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An Overview of Father Involvement in the Education of Children with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe father involvement in the education of children with special needs based on findings from previous research. This review employs a library research method by examining five scholarly articles from reputable journals that discuss the role of fathers in the educational context of children with autism, developmental delays, and hearing impairments. The analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques to identify patterns of involvement, barriers, and supporting factors influencing fathers' roles in the education of children with special needs.The findings reveal that fathers play an essential role through two primary forms of involvement: direct involvement, such as assisting with learning activities, attending school meetings, and participating in intervention programs; and indirect involvement, including managing educational administration and coordinating with schools. Common barriers include work-related demands, limited knowledge about special needs, cultural constructions of masculinity, and the phenomenon of maternal gatekeeping. Nevertheless, father involvement has been shown to enhance children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and academic development, as well as strengthen overall family well-being.In conclusion, father involvement is a critical component in the success of education for children with special needs, yet it still requires systemic support through parent education, inclusive policies, and improved collaboration between families and schools.

Keywords: *father involvement, education, children with special needs*

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INTRODUCTION

Father involvement in the education of children with special needs is an important issue within the fields of educational psychology and family development. The father's role often functions as both a complementary and reinforcing factor in the success of educational interventions provided to the child. In the context of children with special needs, such involvement becomes even more crucial due to the more complex learning and emotional support needs compared with typically developing children (Potter, 2016). Therefore, understanding the dynamics of father involvement is a fundamental basis for formulating effective and inclusive educational strategies. Numerous studies indicate that father involvement has a significant influence on the social, emotional, and academic development of children with special needs. Such involvement is not only instrumental but also serves as a psychological support system that strengthens children's resilience in facing learning challenges (Zin & Nor, 2017). Thus, research on father involvement extends beyond participation and encompasses the broader domain of family psychological well-being.

In educational practice, fathers contribute through two primary forms of involvement: direct and indirect involvement. Direct involvement includes participating in school assignments, supporting learning processes, and attending educational activities. Indirect involvement includes communicating with schools, organizing learning schedules, and making administrative decisions

related to the child's educational needs (Potter, 2016). These two forms complement each other and reflect the multidimensional nature of father roles. In the context of special education, father involvement is also evident in early intervention programs, which have been shown to enhance child well-being and strengthen adaptive parenting patterns within the family (Zin & Nor, 2017). Fathers who actively participate in early intervention tend to have a better understanding of their child's developmental needs and maintain stronger coordination with professionals.

Despite its importance, father involvement faces numerous challenges that reduce the effectiveness of their participation in education. One major barrier is the cultural construction of masculinity, which may influence how fathers view their role in caring for a child with special needs (Karisa et al., 2021). In some cultures, intensive caregiving is seen as a maternal responsibility, leading fathers to withdraw from educational processes. In addition to cultural norms, work demands and time constraints significantly hinder father involvement. Fathers with heavy workloads or inflexible schedules often struggle to attend school activities or participate in home-based learning programs (Kurete et al., 2024). These barriers limit communication between fathers and educational professionals.

Lack of knowledge about special education is another major challenge. Many fathers do not possess sufficient understanding of key concepts in special education such as IEPs, curriculum modifications, or behavioral strategies (Yildirim, 2024). Limited educational literacy causes fathers to feel less confident in engaging more deeply in the child's educational process. Another notable barrier is the phenomenon of maternal gatekeeping, where mothers unintentionally restrict or control fathers' participation in caregiving and schooling (Kıraçcı & Bakkaloğlu, 2023). In families with children with special needs, gatekeeping may occur because mothers are perceived as more knowledgeable about the child's condition, resulting in suboptimal father involvement.

Despite these challenges, various studies affirm that father involvement positively impacts the academic achievement and emotional well-being of children with special needs. Children with actively involved fathers tend to display better emotional regulation and more harmonious social relationships (Potter, 2016). This highlights father involvement as a protective factor in child development. Additionally, father involvement in IEP meetings and communication with teachers has been shown to improve the accuracy of educational strategies provided to the child. Such involvement facilitates more effective collaboration between parents and professionals, ensuring that educational planning is optimally tailored for the child (Mueller & Buckley, 2014). Father–school collaboration thus becomes a crucial element in building effective inclusive education.

