

# Parent's Involvement in the Education of their Children with Disabilities in Primary Schools of Bahir Dar City, Ethiopia: Voices of Parents

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent of parents' involvement in the education of children with disabilities and the role of parent's socio-economic factors in their involvement in primary schools of Bahir Dar city. Qualitative research was carried out in the present study using the descriptive survey design to answer the research question. Data were collected using a questionnaire designed to measure six dimensions of parents' involvement in education (parenting, communicating, learning at home, volunteering, decision making, and collaborating with the community) from 143 parents selected by means of a simple random sampling technique. Five primary schools were sampled for the present study. The data obtained were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics such as one-way MANOVA. The results indicated that involvement in 'parenting' is more prevalent than among dimensions of parental involvement in education. Parents revealed a below-expected level of involvement in communicating, learning at home, volunteering.

**Keywords:** Children with disabilities; Ethiopia; Parent; Parents' Involvement; Socio-Economic factors

## INTRODUCTION

The involvement of parents denotes the multidimensional nature of parents' activities that affects the learning and development of children with diverse abilities (Epstein, 2009). Parents' involvement (PI) as explained by Epstein (2001), Ngwenya (2010), and Hornby (2011) refers to education-related activities that parents perform both at home and school that impact the success of children with diverse needs. Home-based parental involvement activities may consist of helping children with homework, encouragement, discussions with children concerning school activities, reading stories at home, creating a quiet home environment for learning, providing the necessary learning materials and proper care at home. On the other hand, school-based involvement requires parents to physically engage in activities at school, such as volunteering, participating in field trips, participating in conferences, discussions with teachers and school principals, and participating in the decision-making process (Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005; Ngwenya, 2010; Ibrahim, 2012).

Research shows that involving parents in education may go a long way towards the early identification of children with disabilities (CWDs) and special educational needs (SENs) that lead to a successful implementation of intervention strategies in assisting children's education (Vanderpuye, 2013; Afolabi, 2014). While parental involvement benefits all students academically, those with disabilities often require a greater degree of parental involvement than their peers without disabilities in order to receive the same level of instruction as the general student population, as they often face multifaceted challenges requiring special attention from their families (Leyser & Kirk, 2004). More specifically, research on special needs and inclusive education revealed that active participation of parents in their children's education improves students' school attendance, social skill, and academic success (Lalvani, 2015). Thus, parents are the most essential educators of their children as they provide a multitude of experiences that encourage learning for all kinds of learners (Fan & Chen, 2001; Washington, 2011).

In order to understand PI in education, several theoretical frameworks have been developed. Amongst them, Epstein's (2001) framework is the most prominent in the field (Tekin, 2011). It is the most commonly used, tested, and accepted framework which suggests six PI obligations, all of equal importance for children with different capabilities. These obligations are: (1) parenting - which includes all of the activities that parents engage in while

supporting children's education to meet the basic needs; (2) communicating - which implies a frequent two-way communication between parents and teachers; (3) volunteering - refers to the participation of parents voluntarily in the school so as to help teachers as assistants; (4) learning at home - which refers to parents' participation in children's learning at home such as helping in and supervising homework and other curriculum-related activities; (5) decision-making - refers to parents' involvement in school decisions activities through school committees and participating in parent-student-teacher association; and (6) collaborating with the community - refers to parents networking with each other and community stakeholders to find resources.

Despite the general recognition of the value of PI in the education of children with and without disabilities, there are several factors that contribute to the parents' decision to participate in their children's education. These studies have shown that lack of parental involvement in the education of their children at home and school mostly stems from the socio-economic status of the family including income, education level, and occupational status (Fan and Chen, 2001; Georgiou, 2007; Sanders, 2008). These family characteristics could affect the psycho-educational development of children with and without disabilities, and they influence a parent's decision to become involved in their children's learning (Heymann & Earle, 2000). For example, parents with a higher socioeconomic status attend to school children's activities more actively than those with a low socioeconomic status.

