this work, most of the communication occurred in the form of face-to-face meetings which is related to the parent's questions and concerns which they are experience at home or special school. Parents have different demand about the requirement of their children, some of them; ask for strengthening in the skill to find a friend and others ask for

boosting their communication skill and social skill. The information is essential for the parents of the children with motor disabilities as they require more assist compared with other disable children. Kohler [54] reported that the most frequent form of parent involvement was supporting specialists in implanting and developing services, followed by carrying through services independently of providers and being knowledgeable of the approaches to control child improvement. However, parents reported that they were less likely to observe providers work with their child (42%) or support providers in employing services with the child.

The National Educational Longitudinal Study performed by Feuerstein [55] showed that parent contact with the school was most highly influenced by the amount of contact began by the school, especially contact regarding student behavior and student grades. Similar study carried out by Thijs and Eilbracht [56] showed that direct teacher–parent communications may not only improve the quality of interpersonal bonds between teachers and parents but also permit for the disclosure of child-specific information, which allows teachers to better understand their students’ strengths and challenges and to use this understanding to promote student success in the classroom [57].

Other study illustrated parent’s reports of their interaction with the specialists who worked with their children with special needs. In this view, it was revealed that parent–teacher communication in special education could be described as a shared and productive focus on child-directed services [57, 58]. For strengthening the degree of communication between parent and teachers of special school, Pelco, et al. [59] have suggested that psychologists have a essential role and can assist teachers to enhance their communication skills with parents, as well as methods for organizing effective parent-teacher conferences [60]. Psychologists can also encourage the involvement of parents in home- and school-based parental involvement [60]. In this view, Fan [6] indicated that both parents and school staff asserted that it was essential for parents to have an actual connection with the school because it permitted them to better comprehend their child and their child’s high school experience.

The majority of comment associated to the students’ requirements and their preference and performance. However, there is a conflict on some matter such as the kind of problem solving when the students with disability fail to carry out some matter or reply some query. A couple of parents indicated that they only discussed with the teacher and school staff in the IEP meeting which is not sufficient to address the problem of children with special needs. However, most of the parents pointed out that they are absolutely involved in the IEP process and highest degree of involvement was found for children in the first grade. In this view, a few parent stated that they are not desire to involve every IEP process as the agenda was prepare in advance and there is no balance between IEP objective and school performance [57]. In this regard, Hammond [61] showed that almost all parents indicated that being involved in their child’s educational program was a crucial factor that parents should perform in their child’s education. The interview study performed by Blue-Banning, et al. [62] identified six themes associated to collaborative family–school partnerships: communication, commitment, equality, skills, trust, and respect Elbaum [57]. As Epstein [37] propose, what is needed in schools is an extensive system of parental involvement. The significance of parental involvement is that it serves as an accountability tool. When parents visit the school, they discuss with teachers face to face or in groups about their child, involving in decision making, and observe their child’s behavior [63].

Fan [6] indicated that parental involvement at school allowed school staff to carry out their jobs properly. Their result also demonstrated that parent’s involvement in the school activity of their children with autism in various ways. Benson [50] demonstrated that home-based parental involvement activities are fairly unstructured, these activities may need less in the way of support from others compared to the school-based activities which need for parents to make considerable changes to their daily routine due to meet with school staff, participate school meetings, or devote more time throughout the day for students’ activity. Katz [64] indicated the significant impacts of parental involvement on different factors of school quality and performing. In this regard, Rosenblatt and Peled [65] exhibited that parental involvement has positive effects for students’ social and academic performing and for school environment, staff performing and educational viewpoint. Similar study showed that parental involvement in schools via activities that enhance particularized trust, might enhance the school community’s connecting social capital and

less [64, 66, 67]. Westling [12] suggested that the most typical means that parents participated were talking to their child's teacher and achieving information about their child, and speaking with therapists who provided services.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study evaluated parental involvement in the IEP process and communication between school staff and parent of students with severe disabilities. This study uses an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, where quantitative data collection and analysis was carried out in Phase I and subsequently in Phase II qualitative data collection and analysis. The results showed that the majority of the parents mentioned they were involved the IEP process and one third of the parents stated moderately involved in the IEP process while small number of parents had the low involvement. In this regards most of the parents also asserted they communicated with general/special education teacher and consoler/school psychologist every day but some of them presented they meet the school staff two or three times in the week. Parents of the children in the first grade demonstrated the highest degree of involvement and the most time of communicate with the teachers and staff for talked or shared notes daily basis.

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