Beyond the School Gate: Parental Engagement as a Driver of Inclusive Education Success

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Abstract: Parental engagement has emerged as a pivotal factor in the success of inclusive education, particularly in contexts where schools face challenges in addressing the diverse needs of learners. In Ghana, while the Inclusive Education Policy (2015) advocates for community and parental involvement, limited research has explored how parental engagement influences the implementation of inclusive practices. This study investigated the role of parental engagement in fostering inclusive education within a public basic school in Ghana. Anchored in Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, a qualitative case study approach was adopted. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 parents, 5 teachers, and 2 school heads as well as focus group discussions with parents. Findings indicate that active parental involvement improves learning outcomes, strengthens teacher-parent collaboration, and enhances learner confidence. However, cultural perceptions of disability and lack of structured communication channels remain significant barriers. The study recommends strengthening home-school partnerships, community sensitisation, and policy-driven initiatives that position parents as key stakeholders in inclusive education.

***Keywords:** Parental Engagement, Inclusive Education, Ghana, Home-School Partnerships, Community Involvement.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is widely recognised as both a human right and a practical strategy for improving educational quality and equity. The concept rests on the principle that all learners irrespective of disability, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, language, or other markers of difference should participate meaningfully in age-appropriate, mainstream educational environments with the support they require to succeed (UNESCO, 2020). International commitments such as the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) and the education targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education have catalysed national reforms that position inclusion as a system-wide priority rather than a specialist endeavour. These global frameworks encourage countries to remove barriers to presence, participation, and achievement, and to engage families and communities as partners in transforming school cultures, curricula, and pedagogies so that diversity is treated as a resource for learning rather than as a problem to be managed (UNESCO, 1994, 2020).

Ghana has articulated this vision through the Inclusive Education Policy (2015), which calls for proactive identification of learners' needs, teacher upskilling, accessible learning environments, and stakeholder participation, with parents and communities identified as central actors in the change process. The policy sits alongside broader reforms aimed at competency-based curricula and school improvement planning, creating an enabling architecture for inclusion. Despite this policy momentum, implementation remains uneven across regions and school types. Studies (Agbenyega, 2018; Opoku et al., 2021) report persistent gaps in teacher preparedness, resource availability, and multi-agency coordination that collectively constrain the realisation of inclusive practices in everyday classrooms. Within this implementation landscape, the role of parents is frequently referenced yet insufficiently operationalised, leaving a critical lever for change underutilised.

Parental engagement offers a promising, cost-effective route to strengthening inclusive education, especially in contexts where schools face resource constraints and large class sizes. A robust international evidence base links constructive family-school partnerships to improved academic outcomes, better attendance, enhanced behaviour, and greater learner self-efficacy (Epstein, 2011; Jeynes,

2015). Beyond general achievement effects, parental engagement has specific relevance for inclusion: families often provide crucial information about children's strengths, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and support needs that can inform responsive, differentiated instruction. Hornby and Blackwell (2018) state that regular, two-way communication can help teachers and parents co-design strategies for learning at home, monitor progress, and address barriers promptly, thus creating a continuity of support across settings.

Conceptual clarity is essential because "parental involvement" and "parental engagement" are sometimes used interchangeably. In this study, parental engagement is understood as an active, reciprocal partnership in which parents and schools share responsibility for learners' development, rather than a one-directional expectation that parents comply with school directives. Epstein's framework of Overlapping Spheres of Influence underscores this reciprocity, describing how the domains of home, school, and community intersect and can be intentionally organised to promote learner success (Epstein, 2011). Practical expressions of engagement range from parenting support and communication to volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration, each offering a route to amplifying inclusive practices when designed with equity and accessibility in mind. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory complements this view by locating family-school partnerships within nested environmental systems from the immediate microsystem of family and classroom interactions to exosystem and macrosystem influences such as labour markets, media narratives, cultural norms surrounding disability, and national policy frameworks (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Together, these lenses highlight why parental engagement cannot be reduced to isolated activities; it is shaped by relational dynamics, institutional routines, and broader socio-cultural conditions.

