



## Article

# I Be Africa Man Original: Towards a Contextual Conceptualization of Father Involvement in the Education of Children with Disabilities in Kenya

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**Abstract:** Father involvement could play a significant role in the lives of children with disabilities. Research is scarce on father involvement in the education of children with disabilities in Africa. We seek to provide a context for father involvement in the formal education of children with disabilities in Kenya, with the aim of contributing to the development of a conceptual understanding for father involvement in such a circumstance. We examine general research on father involvement in Kenya, explore the policy frameworks that guide fatherhood in the country, and look at the specific area of involvement in education. We then present a case study that examines father involvement in the formal education of children with disabilities in Kenya. Our analysis flags up a key opportunity in the pursuit of education for children with disabilities when fathers are involved; they can support their children with disabilities' access, participation and success in education. We highlight the need for research that builds upon the voices of fathers to illuminate their role in education and we also make some suggestions toward a conceptual lens that will highlight the contextual realities involved, particularly in regard to the education of children with disabilities.

**Keywords:** father involvement; education; special education; children with disabilities; Kenya; Africa



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## 1. Introduction

The import of father involvement in the life of their children is well documented in the literature. In traditional African communities, fathers mostly take the role of decision making and breadwinning in the family, meaning that their involvement in matters central to the child could lead to enhanced achievement of the child's wellbeing [1,2]. Father-child interactions are associated with the child's improved cognitive, social, language, as well as emotional development [3]. Other long-term effects of father involvement in the lives of their children are improved social functioning of the offspring during childhood, high achievement of the child in education and low incidences of juvenile delinquency as well as criminal behavior [4]. In addition, father involvement in a child's life has been linked with the father's satisfaction, which results in a greater prospect of sustained involvement as such a child grows older [5].

According to Karisa, McKenzie and De Villiers [2], the traditional role of the father becomes additionally significant when there is a vulnerable member in the family, such as a child with a disability, because the wellbeing of such a member depends on the will of the father, including if they are to access, as well as to participate in, education. Nevertheless, the nature of father involvement with their children in Africa is diverse, varying from society-to-society and ranging from high physical presence to physical absence. For instance, Aka fathers from Central Africa are reported to value physical presence to an

extent of being within reach of their young children 47% of any time [6]. In contrast, fathers in South Africa, an African country with a significant amount of literature on fatherhood, have been reported to be frequently absent from their families due to unemployment and poverty, among other factors [7]. Yet, Morrell [8] noted that fatherhood in South Africa confers responsibility to the father to provide material and emotional support and to protect the family. The same author reported children in South Africa to be expecting fathers to be able to play with and to give them a sense of security. Importantly, it was suggested that fatherhood in Africa emphasized the need of fathers to meet the financial needs of their offspring, especially young ones, and not merely being physically present or absent [8,9]. Morrell [8] went even further to suggest that sometimes the physical absence of the father in the family could be beneficial to the child due to, for example, a reduced risk of abuse. Richter and Smith [10] in South Africa highlighted the concept of social fathers, where the father concept did not refer to biological fathers alone. Other men within the extended family, such as grandfathers and brothers, took the responsibilities of fathers, and were similarly considered fathers. Such members played a critical role for children whose biological fathers were not present.

Scientific knowledge is, however, still scanty when it comes to how fathers are involved with their children in other African settings. Research on father involvement with their children with disabilities is even more scarce. Although there might be global constructs of father involvement, such as the role of providing social capital to the children [11], subtle differences based on social, cultural and economic realities exist [1,2]. Accordingly, we set out to provide a context for father involvement in the education of their children with disabilities in Africa, with the aim of contributing to the development of a conceptual understanding on the same. We choose Kenya as an instrumental case study. According to Stake [12], and Grandy and Mills [13], an instrumental case study examines a particular case to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization, or build theory. Thus, we examine the case of Kenya in an attempt to develop a conceptual understanding on father involvement in the education of their children with disabilities. We specifically argue for a conceptual lens that highlights the contextual realities of the fathers. To aid this conceptualization, firstly, we explore how fatherhood and father involvement is generally constructed in Kenya. Secondly, we examine the policy frameworks related to fatherhood in the country. Thirdly, we look at father involvement in the specific realm of education in Kenya. Fourthly, we present a case study on father involvement in the education of children with disabilities that we conducted in a special school in Kenya. We end with conclusions, including implications for future research.