Other studies reveal that fathers' socioeconomic background influences their level of involvement. Fathers with higher socioeconomic status tend to have greater access to educational resources, time, and support services, leading to more active participation in their child's education (Šukys et al., 2015). This indicates that father involvement does not stand alone but is shaped by broader social contexts. Educational attainment also plays a determining role. Fathers with higher education levels generally have greater awareness of the importance of involvement and are more proactive in coordinating with schools, attending training programs, and supporting learning at home (Šukys et al., 2015; Karisa et al., 2024).

Cultural issues surrounding masculinity and stigma toward disability frequently emerge in studies of father involvement. In some societies, disability is perceived as a sign of family inadequacy or paternal failure, which influences how fathers interact with their children (Karisa et al., 2021). Such stigma can create emotional distance, hindering engagement in education. When cultural stereotypes about fatherhood are reinforced by social pressure, father involvement may become minimal or inconsistent. Within inclusive education, this can negatively affect collaborative strategies between families and schools (Bezrukova & Samoylova, 2024). Thus, shifting social perceptions of father roles is essential in inclusive education development.

To overcome these barriers, schools and educational institutions must build responsive support systems tailored to fathers' needs. One recommended approach is to provide flexible communication options such as online consultations, meeting schedules aligned with fathers' work hours, or personalized guidance on special education processes (Kurete et al., 2024). Practical workshops that educate fathers about IEPs, behavior management, and home learning strategies are

also necessary (Yildirim, 2024). These efforts enhance fathers' confidence and competence. Long-term cultural shifts require collaboration among schools, families, and social institutions. Public campaigns, family counseling, and community-based programs can help reframe caregiving as a shared responsibility (Karisa et al., 2021; Bezrukova & Samoylova, 2024).

In terms of policy development, governments and educational institutions need to design policies that encourage father involvement, such as paternity leave, psychosocial support, and broader access to educational information (Bezrukova & Samoylova, 2024). Increasing awareness of the importance of father involvement must be complemented by further research exploring variations in involvement across disability types, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic conditions. Research in these areas can strengthen the empirical foundation for effective and targeted interventions.

Overall, father involvement in the education of children with special needs is a multidimensional construct influenced by various personal, social, and cultural factors. Enhancing father involvement is not only essential for children's educational needs but also for building a more inclusive learning ecosystem oriented toward family well-being. Therefore, scholarly inquiry into father involvement remains a vital component in advancing research and policymaking in inclusive education.

METHOD

This study employs a library research approach**,** which utilizes scientific sources as the foundation for analysis, interpretation, and knowledge synthesis (Fletcher et al., 2017). This approach was selected because research on father involvement in the education of children with special needs has been extensively examined in reputable journals such as *Research in Developmental Disabilities* and the *Journal of Family Psychology* (Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2015; Aldosari & Pufpaff, 2020). By drawing on evidence-based literature, this study gains a strong theoretical grounding regarding emotional dynamics, role strain, and ecological factors influencing father involvement in the education of children with special needs (Lee, 2015). The data sources include Scopus- and SINTA-indexed journal articles, scholarly books, and other academic documents relevant to father roles and special education (Khan & Alvi, 2021), including studies highlighting the increasing attention to fathers in the caregiving of children with developmental disabilities (Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, 2016; Al-Yagon, 2016).

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques by searching various databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Wiley, DOAJ, and the Garuda portal. The search employed keywords such as *father involvement*, *special needs children*, *paternal stress*, and *inclusive education*, in accordance with prior research recommendations (Khan & Alvi, 2021; Aldosari & Pufpaff, 2020). The literature was then screened based on relevance, methodological rigor, and alignment with the research focus. Articles from reputable journals such as the *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, *Children and Youth Services Review*, and the *Journal of Early Intervention* were analyzed because they include important empirical findings on family dynamics involving children with special needs (Bagner & Dorros, 2018; Fletcher et al., 2017). Key information regarding variables, methods, and main findings from each study was systematically documented and analyzed (Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2015).

