

Are Parents Ready to Embrace an Inclusive Model of Education: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: *Background: Inclusive education is considered vital for achieving an equitable society. The parents involved are the primary stakeholders, and, hence, their attitudes and concerns towards inclusive education need to be explored and analysed to devise remedial measures to mitigate barriers to inclusive education. Purpose: To explore attitudes and concerns of parents towards implementing inclusive education. Method: An exploratory, descriptive research design was used in this qualitative study, wherein a total of fourteen parents were interviewed. Results: Most parents expressed their readiness to embrace inclusive education. A few parents were anticipating improvements in the performance of normal children in an inclusive classroom. The majority of parents expressed their concerns that general teachers lacked the necessary training to handle Children with Special Needs (CwSN). A few parents were apprehensive that peer harassment could be a real impediment in an inclusive setup. Discussion and Conclusion: The study findings revealed that although the parents hold positive attitudes, there was a felt need for imparting more training and capability enhancement in respect of both general teachers and special educators.*

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Barriers to Inclusive Education, Attitudes, Concerns, Parents

1. Introduction

Education is singularly the most powerful enabler for promoting social justice and equality. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of 2007 is a landmark international treaty that protects and promotes the full and equal rights of people with disabilities. Inclusive education is considered vital for achieving an equitable society, a goal underscored by the National Education Policy 2020 of the Indian Government. Despite the requisite impetus being provided by policymakers at the various echelons of decision-making, the pace of implementation remains far from the desired level as mandated by SDG-4.

Although the concept of inclusive education has been widely adopted throughout the industrialised world, many are still grappling with the appropriate framework for implementing it for the benefit of all (Brown et al., 2015). The transition process has failed to gain necessary traction due to the existence of various barriers, including attitudinal barriers of various stakeholders. Since the attitudinal barrier is at the core, as observed by Hussey et al. (2017), positive attitudes have been recognised as a key factor in the successful implementation of inclusion (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

According to the UNESCO (2019) report, the attitude of parents towards including Children with Special Needs (CwSN) into the mainstream education is crucial to accomplish the goal of inclusive education. Their active participation in the process will help make the system more effective (White Paper on India's National Education Policy and Inclusive Education 2021). As a result, parents are regarded as the key stakeholders not only to usher in inclusive education but also to build an inclusive society (Singh, 2019). Paseka & Schwab (2020b) have also identified parents as one of the most important players in the process.

2. Significance of the study

Parents are the major stakeholders, and their attitudes toward the inclusion process are critical to its success (Taylor & P. Ringlaben, 2012). It is therefore an imperative that the attitudes of all parents, i.e., parents of the CwSN, as well as those of normally school-going children, towards implementing inclusive education, be studied and analysed so that remedial measures can be instituted. Inclusivity is a necessity for the holistic economic growth of any nation and must not be considered as an option anymore.

3. Theoretical Foundations

The theory used to guide this study is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). In conceptualising the TPB, Hill et al. (1977) identified attitude as important to understanding human behaviour. The TPB is a construct, and according to this, an individual's behaviour is determined by his or her intentions to do the behaviour, which are tied to their attitude toward the behaviour (M. Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

4. Literature Review

The concept of attitudes

Attitude is a psychological construct that refers to an individual's disposition toward performing a given activity (De Boer et al., 2011; Srivastava et al., 2017). Hill et al. (1977) stated that an attitude is the way a person perceives and judges the world, including other people, objects, behaviour, and regulations. Martin Fishbein and Ajzen (2020) adopted the position that an attitude is made up of several beliefs, and that these beliefs are usually aimed at specific things, resulting in the construction of beliefs about that object.

Attitudes of parents towards inclusive education

Positive attitudes appear to be a critical factor in the successful implementation of inclusion (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Donohue & Bornman (2014) posited that positive views expressed by parents toward their children's education de facto determine how successful their children will be in their schooling careers. In fact, a positive attitude and active participation may enable learning hurdles to be addressed within the household (Marais & Meier, 2010). Child deficits in social skills, thinking and reasoning were strongly connected to parental perceptions of school supports and resources (Roll-Pettersson, 2003).

Respondents in several studies have cited a lack of training on inclusive education (for teachers), and attitudes of parents toward diversity in schools that appear to be overwhelmingly unfavourable (Zabeli et al., 2020). The majority of parents believe that teachers are underprepared to support the varied range of students with disabilities in inclusive classes (Stevens & Wurf, 2020). According to one study, there was an increased concern among parents of children in the younger age group about inclusive education, which progressively switched to the positive side when parents of older children were questioned about the same (Amitha M. Hegde, Jithin George, 2020).

