



## Perceptions of Parents Towards Inclusive Education: A Review

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### Abstract

Inclusive Education aims to bring children with diverse needs under one roof without any discrimination. Children with impairments are not fully integrated into society due to several challenges, such as stigma around disabilities and discriminatory and negative attitudes. The effectiveness of inclusive education largely depends on the involvement of stakeholders such as administrators, parents, teachers, special needs educators, and students without disabilities. The present study reviewed 15 articles spanning from 2013 to 2023 that have examined the perspectives of parents (both with children with and without disabilities). The review aids in synthesizing the factors influencing parents' views toward inclusive education. It also provides insight into the concerns parents have while their children are learning in inclusive classrooms as well as the advantages their children were able to experience.

**Keywords:** *inclusive, education, perceptions, parents, disabilities*

### Introduction

The World Health Organization estimates that 15% of people worldwide experience some disability, with more than 80% of them residing in low- and middle-income countries (Statista Research Department, 2023). There are approximately 240 million children with disabilities, according to a thorough statistical analysis conducted by UNICEF (2021). Education is unattainable for children with disabilities who are unable to talk or care for themselves, according to UNICEF.

Several barriers impede the complete integration of children with disabilities into society. These include negative attitudes, insufficient policies, unequal access to social services, healthcare, and education, as well as a lack of easily accessible information and communication (Green et al., 2005; UNICEF, 2007). The stigma attached to disabilities, lack of facilities for early detection of disability, and lack of resources act as barriers to implementation as well (Osuwu et al., 2018). These deprivations cause these children to experience poverty, discrimination, low educational attainment, and decreased employment opportunities (Green et al., 2005; Berry et al., 2013).

To combat the problems faced by children with disabilities, steps were taken by the United Nations, whereby the UN General Assembly in 1989, adopted the “Convention on the Rights of the Child” (CRC), which became operative in November 1990. It consists of 54 articles. An internationally



enforceable treaty that addressed the unique circumstances of children did not exist prior to its adoption (UNICEF, 2017). Regarding inclusive education, the 1994 Salamanca statement and framework were produced as a result of an international conference held in Salamanca, Spain, by the “United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization” (UNESCO) under the title “The International Conference on Education for People with Special Needs: Access and Quality.” 52 nations and 25 international organizations signed this declaration. The principle of inclusive education was restated at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal, 2000). It also emphasized on “learning for all”. As Ainscow et al. (2019, as cited in Madhesh, 2023) emphasized that the “main objective of this statement was to promote and develop inclusive education systems globally.”

### *Implementation of Inclusive Education*

There are varying reports on the implementation of inclusive education across nations, alongside the mixed evidence regarding its impact on the developmental outcomes for children with and without disabilities. According to a report on inclusive education prepared for Alana Institute by Hehir et al (2016, p.7), it was found that having impaired kids in regular education courses had no negative effects on students without impairments and it may lead to some positive social and academic effects. Alharbi (2020) reported that inclusive education has been adopted in the Middle East countries, and they have been able to do it with the help of policies and collaboration with NGOs, and they are striving to make things better for a more successful inclusion. On the contrary, in Saudi Arabia, inclusive education is not adopted (Madhesh, 2019), though special education is promoted. Kazakhstan is making efforts to adopt inclusive education, despite the fact that there are several obstacles in the way (Makoelle, 2020).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Inclusive Education has been given prime importance worldwide and its implementation is still in progress in countries worldwide. One of the important stakeholders in inclusive education is the parents. If the attitude of the parents (both with children with disabilities and without disabilities) towards inclusive education is unconvincing or if they refuse to send their children to school where inclusivity is practiced, then the entire inclusive education program may not reach its intended success. Studies indicate that parental advocacy can have a significant impact on the inclusion of children with disabilities in general schools (eg. Palmer et al., 2001; Paseka & Schwab, 2020; Cloete & Obaigwa, 2019).

While there is extensive research on the attitude and perception of teachers and students towards inclusion, there are comparatively fewer studies on the perception of parents towards inclusive education (Paseka & Schwab, 2020). The purpose of the study is to examine the perception of parents

towards inclusive education by reviewing the previous studies and to understand their experience with inclusive education.