The Ghanaian context presents distinctive opportunities and challenges for parental engagement in inclusion. Community norms and extended family structures can provide rich social capital for supporting children's learning and well-being. Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management Committees offer institutionalised channels for participation in school governance and resource mobilisation. Notwithstanding these assets, research points to persistent barriers that can blunt the impact of parental engagement efforts. Stigma and deficit-based cultural perceptions of disability can discourage some families from seeking assessment, accessing support, or disclosing a child's needs to teachers (Agbenyega, 2018). Time poverty and economic precarity limit attendance at school meetings, especially for caregivers in informal employment, while literacy and language differences can restrict parents' confidence to communicate with schools. Teachers likewise report challenges: limited training in family-centred practices, absence of structured communication tools, and large class sizes that make personalised engagement difficult (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Opoku et al., 2021). These barriers are not merely attitudinal; they are embedded in organisational routines (e.g., irregular meetings, limited

feedback loops), infrastructure (e.g., lack of accessible communication formats), and policy-practice gaps.

Inclusive education depends on teachers' pedagogical repertoire, particularly their ability to differentiate instruction, use formative assessment, collaborate with specialists, and cultivate supportive classroom communities. Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) bear responsibility for preparing educators to enact these practices, yet multiple studies in Ghana and comparable contexts indicate that pre-service programmes can be theory-heavy and practice-light, leaving graduates underprepared for the complexity of diverse classrooms (Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015; Forlin, 2018; Opoku et al., 2021). A strategic emphasis on parental engagement within teacher preparation offers a multiplier effect: when teachers learn to work authentically with families listening, co-planning, and sharing responsibility classroom strategies are more likely to be culturally responsive, feasible at home, and sustained over time. Forlin (2018) asserts that practice-based teacher education approaches, including coached practicums and structured reflection on family-school interactions, have been recommended internationally to build such relational competencies. Embedding these approaches in Ghana's TEIs could strengthen the human infrastructure for inclusion while aligning with national policy aspirations.

A second rationale for focusing on parental engagement concerns the early identification and continuous support of learners with diverse needs. Parents are often the first to observe developmental differences or emerging learning challenges. Regular, respectful dialogue between schools and families can accelerate referrals, ensure that classroom accommodations align with home routines, and reduce discontinuities that undermine progress. Communication that is accessible through local languages, low-cost channels such as SMS or WhatsApp, and clear, jargon-free explanations can broaden participation among caregivers with varying literacy levels. In addition, engagement strategies that honour caregivers' knowledge and cultural practices can offset historically unequal power relations between schools and families, which too often silence parent voices or position educators as sole experts (Epstein, 2011; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). For inclusion to be meaningful, parents must be recognised as co-educators and advocates, not merely attendees at meetings.

Evidence from meta-analytic work suggests that the quality of engagement matters at least as much as the quantity. Activities that build parents' efficacy to support learning at home such as modelling dialogic reading, guiding goal setting, or sharing strategies for behaviour support tend to yield stronger effects than generic invitations to events (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Jeynes, 2015; Opoku et al., 2021; Jeynes, 2015). In inclusive settings, targeted guidance on assistive technologies, visual schedules, or differentiated homework can extend classroom accommodations into the home, creating a coherent support system. Schools that cultivate warm, trusting relationships with families characterised by responsiveness, respect, and cultural humility—are more likely to see sustained engagement,

particularly among parents who have historically felt marginalised by schooling institutions (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

Despite these promising pathways, research on parental engagement within inclusive education in Ghana remains relatively sparse compared with the literature on teacher attitudes and school-level implementation challenges. Much of the existing scholarship foregrounds barriers within schools such as resource constraints, teacher confidence, and class size while giving less attention to how home–school partnerships can mitigate or exacerbate these constraints (Agbenyega, 2018; Opoku et al., 2021). Few qualitative case studies have investigated what engagement looks like in schools actively implementing the Inclusive Education Policy, how parents perceive their roles, or which communication routines genuinely enable collaboration around learners with diverse needs. This gap is consequential: policies that exhort "community participation" remain rhetorical unless grounded in a nuanced understanding of the relational work of engagement, what supports it, what hinders it, and how it can be organised to centre equity.

The present study addresses this gap through an in-depth qualitative case study of a public basic school in Ghana that is working to enact the Inclusive Education Policy. The study is anchored theoretically in Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, enabling analysis at the intersection of family–school interactions and broader socio-cultural and policy environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 2011). Methodologically, the study foregrounds participants' lived experiences, drawing on semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers, and school leaders, as well as focus group discussions with parents. This design allows exploration of how engagement is defined by stakeholders, which practices are perceived as effective or tokenistic, and how cultural perceptions of disability shape participation. Attention is also given to communication infrastructures and routines, what channels are used, how often, and with what degree of reciprocity since these are the practical engines of partnership.

