Article

Facilitators of and Barriers to Inclusive Education in the Arab Community of Israel: The Parents' Perspective

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Abstract: A positive and collaborative partnership between parents and schools is required to improve the education of children with special educational needs. Therefore, the present study aimed to explore the educational context in the Arab community in Israel based on the perceptions and beliefs of parents of children with special educational needs about their children's education in relation to schools. Twenty parents of children with different special educational needs were interviewed to understand their thoughts and beliefs about special education in the Arab community in Israel. Six core categories emerged from the analysis of the interviews [i.e., (a) parenting, (b) learning at home, (c) communicating, (d) volunteering, (e) inclusion of parents in decision-making related to their children, and (f) teachers' attitudes towards children from the perspective of parents], which were perceived as axes with high potential to improve special education in this community and guarantee an optimal education for children with special needs. The role of the school as a tool to assist parents is highlighted, with the aim of empowering them and encouraging their active participation in school processes with a clear educational policy that clarifies the demands of the school system for parents and vice versa. Finally, we conclude by highlighting the importance of teachers in a child's life, emphasizing the potential benefits of cooperation and collaboration between teachers, students, and parents.

Keywords: special education; children with disabilities; student; empowerment; parental inclusion

1. Introduction

The active participation of parents in their children's education has been recognized as an essential component for the success of special education programs [1–4]. However, there are challenges and complexities in fostering effective parental involvement [1]. Their active participation and collaboration with educational institutions are key aspects of guaranteeing an optimal education adapted to the specific needs of each child [5]. This participation, which requires mutual trust and respect, is not possible without establishing a strong and collaborative relationship between parents and the school [6]. However, the experience and needs of these parents can vary significantly due to cultural, linguistic, and legal factors that influence their participation in educational activities [7].

Understanding how parents of children with special educational needs adapt and participate in the educational process is essential to improving the quality of special education [1]. Previous research has highlighted the importance of collaboration between parents and education professionals to ensure the educational success of children with special needs, but sometimes external factors such as language barriers [8] or the way of delivering education [9] can significantly affect parental commitment and adaptation to the educational process [10]. In this sense, one of the most used theoretical frameworks in the

literature on parental participation in schools is the typology of Epstein [11,12], who conceptualized parental participation in six types of collaborative relationship between family and school. (i.e., parenting; communicating; volunteering; learning at home; decision-making; collaborating with community). Parenting refers to the help that families should receive in developing parenting skills and establishing a supportive environment for home study; communicating refers to the establishment of two-way communication channels about school programs and children's progress between the school and the family; volunteering refers to involving families to participate as volunteers in school tasks (i.e., excursions); learning at home refers to guiding parents and training them to help children at home with everything related to school; decision-making refers to the inclusion of parents in school decision-making, as well as including them in school representation committees; collaborating with community refers to including community resources and services to improve and strengthen the school by sharing responsibility [12]. This evidence highlights the importance of involving parents in training to effectively support their children in the educational process and achieve a positive impact on the education of children with special needs [13,14].

Furthermore, research on professional learning communities as a teacher training option for inclusive education highlights the importance of collaboration and shared learning among education professionals to improve the quality of inclusive teaching [15]. This collaborative approach may be especially relevant in the context of special education, where active parental involvement and collaboration with educational professionals are critical to the academic and social success of children with special needs [16]. However, the studies by Taller-Azulay and Rusu [17] and Abdullah et al. [18] provide mixed evidence by highlighting the importance of the parent–teacher relationship, diversity in the definition of parent involvement, and challenges in implementing collaborative approaches in special education. These contrasting perspectives highlight the complexities involved in fostering effective collaboration between parents and professionals in the education of children with special needs. Furthermore, the literature on parental involvement in schools does not focus on family involvement in non-Western cultural contexts [19], as may be the case at hand.

In this context, and due to the scarcity of scientific literature on parental involvement in the education of children with special educational needs in the Arab community of Israel, the present study aimed to explore the educational context in the Arab community of Israel, based on the perceptions and beliefs of parents of children with special educational needs about their children's education. Additionally, parents' perspectives were delved into to gather ideas on how to improve special education in this community and ensure optimal education for children with special needs. To this end, the researchers posed the following research questions: (1) How do parents cooperate with schools to facilitate the schooling of their children with special educational needs? (2) How would parents improve cooperation between school and families? (3) How can the education of children with special educational needs be improved? (4) Why is the figure of the teacher relevant in special education schools in Israel?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design and Study Context

The data for this qualitative research were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and a subsequent content analysis [20]. In this way, the data analysis of this tool allows for us to understand the meaning of things through the eyes of the examined subject [21], describing a phenomenon from the point of view of the examined subjects, and also interpret the contents [22].

