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FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examined the experiences of parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) regarding family-school partnership in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The participants were 15 parents selected through maximum variation sampling. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview protocol and analyzed through descriptive and content analyses. The findings revealed that parents' experiences of family-school partnership were shaped by access to support services, communication and information sharing with school personnel, parents' priorities and participation experiences in the educational process, involvement in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process, and expectations of schools. Participants' views particularly highlighted the lack of specialized personnel, difficulties in accessing support services, irregular or superficial communication, limited participation in decision-making processes, and insufficient parental involvement in IEP processes. Nevertheless, some parents stated that regular and solution-oriented communication with teachers made it easier for them to monitor their children's educational process. The results indicate that effective family-school partnership in the education of children with SEN can be strengthened not only through individual teachers' efforts, but also through open communication, institutional support, parental involvement, and inclusive school policies. In this regard, the study underscores the importance of regarding parents as active stakeholders in the educational process of children with SEN and of systematically structuring school-based support mechanisms.

Keywords: family engagement, individualized education program, inclusive education, family-school partnership, children with special educational needs

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary education, equity and inclusion are among the fundamental principles that support the active participation of children with special educational needs (SEN) in educational settings. In this context, inclusive education practices are regarded as an important educational policy aimed at enabling children with SEN to be educated in the same learning environments as their peers (Kargın, 2004). The process of inclusion involves not only students' academic participation in educational settings, but also the enhancement of opportunities for social acceptance, belonging, independence, and participation in social life (Schwab et al., 2020). Therefore, the effective implementation of inclusive education practices is closely associated not only with the pedagogical arrangements provided by schools, but also with the active participation of families in the educational process.

Parents of children with SEN possess valuable knowledge about their children's developmental characteristics, strengths, daily living skills, support needs, and the difficulties they encounter throughout the educational process. Therefore, it is important that parents are regarded not merely as recipients of information, but as active stakeholders who collaborate with teachers and school administrators in the educational process. The literature emphasizes that effective family-school partnership supports students' academic, social, and emotional development, and that family engagement plays an important role in ensuring the continuity and effectiveness of school practices (Epstein, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). However, family-school partnership is not limited solely to the frequency of communication. For such collaboration to be effective, communication needs to be structured in an open, reciprocal, and sustainable manner that also supports families' meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

One of the theoretical foundations of this study is Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement. Epstein (2009, 2010) conceptualizes the interaction between school and family through multidimensional domains such as communication, support for learning at home, participation in decision-making processes, and collaboration with the community. This model demonstrates that family-school partnership is not limited to the exchange of information between teachers and parents; rather, the child's educational process should be considered within the interaction among school, family, and the broader community. Accordingly, examining parental experiences is important for understanding the dimensions in which family-school partnership is strengthened and the areas in which it remains limited.

In the education of children with SEN, families' communication with teachers and school administrators, their participation in IEP processes, and their access to support services are among the key dimensions that influence the quality of inclusive education practices (Arslan et al., 2020; Hyassat et al., 2024). However, the literature indicates that families are often included in decision-making processes only to a limited extent, that communication with schools may remain superficial, and that parents may not be sufficiently positioned as active stakeholders in their children's educational process (Connor & Cavendish, 2018; Van Laere et al., 2018). This situation underscores the need to conceptualize family-school partnership not merely as a formal communication process, but as a holistic support mechanism that responds to the child's individual needs. Indeed, limited family involvement in the process may weaken the sense of shared responsibility and the continuity of inclusive practices (Koskela & Sinkkonen, 2025).

In the context of the TRNC, various structural and practice-based challenges have been reported in areas such as the implementation of educational rights for children with SEN, access to support services, school-based arrangements, and the sustainability of inclusive education practices (Altınay et al., 2018). Therefore, examining the experiences of parents of children with SEN regarding family-school partnership in the TRNC is important for understanding how current practices are evaluated by families and for developing recommendations to strengthen the relationship among schools, teachers, families, and support services. In this context, examining parental experiences is also significant for identifying the structural, pedagogical, and communication-based challenges encountered in the inclusion process and for developing practice-oriented recommendations to strengthen this process (Sharma et al., 2022).

