



International Journal of Behavioral and Social Analytics

Volume I, Issue 2, May 2026

eISSN: 3116-4358

<https://journal.ijhba.com/index.php/ijbesa>

<https://sلسipress.com>

Parental Acceptance-Rejection and School Involvement among Fathers and Mothers of Children with Autism

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Abstract

Parents of children with autism often manage complex emotional, educational, and caregiving demands, making parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement important constructs in understanding family-school engagement. This study examined the level of parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement among fathers and mothers of children with autism and determined whether these variables differed according to selected child-related characteristics and were significantly associated with one another. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, data were gathered from 73 parents, composed of 33 fathers and 40 mothers, whose children with autism were enrolled in selected special education schools in Lipa City, Tanauan City, and Batangas City. The Parent Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire: Short Form and the Parental Involvement Survey-School Age Special Education were used to measure the core variables. Descriptive statistics, group-difference tests, and correlation analysis were applied. Results showed that most fathers and mothers were classified as accepting of their children, although most were also categorized as not involved in school-related activities. Child gender, birth order, and school level were not significantly associated with parental acceptance-rejection or school involvement. Among fathers, school involvement showed significant negative correlations with hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, undifferentiated rejection, and total parental acceptance-rejection scores. Among mothers, school involvement was not significantly related to acceptance-rejection scores. The findings suggest that paternal and maternal patterns of school involvement may operate differently in families of children with autism, warranting differentiated family-school engagement strategies.

Keywords: *parental acceptance-rejection; parental involvement; autism; special education; fathers and mothers; family-school engagement*

Article History:	Received: February 16, 2026	Revised March 30, 2026	Accepted April 22, 2026
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1. Introduction

Autism is a lifelong developmental condition commonly associated with difficulties in social interaction, communication, behavioral regulation, and restricted or repetitive patterns of interest and activity. These characteristics can affect not only the developmental experience of the child but also the emotional, social, and educational experiences of the family. For parents, the diagnosis of autism may introduce expectations and responsibilities that differ from those typically associated with child-rearing. The family may need to adjust to the child's behavioral needs, communication patterns, educational requirements, and long-term developmental support. In many cases, these adjustments require sustained coordination among parents, teachers, school personnel, counselors, and other support professionals.

Within the Filipino family context, parents occupy a central role in the care, discipline, emotional support, and educational development of children. The well-being of the child is often treated as a shared family concern, and parental responsibility is closely tied to nurturance, sacrifice, and educational support. However, when a child is diagnosed with autism, the parental role may become more complex. Parents may experience emotional distress,

uncertainty, grief, worry, and difficulty adjusting to the child's condition. Earlier literature suggests that parents of children with autism may experience greater stress than parents of typically developing children or parents of children with other disabilities because of the unpredictability of behaviors and the continuous nature of support required (Cash, 2006; Darling & Seligman, 2007; Hutton & Caron, 2005; Obaid, 2012).

Parental acceptance-rejection is a relevant psychological construct in understanding how parents emotionally relate to their children. Parental acceptance refers to the warmth, affection, care, comfort, concern, nurturance, support, and love that parents express toward their children. Parental rejection, in contrast, refers to the absence or withdrawal of warmth and the presence of behaviors or attitudes that may communicate hostility, indifference, neglect, or undifferentiated rejection (Rohner et al., 2005). In the parental acceptance-rejection framework, parental warmth is viewed along a continuum. At one end are parents who communicate love and acceptance, while at the other end are parents whose behaviors or attitudes convey dislike, disapproval, or emotional distance (Lila et al., 2007; Rohner et al., 2005). For children with disabilities, including autism, parental acceptance may be shaped by the parents' adjustment to the diagnosis, their expectations of child development, their coping resources, and the practical demands of care.

School involvement is another important dimension of parenting, especially for children with autism who often require educational and behavioral support. Parental involvement may include communication with teachers, participation in school activities, assistance with learning at home, monitoring of school progress, attendance in parent-teacher conferences, and participation in school decision-making. Prior studies have associated parental involvement with positive educational outcomes, improved behavior, stronger school adjustment, and reduced school-related problems (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). For children with autism, family-school cooperation is particularly important because educational and behavioral interventions often require consistency across home and school environments. Parents and teachers need to exchange information, coordinate expectations, and support the child's learning and behavioral development in a sustained manner (Ruble & Gallagher, 2004).

Despite the acknowledged importance of both parental acceptance-rejection and parental involvement, the relationship between these constructs remains important to examine, particularly among parents of children with autism. Acceptance may encourage parents to participate more actively in school-related activities because they feel emotionally connected, responsible, and invested in the child's development. Conversely, school involvement may also become a pathway through which parents better understand their child's needs, develop more positive attitudes, and strengthen acceptance. However, involvement may also be shaped by stress, obligation, unresolved adjustment, or anxiety about the child's educational progress. Thus, the relationship between acceptance-rejection and involvement may not be straightforward.

