

Parental Role in Supporting Inclusive Education in Home Learning Settings

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education ensures that learners of all abilities have equitable access to learning opportunities alongside their peers. While extensive research has explored inclusive practices within school settings, the integral role parents play in cultivating inclusive home learning environments has garnered less attention. This study investigates the multifaceted contributions of parents—encompassing attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors—in supporting children with and without special educational needs during home-based learning. Utilizing a convergent mixed-methods approach, we surveyed 250 parents of children aged 6–14 engaged in remote or hybrid learning modalities and conducted in-depth interviews with a purposive subsample of 30 families. Quantitative analyses reveal that parents who participated in targeted training programs demonstrate significantly higher self-efficacy in implementing differentiated instructional strategies, such as scaffolded lessons, multisensory materials, and assistive technologies. These parents also report more frequent collaboration with educators through virtual meetings and shared learning plans. Qualitative themes underscore the importance of emotional scaffolding, creative adaptation of household resources, peer-network facilitation, and structured routines in sustaining inclusive practices. Nevertheless, parents identify persistent barriers—including limited time availability, gaps in specialized knowledge, and technological constraints—that hinder consistent application of best practices. Based on these findings, we propose a framework for parent empowerment comprising accessible training modules, streamlined communication protocols with schools, and community-based peer support networks.

KEYWORDS

Inclusive Education, Parental Involvement, Home Learning, Special Educational Needs, Equity

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education, grounded in principles of social justice and human rights, strives to dismantle barriers that prevent any student from participating fully in mainstream learning environments. Historically, discussions of inclusion have centered around school-based interventions—teacher training in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), classroom accommodations, peer-mediated support, and policy mandates ensuring access and participation. Yet the sudden shift to remote and hybrid learning models, catalyzed by global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has underscored the critical role of the home environment in maintaining educational equity. In this context, parents have transcended traditional supportive roles to assume multifaceted responsibilities akin to co-educators, encompassing instructional delivery, behavioral management, and social-emotional facilitation.

Unveiling Parental Roles in Inclusive Education

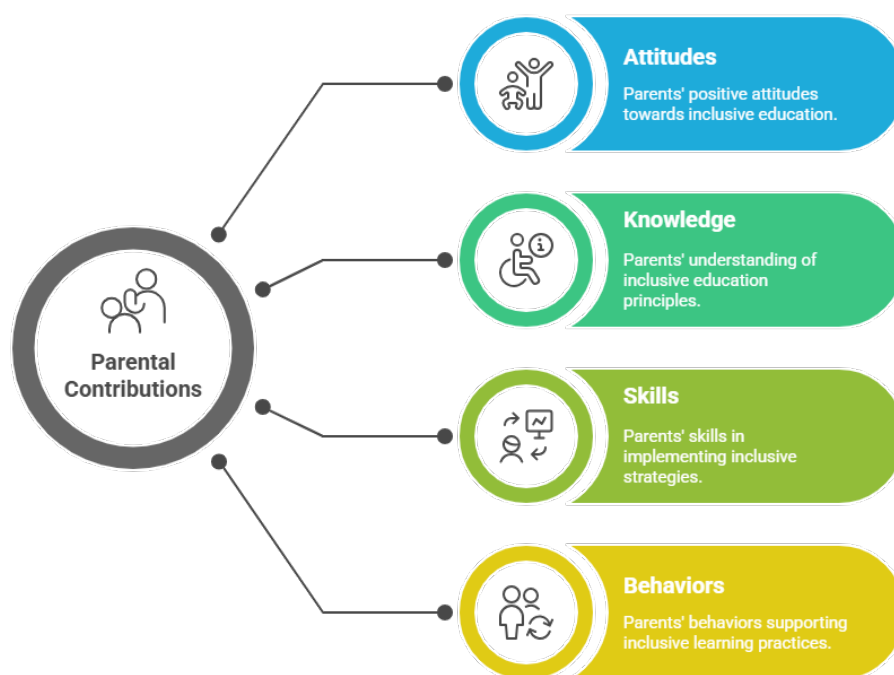


Figure-1. Parental Contributions

Despite this expanded role, systematic investigations into how parents operationalize inclusive pedagogies at home remain limited. Existing literature on parental involvement often prioritizes general engagement metrics—homework assistance, school meeting attendance, and academic encouragement—without differentiating strategies tailored to the diverse learning needs of children with disabilities or learning differences. Consequently, parents may lack the targeted guidance and resources necessary to adapt curricula effectively, leverage assistive technologies, or facilitate peer interactions that mirror inclusive classroom dynamics.