### Research Questions

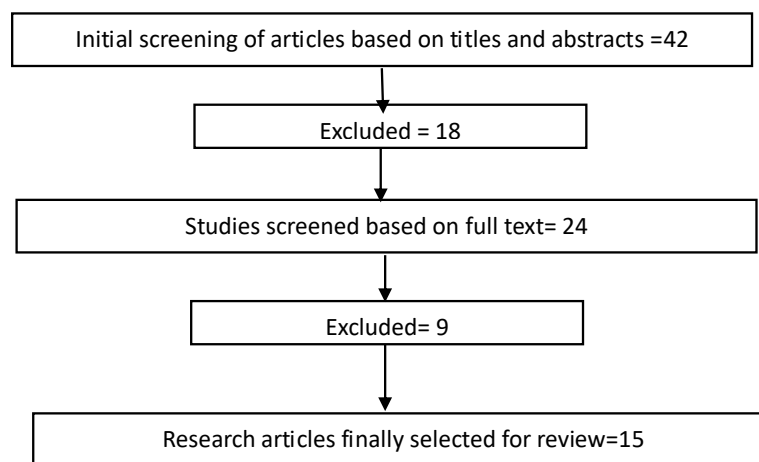
- 1) What are the potential factors that impact the parents’ perception of inclusive education?
- 2) What are the benefits of inclusive education, and what apprehensions do parents have about it?

### Methodology

The studies for the review were selected according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Research articles and theses were located in the journal databases of Scopus, Web of Science, SAGE Journals, Science Direct, Springer Links, Taylor & Francis Online, using relevant keywords. The search terms "perception of parents towards inclusive education," "attitude of parents with children with disabilities towards inclusive education," and "advantages of inclusive education according to the parents" were entered into the databases. By looking through each associated article's reference list, further related articles were discovered. Ultimately, 15 research projects from 2013 to 2023 were chosen (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Flow chart of study selection process*



### *Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

The selected research addressed parents' attitudes and perceptions of parents towards inclusive



education. Additionally, not all research could be included because only public articles that were available via open-access portals were included. Excluded were studies that focused on the opinions of other stakeholders, such as educators and kids without impairments. The current review did not incorporate meta-analysis, but it did contain mixed, quantitative, and qualitative investigations.

The following headings were used to classify and analyze the included empirical research (Appendix)

a) Author and year of study; b) Country c) Objectives d) Sample e) Instruments used f) Results

## **Results and Discussion**

The countries that were covered in the reviewed articles were India, Bhutan, Canada, Germany, Indonesia, Malaysia, Greece, Thailand, Australia, Ghana, and Spain. The majority of the studies were from Asian countries. Different opinions of parents regarding inclusive education emerged from the research in these countries.

Some of the studies that were reviewed included parents of children with special needs (Jigyel et al. 2020, Mackichan & Harkins, 2013; Owusu et al., 2018; Setyarini et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2022; Tryfon et al., 2021; Ummah et al., 2021); others focused on parents of typically developing children (Chandra, 2021; Naskar & Upadhayay, 2019; Simon et al., 2022); still others surveyed parents of students with disabilities and parents of typically developing students (Bhuyan & Joshi, 2022, Jain et al., 2021; Mukherjee et al., 2015; Paseka and Schwab, 2020; Sharma & Trory, 2019).

### *Factors affecting Parents Perception toward inclusive education*

The examined papers identified a few characteristics that influence parents' perceptions and involvement in the inclusive education process.

Parents' understanding of inclusive education and their confidence in building strong relationships with educators and institutions both influence their views and attitudes toward it. For instance, in the study by Jigyel et al. (2020), it was found that Bhutanese parents were reluctant to participate in their children's education. According to Karma Phuntsho (2013), the main reason for this reluctance was their belief that teachers could be completely trusted because they were in the best position to instruct and make decisions for their pupils. The fact that inclusive education was only introduced in Bhutan a few years ago and was still in its infancy, requiring time to address the difficulties, was another factor contributing to the lack of teacher-parent cooperation. A similar notion was expressed by Bhuyan and Joshi (2022), where parents believed that schools and teachers are the best to understand and act accordingly for their children. Parents who hold this belief are unable to fully participate in their disabled children's schooling. This idea is especially common among parents who are unfamiliar with the idea of inclusive education. These were cases in Asian countries. But a similar case was found in the study by MacKichan and Harkins (2013), where the parents were supposed to attend IPP



(Individual Personalized Program) at schools in Nova Scotia, Canada. Many parents were uncomfortable or lacked understanding, which made them wary of participating in IPP programs. The survey did discover, however, that some parents were unwilling to go to IPP meetings because they thought their views were not being heard. The effectiveness of IPP depends in large part on the relationship between teachers and parents, which must be one of mutual respect, understanding, and empathy for the parents.