Data analysis was conducted using **content analysis** by thematically categorizing research findings, including forms of father involvement, psychological barriers, social factors, and educational impacts on children with special needs (Lee, 2015; Al-Yagon, 2016). Comparative analysis was applied to identify similarities and differences across studies, such as between fathers of children with autism (Aldosari & Pufpaff, 2020) and fathers of children with developmental delays (Bagner & Dorros, 2018). Data credibility was strengthened through source triangulation and methodological critique to ensure consistency and reliability of the literature (Fletcher et al., 2017). All research procedures were carried out systematically, beginning with the formulation of the review focus, keyword development, article collection and screening, data reading and coding, and the synthesis of findings to inform the writing of Chapter 3 (Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, 2016; Al-Yagon, 2016).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The results of this study identified five research articles related to father involvement in the education of children with special needs, as follows: The synthesis of the five studies indicates that father involvement in the education of children with special needs is a critical factor that directly contributes to children's cognitive, social, linguistic, and emotional development. Karisa and McKenzie (2022) highlight that in the Kenyan context, father involvement is shaped by cultural norms of masculinity; however, when fathers are able to transcend these cultural barriers, their participation significantly enhances access to and success in the education of children with intellectual disabilities. Research by Potter (2016, 2017) on fathers of children with autism in the United Kingdom underscores the high level of paternal involvement in educational activities, caregiving, and school interactions, despite persistent challenges such as inflexible meeting schedules and limited training. Meanwhile, Lopez et al. (2019) demonstrate that within families of children with developmental delays, father involvement remains insufficiently documented, even though existing literature consistently shows its positive impact on intervention outcomes.

Adigun et al. (2023) further reveal that during emergency remote education for deaf and hard-of-hearing learners, paternal involvement increased when fathers received technical support, sign language proficiency, and access to rapid intervention services. Across all studies, several barriers were identified, including time constraints due to work demands, limited training, cultural expectations regarding fatherhood, reliance on maternal reports in some studies, and small sample sizes that restrict the generalizability of findings.

Table 1. Result

No	Researcher Name (Year of Publication)	Research title	Research methods	Research result	Conclusions and suggestions
1	Amani Karisa, and Judith McKenzie(2022)	I Be Africa Man Original: Towards a Contextual Conceptualization of Father Involvement in the Education of Children with Disabilities in Kenya	1. The study employed a qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews to collect data from participants. 2. Purposive sampling was utilized to select eight fathers, six mothers, nine teachers, and six children with intellectual disabilities for the study. 3. Data collection took place primarily at the study school, with one father interviewed at his home upon request.	1. Father involvement in the education of children with disabilities in Kenya can significantly enhance these children's access to schooling, participation in learning activities, and overall educational outcomes. 2. The study highlights that fathers are often perceived as less likely to attend school meetings and	1. This study primarily refers to fathers in general rather than specifically focusing on fathers of children with disabilities, which may limit the applicability of its findings. 2. The authors acknowledge that fathers of children with disabilities may experience fatherhood

	4. All data collection sessions were audio-recorded to ensure the accurate capture of participants' responses. 5. The study was conducted in English, Kiswahili, and Kigiriama, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the participants	child-related activities, despite their privileged position in educational decision-making. 3. There are cultural expectations for fathers to engage in traditionally feminine roles, such as nurturing and attending school events, which stand in contrast to prevailing patriarchal norms. 4. Father involvement is associated with improvements in children's cognitive, social, linguistic, and emotional development, as well as long-term outcomes such as higher educational achievement and reduced juvenile delinquency. 5. The research indicates that father involvement is linked to various	differently due to context-specific demands, suggesting that the findings may not fully reflect their lived experiences. 3. The relatively small sample size comprising eight fathers, six mothers, nine teachers, and six children—may limit the generalizability of the results. 4. The study's reliance on purposive sampling may introduce bias and affect the diversity of perspectives represented in the research. 5. The authors advise caution in interpreting the findings, indicating that the

				developmental and educational gains for children with disabilities. 6. The findings further suggest that the experiences of fathers of children with disabilities may differ significantly from those of fathers of non-disabled children due to the unique contextual demands they face.	results may not accurately capture the complexity of father involvement in the education of children with disabilities.
2	Potter, CA (2016)	It's the most important thing- I mean the schooling": Father involvement in the education of children with autism.	1. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection. 2. The first phase involved an online cross-sectional survey targeting fathers of children with autism. 3. The second phase consisted of 25 semi-structured interviews to explore in greater depth the issues raised in the survey. 4. The sample included fathers	1. Fathers are very involved in their children's education and schooling. 2. Indirect support includes administrative processes and school attendance.	1. Limited research on father involvement in the education of children with autism. 2. The nature of father involvement in children's education is under-researched.

