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Parental Involvement in the Holistic Development of Learners with Special Needs

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Abstract

This study determined teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in the holistic development of learners with special needs in selected schools in Aranyaprathet, Sakaeo, Thailand during School Year 2025–2026. Anchored on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Epstein's Framework of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parental Involvement, and Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the study used a quantitative descriptive-survey and descriptive-correlational design. Data were gathered from 75 Filipino teachers handling learners with special needs through a validated structured questionnaire and were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, means, and Pearson r. Findings showed that most respondents were female, in early adulthood, had five years or less of teaching experience, taught in the primary grades, and worked in public schools. Parents were perceived as very highly involved in learners' academic, social, emotional, physical, behavioral, and functional and life skills development, while learners demonstrated a high level of holistic development across cognitive, emotional, social, and physical/motor domains. However, Pearson correlation results showed no significant relationship between parental involvement and learners' holistic development. Teachers also reported very serious challenges, particularly ineffective communication, limited parental knowledge of special education practices, limited time, and dependence on teachers. The study recommends stronger home–school partnerships and evidence-based parent training to support learners with special needs. The study supports SDG 4, SDG 3, SDG 10, and SDG 17 by promoting inclusive education, learner well-being, reduced educational barriers, and school–family collaboration. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening educational, institutional, community, and well-being support systems for learners with special needs.

Keywords: Educational Sustainability, Holistic Development, Inclusive Education, Learners with Special Needs, Parental Involvement, Special Education, Teacher Perceptions

1. Introduction

Parental involvement is a critical factor in the holistic development of learners with special needs, particularly within inclusive education settings where home–school collaboration supports academic, social, emotional, physical, behavioral, and functional growth. Effective education depends on collaboration among schools, families, and communities (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2020), and parental involvement is associated with student achievement, socio-emotional growth, and school success (UNICEF, 2022; National Education Association, 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; Council for Exceptional Children, 2019). For learners with special needs, coordinated support from parents, teachers, therapists, and communities is essential to ensure inclusive participation and whole-child development (World Health Organization, 2020; American Psychological Association, 2019; Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, 2021; UNESCO, 2022).

Learners with special needs require individualized and consistent support because their development may differ across cognitive, social, emotional, physical, behavioral, communication, and adaptive domains (UNICEF, 2023; WHO, 2022). These learners may experience challenges in attention, instruction-following, emotional regulation, academic performance, peer interaction, and functional independence (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021; Smith & Oliver, 2023; Lee et al., 2022; Global Partnership for Education, 2024). However, a strengths-based perspective emphasizes that learners with special needs can achieve meaningful progress when educational support recognizes both their needs and potential (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2023). Parental involvement refers to parents' active, consistent, and collaborative participation in home-based and school-based activities that support learners' development (Winkler, 2025; Alshahrani, 2023). It includes communication with teachers, academic support at home, participation in school activities, collaboration in decision-making, and reinforcement of behavioral and therapeutic strategies. Holistic

development refers to learners' comprehensive growth across cognitive, emotional, social, physical, moral, behavioral, and functional domains (Peng et al., 2026; Pandey, 2020; Peng et al., 2024).

