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Teacher-Parent Collaboration in Special Education: A Qualitative Study on Challenges, Expectations, and Coping Strategies^{1 * **}

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the collaboration between special education teachers and parents, the challenges encountered in this process, and the coping strategies employed by both parties. Conducted using a qualitative research design, the study involved semi-structured interviews with five special education teachers and ten parents of children with special needs aged 7–11. All participants responded to the same four questions, and each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. The data obtained were analyzed under four main themes: mutual expectations, forms of collaboration, encountered problems, and coping strategies. The findings revealed that while both teachers and parents share the common goal of supporting the child's development, significant differences exist in their expectations and approaches. Teachers reported that insufficient parental involvement, limited knowledge of their children's needs, and a lack of ongoing communication hindered effective collaboration. Parents expressed dissatisfaction with teachers' lack of innovation and the absence of noticeable progress in their children. Although teachers made efforts to maintain consistent communication through digital tools — sending reminders, instructional videos, and requesting video feedback from home activities — many parents chose to change schools rather than engage in problem-solving. The study concludes with suggestions to enhance collaboration between teachers and parents in special education settings.

Key Words: Special Education, Special Education Teachers, Parents, Cooperation

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Özel Eğitimde Öğretmen-Ebeveyn İş Birliği: Sorunlar, Beklentiler ve Başa Çıkma Stratejileri Üzerine Nitel Bir İnceleme^{1 * **}

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ÖZET

Bu araştırma, özel eğitim öğretmenleri ile ebeveynler arasındaki iş birliği kurma durumlarını, bu süreçte karşılaşılan sorunları ve tarafların bu sorunlara karşı geliştirdikleri başa çıkma stratejilerini incelemektedir. Nitel araştırma desenine uygun olarak yürütülen çalışmada, beş özel eğitim öğretmeni ve 7–11 yaş aralığında özel gereksinimli çocuğa sahip on ebeveyn ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılara aynı dört soru yöneltilmiş ve görüşmeler ortalama 20 dakika sürmüştür. Elde edilen veriler, karşılıklı beklentiler, iş birliği kurma biçimleri, yaşanan sorunlar ve çözüm stratejileri olmak üzere dört ana tema çerçevesinde analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, hem öğretmenlerin hem de ebeveynlerin temel amacının çocukların gelişimini desteklemek olduğunu ortaya koymakla birlikte, taraflar arasında beklenti ve yaklaşımlarda önemli farklılıklar olduğunu da göstermektedir. Öğretmenler, ebeveynlerin yeterli katılım göstermemesi, çocuklarını yeterince tanınamaları ve iletişim eksikliği nedeniyle iş birliğinin sekteye uğradığını belirtmiştir. Ebeveynler ise öğretmenlerin yeterince yenilikçi olmaması ve gözle görülür gelişim sağlanamaması nedeniyle sürecin verimli işlemediğini ifade etmiştir. Öğretmenlerin teknolojiyi kullanarak sürdürülebilir iletişim kurma çabalarına rağmen, ebeveynlerin çoğunluğu çözüm olarak okul değişikliğini tercih etmiştir. Çalışma, iş birliğinin artırılmasına yönelik önerilerle tamamlanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Özel Eğitim, Özel Eğitim Öğretmeni, Ebeveyn, İşbirliği

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Introduction

Education is a multifaceted process conducted by specialists using appropriate materials and environmental conditions, aimed at supporting the cognitive, emotional, and social development of the individual (Açar et al., 2022). From a historical perspective, prior to the establishment of formal educational institutions, the responsibility for educating children rested entirely on the parents. In this context, the roles assumed by mothers and fathers as the first educators were shaped by the structure and needs of society. Initially carried out through informal means, educational practices gradually evolved into a systematic and institutional framework, laying the foundation for school-based formal education (Şerefli, 2008). In contemporary educational paradigms, environmental factors influencing individual development have gained significant importance. Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological systems theory conceptualizes the family as a "microsystem" and the relationships established with the school as part of the "mesosystem" in a child's developmental context. This theoretical framework emphasizes that a child's development is not confined to the school setting alone; rather, it asserts that healthier developmental outcomes are achievable when the family and school work in collaboration.