As outlined in the School Improvement Program (SIP), the government of Ethiopia recognizes that learners with disabilities require extra support from their parents who can be potential partners in designing and implementing educational programs for their children's success in education (Ministry of Education, 2012). In the author's first experience as an Itinerant Teacher at primary schools for more than five years, he observed that collaboration between the schools and parents in the education of children with disabilities appears to be unsatisfactory. It was not unusual to hear parents blaming the school for not involving them and the schools blaming parents for not getting involved with the school, and for not attending meetings to which they are invited. Hence, exploring the existing parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities was deemed worthwhile.

As far as parents' involvement research is concerned, there is a surplus of literature documenting parental involvement and academic achievement of the general student population using correlational design. The studies

have examined the association between parental involvement practices and children's academic achievements. These correlational studies found that parental involvement practice positively correlated with academic achievement of the general student population. That is, children whose parents were involved in their learning on a regular basis tended to demonstrate higher learning achievements and better attendance at school (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Washington, 2011; Ibrahim, 2012; Mauka, 2015; 2016).

Moreover, studies have been also conducted on the extent of parents' involvement in children's education across the globe since the involvement of parents in education is believed to be one of the most important factors of academic success. Findings in USA elementary schools reported that the majority of parents were participating in their children's education regularly in specific activities that directly impact students' achievements (Che, 2010; Flemmings, 2013; Peiffer, 2015; Thornton, 2015). Consistently, a study conducted in the United Kingdom by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) reported that the majority of parents of the general student population work with teachers to resolve any issues or differences that come with learning. Research on the parental involvement practices in education has produced mixed results, with some results indicating that the majority of parents were not involved in their children's learning (Williams, Williams & Ullman, 2002; Monadjem, 2003). These studies focused mainly on parents of children without disabilities, excluding parents of children with disabilities.

Although many factors affecting the involvement of parents in their children's education exist, the role played by parent's socio-economic factors had a relatively stronger impact on their involvement than other factors (Maalouf & Moushaghayan, 2013). International studies carried out on roles of socio-economic factors on PI and results produced mixed findings (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). For instance, Toldson and Lemmons (2013) found that income and educational level were positively associated with PI. However, in other studies, while a negative correlation was observed between education and PI (e.g., Abel, 2012), no correlation between income and PI has been found, (e.g., Awino, 2014) in regards to the general student population. Also, while some studies have found parents' occupation status to be insignificant, others have found it to play a significant role (Afolabi, 2015). Although parents' socio-economic factors play a role in determining the level of PI in the education of the general student population, what has been neglected is how these factors determine the level

of parents' involvement in the education of children with disabilities in particular.

Research on the involvement of parents in the education of children with disabilities is surprisingly very scant, given the fact that children with disabilities need more parental involvement in their education, which is mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. Much of the research that has been conducted in this area focused on the benefits of parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities (Afolabi, 2014); and the correlation between parental involvement practices and psycho-educational development of children with disabilities. Mostly the studies focused on examining the relation between PI and achievement of children with disabilities. For example; Balli (2016) and Monika (2017) in regular schools of Albania, El Shourbagi (2017) in Omani regular schools of Botswana studied the involvement of parents in inclusive schools. The results indicated that the involvement of parents plays a pivotal role in the psycho-educational development of children with disabilities. Similarly, the relationship between parental involvement and mathematics achievements for students with visual impairments was studied and results showed that PI and mathematical achievement was positively related (McDonnall, Cavanaugh & Giesen, 2012). The studies reviewed did not focus on how and to what extent parents were involved in the education of children with disabilities. There is therefore a call to study the role played by parents of children with disabilities.

Locally, Girma (2017) conducted his PhD dissertation on experiences of parental involvement in the management of primary schools in the Oromiya Region, Ethiopia. The focus was on parents' participation in school management and suggested that a low level of parental involvement in the management of schools was present. In conclusion, a major gap in PI literature has been the lack of research conducted on the education of children with disabilities despite the fact that children with disabilities require more parental involvement in their education. Besides, in the author's opinion, it also appears that none of the above studies conducted in Ethiopia were focusing on the extent of parents' involvement practice and socio-economic variations on their involvement. Thus, the present research aims to address the gap stated above in the literature. As a guide to the study, the researcher formulated the following research questions: to what extent do parents of children with disabilities are involved in their children's education? Does parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities vary by socio-economic factors (education, income, and occupational status)?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

To answer the research questions, a quantitative research approach with a descriptive survey design was employed. This is because descriptive survey design is very important and most commonly used type of quantitative research design to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena and to describe „what exists” with respect to variables or conditions in a situation such as the extent of parents' involvement in the education of children with disabilities (Burns & Grove, 2001).

### Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The participants of the study were selected from five government primary schools located in Bahir Dar city administration which had considerable experience in practicing inclusive education for children with different disabilities. In the five primary schools, there were 236 students with disabilities with three categories (deaf, blind, and intellectually disabled) in which the researcher assumed to have a minimum of 236 parents based on the number of students enrolled. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2004) suggest that with a population of approximately 250, the ideal sample size is 151 which can be considered as representative of the population at the confidence level of 95%. Parents with more than one child with disabilities in the school were substituted after having been selected once. Therefore, the study used a proportionate stratified sampling technique to categorize parent participants into three strata. Then, using a simple random sampling technique 151 parents were selected and 143 of them were properly returned.

### Methods of Data Collection

To answer the research questions of the study, a family involvement questionnaire was used to gather data from parents of children with disabilities. The family involvement questionnaire is a multidimensional measure of involvement that identifies six family involvement dimensions. The instrument was adapted from an existing parental involvement survey questionnaire designed by Grover (2015) with the permission to use it. The questionnaire consists of 40 items (parenting with 8 items, communicating with 10 items, volunteering with 6 items, learning at home with 6 items, decision making with 5 items, and collaborating with 5 items), where parents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they participated in various activities with a four-point Likert scale format of 4 = always, 3 = usually, 2 = sometimes and 1 = rarely. In addition, the survey includes:

socio-economic information (e.g., parents' education level, monthly income, and occupation).

### Method of Data Analysis

As the main objective of this study was to assess the extent of parents' involvement in the education of their children with disabilities and the role of socio-economic factors on parents' involvement, descriptive statistics (mean and SD) and inferential statistics such as a one-sample t-test, one-way MANOVA, and Pearson product moment correlation were used. One-way MANOVA was used to identify differences in parents' involvement based on their occupational type and educational level. Pearson product moment was used to measure the relationship between parents' involvement and their income. A single sample t-test was also used to compare the population mean and sample mean scores of each dimension of parental involvement in the education of their children with disabilities.

## RESULTS

### The Extent of Parents' Involvement in the Education of their Children

The frequency of parent's participation in a number of involvement activities in their children's education was assessed. The main focus was the six dimensions of parental involvement in education (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community).

### The Involvement of Parents in Parenting Activities

Parents were asked to respond to statements concerning their involvement in parenting. The mean and SD of their responses have been presented in descending order and a one-sample t-test was computed (see Table 1)

From the analysis, the total item mean score ranges from between the highest mean score of ( $M=2.79$ ) to the lowest mean score ( $M= 2.22$ ). The results reported parents of children with disabilities were engaged in a number of activities as far as their involvement in their children's education was concerned. The majority of the parents report that they took part in monitoring where their children spent time outside school; this had a high mean score of ( $M=2.79$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ) and they provide their children learning resource materials ( $M=2.71$ ,  $SD=0.98$ ) respectively. Table 1 further showed that a number of the activities recorded lower parental involvement. For instance, parents were not frequently involved in monitoring their children's TV watching at home ( $M=2.21$ ,  $SD=0.96$ ) and they did

Table 1 **Items and Mean Scores of Parents' involvement in parenting activities**

ITEMS	N	Mean	SD
I monitor the way my child/ children spends his/her time outside of school.	143	2.79	.98
As a parent, I make available/provide learning resource materials such as pens, pencils, Braille and sign language books, calculators, and others.	143	2.71	.97
I strictly monitor my child's/ children's relationship with his/her peer groups reasonably.	143	2.59	1.09
I send my child/children to school clean and well-fed.	143	2.57	.97
I keep a regular morning and bedtime schedule for my child	143	2.54	1.08
I maintain clear rules at home that my child should obey.	143	2.51	1.02
As a parent, I establish age and grade-appropriate home conditions that support my child's learning	143	2.34	.91
I limit my child's/ children's TV watching at home.	143	2.22	.96

Average rating of all items= 2.29

not establish age and grade-appropriate home conditions ( $M=2.34$ ,  $SD=0.91$ ).