The context of Arab special education is based on the Law of 1988 [23], which includes the systematic teaching and treatments provided to a disabled child, adapted to the needs of these children, including therapies paramedics. This law [23], although it defines a general policy on special education, does not specify the specific commitments of the

Ministry of Education and the authority to provide an adequate response to the needs of all students with disabilities, which poses a legal challenge to providing special education treatment and services to all students with special needs [24]. One of the immediate results of the limitation of the law is that the offer of special education services in the Arab sector is significantly lower than in the Jewish sector [25,26]. The findings of the study by Weisel et al. [27], which included principals, teachers, therapists and parents, indicate the following scarcities:

1. Classrooms, equipment, programs, teaching materials, learning aids, computers, and didactic games.
2. Trained teachers suitable for special education and paramedical therapists. These two subjects are dependent to a large extent upon resources from the Government and the Authority.
3. Associations for children with special needs; there is a great difficulty to establish associations and organizations and obtain support. These two subjects are relevant, as associations and organizations have vast importance for developing services and care for the rights of children in special education who are in dire straits.

Furthermore, it was found that, in the Jewish sector, the school report of children with special needs begins when they are in primary school. On the contrary, in the Arab sector, it mainly concerns their entry into middle and high school. Thus, diagnostic and treatment actions in this sector are usually carried out in the last stages of child development [28]. On the other hand, the majority of children with disabilities in the Arab sector do not study in a framework appropriate to their needs, and the few existing special education schools do not respond to the level of minimum conditions required for children of different age groups and various disabilities. They study in the same classes [29]. There is also a serious lack of professional personnel to treat children with special educational needs, including speech therapists, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists [30]. Faced with this situation, many families prefer not to send their children to special education schools and have them remain at home [31]. The Arab educational system is characterized by a serious and continuous lack of qualified professional personnel, mainly in the Bedouin sector, and of valid and reliable diagnostic tools appropriate to the cultural and linguistic environment [32], generating a state of inequality between Arab and Jewish education [33].

2.2. Participants

For data collection, an intentional research sampling strategy was carried out based on the selection of participants by the researcher directly according to their evaluation, and the perception that the chosen participants would contribute to the achievement of the research objectives and answer the researcher's questions [20]. Parents of children with special needs from the Arab community in Israel who study in special education schools were selected through a voluntary sampling system, because they are dispersed throughout Israel and the settlements are far away and inaccessible. All interviewees received an explanation of this study and its objectives and signed an informed consent form before the interview.

A total of 20 parents of children with special needs from the Arab community in Israel studying in special education schools were interviewed. The parent sample included 9 mothers and 11 fathers, all of them residing in Arab settlements in rural (15) and urban (5) areas with a medium or low financial situation. The parents' ages ranged between 33 and 68 years old. The distribution of the subjects according to personal characteristics is presented in Table 1. (A pseudonym was used as a name to preserve the privacy and anonymity of the participating parents.)

Table 1. Participants characteristics.

Type of Child Disability	Religious Status	Marital Status	Residence	Job	Educational Status	Gender	Interviewee
Autism	Traditional	Divorced	Village	Employee	Primary	Female	1
Behaviors	Religious	Married	Village	freelance	Secondary	Female	2
Physical	Traditional	Married	Village	Employee	Primary	Female	3
Intellectual disability	Traditional	Married	City	Employee	College	Male	4
Learning disability	Traditional	Married	Village	Employee	Primary	Male	5
Intellectual disability	Traditional	Married	Village	Freelance	Primary	Female	6
Intellectual disability	Traditional	Married	Village	Employee	Primary	Male	7
Intellectual disability	Traditional	Widower	City	Employee	Secondary	Male	8
Learning disability	Traditional	Married	Village	Unemployed	Primary	Male	9
Behaviors	Traditional	Married	City	Employee	Secondary	Male	10
Learning disability	Traditional	Married	Village	Employee	Primary	Female	11
Physical	Traditional	Married	Village	Employee	Primary	Male	12
Learning disability	Traditional	Married	Village	Employee	Primary	Male	13
Autism	Traditional	Married	Village	Freelance	Vocation	Female	14
Learning disability	Traditional	Married	Village	Employee	Secondary	Male	15
Physical	Traditional	Widower	Village	Employee	Vocation	Male	16
Learning disability	Traditional	Married	Village	Employee	Primary	Male	17
Behaviors	Traditional	Married	Village	Employee	College	Female	18
Physical	Religious	Married	City	Employee	College	Female	19
Intellectual disability	Traditional	Married	City	Employee	Primary	Male	20