➢ *Research Questions*
   The research questions were:
*   How do parents, teachers, and school leaders conceptualise parental engagement in inclusive education?
*   Which engagement practices are currently enacted?
*   How do stakeholders perceive their effects on learners' participation, and academic progress?
*   What barriers shape the quality and sustainability of parental engagement?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory (2011) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which together provide a comprehensive lens for understanding parental engagement as a dynamic, multi-level process that shapes inclusive

education outcomes. These frameworks complement each other in highlighting both the relational and contextual dimensions of engagement.

Epstein's theory conceptualises children's learning and development as occurring within three interrelated spheres of influence: home, school, and community. These spheres are not isolated; rather, they overlap and interact to varying degrees depending on the attitudes, practices, and policies of families, educators, and broader societal structures (Epstein, 2011). In inclusive education, the theory underscores that responsibility for supporting learners with diverse needs cannot rest solely with schools. Instead, active partnerships between educators, parents, and community actors (such as health professionals, social services, and advocacy groups) are essential for ensuring meaningful participation and success for all learners.

Epstein identifies six key dimensions of parental engagement: (1) parenting (supporting children's basic needs and home learning environments), (2) communicating (two-way, respectful exchanges of information), (3) volunteering (participation in school activities), (4) learning at home (reinforcement of classroom learning), (5) decision-making (involvement in school governance and policy), and (6) collaborating with the community (mobilising resources and networks). These dimensions provide a practical framework for analysing how engagement is conceptualised and enacted in this study's case school. For example, understanding whether communication is one-way (school-to-parent) or two-way (mutual dialogue) reveals much about the depth of collaboration in inclusive practices. Similarly, the presence or absence of parental input in school-level decisions can indicate whether parents are treated as partners or merely passive recipients of school directives.

While Epstein's theory focuses on the direct interfaces between home, school, and community, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory situates these interactions within nested environmental systems that shape and constrain engagement (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). At the microsystem level, the immediate relationships between the child, parents, and teachers directly influence learning and inclusion. At the mesosystem level, the quality of connections between microsystems for instance, how well schools and families communicate determines whether supports are consistent across settings. The exosystem includes structures that indirectly affect engagement, such as parents' workplaces, local NGOs, or district-level education offices, which can enable or limit parental availability and resource mobilisation. At the macrosystem level, cultural norms, societal attitudes toward disability, and national policies (e.g., Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy, 2015) create the ideological and structural backdrop against which engagement occurs. Finally, the chronosystem accounts for temporal dynamics, such as how engagement evolves over time in response to policy reforms, school changes, or family circumstances.

Epstein's and Bronfenbrenner's theories enable a multi-dimensional analysis of parental engagement in inclusive education. Epstein's framework guides the examination of how engagement is conceptualised and enacted at the school level, while Bronfenbrenner's theory illuminates the contextual factors and systemic barriers that shape these practices. This integrated perspective is particularly pertinent in the Ghanaian context, where cultural perceptions of disability, socio-economic constraints, and policy–practice gaps interact to influence parental participation. The combined framework allows this study to answer not only what forms of engagement exist and how they impact learners, but also why certain engagement practices succeed or fail in promoting inclusion. Ultimately, these theories ground the study's central argument that sustainable, equitable parental engagement requires collaborative, multi-level strategies that address both interpersonal relationships and structural conditions.

➤ *Research Design*

This study utilised a qualitative case study design to investigate the role of parental engagement in promoting inclusive education within a Ghanaian public basic school. The case study approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth, contextually rich exploration of complex social phenomena within their natural settings (Yin, 2018). Inclusive education and parental engagement are not isolated occurrences; they are deeply intertwined with cultural beliefs, institutional structures, and social relationships. Consequently, adopting a case study enabled the researcher to capture the intricate realities of how parents, teachers, and school leaders interact to support learners in inclusive settings. Unlike quantitative methods, which often prioritise measurable outcomes, this approach facilitated a holistic understanding of participants' lived experiences, revealing nuances that might otherwise be overlooked in broader surveys.