Further examination was computed using a one-sample t-test to determine if a significant difference evident between parenting scores from a sample and the general population. The test revealed that the observed mean of parenting score of the sample ( $M= 20.28$ ,  $SD= 5.89$ ) was significantly greater than the test value or population mean of the score ( $M=16$ ),  $t(142) = 8.70$ ,  $p<.05$  at alpha .05. Parents were more involved in parenting because in six out of eight activities, the parents mean shows that the majority of the parents followed the theme frequently.

### The Involvement of Parents in Communicating Activities

The parents were also asked to respond to a set of items concerning parents' involvement in communicating (see Table 2)

It is revealed in Table 2 that an overall mean rating of 2.29 was achieved which is described as "sometimes". The total item mean score ranges from between the highest mean score ( $M=2.58$ ) to the lowest mean score ( $M= 2.09$ ). Most parents participated in monitoring messages which the teachers sent them, ( $M=2.58$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ) which was greater than the total mean of communicating items. Indeed, among the 10 items of communicating sub-scale, only follow up on messages which the teachers send to parents was observed above the expected mean value. The aggregate mean showed a low level of parents' involvement in the communicating dimension.

In addition, a one-sample t-test was performed to see if the mean score of the sample result ( $M= 22.89$ ,  $SD= 7.48$ ) is significantly different from a test value of 25, which yielded a significant difference between the scores. That is, the mean communicating score of parents was significantly

Table 2 **Items and Mean Scores of Parents' involvement in communicating activities**

ITEMS	N	MEAN	SD
I follow up on messages which the teacher sends me about my children or the school.	143	2.58	1.02
I talk to my child's teacher about the classroom rules and regulations.	143	2.34	.93
I talk with my child's teachers or principals about disciplinary problems at school.	143	2.34	.93
I attend conferences with the teachers to talk about my child's learning.	143	2.31	.98
I have a regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, and other communications.	143	2.28	.97
I talk to my child's/children's teacher about his/her daily school routine and class schedule.	143	2.26	.97
I attend sign language, Braille, life skill, and other related training sessions organized by the school.	143	2.24	1.03
I involve myself in an organized, ongoing, and timely way in the planning, review, and improvement of programs for my child's learning.	143	2.24	1.01
I ask the teachers about my child's strengths & weaknesses and talents.	143	2.23	1.07
I contact the teachers and principals to get information concerning my child's learning at school regularly.	143	2.09	0.88

Average rating of all items= 2.43

Table 3 **Items and Mean Scores of Parents' involvement in volunteering activities**

ITEMS	N	MEAN	SD
I participate in fundraising activities voluntarily.	143	2.41	0.89
I volunteer for my children's classroom (in a classroom, materials preparation, etc.).	143	2.31	0.86
I initiate contact with the teachers concerning my children's learning voluntarily.	143	2.25	0.96
I attend extracurricular activities, assemblies, celebrations, and other events voluntarily.	143	2.24	1.07
I talk to teachers to create flexible volunteering and school events schedules.	143	2.22	1.06
I take my child to the library and to other places which help in educating him/her with my initiation.	143	2.08	1.02

Average rating of all items= 2.25

less than the population mean of communicating score,  $t(142) = -3.365$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In sum, the findings revealed that parents did not exhibit an active involvement in communicating sub-scale.

### The Involvement of Parents in Volunteering Activities

To measure the view of parents of children with disabilities on their involvement in volunteering activities to assist their children's education, six items were used. See Table 3

Results in Table 3 showed that the parents report that they were not engaged in all voluntary activities as far as their involvement in their children's education was concerned. Though the table suggested a low level of parental involvement in each item, the mean scores of all items are quite similar to each other (between 2.41 & 2.08) implying that respondents responded to the items in a similar fashion. The mean rating of all items depicted that most parents were not involved frequently in the education of their children with disabilities.