Although studies in the literature address the educational process of children with SEN, in-depth qualitative studies that directly examine the family-school partnership experiences of parents of children with SEN appear to be limited (Doğan et al., 2022; Karabıyık & Avcıoğlu, 2021). This limitation highlights the need to examine parents' experiences regarding access to support services, communication with school personnel, participation in the educational process, IEP processes, and expectations of schools in a holistic manner. This study aims to contribute to addressing this gap and to provide practice-oriented findings for strengthening family-school partnership in the context of the TRNC.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to examine in depth the experiences of parents of children with SEN regarding family-school partnership in the TRNC, with a focus on their access to support services, communication processes with school personnel, participation experiences in the educational process, levels of involvement in the IEP process, and expectations of schools. In line with this aim, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do parents of children with SEN evaluate access to support services and the adequacy of school-based support?
2. How do parents experience communication and information-sharing processes with teachers and school administrators?
3. What are parents' priorities in their children's educational process, and what are their experiences of participation in school processes?
4. To what extent and in what ways are parents involved in the IEP process?
5. What are parents' expectations and proposed solutions for strengthening family-school partnership, supporting their children, and improving school practices?

METHOD

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative case study design. A case study is a qualitative design that enables the comprehensive and in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon (Büyüköztürk et al., 2008). In the present study, this design was used to understand the views of parents of children with SEN regarding family-school partnership in the TRNC.

Participants

The participants consisted of 15 parents of children with SEN living in different regions of the TRNC. Participants were selected through maximum variation sampling and varied according to gender, age, socioeconomic status, the child's diagnosis, and the type of school the child attended. Participation in the study was voluntary.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview protocol was developed based on a review of the relevant literature, and expert feedback was sought to support its content validity. The protocol consisted of 13 open-ended questions and was reviewed by three assistant professors specializing in special education who had conducted research on families and family education. Based on their feedback, the wording of some questions was revised for clarity, without adding or removing any questions.

Data Collection Procedure

During the research process, families of children with SEN living in different regions of the TRNC were first contacted. After communication was established with the participants, they were informed about the aim, scope, and voluntary nature of the study. Face-to-face interviews were then conducted with parents who agreed to participate. The interviews were held at times and locations considered convenient by the participants, and informed consent was obtained prior to each interview. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded, and each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. All interviews were conducted individually with each parent by a single researcher.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive analysis and content analysis procedures. First, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure data integrity and dependable text processing (Sandelowski, 2000; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Subsequently, the transcripts were systematically coded, and each participant's responses were grouped under relevant conceptual themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). During the data analysis process,

participants' statements were supported with direct quotations to enhance the credibility, transparency, and "thick description" of the qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings obtained from the views of parents of children with SEN regarding family-school partnership in the TRNC. The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using descriptive analysis and content analysis, and participants' views were grouped under themes based on their similarities and differences. As a result of the analysis, the findings were examined under five main themes: access to support services and the adequacy of school-based support; communication and information sharing with school personnel; parents' priorities and participation experiences in the educational process; family involvement in the IEP process; and parents' expectations of schools and proposed solutions.

Access to Support Services and the Adequacy of School-Based Support

Participants' views indicate that children with SEN differed in terms of their access to school-based and external support services. While some parents stated that their children did not receive any additional support services, others reported that their children received guidance and counseling, physiotherapy, speech therapy, special education, or regular support services. This variation suggests that access to support services may differ depending on families' economic conditions, service availability, the school's referral capacity, and the continuity of the services provided.