## 2. Fatherhood and Father Involvement in Kenya

Kenya has 44 ethnic groups [14] that have their own distinct mother tongues, cultures, beliefs and practices [15]. When it comes to parenting, the father's ethnicity influences the perception of the primary caregiving role in the context of cultural norms of gender [16]. Nevertheless, similarities in performing fatherhood are now present, due to socio-demographic factors and cultural practices like inter-ethnic marriages, formal employment, increased access to education as well as improved opportunities of trade [17]. For example, Ratemo, Ondigi and Kebaso [18] note that in the traditional Kenyan family and community, the father was the definitive symbol and custodian of power and responsibility. However, with Kenya's increased urbanization, modernization, and population growth, the roles of fathers have changed noticeably.

According to Mwoma [19], who has conducted extensive research on fatherhood in Kenya, fatherhood in this country may now be conceptualized into two types: fathers in the traditional context and fathers in the contemporary context. Fathers in the traditional context have followed cultural scripts that have endowed them with perceived masculine roles, like those linked with economic production, headship, moral guidance, and mentoring primarily boys and young men when they transition to adulthood. Fathers tend to be close to their sons and to keep a considerable distance from the socialization and

education of their daughters. Girls mainly stay around mothers and other women and are presented with domestic chores and responsibilities while still young. Furthermore, emotional support of fathers towards their children is not clear [19]. In a study on the role of fathers in a rural part of Kenya, the fathers hardly mentioned the need to stimulate children both cognitively and emotionally; “only one father (out of nine) mentioned that children need the love of their father” [11]. Additionally, it is not clear from the study by Mwoma [19] whether the difference between a father’s involvement with the son and daughter extends to the basic education context—like in the case of assisting with school work or attending school meetings—particularly in the contemporary context where the role of fathers is changing.

In the contemporary context, Mwoma [19] notes that factors like employment demands have diminished the time that fathers and their children spend with each other. Additionally, children now spend more time in school than at home when compared to the past, a factor that has reduced the time parents spend with their children. Apart from the fathers in the traditional context and those in the contemporary context, Mwoma [19] suggests that there is another group of fathers that straddles between the past that they grew up with and the contemporary that is demanding much more of fathers, including emotional support to the family members.

*“This tension between the past and present can cause quite a bit of dissonance in terms of how men define masculinity and fathering identities. Furthermore, it has implications for the negotiation of roles, rituals, and childrearing responsibilities and practices in both rural and urban areas. For traditional societies, the distance between the old and emergent ways of doing fathering can be wide”. [19] (p. 410)*

Notwithstanding the tension between the traditional context and the contemporary context of performing fatherhood in Kenya, the husband’s presence in a marriage tends to confirm the legitimacy of the family, even if he does not provide any support to the family [20]. Traditionally, children from mothers who were married and in stable marriages had higher status than children from single mothers. “Legitimacy as a social construct in Kenya inspires the confidence needed for children to face life and be successful; when compared to children from single-mother families who at times are swamped with feelings of rejection” [19]. In spite of that, a survey by Clark and Hamplová [21] established that Kenyan women have a 59.5% chance of becoming single mothers by the age of 45, a finding that points to the changing view of the importance of the father in the family. In the contemporary context, there is greater acceptance of children from alternative family models, as an increased number of single mothers are able to sustain their families and support the education of their children, among other duties [19]. Additionally, gender roles within families are gradually changing from traditional patterns, although little is known about what this evolution means for the children in the families [11]. It means that the perceptions of fatherhood in this specific context are not rigid, but are responsive to the dynamic contextual realities. Conceptualizing father involvement in the Kenyan context calls for considering this dynamism of the context, which is also evident in the laws of the land.