Besides, a one-sample t-test indicated that the calculated mean ( $M=13.40$ ,  $SD= 4.66$ ) of the score is significantly less than the expected mean score ( $M= 15$ ),  $t(142) = -4.091$ ,  $p < .05$  at alpha .05. That means the obtained mean score pertaining to parental involvement in volunteering was significantly less than the expected mean score.

Therefore, it could be concluded that the involvement of parents in the education of their children with disabilities in volunteering activities was low.

### The involvement of Parents in learning at Home Activities

Six items were used to measure parents' views on their involvement in learning at-home activities to support their children's education. See Table 4

As depicted in Table 4, the total item mean score ranges from a maximum of ( $M= 2.62$ ) to a minimum of ( $M=2.08$ ). Two items that generated highly positive responses among the parents perform the activities to assist their children's learning at home respectively were 'I look over and express concern for my children's work which they bring home' ( $M=2.62$ ,  $SD=1.37$ ) and 'I try to help and monitor my children in a positive way with homework and other activities' ( $M=2.60$ ,  $SD= 0.84$ ) that implied that parents participated in these learning at home activities than other activities of learning at home. In contrast, the lowest mean score was observed for the item 'I read with my children on a daily basis' ( $M=2.08$ ,  $SD=1.04$ ), a reply suggesting that majority of parents were not involved in reading with their children regularly. Furthermore, a one-sample t-test indicated that the cal-

Table 4 **Items and Mean Scores of Parents' involvement in learning at-home activities**

ITEMS	N	MEAN	SD
I look over and express concern for my children's school work which they bring home.	143	2.97	0.97
I try to help and monitor my children in a positive way with homework and other activities at home	143	2.60	1.34
I talk to my child about his/her learning at home.	143	2.39	1.01
I support my child in curriculum-related activities and in setting goals at home.	143	2.28	1.08
I bring home learning materials for my child (tapes, videos, books).	143	2.27	1.05
I read with my children on a daily basis at home.	143	2.08	1.04

Average rating of all items= 2.29

Table 5

Items and Mean Scores of Parents' involvement in decision making

ITEMS	N	MEAN	SD
I engaged in deciding matters relating to the discipline of my children.	143	2.31	.97
I participate in revising the school curricula, individual education plan (IEP), and other activities to support my child's learning.	143	2.23	.84
I attend and decide on organized family-school associations at my children's school (e.g., PTA and IEP meetings).	143	2.17	.96
I Involved in decision making in school regarding development projects, fees, and teacher employment/firing.	143	1.90	.99
I have clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, and transitions for the decision making process.	143	1.85	.83

Average rating of all items= 2.09

culated mean ( $M=14.04$ ,  $SD= 3.94$ ) of the score was significantly lower than the expected mean score ( $M=15$ ),  $t(142) = -2.91$ ,  $p < .05$  at alpha .05. Therefore, a low level of involvement was scored in learning at home activities.

### The Involvement of Parents in the Decision Making Process

Parents' involvement in decision making is one of the main categories included in Epstein's typology of PI. See Table 5

As indicated in Table 5 above, the sample mean of scores of each item was below the expected mean of each item scores with an overall mean of ( $M= 2.05$ ). This told us the extent of parent's involvement in the education of children with disabilities was low. Furthermore, to determine the level of parental involvement in the decision making dimension, a one-sample t-test was performed to see if there is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of a population mean ( $M=12.5$ ) and the calculated mean score ( $M=10.5$ ),  $t(142) = -6.707$ ,  $p < .05$  at alpha .05. Thus, the obtained mean score pertaining to PI in learning at home was significantly lower than the test value. This suggested that the level of parents' involvement in decision making was below the average score of the population.

### The Involvement of Parents in Collaborating with Communities

Six items with four response scales were used to measure parents' views on their involvement in collaborating with community activities to support their children's education. See Table 6

As depicted in Table 6, the mean scores of all items are closely similar to each other (between 2.36 & 2.16) implying that parent participants responded to the items in a similar manner in which parents' view on their involvement in collaboration in the community activities is not that much varied. In addition, the scores of each item are below the expected mean of each of the items that indicated parents of children with disabilities were not in a position to become involved in collaborating with the community.