Participants 1, 3, 6, and 7 stated that their children did not receive any specialized support services. This finding indicates that some families experienced limitations in accessing additional support for their children's needs. Participant 1 expressed this situation as follows:

> "We can't get any support other than what the state provides. We haven't received any extra support because of financial reasons." (Participant 1)

Similarly, Participant 3 associated the inability to benefit from support services with economic conditions:

> "We want our child to receive support, but financially, we can't keep up with everything. Apart from the opportunities provided by the state, we haven't been able to receive regular support." (Participant 3)

In contrast, some participants stated that their children benefited from at least one type of support service. Participants 2 and 5 reported receiving guidance and counseling services; Participants 4 and 14 reported receiving physiotherapy services; Participant 9 reported receiving physiotherapy and speech therapy; and Participant 10 reported receiving speech therapy and special education support. Participants 12 and 15 stated that their children received regular support services; however, they did not provide detailed information about the type of these services. Nevertheless, receiving support services does not necessarily mean that these services can be accessed regularly and without interruption. The statement of Participant 10 shows that economic conditions may be a determining factor in the continuity of support services:

> "Sometimes we can go to the support services, and sometimes we can't. It depends on our financial situation. I wish we could go to all of them and get all the support, so my child's development could move forward faster." (Participant 10)

Similarly, Participant 9 stated that multiple support services were needed, but that these services could not always be maintained regularly:

> "We need physiotherapy and speech therapy, but we can't always continue with them. Sometimes we have to miss them because of transportation, and sometimes because of financial difficulties." (Participant 9)

Different experiences also emerged in participants' evaluations of school-based support services. Some participants stated that the support provided at school remained limited and that there were

shortcomings in terms of specialized personnel and referral services. Participant 13 drew attention to the inadequacy of specialized support for children with SEN at school as follows:

> "There aren't enough specialists at school to work specifically with these children. Sometimes the teachers don't know what to do either." (Participant 13)

Participant 5 stated that although they met with the school counseling service, this support was not sufficient or regular:

> "We meet with the school counseling service, but apart from that, we don't receive any special support, and unfortunately, it isn't enough. If there were more regular and guiding support, it would be more useful for us." (Participant 5)

Participant 14 stated that although some support was available at school, it needed to be provided in a more planned way according to the child's needs:

> "There is some support, but it doesn't seem very comprehensive. It needs to be more planned and more regular according to the child's needs." (Participant 14)

When the additional support expected from schools was examined, families were found to expect support not only in academic areas, but also in relation to IEPs, teacher qualifications, physical accessibility, appropriate materials, and regular information sharing. Participant 12 expressed the need for an educational plan based on the child's individual characteristics as follows:

> "Every child has different needs. For my child, I would like a plan that is not the same program for everyone, but one prepared according to what my child can do and the areas where my child has difficulties." (Participant 12)

Physical environment and material support were also among families' expectations. Participant 10 stated that the educational environment should be arranged according to the child's individual needs:

> "There should be classroom equipment suitable for my child. For example, there should be a desk suitable for my child, reading and writing materials, and also materials for mathematics." (Participant 10)

These findings indicate that, from families' perspectives, access to support services becomes meaningful not merely through the availability of services, but through their continuity, quality, individualized nature, and systematic support by the school.

Communication and Information Sharing with School Personnel

Participants' views indicate that communication with school personnel is one of the key determinants of family-school partnership. For families, effective communication means not only being in contact with teachers or school administrators, but also receiving regular information, obtaining feedback, feeling acknowledged as legitimate interlocutors, and being clearly informed about their child's educational process.