### **3. Fatherhood Legislative Frameworks in Kenya**

Since 2000, various laws have been passed to make fathers in Kenya more accountable to their children. To start with, the Constitution of Kenya [22] protects all Kenyans against discrimination. This protection traverses various aspects, including relationships between fathers and their children. Before the promulgation of the constitution, a father’s responsibility for the child only came into effect if he acknowledged that the child was his. This was either through the father consenting for his name to be put on the birth certificate of the child, or by him providing maintenance for the child. Here, we see the elevated status of men, as they possessed the sole power of ascribing paternity. However, that has now changed with the Constitution of Kenya [22]. The powers of fathers as the sole decision makers in ascribing paternity have been tilted in favor of the wellbeing of the children.

The children, through the mothers, now have an upper hand in claiming their fathers. For instance, in cases where a man has sired a child, it is no longer necessary to get the consent of the man before putting his name on the birth certificate, whether the mother is married to the man or not [23].

Following in the steps of the Constitution of Kenya [22], court decisions have set precedents that influence how fatherhood is defined in Kenya. For example, in the past, men used to oppose Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) tests, arguing that they infringed on their privacy. However, the Kenyan High Court overruled that argument and directed that the best interest of the child overrode the right to privacy. Moreover, when the DNA test proves that one is not the father, the law now dictates that if a child was born while the man was living with the mother, he is still obligated to take up parental responsibilities of taking care of the child [23]. Thus, the law has redefined fatherhood to emphasize the responsibilities and duties that the father has towards providing for the needs of the child, rather than biological relationships. Nevertheless, article 53 of the Constitution of Kenya [22] stipulates that both parents take up equal responsibilities for raising their children. Yet, the attempt at redefining fatherhood is not without challenges.

Despite the Constitution of Kenya [22] and the Court decisions attempting to redefine fatherhood, the position on polygamy held by the Marriage Act [24] is reminiscent of the traditionally elevated status of men. For instance, the Act allows men to have multiple wives—which was in the past a preserve for Islamic marriages only. It means that regardless of the type of marriage (religious, traditional, or civil), men in Kenya can now legally marry as many wives as they please, provided they notify the other spouse(s). However, the same right has not been extended to women, which depicts the continued protection of patriarchy in gender relations. Similarly, heteronormative beliefs around gender are evident in Kenya's stance against same-sex marriages. Kenyan legislation does not recognize same-sex marriages. The Constitution of Kenya [22] has only authorized opposite-sex marriages. Moreover, the Penal Code (2009) [25] criminalizes homosexuality. The Children Act [26] as well prohibits adoption of children by same-sex partners.

It is evident that patriarchy and heteronormativity still have a role in the construction of fatherhood in Kenya. Nevertheless, based on the spirit of the Constitution of Kenya [22] and some court decisions, subtle transitions characterized by less biological definitions of fatherhood and a focus on increased partnerships between the father and mother are happening. Again, what stands out is the responsiveness of fatherhood to contextual complexities. Fatherhood in this African context is many things but static. Constructed by the society, it attempts taking a different, more egalitarian form, yet simultaneously retaining some traits of its past. We further examine how fatherhood and father involvement is enacted within the context in the specific realm of education in Kenya.

#### **4. Father Involvement in Education in Kenya**

Studies by Mwoma [19,27,28] offer a glimpse of father involvement in education in Kenya. Mwoma [28] established that the type of school attended by the child was related to the father's involvement in the child's education. The fathers whose children attended private preschools showed more involvement in their children's education than those whose children attended public preschools. The reason for the tendency was not clear in the study, but, in our view, it could have resulted from the feelings of accomplishment and prestige that come with sending a child to a private pre-school. In Kenya, private schools have a higher social status than public ones, because of the high amount of school fees one has to pay and the assumed better quality education that the schools offer. However, other factors could have been at play in the above tendency as, for example, studies have established that fathers with better education and of high economic status tend to be more involved in the education of their children than those with less education and those of poor economic backgrounds [27,29]. Additionally, Mwoma [19,27] suggested that a father's understanding of the importance of being involved in his child's education influenced involvement more than his occupation. The same author observed that fathers who were

teachers were more involved in their children's education—because they likely knew its importance—than, for example, the unemployed fathers who could afford more time to be involved.