This study seeks to fill this gap by examining parental attitudes, self-efficacy, and practical behaviors that contribute to fostering inclusive home learning settings. We conceptualize “inclusive home learning” as an intentional process wherein parents adopt differentiated instructional strategies, accommodate individual learning profiles, and promote social inclusion among siblings and peers. By integrating quantitative measures of parental self-efficacy and inclusive practices with qualitative narratives of lived experiences, this research delineates enabling factors and persistent obstacles. The ultimate aim is to inform the design of scalable interventions—training programs, policy refinements, and community supports—that empower parents as active stakeholders in the inclusive education ecosystem. Through this lens, we reframe home learning not merely as a temporary contingency plan but as an integral domain for advancing educational equity and participation for all learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental Involvement and Educational Outcomes

Substantial evidence links parental involvement to positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes for children. Meta-analyses reveal that home-based engagement—regular homework supervision, reading aloud, and enrichment activities—correlates with

higher achievement scores and stronger self-regulation skills (Fan & Chen, 2001). However, these studies often treat parental involvement as a monolithic construct, overlooking the nuanced approaches required for children with special educational needs (SEN). Within inclusive frameworks, parents engage not only in academic support but also in advocacy, collaboration with educators on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and the negotiation of accommodations.

Inclusive Education Framework

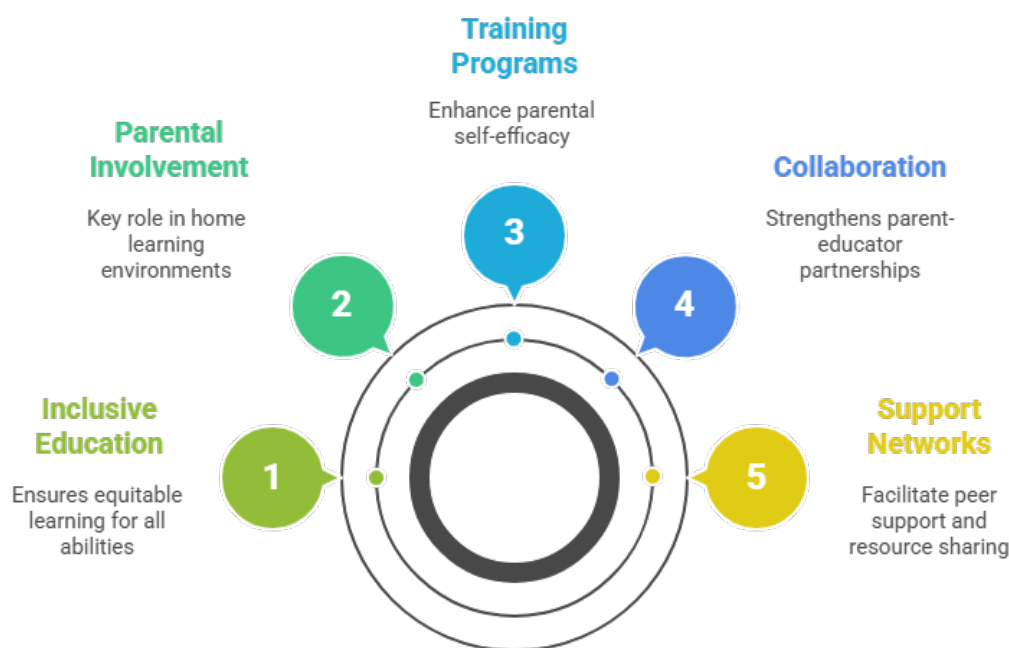


Figure-2. Inclusive Education Framework

Inclusive Education Frameworks

Key tenets of inclusive education encompass access, participation, and achievement (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles—providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression—guide teachers in creating adaptable curricula. Peer-mediated strategies, such as buddy systems and cooperative learning groups, foster social inclusion and model empathy (Katz & Mirenda, 2002). Assistive technologies, ranging from text-to-speech software to interactive apps, further enable differentiated learning pathways. The translation of these school-based strategies into home environments requires parental understanding and skillful application, a dimension underrepresented in current scholarship.