The research was conducted in a public basic school located in southern Ghana, a region noted for its diverse socio-economic population and commitment to educational reforms. The selected school was actively engaged in implementing Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy (2015) and had a documented history of collaboration with the local education office on inclusive education initiatives. This made it a suitable site for examining how inclusive education policies are operationalised on the ground, particularly in resource-constrained environments where cultural attitudes and infrastructural limitations often intersect. By situating the study in this context, the research was able to explore not only the practices and experiences of stakeholders within the school but also the broader socio-cultural dynamics that shape parental engagement.

The study population comprised key stakeholders who were directly involved in supporting inclusive education in the school. These included 15 parents (10 mothers and 5 fathers) of children both with and without disabilities, 5 teachers responsible for teaching at various grade levels, and 2 school leaders, the headteacher and the inclusive education coordinator. Purposive sampling was employed to select

participants who possessed first-hand knowledge and experience relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). This sampling strategy ensured that participants represented a range of socio-economic, educational, and professional backgrounds, providing diverse insights into parental engagement practices. Including parents of both children with and without disabilities allowed the study to capture variations in engagement influenced by differing learner needs, while engaging teachers with varied levels of experience helped illuminate how professional perspectives on inclusion evolve over time.

To generate comprehensive and reliable data, the study employed multiple data collection methods, enhancing credibility and triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviews formed the core of data collection and were conducted individually with parents, teachers, and school leaders. These interviews explored participants' understandings of parental engagement, the forms of involvement they practiced, their perceptions of its impact on learner participation and progress, and the challenges they encountered. Interviews were held in either English or a local language, depending on participants' preferences, and each session lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Additionally, two focus group discussions were conducted with parents to provide a platform for shared dialogue and collective reflection. The first group consisted of eight parents, while the second comprised seven parents. Focus groups encouraged participants to build upon each other's ideas, uncovering community-level perspectives and common experiences that might not have emerged in one-on-one interviews. To further validate and contextualise participants' accounts, a document review was undertaken, examining school-home communication materials such as meeting invitations, attendance records, circulars, and reports on parental involvement. These documents offered tangible evidence of the school's engagement practices and helped cross-check the accuracy of reported interactions. All interviews and discussions were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English where necessary. Field notes were maintained throughout the data collection process to capture non-verbal cues, contextual factors, and researcher reflections, providing additional layers of insight during analysis.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase thematic analysis framework, which included familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Both inductive and deductive coding strategies were applied. Inductive codes emerged organically from the participants' narratives, capturing unique experiences and context-specific insights, such as "parental pride," "financial strain," and "teacher-parent trust." Deductive codes were guided by the study's theoretical framework, particularly Epstein's dimensions of engagement and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems, ensuring that analysis was grounded in existing scholarship while remaining open to new discoveries.

The coding process was iterative and comparative, involving continuous movement between data sources to identify patterns, divergences, and relationships across interviews, focus groups, and documents. To enhance trustworthiness, peer debriefing was conducted with two colleagues experienced in qualitative research, and member checks were carried out by sharing preliminary findings with a subset of participants to confirm their accuracy and resonance with lived realities.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are organised thematically around four core areas aligned with the research questions: (1) conceptualisations of parental engagement in inclusive education, (2) enacted engagement practices, (3) perceived impacts on learners' participation and progress, and (4) barriers affecting the quality and sustainability of engagement. The results reveal that while parental involvement is recognised as essential for inclusive education success, its implementation is constrained by cultural, systemic, and resource-related factors. Each theme is presented with illustrative participant quotes and integrated with relevant literature and the guiding theoretical frameworks.

➢ Conceptualisations of Parental Engagement in Inclusive Education

Participants demonstrated varied understandings of what parental engagement in inclusive education entails. Parents largely defined engagement in terms of providing material support and ensuring regular school attendance, while teachers and school leaders emphasised collaborative partnerships for supporting learning needs. A mother of a child with a learning disability described her role as follows:

"I make sure my son goes to school every day and has food and books. That is how I support him, but I don't always know what the teachers are doing with him in class." (Parent 4)

This response reflects a narrow view of engagement, primarily focused on meeting basic needs rather than engaging in collaborative decision-making regarding learning. Teachers, on the other hand, articulated a more interactive view of engagement, aligning with Epstein's (2011) assertion that effective partnerships involve shared responsibility between home and school:

"Parental involvement goes beyond buying books. We need them to understand their children's learning difficulties and work with us to address them. Some parents do this very well, but many leave everything to the school." (Teacher 3)

These divergent conceptualisations highlight a disconnect between parental and professional expectations, a finding consistent with Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) observation that mismatched perceptions often hinder effective home-school collaboration. From Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective, this reflects the interaction between microsystem factors (parents' beliefs and capacities) and exosystem influences (institutional norms regarding parent roles). Such misalignment can weaken the overlapping spheres of influence essential for inclusive education (Epstein, 2011).