We take cognizance of the fact that most of the references cited hitherto are on fathers in general, not specifically on fathers of children with disabilities. While fathers of children without disabilities might have similar experiences to fathers of children with disabilities, we do not deny the possibility that the two might experience fatherhood differently due, for instance, to the context-specific demands that come with having a child with a disability. Thus, we treat the findings with caution as they might not be reflective of fathers of children with disabilities, particularly when it comes to involvement in education.

In the particular realm of the education of children with disabilities in Kenya, it has been observed that perceptions of masculinity influence how fathers are involved in education. These include fathers' attempts to protect their identities as men in societies that associate manliness with being strong and perfect, and disability with being weak and imperfect. Also influencing father involvement are teachers' prejudicial views of men as uncaring and specifically wanting little to do with children with disabilities [2]. Additionally, it has been observed that the fathers' considerations of the benefits of formal education for their children with disabilities influence how they are involved in the education [1]. The future economic benefits of investing in formal education are particularly an important consideration when the poverty rate in Kenya comes to the picture. More than 40% of Kenyans live in extreme poverty [30], and the poverty rate can be as high as 80% in the remote, arid, sparsely populated parts of the country [31]. Parents in this context often consider educating their children as a way of breaking out of the poverty circle in the future through increasing the chances of the children getting gainful employment. Moreover, the children are a sort of insurance for the family, able to take care of the parents when they are aged, invalid or no longer able to work [1,32]. Gainful employment and self-reliance for, for instance, children with intellectual disabilities, has mostly remained unattainable in Kenya and, consequently, the children and their families mostly live in poverty [33]. When the economic outcomes of investing in education are not certain because of the child's disability, fathers might resist investing in the education of such children [1].

This section began by demonstrating how contextual realities, such as the type of school attended by the child as well as the fathers' comprehension of the importance of education, influence father involvement in the formal education of children in general in Kenya. Furthering the discussion to the specific realm of education of children with disabilities equally evidenced that contextual factors, such as perceptions of masculinity and the experience of poverty, play a major role in constructing father involvement. A conceptual lens that highlights the contextual realities when examining father involvement in the education of children with disabilities in this African setting would be most appropriate. In an attempt to further exemplify the significance of contextual realities in the conceptualization of father involvement, we present a case study on father involvement in the education of children with disabilities that we conducted in a school in Kenya.

## **5. Father Involvement in the Education of Children with Disabilities in a Special School in Kenya**

Scientific evidence on father involvement in the education of children with disabilities in Africa, as stated before, is scarce. In an attempt to address this gap, we set out to answer the question: How do contextual realities of gender roles influence father involvement in the formal education of children with disabilities in Kenya. We aimed to get the views of fathers regarding this question. However, we also included the views of mothers, guided by the suggestion that "both maternal and paternal views shape not only paternal perceptions of their roles but also the actual impact of fathers in the child's life and perhaps the dynamics within the family system" [11]. We additionally included the views of teachers and children with disabilities, believing that their views equally shaped the phenomenon of father involvement in education.

### 5.1. Study Site

The study was conducted in a special school for children with intellectual disabilities in Kilifi County in coastal Kenya. The school is located in a cosmopolitan urban center and has a population of 232 learners (145 males, 87 females) with the age range between four and 34 years. The majority (83%) of the children at the school have intellectual disabilities. The others have comorbidities including intellectual disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorders, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, congenital heart defects, mild hearing impairments, mild visual impairments, and emotional and behavioral disorders. The local Educational Assessment and Resource Centre, a Ministry of Education institution in Kenya, makes the diagnoses of the learners and referrals to the school.