The distinction between fathers and mothers also requires attention. In many educational contexts, mothers are more frequently involved in day-to-day school communication and home-based academic support, while fathers may participate differently or less visibly. Studies on parental involvement have shown gender differences in participation, with mothers often reporting higher attendance and more frequent involvement than fathers (Bæck, 2010; Şad & Gürbüztürk, 2013). At the same time, paternal acceptance and involvement have been linked to children's adjustment and well-being, suggesting that fathers' roles should not be treated as secondary in family-school research (Najam & Kausar, 2012; Veneziano & Rohner, 1998). Among parents of children with autism, father-mother differences may therefore reveal distinct patterns in how emotional acceptance and educational involvement interact.

The present study addresses this concern by examining parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement among fathers and mothers of children with autism in selected special education schools in Lipa City, Tanauan City, and Batangas City. The study focuses on parents whose children were enrolled in special education settings, recognizing that school involvement in special education may differ from involvement in regular school settings. By examining acceptance-rejection, involvement, and selected child-related characteristics, the study contributes to the behavioral and social understanding of family-school engagement in autism education.

This study aimed to examine parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement among fathers and mothers of children with autism. Specifically, it sought to: (1) describe the profile of the respondents in terms of parent gender, child gender, child birth order, and child school level; (2) determine the level of parental acceptance-rejection among fathers and mothers of children with autism; (3) determine the level of school involvement among fathers and mothers of children with autism; (4) examine whether parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement differ according to child gender, birth order, and school level; and (5) determine whether parental acceptance-rejection is significantly related to school involvement among fathers and mothers of children with autism.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Parental Acceptance-Rejection and Child Adjustment

Parental acceptance-rejection theory explains parenting through the warmth dimension, where acceptance and rejection are understood as opposite ends of a relational continuum. On one end are parents who express affection, care, comfort, support, and warmth; on the other are parents whose behaviors communicate hostility, indifference, neglect, or rejection (Rohner et al., 2005). This framework is useful in examining parents of children with autism because it focuses not only on observable caregiving behavior but also on the emotional quality of the parent-child relationship. Parental acceptance is commonly associated with expressions of warmth, nurturance, concern, protection, and encouragement, while parental rejection refers to the withdrawal or absence of these qualities and may include hostility, emotional distance, or undifferentiated rejection (Ali & Zubair, 2011; Dwairy, 2010; Lila et al., 2007).

The literature consistently suggests that parental acceptance and rejection have implications for children's emotional and psychological adjustment. Children who perceive rejection from parents may become more vulnerable to dissatisfaction, aggression, dependence, low self-esteem, emotional instability, and negative views of the world (Rohner, 2013; Rohner et al., 2005). Studies also suggest that experiences of parental rejection during childhood may be associated with later psychological difficulties, including hostility, aggression, negative self-evaluation, and emotional unresponsiveness (Hussain & Munaf, 2012). Erkan and Toran (2010) similarly linked parental acceptance-rejection behavior with child development and adjustment, emphasizing that acceptance and rejection are not merely parental attitudes but relational experiences that may shape children's later functioning. Adjacent evidence among college students likewise shows that perceived paternal and maternal emotional warmth is positively associated with self-control, whereas rejection and overprotection are negatively associated with self-control, reinforcing the developmental relevance of warmth-rejection patterns beyond childhood samples (Rui, 2026). Related student-development evidence also treats self-esteem as a psychosocial adjustment construct, although findings from social media and body-image contexts should be read as adjacent rather than autism-specific support (Ruela et al., 2026).

Within disability contexts, acceptance may become more complex because parents often need to adjust their expectations regarding the child's development, schooling, communication, and independence. Bankar (2012) noted that parents of children with disabilities may pass through a process of mourning before fully accepting their child's condition. The literature also suggests that parental acceptance may vary according to family and child-related conditions, although findings are not always consistent. Some studies have associated gender and birth order with parental acceptance-rejection, while others reported no significant effect of child gender on parental acceptance and rejection (Bankar, 2012; Erkan & Toran, 2010; Gülay, 2010; Mah, 2011). These mixed findings justify further examination of acceptance-rejection among fathers and mothers of children with autism.

2.2 Autism, Parental Stress, and Family Adjustment

Autism is generally described as a developmental condition involving impairments in social interaction, communication, and patterns of behavior, interests, and activities (Obaid, 2012; Ruble & Gallagher, 2004). Because the diagnosis is based on behavioral and developmental indicators rather than a single medical test, accurate

identification requires comprehensive evaluation of language, social, behavioral, and cognitive development (Ruble & Gallagher, 2004). The characteristics of autism may be especially challenging for families because the child's needs often require consistent behavioral, educational, and emotional support across home and school environments.