			of children with autism aged up to 19 years, primarily from the United Kingdom. 5. The study focused on understanding the nature of father involvement in education and the barriers they encounter.		
3	Adigun, O. T., Mosia, P.A., & Mngomezulu, T. P. (2023).	Were the fathers available?": An evaluation of fathers' involvement in emergency remote education of learners who are deaf/hard of hearing.	1. Qualitative research design with an interpretivist paradigm 2. Semi-structured telephone interviews for data collection.	1. Fathers' involvement in LDHH distance learning increased during the lockdown. 2. Factors influencing father involvement: sign language, technical support, rapid intervention.	1. This study has a limited sample size, with only a small number of mothers participating, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. 2. The qualitative research design employed requires caution when applying the results to broader contexts. 3. Perceptions of father involvement were based solely on mothers' viewpoints, with

			limited direct input from fathers and learners who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH). 4. The study did not account for all variables that may influence father involvement in remote education for DHH learners, indicating the need for further research. 5. The authors recommend that future studies include fathers and DHH learners as respondents to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of father involvement.

4	Lopez,S., McWhirter.,A.C., Rosencrans,M., R. Giuliani,N., McIntyre,L.L.(2019).	Father Involvement with Children with Developmental Delays.	1. Systematic literature review of father involvement studies. 2. Demographics, setting, methods, and intervention analysis	1. Summarize father involvement in families of children with developmental delays 2. Highlight the need for increased father involvement for positive outcomes	1. Publication bias due to limited articles in peer-reviewed journals 2. Exclusion of single-subject designs and small sample size studies.
5	Potter, CA (2017)	Father involvement in the care, play and education of children with autism.	1. This study employed an online survey methodology to collect data from fathers of children with autism in the United Kingdom. 2. A total of 306 fathers participated in the survey, providing insights into their involvement in daily care, play, and educational activities. 3. The survey included questions related to caregiving responsibilities, stress, employment, sources of support, and coping strategies. 4. The purpose of the study was to examine the nature and extent	1. Half of fathers are largely or equally responsible for their children's daily care routines. 2. Many fathers support their children's education, especially helping with homework.	1. Many fathers do not receive relevant training 2. Most meetings occur during working hours

		of father involvement, highlighting the importance of recognizing fathers' roles alongside mothers. 5. The findings were intended to inform the provision of services and support for families raising children with autism.

Discussion

The discussion of this study integrates findings from five scholarly articles examining father involvement in the education of children with special needs. Overall, the results consistently highlight that father involvement contributes significantly to children's cognitive, social, emotional, and academic development. However, the level and quality of this involvement are strongly shaped by sociocultural contexts, psychological factors, communication skills, educational environments, and the systemic support available to fathers in fulfilling their caregiving roles.

Research findings demonstrate that father involvement occurs in two primary domains: direct and indirect involvement. Potter (2016, 2017) emphasizes that fathers participate by accompanying learning activities, assisting with homework, interacting with teachers, and attending school meetings. Such direct involvement has been shown to enhance fathers' understanding of their children's educational needs and strengthen father–child emotional bonds. Indirect involvement includes scheduling learning activities, making educational decisions, managing administrative requirements, and coordinating with schools.

The systematic review conducted by Lopez et al. (2019) further underscores fathers' essential role in early intervention programs, caregiving routines, and educational support for children with developmental delays. Nonetheless, the review also reveals a lack of paternal representation in research, indicating that the scientific documentation of fathers' roles in raising children with disabilities remains limited. Similarly, Karisa and McKenzie (2022) show that father involvement is influenced by cultural constructions of masculinity, particularly in Kenya, where traditional norms hinder men from entering caregiving domains perceived as "feminine." When fathers overcome these cultural barriers, however, their involvement greatly benefits children's social, emotional, and language development.