The literature consistently presents parental involvement as a major contributor to academic progress, emotional well-being, social participation, and inclusive education outcomes (Wilder, 2024; UNICEF, 2024). Parental engagement includes assisting with homework, communicating with teachers, attending school activities, supporting learning at home, and building a home environment that reinforces school-based learning (Alshahrani, 2023; Sheridan et al., 2024; Hornby & Blackwell, 2024; National Education Association, 2023). More than simple cooperation, it requires trust, shared responsibility, and sustained communication between families and schools (Sheridan et al., 2024; Wilder, 2024; OECD, 2023). In inclusive education, parental involvement serves as a bridge between home and school (Hyassat et al., 2024; Muhammad et al., 2024). When parents communicate with teachers, assist with learning tasks, attend meetings, and reinforce strategies at home, learners demonstrate improved motivation, behavior, confidence, and socio-emotional outcomes (Nurhayati, 2024; Yazicioğlu & Sümer Dodur, 2023). Parental collaboration also helps teachers identify appropriate interventions and maintain consistency in individualized support (Narot & Kiettikunwong, 2024; Hyassat et al., 2024). Inclusive education recognizes the right of all learners to equitable access to quality education (UNESCO, 2023; UNICEF, 2024). It values diversity and supports the participation of learners with disabilities in regular classrooms (OECD, 2023; Hyassat et al., 2024). In this setting, parents act as advocates and partners who provide teachers with important knowledge about their children's strengths, needs, behaviors, and developmental progress (UNICEF, 2024; Alnahdi, 2023; Hyassat et al., 2024). Strong family–school collaboration supports individualized education planning, monitoring, and instructional adjustment (Sheridan et al., 2024; National Education Association, 2023; Hornby & Blackwell, 2024; OECD, 2023). Despite its importance, parental involvement remains uneven. Some parents are highly engaged, while others face barriers such as limited time, insufficient understanding of their child's condition, lack of awareness of inclusive education, financial strain, limited access to services, and uncertainty about special education procedures (Hyassat et al., 2024; Gaspar & Sahay, 2025; Calderon-Villarreal et al., 2025; Wildmon et al., 2024; Alshahrani, 2023; Hornby & Blackwell, 2024; UNESCO, 2023). Communication difficulties, cultural differences, language barriers, and perceived power imbalances between educators and parents may further reduce meaningful collaboration (Hornby & Blackwell, 2024; Hyassat et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023; UNICEF, 2024; OECD, 2023; Alshahrani, 2023). The related studies also show varied findings. Departemen and Nastiar (2025) found that parental involvement supports academic and socio-emotional development but may be hindered by lack of information, resources, and financial capacity. Pantao-o and Baldonado (2025) reported high parental involvement but limited significant correlation with academic performance. Quimpang, et. al (2025) found stronger home-based than school-based involvement. Cordero, et. al. (2025) emphasized the importance of parental involvement and self-efficacy among parents of learners with special educational needs. Escol and Alcopra (2024) found significant relationships between parental involvement and academic performance. Kantova (2024) associated higher parental involvement with increased probability of high school graduation, while Barten, et. al. (2022) found high parental involvement and favorable parenting behavior among parents of learners with special educational needs.

Globally, inclusive education is supported by international organizations and policy frameworks that emphasize equitable access, family engagement, and shared responsibility. The Salamanca Statement and related inclusive education frameworks emphasize cooperation between schools and families as a foundation for addressing diverse learner needs (UNESCO, 2023). International evidence shows that learners with disabilities may experience lower academic achievement, higher dropout risk, limited participation, restricted access to specialized services, and inadequate institutional support. These challenges show the need for stronger home–school partnerships, especially for learners requiring individualized educational, behavioral, therapeutic, and functional support. In Thailand, inclusive education has been promoted through national policies supporting the integration of learners with special needs into mainstream schools. However, implementation challenges remain, particularly in strengthening collaboration between parents and schools. Teachers observe that parental participation varies according to educational background, socioeconomic status, work commitments, awareness of inclusive education, and understanding of children's needs. In rural communities, parents may also experience limited access to support services, therapy programs, and professional guidance. Cultural factors may lead some families to rely primarily on teachers for educational support, making teachers' perspectives important in understanding the actual extent and challenges of parental involvement.

This study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Epstein's Framework of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parental Involvement, and Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Bronfenbrenner's theory explains that child development is shaped by interacting environmental systems, with the home–school connection serving as a key mesosystem for learners with special needs. Epstein's framework explains that students' development depends on the shared work of family, school, and community, particularly through parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Joyce Epstein, 2018; Wilder, 2024). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model explains that parental involvement is influenced by parents' beliefs about their role, school invitations, and self-efficacy (Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey & Howard Sandler, 2005; Hornby & Blackwell, 2024). Bandura's Social Learning Theory supports the idea that parents influence children's behaviors, attitudes, social skills, emotional responses, and study habits through modeling, reinforcement, and social interaction.

Conceptually, the study follows an independent variable–dependent variable model. Parental involvement is examined through academic, social, emotional, physical, behavioral, and functional and life skills domains, while holistic development is examined through cognitive, emotional, social, and physical/motor domains. Teacher profile variables include age, sex, length of teaching experience in special/inclusive education, grade level handled, and type of school.