Although schools have gradually become the central institutions within the education system, this evolution has not altered the fact that education is not confined solely to the school environment. The establishment of a high-quality, sustainable, and inclusive education system depends on robust collaboration among students, schools, and families (Tümekaya, 2017). In this regard, parents assume a dual role: acting both as independent educators within the home environment and as collaborative stakeholders working alongside schools. Active parental involvement in the educational process yields long-term positive effects on children's development. Within the context of special education, such collaboration holds even greater significance. Special education is an instructional framework grounded in individual differences and tailored to meet each student's unique needs through customized teaching strategies and approaches. The practical implementation of this individualized structure necessitates the active participation of not only teachers but also parents. This is because students' academic achievements and socio-emotional development are shaped holistically through learning experiences supported both in school and within the home and family environment (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Research demonstrates that parental involvement has a significantly positive impact on the education of children with special needs (Çalışoğlu & Tanışır, 2018; Dayı et al., 2022; El Nokali et al., 2010; Ishartiwi et al., 2022; Lara & Saracostti, 2019; Yigen, 2008). Such involvement enables teachers to assess students' individual needs more effectively while empowering parents to take on more constructive and informed roles in their children's learning processes. Consequently, this type of collaboration not only enhances educational outcomes but also lays the foundation for building

comprehensive support systems that contribute to the overall quality of life of the child (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

In special education, effective collaboration between teachers and parents has a positive influence not only on the child's academic achievement but also on their behavioral development and acquisition of social skills. As noted by Griffiths and colleagues (2021), schools should adopt an open and responsive approach to the cultural, linguistic, and experiential diversity that parents bring into the educational process. Parents contribute to the personalization of instructional strategies by sharing daily observations and insights regarding their children, while teachers are expected to guide families through their professional knowledge and expertise. However, translating this ideal model of collaboration into practice often involves significant challenges. The literature emphasizes that establishing a genuine partnership between parents and professionals is frequently a complex and demanding process (Moses & Croll, 1987). Imbalances in power dynamics, disparities in knowledge levels, deficiencies in interpersonal communication skills, and educators' inadequate preparation for working with families represent substantial barriers to effective collaboration.

In some cases, teachers may adopt limiting attitudes that hinder parental participation, while on the other hand, families may develop a sense of mistrust toward the educational system. Addressing these challenges requires that teachers be supported through in-service training on family-centered educational approaches and that school administrations establish structures that foster and sustain such partnerships (Summers et al., 2005). Particularly in the field of special education, teachers are expected to develop a more holistic understanding of family dynamics, cultural values, emotional processes, and parenting experiences.

Contribution of Teacher-Parent Collaboration to Development in Special Education

Special education is a field that emphasizes individual differences and involves instructional processes tailored to the unique needs of students. One of the most fundamental components of this field is the effective collaboration between teachers and parents. This collaboration is crucial not only for the child's academic development but also for their social and emotional growth, relying on the active and sustainable engagement of both parties (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Jeynes, 2007; Wehman, 2012). The continuity of learning is ensured when parents reinforce individualized instructional strategies implemented by teachers in the classroom at home. Turnbull and colleagues (2015) assert that such coordinated efforts enable a more accurate identification of students' needs and the development of strategic responses to address them. The joint development of individualized education plans (IEPs) by teachers and parents, which are designed to meet students' developmental requirements, is recognized as one of the most critical factors contributing to academic success.

The social and emotional development of students is a frequently overlooked yet equally critical dimension of the special education process, comparable in importance to academic progress. Epstein's (2011) School-Family-Community Partnership Model emphasizes that

socio-emotional support significantly enhances children's classroom performance. While teachers cultivate an empathetic and collaborative learning environment within the classroom, parents provide emotional support at home, thereby strengthening their children's self-perception. This integrated support structure fosters the development of emotional intelligence, enhances social interaction skills, and promotes individual self-awareness in students.

Special education is a specifically designed educational approach developed for individuals who demonstrate developmental differences and, as a result, cannot fully benefit from mainstream educational processes. These individuals, due to various physical and cognitive distinctions, require a uniquely tailored educational model. Education is not solely an interaction between teacher and student; instead, it is a multidimensional process that necessitates the active participation of families. However, the crucial role of parents in creating optimal learning environments for students is often undervalued. In contrast, many countries increasingly prioritize family involvement in their educational reform agendas (Avvisati et al., 2010). Within the context of special education, family participation is just as critical as the individual's involvement, and effective parental engagement can significantly enhance educational outcomes (Şanlı, 2012). Therefore, communication and collaboration between families and teachers represent foundational factors that directly influence the overall success of the educational process. The primary aim of this study is to examine the challenges encountered by special education teachers and parents during their collaborative efforts and to explore the strategies they employ to overcome these difficulties. Accordingly, the following research questions have been addressed:

1. What are the mutual expectations of teachers and parents working in special education institutions?
2. What is the nature of the collaboration between teachers and parents in special education institutions?
3. What challenges do teachers and parents encounter during their collaborative processes in special education institutions?
4. How do teachers and parents in special education institutions address and resolve the challenges they face in their collaboration?