2.3. Tools

For data collection, the open semi-structured interview (Table 2) was chosen as a tool, in which the interviewee is asked to talk about their experiences, but within the framework of a previously prepared plan, since the objective is to produce the greatest amount of deep, conceptual, and interpretative information possible about the phenomenon investigated [34].

Table 2. Semi-structured interview questions for parents.

Questions
Q1. How do you consider the inclusion of parents in school activity to be a factor for the advancement of school for the sake of pupils?
Q2. Which activities in your opinion, can assist pupils in school?
Q3. In your opinion, what causes your children to go to school willingly and with motivation in the morning?
Q4. How does the interest of teachers in pupils can contribute to them on a personal aspect?
Q5. How would you be willing to cooperate with the school to achieve the targets of pupils?
Q6. How would you propose to empower teachers so that there would be good contact and success in the promotion of pupils?
Q7. Are parents willing to be involved in school programs and in what way?

In addition to the interview questions, demographic data [i.e., name (names were modified to preserve the privacy and anonymity of the participants); gender (male/female); educational background; marital status; job; residence (city/town); religious status; type of childhood disability; age of disability diagnosis] were recorded.

Likewise, two procedures were used in the present study:

(1) This study includes data from several different recorded interviews.
(2) Inclusion of the interviewees: the Results Section was sent for approval to five of the parents, who reviewed it and confirmed that there is congruence between the meaning they gave to their experiences and the interpretation that the researchers gave them [35].

2.4. Procedures

Before beginning, a pre-test was conducted by interviewing three people, who did not participate in the main study, from the population examined who were asked to give their comments. According to the responses, some details in the formulation of the open questions were rectified so that they were clearer and more easily understood.

Then, the location of the subjects began. The parent group was located with the help of a national parent representative. Out of consideration and respect for privacy, the researchers approached the presidents of the settlements' parents' associations, who, in turn, agreed to give them the names of the parents who had children with special educational needs. Once the names of the families with children with special educational needs were obtained, they were contacted by telephone, the purpose was explained, informed consent was requested, and an appointment was made for the interview. Twenty interviews were carried out with parents in their homes after prior coordination. The interviews were conducted individually for approximately one hour in friendly conversation. To gain the parents' trust, the conversation took place in Arabic. Participants did not receive any benefit from participating in this study. With most parents, each question had to be emphasized and explained more than once, as they tended to talk about other topics and begin criticizing the system and what was established. Seven parents asked to meet at a location further away from their home (i.e., a coffee shop). In these interviews, the recording had to be paused and continued due to other people's incoming conversations. Two parents requested that the interview be conducted at their workplace. After each interview, the recordings were transcribed; everything was written exactly as the interviewees said it without any changes or rewriting. Phrases spoken in Arabic were translated into Hebrew.

Each interviewee was given a demographic questionnaire at the end of the interview to collect general information (Table 1).

The entire research project was completed in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki. The national EDUCA platform's Ethics Committee received the research protocol and accepted it on 11 March 2022 with code number 8/2022.

2.5. Qualitative Analysis

The data analysis is based on the Strauss and Corbyn [21] method, presenting three levels of analysis: Step 1: First and open coding. At this stage, the material from the initial findings was reviewed, identifying repetitions. Open coding involved examining sensitive chunks of text: individual words, phrases, and sentences. The material was classified based on themes defined as "primary categories". The objective was to validate or refine the initial categories. Step 2: Category design (axial coding). At this stage, a more precise definition of the categories occurred, where each one explicitly indicated its unique content. Criteria were determined for each category, which acted as "inclusion criteria" with details of specific information, causal strategies, and interventional and contextual models. Refining the criteria ensured that all material found its place within the categories. Step 3: Refine the criteria and design the final category system. At this stage, additional data were accumulated and coded based on the existing category system, making recent corrections to the categories and criteria. The objective was to improve internal validity by condensing the data within each category. The categories were analyzed and received a conceptualization through the model based on Epstein's theory [12].