Although existing literature supports the importance of parental involvement, many studies focus mainly on academic performance rather than holistic development. Limited attention has been given to how parental involvement relates to cognitive, emotional, social, physical/motor, behavioral, and functional development among learners with special needs. There is also a gap in Thailand-based studies that examine parental involvement in inclusive education while considering contextual factors such as culture, rural access, parental migration, school–family communication, and teacher perceptions. This study addresses that gap by determining teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in the holistic development of learners with special needs in selected schools in Aranyaprathet, Sakaeo, Thailand during School Year 2025–2026. It examines the level of parental involvement, the level of learners' holistic development, the relationship between these variables, and the seriousness of challenges encountered by teachers in fostering parental involvement.

The study aligns most directly with SDG 4 – Quality Education because it focuses on inclusive education, equitable learning opportunities, and the development of learners with special needs. It also relates to SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being because holistic development includes emotional, social, physical, and functional well-being. The study further supports SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities because it addresses the educational participation of learners with disabilities and the need to reduce barriers to inclusive learning. Finally, it connects with SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals because it emphasizes collaboration among parents, teachers, schools, communities, and support systems. These SDG connections naturally emerge from the manuscript's focus on inclusive education, home–school partnership, learner well-being, and coordinated support for children with special needs (UNESCO, 2023; UNICEF, 2024; Sheridan et al., 2024; Hornby & Blackwell, 2024; World Health Organization, 2023; OECD, 2023).

This study contributes to educational sustainability by supporting inclusive practices that help schools sustain meaningful participation and learning opportunities for learners with special needs. It contributes to public health and well-being sustainability by recognizing that emotional, physical, social, and functional development are essential to learners' quality of life (World Health Organization, 2023; UNICEF, 2024). It supports socio-economic and community sustainability by strengthening family–school partnerships that may improve learner independence, participation, and long-term functioning. The study also contributes to institutional sustainability because its findings may guide schools, administrators, teachers, and policy makers in designing parent-training programs, communication systems, and inclusive education policies. By examining teachers' perspectives, the study provides evidence that may help improve collaboration, resource planning, and support structures for learners with special needs.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative research method, specifically the descriptive-survey design. Bhandari (2022) defines quantitative study as the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data to identify patterns, averages, predictions, causal relationships, and generalizable results. The descriptive-survey method was used because the study gathered data through a questionnaire to describe teachers' perceptions. A survey is a descriptive research design that collects data through questionnaires or interviews to gather qualitative and quantitative data (Singh. 2023). The study also used a descriptive-correlational design to determine the significance of the relationship between parental involvement and the holistic development of learners with special needs. A descriptive-correlational design explains the relationship between two or more variables without making claims about cause and effect (Singh, 2023).

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in selected schools in Aranyaprathet, Sakaeo, Thailand during School Year 2025–2026. These schools included teachers handling learners with special needs in inclusive or special education settings.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were 75 Filipino teachers in Thailand who handled learners with special needs. Their profile variables included age, sex, length of teaching experience in special or inclusive education, grade level handled, and type of school.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The teacher-respondents were selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique was appropriate because the study required participants with specific characteristics related to teaching learners with special needs. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which units are selected because they possess characteristics needed in the sample (Nikolopoulou, 2023). It is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling (Bullard, 2024).