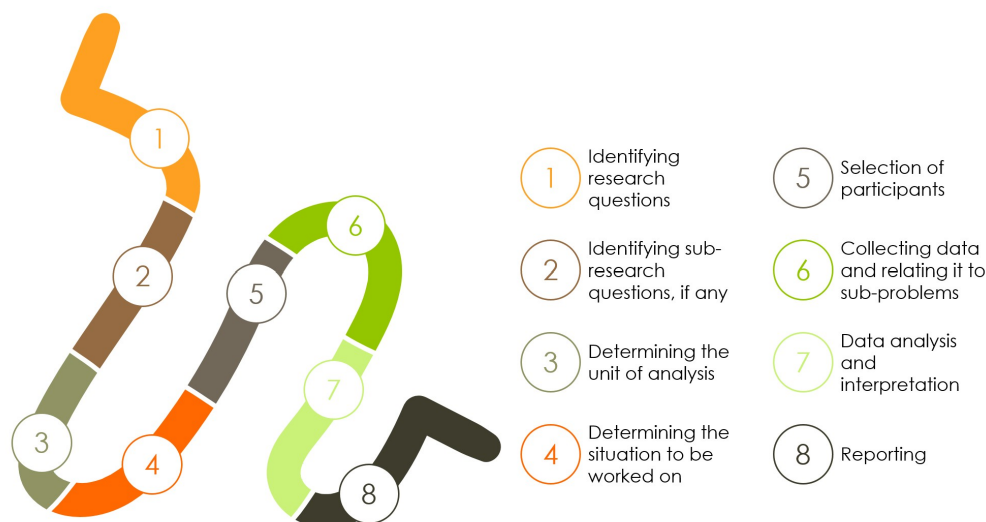
Methodology / Yöntem

Research Design

This study was conducted to examine the challenges encountered in the collaboration process between special education teachers and parents, as well as the solution strategies developed to address these challenges. The research was structured using the case study design, a qualitative research method. Case studies are approaches that allow for an in-depth examination of a phenomenon within its real-life context, involving a comprehensive analysis of a bounded system (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this study, the eight-step case study

process outlined by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018) was adopted, and the research was structured accordingly. The methodological framework of the study is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Stages of A Case Study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018)



Participants

To determine the study group, the method of convenient sampling, one of the purposeful sampling techniques frequently used in qualitative research, was employed (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). This sampling method allows the researcher to select participants who are easily accessible and can contribute effectively to the data collection process. In line with this approach, the researcher visited three special education institutions located in the city center of a province in Eastern Anatolia and provided detailed information to the school administrators regarding the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study. Following these briefings, a group of five special education teachers and ten parents who volunteered to participate constituted the study's participant group. The selection of participants was based on their experience in the field of special education and their potential to provide data aligned with the study's objectives. Detailed demographic information about the participants is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Demographic Information About Teachers

	Gender	Age	Teaching experience	Department of graduation	Educational level
Teacher 1	Female	24	2	Department of Special Education	Undergraduate
Teacher 2	Male	32	8	Department of Special Education	Graduate
Teacher 3	Female	28	5	Department of Special Education	Undergraduate
Teacher 4	Male	37	10	Department of Special Education	Undergraduate
Teacher 5	Female	26	3	Department of Special Education	Graduate

Table 2. Demographic Information About Parents

	Gender	Age	Employment status	Educational level	Degree of Kinship
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Parent 1	Female	26	Employed	High school	Mother
Parent 2	Female	35	Employed	High school	Mother
Parent 3	Male	27	Employed	High school	Father
Parent 4	Female	24	Employed	Undergraduate	Mother
Parent 5	Female	40	Unemployed	High school	Mother
Parent 6	Female	38	Unemployed	High school	Mother
Parent 7	Male	29	Employed	Undergraduate	Father
Parent 8	Male	33	Employed	Undergraduate	Father
Parent 9	Kadın	28	Unemployed	High school	Mother
Parent 10	Kadın	45	Employed	Undergraduate	Mother

Data Collection Tool

Within the scope of this study, two primary data collection tools were employed: a participant demographic information form and a semi-structured interview form. The demographic information form was developed to identify the basic socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. Through this form, data were collected from the teachers regarding their gender, age, teaching experience, department of graduation, and educational level. Similarly, information was gathered from parents concerning their gender, age, employment status, educational level, and degree of kinship with the child with special needs.