Furthermore, to determine the level of parents' involvement in the area of collaborating with the community, the computed one-sample t-test yielded a significant difference which was observed between the mean score of the sample ( $M= 11.44$ ,  $SD= 4.1$ ) and the mean score of the population ( $12.5$ ),  $t(142) = -2.56$ ,  $p < .05$ . This showed that the involvement of parents in the education of children with disabilities in collaborating with the community was below the average score.

Table 6

Items and Mean Scores of Parents' involvement in collaborating with community

ITEMS	N	MEAN	SD
I meet with other parents at school and discuss issues or concerns about the school and children's learning.	143	2.36	.98
I speak up for the school in my community.	143	2.34	.97
I serve in identifying and integrating community resources to improve schools, strengthen families, and assist students to succeed.	143	2.30	.96
I Participate in income-generating activities in collaboration with other stakeholders.	143	2.28	1.03
I participate in community and family social activities at my child's school (e.g., sports games, plays, festivals).	143	2.16	1.01

Average rating of all items= 2.28

In summary, one-sample t-test results showed that one of the six dimensions of parental involvement in education was perceived as practiced more prevalently to assist children's education. Parents' involvement in the other five dimensions was below the average expected level. In addition to the one-sample t-test results, the mean ratings of all items of six dimensions were rank-ordered and parenting was more practiced than the other dimensions.

**Socio-Economic Variations in Parents' Involvement**

To investigate whether the parents' involvement varied in terms of their educational level, occupation, and monthly income, one-way MANOVA, and Pearson product movement correlation were used. Where statistically significant differences were identified in MANOVA, a post-hoc test was conducted to identify where the differences were coming from.

**Educational level and Parents' Involvement**

One-way MANOVA was performed in order to test whether the level of parental involvement in the education of their children with disabilities differed accordingly to the educational level of parents and the results obtained are presented below. See Table 8

Table 8 **MANOVA Results on Parental Involvement Scale for Parents' Educational level**

EFFECT	$\Lambda$	F	df1	df2	sig.
Educational level	.920	.963	12	270	.484
Intercept	0.68	307.15	6	135	0.00

df 1 = hypothesis degree of freedom; df 2 = error degree of freedom

Parents' education level was split into three groups based on the highest level of education which they had completed. Group one consisted of parents of children with disabilities who reached up to primary education level. Group two consisted of parents who had completed secondary education (from grade 9-12). Group three consisted of parents who had completed their tertiary level (certificate and above). The one-way MANOVA revealed no statistically significant effect was found for parents' educational level on their involvement scale,  $F(12, 270) = .963, p > .05$ . Therefore, the test suggested that parents' educational level did not affect the level of involvement in their children's education.

**Parents' Occupation and Parents' Involvement**

Secondly, to examine the difference in parental involvement in the education of their children with disabilities and type of parent's occupation, a one-way MANOVA test was used. The results are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9 **MANOVA test results of Parental Involvement according to the type of parent's occupation**

EFFECT	$\Lambda$	F	df1	df2	sig.
Educational level	.725	3.93	12	270	.00
Intercept	0.08	307.18	6	135	.00

df 1 = hypothesis degree of freedom; df 2 = error degree of freedom

Type of parent's occupation was coded into three categories (government employee, private or business employee, and unemployed). Types of occupation were found to be significant as a factor in the involvement of parents in their children's education,  $F(12, 270) = 3.93, P < 0.05$ . Furthermore, a post-hoc analysis was utilized to assess which group means differ from which others. The mean scores for each type of occupation such as government employee ( $M=106.04, SD=25.68$ ), private or business ( $M=89.05, SD=27.00$ ), and unemployed ( $M=77.65, SD=24.06$ ). Therefore, the test indicated that parents who were government employees display a higher level of involvement in their children's education than those who were unemployed or private/business workers.

**Income and Parents' Involvement**

Pearson product movement correlation was employed to examine the correlation between income and level of involvement in the education of children with disabilities. See Table 10

Pearson product-moment correlation indicated a positive relationship between the monthly average income of parents and parental involvement scores of parents in their children's education, ( $r = 0.439, p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that when the monthly income of parents increases, the level of parents' involvement increases as well and vice versa.