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used a structured questionnaire as the primary data-gathering instrument. The instrument was appropriate for a quantitative descriptive-correlational design because it allowed the researcher to measure teachers' perceptions systematically and analyze relationships among variables numerically. The questionnaire gathered information on respondents' profile, including age, sex, educational attainment, length of teaching experience, and relevant special education training or seminars attended. It also measured the level of parental involvement in the holistic development of learners with special needs in terms of academic support, social skills, emotional support, behavioral guidance, and functional or life skills. Respondents answered the items using a Likert-type scale. The questionnaire-checklist underwent validation after the comments and suggestions of the adviser and critic-reader were incorporated. It was evaluated by five evaluators composed of two school heads and three teachers. The evaluators had at least five years of teaching experience, held a master's degree, and had completed training or coursework related to Special Education. They assessed the instrument based on clarity, relevance, alignment with the study variables, and content validity. Their feedback was used to revise and refine the questionnaire. The instrument was considered valid if the average rating of the evaluators reached 3.50.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Before data collection, the researcher secured approval from the Executive Director of the PSU–School of Advanced Studies to conduct the study in Thailand and submitted formal request letters to the relevant institutional review boards or ethics committees for ethical clearance. After approval was obtained, permission was requested from school administrators, such as principals or school directors, through official letters to ensure coordination with school policies and schedules. The researcher then met with the teacher-respondents and provided each participant with an informed consent form. The form explained the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Only teachers who voluntarily agreed and signed the consent form were included. The validated questionnaire was administered personally by the researcher or with the help of trained research aides during non-instructional hours to avoid disrupting classes and school activities. Clear instructions were given so respondents could answer accurately and honestly. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to ensure a high retrieval rate and preserve data integrity. The data were checked, organized, and encoded into statistical software for analysis.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the profile of the teacher-respondents. Frequency counts and means were used to determine the level of parental involvement in the holistic development of learners with special needs. The mean ranges were interpreted as follows: 4.51–5.00 as very highly involved, 3.51–4.50 as highly involved, 2.51–3.50 as moderately involved, 1.51–2.50 as fairly involved, and 1.00–1.50 as not involved. The level of holistic development of learners with special needs was also analyzed using frequency counts and means. The mean ranges were interpreted as follows: 4.51–5.00 as very high, 3.51–4.50 as high, 2.51–3.50 as moderately high, 1.51–2.50 as fair, and 1.00–1.50 as poor. Pearson r was used to determine the significance of the relationship between parental involvement and the holistic development of learners with special needs. Frequency counts and means were also used to analyze the seriousness of challenges encountered by teacher-respondents in fostering parental involvement.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study followed established ethical guidelines. Participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the research and were allowed to participate voluntarily, with the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured because no identifying information was attached to responses. All data were stored securely and used only for academic purposes. The study also ensured that respondents would not experience psychological, emotional, or professional harm. Accuracy, honesty, and objectivity were observed from data gathering to reporting of findings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Profile of the Teacher-Respondents

3.1.1 Age, Sex, Teaching Experience, Grade Level, and Type of School

Most teacher-respondents were between 30 and 39 years old, representing 39 or 52 percent of the sample. Females comprised the majority, with 44 or 58.7 percent, while males accounted for 31 or 41.3 percent. In terms of teaching experience, 40 or 53.3 percent had taught for one to five years, 31 or 41.3 percent had six to ten years of experience, and only 4 or 5.3 percent had eleven to fifteen years of experience. Most respondents taught in the primary grades, with 31 or 41.3 percent handling Grades 1–3, followed by 27 or 36 percent in Grades 4–6, 11 or 14.7 percent in junior high school, and 6 or 8 percent in preschool or kindergarten. Most teachers, 45 or 60 percent, taught in public schools, while 30 or 40 percent taught in private schools. These results suggest that the respondents were mostly early- to mid-career teachers, many of whom were female and assigned to primary grade levels. Teachers in the 30–39 age range may possess a balance

of professional energy and developing experience, as Shin, et. al. (2021) found that teachers at this stage draw satisfaction from the meaning of their work, although their well-being may be affected by personal and professional demands. The female majority reflects the female-dominated nature of teaching, particularly in inclusive contexts where female teachers are often perceived as patient, empathetic, and adaptive in handling learners with disabilities (Lindner, et. al., 2023). The relatively short teaching experience of many respondents may also relate to Filipino teachers' migration to Thailand for better opportunities and difficulty securing regular teaching positions in the Department of Education (Blasé and Naanep, 2025). The concentration of teachers in primary grades may be linked to cultural expectations that associate women with caregiving and nurturing roles in early education (International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2022). The predominance of public school teachers may reflect the high demand for Filipino English teachers in Thai public schools due to affordability, qualifications, adaptability, and existing recruitment networks (Cebu Aaron, n.d.).