Parents of children with autism may experience distinctive forms of stress compared with parents of typically developing children and parents of children with other disabilities. Cash (2006) reported that parenting children with autism may be more stressful than parenting children with Down syndrome, behavioral disorders, or typical development. This may be due to the child's behavioral difficulties, communication concerns, safety needs, and the uncertainty associated with long-term developmental outcomes. Hutton and Caron (2005) also emphasized that autism can affect family routines, leisure, marital relationships, travel, and parents' sense of safety and emotional stability.

The diagnosis itself may generate strong emotional reactions. Parents may experience grief, anxiety, sadness, fear, anger, or emotional exhaustion when trying to understand and adjust to the diagnosis (Andreica-Sandica et al., 2011; Dzubay, 2011). Osborne et al. (2008) found that parenting stress was associated with the severity of autistic symptoms and with the time between the parents' first recognition of developmental concerns and the formal diagnosis. These findings indicate that parental adjustment is not only a reaction to the label of autism but also a response to accumulated uncertainty, caregiving demands, and perceived child needs.

At the same time, families develop coping mechanisms that may help them adapt to the demands of raising a child with autism. Andreica-Sandica et al. (2011) identified planning, acceptance, positive reinterpretation and growth, active coping, instrumental social support, and religious coping as important coping responses among parents. These findings indicate that acceptance and stress may coexist. A parent may love and accept the child while still struggling with emotional, educational, and practical burdens.

2.3 Parental Involvement and Family-School Cooperation

Parental involvement refers to parents' participation in the educational development of their children. It may include communication with teachers, assistance with homework, participation in school events, volunteering, educational discussions with the child, monitoring of school progress, and collaboration with school personnel (Secord, 2009). Şad and Gürbüzürk (2013) described parental involvement as a broad set of behaviors that support learning, including home-based educational support, communication with teachers, classroom participation, curriculum support, and the creation of home conditions that facilitate learning. Marshall (2010) similarly emphasized that parental involvement covers children's education and development from birth to adulthood, with parents recognized as primary influences in children's lives.

The literature generally associates parental involvement with positive educational and behavioral outcomes. Earlier and more recent studies have linked parental involvement with improved school achievement, better attendance, reduced dropout risks, improved student motivation, positive attitudes toward school, and fewer behavioral problems (Armstrong-Piner, 2008; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). These findings suggest that parental involvement is not merely an administrative school expectation but a behavioral and educational support mechanism that may influence children's school adjustment.

Models of parental involvement provide useful ways of categorizing this construct. Ng's (1999) six-level model of home-school cooperation describes involvement from basic communication to higher-order participation in school decision-making. These levels include communication, helping the child's actual learning, joining parent programs and organizations, assisting in school operations, helping in decision-making, and participating in decision-making. Epstein's structure of parental involvement likewise identifies parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community as major forms of school-family partnership (Brueck et al., 2012; Griffin & Steen, 2010). Both models recognize that parental involvement occurs across home, school, and community contexts.

For children with autism, family-school cooperation is particularly important because educational and behavioral support often requires consistency between school and home. Ruble and Gallagher (2004) argued that collaborative partnerships among parents, teachers, and other professionals are necessary in developing strong educational programs for children with autism spectrum disorders. Boswell et al. (2012) also found that parents of children with autism tend to be active in school involvement, including attending school conferences, meeting counselors, and helping with homework. However, involvement may still vary according to parent characteristics, family resources, school expectations, and the child's age or educational level (Bæck, 2010; Secord, 2009; Spann et al., 2003). Because family-school cooperation often depends on sustained professional guidance, related evidence among helping professionals shows that adversity quotient and resilience are associated with perceived professional effectiveness, supporting the value of resilient counselors and support personnel in school-based family engagement (Adame, 2026).

2.4 Father-Mother Patterns in Acceptance-Rejection and Involvement

A recurring issue in the literature is whether fathers and mothers differ in their patterns of acceptance, rejection, and school involvement. Studies on parental involvement suggest that mothers often report more frequent participation than fathers, especially in home-based educational activities and school communication. Şad and Gürbüztürk (2013) found that mothers were more dominant than fathers in helping children with homework, although parents did not significantly differ in involvement according to the child's gender. Bæck (2010) similarly reported differences in participation based on parent gender, educational level, and family type, with mothers showing more frequent attendance in formal home-school cooperation than fathers.

Paternal acceptance and involvement remain important because fathers' emotional and behavioral engagement may influence children's psychosocial adjustment. Najam and Kausar (2012) found that father acceptance-rejection and father involvement were related to adolescents' socio-emotional adjustment, including hostility, dependency, self-esteem, self-adequacy, emotional responsiveness, worldview, and depressive symptoms. Their findings also showed gender differences, with boys perceiving their fathers as warmer and reporting more father involvement than girls. These results indicate that paternal involvement may carry developmental meaning beyond simple participation in school-related tasks.

