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The role of family support in the educational progress of children with special educational needs in Ghana: Perspectives of public schools in Kasoa

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Abstract
Background: Family support is widely recognised as a cornerstone of inclusive education for children with special educational needs (SEN). Yet within the Ghanaian context, systematic evidence exploring how family involvement shapes educational outcomes for SEN pupils remains scarce, particularly in peri-urban communities such as Kasoa in the Central Region.
Objective: This study investigates the nature, extent, and impact of family support on the educational progress of children with SEN in public schools in Kasoa, examining both facilitators and barriers that shape family involvement.
Method: A convergent mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were collected via structured questionnaires from 80 participants (40 parents/guardians and 40 school personnel) across six public primary schools in Kasoa. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used for data analysis.
Results: Findings reveal that children with SEN whose families provided high levels of support demonstrated markedly better outcomes in academic performance (76% vs 42%), school attendance (88% vs 55%), and emotional well-being (80% vs 52%) compared to those with low family support. Financial constraints (82%), low parental educational attainment (68%), and limited awareness of SEN (65%) were the predominant barriers to family involvement. Six major themes emerged: emotional encouragement, material support, school-family communication, advocacy and empowerment, cultural and religious coping, and teacher-parent partnerships.
Conclusion: Family support is a significant determinant of educational progress for SEN children in Kasoa public schools. Policy reforms must prioritise capacity-building programmes for families, strengthen home-school partnerships, and address socioeconomic barriers to inclusive education in Ghana.

Keywords: Special educational needs, family support, inclusive education, Ghana, Kasoa, home-school partnership, educational outcomes

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a global imperative, enshrined in international frameworks such as the united nations convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD, 2006) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly goal 4, which commits nations to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations, 2015). Central to the success of inclusive education is the active participation of families, whose involvement has been consistently linked to improved academic and psychosocial outcomes for children with special educational needs (SEN) (Epstein, 2011; hornby & lafaele, 2011; Turnbull *et al*., 2015) [12, 17, 26].

In Ghana, the discourse on inclusive education has gained momentum following the enactment of the Persons with Disability Act (Act 715, 2006) [24] and the Ghana Education service's inclusive education policy (2015), which mandate the integration of learners with SEN into mainstream public schools (Ghana Education Service [GES], 2015; Ministry of education [MoE], 2013) [15, 21]. Despite these legislative commitments, implementation remains uneven. Studies conducted in Ghana's urban and peri-urban contexts indicate persistent gaps in educational resources, trained personnel, and, critically, informed and engaged family participation (Agbenyega, 2007; Avoke, 2002; Ocloo & Subbey, 2008) [3, 5, 22]. Kasoa, a rapidly growing peri-urban municipality within the Awutu Senya East Municipal Assembly (ASEMA) of the Central Region, presents a particularly compelling context for this inquiry.

Characterised by high population density, socioeconomic heterogeneity, and strained public services, Kasoa's public schools face compounding challenges in delivering quality SEN education (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021) [16]. Existing evidence from sub-Saharan Africa suggests that in such contexts, the family unit often substitutes for absent state services, making family support a critical, yet understudied, variable in children's educational trajectories (Addo, 2015; Bines & Lei, 2011) [2, 6].

Research from high-income countries consistently demonstrates that family involvement encompassing emotional encouragement, material provision, home-based learning support, and active school engagement significantly predicts educational success for SEN learners (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Wilder, 2014) [11, 30]. However, direct replication of these findings to the Ghanaian socioeconomic and cultural context is problematic. Differences in family structure, parental literacy, economic constraints, cultural beliefs about disability, and school-community relations mediate the relationship between family support and educational outcomes in ways that are specific to the Ghanaian experience (Fiaveh, 2010; Kuyini & Mangope, 2011) [13, 18].

There is, therefore, a critical need for empirically grounded, contextually sensitive research that examines how family support operates in shaping the educational progress of SEN children in Ghanaian public schools. This study addresses this gap by investigating the perspectives of parents, guardians, teachers, and school administrators in Kasoa's public schools, with the aim of generating evidence that can inform policy and practice in inclusive education across Ghana.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Despite the proliferation of inclusive education policies in Ghana, children with SEN in public schools continue to experience disproportionately poor educational outcomes (Agbenyega & Deku, 2011; UNESCO, 2020) [3, 4]. In the Kasoa municipality, anecdotal evidence from school visits and preliminary discussions with teachers suggests that many SEN pupils exhibit high rates of absenteeism, academic underperformance, and school dropout, often correlating with low levels of family engagement. Yet the precise nature of family support and its mechanisms of influence have not been rigorously examined in this context. This study seeks to fill that void.

1.2 Research objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess the nature and extent of family support provided to children with SEN in public schools in Kasoa.
2. To examine the impact of family support on the educational progress of SEN children in Kasoa public schools.
3. To identify barriers that limit family support for children with SEN in Kasoa.
4. To explore strategies for strengthening family-school partnerships in SEN education in Kasoa.

1.3 Research questions

- **RQ1:** What is the nature and extent of family support provided to children with SEN in public schools in Kasoa?
- **RQ2:** How does family support influence the educational progress of SEN children in public schools in Kasoa?
- **RQ3:** What barriers hinder family support for children with SEN in Kasoa public schools?
- **RQ4:** What strategies can strengthen family-school partnerships to improve educational outcomes for SEN children in Kasoa?