3.2 Level of Parental Involvement in the Holistic Development of Learners with Special Needs

3.2.1 Academic Development

Parents were rated as very highly involved in the academic development of learners with special needs, with a mean of 4.58. The highest-rated indicator was parents' regular assistance with school-related academic activities, with a mean of 4.92. Parents also strongly encouraged positive study habits, with a mean of 4.69. The lowest-rated indicators, though still interpreted as highly involved, were parents' reinforcement of lessons at home and collaboration with teachers in addressing academic challenges, both with means of 4.47, while support in completing homework and school tasks obtained a mean of 4.44. These findings show that parents actively support the academic learning of their children with special needs, particularly through direct assistance, study habits, and provision of learning support. This supports Hasegawa (2023), who stated that children whose parents are involved in education tend to earn better grades and higher test scores. The result is also consistent with Vygotsky Theory of Cognitive Development, which views cognitive development as socially and culturally shaped through interaction with more knowledgeable others (McLeod, 2025). It is further supported by Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which identifies the family within the microsystem as a major influence on development. The findings also conform with Mchia and Mwila's (2024) study, which found that active parental participation supports children's mental, ethical, and social development, and with Sevilla (2024), who found that students with intellectual disabilities improved academically when parents became involved.

3.2.2 Social Development

Parents were very highly involved in the social development of learners with special needs, with a mean of 4.56. The highest-rated indicator was parents' encouragement of positive interaction between their child and peers, with a mean of 4.85. This was followed by helping children develop appropriate communication skills, with a mean of 4.64. The lowest-rated indicator was parents' modeling of positive social behavior at home, with a mean of 4.45, but it was still interpreted as highly involved. These results indicate that parents provide strong support for their children's social growth, especially in peer interaction and communication. The findings are supported by Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory, which positions the family or microsystem as a central influence on social-emotional and cognitive development. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2025) also reported that children with highly involved parents showed enhanced social functioning and fewer behavioral problems than classmates whose parents were less involved. Similarly, Martinez-Yarza, et. al. (2023) found that family involvement at home positively influences student participation in school and supports socio-emotional competence, while Dela Cruz (2025) confirmed that children with more involved parents show better social skills.

3.2.3 Emotional Development

Parents were very highly involved in the emotional development of learners with special needs, with a mean of 4.60. The highest-rated indicator was parents' consistent emotional support, with a mean of 4.75, followed by creating a nurturing and supportive home environment, with a mean of 4.71. The lowest-rated indicator was helping the child cope with school-related stress and anxiety, with a mean of 4.33, although this was still interpreted as highly involved. These findings suggest that parents provide strong emotional support but may be less confident or consistent in helping children manage school-related stress and anxiety compared with more concrete forms of involvement such as homework support or school attendance. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory and Attachment Theory explain this result by emphasizing that consistent parental warmth, emotion coaching, and proximal parent-child interactions influence emotional regulation. The Bowlby and Ainsworth's Attachment theory also suggests that sensitive and involved parenting fosters secure attachment, which supports emotional regulation and social competence.

3.2.4 Physical Development

Parents were very highly involved in the physical development of learners with special needs, with a mean of 4.58. The highest-rated indicator was ensuring proper personal hygiene, with a mean of 4.75, followed by encouraging healthy eating habits, with a mean of 4.73. The lowest-rated indicator was informing teachers about the child's physical limitations or needs, with a mean of 4.39, although it remained highly involved. These findings imply that parents place strong emphasis on hygiene, nutrition, safety, and daily health practices as direct ways of protecting their children's well-being. However,

the lower rating for informing teachers about physical limitations may suggest hesitation in disclosing conditions due to fear of labeling, discrimination, denial, or normalization of the condition. The findings may be explained by Bandura' Social Learning theory, which views children as learning physical behaviors and health habits by observing parents. Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory also supports the finding because parents serve as more knowledgeable others who scaffold physical skills within the child's zone of proximal development. Fah (2024) similarly stated that parental involvement shapes children's health outcomes through healthy behaviors, emotional support, cognitive stimulation, and healthcare management.

3.2.5 Behavioral Development

Parents were very highly involved in behavioral development, with a mean of 4.58. The highest-rated indicators were reinforcing positive behavior at home and encouraging respectful behavior toward others, both with means of 4.73. Parents also strongly implemented discipline strategies consistent with school policies. The lowest-rated indicator was collaborating with teachers to manage behavioral challenges, with a mean of 4.43, though still interpreted as highly involved. These results show that parents strongly support behavior formation at home, particularly through reinforcement, respect, and discipline. However, collaboration with teachers regarding behavioral challenges was comparatively lower, possibly because parents may feel judged or blamed when behavioral issues are discussed. When communication occurs mainly during critical or punitive situations, parents may feel unwelcome or unfairly treated, which may reduce their willingness to work with teachers on behavioral concerns.