Studies on paternal involvement and acceptance also suggest that the relationship between involvement and acceptance may differ by context. Veneziano and Rohner (1998) found that paternal involvement was significantly related to perceived paternal acceptance among white children, although this relationship was not significant among black children. These findings support the view that involvement may be associated with emotional acceptance, although the strength and direction of this relationship may vary across cultural, family, and developmental contexts. Adjacent attachment research among young adults also shows that trust, communication, and alienation in childhood attachment are associated with later relationship satisfaction, suggesting that family relational quality may have developmental implications beyond immediate school participation (Gabriel et al., 2026).

In the case of parents of children with autism, the relationship between acceptance-rejection and involvement may be especially complex. Fathers and mothers may differ in their emotional adjustment to the child's diagnosis, their caregiving roles, and their participation in school-based activities. Mothers may be more consistently involved due to traditional caregiving expectations, while fathers' involvement may be more variable and possibly more closely linked to emotional adjustment, acceptance, or unresolved stress. Because the literature does not provide a uniform explanation of how acceptance-rejection and school involvement interact among fathers and mothers of children with autism, further empirical examination is warranted.

2.5 Synthesis and Gaps

The reviewed literature establishes that parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement are important constructs in understanding parent-child and family-school relationships. Parental acceptance-rejection theory

emphasizes the emotional quality of parenting, particularly the continuum between warmth and rejection (Rohner, 2013; Rohner et al., 2005). Studies on autism parenting show that parents of children with autism may experience considerable stress, adjustment difficulties, and caregiving demands, although they may also develop coping mechanisms and maintain strong emotional commitment to the child (Andreica-Sandica et al., 2011; Cash, 2006; Hutton & Caron, 2005; Osborne et al., 2008). The literature on parental involvement, meanwhile, suggests that school participation contributes to children's academic, behavioral, and developmental outcomes, especially when parents and schools collaborate effectively (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Ruble & Gallagher, 2004; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Related evidence among late adolescents suggests that relational contexts can be associated with personal-social competencies such as self-regulation, empathy, and social awareness, supporting the broader view that adjustment is shaped by interpersonal environments as well as individual characteristics (Balut et al., 2026).

However, several gaps remain. First, many studies examine parental acceptance-rejection and parental involvement separately rather than as related constructs. Second, father-specific and mother-specific patterns are not always clearly distinguished, even though prior findings suggest that fathers and mothers may differ in both emotional acceptance and school participation (Bæck, 2010; Najam & Kausar, 2012; Şad & Gürbüzürk, 2013). Third, the relationship between acceptance-rejection and school involvement among parents of children with autism remains insufficiently clarified, particularly in local special education contexts. This study responds to these gaps by examining parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement among fathers and mothers of children with autism in selected special education schools. Similarly, evidence from Chinese medical students indicates that self-disclosure mediates the relationship between self-identity and fear of intimacy, offering adjacent support for treating emotional openness and relational communication as relevant to interpersonal adjustment (Qi, 2026).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used a quantitative descriptive-correlational design with comparative analysis. The descriptive component was used to summarize the profile of the respondents, the level of parental acceptance-rejection, and the level of school involvement among fathers and mothers of children with autism. The correlational component was used to determine whether parental acceptance-rejection was significantly associated with school involvement. Comparative procedures were also applied to examine whether parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement differed according to selected child-related characteristics, including gender, birth order, and school level. The design was non-experimental; therefore, the findings were interpreted in terms of association and group differences rather than causality.

3.2 Respondents and Study Setting

The respondents were 73 parents of children diagnosed with autism. The sample consisted of 33 fathers and 40 mothers whose children were enrolled in selected special education schools in Lipa City, Tanauan City, and Batangas City. The children of the respondents were enrolled in special education settings because parental involvement in special education schools may differ from involvement in regular school settings.

The inclusion criteria required that the child with autism be at least five years old, not enrolled in high school or higher education, and currently enrolled in a special education school for at least one year. These criteria were used to ensure that the respondents had sufficient exposure to their child's school environment and were familiar with school-related expectations and responsibilities.

3.3 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents. This sampling approach was appropriate because the study focused on a specific population: fathers and mothers of children diagnosed with autism who were enrolled in

special education schools. Participation depended on the availability of qualified respondents and the consent of parents and participating schools.

3.4 Research Instruments

Two standardized instruments were used in the study: the Parent Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire: Short Form and the Parental Involvement Survey-School Age Special Education.