3. Results

3.1. Parenting

This type of participation in Epstein's model [12] includes parenting skills training that families must receive to become empowered, such as through workshops.

This is what this interviewed father attests:

"The parenting workshops are designed to train and support parents in developing effective parenting skills. Parents learn techniques and tools that can help them address the needs of their children and promote their emotional, social, and physical development, thereby contributing to their overall well-being". Haled (interviewee_10)

In this sense, some of the parents interviewed indicated that carrying out parent meetings/workshops and sharing information with them is beneficial for the children's development. Therefore, parenting workshops are important and effective tools to empower parents. They provide an opportunity for parents to gain skills, tools, and a better understanding of their children's developmental processes, enabling them to support their children effectively.

Furthermore, the parents interviewed consider that support should be provided to establish and maintain situations to help children study at home; in relation to this, a mother said:

"I think that connection with the school will be better if the school enables parents to take an active part without concern regarding criticism". Rimonda (interviewee_19)

In this way, better behavior would be encouraged during their attendance at school. Parental empowerment refers to situations in which parents achieve, on their own or with the help of others, control over their lives and a relative degree of influence. The empowerment process begins with the belief that all parents can make meaningful contributions that benefit their children, including parents of children with special educational needs.

Additionally, one parent highlighted that positive relationships between all the agents involved in their children's education would improve the process:

"My goal is to foster a collaborative environment where parents, teachers, and students work together for the holistic development and success of our children". Asa (interviewee_7)

For this reason, fostering a positive relationship with both the teacher and the school is advantageous for creating an environment that offers support and seeks solutions in the best interests of the child. A lack of cooperation between parents and teachers can impact the way teachers relate to children, as well as the overall learning system.

On the other hand, interviewee 8 gives us a different version of parenting: the school should be granted the necessary autonomy without requiring repeated input from parents. This perspective represents a minority viewpoint that was not expressed by other interviewees:

"Unfortunately, parents' cooperation gives us nothing, and therefore we need to enable the school to work according to the accepted rules without our overintervention". Farid (interviewee_8)

In summary, parenting empowerment process begins with the belief that they can achieve meaningful achievements for the benefit of their children. There are processes in which a school can accompany them and incorporate them into the educational act (i.e., organizing workshops on topics related to their children, including them on excursions, supporting the school's parent committee, exposing them to the study program that is developed in school). Parenting workshops are important and effective tools to empower parents. They provide an opportunity for parents to gain skills, tools, and a better understanding of their children's developmental processes, enabling them to support their

children effectively in their education. However, there are also parents who believe that the school should be granted the necessary autonomy without requiring repeated contributions from parents.

3.2. Learning at Home

Learning at home refers to the help parents give children with skills they need to improve. A father explains it as follows:

> "The school can also include parents and get them to help in the learning field and improve their children's achievements, and give tools for parents to cope with their children's difficulties". Wasim (interviewee_16)

Another of the mothers interviewed introduces another element:

> "To structure mutual partnership, parents should participate in different courses offered by the school, rather than visiting school only when we are invited". Libya (interviewee_2)

More than half of the parents indicated that the school has a fundamental role in clarifying some tasks and instructions to parents, since this allows for them to be an active part in reducing gaps and challenges in their children through orientation courses to be able to implement effective teaching at home that adapts to each of their children's needs. This requires involving parents and their children in all decisions related to the curriculum. Therefore, support and encouragement are necessary to involve parents in learning at home, emphasizing the importance of greater involvement and participation of fathers.

In summary, parents consider their contribution to their children's education from home to be of vital importance. Based on this, they indicate that the tools that can be provided from the training and orientation workshops that should be offered by schools are very important. In this way, they say that these workshops/courses are very necessary to be able to be an active part in their children's education and reduce gaps between and challenges faced by their children.