1.4 Significance of the study

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive education in sub-Saharan Africa by providing empirical evidence on the role of family support in SEN education within a specific Ghanaian peri-urban context. The findings are of relevance to policymakers within the Ghana Education Service, school administrators, SEN practitioners, and non-governmental organisations working in the disability and education sectors. The study also adds theoretical depth by testing the applicability of established frameworks of family involvement notably Epstein's (2011) [12] model of school-family-community partnerships within the socio-cultural milieu of Ghana.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualising family support in SEN education

Family support in the SEN context encompasses a wide spectrum of activities and behaviours that parents, guardians, and extended family members engage in to facilitate the learning, development, and well-being of children with disabilities or learning differences (Turnbull *et al*., 2015). Epstein's (2011) [12, 26] influential framework conceptualises family involvement along six dimensions: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Applied to the SEN context, each dimension carries distinct implications for children's educational trajectories. For instance, learning at home which includes assistance with homework, reading, and skill reinforcement has been found to have one of the strongest associations with academic achievement (Wilder, 2014) [30].

Beyond Epstein's framework, scholars have highlighted the affective dimensions of family support, including emotional encouragement, advocacy, and the maintenance of high expectations, as critical predictors of educational resilience in SEN learners (Lalvani, 2012; Trainor, 2010) [19, 25]. The Bioecological Systems Theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) [8], and subsequently extended by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) [9], provides a useful ecological lens, situating family support within nested systems of influence microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem that collectively shape the developmental context of SEN children. This study adopts a bioecological perspective to account for the multilevel factors that mediate family support in Kasoa.

2.2 Family support and educational outcomes: Global evidence

An extensive body of research from Europe and North America attests to the positive effects of family involvement on educational outcomes for SEN learners. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) [11] conducted a landmark review indicating that parental involvement at home is a significant predictor of academic achievement, independent of social

class and family background. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Wilder (2014) [30] confirmed positive correlations between parental involvement and student achievement across diverse samples and educational contexts. Studies specifically focused on SEN populations corroborate these general findings: Turnbull *et al*. (2015) [26] documented that families who adopted an active advocacy role significantly improved their children's access to appropriate support services and individualized educational programmes (IEPs).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the evidence base is comparatively sparse but growing. Kuyini and Mangope (2011) [18] found that in Botswana, inclusive classroom success was significantly associated with parental engagement with teachers. Abosi and Koay (2008) [1] similarly noted that in Nigeria, family attitudes towards disability often shaped by cultural and spiritual beliefs were among the strongest predictors of whether SEN children were enrolled in and retained by schools. These findings suggest that while the broad association between family support and educational outcomes is robust, its manifestation is deeply contextually mediated.

2.3 Barriers to family involvement in SEN education

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) [17] identified three primary categories of barriers to parental involvement in education: parent-related factors (including time constraints, limited educational background, and negative prior experiences with school systems); child-related factors (including the nature and severity of the child's SEN); and school-related factors (including unwelcoming school cultures and inadequate communication). In the Ghanaian context, these barriers are further compounded by structural and cultural dimensions. Research by Agbenyega (2007) [3] in Ghana highlighted that negative cultural attitudes towards disability, rooted in traditional beliefs about causation and spiritual attribution, frequently deter families from actively engaging with school systems.

Financial constraints represent another pervasive barrier. In the Kasoa context, where a substantial proportion of families live in poverty or near-poverty conditions (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021) [16], the direct and indirect costs associated with SEN education including transport, therapeutic interventions, specialised materials, and lost opportunity costs can be prohibitive (Opoku *et al*., 2017) [23]. Low parental literacy also limits the capacity of families to engage meaningfully with school curricula and administrative processes, reinforcing cycles of low involvement and poor educational outcomes (Avoke, 2002) [5].

2.4 Policy context: inclusive education in Ghana

Ghana's legislative and policy landscape reflects a formal commitment to inclusive education. The Persons with Disability Act (Act 715, 2006) [24] guarantees the right to education for all persons with disabilities, while the Ghana Education Service's Inclusive Education Policy (2015) sets out a framework for mainstreaming SEN learners within public schools (GES, 2015). The National Disability Policy (2000) and ratification of the CRPD (2007) further affirm Ghana's international obligations. However, as Ocloo and Subbey (2008) and Agbenyega and Deku (2011) [4, 22] observed, a significant implementation gap persists: inadequate teacher training, insufficient resource allocation, and weak enforcement mechanisms undermine the transformative potential of these frameworks. The role of families in bridging this gap has received limited systematic attention.

2.5 The Kasoa context

Kasoa's emergence as a significant peri-urban centre within Greater Accra's orbit has been accompanied by rapid, largely unplanned growth that has strained educational and social services (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021) [16]. The Awutu Senya East Municipality, within which Kasoa is situated, recorded a population growth rate of approximately 5.4% per annum between 2010 and 2021, attracting migrants from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021) [16]. Public schools in Kasoa serve a predominantly low-income population characterised by high unemployment, informal sector employment, and limited access to social safety nets. In this context, the family's role in supporting SEN children's education is both more critical and more constrained than in relatively affluent urban settings.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) [10]. This design involved the concurrent collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, followed by integration of findings at the interpretation stage. The mixed-methods approach was selected because the complexity of family support in SEN education resists reduction to purely statistical analysis, while qualitative methods alone would lack the breadth and generalisability required to address the study's objectives (Mertens, 2015) [20]. A convergent design allowed the strengths of both paradigms to be leveraged, producing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

3.2 Research site

The study was conducted in Kasoa, specifically within the Awutu Senya East Municipal Assembly (ASEMA) in Ghana's Central Region. Six public primary schools were purposively selected based on the following criteria: confirmed enrolment of children with SEN, accessibility, and willingness to participate. The selected schools collectively served approximately 285 identified SEN pupils at the time of the study.

3.3 Sampling and participants

A combination of purposive and convenience sampling strategies was employed. The total sample comprised 80 participants distributed as follows: 40 parents or guardians of SEN children; 20 classroom teachers; 12 school administrators (including headteachers and assistant headteachers); and 8 special education support staff. Inclusion criteria for parents and guardians required that participants had a child currently enrolled with a documented SEN designation and had been associated with the school for a minimum of one academic term. Teachers and administrators were required to have direct experience with SEN pupils in their respective school

Table 1: Summary of Study Participants

Participant Category	n	% of Sample	Data Collection Method
Parents/Guardians	40	50.0%	Questionnaire + Semi-structured Interview
Classroom Teachers	20	25.0%	Questionnaire + Focus Group Discussion
School Administrators	12	15.0%	Questionnaire + Semi-structured Interview
SEN Support Staff	8	10.0%	Focus Group Discussion
Total	80	100%	

Note: SEN = Special Educational Needs.