### 5.2. Participants

This research was part of a larger case study on understanding father involvement in the education of children with disabilities in Kenya. University of Cape Town in South Africa and the National Council for Science and Technology, Kenya gave ethical clearances to conduct the study. Purposive sampling was used to select eight fathers, six mothers, nine teachers and six children with intellectual disabilities. The parents selected had to be biologically related to the children with intellectual disabilities, in order to control against introducing further relationship dynamics in the research. Additionally, with the goal of not introducing particular household dynamics, persons whose family members had taken part in the study were not included. All the participants in this study gave informed consent. Children under the age of 18 years assented to the study after their parents/guardians consented. We use pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the participants. Their demographics are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Participants' demographics.

Characteristics	Fathers	Mothers	Teachers	Children with Disabilities
Age range	31–71	36–62	33–53	11–21
Gender	Male	Female	Female 6 Male 2	Female 3 Male 3
Formal education				
Unschooling	1	2		All pursuing special education
Primary education	4	4		
Secondary education	3	0		
Tertiary education	0	0	8	
Income per month range	0–\$500	0–\$150	Not provided	Not asked
Age range of their children with disabilities	6–32	9–17	Not applicable	Not applicable

### 5.3. Data Collection

The venue for data collection was the study school except for one father where the exercise happened at his house upon his request. The first author collected the data using a set of semi-structured questions that had been developed in consensus with the second author. English, Kiswahili and Kigiriana were the languages used for the data collection. All the data collection sessions were audio-recorded. Table 2 shows the data collection methods for each group of participants.

**Table 2.** Data collection methods.

Group of Participants	Data Collection Method
Fathers	Individual interviews
Mothers	Focus group discussion
Teachers	Focus group discussion
Children with intellectual disabilities	Focus group discussion and draw-and-tell interviews

#### 5.4. Data Management and Analysis

The audio-recorded data were translated by the first author into English, as necessary, and transcribed. The data were analyzed thematically with the assistance of Nvivo software (version 12, QSR International Pty Ltd., Melbourne, Australia, 2018). The first author read the transcripts three to six times and developed a coding scheme that was shared with the second author and another experienced qualitative researcher. The three researchers held discussions to explore alternative interpretations of the findings and attain confirmability of the themes emerging.

#### 5.5. Results

##### 5.5.1. The Father Considers Himself the President of the House

The father, being a man, was culturally viewed as the head of the family. He held primary power and political leadership, moral authority, and social privilege in the family. According to Kadzo—one of the teachers—just like a president, the father had some impunity:

*The father considers himself the president of the house. If he misbehaves or not, he is not answerable to anyone. In the meetings, he might decide not to attend because he knows he is the head of the family and his authority cannot be questioned. If you ask him or question him, you disrespect him. So, you cannot question him because the culture says that he is the number one. (Teachers' FGD)*

When it came to issues like attending school meetings, the fathers could decide whether and who to attend such functions without being questioned. The fathers affirmed this headship position in the family and contrasted it to that of the mothers. The mothers' role was to support the father and care for as well as nurture the child. Katana, a father, said, *"The mothers' responsibility is to see to it that the child has eaten, and she helps the child do the tasks that I try to urge him to do"* (Father's individual interview). Thus, while the father decided which tasks were important, the mother saw to it that what the father had decided upon was implemented. This decision making power of the father could have a big impact on the school if the father was involved in, for instance, school meetings.

