

ERD 2017
Education, Reflection, Development, Fifth Edition

**DIFFERENT DISABILITIES, DIFFERENT ATTITUDES TOWARD
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL IN ISRAELI
TEACHERS**

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Abstract

There are few investigations of the involvement of parents of children with special needs (SN) in relation to the various disabilities of the children and their potential effect on teachers' attitudes towards the parental involvement (PI) in school and in the inclusion process. In a research conducted among 138 Israeli special and regular education teachers involved in the education of children with three types of disability (complex disabilities, learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders and behavioral problems) it was found that teachers of pupils with complex disabilities (such as autism or motor disabilities) have more favorable attitudes toward PI in school than teachers of children with other types of disabilities. This difference was significant at level of attitudes toward parental involvement in decision-making in general and decision making regarding the individual educational programs (IEP) for SN children in particular. Significant differences were also found between the attitudes of teachers of pupils with behavioral problems to the other teachers regarding the contribution of PI to the SN pupil and its progress in school. The findings are discussed in the light of promoting school-parents' partnerships in Israel and in other countries.

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Keywords: Teachers' attitudes, children with special needs, parental involvement, type of disability.



1. Introduction

Parental involvement (PI) in the education and inclusion of their children with disabilities in early childhood has been widely researched in the last five decades. Research has examined PI in the light of various family related approaches such as the family-centered approach and with reference to different professionals-parents' partnership models (Bailey et al., 1991; Crais et al., 2006; Dunst, 2002; Ingber & Dromi, 2010; King et al., 2003; Summers et al., 2005). In the recent years, an increased level of PI in the education of their children has been reported in different societies. Hence, several studies examining the aspects of PI in children's education and the phenomenon of school-family partnership exist (Addi-Racah & Ainhoren, 2009; De Bruïne et al., 2014; Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012; McAnnof-Gumbs, 2006; Pereira & Serrano, 2014; Shamay, 2008; Sauto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

The current study is part of a wider research that examined Israeli teachers' attitudes regarding the involvement of parents of pupils with SN in the inclusion process. The study examined these attitudes towards parental involvement in areas that were found to be significant in the involvement of parents with SN children: communication, decision-making and their attitudes towards the contribution of parental involvement. The results were discussed in relation with an educational reform that is implemented in part of the Israeli education system (Dorner, 2009). One of the independent variables in the research was the type of disability of pupils taught by the participating teachers in relation to their attitudes towards PI. This article presents the results regarding this particular variable.

1.1. Involvement of Parents of Children with SN

While in regular education the concept, PI usually describes cooperation between school and family, in the field of special education, the family-school cooperation is known as "family school partnership" (Burke, 2012). In a model of cooperation between families and schools (Epstein, 2011) the relationship between parents and school was rated according to six levels of PI that encourage children's development and academic success: parenting, communicating, volunteering, extending learning at home, decision-making and collaboration with family (Epstein et al., 2009; Sakamoto, 2017). Turnbull et al. (2015) tried to adapt Epstein's model (2001) to special education and reached the conclusion that the partnership in special education differs from that in Epstein's original model (2009), which focused on communication and decision-making, in the following dimensions:

(1) Communicating: Communication in PI in general and of parents of children with SN in particular is a much researched and discussed topic. Communication has been often defined as part of the components and dimensions that should exist in the partnerships between families and professionals in addition to professional skills respect, commitment, equality and trust (Blue-Banning et al, 2004; Turnbull et al., 2009; White & lever, 2017). The concept communication includes clear empathetic, respectful and ongoing discourse to pass on information relevant to families for decision-making purposes (Epstein, 2011; Francis et al., 2016; Haines et al., 2015; Kyzar et al., 2012; Murray et al., 2007; Murray & Mereoiu, 2015; Turnbull et al., 2015). Teachers usually understand that fluent and open communication with parents is a way of preventing conflicts with parents and a mean of bridging between home and school (Addi-Racah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008; Haines et al., 2015). Šukys et al., (2015) found that PI increases when communication and interaction with teachers is high, and that parents feel equal partners when there is optimal communication

with the school and vice versa. Families that were satisfied with their partnership with school communicated with the school staff and participated more in school activities (Turnbull et al., 2009; Šukys, Dumčienė, & Lapėnienė, 2015).

(2) Decision-making: The right of parents and family to choose and influence on behalf of their children with SN is part of the family-centered approach. Supporting parents and their choices and accompanying them in the decision-making process open the door to partnership with professionals, increase parents' ability to make informed decisions and empower them (Bailey et al., 2004; Murray et al., 2007). Despite the above-mentioned aspects, research has found that often parents of children with SN tend to be more involved in transmitting and receiving information about their children and less in decision-making. Razalli et al. (2015) examined the process of constructing IEP from the perspective of Epstein's six PI levels. It was found that in all levels examined scores for the extent of PI were high, except the level of decision-making, which received a score that was much lower than the other levels (ibid). In contrast, Lindsay et al. (2016) found that most parents were satisfied with their involvement in decision-making processes with regard to their children's entitlement to receive special education services. It appears that PI differs from case to case and from one disability to another.