3.4 Data collection instruments

Three data collection instruments were employed. First, a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher and validated through expert review and a pilot study (n=10) was administered to all 80 participants. The questionnaire consisted of 45 items across five sections: demographic information, nature and extent of family support, perceived impact of family support on educational outcomes (measured on a five-point Likert scale), barriers to family involvement, and recommendations for policy. The internal consistency of the Likert-scale items was confirmed by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating good reliability (Field, 2018) [14].

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 purposively selected parents/guardians and 8 school administrators. Interviews were conducted in either English or Akan (Twi), lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, and were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Third, two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted one with classroom teachers (n=8) and one with SEN support staff (n=6) each lasting approximately 90 minutes.

3.5 Data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) computed via IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. Independent samples t-tests were employed to compare outcome indicators between pupils classified as receiving high versus low family support. Qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) [7] six-phase reflexive thematic analysis. Interview and FGD transcripts were coded inductively, with themes and sub-themes developed iteratively through researcher reflexivity and peer debriefing. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings was achieved through a narrative weaving approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) [10], whereby qualitative themes served to explain and contextualise quantitative patterns.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Education, Winneba. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all adult participants. For parents and guardians of SEN children, the researcher ensured that consent was provided in the participant's preferred language. Confidentiality was protected through the anonymisation of all identifying information in transcripts and datasets. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. All data were stored on password-protected servers in accordance with the Data Protection Act of Ghana (Act 843, 2012).

4. Findings

4.1 Demographic profile of participants

Of the 80 participants, 42 (52.5%) were female and 38 (47.5%) were male. Among the 40 parents/guardians, parental educational attainment was markedly varied, reflecting the broader socioeconomic stratification of the Kasoa municipality. The majority (55%) had attained no higher than primary-school level, while only 7.5% held a tertiary qualification. This profile has direct implications for the capacity of families to engage with formal educational processes. Table 1 presents the full demographic breakdown of study participants, while Table 2 details the parental educational attainment distribution.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Study Participants (N = 80)

Participant Category	n	% of Sample	Data Collection Method
Parents / Guardians	40	50.0	Questionnaire + Semi-structured Interview
Classroom Teachers	20	25.0	Questionnaire + Focus Group Discussion
School Administrators	12	15.0	Questionnaire + Semi-structured Interview
SEN Support Staff	8	10.0	Focus Group Discussion
Total	80	100.0	

Note: SEN = Special Educational Needs. Data collection methods reflect both quantitative and qualitative strands of the convergent mixed-methods design.

Table 3: Parental Educational Attainment and Occupational Profile (n = 40 Parents/Guardians)

Category	n	%	Implication for SEN Support
Educational Attainment			
No formal education	8	20.0	Severe limitations for literacy-based home support
Primary school	14	35.0	Limited curriculum engagement capacity
Junior/Middle High School	10	25.0	Moderate home learning support possible
Senior High School	5	12.5	Greater capacity for self-directed advocacy
Tertiary / University	3	7.5	Strong advocacy and IEP engagement capacity
Primary Occupation			
Petty trading	15	37.5	Irregular hours; variable disposable income
Artisanal work	9	22.5	Physical demands limit school engagement
Unskilled labour	7	17.5	High financial vulnerability; low flexibility
Formal employment	4	10.0	Greater structural stability and advocacy capacity
Unemployed / Dependent	5	12.5	Highest vulnerability; dependent on community networks

Note: SEN = Special Educational Needs; IEP = Individualised Education Programme. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

4.2 Types of special educational needs represented

The 285 SEN pupils across the six schools presented a diverse range of needs. Intellectual disabilities constituted the largest category, followed by learning disabilities, autism spectrum conditions, and sensory impairments. *Table 3* presents the full distribution, which aligns broadly with prevalence patterns reported in other Ghanaian urban settings (Opoku *et al.*, 2017) [23], and underscores the heterogeneity of SEN populations that families in Kasoa must navigate. The *Figure 1* bar chart below visualises this distribution comparatively.

Table 3: Distribution of special educational needs among pupils in Kasoa public Schools (N = 285)

SEN Category	n	%	Relevant Implications for Family Support
Intellectual disability	80	28.1%	Requires sustained daily supervision and adaptive learning routines
Learning disability (dyslexia/dyscalculia)	63	22.1%	Benefits strongly from structured home literacy/numeracy support
Autism spectrum condition	46	16.1%	Communication-intensive; families often require specialist guidance
Hearing impairment	34	11.9%	Sign language training for families critical for inclusion
Visual impairment	23	8.1%	Braille/tactile materials and orientation support in the home
Physical disability	20	7.0%	Accessibility adaptations and transport support paramount
Multiple disabilities	19	6.7%	Highest complexity; greatest caregiver burden
Total	285	100.0	

Note: SEN categories were assigned based on documented school records and teacher assessments consistent with Ghana Education Service (2015) [15] classifications.

