

Chapter 16

A Workshop–Based Model for Parents Supporting Students With Additional Learning Needs: Enhancing Parental Engagement in Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the efficacy of targeted workshops designed to enhance parental engagement in the education of children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) within inclusive mainstream settings. Recognizing the critical role parents play in their children's educational outcomes, this research equips parents with the skills needed to support effective home learning environments. Utilizing a concurrent mixed-methods design, the chapter presents findings from quantitative surveys measuring shifts in parental confidence and qualitative data from open-ended survey responses. Key findings reveal significant improvements in parental confidence across various areas, including understanding ALN, emotional regulation, and boundary setting. The chapter highlights how workshops contribute to positive behavioral changes at home and in school, emphasizing the need for ongoing parental education to address the complexities of ALN effectively.

INTRODUCTION

According to Lyu et al. (2019), families have the most significant impact on the attitudes, behaviors, and academic performance of children and adolescents. Consequently, a child's attitude toward school and academic motivation primarily develops within the home environment. Many parents, however, remain unaware of their critical role in shaping their children's education (Sobri et al., 2022). While the family serves as the initial educational environment responsible for early learning, this responsibility

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transitions to schools over time. Nonetheless, families retain a foundational role and cannot be excluded from the educational process (Ruhela, 2024).

As a teacher and later head of inclusion in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), I have observed firsthand the critical importance of collaboration between schools and families, particularly for children with additional learning needs (ALN). Parents of children facing significant academic challenges often miss key meetings or struggle to consistently support homework efforts. In my earlier research on parental involvement in special schools, teachers expressed frustration with the perceived lack of parental engagement (Schoeman, 2014). However, it became increasingly evident that understanding parents' perspectives and the barriers they face is essential.

While extensive research highlights the importance of parental involvement, limited attention has been given to identifying and addressing the barriers parents face. Informal action research at a school in the UAE where I previously worked revealed that many parents lack both information on how to engage and an understanding of the significance of their involvement. This finding aligns with evidence from various studies (Dai et al., 2018; Lendrum et al., 2015; Ronkainen et al., 2023).

Parental involvement refers to parents and parent communities actively contributing to a supportive educational environment for their children (Bornman, 2021; Huscroft-D'Angelo et al., 2022). It encompasses both dedication and active participation in school activities as well as support for children at home (Diaz, 2023; Mantey, 2020). This chapter will further explore and refine this concept. In modern schools, teachers and administrators encounter diverse family structures. Consequently, "parent" in the context of parental involvement extends beyond biological parents to include any individual responsible for a child's education. This aspect may include family members, legal guardians, older siblings, surrogate parents, foster parents, or groups involved in the child's upbringing (Arcama & Aton, 2024; Sobri et al., 2022).

Parents play a critical role in fostering students' academic achievement. Research highlights the importance of parental involvement in shaping children's education, attitudes toward school, and academic success (Lendrum et al., 2015; Ruhela, 2024). Academic success is more attainable when parents actively support teaching and learning at home, regardless of their educational background or social status (Lendrum et al., 2015; Lyu et al., 2019). This chapter will explore effective strategies for achieving this. Involved parents enhance their children's development, providing motivation and support. Parental behavior and attitudes toward school significantly influence children's physical, intellectual, and socio-emotional growth, and predict academic success more effectively than factors such as social class, family size, or parental education level (Diaz, 2023; Lyu et al., 2019). However, cross-country variations in outcomes suggest that demographic factors may also play a role. Mantey (2020) further affirmed that limited parental involvement is often linked to financial constraints.

Dai et al. (2018) asserted that parental involvement in children's education has a profound impact on academic performance and overall development. Such involvement reduces behavioral issues, strengthens the parent-child relationship, and fosters greater self-esteem and confidence (Ahmetoglu et al., 2020; Paseka & Schwab, 2020). There is limited research on parental involvement in supporting students with ALN in the UAE. This gap is addressed in this chapter by enhancing parental engagement through the provision of information about their child's specific needs and the influence of their involvement on academic outcomes.

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