The Parent Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire: Short Form was used to measure parental acceptance-rejection. The instrument contains 25 items and uses a four-point Likert scale, where 4 means “almost always true,” 3 means “sometimes true,” 2 means “rarely true,” and 1 means “almost never true.” It measures four dimensions: warmth and affection, hostility and aggression, indifference and neglect, and undifferentiated rejection. The warmth and affection subscale is reverse-scored when computing the total parental acceptance-rejection score. In the scoring interpretation used in the study, scores of 48 and below indicate acceptance, while scores of 49 and above indicate rejection. The reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the father and mother PARQ were both .77, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

The Parental Involvement Survey-School Age Special Education was used to measure the level of parental involvement in the child’s schooling. The instrument contains 26 items and uses a six-point Likert scale ranging from “very strongly disagree” to “very strongly agree.” The total score classifies parental involvement into six levels: communication, helping the actual learning of individual children, taking part in parent programs and organizations, assisting in school operations, helping in decision-making, and participating in decision-making. Scores of 77 and below were classified as not involved; scores of 78-91 indicated Level 1 or communication; 92-104 indicated Level 2 or helping actual learning; 105-117 indicated Level 3 or taking part in parent programs and organizations; 118-130 indicated Level 4 or assisting in school operations; 131-143 indicated Level 5 or helping in decision-making; and 144-156 indicated Level 6 or participating in decision-making. The available study documentation did not report a separate reliability coefficient for this instrument.

3.5 Data Gathering Procedure

Permission was sought from selected special education schools through formal letters of request. After school approval was obtained, parents of children with autism were invited to participate in the study. The questionnaires were distributed together with an information form and consent materials. Each respondent answered the Parent PARQ: Short Form and the Parental Involvement Survey-School Age Special Education.

The respondents were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaires and review their responses. After data collection, the responses were recorded, tallied, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted. Confidentiality and related concerns were addressed during the data-gathering process.

3.6 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the categorical levels of parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement. Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe parent gender, child gender, birth order, school level, acceptance-rejection classification, and school involvement level.

Independent-samples t-tests were used to determine whether parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement differed according to child gender. Analysis of variance was used to examine differences in parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement according to child birth order and child school level. Pearson’s correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between parental acceptance-rejection scores and school involvement among fathers and mothers. Statistical significance was interpreted using the p-values reported in the original results.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study involved parents of children with autism; therefore, voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality were necessary safeguards. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and participated through the consent process. Permission was sought from participating schools before data collection. The confidentiality of responses was considered during the administration, tabulation, and interpretation of the questionnaires.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Profile of the Respondents

The study involved 73 parents of children with autism, composed of 33 fathers and 40 mothers. Fathers accounted for 45.2% of the respondents, while mothers accounted for 54.8%. In both parent groups, most children with autism were male. Among father respondents, 26 children, or 78.8%, were male, while 7 children, or 21.2%, were female. Among mother respondents, 32 children, or 80.0%, were male, while 8 children, or 20.0%, were female.

In terms of birth order, first-born children formed the largest group. Among fathers, 13 respondents, or 39.4%, had first-born children with autism, followed by third-born children at 30.3%, second-born children at 21.2%, and fourth-born children at 9.1%. Among mothers, 21 respondents, or 52.5%, had first-born children with autism, followed by second-born children at 22.5%, third-born children at 15.0%, and fourth-born children at 10.0%.

Most children were classified as ungraded in school placement. Among father respondents, 23 children, or 69.7%, were ungraded, while 7 were in Grade 1 and one child each was in Grades 2, 3, and 4. Among mother respondents, 29 children, or 72.5%, were ungraded, 10 were in Grade 1, and one was in Grade 5. These findings indicate that the sample mainly represented parents of male, first-born, and ungraded children with autism enrolled in special education settings.

4.2 School Involvement of Fathers and Mothers

Table 1 presents the level of school involvement among fathers and mothers. The results show that most respondents in both groups were classified as not involved in their child's school-related activities. Among fathers, 20 out of 33 respondents, or 60.6%, were classified as not involved. Among mothers, 30 out of 40 respondents, or 75.0%, were classified as not involved.

Table 1

School Involvement of Fathers and Mothers of Children with Autism

Level of School Involvement	Fathers f	Fathers %	Mothers f	Mothers %
Not involved	20	60.6	30	75.0
Level 1: Communication	3	9.1	1	2.5
Level 2: Helping actual learning	2	6.1	1	2.5
Level 3: Taking part in parent programs and organizations	4	12.1	4	10.0
Level 4: Assisting in school operations	2	6.1	2	5.0
Level 5: Helping in decision-making	0	0.0	1	2.5
Level 6: Participating in decision-making	2	6.1	1	2.5
Total	33	100.0	40	100.0

The findings indicate that school involvement was generally low among both fathers and mothers. Although fathers showed slightly more distribution across higher involvement levels, the dominant pattern remained non-involvement. The highest active involvement category among fathers was Level 3, or taking part in parent programs

and organizations, reported by 4 respondents, or 12.1%. Among mothers, the same level was also the most common active involvement category, reported by 4 respondents, or 10.0%.