3.2.6 Functional and Life Skills Development

Parents were very highly involved in developing functional and life skills, with a mean of 4.60. The highest-rated indicator was teaching basic self-care skills, with a mean of 4.89, followed by encouraging independence in daily activities, with a mean of 4.65. The lowest-rated indicator was supporting communication and functional language development, with a mean of 4.48, though it remained highly involved. These findings indicate that parents recognize the importance of life skills in promoting independence, safety, and long-term quality of life. Functional and life skills require continuous home-based support because children with special needs may need specialized and repetitive instruction to master daily tasks (Fisher, 2024). The high level of involvement suggests that parents are active in helping their children practice independence and self-care within everyday home routines.

3.2.7 Overall Level of Parental Involvement

Overall, parents were very highly involved in the holistic development of learners with special needs, with a grand mean of 4.58. Emotional development and functional and life skills development both obtained the highest mean of 4.60. Academic, physical, and behavioral development each obtained a mean of 4.58, while social development obtained the lowest mean of 4.56, though still interpreted as very highly involved. These findings suggest that parents are highly aware of their role in supporting the holistic development of their children with special needs. Their involvement reflects an understanding that children's development cannot be supported by schools alone. The results highlight the importance of cohesive, consistent, and collaborative efforts between home and school to provide comprehensive developmental support.

3.3 Level of Holistic Development of Learners with Special Needs

3.3.1 Cognitive Development

Learners with special needs were assessed as having a high level of cognitive development, with a mean of 3.889. The highest-rated indicator was the ability to name the days of the week in order, sequence complex events, and make simple plans, with a mean of 4.51. This was followed by progressing from sounding out words to reading for information and writing stories, with a mean of 4.10. The lowest-rated indicator was understanding that others have different thoughts and viewpoints, enhancing empathy, with a mean of 3.57, though still interpreted as high. These results indicate that learners with special needs demonstrated strong cognitive progress, particularly in sequencing, planning, and literacy-related skills. The findings may be linked to the very high level of parental involvement in academic development. Supportive home environments, active parental involvement, and stimulating activities may contribute to cognitive development. The result aligns with Purwasih, et. al.'s (2024) study, which found that children receiving strong support from family and educational environments showed notable cognitive advancement.

3.3.2 Emotional Development

Learners with special needs had a high level of emotional development, with a mean of 4.048. The highest-rated indicator was showing concern for others, with a mean of 4.63, followed by having a strong desire to be liked by peers and preferring to play with friends rather than being alone, with a mean of 4.61. The lowest-rated indicator was understanding others' viewpoints and showing empathy, with a mean of 3.60, though still interpreted as high. These findings imply that learners with special needs developed emotional skills important for positive relationships and harmonious living. This may be attributed to the very high level of parental involvement in emotional development, particularly through emotional support, nurturing home environments, and open communication with children.

3.3.3 Social Development

Learners with special needs had a high level of social development, with a mean of 4.132. The highest-rated indicator was preference for playing with peers of the same gender or sex, with a mean of 4.61. This was followed by reduced reliance on parents and family for daily social interaction and support, with a mean of 4.60. The lowest-rated indicator was experiencing and responding to peer pressure, with a mean of 3.73, though still interpreted as high. These results suggest that learners with special needs demonstrate social development patterns similar to those of typical children, especially in same-sex peer preference during preschool and elementary years. Same-sex peer preference may occur because children share similar styles and interests, with girls often preferring cooperative play and boys often engaging in more active or competitive play (Fabes, et. al., 2025). The reduced reliance on parents may reflect the very high parental involvement in social development, which supports learners' ability to socialize more independently. The ability to respond to peer pressure may also be explained by parental scaffolding and modeling, consistent with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, where parents act as more knowledgeable others who support appropriate social behavior.