Table 10 **Correlation test result on parents' income and their level of involvement**

No.	Variable	PI (correlation coefficient)	Sig.
1	Monthly income	.439	0.00

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

This study investigated the range of parents' involvement in the education of their children with disabilities. In addition, it examined differences in parental involvement as related to parents' socio-economic background that participants were asked about. The study was guided by two research questions.

### Research Question 1:

**To what extent are parents of children with disabilities involved in their children's education?**

This section examines the extent of parents' involvement in the education of their children with disabilities. The involvement of parents in all dimensions of parental involvement in children's education is vital for student's academic achievement although parents were less likely to be involved in all dimensions regularly. Based on this finding, the level of parental involvement was below the expected level in all dimensions of parental involvement in education except the parenting sub-scale. The majority of parents of children with disabilities were involved prevalently in parenting activities rather than in other dimensions of parental involvement. This finding is virtually consistent with previous studies which state that parents were more involved in parenting activities of parental involvement than in other dimensions (Ibrahim, 2012; Mwaikimu, 2012; Compton, 2016; Mason, 2016). These authors explained that parents were involved in basic parenting activities such as providing stationery and books for their children. This implies that parents of children with different types of disabilities are involved in parenting particularly by providing basic stationery and clothes. More specifically, parents participating in this study were not actively monitoring their children when they watched TV nor creating age and grade-appropriate home conditions which is consistent with the findings by Erlendsdóttir (2010) and Kavanagh (2013) who explained parents did not monitor activities such as television watching. Thus, the studies imply that parents exhibit more involved participation in most activities of parenting while they display a low level of participation in monitoring their children when they watch TV and creating age and grade-appropriate home conditions.

Considering the overall mean rating, most parents of children with disabilities were not participating in communicating and learning at home activities. For instance, the researchers learned that the majority of parents of

children with disabilities were not involved in learning at home activities that support their children's education regularly. The findings from the present study are complementary to previous findings by Munowenyu, (1997); McDonnall, Cavanaugh, and Giesen, (2009) who stated that most parents are reluctant to become fully involved in the area of learning at home activities to support the education of their children with special needs. Similarly, the research by Mauka (2015) and Girma (2017) revealed that a large number of parents did not check and supervise their children's homework and assignments regularly because most of them did not know the subject matter. Another pattern exhibited in these studies that occurs in the general student population was a higher level of parental involvement when compared with parents of children with disabilities because most parents of the general student population monitored and assisted children with homework at home and checked whether their children have finished their activities at home or not at a regular basis (Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Van Voorhis, 2003; Kavanagh, 2013; Compton, 2016). Therefore, it is essential that primary schools in this context need to educate parents of children with disabilities on how important their participation is in regards to their children's future at home. Besides, It is the author's suggestion that more research is required to determine the practice of parents' involvement from the perspective of parents of children with and without disabilities.

The result also showed that the communication that occurred between parents of children with disabilities and school teachers and principals were below the expected level. That is, a great majority of participants responded to each item of communication by saying "sometimes" which means parents were not communicating with teachers regarding their children's daily progress frequently. This, in turn, might negatively affect the academic and psychosocial development of children with disabilities. A study by Girma (2017) revealed similar results with the current research at primary schools of Oromia regional state. In contrast with the current research, most parents reported that parents of the general student population were involved in communication activities of parental involvement with teachers and school principals on a regular basis (Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Hornby, 2011; Mwaikimu, 2012; Kavanagh, 2013). This result implies that teachers and principals should encourage parents of children with disabilities to be active in the education of their children because the importance of encouraging PI has been recognized by the government of the federal democratic republic of Ethiopia.

Furthermore, below the expected level of parents' involvement was observed in all activities of volunteering, decision-making process, and collaborating with the community because the average mean score on these three dimensions showed that parents were reluctant to participate in their children's education regularly. This finding is analogous with previous findings that reported the involvement of parents in their children's education (Mwaikimu, 2012; Flemmings, 2013; Peiffer, 2015; Dameh, 2015; Cetin and Taskin, 2016; Girma, 2017). In fact, the above findings have implication for indicating how much of the problem is severe and suggest that the intervention strategy should be designed in the future to address the problem. This implies that parents were not in a position to become regularly involved. This means due attention has to be in place to increase their involvement because this surely has adverse effects on the achievements of children with disabilities.