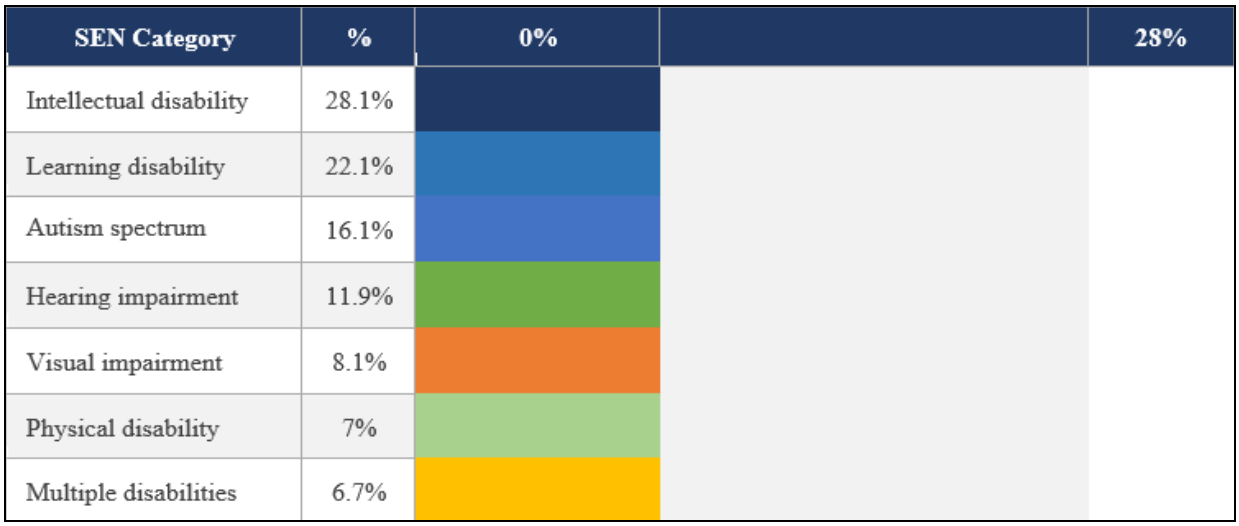


Fig 1: Distribution of special educational needs among pupils in Kasoa public schools (n = 285). Bar lengths are proportional to percentage representation

4.3 Nature and extent of family support (RQ1)

Participants' responses on the Likert-scale items measuring family support practices revealed a heterogeneous landscape of engagement. As illustrated in *Figure 2* and summarised in *Table 4*, monitoring school attendance emerged as the most consistently practised form of support, with 79% of parents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they monitored their child's daily attendance. Helping with homework daily (73%) and attending school meetings (60%) were also relatively common. By contrast, seeking external support such as tutors or therapeutic services was less prevalent (34%), a finding largely attributable to financial barrier

Table 4: Family Support Practices: Descriptive Statistics and Likert-Scale Responses (n = 40 Parents/Guardians)

Support Practice	SA%	A%	N%	D%	Agree/Strongly Agree%	M (SD)
Monitoring school attendance	48%	31%	11%	10%	79%	3.9 (0.82)
Assisting with homework daily	40%	33%	15%	12%	73%	3.7 (0.91)
Attending school meetings	28%	32%	20%	20%	60%	3.4 (1.02)
Providing emotional encouragement	38%	30%	18%	14%	68%	3.6 (0.97)
Providing meals and school supplies	32%	28%	22%	18%	60%	3.4 (1.05)
Communicating regularly with teachers	25%	30%	25%	20%	55%	3.2 (1.08)
Advocating for child's rights at school	18%	28%	28%	26%	46%	3.0 (1.11)
Seeking external tutors / therapy	10%	24%	30%	36%	34%	2.7 (1.03)

Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree/Strongly Disagree. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Cronbach's α =.82.

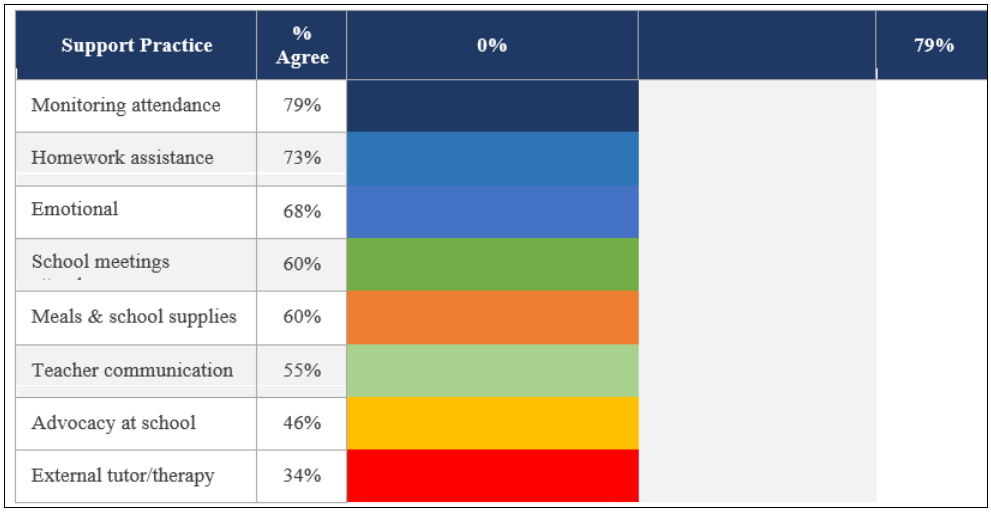


Fig 2: Prevalence of Family Support Practices Reported by Parents/Guardians (n = 40). Values represent the combined percentage of 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' responses on the five-point Likert scale

Qualitative interview data enriched this quantitative profile. A parent of a child with hearing impairment described her support strategies:

"Every morning I prepare him for school before anyone else wakes up. I practise signs with him and write the new vocabulary on cards. When he comes home, we go through everything the teacher taught. I cannot always understand what they teach at school, but I sit with him and try."

(Parent 7, female, no formal education)

This narrative illustrates the creative and committed nature of family support even in the context of limited parental educational resources a finding consistent with research by Lalvani (2012) [19] in comparable socioeconomic contexts. Such informal but intentional engagement constitutes what Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) [11] termed "at-home good parenting," identified as among the most powerful predictors of children's academic outcomes.