Home Learning in the Digital Age

The proliferation of digital learning platforms offers unprecedented access to educational content but also exacerbates disparities rooted in the digital divide (Van Dijk, 2020). Families with higher socioeconomic status typically possess greater digital literacy and resource availability, facilitating seamless integration of online tools. Conversely, parents with limited technical skills or unstable internet access struggle to replicate inclusive digital practices at home. Furthermore, screen fatigue and challenges in

maintaining learner engagement underscore the need for diversifying instructional modalities, including tactile and experiential activities.

Parent Training and Self-Efficacy

Bandura's self-efficacy theory posits that confidence in one's capabilities influences motivation and behavioral persistence (Bandura, 1997). In special education contexts, parent-mediated interventions—such as those designed for children with autism spectrum disorder—have demonstrated that training parents in behavior management and communication strategies yields significant gains in child outcomes (McConachie & Diggle, 2007). Extending such targeted training to encompass UDL principles and inclusive social supports could elevate parental self-efficacy in home learning contexts, leading to more consistent and innovative inclusive practices.

Barriers and Enablers in Inclusive Home Learning

Barriers identified in the literature include parents' competing demands (employment, caregiving for multiple children), limited access to specialized knowledge, and technological constraints (Kim & Sundar, 2020). Enablers comprise robust home-school communication—regular feedback loops via virtual meetings, shared digital platforms, and co-created learning plans. Community networks—parent support groups, online forums, and local advocacy organizations—serve as knowledge hubs where parents exchange strategies, troubleshoot challenges, and gain emotional encouragement. Despite these insights, few studies systematically integrate quantitative and qualitative data to chart how these factors interact to shape inclusive home learning.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to capture both statistical trends and rich narrative insights into parental practices. Quantitative surveys provided breadth, while qualitative interviews offered depth.

Participants and Sampling

Quantitative Phase: A total of 250 parents of school-aged children (6–14 years) engaged in remote or hybrid learning were recruited via parent associations, special education networks, and social media groups. The sample included 140 parents of neurotypical children and 110 parents of children with identified SEN (e.g., learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, physical impairments).

Qualitative Phase: A purposive subsample of 30 families—18 with children receiving specialized services and 12 with neurotypical children—participated in semi-structured interviews. Selection criteria emphasized diversity in socioeconomic status, geographic location, and parental education levels to ensure a broad range of perspectives.

Instruments

1. **Parental Involvement and Self-Efficacy Scale (PISES):** A validated 30-item Likert instrument assessing confidence in instructional support, implementation of differentiated strategies, and collaboration with educators. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .89, indicating high internal consistency.
2. **Inclusive Practices Checklist (IPC):** A 20-item checklist measuring frequency of applying UDL principles, use of assistive technologies, and facilitation of peer interactions.
3. **Semi-Structured Interview Guide:** Open-ended questions explored parents' resource acquisition strategies, emotional support techniques, collaborative experiences with educators, and perceived enablers and barriers.

Data Collection

Surveys were administered online over a six-week period. Interested respondents indicated willingness to participate in follow-up interviews. Interviews, conducted via videoconference, lasted 50–70 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: Descriptive statistics characterized the sample. Independent-samples t-tests compared PISES and IPC scores between parents with and without formal training. Multiple regression analyses examined predictors of inclusive practice frequency, including parental self-efficacy, training exposure, and home–school communication frequency.

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework: data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report production. NVivo software facilitated coding and theme organization.

Integration: Joint displays aligned quantitative findings with qualitative themes, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how statistical patterns manifested in lived experiences.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

Self-Efficacy and Training: Parents who completed at least one formal inclusive education training module ($n = 118$) reported higher PISES scores ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.4$) compared to those without training ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 0.6$), $t(248) = 10.5$, $p < .001$. Training predicted 32% of the variance in differentiated strategy use ($\beta = .57$, $p < .001$) in regression models controlling for parental education and income.