3.3. Communicating

Through this parental involvement, two-way communication between school and home should be promoted to address issues such as school programs, learning, and children's progress. This communication can occur through conferences, phone calls, emails, newsletters (daily or weekly) and other communications, as expressed by a mother and father interviewed:

> "(. . .) I receive messages regarding things the school demands through the daughter in writing". She adds, "We visit the school when the teacher calls and speaks to my husband. I feel that there is cooperation, expressed when we call and speak to the teacher and the counsellor regarding any complaint". Jamila (interviewee _1)

> "We need to be in permanent contact by telephone, e-mail, text messages or a contact notebook with the homeroom teacher". Hanaa (interviewee_4)

In an educational institution, effective communication between school administrators and parents is essential for the well-being and progress of the students to address issues such as school programs, learning, and children's progress. This communication can occur through conferences, phone calls, emails, newsletters (daily or weekly), or other methods.

Furthermore, parents are committed to this communication, as reflected on by these two parents interviewed:

> "As a parent, I am committed to being available for any questions or concerns regarding my child". Asa (interviewee_7)

> "I consider a good connection with the school to be extremely important because both sides complete each other". Wasim (interviewee_16)

Despite this perception of the importance of communication, there are problems, as indicated by the following interviewee:

"(. . .) I went to the teacher and talked to her, and she said it was due to his disability and did not explain beyond that. I decided to transfer him to a different frame". Ar (interviewee_15)

"While visiting the school I noticed that my son sits with children of a lower level than his. I asked the teacher regarding my son's study program, and she didn't answer. After asking again she told me that if I have a problem, I should ask the principal". Hadija (interviewee_3)

"(. . .) We are not invited for set discussions about various issues in school, and the dynamic in discussions is not always positive nor is it democratic, the principal always has the final say". Hadra (interviewee_14)

Furthermore, despite the importance of communication, and commitment from the parents' perspective, it seems that there is a communication problem between them and the school. When interviewed, the majority of parents reported that teachers often do not provide information about their children. In schools, the function of communicating is left solely to the principals. Thus, most teachers, when asked about a child, do not provide information and instead direct families to the school principal.

In summary, parental behavior plays a crucial role in the educational process of children with special needs. It is vital to maintain open communication and support with the school. Regular contact with educators or the school is essential for understanding the child's behavior and ensuring appropriate treatment.

In an educational institution, effective communication between school administrators and parents is essential for the well-being and progress of students. The fact that the principal did not provide clear information or guidance on a matter related to a child's registration is disconcerting.

3.4. Volunteering

Volunteering refers to the recruitment and participation of parents as volunteers in school programs to support teachers, school staff, and the children themselves. A sample of family responses reflects this:

"Participation of parents in extra-curricular activities and social activities will turn parents into a significant part of school activity". Libya (interviewee_2)

"Activities with parental involvement and cooperation can assist the pupils in school (. . .)". Amal (interviewee_11)

The results of the interviews indicated that parents consider that participating in school and extracurricular activities is important for them and their children and some of them want to volunteer at school.

Regarding the type and number of activities, a father put it as follows:

"Many activities should be promoted to create positive channels with the institution, and parents should be included in structuring the activity program that can help the pupils to advance (. . .)". Ismail (interviewee_12)

Furthermore, parents consider that to foster positive connections with the institution, it is essential to promote a variety of activities that actively involve parents in shaping the program. To support students' advancement, a well-rounded activity program that encompasses various aspects of their development should be encouraged (i.e., art sessions, emotional and mental support initiatives, photography workshops, football classes). Even so, some interviewees indicate that when they offer to volunteer for activities proposed by the center, they encounter obstacles in doing so:

"I had many difficulties with school management when they asked me to come with him to an excursion". Asa (interviewee_ 7)

In summary, involving parents in classes and activities can be a great advantage for all parties. It fosters for the parents a sense of being involved in their children's school life and helps them understand the educational and therapeutic processes at school in the context of students with special needs; forming partnerships by involving parents is a key aspect to which the entire educational system should be committed.