1.2. Involvement of Parents of Children with Behaviour Problems

The contribution of the educational involvement of parents of children with behaviour problems has been widely researched (Avvisati et al., 2014; Badri et al., 2014; Dunlap & Fox, 2007; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Schechtman & Busharian, 2015). Parents often expect teachers to deal with these problems as professionals, while teachers, who have sometimes to deal with overpopulated classes, expect parents to educate their children and support them. These gaps in expectations are often the reason for tension between school and family, particularly where cooperation is necessary and supported by the legislation (Schechtman & Busharian, 2015). There are evidences that PI and cooperation between schools and families significantly affect the reduction of unwanted and challenging behaviours (Badri et al., 2014). Intervention programs for pupils with behavior problems are more effective and stable if they are planned and implemented by people close to pupils and in daily contact with them, i.e. family and educational staff (Dunlap & Fox, 2007). In addition, a reverse link was found between the level of PI and behavior problems. Parents of pupils with behavior problems often avoid being involved in school. Studies have found a negative correlation between behavioral problems and parents' motivation to be involved (Hornby, 2011; Dunlap & Fox, 2007).

1.3. Involvement of Parents of children with Complex Disabilities

In terms of parental involvement, raising a child with autism and other complex disabilities appears to be different in many aspects compared to raising children with learning or behaviour disorders. Studies that examined the difficulties found high stress levels, financial difficulties, social difficulties for the entire family, coping with complex behavior difficulties and more (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013; Webster et al., 2017). Parents of pupils with complex disabilities, and particularly autism, are interested in being involved in decision-making and regularly demand it (Twomey & Shevlin, 2016; Webster et al., 2017). Most difficulties are found around PI in regards to the individual educational plan (IEP) and placement in

appropriate educational frameworks. In practice, parents tend to be more involved both at a local level regarding their own children and on a national level to promote the rights of children with SN in contrast to parents of children with high incidence (Banerjee et al., 2016; Newman, Cameto & Hernandez, 2006).

1.4. Dorner Reform in Israel

The Dorner reform combines two issues: involvement of parents of SN children and the inclusion of pupils with SN. This reform, whose implementation began in parts of the state of Israel (4 cities), placed parents of SN children on to the public agenda (Dorner, 2009). According to the reform, parents are given the right to decide solely on the type of educational framework that they consider it is appropriate for their children even if it is against the recommendations of professionals. In other words, the reform in fact emphasizes that decision-making is part of PI and gives it practical expression. This reform is perceived as a significant revolution for teachers and educational professionals in Israel to go through. As a result, teachers have to change their role from experts and sole deciders to advisors accompanying parents and helping them to make decisions. For the reform to succeed, one must guarantee implementing teachers' commitment to the reform in practice.

2. Problem Statement

Benefits of cooperation between parents and school staff in general and parents of SN children in particular seem allegedly obvious, but apparently, the implementation of this concept in day-to-day life is rather complex (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Yotyodying & Wild, 2016). Different studies have found that the type of disability is a factor that influences the nature of PI in the education of their children and the level of their involvement (Hebel, 2014; Strauss et al., 2015; Hornby, 2011; Dunlap & Fox, 2007; Webster, Cumming & Rowland, 2017; Yotyodying & Wild, 2016). It has also impact on the inclusion of SN children in regular education (Marom et. al., 2006; Milstein & Rivkin. 2013) and on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion (Talmor, 2007). Nevertheless, no studies were found which examined the influence of the type of disability on teachers' attitudes towards PI in inclusion. Examination of the influence of type of disability on teachers' attitudes towards PI will allow for profound understanding of the difficulties and barriers that this partnership may generate, and to construct suitable programs that will encourage the relationship between school and parents.

3. Research Questions

Are there differences between Israeli teachers' attitudes toward PI in relation to three types of disabilities of children: (1) complex disabilities, (2) behavioral problems, and (3) learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine whether the type of disability of SN pupils is associated with the Israeli teachers' attitudes toward PI in School.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Participants

The study was conducted on a number of 138 teachers in Israel (68 special education teachers and 70 regular education teachers) who teach pupils with SN in a regular class or in a special education class in regular schools. The participants were divided into three groups according to the type of disability: complex disabilities, behavioral problems and learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders (Table 01).

Table 01. Descriptive statistics of the Israeli teachers included in the research.