Some participants reported positive experiences regarding communication with special education teachers. Participant 6 stated that receiving regular information from teachers made them feel reassured:

> "Our teachers give us information every day as much as they can, and this really makes me feel relieved." (Participant 6)

Participant 11 emphasized the importance of solution-oriented communication with the teacher:

> "I can say that our communication with the teacher is solution-oriented. When there is a problem, the teacher doesn't just tell us what the problem is; they also guide us about what we can do. That is really helpful." (Participant 11)

In contrast, some participants stated that they experienced problems regarding the continuity and consistency of communication with teachers. The statement of Participant 7 indicates that although

communication with the teacher was sometimes supportive, it was not always maintained consistently:

> "It is unstable... Sometimes the teacher communicates with us and shows interest, but sometimes it feels like we don't exist, like we are not wanted. I would say it is unstable with the teacher." (Participant 7)

Participant 14 stated that they expected more detailed explanations and greater attention from the teacher:

> "I would like the teacher to be more interested and to give more detailed explanations." (Participant 14)

Participants' experiences also differed in terms of communication with school administrators. Participants 6 and 11 stated that school administrators could be supportive in communicating with families and listening to their requests. Participant 6 expressed this as follows:

> "When we go to the school administration about something, they listen to us. Even if it is not always solved right away, we feel that we are being taken seriously." (Participant 6)

However, some participants stated that although they were able to meet with school administrators, these meetings did not result in feedback or concrete solutions. The statement of Participant 2 clearly illustrates this situation:

> "When we go to talk to them, they do talk to us, but we don't get any feedback from them." (Participant 2)

Participant 15 stated that although communication with the teacher was possible, it was sometimes difficult to find a direct point of contact at the administrative level:

> "We can communicate with the teacher, but when we want to speak directly with the administration, sometimes we don't know whom to contact. I mean, I would like there to be someone more accessible to talk to." (Participant 15)

When participants' views on information sharing were examined, some stated that they received regular information from the school, whereas others reported that information sharing was not systematic and often depended on the parent's own initiative. Participant 9 stated that regular communication with the teacher made it easier to follow the child's school experience:

> "We communicate almost every day. It is very important for me to know what my child does during the day and how they behave. It is really helpful." (Participant 9)

In contrast, Participant 5 stated that the information received from the school was quite limited:

> "We are called twice a year. Other than that, if we don't ask, we can't get much information." (Participant 5)

The view of Participant 8 indicates that information sharing occurred not systematically, but in response to the parent's request:

> "They don't give me information unless I call and ask. But I would like to get information every day, or at least twice a week, about how my child is progressing and what is being done." (Participant 8)

Regarding effective communication methods, face-to-face communication emerged as particularly important. Participant 1 stated that regular face-to-face communication was more effective in following the child's development:

> "Meeting face to face regularly and continuously is more effective. I think we can make more progress this way." (Participant 1)

These findings indicate that the quality of communication, rather than the specific tools used in family-school communication, is the determining factor. From the participants' perspective, effective communication is regarded as a regular, explanatory, feedback-oriented, empathetic process based on mutual trust.

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Parents' Priorities and Participation Experiences in the Educational Process

Participants' views indicate that, in the educational process of children with SEN, families attach importance not only to academic achievement, but also to dimensions such as social acceptance, independence, happiness, emotional well-being, and individual development. This approach shows that families perceive their children's education as a holistic developmental process.

Participant 6 stated that they prioritized their child's acquisition of independent living skills and participation in social life in harmony with their peers:

> "I want my child to be ready for life and to learn reading and writing enough to manage on their own. I want my child to be able to play in harmony with peers, go to and from the market, and be like the other classmates." (Participant 6)

Participant 2 associated their priority in the educational process with the child's overall well-being:

> "For me, the most important thing is first for my child to be healthy. Of course, academic progress is important, but feeling good, being happy, and being able to continue school without too much difficulty are more important to me." (Participant 2)

Participant 14 emphasized that education should be arranged in line with the child's rights and individual needs:

> "Education is my child's right. I want my child to receive education in the same environment as other children, without being excluded, and according to their needs. It is very important that the school is supportive." (Participant 14)

Regarding participation in meetings, activities, and decision-making processes, families' experiences appeared to remain limited in many cases. Some parents stated that they wanted to participate but could not be actively involved in the process due to timing issues, late notification, or the school's failure to invite them sufficiently. Participant 5 stated that timing was an important barrier for working parents:

> "I would like to attend if the timing were suitable, but most of the time we are informed late, or the hours do not work for us." (Participant 5)

Participant 3 stated that although they attended meetings, families of children with SEN were not given enough opportunity to speak:

> "We are invited to the meeting, but only the other families speak. Families of children with special needs are not given a chance to speak. The teacher talks to us separately in private, as if they are embarrassed." (Participant 3)

Some participants emphasized that families also have responsibilities in strengthening family-school partnership. Participant 1 stated that it was important for parents to remain in communication with the teacher and to follow the child's development:

> "As a parent, I also need to stay in touch with the teacher. If I don't follow what my child is doing or where my child has difficulties, the school alone cannot be enough." (Participant 1)

Participant 13 stated that families should support the process voluntarily, not only when invited by the school:

> "It is not enough to go only when the school calls. As parents, we also need to support the process." (Participant 13)

These findings indicate that families do not want to remain in a passive position in the educational process; however, effective participation requires regular information sharing by the school, appropriate timing, involvement in decision-making processes, and open channels of communication.

Family Involvement in the Individualized Education Program Process

Participants' views indicate that family involvement in the IEP process occurred at different levels. While some parents stated that they shared information with teachers about their children's strengths,

habits, and observations at home, others reported that they were included in the process only formally or that they did not have sufficient information about the process.

Participants 4, 8, 10, and 13 stated that they contributed to the IEP process. Participant 10 stated that setting goals together with the teacher made it easier both to understand the child's needs and to plan the support to be provided at home:

> "When we prepare this education plan together, I understand better what my child needs, and I know step by step what I should do as well." (Participant 10)

Participant 8 emphasized the importance of reflecting family observations about the child's situation at home in the educational process:

> "When I tell the teacher what my child can do at home and what my child has difficulty with, I want the school to move forward accordingly. Because I am the person who knows my child best." (Participant 8)

In contrast, some participants stated that although they had contact with the teacher, they did not know to what extent their contributions were reflected in the IEP. The view of Participant 5 indicates that, in some cases, family involvement may remain unclear or limited to an apparent level of participation:

> "We talk to the teacher, but I don't know how much of what we say is reflected in the plan. I wish these things were explained to us more clearly." (Participant 5)

Participant 7 stated that when participation remained limited to signing documents, families were excluded from decision-making processes:

> "Not much happens. We are just called in and asked to sign. They don't ask us what we want." (Participant 7)

Similarly, Participant 12 stated that they were not sufficiently informed about the IEP:

> "I don't really know whether a plan is being prepared or what is included in it. If it were explained to me more clearly, I would also know how to support my child at home." (Participant 12)

These findings indicate that family involvement in the IEP process should not remain limited to providing information or obtaining signatures. Taking families' observations about their children's individual characteristics into account, actively involving them in the goal-setting process, and providing regular feedback on the implementation of the plan may support a more functional process.

Parents' Expectations of Schools and Proposed Solutions

Participants' expectations of schools point to the need for a more inclusive, responsive, and collaborative approach in the education of children with SEN. Families expressed expectations in areas such as clear information sharing, participation in decision-making processes, improved teacher qualifications, psychological and counseling support, physical accessibility, material support, and strengthened peer awareness.

Regarding the enhancement of family involvement, participants stated that schools should develop more open, systematic, and flexible channels of communication. Participant 2 expressed the expectation that the school should clearly inform families about decisions and practices:

> "I would like us to be given clear information. I want to know what is being done, what decisions are being made, and what path is being followed for my child." (Participant 2)

Participant 6 stated that digital communication channels could be used more effectively, especially for working parents:

> "Because I work, I can't be very involved in school matters. But if they reached out more through WhatsApp, I think we would communicate better." (Participant 6)

The inclusion of families in decision-making processes also emerged as an important expectation. Participant 10 stated that merely inviting families to meetings was not sufficient and that their views should be taken into consideration in decision-making processes:

> "It is not enough just to be invited to meetings. I would like our opinions to be taken into account, and I would like to have a say in the decisions made for my child." (Participant 10)

Inclusive teacher attitudes and social acceptance were also among families' expectations. Participant 5 expressed that children should be accepted with their differences and should not be segregated:

> "I would like their right to education to be respected with their differences. I would like every child to be seen simply as a child. I wish they would not see them as different or separate them just because they are different. I would be happier if they always approached them with love and without prejudice." (Participant 5)

Participant 15 stated that there was a need to increase peer awareness at school:

> "Sometimes jokes are made about my child. My child cries because of those jokes. I can calm my child down by talking to them, but this keeps happening again and again. I wish all students at school were given training about sensitivities." (Participant 15)

Improving teacher competencies was also among the participants' proposed solutions. Participant 7 emphasized that teachers should be supported in working with children with SEN:

> "Teachers need to know how to approach these children. They need to receive extra training for this, because when the teacher is understanding and knowledgeable, both the child and the parent feel more comfortable." (Participant 7)

Similarly, Participant 15 stated that teachers should be better equipped in the field of special education:

> "Teachers need to receive more training in special education. It is very important to have teachers who are patient, understanding, and who can really understand the needs of these children." (Participant 15)

Supporting families also emerged as an important expectation. Participant 10 stated that psychological support should be provided not only to the child but also to the parents:

> "The counseling service is very insufficient. My spouse and I have problems because of our child's situation. Psychological support should be provided to mothers and fathers; they should not be left alone." (Participant 10)

Feedback and support at home were also among the participants' suggestions in terms of home-school continuity. Participant 14 stated that supporting at home what is done at school would contribute to the child's development:

> "Our harmony with the teacher affects the home as well. When I support at home what is being done at school, it works better; it is very effective." (Participant 14)

Overall, the findings indicate that families' expectations of schools centered on communication, inclusion, teacher competence, counseling support, family involvement, and individualized practices. Participants' accounts suggest that, in order to strengthen family-school partnership, families should be regarded not merely as recipients of information, but as active stakeholders who participate in decision-making processes and support their children's development.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, and RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that the experiences of parents of children with SEN regarding family-school partnership varied in relation to access to support services, communication with school personnel, family involvement, the IEP process, and expectations of schools. Participants' accounts reveal that family-school partnership is not limited solely to the frequency of communication between teachers and parents; rather, it is closely associated with the quality of communication, the structural

capacity of the school, the continuity of support services, and families' meaningful participation in decision-making processes. The literature also emphasizes that family-school partnership in the education of individuals with SEN is important for children's academic, social, and emotional development (Chang et al., 2023; Çuhacı & Nuri, 2022; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kazanopoulos et al., 2021; Paccaud et al., 2021). In this regard, the findings of the present study indicate that parents should be regarded not merely as recipients of information, but as active stakeholders who wish to contribute to their children's educational process.

One of the prominent findings of the study is that families often experienced family-school partnership at a superficial, irregular, or merely formal level. While some participants stated that they were able to establish positive communication with teachers and school administrators, others reported experiences such as not receiving feedback, not being included in decision-making processes, and remaining only in the position of listeners. This finding is consistent with the difficulties emphasized in the literature regarding the establishment of "authentic" and mutually empowering partnerships (Auerbach, 2010, as cited in Gedik & Urkmez, 2024; Haines et al., 2017). Similarly, it has been noted that school-centered and traditional understandings of partnership may position parents as passive recipients (Auerbach, 2010, as cited in Gedik & Urkmez, 2024; Auerbach, 2010, as cited in Yates, 2023; Gedik & Urkmez, 2024). Koskela and Sinkkonen (2025) likewise describe variation in how parents experience cooperation with school professionals in inclusive education. Their findings underscore the distinction between formal participation and having a meaningful voice in educational decisions. In the present study, some parents' statements that they were not given sufficient opportunity to have a say in meetings and decision-making processes also indicate that family-school partnership may remain at a formal level.