#### **Research question 2:**

##### **Is there a significant difference in parental involvement as a function of parent's socio-economic factors?**

In this section of the research, socio-economic factors such as parent's education, occupation, and monthly income were presented. The current research revealed that no significant differences were observed with regard to parental involvement as based on parent's varying educational levels. The results imply that parents' level of involvement may not be significantly associated with parents' level of education. The results of the study indicate that parents from different educational levels do not have starkly different ideas about the process of involvement in the process of education. The findings of the present study are in agreement with the study carried out by (Baecck, 2010; Kavanagh, 2013) who suggested that parents with higher level of education are not more likely to help their children in their education. This may be because parents with high levels of education would not have time to participate in the education of their children. In contrast to the current study, researchers argued that there was a significant difference between educational level and parents' involvement in education (Herrell, 2011; Vanderpuye, 2013). I have observed that these two pieces of research are dissertations with large sample sizes which may be the reason for the discrepancies in the findings. I am also at times inclined to refuse the assumption that there exists a relationship between parents' high level of education and PI with their children's education. These contradicting findings serve as an invitation for researchers to conduct additional studies.

Moreover, the findings of the current study revealed that a significant difference was observed between parental involvement and parent's occupation. The study revealed that government-employed parents of children with disabilities showed better involvement in their children's education than unemployed parents. It was also noted that parents who were private/business workers were involved in a higher degree than the unemployed parents of children with disabilities. It may be because the occupation status of parents is tied with the monthly income of parents. Therefore, parents with high income and occupational status can provide the necessary learning materials, discuss the future and other conditions needed by their children. The findings in this study comply with the findings of (Kavanagh, 2013; Vanderpuye, 2013; Al-Matalaka, 2014), in regards to the effect of parental occupation on their involvement.

Finally, the findings of the present study indicated that parents' monthly income level has an impact on their level of involvement. In the present study the higher the income level of parents, the higher would be the parental involvement in the education of their children with disabilities. This suggested that parents of children with disabilities with high income could be more likely to help their children in activities at home and provide them the necessary learning materials and knowledge. Their involvement may be also hindered by transportation problems that parents with low levels of income can face. The findings of the current study are consistent with the findings of (Kavanagh, 2013; Al-Matalaka, 2014; Dameh, 2015; Peiffer, 2015), who argued that parents with high levels of income scored higher in levels of involvement in the education of their children than economically disadvantaged parents. In addition, it was found that parents with a good economic status were more willing and active in participating in the process of education (Cetin and Taskin, 2016).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In this study, the researcher investigated the involvement of parents in the education of children with disabilities. In addition, the study examined the role of socio-economic factors on parents' involvement. The study was carried out in primary schools of Bahir Dar city administration, Ethiopia where inclusive education is practiced. Research question one investigated the extent of parents' involvement in the education of their children with disabilities considering the six dimensions of PI proposed by Epstein. Parents of children with disabilities were found to display

higher involvement in almost all parenting activities. However, parents did not create age and grade-appropriate home conditions. In relation to parental involvement in learning at home, the majority of parents of children with disabilities in the study area were not supervising and monitoring their children's work at home on a daily basis. Only a small number of parents of children with disabilities in the study area were involved in their children's education in learning at home activities. Parental involvement in communicating was also minimal. Similarly, low levels of parents' involvement were observed in activities of volunteering, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

Additionally, this study found a statistically significant difference in parents' level of involvement as a function of their income level. The study suggests that parents with high levels of monthly income participated higher than did parents with low income. A statistically significant difference was also observed in parents' levels of involvement based on their occupational status. This implies that unemployed parents display lower levels of involvement than government and private/business workers. However, a statistically significant difference was not observed in parental involvement as a function of their educational level. The results suggest that parents with varying levels of education were similarly involved.

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