This pattern is important because children with autism often require sustained coordination between home and school (Shahidullah et al., 2020). Low parental involvement may limit the consistency of educational and behavioral support across settings. While special education schools may provide structured intervention, parental participation remains important in reinforcing learning, monitoring progress, and maintaining communication with teachers and school personnel (Azad & Mandell, 2015).

4.3 Parental Acceptance-Rejection among Fathers and Mothers

Table 2 presents the classification of fathers and mothers according to parental acceptance-rejection. Most respondents in both groups were classified as accepting of their children. Among fathers, 25 out of 33 respondents, or 75.8%, were classified as accepting, while 8, or 24.2%, were classified as rejecting. Among mothers, 33 out of 40 respondents, or 82.5%, were classified as accepting, while 7, or 17.5%, were classified as rejecting.

Table 2

Parental Acceptance-Rejection among Fathers and Mothers of Children with Autism

Classification	Fathers f	Fathers %	Mothers f	Mothers %
Accepted	25	75.8	33	82.5
Rejected	8	24.2	7	17.5
Total	33	100.0	40	100.0

The findings suggest that most fathers and mothers reported attitudes consistent with acceptance. Mothers showed a slightly higher proportion of acceptance than fathers, although both groups were predominantly classified as accepting. This result is notable because it indicates that low school involvement did not necessarily mean low parental acceptance. Many parents were emotionally accepting of their children but were not highly involved in school-related activities.

The distinction between emotional acceptance and behavioral involvement is therefore important. Parents may accept and care for their child while still facing constraints that limit school participation. These constraints may include time, work responsibilities, limited confidence in school-based participation, unclear school expectations, or emotional fatigue associated with caregiving demands (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). In this sense, parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement should be treated as related but distinct dimensions of parenting.

4.4 Differences in Parental Acceptance-Rejection and School Involvement by Child Characteristics

The study examined whether parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement differed according to child gender, birth order, and school level. Table 3 summarizes the p-values for the total parental acceptance-rejection score and school involvement.

Table 3

Summary of Differences in Parental Acceptance-Rejection and School Involvement by Child Characteristics

Child Characteristic	Parent Group	PARQ p-value	Interpretation	School Involvement p-value	Interpretation
Child gender	Fathers	.456	Not significant	.905	Not significant
Child gender	Mothers	.170	Not significant	.300	Not significant
Child school level	Fathers	.219	Not significant	.376	Not significant
Child school level	Mothers	.124	Not significant	.418	Not significant
Child birth order	Fathers	.616	Not significant	.892	Not significant

Child Characteristic	Parent Group	PARQ p-value	Interpretation	School Involvement p-value	Interpretation
Child birth order	Mothers	.705	Not significant	.238	Not significant

The results indicate that child gender, school level, and birth order did not produce significant differences in parental acceptance-rejection or school involvement among fathers and mothers. These findings suggest that parents' acceptance-rejection and involvement were not statistically dependent on whether the child was male or female, first-born or later-born, or ungraded versus placed in a specific elementary grade.

This finding is important because the sample was largely composed of parents of male, first-born, and ungraded children with autism. Despite this uneven distribution, the inferential results did not show significant differences based on the tested child characteristics. The results suggest that, within this sample, parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement may be more strongly shaped by factors other than the child's gender, birth order, or school placement. Possible factors may include parental adjustment, family resources, school communication practices, severity of the child's needs, parental work schedules, or perceived competence in supporting the child's education.

4.5 Relationship Between Parental Acceptance-Rejection and School Involvement

Table 4 presents the correlation between parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement among fathers and mothers. Among fathers, school involvement was significantly and negatively correlated with hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, undifferentiated rejection, and total parental acceptance-rejection. The correlation between school involvement and warmth/affection was not significant. Among mothers, none of the parental acceptance-rejection dimensions was significantly correlated with school involvement.

Table 4

Relationship Between Parental Acceptance-Rejection and School Involvement among Fathers and Mothers

PARQ Dimension	Fathers r	Fathers p-value	Interpretation	Mothers r	Mothers p-value	Interpretation
Warmth and affection	-.148	.411	Not significant	-.068	.676	Not significant
Hostility and aggression	-.439	.011	Significant	-.135	.405	Not significant
Indifference and neglect	-.625	.001	Significant	-.170	.294	Not significant
Undiff. rejection	-.605	.001	Significant	-.149	.358	Not significant
Total PARQ score	-.566	.001	Significant	-.172	.287	Not significant

For fathers, the negative correlations indicate that higher school involvement was associated with lower scores in several rejection-related dimensions. Since the PARQ scoring procedure treats higher total scores as indicating greater rejection, the negative association between school involvement and total parental acceptance-rejection suggests that fathers who reported greater school involvement tended to report lower rejection. This is an important correction to the original thesis-style interpretation, which appeared to imply that fathers became more involved when they rejected the child. Based on the stated scoring logic, the safer interpretation is that paternal involvement was associated with reduced rejection-related responses.