Another important finding of the study is that teachers' provision of clarity, sensitivity, and continuity in communication plays a determining role in families' experiences of the process. Participants stated that when they were able to establish regular, clear, and trust-based communication with teachers, they could follow their children's development more closely and become more involved in the school process. This finding is consistent with studies showing that the quality of teacher-parent communication affects parents' satisfaction and perceptions of support (Chang et al., 2023; Graham-Clay, 2005, as cited in Kazanopoulos et al., 2021; Hedlin, 2023; Kazanopoulos et al., 2021). In contrast, communication that is established mostly in response to problems, remains limited to compulsory meetings, or includes professional jargon may lead parents to feel alienated from the process (Fish, 2006, as cited in Kazanopoulos et al., 2021; Jigyel et al., 2018; Syriopoulou-Delli et al., 2016). Walker and Bond (2025) identify relationships, communication systems, and shared knowledge as important characteristics of home-school collaboration. This perspective supports interpreting communication quality in terms of reciprocity and consistency rather than frequency of contact alone. In this respect, the findings indicate that effective family-school communication can be strengthened not merely through the availability of communication channels, but through the regular, clear, and reciprocal use of these channels.

The findings also reveal significant limitations regarding the quality and continuity of support services provided at school. Participants drew attention to the lack of school counselors, special education specialists, and individual support personnel, as well as inadequacies in physical accessibility and educational materials. This finding is consistent with studies indicating that teacher competence, lack of resources, and insufficient expertise are among the important factors that limit family-school partnership (Gedik & Urkmez, 2024; Svendby, 2017, as cited in Wilhelmsen & Sørensen, 2019). Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) model also emphasizes that family-school partnership should be considered not only in terms of individual relationships, but also in relation to broader contextual factors such as socioeconomic conditions, school policies, and structural barriers. Bakir and Elmalı (2025) also identify differing expectations and difficulties in teacher-parent collaboration in special education, suggesting that barriers may arise from how families and professionals understand their respective roles. In this regard, the findings of the present study suggest that difficulties in accessing

support services and school-based arrangements may affect families' trust in the school process and their willingness to participate.

Another noteworthy finding of the study is that family involvement in IEP processes often remained limited, unclear, or tokenistic. While some participants stated that they were able to contribute to the IEP process, others reported that they were included only at the level of signing documents or receiving information. However, the literature emphasizes that IEP or individual support plan processes should be carried out through a collaborative model in which families' knowledge and experiences regarding their children are recognized and families actively participate in the planning and implementation stages (Raudeliūnaitė & Gudžinskienė, 2023; Taytak Küçük & Taşkın, 2023). Connor and Cavendish (2018) note that IEP processes may often have an alienating quality for families, while teachers may experience difficulties in planning individualized support as they try to meet the general needs of the classroom. Majadley and Aloshi (2026) likewise report varied parental experiences of school collaboration and requests for more tailored individualized educational planning among families of students with learning disabilities. This provides a point of comparison with parents in the present study who described IEP participation as largely procedural. The findings of the present study similarly indicate that the IEP process needs to move beyond a school-centered practice and be transformed into an open and participatory structure based on teacher-family partnership.

The findings of the study also indicate that families' psychosocial burden and support needs constitute an important dimension of family-school partnership. Some participants stated that they needed guidance and psychological support not only for their children's academic development, but also in relation to their own parenting experiences, stress, and coping processes. The literature indicates that families of children with SEN may experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout compared to families of typically developing children, and that they may face additional challenges such as accepting the diagnosis, reconstructing the parental role, and coping with uncertainties about the future (Ciğerli et al., 2014, as cited in Erdem & Nazlı, 2024; Erdem & Nazlı, 2024; Nuri et al., 2018). Accordingly, psychoeducational programs, psychological counseling, and peer support groups for families can be considered complementary forms of support that may strengthen family-school partnership (Erdem & Nazlı, 2024).