3.3.4 Physical/Motor Development

Learners with special needs were assessed as having a high level of physical or motor development, with a mean of 4.255. The highest-rated indicator was improvement in skipping, hopping on one foot, and balancing on one leg, with a mean of 4.56. This was followed by drawing detailed pictures, with a mean of 4.54. Other indicators, such as running games, swimming, riding bikes, improved endurance, clearer writing, and use of simple tools, were also rated high. These findings may be explained by the strong support learners receive from parents in physical development. Parents were found to be very highly involved in ensuring hygiene, encouraging healthy eating habits, promoting physical activities, and supporting school programs that develop physical skills. Such home-based and school-linked support contributes to learners' physical participation, motor skill improvement, and functional development.

3.3.5 Overall Level of Holistic Development

Overall, learners with special needs had a high level of holistic development, with a grand mean of 4.105. Physical or motor development obtained the highest mean of 4.255, followed by social development with 4.132, emotional development with 4.048, and cognitive development with 3.889. These results indicate that learners with special needs were developing well across all measured domains, with strongest development in physical or motor skills and lowest, though still high, development in cognitive skills. The findings align with the very high level of parental involvement reported in the study. As found in the literature review conducted by Mokhtar, et. al (2023), family involvement plays a pivotal role in the education of learners with special needs and contributes significantly to their holistic development.

3.4 Relationship Between Parental Involvement and Holistic Development

The Pearson correlation results showed that all p-values were greater than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted, indicating no significant relationship between the level of parental involvement and the level of holistic development of learners with special needs. The overall correlation between parental involvement and holistic development was very weak, with an overall Pearson r of 0.017 and a p-value of 0.888. This finding implies that, within the data of this study, parental involvement did not significantly influence the measured holistic development of learners with special needs. This result contradicts previous findings that parental involvement plays an important role in the development of children with special needs across different domains, such as the studies of Purwasih, et. al. (2024) and Mokhtar, et. al. (2023).

3.5 Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Fostering Parental Involvement

Teachers perceived the challenges in fostering parental involvement as very much serious, with an overall mean of 4.60. The highest-rated challenge was ineffective communication between parents and teachers, with a mean of 4.81, followed by parents' lack of sufficient knowledge about special education practices, with a mean of 4.79. Limited parental time obtained a mean of 4.77, while heavy dependence on teachers for child development obtained a mean of 4.65. The lowest-rated challenges were socio-economic factors affecting involvement and the need for more training and guidance from the school, both with means of 4.51, though still interpreted as very much serious. These findings suggest that barriers to parental involvement are serious despite the high level of reported parental participation. The challenges may be explained by socio-economic pressure on parents, limited time and energy, and a traditional educational structure in which teachers are viewed as the sole authorities. This may create a "school-centric approach" that leaves parents feeling unwelcome, overwhelmed, or disengaged (Lei and Vipulphol, 2024).

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concluded that most teacher-respondents were female, in early adulthood, had five years or less of teaching experience, taught in the primary grades, and were assigned in public or government schools. Parents in Thailand were found to be very highly involved in the holistic development of learners with special needs, while the learners themselves

demonstrated a high level of holistic development. However, the study found no significant relationship between parental involvement and learners' holistic development. Teachers also encountered very serious challenges in fostering parental involvement, particularly in communication, parental knowledge of special education practices, time constraints, and the need for stronger support systems.

Based on the findings and conclusions, school heads, teachers, and other stakeholders should strengthen partnerships with parents to better support the holistic development of learners with special needs. Parents should be encouraged to participate more actively in school activities related to their children's development, while schools should provide evidence-based training that enhances parents' capacity to support their children with special needs at home.

The study was limited to teachers handling learners with special needs in selected schools in Aranyaprathet, Sakaeo, Thailand during School Year 2025–2026. Since only teachers were included as respondents, the findings reflect teachers' viewpoints and do not include the perspectives of parents, learners, or administrators. The results were also limited to the selected schools and relied on self-reported data, which may have been influenced by respondents' personal experiences or biases.

Compliance with ethical standards

The research followed institutional ethical guidelines, secured appropriate approval before data collection, and ensured that all teacher-respondents participated voluntarily after being informed of the study's purpose and procedures. Informed consent was obtained, confidentiality and anonymity of responses were maintained, and all gathered data were used only for academic purposes. The researcher acknowledges the contributions of the adviser, validators, school authorities, respondents, and other individuals who supported the completion of the study. The researcher declares no conflict of interest and affirms responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and copyright ownership of the work.

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