There were some *beliefs* among parents that sometimes affect their perspectives towards inclusive education. One of the beliefs in Bhutan mentioned by the Ministry of Education (2017, p.46) and as pointed out in the study by Jigyel et al. (2020) was that some parents were worried that after witnessing the behaviours of peers with severe impairments, their children's mild difficulties would worsen and parents of children without disabilities feared that their kids might “contract” some form of disability. Owusu et al. (2018) conducted a study in Ghana that examined the attitudes that parents have regarding their children who have disabilities. They believed that being disabled is an illness and that children who are born with disabilities are incapable of doing anything. Some even believed it to be God's wrath.

The review of the articles also revealed that parents' attitudes about including students with disabilities varied according to the *kind of disability*. Paseka and Schwab (2020) found that parents' opinions toward the inclusion of children with physical or learning disabilities were typically supportive, in contrast to their attitudes toward kids with behavioral and mental issues. Parents of children with intellectual disabilities felt that inclusive education was unsuitable for their kids since it didn't get them ready for school, according to the research by Owusu et al. (2018). However, parents of children with hearing, vision, or physical disabilities expressed hope that their children will be able to learn in school. Tryfon et al. (2021) found that parents of children with intellectual disabilities (ID) favored "mainstream class" with cooperative teaching methods because they believed it was beneficial for their children to attend an inclusive school. While parents of children with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities expressed very little satisfaction, parents of children with mild intellectual disabilities demonstrated a reasonable degree of satisfaction with their children's involvement in conventional schools.

The *kind of school* the children went to also affected how they were perceived. According to Paseka and Schwab (2020), compared to parents whose children attended regular classrooms, parents whose children attended inclusive schools with at least one special education student exhibited a more positive attitude. Simon et al. (2022) focused on families of peers with autism spectrum disorder and found that when their children had special education requirements, the families were more likely to have positive attitudes about inclusive education. Sharma et al. (2022) observed that parents of children attending government schools reported less satisfaction with their child's inclusion in school settings and the support extended by the teachers and school.



Parents' perceptions also depended on their *satisfaction with the school services*. Setyarini et al. (2021) found that mothers' satisfaction was significantly related to fathers' satisfaction. If fathers are satisfied with the school services, then their involvement in the school activities for their children increases. Educated mothers understand inclusive education and participate wholeheartedly both at school and at home. Simon et al. (2023) also found that the greater the family's satisfaction with teachers, the better the attitudes toward inclusion and also the collaboration with the school. Also, parents' educational qualifications have an impact on their understanding and involvement in inclusive education. As Chandra (2021) found, parents with better educational backgrounds expressed more favourable attitudes toward inclusive education. Again, parents in urban areas may have access to education and knowledge about inclusive education, while rural parents may not have that access which may lead to a less positive attitude toward inclusive education (Bhuyan & Joshi 2022).

#### *Parents' Perception of Inclusive Education*

Parents' perspectives on the advantages of inclusion were emphasized in the examined studies (Jain et al., 2020; Jigyel et al., 2020). Parents cited inclusive education as one of the advantages that supports the interests and strengths of both typically developing and special needs children (Jain et al. 2020). Jigyel et al. (2020) noted that when parents of SEN students in Bhutan's inclusive schools were questioned, they stated that "reduced aggression" and "increased social interaction, improved self-care and emerging independence in the child" were among the advantages of inclusive education. Children in semi-urban and rural areas demonstrated academic improvement, which was an additional benefit, and students without impairments demonstrated acceptance of children with disabilities. According to the study, parents were no longer needed to assist their children with special needs in inclusive schools because peers were entrusted with helping them get to places like the library. Without having to care for the children, parents could carry on with their employment or other work-related activities. Jigyel et al. (2020) reported that parents were pleased with the medical care provided to their children by the hospitals and non-governmental organizations.

There has been research on how parents view children with special educational needs (SEN) and children who are typically developing (Mukherjee et al., 2015; Sharma & Trory, 2019; Tryfon et al., 2021). These studies point to "social acceptance," which emphasizes how children without disabilities are likely to engage with and grow more understanding of their peers with disabilities, hence enhancing their social development, as the primary benefit of inclusive education. Ummah et al. (2021) found that parents of children with intellectual disabilities experienced similar outcomes. In a study by Sharma and Trory (2019), parents of children with SEN and typically developing children said inclusive education will help children with SEN grow socially and academically. Additionally, studies have shown how important it is to recognize, comprehend, and accept people's individual differences (Simon et al., 2022; Tryfon et al., 2021). Tryfon et al. (2021) noted a decline in the stigma

attached to children with special needs in relation to inclusive schooling. Children with and without impairments both gain a "sense of self-worth" through inclusive education, which was thought to be a means of fostering their independence (Naskar & Upadhyay, 2019).