The strongest paternal associations were observed for indifference and neglect, undifferentiated rejection, and total parental acceptance-rejection. This suggests that school involvement among fathers may be linked less to general warmth alone and more to reduced emotional distancing, neglect, or diffuse rejection. In practical terms, fathers who were more connected to school may have had more opportunities to understand their child's needs, communicate with educators, observe progress, and participate in the child's developmental support system.

For mothers, the absence of significant correlations suggests that school involvement and acceptance-rejection may operate more independently. Mothers may maintain acceptance regardless of their level of formal school involvement, or their involvement may be shaped by other factors not measured in the study. It is also possible that

mothers' caregiving roles are broader than school participation, meaning that the school involvement scale may not fully capture the ways mothers express support, acceptance, and care for children with autism.

4.6 Discussion

The findings indicate that most fathers and mothers of children with autism were classified as accepting, yet most were also classified as not involved in school-related activities. This pattern suggests that parental acceptance and school involvement should not be treated as identical constructs. Acceptance reflects the emotional quality of the parent-child relationship (Rohner, 2013), while involvement reflects behavioral participation in the child's schooling (Bakker & Denessen, 2023). Parents may accept their child emotionally but still remain minimally involved in school because of work demands, limited school access, role expectations, uncertainty about how to help, or reliance on teachers and special education personnel (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Ziden et al., 2020).

The low level of school involvement among both fathers and mothers is noteworthy because the literature consistently emphasizes the value of parental involvement in children's educational and behavioral development. Prior studies have associated parental involvement with improved academic performance, stronger school adjustment, better attendance, lower dropout risk, improved motivation, and fewer behavioral problems (Armstrong-Piner, 2008; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). For children with autism, family-school cooperation is especially important because educational and behavioral interventions often require consistency between home and school (Azad & Mandell, 2015; Ruble & Gallagher, 2004; Shahidullah et al., 2020). The present findings therefore suggest a practical concern: even when parents are emotionally accepting, schools may still need to develop more active mechanisms to support and sustain parental participation.

The finding that child gender, birth order, and school level did not significantly differentiate parental acceptance-rejection or school involvement suggests that these child-related characteristics were not decisive factors in the present sample. This result is consistent with studies indicating that child gender does not necessarily affect parental acceptance-rejection or involvement (Erkan & Toran, 2010; Gülay, 2010; Şad & Gürbüzürk, 2013). However, it differs from studies suggesting that parental attitudes and involvement may vary according to child gender or birth order (Avvisati et al., 2010; Bankar, 2012; Mah, 2011; Najam & Kausar, 2012). These mixed findings imply that the influence of child characteristics may be context-specific and may depend on disability type, family structure, cultural expectations, or the nature of the school environment.

The most important finding of the study concerns the father-mother contrast in the relationship between parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement. Among fathers, school involvement was significantly and negatively related to hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, undifferentiated rejection, and total parental acceptance-rejection. Assuming the PARQ scoring described in the methodology, this means that higher paternal school involvement was associated with lower rejection-related responses. This pattern aligns with studies suggesting that paternal involvement and paternal acceptance are linked to children's adjustment and perceived acceptance (Najam & Kausar, 2012; Veneziano & Rohner, 1998). It also suggests that fathers' participation in schooling may be psychologically meaningful, not merely administrative.

For mothers, the lack of significant relationship between acceptance-rejection and school involvement may indicate that maternal acceptance is less dependent on formal school participation. Mothers may express acceptance through home-based caregiving, daily routines, emotional regulation, health monitoring, and other forms of support that are not fully reflected in school involvement measures. This interpretation is consistent with literature suggesting that mothers often carry dominant caregiving and home-learning responsibilities, while formal participation in school may represent only one aspect of maternal involvement (Bæck, 2010; Şad & Gürbüzürk, 2013).

Overall, the study contributes to behavioral and social analytics by showing that parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement may function differently for fathers and mothers of children with autism. The findings support the need for gender-sensitive family-school engagement strategies. Fathers may benefit from targeted school inclusion programs that strengthen communication, participation, and confidence in supporting children with autism. Mothers,

on the other hand, may require support that recognizes both visible school participation and less visible caregiving labor at home. Rather than assuming that all parents need the same type of involvement strategy, special education schools may need differentiated approaches that account for paternal and maternal roles, emotional adjustment, and practical barriers to participation.

5. Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

5.1 Conclusions

This study examined parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement among fathers and mothers of children with autism in selected special education schools. The findings showed that most fathers and mothers were classified as accepting of their children. However, most respondents were also classified as not involved in school-related activities. This indicates that emotional acceptance of the child does not automatically translate into active school participation. In the context of autism education, acceptance and involvement appear to be related but distinct dimensions of parental engagement.

The findings further showed that child gender, birth order, and school level did not significantly differentiate parental acceptance-rejection or school involvement among fathers and mothers. This suggests that, within the sample, parents' acceptance-rejection and involvement were not significantly shaped by whether the child was male or female, first-born or later-born, or ungraded versus placed in a formal grade level. Other factors not examined in the study, such as parental work schedule, caregiving burden, perceived school support, severity of the child's needs, or parental confidence in participating in school activities, may better explain variations in school involvement.

The most important finding concerns the relationship between parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement. Among fathers, school involvement was significantly and negatively correlated with hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, undifferentiated rejection, and total parental acceptance-rejection scores. Since higher PARQ scores indicate greater rejection, this means that greater paternal school involvement was associated with lower rejection-related responses. Among mothers, school involvement was not significantly related to parental acceptance-rejection. These results suggest that fathers' school involvement may be more strongly connected to acceptance-rejection patterns, while mothers' acceptance may operate independently of formal school involvement.

Overall, the study concludes that parental acceptance-rejection and school involvement should be understood separately when examining parents of children with autism. Fathers and mothers may differ in how emotional acceptance and educational participation are connected. Special education schools should therefore avoid assuming that parental acceptance alone is sufficient evidence of active school engagement.

5.2 Recommendations

Special education schools should develop more intentional family-school engagement programs for parents of children with autism. Since most fathers and mothers in the study were classified as not involved in school-related activities, schools may need to create clearer, more accessible, and more structured opportunities for parental participation. These may include scheduled parent consultations, parent coaching sessions, classroom observation opportunities, home-school communication systems, and structured activities where parents can learn how to reinforce school-based interventions at home.

Schools should also design father-inclusive engagement strategies. The findings suggest that fathers' school involvement is significantly related to lower rejection-related responses. This means that fathers should not be treated as secondary participants in autism education. Schools may invite fathers directly to conferences, workshops, behavioral planning sessions, and progress consultations. Weekend or flexible schedules may also help fathers who are constrained by work responsibilities.

For mothers, support programs should recognize both school-based involvement and home-based caregiving. The absence of a significant relationship between maternal involvement and acceptance-rejection does not mean that mothers are disengaged. Rather, maternal support may be expressed through daily caregiving, emotional regulation, learning support at home, health monitoring, and routine management. Schools should therefore document and support both visible and less visible forms of maternal involvement.

School counselors, special education teachers, and administrators should use parent engagement as part of a broader psychosocial support system. Parents of children with autism may need assistance not only in understanding school requirements but also in processing emotional adjustment, stress, acceptance, and long-term caregiving expectations. Parent education programs may include topics such as autism understanding, behavioral support, communication strategies, coping mechanisms, and collaborative planning with teachers.

Future researchers may expand the study by using a larger sample, including more schools, and examining additional variables such as socioeconomic status, parental education, work schedule, family structure, severity of autism symptoms, time since diagnosis, and parental stress. Qualitative interviews may also be useful in explaining why parents who accept their children may still remain uninvolved in school-related activities. Future studies may also separately examine home-based involvement and school-based involvement, since formal school participation may not fully capture the parental support provided at home.

5.3 Implications of the Study

Theoretically, the study supports the value of examining parental acceptance-rejection and parental involvement as separate but potentially related constructs. The findings suggest that emotional warmth or acceptance does not necessarily produce school involvement, and that the relationship may differ between fathers and mothers. This distinction is important for psychology, family studies, and special education research because it prevents the overgeneralization of parental engagement as a single unified construct.

Methodologically, the study highlights the need to analyze fathers and mothers separately when examining parenting variables. Combining fathers and mothers into a single parent group may conceal important differences in how acceptance-rejection and involvement operate. Future studies on autism parenting may benefit from parent-role-specific analysis, especially when examining emotional, behavioral, and school-related variables.

Practically, the study implies that special education schools should not rely only on general parent participation programs. Instead, schools should develop differentiated engagement strategies for fathers and mothers. Fathers may require more direct inclusion in school communication and child-development planning, while mothers may require recognition and support for both school-based and home-based caregiving responsibilities.

For behavioral and social analytics, the study demonstrates how parent-role patterns can reveal meaningful differences in family-school engagement. By analyzing parental acceptance-rejection, school involvement, and child-related characteristics separately for fathers and mothers, the study provides a more nuanced picture of how families participate in autism education. The findings may help schools, counselors, and special education practitioners design evidence-informed parent engagement programs that respond to actual behavioral patterns rather than assumed parental roles.

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