Variable	Categories	No.	Percent
Type of Class	Regular Classes	70	50.7
	Special Classes	68	49.3
Age group	Elementary school	100	72.5
	Secondary school	38	27.5
Type of disability the teachers have experience with	Complex disabilities	36	26.1
	Behavior problems	37	26.8
	Learning difficulties and attention deficit disorders	65	47.1

5.2. Research Tools

A valid and reliable Teachers' Attitudes toward PI Questionnaire (TAPIQ) was developed for the research and consisted of two significant areas for SN pupil's parents' involvement: communication and involvement in decision-making. Teachers' attitudes towards the contribution of PI were also examined. TAPIQ consists of 33 items covering three main dimensions (see Table 02). The questionnaire had an Alfa Cronbach value of 0.865. The items were constructed on a 4-points Likert Scale (4- Strongly agree, 3- agree, 2- disagree and 1- strongly disagree).

Table 02. The structure of TAPIQ (Teachers' Attitudes toward PI Questionnaire)

Topics	Dimensions	No of items	
Teachers' attitudes towards the implications and contributions of parental involvement	• Effect of PI on teachers' sense of self-efficacy	4	16
	• Effect of PI on school and other pupils who do not have SN	4	
	• Effect of PI on the level of investment and training teachers need	4	
	• Effect of PI on pupils with SN in different areas	4	
Teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement and communications	• Type of information passed from school to parents and vice versa	2	8
	• Communication frequency and sequence between school and parents and vice versa	3	
	• Professional language clarity in dialogue with parents	3	
Teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in decision-making	• Taking decisions with regard to choosing the type of education framework in which SN pupils will learn	3	9
	• Taking decisions with regard to building individualized education program for SN pupils	6	

* PI = Parental involvement, SN= Special needs

6. Findings

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyse teachers' attitudes towards PI in relation to the disability type of children they taught, followed by a ranking analysis based on a post-hoc pairwise analysis with Bonferroni correction. The post-hoc analysis provided a follow up ranking across the three groups to determine the larger versus smaller group means. Ranking is provided by small Latin letters for which "a" represents the smaller group and on (see Table 03).

Table 03. Comparison of teachers' attitudes towards PI between types of disabilities (means, standard deviations and F test values)

	Complex disabilities (n=36)		Behavior problems (n=37)		Learning + attention deficit disorders (n=65)		F	η_p^2
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Teachers' attitudes towards the implications and contributions of PI	3.08	0.30	3.16	0.36	3.04	0.34	1.60	.02
Teachers' attitudes towards PI and communications	3.12	0.39	3.19	0.36	3.15	0.30	0.33	.01
Teachers' attitudes towards PI in decision-making	2.78 ^b	0.44	2.48 ^a	0.50	2.50 ^a	0.45	5.13**	.07
Effect of PI on teachers' sense of self-efficacy	3.19	0.45	3.20	0.51	3.07	0.56	1.07	.02
Effect of PI on school and other pupils who do not have SN	3.06	0.45	3.13	0.52	2.97	0.42	1.60	.02
Effect of PI on the level of investment and training teachers need	3.12	0.44	3.05	0.44	3.16	0.45	0.79	.01
Effect of PI on pupils with SN in different areas	2.97 ^a	0.35	3.20 ^b	0.41	3.00 ^a	0.42	3.54*	.03
Type of information passed from school to parents and vice versa	3.32	0.48	3.46	0.45	3.42	0.50	0.85	.01
Communication frequency and sequence between school and parents and vice versa	2.94	0.52	2.89	0.57	2.87	0.41	0.20	.003
Professional language clarity in dialogue with parents	3.18	0.44	3.30	0.46	3.24	0.46	0.65	.01
Taking decisions with regard to choosing the type of education framework in which SN pupils learn	2.18	0.51	2.04	0.48	2.15	0.54	0.83	.01
Taking decisions with regard to building IEP for SN pupils	3.00 ^b	0.51	2.65 ^a	0.61	2.64 ^a	0.51	6.08**	.08

*p<.05. **p<.01. PI = parental involvement; SN = special needs; IEP = individualized education program;

6.1. Attitudes towards PI in decision-making

The values on this item ($F=5.13$, $p<.01$, Table 3) revealed that both the behavioral and the learning problem groups had lower mean values compared to the complex disability group of teachers. This indicates that the Israeli teachers who were teaching pupils with complex disabilities agreed more that parents should be involved in the decision-making process in general. Within this topic, similar differences were also found in the following dimensions: "*Involvement in taking decisions with regard to building individualized education program for SN pupils*" ($F=6.08$, $p<.01$, Table 3). This might indicate that teachers of pupils with complex disabilities agreed more towards PI in building Individualized Education Program compared to the teachers of children with the other two categories of disabilities.

6.2. Effect of PI on pupils with SN in different area

Differences were recorded between the categories of disabilities of the children ($F=3.54$, $p<.05$, Table 3). The behavioural problem group had the higher mean value (the letter "b"), while complex and learning problem groups had lower mean (both share the letter "a"). In other words, according to teachers, the effect of PI on pupils with SN themselves is higher when pupils have behavioural problems than other disabilities.