Several characteristics related to parents' attitudes were discovered by de Boer et al. (2010), which include socioeconomic position, experience with inclusion, and type of impairment, etc. The educational level of parents is also a significant component in creating a positive attitude toward inclusive education (Unianua, 2012).

5. Research Methodology

Research aim

This research aimed to explore the attitudes of parents towards implementing inclusive education.

Research design

An exploratory, descriptive research design was used in this qualitative study. Based on the literature reviewed, it has been observed that in most studies, attitudes were examined using Likert-type inventories, which are considered grossly inappropriate to measure the real attitudes and to draw conclusions (Supriyanto, 2019).

Sample

A purposive sampling approach using the strategy of criterion sampling was used to select ten parents who had CwSN (denoted with the prefix as PS hereinafter), and four parents of normal school-going children (denoted with the prefix as PN hereinafter), for the study. While determining the sample, diversity was catered for by taking into account the variables of their gender, educational qualifications, socio-economic status, etc. The participants had different professional backgrounds, such as homemakers, business administrators, pharmacists, educationists, members of the central security force, and the Indian army. A brief description of the ten PS participants and four PN participants, using pseudonyms, is presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Table 1: Brief description of PS participants

Participant (PS)	Age	Gender	Qualification	Annual Income
PS 1	45	Male	Intermediate	3-9 Lakhs
PS 2	37	Female	BA	1 - 3 Lakhs
PS 3	41	Male	B Pharma	3 - 9 Lakhs
PS 4	32	Female	BA	< 1 Lakh
PS 5	40	Male	Tenth	< 1 Lakh
PS 6	42	Male	MBA	3 - 9 Lakhs
PS 7	44	Male	MA, B Ed	> 9 Lakhs
PS 8	60	Male	Eighth	1 - 3 Lakhs
PS 9	38	Female	MA	3 - 9 Lakhs
PS 10	-	Female	Intermediate	1 - 3 Lakhs

Table 2: Brief description of PN participants

Participant (PN)	Age	Gender	Qualification	Annual Income
PN 1	33	Female	MA, B Ed	3-9 Lakhs
PN 2	30	Female	Intermediate	1 - 3 Lakhs
PN 3	45	Female	MA	3 - 9 Lakhs
PN 4	40	Male	BA	3 - 9 Lakhs

Interview methods

Following the process described in McGhie-Richmond et al. (2013), each parent participated in an audio-taped telephonic semi-structured interview focused on how they perceived proposed inclusivity. The interview questions were developed to allow parents to freely discuss the features of inclusive education that are important to them. All interviews were conducted at the participants' convenience to guarantee participant comfort and to eliminate potential disruptions. The interview questions provided as a guide, but participants were free to explore and recollect their own personal experiences and ideas. The participants were encouraged to explain their answers and share experiences through follow-up questions.

The length of each interview ranged from 40 to 90 minutes. Each interview, except for two, was completed in a single session without any interruptions in order to maintain continuity of thoughts and seamless sharing of experiences. In two instances, interviews were extended over two sessions. In one case, it was interrupted by CwSN himself, and in the other case, there was a network connectivity failure. In both cases, the chain of thoughts and tempo of discussions got altered due to interruptions, and it took substantial efforts and time to get back to the earlier frequency of conversation. Following each interview, all audiotapes were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts, once ready, were read out to the participants subsequently for their endorsement on clarity and accuracy.

Ethical considerations

The participants were provided, in writing, by means of a participant information sheet, the purpose and aims of the research, its uses, the contact details of the researcher, as well as how data would be collected. Anonymity of the participants was maintained through the use of pseudonyms. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the right to withdraw at any time from the research study was provided to the participants.

Furthermore, participants were assured that in order to maintain confidentiality, transcription of the data would be

done in private, that all recordings would be listened to through the use of headphones and that all recordings and transcribed data would be kept on a password-protected computer and would only be accessed by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data gathered were rigorously checked after evaluating the audiotapes, translating, and transcribing them into English. After the checks, the researcher manually coded all transcripts of semi-structured interviews for the first cycle of coding in order to get data segmentation, overall pattern, and the large picture. Following that, a few codes and categories were manually adjusted before putting the data into the QDA Miner Lite for further organisation of the data. The researcher then searched for themes in the data.

Main themes and sub-themes for qualitative research

The researcher analysed the data for their contents, and the data were reduced to the following main and sub-themes based on content analysis (see Table 3).