3.5. Direct Inclusion of Parents in Decision-Making Related to Their Children

Including parents in decisions about their children means that families can participate in school decisions, school councils, committees, and/or other parent organizations, as this could improve the relationships, cooperation, and well-being of their children. Along these lines are the words of the following father interviewed:

> "The school must have a parents' committee, through which there will be target achievement and advancement in the positive activity". Wasim (interviewee_16)

> "(...) We are not invited for set discussions about various issues in school, and the dynamic in discussions is not always positive nor is it democratic, the principal always has the final say". Hadra (interviewee_14)

Parents believe that this relationship could improve their children's relationships, cooperation, and well-being. On the other hand, some of the parents interviewed mentioned that they need to feel involved in making important decisions for their children and that they do not always feel listened to and involved. In line with the last comment about participation in important decisions, this mother indicates the following:

> "(...) In the end, they said this is it, you will get an answer within a week. (...). They didn't hear from me where I would like my son to study, didn't include me in the decision, and did what they considered (...)" Rimonda (interviewee_19)

For this reason, many parents think that the special education schools do not perceive parents as the primary treatment factor for their children. Parents have no control over the decision. As a result, parents constantly argue that there is damage to the quality of treatment and develop distrust in the school, which limits cooperation. Furthermore, parents perceive that they are neither invited nor able to ask for appropriate treatment for their children when problems arise at school. A parent spoke regarding a comment he received about it:

> "(...) 'You don't decide, we will handle it'". Hadija (interviewee_3)

For the above, the extent of dynamic and quality of contact between school and family affects the extent of parental involvement. A vast majority believe that there is importance in the fact that a parent identifies with school educational purposes, accepts procedures agreeably, and accepts the school teaching method agreeably, should they be included in decision-making regarding their children.

3.6. Teachers' Attitudes towards Children from the Perspective of Parents

From a parent's perspective, the teacher–student relationship encompasses many complex factors and can have a significant impact on students. A mother in this regard indicated:

> "As a parent, I see that support is the basic factor for children to go to school willingly. (...) For example, my daughter wakes up early in the morning to be on time because of her teacher whom she loves and appreciates greatly". Libiya (interviewee_2)

In that sense, we have the words of another of the parents interviewed:

> "Encouragement and good treatment on the part of the teacher encourages my son to visit the school". Juma (interviewee_9)

A mother talks about how the teacher's attitude can help and motivate children to study:

"A teacher's interest in the pupils personally can raise self-confidence, increase their study interest and draws them to learning and succeeding". Moset (interviewee_18)

A teacher's interest and positive attitude can improve a student's self-confidence, encouraging him or her to focus on learning and strive to improve. Fostering positive connections, providing personalized attention, and being attuned to students' needs can enhance their desire to learn and succeed. A teacher is the main educational figure in a child's life. It is an image that can mediate and complete parental actions. The degree of connection between students and the teacher encourages and brings parents closer to the school. The teacher's attitude toward students in the classroom and the overall learning environment at school can significantly impact students' motivation to learn.

On the other hand, a mother emphasizes paying attention to the interests and tastes of each child:

"My son loves the subject of nature as the teacher of nature always pays attention to him and loves him". Amal (interviewee_11)

When teachers consider the emotional and social needs of students, positive relationships can be cultivated, contributing to an improved learning atmosphere in the classroom.

For all of the above, the image of a teacher is significant in a child's life. If we can learn to cooperate and work together, we will all benefit. A teacher is a mediating factor, coordinating between the needs of pupils as individuals and as a group and between the broad educational system, alongside them being a connecting link between school, family, and community. The teacher has a significant role in structuring the class as a caring social frame, which constitutes a natural experience field for social processes. A significant teacher in one's own class challenges one's pupils and directs and facilitates discussions aiming at assisting one's pupils to understand the occurrences in class and school, while processing experiences and consolidating positions founded on consideration of another as well as moral and social thinking.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the educational context in the Arab community in Israel based on the perceptions and beliefs of parents of children with special educational needs about their children's education. Additionally, we sought to delve deeper into parents' perspectives to gather ideas on how to improve special education in this community and ensure optimal education for children with special needs. Through the analysis of the interviews, it was possible to understand the complex context from the parents' perspective, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the school as well as the barriers that parents of children with special educational needs encounter in the Arabic sector in Israel.