4.4 Barriers to family involvement (RQ3)

Table 5 and *Figure 3* present the prevalence of barriers to family involvement as reported by parents. Financial constraints were overwhelmingly identified as the most pervasive barrier, cited by 82% of parents. Low parental educational attainment (68%), limited awareness of SEN (65%), and time constraints (58%) were also prominently reported. Cultural and religious beliefs including attributions of disability to spiritual causes were cited by 45% of respondents.

Table 5: Barriers to Family Involvement in SEN Education (n = 40 Parents/Guardians)

Barrier	n	% Reporting	Policy/Practice Implication
Financial constraints	33	82.5%	Targeted social protection; free specialised materials
Low parental educational attainment	27	67.5%	Adult literacy programmes linked to SEN parenting support
Limited awareness of SEN	26	65.0%	Community sensitisation and caregiver training programmes
Time constraints / work demands	23	57.5%	Flexible school meeting times; digital communication channels
Inadequate school communication	18	45.0%	Structured teacher-parent liaison protocols
Cultural / religious beliefs	18	45.0%	Culturally responsive outreach; engagement with faith leaders
Transport difficulties	16	40.0%	School transport subsidies; community-based support hubs
Stigma / social exclusion	14	35.0%	Anti-stigma campaigns; peer parent support networks
Lack of specialist guidance	12	30.0%	SEN advisory teacher outreach; NGO partnership programmes

Note: Participants could endorse more than one barrier; therefore, percentages do not sum to 100. Barriers are ranked by prevalence.

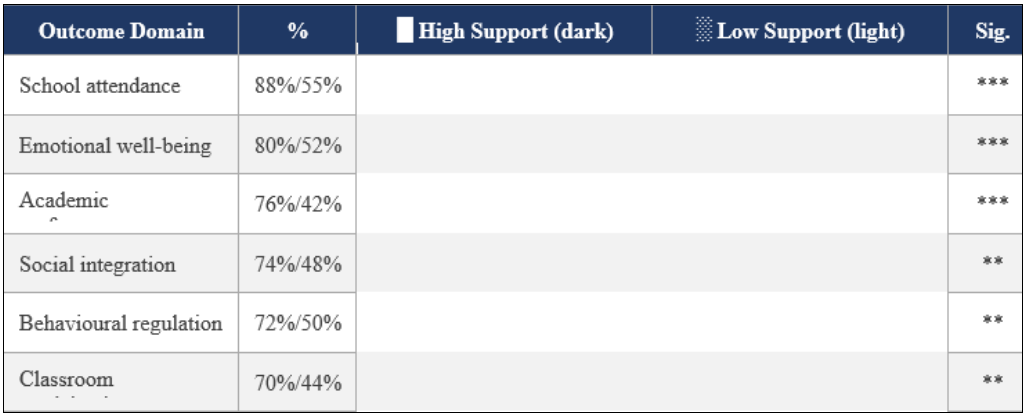


Fig 3: Barriers to Family Involvement in SEN Education Reported by Parents/Guardians (n = 40). Bars represent the percentage of participants citing each barrier. Multiple responses permitted.

Regarding school-family communication, face-to-face meetings (35%) and phone calls (28%) were the most commonly used channels. Notably, 7% of parents reported no regular contact with the school, representing a particularly vulnerable group. *Table 6* details the full distribution of communication channels used.

Table 6: Primary Channels of Family-School Communication (n = 40 Parents/Guardians)

Communication Channel	n	% Using	Accessibility Considerations
Face-to-face meetings at school	14	35.0%	Requires transport; may conflict with work schedules
Phone call from teacher	11	27.5%	Accessible but dependent on teacher initiative
WhatsApp message	8	20.0%	Growing uptake; requires smartphone and data access
Written notes sent home	4	10.0%	Limited utility for low-literacy parents
No regular contact	3	7.5%	Highest-risk group for disengagement

Note: Participants selected their primary (most frequent) mode of communication. Percentages sum to 100.

4.5 Impact of family support on educational outcomes (RQ2)

To examine the impact of family support on educational outcomes, participants were divided into high family support (n = 21) and low family support (n = 19) groups using a median-split composite score. *Table 7* presents teacher-rated educational outcomes across six domains alongside the associated statistical tests, and *Figure 4* visualises the between-group differences. Children in the high-support group consistently outperformed their counterparts across all six domains, with the most pronounced differences observed in school attendance (88% vs 55%), emotional well-being (80% vs 52%), and academic performance (76% vs 42%).

Table 7: Educational Outcomes by Level of Family Support: Descriptive Statistics and Independent Samples t-Tests

Outcome Domain	High Support (n=21)		Low Support (n=19)		t	p	Cohen's d
	M (%)	SD	M (%)	SD			
Academic performance	76%	8.3	42%	9.1	5.81	.001***	1.11
School attendance	88%	6.2	55%	10.4	6.12	.001***	1.24
Social integration	74%	9.0	48%	11.2	4.97	.002**	0.97
Behavioural regulation	72%	8.8	50%	10.6	4.52	.004**	0.89
Emotional well-being	80%	7.5	52%	9.8	5.88	.001***	1.18
Classroom participation	70%	9.4	44%	10.1	4.78	.003**	0.91

Note: M = Mean percentage of positive outcome ratings assigned by teachers; SD = Standard Deviation. Two-tailed independent samples t-tests; degrees of freedom = 38. Cohen's d effect size benchmarks: small ≥ 0.20, medium ≥ 0.50, large ≥ 0.80 (Cohen, 1988). ** p<.01; *** p< 001.