Despite the importance of father involvement, various internal and external barriers persist. Potter (2017) identifies time constraints due to work demands as a central obstacle, limiting fathers' participation in school meetings or intervention programs. This aligns with the findings of Šukys et al. (2015), who report that socioeconomic status and work flexibility substantially affect fathers' opportunities for engagement. From a psychological perspective, Lee (2015) notes that fathers of children with special needs experience higher stress levels than fathers of typically developing children, reducing their confidence to participate actively. Additional barriers stem from limited knowledge of special education, including understanding Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), communicating with special education teachers, and applying behavior management strategies (Yildirim, 2024).

Maternal gatekeeping also influences father involvement. Kıraçcı and Bakkaloğlu (2023) explain that some mothers unintentionally limit fathers' access to caregiving because they perceive themselves as more knowledgeable about the child's condition, resulting in suboptimal paternal involvement. Educational contexts may also hinder involvement. Adigun et al. (2023), in the context of remote learning for deaf and hard-of-hearing children, find that father participation is shaped by technological literacy, access to devices, and proficiency in sign language.

All reviewed studies affirm that father involvement yields substantial benefits. Potter (2016) shows that autistic children with actively involved fathers demonstrate improved academic and social outcomes. Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagans (2016) add that fathers' language input significantly influences the linguistic and academic development of children with disabilities. Moreover, father participation enhances the effectiveness of educational interventions. Mueller and Buckley (2014) demonstrate that fathers' presence in IEP meetings strengthens coherence between home and school strategies, emphasizing that father–school collaboration is vital for educational success. Father involvement also improves family well-being; Zin and Nor (2017) note that active paternal engagement creates more harmonious caregiving patterns and reduces maternal emotional burden.

Sociocultural contexts strongly determine the form of father involvement. Karisa et al. (2021) report that patriarchal norms, masculinity perceptions, and disability stigma often prevent fathers from being actively involved. In some societies, disability is perceived as a family failure or a reflection of paternal inadequacy, affecting fathers' emotional engagement with their children. Conversely, in more supportive contexts, fathers show higher levels of involvement. Potter (2017), for example, finds that inclusive education policies, family support programs, and access to professional services in the United Kingdom increase paternal participation. Thus, inclusive social environments directly enhance father involvement.

To address these barriers, several strategies are recommended. First, schools should provide flexible communication mechanisms such as online meetings, after-work consultations, and sustained guidance (Kurete et al., 2024). Second, fathers need technical and psychological training, including understanding IEP processes, learning strategies for children with special needs, and effective communication techniques (Yildirim, 2024). Third, family interventions must include efforts to challenge cultural stigma and gender stereotypes. Social campaigns, family counseling, and community education can help broaden the understanding that caregiving is a shared parental responsibility (Bezrukova & Samoylova, 2024). Finally, government policies such as paternity leave, psychosocial support services, and improved access to educational information represent strategic measures to enhance father involvement and promote family-centered caregiving.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that father involvement in the education of children with special needs plays a significant role in supporting children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral adaptation. Fathers contribute by providing emotional support, assisting with learning activities, and ensuring the continuity of educational interventions at home. Findings across various studies indicate that consistent paternal involvement enhances family stability, reduces maternal stress, and increases the effectiveness of educational or therapeutic programs undertaken by the child. Factors such as the quality of family communication, fathers' knowledge and readiness regarding their child's special needs, and the availability of social support strongly influence the level of paternal involvement.

Furthermore, the literature indicates that common barriers to father involvement include time constraints, work demands, limited understanding of the child's condition, and psychological pressure associated with parental adjustment to the child's diagnosis. Nevertheless, previous studies emphasize that when fathers gain access to information, training, and community support, their confidence and effectiveness in fulfilling their educational role significantly increase. Thus, father involvement is not only essential for the child's educational outcomes but also has positive implications for overall family well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is recommended that inclusive education programs and early intervention services actively involve fathers in all aspects of support, including assessment, family counseling, and parenting-skills training. Educational institutions, community health centers, and therapy service providers should offer educational programs for fathers concerning the characteristics of children with special needs and effective support strategies. In addition, government agencies and disability advocacy communities are encouraged to expand social support resources for fathers to reduce psychological burdens and enhance their caregiving capacity. Future research may explore variations in father involvement based on specific types of special needs as well as the sociocultural context of families in Indonesia.

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