In response to the first research question (How do parents cooperate with schools to facilitate the schooling of their children with special educational needs?), the findings from the interviews conducted demonstrate that active participation in the academic life of special education students plays a fundamental role in promoting educational advancement, in agreement with previous research [36]. It is also known that parents express a positive belief in continuous interaction with the school, emphasizing its important contribution to strengthening the relationship between them and the educational institution [37]. The school's emotional support encourages parents to stay connected, with shared experiences and family encouragement fostering collaborative efforts. Furthermore, it emphasizes that parents are more inclined to volunteer their time at school when their needs and regulations are transparent, which agrees with the results obtained by Amador-Ruiz, et al. [38].

From the results obtained from the interviews, as in previous research [39,40], cooperation and participation are considered essential, and schools are urged to allow parents to participate in various activities to encourage their active participation, since a school that requires parents to participate in ongoing discussions and meetings about their children

strengthens the partnership and collaboration between parents and the school, as stated by Paccaud et al. [41] and Tiwari [42].

The analysis of the interviews clearly indicates that school engagement initiatives largely depend on the proactive stance of the school team given that a school that promotes initiatives with parents facilitates inclusive collaboration [43]. In essence, schools must take the initiative to foster these collaborative relationships [44,45]. These results align with the findings of Hill and Tyson [46] suggesting that greater parental involvement in school life and the learning process is correlated with better student performance in academic areas [46,47]. While acknowledging that previous research focuses on parents of average students, there is a need to consider these findings for parents of students with special needs in the Arab region of Israel. It is crucial to recognize the unique cultural and traditional aspects of the Arab minority and address the specific challenges they face [48].

In response to the second research question (How would parents improve cooperation between school and families?), it can be inferred that investing in parental support by the school turns out to be a valuable task. It is recognized that parents are fundamental figures when it comes to raising and guiding their children towards a state that facilitates active and effective participation in society, as previously highlighted in the study by Acosta-Muñoz et al. [49]. This study's participants expressed great interest in guidance and sought to improve their knowledge through school initiatives, with the intention of actively participating in school activities that involve their children, such as workshops for parents and volunteering, activities also highlighted in the study by Fernández-Batanero et al. [50].

In line with Cáceres-Gómez et al. [51], the participants in this research expressed their desire for teachers to make more home visits and for workshops to be organized to educate parents about their children's rights, effective care, and methods of interaction at home. They also expressed their hope that the school would allocate special entertainment days, provide ongoing guidance, and facilitate informal activities for parents, including extracurricular events and workshops on parenting topics.

Empowering parents involves providing them with the skills and resources necessary to make informed decisions and actively participate in matters related to their children or their environment, as highlighted by de Campos et al. [52]. This encompasses providing essential information and skills for making sound decisions and contributing to educational, social, or health-related processes [53]. In this context, the results of this research are in line with previous research, which agrees that schools can offer activities and resources to support parents in their educational efforts, including organizing workshops, maintaining parent diaries, organizing joint outings, and participating in informal activities orchestrated by the institution, as proposed by Paico-Campos et al. [54]. Through these initiatives, parents can perceive their personal value, gain knowledge, and feel substantially involved in their children's lives, as reported in Nachshen and Minnes [55]. "When a parent feels empowered, they believe they have control over various events in their life, possess personal skills, exhibit high self-efficacy, and play a greater role in their child's life". Dunst et al. [56] affirm the need to identify the centers of power within families and highlight the importance of empowering parents while at the same time fostering their capabilities.

In response to the third research question (How can the education of children with special educational needs be improved?), interviews with research participants shed light on the challenges and opposition that arose due to the absence of a clear communicating. The analysis indicates that the presence of well-defined communication within the school would contribute significantly to fostering the active participation of parents, integrating them as essential contributors to the school community, as shown by Afolabi, et al. [57]. The results highlight that, as in previous research [58], receiving regular reports and messages about their children from school improves cooperation between parents and schools, going beyond negative comments, highlighting the clear opposition that arose due to the absence of a clear communicating. Parents emphasize the importance of the school, clarifying any deficiencies or oversights, and committing to address all student concerns was a recurring category among parents. Parents highlighted the school's role in establishing

communication channels with less accessible entities, such as social services, improving the ease of communication and motivation for parental participation as strategies that favor family participation, as expressed by Padilla and Madueño [59], especially because studies such as the one carried out by Fisher and Friedman [60] highlighted that the following essential conditions can elevate school effectiveness and foster positive relationships with parents: (a) establish mutually agreed upon goals for the school team and ensure their commitment; (b) prioritize objectives; and (c) provide transparent reports on the degree of achievement of objectives [61]. For the above, to improve cooperation between families and educational centers and improve the education of children with special educational needs, a distinct and focused school identity implies a comprehensive approach that is manifested in innovation in all aspects of school life. This includes social education values and programs integrated into the curriculum, high teacher commitment, active parental involvement, and a strong sense of community, as indicated by Corwin and Flaherty [62].