According to the teachers, events like school meetings were an important indicator for father involvement in the education of children with disabilities because, on such occasions, fathers got a chance to interact with their children and the teachers, and to know the progress of their children as well as the school in general. Mkarye, a teacher, stated, *"I think the father should visit the school more. They should participate more in the school activities"* (Key informant interview). Salient issues were discussed during such meetings and decisions passed. Given the decision making power of the fathers in the family, getting them to support decisions passed at the school could lead to better implementation of such decisions. Mchenzala, another teacher, observed:

*You know in something that the father agrees to; it's not easy for the mother to reject it. Because for us the Mijikenda or people from the Coast, we believe that fathers are the final decision makers, which is not the case because an issue needs to be discussed before we get the way forward. But we, we have that threshold that what the father says is right. So, if everything that the father says is right, it means a lot of things work when you involve the father and you get him to support you. (Key informant interview)*

It meant that, if fathers could take part in decision making at the school, there would be hastened implementation of the decisions arrived at in the school meetings. However, although the fathers were considered to have this decision making privilege, they were, on the other hand, viewed as less likely to attend the school meetings and other activities that concerned their children.

The fathers were depicted as not approachable towards children. Dama, a mother said:

*... other children might head to the father to tell him something; but before they get to him, they are told, "go back" (by the father). Others are told, "Go and tell your mother". So the father does not know what the child wants to tell him, yet he asks him/her to go back. (Mothers' FGD)*

Apart from the father being seen as unapproachable, there were cultural expectations regarding who between the father and the mother was to be involved in the affairs of the children at the school. Kadzo, a teacher, stated:

*... Some communities have held into culture so much that they say if it's a girl the mother should go to the school. If it's a boy it's still the mother to attend because children belong to the mother. So it depends on the community. (Teachers' FGD)*

Accordingly, affairs touching on the child at the school were sometimes seen as falling in the realm of the roles of mothers and not fathers. Moreover, the gender of the child influenced the unlikeliness of some fathers to attend their child's events at the school. Ndoko, a father, said, "*... there are some things that the father can discuss with the daughter and others that he can't share with her, they are for the mother*" (Father's individual interview). Fuli, another father, stated, "*You can't be the father and then you are very close to the female child. It will not be good*" (Father's individual interview). Therefore, it seemed that there were reservations in some spheres when it came to the fathers involving themselves in the affairs of male or female children.

Adding to the influence of the gender of the child, the fathers were depicted as typically impatient when compared to the mothers. The fathers, it was reported, did not like to attend to meetings that took long to arrive at conclusions. Jumaa, a teacher, said, "*... it's the mothers who have the patience, to sit and listen to what is being said in the meeting*" (Teachers' FGD). Thus, mostly mothers attended the school meetings.

Besides the fathers being less likely to attend meetings, they were not likely to take seriously the information conveyed by the mothers who had attended the meetings. Consequently, when decisions were passed in the school meetings where mothers were the majority, they were difficult to implement without the approval of the fathers. Katana, a father who was also a board member in the school, stated, "*... but if we plan with the mothers, when they go back home, they must explain what we passed. But the fathers react differently and it becomes difficult to be implemented*" (Father's individual interview). The case could have been different if the fathers could participate directly in the meetings or if they could be consulted directly by the school.

The fathers, being the heads, were consulted by the school only when necessary, like in cases of significant challenges. A teacher decided to involve the father when a child with a disability had profound discipline issues. Kadzo, the teacher, stated:

*I realised that his behaviour (child) was because the mother did not have much control over the child ... So I told the child that next time I wanted to see the father ... It's like this side, it's the man who is listened to ... (Teachers' FGD)*

Similarly, some mothers involved the fathers in education issues of their children with disabilities when there was a dire need. For example, Kapani, a mother, reported how she engaged the father to find a place at the special school after learning that their child with a disability was being "*bound with a rope*" at the regular school he was attending (Mothers' FGD). In the absence of significant challenges, most the fathers hardly attended to specific school activities. The role they considered most salient was to provide finances for the

needs of their families, including for the education of their children with disabilities, as we describe next.