The findings of the study indicate that various barriers to family involvement exist, including lack of communication, limited time and resources, teacher competencies, the use of professional jargon, and socioeconomic differences. This finding is consistent with studies emphasizing that barriers to family-school partnership are multidimensional (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, as cited in Chang et al., 2023; Kazanopoulos et al., 2021; Taytak Küçük & Taşkın, 2023). Time constraints, limited resources, and communication difficulties may make it difficult to establish regular and high-quality communication; in turn, this may limit families' participation in meetings and feedback processes (Kazanopoulos et al., 2021; Paccaud et al., 2021). Similarly, in the present study, some parents stated that they remained distant from the school process due to inconvenient meeting times, late notification, and insufficient participation in decision-making processes.

On the other hand, the findings also indicate that there were examples of positive family-school partnership. Some participants stated that they were able to establish regular, solution-oriented, and supportive communication with teachers and school administrators. The literature emphasizes that strong and inclusive family-school partnerships are associated with families' more meaningful involvement in educational decisions, improved collaboration with school professionals, and the development of inclusive educational practices (Haines et al., 2017; Paccaud et al., 2021). However, in the present study, positive experiences were mostly reported in relation to the individual efforts of teachers or administrators. This finding suggests that effective partnership should be supported not merely by individual goodwill, but through institutionally structured and sustainable mechanisms (Francis et al., 2016, as cited in Gedik & Urkmez, 2024; Gedik & Urkmez, 2024).

Overall, this study demonstrates that family-school partnership in the education of children with SEN should be addressed within a planned, institutional, and multi-stakeholder structure. The findings highlight the importance of regarding families as sources of information, decision-making partners, and supportive actors in their children's educational process. Epstein's (2010) model of school-family-community partnership and Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) framework also indicate that effective partnership should be considered beyond interpersonal communication, together with structural arrangements, an inclusive school culture, and supportive educational policies. In this context, based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions and practice-oriented recommendations may contribute to the field:

1. Providing teachers with regular in-service training opportunities in the field of special education may strengthen their skills in working with students with SEN and their competencies in collaborating with families.
2. Supporting families' active and meaningful involvement in IEP processes may contribute to their inclusion in the process as important sources of information regarding their children's developmental characteristics and needs.
3. Structuring family-school communication in a continuous, two-way, and open manner may support families' more effective participation in the educational process. In this regard, it may be beneficial to use different communication channels, such as face-to-face meetings, telephone communication, digital tools, and written information sharing.
4. Planning meetings and activities at times suitable for working parents may facilitate families' access to the process. In addition, arrangements aimed at reducing time- and location-related barriers may support the sustainability of family-school partnership.
5. Supporting practices aimed at developing an inclusive school culture may contribute to reducing the physical and social segregation of students with SEN within the school environment.
6. Planning psychoeducational programs, psychological counseling services, and peer support groups to address families' psychosocial needs may strengthen families' resilience and participation in the educational process.
7. Adapting schools' physical conditions and educational materials in line with the individual needs of students with SEN may support students' more effective participation in educational settings.

In conclusion, the education of children with SEN is a shared responsibility not only of teachers, but also of families, school administrators, specialists, and policymakers. The findings of this study indicate that, for family-school partnership to be effective, families should be regarded not merely as recipients of information, but as stakeholders who participate in decision-making processes and whose views are taken into consideration. Strengthening partnership through mutual trust, open communication, an inclusive school culture, and sustainable support mechanisms may support more effective participation of children with SEN in educational processes.

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Ethics and Conflict of Interest
The authors of the study acted in accordance with ethical rules in all processes of the research. The authors declare that he acted in accordance with ethical rules in all processes of the research. The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest with other persons, institutions or organizations.

Author Contribution
All authors contributed equally to this study. All authors read and approved of the final manuscript.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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