To obtain the main data for the study, a semi-structured interview form was developed. Initially, two separate question pools were created for teachers and parents. These pools were constructed in line with the study's objectives and based on a comprehensive review of the relevant literature. To maintain thematic consistency across the interviews and facilitate a comparative analysis of the experiences of both groups, six core questions with parallel content were identified. The draft interview form was evaluated by two academic experts specializing in special education. Based on their feedback, the content of the questions was revised and refined accordingly. As a result of this process, two questions were removed, and one was structurally modified to finalize the interview form.

To test the clarity and applicability of the form, a pilot study was conducted with one special education teacher and one parent. Following this pilot application, a syntactic simplification was made to one of the questions. The final set of questions used in the semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents focused on mutual expectations, collaboration practices, challenges encountered during the collaboration process, and the strategies employed to address these challenges.

Data Collection Process

By ethical considerations, the necessary permissions were obtained from the relevant institutions before initiating participant recruitment. Then, a school principal from a special education institution located in the selected province was contacted, and interviews were conducted with five special education teachers working with children aged 7 to 11 who have special needs. These teachers voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Similarly, another special education institution was visited, and communication was established with the parents of students within the same age group. Following a detailed explanation of the study, ten out of fifteen parents expressed their willingness to participate voluntarily. During the interview

organization process, each participant was contacted individually to schedule a suitable date and time. Interviews with the teachers were conducted at their workplaces, while those with the parents were held in a private room at the child's school to ensure confidentiality and avoid interruptions. Prior to each interview, a brief introductory conversation was held to establish trust and create a comfortable atmosphere for the participants. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent, both verbal and written. Each interview lasted approximately twenty minutes.

Data Analysis

Throughout the research process, strict attention was paid to participant confidentiality. Instead of using real names, participants were assigned codes such as "Teacher 1" or "Parent 1." The data collected in the study were systematically analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis technique. Initially, the raw data obtained from the interviews were transferred to a digital environment and then transcribed into written text. These transcriptions were compared with the audio recordings to ensure that all participant statements were wholly and accurately documented. Following this step, the written transcripts were meticulously reviewed three times by the researchers, and the data obtained from teachers and parents were analyzed separately to identify themes, categories, and codes. Subsequently, the themes, categories, and codes developed by both researchers were compared to determine inter-rater reliability. Using the formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), the inter-rater reliability was calculated to be 95%. In instances where discrepancies occurred, consensus was reached, and a unified structure was established. Moreover, all identified themes, categories, and codes were reviewed by another expert in the field for conceptual and linguistic accuracy, resulting in the renaming of one theme and three codes.