#### 5.5.2. It's the Father Who Pays

The fathers were expected to provide for the financial needs of the family, including paying for the education of the children with disabilities. They were to pay for food, clothing, health care, school fees, school accessories and transport, among other needs. Nyuwi, a mother, said, *"Everything that my child has, he has been bought for by the father"* (Mothers' FGD). Likewise, Kesi, a child with a disability, stated, *"He (father) pays school fees. He buys books, school uniform, school shoes, and gives me pocket money"* (Learner's draw-and-tell interview). The fathers themselves acknowledged their role as financial providers. Bonge, a father, said, *"I will do everything, stealing or anything, for I did not go to school, but I will take my children to school"* (Father's individual interview). It seemed that Bonge wanted to cushion his children from the deficiencies he had experienced growing up. The statement shows how Bonge not only cared for the education of all his children, but also the great extent he was ready to go to give his children an education. Notwithstanding, the way the fathers were involved in the education of their children with disabilities was also influenced by how the school perceived the role of the fathers.

The school, being a part of the society, played a role in shaping the societal expectation of the fathers to take up the role of financial provision in the education of children with disabilities. Mkarye, a teacher, said, *"... you look at the dressing of the child and you say no, this is a problem. So, we believe that the father is normally the financier. So, we call the father then we come and discuss with the father"* (Key informant interview). The mothers and children with disabilities too ascribed this role to the fathers by expecting them to pay for education and other expenses of the children. It was intriguing to note that the fathers were considered to be fulfilling their role as fathers provided they paid for the expenses of the family. They did not have to be present at home. Jeri, a teacher, stated, *"... maybe even the father is not near the home—he is on a journey, working. But he's providing the financial support to the family"* (Teachers' FGD).

However, there were cases where the fathers acted differently depending on the child's disability or non-disability. Some fathers reported favoring the child with a disability rather than the counterparts without disabilities in resource provision. Kasorobo, a father, said:

*I really focus on the education of the child with a disability. Because it's his life. I help my child with a disability a lot. Even now, there's one child without disability in Form 2 (in secondary school). I took him to the school but he was not admitted because I had no money. I told him, "Wait first I... take the disabled one to school first, before I come back and deal with you". So the child with a disability... I'm really ahead in helping him.* (Father's individual interview)

It appeared that Kasorobo prioritized paying school fees for his child with a disability, believing that the wellbeing of this child was more dependent on the education when compared with the wellbeing of the child without a disability. The case was different for another father who, faced with financial difficulties, had to pay for the child without a disability first. Nyuwi, his wife, reported: *In my case, the child without a disability is paid for the fees first. Because in the school they attend, the teachers are too hard on them in seeking the payments. But in this school, the teachers are more understanding. So, you consider where there is more push, and pay there first* (Mothers' FGD).

By paying school fees for their child without a disability first, it did not mean that this father discriminated against his child with a disability. Rather, this was a strategy to share scarce resources against a background of great necessity.

#### 5.6. Discussion

*"I no be gentleman at all o. I be Africa man original"* are words from the song 'Gentleman' by Fela Kuti, a Nigerian Afrobeat musician and political activist. In this song, Fela presents himself as a proud African man guarding his African identity against expectations to

conform to the postcolonial English image of a 'gentleman'. Fela holds his ground, choosing the traditional African masculinity and mocking the western ideologies of being a man. In the current study, fathers face a similar situation of having to choose between African and western masculinities when involving themselves in the education of their children with disabilities.

There is an expectation for the fathers to be involved in the education of their children with disabilities by acting in roles that are traditionally viewed as feminine and against the norms of patriarchy that guide their own community. Such new expectations entail participating more in the care and nurturing of children, including attending school events to socialize with the children with disabilities and teachers, to know the progress of the children and to contribute to decision making at the school. However, most of the fathers subscribe to the pursuit of their community's prevailing perception of fatherhood that emphasizes economic provision.