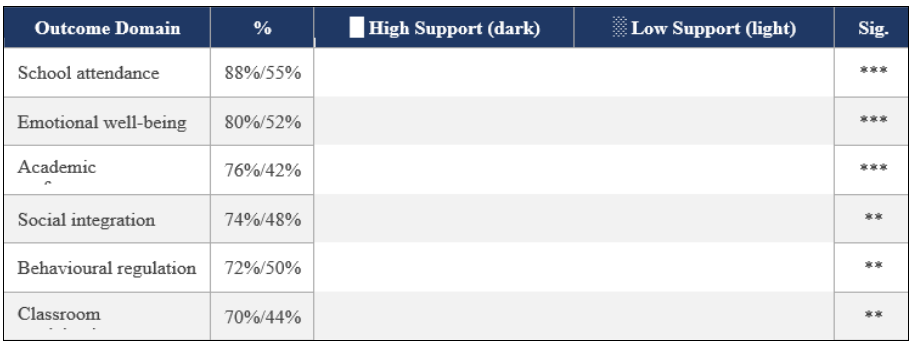


Fig 4: Educational Outcomes Compared by Family Support Level (High vs. Low). Percentages reflect teacher-rated positive outcome indicators. ** p< 01; *** p<.001

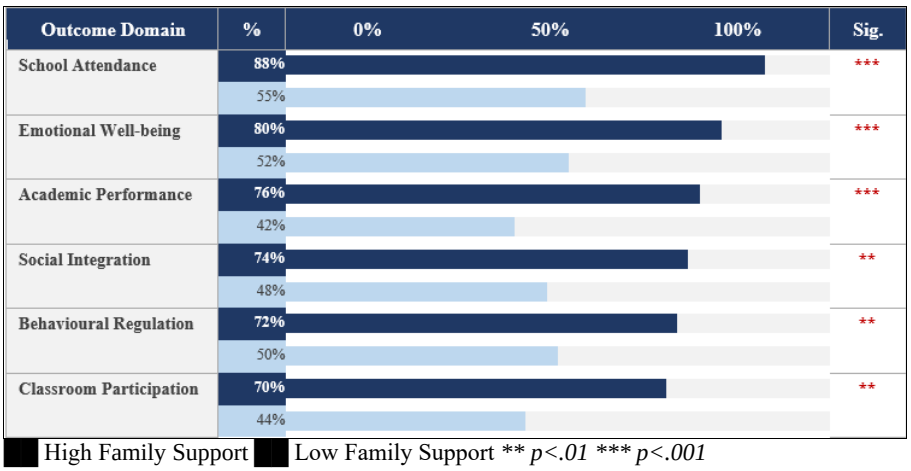


Fig 4: (Revised Visualisation) Side-by-Side Comparison: Educational Outcomes by Family Support Level

Figure 4. Educational Outcomes by Level of Family Support as Rated by Teachers (n = 20 teachers evaluating n = 40 pupils). Each pair of bars represents one outcome domain: dark bars = high family support group; light bars = low family support group. Significance markers indicate independent samples t-test results

4.6 Thematic analysis: Key themes (RQ2 and RQ4)

Thematic analysis of qualitative data generated six major themes. *Table 8* presents a structured synthesis of the themes, their definitions, illustrative exemplars, and linkages to educational outcomes and strategic recommendations.

Table 8: Thematic Analysis: Summary of Major Themes, Representative Exemplars, and Strategic Implications

#	Theme	Definition	Illustrative Exemplar	Outcome Link & Strategic Implication
1	Emotional Encouragement	Affirmation, motivation, and emotional reassurance provided by family members	"I tell him every morning that he is intelligent and that God made him special." (Guardian 3)	Linked to emotional well-being and resilience. Schools should affirm and build on families' emotional capital through parent support groups.
2	Material Support	Provision of school supplies, uniforms, meals, and specialised learning materials	"Last term he missed three weeks because I could not find money for transport." (Parent 19)	Linked to attendance. Policy should expand free SEN material provision and transport subsidies.
3	School-Family Communication	Reciprocal information exchange between families and school personnel	"The parents who keep in touch those children do better." (School Administrator 2)	Linked to all outcome domains. Structured liaison protocols and mobile platforms are recommended.
4	Advocacy & Empowerment	Active negotiation for accommodations and engagement with SEN rights frameworks	Higher-attainment parents consistently secured IEP adjustments and specialist referrals.	Linked to academic performance. Capacity-building and parent empowerment programmes are essential.
5	Cultural & Religious Coping	Use of spiritual practices and community frameworks to interpret and respond to SEN	"Some families believe the child will be healed and does not need special help." (Teacher FGD)	May delay formal assessment. Culturally responsive outreach and engagement with faith leaders recommended.
6	Teacher-Parent Partnerships	Collaborative, empathetic relationships between teaching staff and families	"We need to train our teachers to see the parent as a partner, not a problem." (Administrator 5)	Underpins all outcome gains. In-service training in family engagement must be prioritised.

Note: Exemplars drawn from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) transcripts. Participant identifiers are anonymised. IEP = Individualised Education Programme.

Theme 1: Emotional encouragement

The most frequently coded theme related to emotional encouragement provided by families. Parents articulated a strong sense of duty to reassure, motivate, and affirm their children's efforts regardless of academic progress. Teachers observed that children whose families provided such affirmations demonstrated greater resilience in the classroom and were less susceptible to the demoralising effects of academic setbacks. This finding aligns with Lalvani's (2012) [19] contention that affective dimensions of family support are critical predictors of educational resilience in SEN learners.

Theme 2: Material support

Material support including provision of school supplies, uniforms, meals, and specialised learning materials was the second most prominent theme. However, the inability to sustain material support emerged as a major source of stress. The data reveal that transport costs alone caused several children to miss multiple weeks of schooling, underscoring the direct link between financial deprivation and educational exclusion documented by Opoku *et al.* (2017) [23].

Theme 3: School-Family communication

Participants identified effective communication as a pivotal enabler of educational support. Where communication was regular and reciprocal, parents felt more empowered to reinforce school-based learning at home and to advocate for their children's needs. Teachers similarly reported higher professional efficacy when parents engaged proactively, suggesting a bidirectional benefit consistent with Epstein's (2011) [12] partnership model.