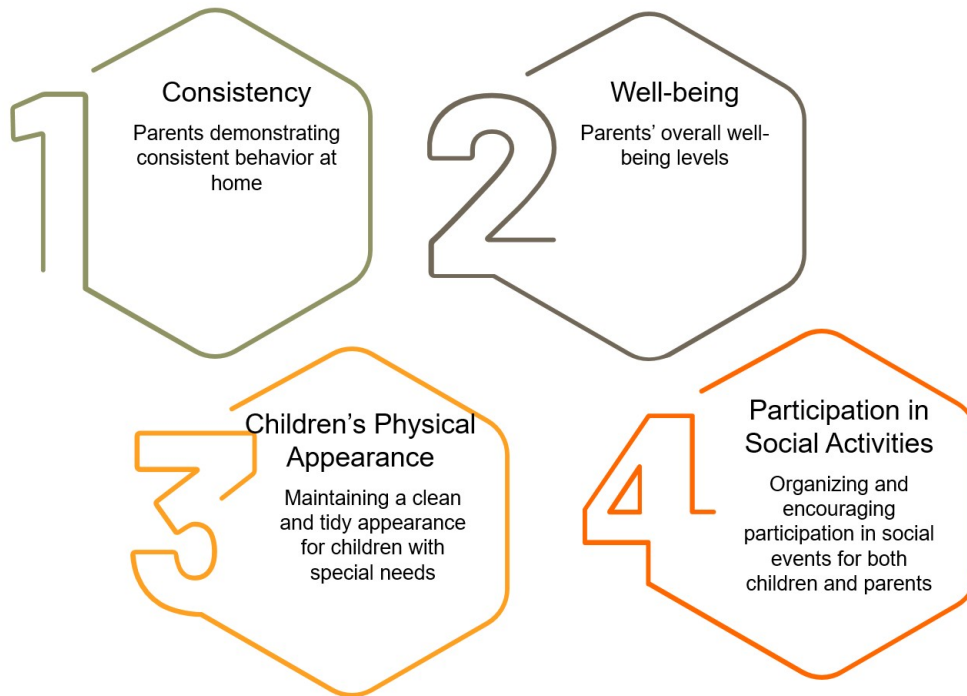
To ensure the validity of the study, the findings were reported in detail, and frequent direct quotations from participants were included to substantiate the interpretations. Special care was taken to present participant statements verbatim in the analysis of the findings, with thematic explanations built upon these quotations. To enhance internal validity, the interview questions were developed with consideration for the stages of educational assessment and diagnosis, and the content was revised based on feedback from two academic experts. This multi-stage process was meticulously implemented to strengthen the reliability and validity of the analysis results.

Findings

Findings Related to the First Research Question

Within the scope of this study, both special education teachers and parents were asked about their expectations of one another. In this context, the findings obtained from the teachers are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. *Special Education Teachers' Expectations from Parents*



Direct quotes from teachers regarding these findings are as follows:

Parents need to stay consistent at home. We talk things through and make decisions, but then everything changes once they're home. It kind of makes what I'm doing at school feel pointless. So, consistency is a big expectation I have from them (Teacher 3)

When parents are really involved and supportive of their child's development, it boosts the child's emotional resilience. But at the same time, we often have to remind parents to take time for themselves too. (Teacher 4)

When parents join these activities, it actually helps them feel less alone. Sharing experiences with other families helps reduce their stress and gives them emotional support. (Teacher 5)

Some families are really meticulous. They take great care of their kids, and that has a really positive impact on the child's overall well-being. But other families struggle a bit more—especially when the child has special needs, things like cleanliness and routines can become tough. That's when we step in to offer support and raise awareness. (Teacher 1)

The expectations of parents from special education teachers are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. *Parents' Expectations from Special Education Teachers*



Direct quotes from parents regarding these findings are as follows:

If our child isn't able to learn a skill, we expect the teacher to try different teaching methods and stay positive and motivated. (Parent 4)

I want the teacher to be patient and cheerful. Their energy really affects us too, so I hope they bring good vibes. (Parent 5)

It's really important to us that our child can meet their basic needs independently. We expect the teachers to work systematically on that and help build those skills. (Parent 10)

I believe I need to play an active role in my child's education. It's really important that the teachers keep me informed, include me in the process, and work with me. (Parent 7)

Findings Related to the Second Research Question

Within the scope of the second research question, the collaboration practices between special education teachers and parents were examined. The collaboration status of teachers with parents is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Teachers' Collaboration Status with Parents



Direct quotes from teachers regarding these findings are as follows:

Parents tend to be pretty passive when it comes to adding stimulating experiences into their child's life. But kids who grow up in a rich and engaging environment develop much faster. That's why I try to collaborate with parents to make this happen. (Teacher 2)

When we're putting together or implementing an IEP, I expect parents to work with me. It's really important that they regularly attend meetings, give feedback, and stay in touch. I also need them to support the learning process at home. Honestly, a lot of the time, the activities I send just stay there and never get used. (Teacher 2)

I expect parents to be patient while we're working on the goals we set based on their child's abilities, and not to put too much pressure on the kid. I need their support in making sure the child attends school regularly. I also want them to create a loving environment that meets the child's emotional needs and helps them feel supported. (Teacher 3)

It's really important that parents give me accurate info about how their child behaves at home, their habits, and any specific needs or wants. And if something's wrong or there's been a change, I need them to talk to me openly about it. (Teacher 3)

The collaboration status of parents with teachers is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. *Parents' Collaboration Status with Teachers*



Direct quotes from parents regarding these findings are as follows:

Our teachers regularly update us on how our child is doing. (Parent 3)
I'd like our teacher to keep us in the loop about our child's progress, strengths and weaknesses, new methods being used, and any challenges. And I think it's just as important that they hear from us regularly, too. (Parent 4)

Findings Related to the Third Research Question

Within the scope of the third research question, both teachers and parents were asked about the challenges they encountered during their collaboration process. In this context, the findings obtained from special education teachers are presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6. *Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Collaboration Process*



Direct quotes from teachers regarding these findings are as follows:

Some of our parents just don't take on the responsibilities expected of them when it comes to their child's education. And that really impacts both the child's development and the quality of education we're trying to provide. (Teacher 1)

Some parents don't fully understand their child or they get too emotionally involved—like, they struggle to accept their child's limitations. And honestly, that can make things harder for us as teachers. (Teacher 4)

As a teacher, I try to have regular meetings with parents and keep communication open. But some parents avoid being fully transparent or just don't give us the whole picture when we talk. (Teacher 2)

The challenges faced by parents during their collaboration process with special education teachers are presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Challenges Faced by Parents in the Collaboration Process



Direct quotes from parents regarding these findings are as follows:

When we ask our teacher about which different methods they're using, it stays theoretical. They don't actually implement anything with our child during lessons. (Parent 4)

I think the teacher is a bit impatient, and that makes it hard for my child to feel confident around them. (Parent 6)

I find it lacking that the teacher doesn't try methods suitable for my child. They just go with standard solutions and don't dive deeper into the issues. It's the same old general things. (Parent 4)

Findings Related to the Fourth Research Question

In response to the fourth research question, how teachers and parents working in special education institutions resolve the challenges they face during their collaboration process was examined. The findings obtained from special education teachers are presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Teachers' Strategies for Solving Problems Encountered in the Collaboration Process



Direct quotes from teachers regarding these findings are as follows:

Having to constantly remind parents what they should be doing creates this endless loop of communication that goes nowhere. It really holds us back from making real progress. (Teacher 3)

Sample videos are super helpful for guiding parents. But the content needs to be simple and easy to understand. (Teacher 4)

Keeping records is useful for both parents and teachers. It helps us track how involved parents are in activities. But some of them see it as a burden, and we often don't get consistent feedback from them. (Teacher 5)

Parents' views on solution strategies are presented in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Parents' Strategies for Solving Problems Encountered in the Collaboration Process



Direct quotes from parents regarding these findings are as follows:

We share new approaches with our teacher, and the exchange of information between us has been really positive. (Parent 10)

Before changing my child's school, I want to make sure the new one has teachers and staff who will understand my child's individual needs and treat them with patience. (Parent 4)

Result and Discussion

Collaboration between educators and parents in the field of special education has a positive impact on both the academic performance and socio-emotional development of students. Indeed, numerous studies have confirmed that parental involvement significantly enhances students' academic achievement (El Nokali et al., 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001; Lara & Saracostti, 2019; Jeynes, 2007) and supports their social and emotional development (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020; McCoy et al., 2016; Paccaud et al., 2021; Schuck et al., 2023). In the context of educating students with special needs, teacher-parent collaboration plays a crucial role. While teachers design individualized instructional strategies for use in classroom settings, parents reinforce these strategies at home, contributing to the child's overall development. However, for this process to be effectively operationalized, continuous and effective collaboration between special education teachers and parents is essential. Accordingly, this study aimed to examine the collaboration process between teachers and parents in special education in depth, identify the challenges encountered during this process, and evaluate the strategies developed to address these problems from the perspectives of both teachers and parents.

Expectations Between Special Education Teachers and Parents

In the context of special education, expectations between teachers and parents may vary depending on the individual needs of the student; however, the foundation of this relationship rests on effective communication and collaboration. From the teachers' perspective, it is essential for parents to participate in their child's developmental process actively, support educational practices at home, and regularly attend school activities. Such parental involvement not only reinforces the child's learning process but also enables teachers to structure academic interventions more effectively (Matsagouras & Poulou, 2007; Zaoura & Aubrey, 2010). Conversely, parents expect that their differences will be acknowledged within the educational environment and that instructional strategies tailored to their special needs will be implemented. When parents are involved in the educational process, they wish for their participation to be perceived as meaningful and valuable, emphasizing the importance of clear, reciprocal, and two-way communication with teachers. This expectation becomes particularly pronounced during the development and implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), where receiving feedback is critical (Madsen & Madsen, 2022).