There seems to be a disagreement between the fathers' old version of a hegemonic masculinity [34] and the school's contemporary view of the same. The fathers are facing pressure from the modern society to acquire a less patriarchal masculinity influenced by western cultures as championed by the special school. However, these fathers have their own cherished masculinity, which is informed by their traditional cultural norms and values that favor patriarchy. It appears, though, that the fathers' traditional masculinity favoring patriarchy is becoming marginalized by the modern society's expectations for more equal gender roles—the new hegemony. This trend echoes the suggestion by Jørgensen [35] that the patriarchal perception of a hegemonic masculinity of ethnic minority fathers in Denmark was facing emasculation by Danish values that emphasized the superiority and correctness of gender equality. However, in the current study, there seems to be some resistance to the new hegemonic masculinity championed by the school, probably because of the privileges that the old hegemony guarantees.

Subscribing to the version of hegemonic masculinity espoused by the traditional African cultures and norms ensures protection of the fathers' position of headship, decision making and impunity. In this position, the fathers have the power to decide who and how to be involved in the school without being questioned. The traditional African masculine attributes also justify the fathers' focus on meeting the financial needs of the family, including for the education of the children with disabilities, rather than offering direct support to the children with disabilities at the school. This is particularly significant when the poor economic status of the families is considered. Schiemer [36] suggested that poverty made parents of children with disabilities in Ethiopia focus on earning a living rather than the 'luxury' of educating children with disabilities. In a similar fashion, the fathers in this study have to prioritize what to pay for because of scarce finances, which might entail putting on hold paying for the education of the children with disabilities. However, even in instances where some fathers stop paying for the education of their children with disabilities, it does not necessarily mean that such fathers do not care for such children. Sometimes it is about prioritizing what to pay for amidst financial constraints. A similar scenario also plays out when the fathers choose not to be directly involved at the school.

The failure of some of the fathers to be directly involved at the special school does not automatically amount to rejection of their children with disabilities or negligence of duty. A consideration of the context of such behaviors reveals that some of these fathers care for their children with disabilities despite the perceived shortfalls. For instance, a teacher points out that the need to provide for the family often makes fathers travel long distances because of job demands, making the fathers not able to be physically present for school meetings or other events. Thus, the mere physical absence of the father from the school may not be enough to judge the father as not caring about the education of the child with a disability. This finding is in line with the idea that parenthood in Africa stresses meeting the needs of the children and not physical presence or absence [8,37]. The physical absence is better viewed as the price the father has to pay to enjoy his patriarchal privilege

associated with being a man. In this way, it is often the sacrifice the father makes to keep the child with a disability in the special school by looking for means to provide for the family's financial needs.

### 5.7. Summary of Discussion

Although the school considered attendance at school events to be important in the education of children with disabilities, most fathers seemed not keen to play this role. They rarely attended such events because of cultural norms and values differentiating between the roles and attributes of men and women. In this context, the fathers had power and authority, and they had the discretion of choosing how and who to be involved in the school. Like presidents, the fathers mainly made the 'policies' and directed what was to happen in the family, including in education, and left the actual implementation of the day-to-day activities to the mothers. They did not take instructions on what to do from either the school or the mothers. Although the school might have judged father involvement by how much the fathers were directly engaged with the formal education of the child with a disability, the context's cultural norms and values placed an emphasis on how the fathers provided for the financial needs of the children at home and at the school. Fathers were considered responsible when they met their financial obligations—they did not have to be directly involved in school activities. This means that a different attribute from what the school used was employed by the society to gauge the involvement of fathers in the education of their children with disabilities.

## 6. Conclusions

A key opportunity exists in the pursuit of education for children with disabilities when fathers are involved. They can support their children with disabilities' access, participation and success in education. However, fatherhood is context-specific, and African fathers could be facing contextual realities that differ from those experienced by fathers elsewhere. We suggest the adoption of a conceptual lens that prioritizes the contextual realities of the fathers. Fathers' involvement with the formal education of their children with disabilities needs to be examined taking into account cultural and social norms, as well as economic dynamics. Accordingly, we root for research that highlights the voices and experiences of fathers within their local contexts. Further research is needed to enhance the involvement of fathers in the education of children with disabilities within their contextual realities rather than focusing on their perceived failings within a normative understanding external from the 'local'.

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