Assistive Technology Adoption: Overall, 72% of parents reported using one or more assistive tools—text-to-speech applications, interactive learning apps, or adaptive devices. Usage rates were higher among parents of children with SEN (85%) than neurotypical peers (61%), $\chi^2(1, N = 250) = 18.2$, $p < .001$.

Home–School Collaboration: Frequency of educator-parent interactions (emails, virtual conferences) correlated strongly with IPC scores ($r = .49$, $p < .001$), indicating that active collaboration fosters a broader repertoire of inclusive practices at home.

Qualitative Themes

1. **Emotional Scaffolding:** Parents highlighted the centrality of nurturing a growth mindset. Strategies included celebrating effort (“You tried your best!”), normalizing mistakes as learning opportunities, and using emotion-regulation tools (deep-breathing exercises) to manage frustration.
2. **Resourceful Adaptation:** Faced with limited specialized materials, parents repurposed household items—colored beads for math manipulatives, timers for structuring tasks, and tactile objects for sensory breaks. These creative adaptations empowered children to engage multisensorily, reducing reliance on digital screens.
3. **Collaborative Partnerships:** Effective inclusion depended on clear, timely guidance from educators. Parents valued co-constructed learning plans that specified learning goals, recommended resources, and suggested accommodations, enabling consistent support across settings.
4. **Peer Interaction Facilitation:** Recognizing social inclusion as vital, parents organized virtual study groups and playdates, often leveraging platforms like video-conferencing breakout rooms. Sibling pairing—assigning older siblings as “learning buddies”—also fostered peer-mediated assistance and social bonding.
5. **Persistent Barriers:** Time scarcity—balancing employment with intensive homeschooling—emerged as a universal constraint. Technological limitations, such as unreliable internet or lack of devices, further impeded consistent implementation. Parents expressed anxiety about inadequate knowledge in specialized pedagogies, underscoring the need for accessible training.

CONCLUSION

This study illuminates the critical yet underexamined role parents play in enacting inclusive practices within home learning environments. Quantitative data demonstrate that targeted training and active home-school collaboration significantly bolster parental self-efficacy and the application of differentiated strategies. Qualitative narratives enrich these findings by showcasing how emotional scaffolding, resourceful adaptation, and peer-network facilitation translate inclusive principles into daily practice. Nonetheless, systemic barriers—time constraints, technological inequities, and gaps in specialized knowledge—persist, threatening the consistency and depth of inclusive engagement.

To harness parental potential as co-educators in inclusive education, stakeholders must implement a multifaceted empowerment framework. Key components include scalable, module-based online training tailored to diverse learning needs; streamlined communication protocols enabling co-creation of learning plans; and community-driven peer support networks that provide emotional encouragement and practical advice. Equally important is policy recognition of home learning as an extension of inclusive education, warranting dedicated funding for assistive technologies and parental capacity-building initiatives.

By elevating parents from peripheral supporters to active collaborators, education systems can bridge the gap between school and home, fostering equitable learning landscapes where all students thrive. Future research should longitudinally assess the impact of parental empowerment interventions on both academic and socio-emotional outcomes, and explore scalable dissemination models adaptable to varied cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Parental involvement in home learning settings holds transformative potential for inclusive education. First, it reframes parents as integral partners in implementing UDL and peer-mediated strategies, ensuring continuity of differentiated instruction beyond formal classroom walls. Second, empowering parents through targeted training enhances their self-efficacy, leading to more confident, consistent, and creative applications of inclusive practices. Third, robust home-school communication and community networks amplify resource sharing, emotional support, and collaborative problem-solving, mitigating common barriers such as time constraints and knowledge gaps. Finally, policy frameworks that formally recognize and resource parental roles in inclusive education can institutionalize support mechanisms—subsidized assistive technologies, funded training programs, and inclusion metrics—to drive systemic change. By anchoring inclusive education within both school and home environments, stakeholders can cultivate learning ecosystems that honor diversity, promote participation, and uphold the educational rights of every learner.

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