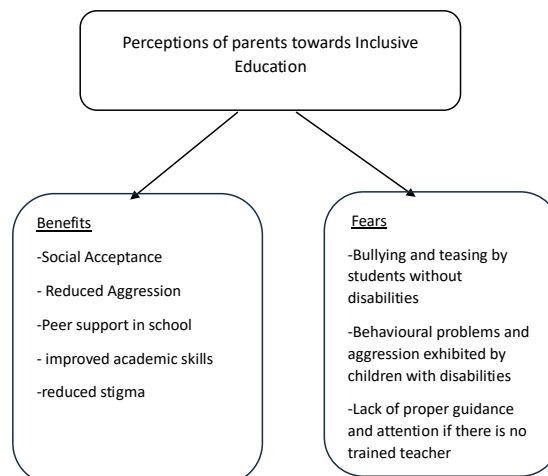
### *Fears and Concerns about Inclusive Education*

According to Jigyel et al. (2020), parents expressed worry that their children would exhibit physically violent behaviours and anxiety due to being older than other students in the classroom. Additionally, they expressed worries about their children being teased by children without impairments, and the latter using disparaging and abusive language. Bullying was a concern for parents in the study by Sharma and Trory (2019), which would lead to social exclusion. Low self-esteem and a lack of interest in academics were the results of some parents' perceptions that their kids were not getting enough attention. In the study by Mukherjee et al. (2015), parents of SEN children indicated the same worry about academic performance and emotional harm. Parents of children with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities expressed dissatisfaction with the inclusive classroom, according to Tryfon et al. (2022). The socialization challenges faced by children with intellectual disabilities and the potential for discriminatory behavior from pupils without disabilities could be the reasons behind this. Another major concern expressed by parents of children with and without special education needs was the shortage of trained teachers (Jigyel et al., 2020; Sharma & Trory, 2019; Sharma et al., 2022). Mukherjee et al. (2015) and Owusu et al. (2018) assert that having the appropriate resources and teachers who are prepared to engage with kids who have a range of disabilities is essential to the success of inclusive education. An effective inclusion requires more than just positive parental attitudes.

The parents also highlighted the issue of their limited knowledge about their child's educational needs and also the lack of guidance on supporting their child's learning (Tryfon et al., 2022; Ummah et al., 2019). This information gap hinders the parents from giving their children the necessary support.

Figure 2

*Benefits of Inclusive Education and concerns expressed by the parents*





## **Conclusion and Suggestions**

The current review examined the variables influencing parents' attitudes and views toward inclusive education. It was seen that parents had a mixed perception. In studies where the parents of typically developing children were surveyed, most of them expressed a positive attitude towards inclusive education as they felt that it would help their children to be empathetic and more accepting of people with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities also had a positive experience with inclusive education, though there were some with a lack of knowledge about inclusion and they had their concerns that their children might be bullied, might be hurt emotionally and their academics might not improve. A major concern was the lack of trained teachers and special needs educators. Involvement of the parents in the school seemed less, as some parents were not aware of the way they should guide their children at home in academics.

Collaboration between the school and parents needs to be encouraged. Parents can provide the school with important information about their child's needs, which can help teachers better understand how to manage the child (Ashman, 2015). In a similar vein, teachers can provide parents with insightful input on their child that will enable them to provide the support their child needs at home. As Bronfenbrenner (1977) in his ecological theory, emphasized that the microsystems are the parents and teachers (apart from neighbours, and classmates) and the interactions that occur between various microsystems in a child's life take place at the mesosystem, and a healthy relationship and interaction between these microsystems is essential to the child's overall development.

Also, the parents with children without disabilities need to be involved in the orientation and collaborative program in the schools from time to time as they too need to be made feel secure that inclusive education can only do its best for their children as they will learn to accept such children and also provide aid to them. Various workshops can be organized for sensitizing the parents with children with and without disabilities and similar programs must be organized by the school for the students to help them accept their peers with disabilities and also to avoid bullying and name-calling.



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