Theme 4: Advocacy and empowerment

A subset of parents demonstrated active advocacy behaviours, including negotiating accommodations and connecting with disability-related non-governmental organisations. These parents tended to have higher educational attainment, and their children's outcomes were consistently more positive. This underscores parental empowerment as a key mediating variable in the family support-outcomes relationship (Trainor, 2010) [25], with significant implications for capacity-building investment.

Theme 5: Cultural and religious coping

Cultural and religious frameworks significantly shaped families' responses to their children's SEN. While spiritual coping practices were not inherently antithetical to educational engagement, they sometimes delayed access to formal assessment and intervention. Teachers noted that delays in accepting a learning difference could cost children critical years of targeted support. This finding is consistent with Agbenyega's (2007) [3] observations regarding spiritual attribution of disability in Ghana and calls for culturally responsive, non-confrontational outreach.

Theme 6: Teacher-Parent partnerships

The final theme highlighted the critical importance of proactive and empathetic teacher-parent relationships. Teachers who made deliberate efforts to communicate progress in accessible language were perceived by parents as key allies. Such partnerships were particularly valued by parents with low literacy. The data affirm that teacher professional development in family engagement is not peripheral but central to improving SEN educational outcomes in Kasoa.

5. Discussion

5.1 Family support and educational outcomes

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that family support is a significant determinant of educational progress for SEN children in Kasoa public schools. The substantial and statistically significant differences documented across all six outcome domains (see *Table 7* and *Figure 4*) corroborate the extensive international literature on parental involvement and educational outcomes (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Wilder, 2014) [11, 17, 30]. Critically, however, this study reveals that the mechanisms and forms of family support in Kasoa are shaped by a distinctive socioeconomic and cultural context that distinguishes it from high-income country settings.

Notably, the forms of family support most prevalent in Kasoa daily monitoring of attendance, homework assistance, and emotional encouragement (see *Table 4* and *Figure 2*) align closely with what Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) [11] characterised as "at-home good parenting," identified as the most powerful form of parental involvement in children's education. *Table 9* situates these findings in relation to Epstein's (2011) [12] six-dimension framework of family involvement, illustrating how each dimension was evidenced (or constrained) in the Kasoa context.

Table 9: Alignment of Kasoa Findings with Epstein's (2011) Six Dimensions of Family Involvement

Dimension	Epstein's Definition	Evidence in Kasoa	Constraining Factors & Implications
Parenting	Supporting children's health, safety, and learning at home	Prevalent: 79% monitor attendance; 73% assist with homework	Constrained by low literacy (68%) and financial hardship (82%); adult literacy programmes needed
Communicating	Two-way school-family information exchange	Partial: face-to-face (35%) and phone (28%) most common	7% have no contact; mobile platform investment could expand reach significantly
Volunteering	Organising support and participation at school	Limited: work demands and transport costs restrict school-site presence	Flexible volunteering models and community-based alternatives required
Learning at Home	Assisting children with curriculum-linked activities at home	Prevalent emotionally; restricted by limited curriculum familiarity	Structured home-learning packs and translated guidance materials recommended
Decision-Making	Including families in school governance and IEP processes	Minimal for most families; only higher-literacy parents engage in IEP advocacy	Capacity-building and plain-language IEP documentation essential
Community Collaboration	Connecting with community resources and services	Partial: some NGO engagement reported; cultural/religious networks prevalent	Formalise links between schools, NGOs, faith communities, and social services

Note: IEP = Individualised Education Programme. Adapted from Epstein (2011) [12]. 'Evidence in Kasoa' derived from quantitative (Tables 4-7) and qualitative (Table 8) data.

This mapping reveals that engagement is highest in the parenting and learning-at-home dimensions, consistent with families prioritising direct child-focused support over formal institutional participation. This has significant implications: policy interventions should not focus exclusively on fostering formal parental participation in school governance structures, but must first recognise, affirm, and build upon the everyday, informal support that families already provide.

5.2 Barriers to participation and structural inequities

The dominance of financial constraints (82.5%) as the primary barrier to family involvement (*Table 5*; *Figure 3*) reflects the broader socioeconomic vulnerabilities of the Kasoa community and is consistent with findings from comparable sub-Saharan African contexts (Avoke, 2002; Opoku *et al*., 2017) [5, 23]. The intersection of poverty, disability, and educational marginalisation creates a compounding disadvantage for SEN families, wherein financial stress simultaneously reduces the availability of time, resources, and psychological bandwidth for educational engagement.

The prominence of low parental educational attainment (67.5%) as a barrier underscores the need for capacity-building initiatives specifically designed for parents with limited literacy. Adult literacy programmes linked to SEN parenting support, delivered through accessible community platforms, could substantially enhance the capacity of these families to engage with their children's education (Avoke, 2002) [5]. The cultural and religious dimensions of barriers, including spiritual attribution of disability and associated stigma (reported by 45%), are particularly nuanced challenges that require culturally responsive rather than dismissive or confrontational interventions (Fiaveh, 2010; Kuyini & Mangope, 2011) [13, 18].

Table 10 presents a synthesised framework of the key barriers identified in this study, ranked by prevalence, and maps each to its theoretical antecedent and recommended policy response.

Table 10: Barriers to Family Involvement: Theoretical Classification and Policy Recommendations

Barrier (% Reporting)	Classification (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011)	Bioecological Level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) [8]	Recommended Policy Response
Financial constraints (82.5%)	Parent-related	Exosystem	Targeted social protection grants; free SEN materials; school transport subsidies
Low parental education (67.5%)	Parent-related	Microsystem	Community adult literacy programmes integrated with SEN parenting support
Limited SEN awareness (65.0%)	Parent-related	Exosystem	Community sensitisation campaigns; teacher-led SEN information workshops for families
Time/work demands (57.5%)	Parent-related	Exosystem	Flexible school contact hours; asynchronous mobile communication platforms
Inadequate school communication (45.0%)	School-related	Mesosystem	Structured liaison protocols; dedicated family engagement coordinator role
Cultural/religious beliefs (45.0%)	Parent-related	Macrosystem	Culturally responsive outreach; collaboration with faith and community leaders
Transport difficulties (40.0%)	Parent-related	Exosystem	Community-based parent support hubs proximal to residential clusters
Stigma/social exclusion (35.0%)	School-/community-related	Macrosystem	Anti-stigma programmes; peer parent networks; whole-school inclusion culture

Note: Barriers ranked by prevalence. Classification adapted from Hornby and Lafaele (2011) [17]. Bioecological level assigned per Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) [8, 9]. SEN = Special Educational Needs.