Similarly, this study reveals that special education teachers expect parents to exhibit consistent behavioral practices at home, to pay attention to their child's physical care, to ensure their child's participation in social activities, and to be mindful of both their child's and their psychosocial well-being. On the other hand, parents expect special education teachers to help their children acquire self-care skills, to be patient, cheerful, and honest in character, to be open to developing new instructional strategies, to actively engage in the educational process, and to establish open, trust-based communication with families. Balancing and consciously managing these mutual expectations provides a comprehensive educational experience that supports the child's academic, social, and emotional development. Effective parent-teacher collaboration is founded on principles such as regular communication, clearly defined expectations, mutual support, and the encouragement of positive behaviors.

Collaboration Between Special Education Teachers and Parents

Considering individual differences is crucial in education, and this becomes even more critical when addressing the learning needs of students with special requirements. In this context, collaboration between teachers and parents in special education institutions plays a foundational role in supporting students' developmental and academic progress. The primary goals of such collaboration include gaining a better understanding of the student's unique characteristics (Hornby, 2011), ensuring consistency between the school and home environments (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001), developing and implementing shared goals and strategies (Turnbull et al., 2015), enhancing student motivation toward learning (Epstein, 2011), and facilitating the effective sharing of available resources (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007). In this study, special education teachers stated that their collaborative efforts with parents aimed to set common goals for the development of IEPs, gather feedback related to the home environment, and create supportive, tailored environmental conditions for the child. Parents, on the other hand, associated their reasons for collaboration with teachers mainly with a desire to receive regular feedback on their child's development and to track progress in the IEP process.

The core purpose of teacher-parent collaboration in special education is to ensure that students with special needs derive the maximum benefit from the educational process. This collaboration not only promotes educational continuity but also contributes to a more

profound understanding of the student's individual needs and the development of strategies tailored to those needs. Research indicates that teacher-parent collaboration fosters improvements in students' academic and social skills, encourages active parental involvement in education, and enhances trust in the educational process (Bywater et al., 2011; Camarata, 2014; Demirel et al., 2024; Detraux & Thirion, 2010; Dunst & Dempsey, 2007). Moreover, such collaboration helps parents better understand the types of support their children require in learning environments and allows them to contribute effectively to the implementation of strategies at home. For all these reasons, it is vital to strengthen collaboration between teachers and parents in special education settings.

Challenges Faced by Special Education Teachers and Parents in the Collaboration Process

Special education, by its nature of centering on individual needs, necessitates continuous and effective collaboration between teachers and parents. This collaboration not only supports the student's academic performance but also plays a crucial role in developing social skills and enhancing participation in community life. However, in practice, this process often encounters various challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Among the most common issues negatively impacting teacher-parent collaboration are communication deficiencies, mismatched expectations, and insufficient parental involvement.

The foremost problem in this context is the lack of sustained and clear communication between teachers and parents. Teachers often face heavy workloads due to time-intensive responsibilities such as developing IEPs (Stoner et al., 2005), while parents simultaneously contend with the emotional and physical stress stemming from the needs of their children with special requirements (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). These conditions make it difficult to establish regular and healthy lines of communication. The literature suggests that teachers sometimes struggle to communicate information to parents in a clear and comprehensible manner, while parents often lack sufficient understanding of the educational process (Epstein, 2018; Hornby, 2011). This collaboration not only supports the student's academic performance but also plays a crucial role in developing social skills and enhancing participation in community life. In the current study, special education teachers reported that parents often remain unresponsive to the information and requests for collaboration that are conveyed to them. In contrast, no such concern was explicitly raised by the parents. This discrepancy highlights the need for a more in-depth investigation into the underlying reasons behind the parents' silence and lack of engagement.

The second major issue pertains to the inconsistency between the priorities and goals identified by teachers and parents for the child. These differences in expectations can lead to communication difficulties and disruptions in collaboration (Turnbull et al., 2015). While teachers tend to prioritize academic development, parents often focus on areas such as daily living skills, social relationships, and the acquisition of independence (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Hornby, 2011; Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Harry (2008) similarly notes that parents usually regard independent living skills as a primary goal for their children, whereas teachers place greater emphasis on academic achievements. Such discrepancies in priorities complicate joint decision-making processes and may hinder the child's holistic development.