➢ Enacted Engagement Practices

Despite conceptual differences, the study revealed multiple forms of parental engagement practices, ranging from home-based support to limited school-based participation.

Most parents actively supported their children's learning at home through homework supervision, informal tutoring, and reinforcing classroom learning. As one father explained:

"Every evening, I sit with my daughter to read. It has made her more confident in school, especially when she answers questions in class." (Parent 7)

Such engagement aligns with existing literature highlighting the positive impact of home-based support on learner achievement (Jeynes, 2015). Within Bronfenbrenner's microsystem, these home practices directly shape learners' immediate experiences, promoting self-confidence and skill development.

Participation in school-based activities, however, was relatively limited and often restricted to attending meetings or responding to crises. Attendance records reviewed during document analysis indicated that less than half of parents regularly attended scheduled parent-teacher meetings. Teachers attributed this to work commitments and low perceived value of meetings:

"We invite them for meetings, but some only come when their child is in trouble. They don't see meetings as important unless it concerns discipline." (Teacher 2)

This finding mirrors studies in other low- and middle-income contexts where structural and attitudinal barriers constrain school-based involvement (Kimani et al., 2020). According to Epstein (2018), sustained and meaningful engagement requires two-way communication and proactive outreach, which were largely absent in this school.

A small subset of parents demonstrated advocacy-oriented engagement, lobbying for resources or policy enforcement to support inclusion. One mother, whose child had a hearing impairment, shared:

"I had to go to the education office myself to ask for a hearing aid. If I didn't push, no one would help my child." (Parent 12)

This reflects the potential for parents to act as change agents within Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem, bridging home and institutional environments. However, such advocacy was isolated and dependent on individual agency, indicating a lack of systemic support for empowering parents as partners.

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➤ *Impacts of Engagement on Learners*

Across interviews and focus groups, participants consistently linked active parental engagement with positive learner outcomes, including improved attendance, academic performance, and socio-emotional well-being.

Teachers reported that children whose parents regularly monitored school attendance were less likely to drop out, particularly among learners with disabilities:

"We notice that children whose parents are involved rarely miss school. They feel someone is checking on them and encouraging them." (Teacher 5)

This finding aligns with Jeynes' (2015) meta-analysis demonstrating that parental monitoring and encouragement significantly enhance school retention.

Learners whose parents supported their learning at home performed better academically. A school leader noted:

"The difference is clear. Those with engaged parents do better in exams. It's not just about intelligence; it's about the support system they have." (Headteacher)

This echoes Darling-Hammond's (2021) argument that holistic educational success is contingent upon supportive learning environments both inside and outside school.

Parental involvement also had socio-emotional benefits, fostering learners' confidence and sense of belonging:

"Since my parents started attending school events, I feel proud. I am no longer shy to participate in class." (Learner, 11 years old).

This outcome underscores Epstein's (2011) assertion that family-school-community partnerships nurture learners' self-esteem and engagement, reinforcing the transformative potential of parental involvement in inclusive education.

➤ *Barriers to Effective and Sustainable Engagement*

Despite the benefits, multiple barriers constrained the quality and sustainability of parental engagement.

Cultural perceptions of disability emerged as a significant barrier, with some parents reluctant to acknowledge or disclose their children's needs due to fear of stigma:

"Some families hide their children with disabilities. They think it brings shame to the family." (School Leader)

This barrier, located within Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem, reflects deep-rooted societal attitudes that undermine inclusion (Agbenyega, 2018). Similar challenges have been documented across sub-Saharan Africa, where stigma remains a pervasive obstacle to parental involvement in special needs education (Opoku et al., 2021).