5.3 Strengthening Family-School partnerships: Strategic implications

The thematic analysis (Table 8) highlights several actionable pathways for strengthening family-school partnerships in the Kasoa context. *Table 11* presents a priority matrix of recommended strategies, aligned to the six themes and ranked by evidence strength and implementation feasibility.

Table 11: Strategic Priority Matrix for Strengthening Family-School Partnerships in SEN Education

Strategy	Rationale & Evidence Base	Lead Actor	Priority Level	Outcome Domain Targeted
Parent capacity-building programme	Low parental literacy (68%) and SEN awareness (65%) limit engagement; evidence from Lalvani (2012) and Trainor (2010)	GES / NGOs	HIGH	All domains
Mobile communication platform	Mobile penetration at 134.5/100 (GSS, 2021); 28% already using phone calls; low-cost scalable solution	Schools / GES	HIGH	Attendance; communication
Peer parent support networks	Social isolation among SEN families documented; peer support reduces stigma and shares coping strategies	Schools / NGOs	HIGH	Emotional well-being
Free SEN material provision	82.5% cite financial barriers; direct material support reduces attendance-linked poverty exclusion	GES / MoE	HIGH	Attendance; academic
In-service teacher training in family engagement	FGD data confirm teacher-parent partnerships as central; current pre-service programmes insufficient	Teacher Education Institutions	HIGH	All domains
Culturally responsive SEN outreach	45% cite cultural/religious barriers; confrontational approaches ineffective (Agbenyega, 2007) [3]	Schools / Faith leaders	MEDIUM	Participation; attendance
Flexible school meeting schedules	57.5% cite time/work demands; structural adjustment with minimal resource cost	School Administration	MEDIUM	School-family communication
Community-based parent support hubs	Transport barriers (40%) restrict school-site engagement; proximal hubs reduce access inequities	ASEMA / NGOs	MEDIUM	Attendance; advocacy
Inclusive school culture training	Stigma (35%) discourages family engagement; whole-school approach required (UNESCO, 2020)	Schools / GES	MEDIUM	Social integration

Note: GES = Ghana Education Service; MoE = Ministry of Education; ASEMA = Awutu Senya East Municipal Assembly; NGO = Non-Governmental Organisation. Priority levels reflect intersection of evidence strength and implementation feasibility. SEN = Special Educational Needs.

The communication channel data (Table 6) reveal that mobile phone communication already constitutes 48% of family-school contact when WhatsApp and phone calls are combined. Given Ghana's high mobile phone penetration rates (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021) [16], school-to-family mobile platforms represent an accessible, scalable, and cost-effective mechanism for strengthening regular contact, particularly for families with transportation constraints.

Teacher professional development emerges as the highest-priority strategic action. FGD data indicate that teachers who approach parents as partners rather than as problems or peripheral stakeholders achieve measurably better collaborative outcomes. Pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes in Ghana should incorporate dedicated modules on family engagement in inclusive SEN education, with specific attention to culturally responsive communication strategies. The Ghana Education Service's 2015 Inclusive Education Policy provides an existing framework for this, but its operationalisation at school level requires sustained investment in teacher capacity and school leadership development.

5.4 Theoretical implications

The findings affirm the applicability of Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) [9] bioecological theory to the Kasoa SEN context (see *Table 10* for the multi-level classification of barriers). The educational progress of SEN children was clearly mediated by interactions across multiple system levels: the microsystem of the family and classroom; the mesosystem of family-school partnerships; the exosystem of community resources and economic conditions; and the macrosystem of cultural beliefs, policies, and legislative frameworks.

Epstein's (2011) [12] framework of school-family-community partnerships was partially supported (see *Table 9*), with evidence of engagement across the parenting, communicating, and learning-at-home dimensions. However, engagement in the decision-making and community collaboration dimensions was minimal for most families, reflecting the significant structural and literacy-based constraints documented in this study. These findings underscore the need to contextualise and adapt Epstein's framework for low-income, peri-urban African settings where formal institutional participation is constrained but informal home-based support is both present and powerful.

6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that family support is a critically important determinant of educational progress for children with SEN in public schools in Kasoa, Ghana. Children who benefit from higher levels of family support encompassing emotional encouragement, daily academic assistance, regular school contact, and advocacy achieve substantially better outcomes across academic, social, behavioural, and emotional dimensions. At the same time, multiple structural, cultural, and informational barriers constrain the capacity of many Kasoa families to provide adequate support, creating inequitable conditions for SEN children's educational development.

These findings call for urgent, coordinated action from multiple stakeholders. The Ghana Education Service should prioritise the development and implementation of structured family engagement programmes within its Inclusive Education Policy framework, with special attention to the needs of low-income and low-literacy families. Schools should invest in proactive, culturally responsive communication with families, leverage mobile technologies to strengthen regular contact, and create welcoming environments that position families as essential partners rather than peripheral observers. Teacher education institutions should equip pre-service and in-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to build effective family-school partnerships in diverse, resource-constrained settings. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine the long-term developmental trajectories of SEN children in relation to sustained family support, and should seek to include the voices of SEN children themselves a perspective notably absent from the existing Ghanaian literature. Comparative studies across different municipal and regional contexts within Ghana would also enrich understanding of how local socioeconomic, cultural, and policy environments shape the relationship between family support and SEN educational outcomes.

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