In line with the previous results, to improve the cooperation of parents with the school, and thus improve the education of their children, a comprehensive examination of the study findings reveals that active participation is observed when the school extends the privilege of participating in decisions together with the school team and parents, as explained by Gueterres et al. [63]. Throughout the interviews, parents recounted the challenges and opposition they faced within the school institution, expressing that the special education school treated them unfairly and dismissed their comments when critical decisions were made about their children [64]. Despite being legally required to do so, the school did not invite parents during discussions about child-related programs. Decision-making is recognized as a psychological process that involves the selection of alternatives to initiate actions that lead to optimal results with minimal harm [65]. Parents are in an undefined position in terms of participation in decision-making and must function as partners in the educational process, significantly impacting the lives of their children, fact already highlighted by Abdullah and Ibrahim, due to the importance in improving the education of children with special educational needs [1]. Research indicates that when parents consult with professionals to make decisions about their children's care, they strengthen their sense of parental control and improve collaboration with the educational system [66]. On the contrary, parents excluded from decision-making experience frustration and perceive a lack of response to their expectations and aspirations.

Finally, in response to the fourth research question (Why is the figure of the teacher relevant in special education schools in Israel?), the analysis of the interviews shows that a personal relationship based on respect significantly improves parental participation in the educational process. Students benefit from respectful relationships between home and school, particularly when communication channels remain open [67]. Teaching support for students contributes to the development of their resilience in the face of academic challenges. Furthermore, it has been shown in previous research, such as that of Lara et al. [68], that the teacher's behavior influences the child's passion for the subject being studied, promoting a positive adaptation to school. In this regard, this would enhance the teacher–student–parent relationship [69]. Finally, the results of this research on teachers' assessments of their students' academic performance and their capacity to adjust to the classroom and school environment are correlated with their perception of their relationship with students, as indicated by previous studies [70].

5. Limitations

This study had several limitations. The first of them is that only interviews and recordings of them were used to collect data. Additionally, only a single researcher conducted the interviews and data analysis, which may limit the interpretation of the results and the drawing of conclusions by the entire research group. It is possible that the participation of more researchers in these phases (interviews and analysis) would have improved the interpretation of the results. Another limitation may be not conducting focus group interviews with parents, which could have increased the possibility of broader discussions and

data enrichment by doing so collaboratively. Finally, the results were only obtained from the parents' perspective; taking into account the perspectives of the teaching team or other groups involved in special education could have added value to the results.

6. Conclusions

The results underscore the crucial role of a positive and collaborative partnership between parents and schools in improving children's education. While parents generally view such collaboration positively, they often perceive the school as the primary initiator of this partnership. Parents tend to view the school as a professional entity responsible for their children's future, leading some to covertly demand recognition of their parental role. There are different levels of parental involvement, from active partnerships to passive involvement.

The results also indicate that a high level of educational collaboration exists when parents and teachers consult with each other honestly and equally. Some parents prioritize staying updated on their children's progress and believe in the importance of inclusion, depending on the scope of school intervention. Likewise, proactive parental involvement can lead to positive outcomes for children's social and academic achievements. However, the results also indicate the presence of passive parents who, despite their willingness to cooperate, may not fully understand their children's capabilities and needs.

On the other hand, in the context of special education schools, the role of the school as a tool to assist parents is highlighted, with the aim of empowering them and encouraging their active participation in school processes. It is suggested that a clear policy that clarifies the demands of the school system for parents and vice versa is crucial to addressing problems and fostering good relationships between parents and schools.

Finally, we conclude by highlighting the importance of teachers in a child's life and emphasizing the potential benefits of cooperation and collaboration between teachers, students, and parents. Overall, the importance of mutual understanding, respect, and clear communication cannot be stressed enough with regard to enhancing children's educational experience.

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