Poverty was another major factor limiting engagement. Many parents worked long hours in informal jobs, leaving little time or energy for school involvement:

"I want to attend meetings, but I sell at the market. If I leave my stall, I lose money, and we can't eat." (Parent 9)

This finding aligns with Hornby and Blackwell (2018), who emphasise the structural barriers low-income families face in participating in their children's education. Within Bronfenbrenner's framework, these exosystem constraints indirectly limit children's opportunities for enriched educational support.

Both parents and teachers cited inadequate communication systems as a hindrance. Parents felt excluded from decision-making, while teachers struggled to reach families consistently:

"We have no proper way of sharing updates except calling individually, and sometimes they don't pick up." (Teacher 4)

Effective communication is central to Epstein's model, yet this study found a lack of institutionalised mechanisms for ongoing dialogue, resulting in sporadic and reactive engagement.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of parental engagement in promoting inclusive education within a Ghanaian public basic school, using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence as guiding frameworks. The findings indicate that although parental engagement is widely acknowledged as critical to the success of inclusive education, its conceptualisation, practice, and outcomes are shaped by intertwined socio-cultural, economic, and systemic factors. Parents in this study primarily perceived engagement as the provision of material support and ensuring school attendance, while teachers and school leaders viewed it as a collaborative partnership focused on addressing the diverse learning needs of children. This divergence in expectations highlights a lack of shared understanding of inclusive education and weakens the potential for effective home-school collaboration.

Engagement practices were more pronounced within the home environment, with many parents actively supervising homework, providing encouragement, and supporting basic learning needs. However, participation in school-based activities was limited and largely reactive, with parents attending meetings primarily in response to problems rather than as part of an ongoing partnership. Despite these limitations, the study found that active parental involvement had significant benefits for learners, including improved attendance, better academic performance, and enhanced socio-emotional well-being. Nonetheless, barriers such as cultural stigma associated with disability, socio-economic constraints, and inadequate communication structures consistently undermined the quality and sustainability of

engagement. These findings suggest that while individual parental efforts are important, they are insufficient without systemic interventions to create supportive, inclusive environments. Strengthening parental engagement, therefore, requires moving beyond isolated parent-driven actions towards structured, institutionalised, and culturally responsive strategies backed by policy support, educator capacity-building, and community-wide sensitisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed at policy, practice, and research levels. At the policy level, there is a need to develop and enforce inclusive education policies that mandate parental participation in decision-making processes. Such policies should provide clear guidelines on collaboration between schools, families, and communities and allocate resources to support parental engagement initiatives, particularly in low-income settings. Additionally, public sensitisation campaigns should be implemented to address cultural stigma and misconceptions surrounding disability, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive societal environment. At the practice level, schools should prioritise strengthening communication systems by establishing structured, two-way platforms that ensure regular information sharing and genuine parental involvement. Educators should be trained in family-school partnerships, cultural competence, and inclusive practices to enhance their ability to engage parents effectively. Likewise, parents should be empowered through workshops and training programmes on inclusive education to build their capacity to support their children's learning and advocate for their rights. Creating collaborative school cultures where parents are treated as co-educators actively participating in planning, implementation, and monitoring of inclusion initiatives is essential for meaningful engagement. Research should also explore innovative approaches to engagement, such as the use of mobile-based communication tools to overcome logistical barriers, and investigate gender-specific dimensions of parental involvement to better understand how mothers and fathers perceive and enact their roles in supporting inclusive education.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This study makes several important contributions to the field of inclusive education. First, it provides a contextual understanding of how parental engagement in inclusive education is conceptualised and enacted within a Ghanaian public basic school, highlighting the cultural, socio-economic, and systemic factors that shape engagement practices. Second, it advances theoretical understanding by demonstrating how Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence can be applied to explain the complex interactions between individual, institutional, and societal factors that facilitate or hinder parental engagement in low- and middle-income contexts. Third, the study contributes empirical evidence to support the need for structured, institutionalised parental engagement strategies in inclusive education. The findings provide practical recommendations that can inform policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders seeking to enhance inclusion in schools. Finally, the study lays a foundation for future research by identifying critical areas such as the role of cultural beliefs, socio-economic status, and innovative engagement models in shaping parental involvement. In doing so, it offers a comprehensive and contextually relevant perspective that can guide interventions aimed at strengthening inclusive education in Ghana and similar contexts globally.

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