Although no significant differences were found in two measurements of the attitudes toward PI in relation to the types of disabilities, the similar value levels between them (high or low values) indicate a certain trend, as it follows (Table 3): (a) "*Taking decisions with regard to choosing the type of education framework in which SN pupils learn*" The values on this item revealed that all the disabilities groups had low mean values (mean ≤ 2.18). This might indicate that the Israeli teachers (regardless of the type of disabilities they teach) think that decision-making in regard of choosing the type of framework PI in the process is not obvious, and that PI should not include choosing the type of framework; (b) On the other hand, the values on item "*Type of information passed from school to parents and vice versa*" revealed that all the disabilities groups had high mean values (mean ≥ 3.32). This might indicate that teachers in general are aware to the significance of information passing from school to parents and vice versa and to their responsibility to do it.

7. Conclusion

In this study, the connection between types of pupils' disabilities and Israeli teachers' attitudes toward parental involvement (PI) was examined. The research examined three types of disability: behavioral problems, learning and attention deficit disorders and complex disabilities. The results revealed that, in our sample, Israeli teachers teaching pupils with complex disabilities (e.g. autism spectrum disorders) expressed more favourable attitudes toward PI in decision-making in general and decisions about IEP in particular compared to behavioural problems and learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders.

Studies have found the complexity level of disability is a factor that can influence parents of children with disabilities to be involved and fight for their children's rights to receive support and adjusted responses to the type of disability more than other disabilities (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). It was also found that parents of pupils with complex disabilities, and particularly autism, are interested in being involved in educational decision-making and regularly demand it. Studies have also shown that in practice, these parents are aware to their rights and are indeed more involved regarding their children (Banerjee et al.,

2016; Newman, Cameto & Hernandez, 2006). These studies strengthen the research findings by providing evidence that attitudes of teachers that teach children with SN with complex disabilities towards PI in decision-making do not show a gap between parents and school and do not contradict the parents' motivation and desire to be involved in this area.

Another aspect of these differences between the teachers' attitudes in relation to disabilities could be the influence of the Dorner Reform implemented in Israel. The Dorner Committee was established, *inter alia*, to anchor the rights of SN pupils in inclusion and equate the support given to pupils receive in the special education frameworks (Dorner, 2009). In Israel, most pupils with learning disabilities and those with behavioral problems are already study in a full inclusion framework (Weissblei, 2015) and most discussions in the Dorner Committee addressed the groups of pupils with complex disabilities (Dorner, 2009). Although the report's recommendations have not been yet implemented fully in Israel (only in four local authorities), the Special Education Department's instructions to Regional Inspectorate and MATYA Directors to take steps to promote dialogue with parents, influenced, in the researcher's opinion, on teams in the field. The discourse today in Israel is more and more oriented toward the parents' right to take part in educational decision-making and encouraging school-parents partnership.

Another possible explanation of the differences in the attitudes of Israeli teachers teaching pupils with complex disabilities might be related to the relatively high resources given to this population in recent years in Israel. Hence, in the 2005 as part of the Inclusion Law 2002, it was decided to allocate additional resources to various populations and sectors in Israel including a defined differential budget for complex populations such as: pupils with medium retardation, pupils with sight disabilities, cerebral palsy, autism (Naon, Milstein & Marom, 2012, Weissblei, 2015). Adding these resources led to the institutionalization of work processes for these populations and possibilities to deepen the connection between various school professionals and parents.

The results also revealed that the attitudes of Israeli teachers who taught pupils with behavioral problems were more favourable than those who taught pupils with other disabilities with regard to the contribution of PI and its effects on children with SN. The research findings reaffirm findings of other studies (Avvisati et al., 2014; Badri et al., 2014; Dunlap & Fox, 2007; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Schechtman & Busharian, 2015), and testify that the contribution of involvement of parents of pupils with SN is significant and most important in reducing pupils' behavior problem and successful implementation of various intervention programs. These results point toward the importance of PI for those pupils specifically and the need to bring parents closer and turn them into partners of the educational system.

In conclusion, the study indicates differences in the attitudes of teachers towards parental involvement in relation to the types of disabilities of the children (e.g. complex disabilities), . These differences might derive from changes involved in bringing up children with different needs and their effect on parents' stress levels and the motives for involvement, from the difference in resources invested in each type of disability and the Department of Special Education's policy aimed at involving parents. Also, the similarities revealed by the study between the attitudes of the Israeli teachers in relation to parental involvement in the inclusion of children with specific types of disabilities can offer a significant informational contribution to the agents responsible with the Dorner reform implementation in Israel. These

research findings can shed light on and contribute to understanding barriers and difficulties which are quite common in parents-school partnership and to finding ways to encourage this partnership.

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