Another significant concern raised by teachers is the low level of parental involvement in educational programs. Factors such as heavy workloads, economic constraints, and lack of

motivation often prevent families from contributing effectively to the educational process (Turnbull et al., 2015). In this study, teachers reported that many parents lack a sufficient understanding of their children's characteristics and needs and, as a result, fail to implement recommended practices at home. Conversely, parents stated that despite collaborating with teachers, they had not observed significant behavioral improvements in their children. Furthermore, parents criticized some teachers for lacking patience and a positive attitude during individual meetings, as well as for showing insufficient initiative in adopting new educational approaches. These findings indicate that teachers and parents hold differing perspectives on collaboration, with each party approaching the process with distinct expectations.

Strategies Used by Special Education Teachers and Parents to Address Challenges in Collaboration

Maintaining a healthy teacher-parent collaboration within special education institutions and effectively addressing the challenges encountered in this process necessitates the development of strategic interventions that involve both parties. Notably, regular meetings, individual consultations, and the establishment of structured communication platforms are among the fundamental components that enhance the effectiveness of such collaboration (Epstein, 2018). Continuous and systematically maintained communication channels can facilitate the flow of information between teachers and parents, thereby improving the overall quality of the collaborative process.

In this study, it was found that special education teachers frequently sent reminders to parents, shared example activity videos, and requested video recordings of activities conducted at home. These strategies aimed to reinforce the connection between school-based educational efforts and home-based educational efforts. However, observations indicate that many parents prefer to change their child's school rather than actively engage in resolving the issues they encounter. Of the ten parents who participated in the study, only two demonstrated proactive behaviors including conducting research, developing new approaches, and sharing their findings with teachers to become more involved in the process. This situation suggests a lack of awareness among parents regarding the potential developmental benefits of a well-structured partnership between teachers and parents. It also highlights a broader issue: the collaborative framework has not been effectively constructed or internalized by either party.

To strengthen collaboration, several strategic recommendations can be made. These include establishing regular, open, and trust-based communication between teachers and parents, jointly determining educational goals and instructional methods, implementing necessary support programs, and organizing seminars or workshops that involve both parties. Additionally, effective use of digital communication tools, enhancing the digital literacy of both teachers and parents and maintaining regular monitoring of the educational process are crucial practices that can contribute positively to collaboration (Kulak, 2020; Williamson & Hogan, 2020).

Within this framework, the active and informed participation of teachers and parents emerges as a core dynamic in supporting student development. Furthermore, accurately identifying and effectively utilizing resources that can support children's educational and social growth is another important step toward resolving collaboration-related challenges. Especially through partnerships with local governments, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector,

diversifying and improving access to such resources will enhance the practical implementation of inclusive education principles (Harry & Klingner, 2006).

Recommendations

Recommendations for parents:

- Establishing platforms where parents of children with special needs can receive emotional and social support is a critical component in strengthening teacher-parent collaboration. These mechanisms help reduce feelings of isolation among parents and enhance a sense of social solidarity.
- Parents need to be well informed about their children's educational journey and take an active role in implementing IEPs. It is recommended that they maintain regular communication with teachers, stay updated on their child's development, and seek guidance on strategies applicable in the home environment.
- Parents should be encouraged to join support groups where they can share experiences. Such groups not only help them cope with challenges but also contribute positively to the collaboration process with educators.

Recommendations for teachers:

- Participation in educational programs such as seminars, workshops, and counseling services should be encouraged to increase parents' knowledge of the special education process. These opportunities enable parents to gain a deeper understanding of their children's unique needs and become more actively engaged in the educational process.
- Teachers should adopt a clear, empathetic, and sensitive communication approach to understand better families' needs and the special requirements of their children. Such an approach helps parents feel understood and valued.
- Teachers must receive in-service training that focuses on enhancing practical communication skills and increasing awareness of strategies that promote parental involvement. These trainings directly improve the quality of collaboration processes.
- Teachers are encouraged to use technology to maintain active and continuous communication with parents. By sharing information through digital platforms and providing timely responses to parents' questions, families feel supported throughout the educational process.
- To alleviate the emotional burdens that teachers may face, it is essential to establish effective psychosocial support systems. These support mechanisms help teachers maintain their professional motivation and contribute effectively without experiencing burnout.
- Holding regular meetings with parents, sharing IEPs, and providing transparent feedback on students' developmental progress are among the core practices that strengthen teacher-parent collaboration.

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