Table 3: The main theme and sub-themes obtained from the content analysis

Main Theme	Category	Sub Themes
Attitudes and concerns of parents	Attitudes	Parental awareness of inclusive education
		Parental participation and positive involvement
		Perspective towards inclusive education
	Concerns	Lack of positive attitudes of teachers
		Coping skills of CwSN in a regular classroom
		Inadequate infrastructure
		Lack of peer acceptance in a regular classroom

6. Results

Findings with respect to parents of CwSN

Parental awareness of inclusive education

All parents were asked to articulate their concept of inclusive education, which was deemed necessary in order for them to answer more questions during semi-structured interviews. The parents of CwSN, surprisingly, were mostly unaware of the concept of inclusive education, and hence, did not respond except respondent PS6, who said:

“Maybe I know. My son was once admitted to DAV School, Sector 10, Gurgaon, where they follow an integrated model of education. But unfortunately, I could not shift my family there.” (Parent PS6)

The parent PS6 was a qualified person with an MBA degree. Even then, he could not differentiate between the integrated and inclusive model of education. All participants were, thereafter, explained by the researcher about the concept of inclusive education, and then requested to express their views on the subject. Few parents sought more clarifications and the same were provided to them. Once explained, and having understood the concept, the majority of parents showed eagerness to put their wards in an inclusive school, except for parent PS2, who opined:

“Yes, sir, this is a good step, but my son is above the schooling age, and the syllabus in a normal school will have to be curtailed as per his age. He is quite old now, and he would not be able to study in a normal school”. (Parent PS2)

Parental participation and positive involvement

During interviews, one factor that emerged as the most significant one towards implementing inclusive education was the requirement of active participation and positive involvement of parents. All participants rated parental involvement as the prime factor for the process to succeed. This was reflected in the articulations by most parents as follows:

“Parental involvement in inclusive education is very important. When families get involved in their children’s education, the students achieve more. It is the key component.” (Parent PS9)

“Parental participation is a must for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Parents must give adequate time and attention, especially the mom. A doctor told me once that you would never be able to take up a job because you need to look after your child, which is so true.” (Parent PS1)

One parent stated that their involvement was necessary to placate their child once he undergoes unpleasant experiences from other children, as follows:

“It is important that parents take adequate interest. Sometimes, when other children taunt or tease him, we take him out to get over those kinds of experiences. But we will send him to a normal school. We have no problem. (Parent PS5)

Most parents rated parental involvement as the key to successful implementation of inclusive education.

Perspective towards inclusive education

Along with the willingness of parents to implement inclusivity in regular classrooms, most parents demonstrated an optimistic outlook towards the process. They looked not only at the developmental prospects for their children, but also at their integration with society eventually. The following quotes indicate the positive attitudes of the parents:

“I think inclusive education should be implemented. It is very important for the development of children with special needs. Children should not be segregated in society; other children will also learn how to accept CwSN. (Parent PS7)

“Yes, this (inclusive education) will create more awareness in society. Because there are so many children who are disabled. Parents face so many difficulties in taking care of such kind of children, who have no awareness about themselves and the outside.” (Parent PS8)

“The children with special needs can learn to become independent at normal schools by watching other normal children. Interaction with normal children will help them in

the long run. At special schools, they do not get a normal environment and therefore do not learn much." (Parent PS3)

"Socially, he will also grow in a normal school, and that is important too. Hope he gets positive friends out there. A normal student uses education to get into a professional life. But we want him to be practical in life. Being practical in life is more important than having academic qualifications." (Parent PS6)

A few parents were looking at the brighter side of their children becoming better in a regular school, and leading a normal life in times to come, as spelt out as under:

"But he will be able to eat and play like others in a normal school, and he will be ready for normal life, if he becomes a normal person one day." (Parent PS1)

"I try my best to teach him to do his work independently, as in the future he has to do it all by himself, the sooner he learns the better it is.....My child was born normal, but this problem started much later. I am certain that he will get better with time. He is undergoing treatment, and the doctor says that once his fits (seizures) stop, he will be much better, and I am positive that his condition will definitely improve." (Parent PS4)

"Our aim should be to make these children socially strong. Proper academic education is not possible with these 50-60% type children. They should lead a normal life; (academic) education does not matter. Make them famous in the school through extracurricular activities. Social acceptability will increase with these kinds of activities." (Parent PS6)

"We will definitely prefer to send my child to a regular school, among the normal children. The child must learn social skills and interact with others. My child is very sociable, she plays with other children in our neighbourhood, we always take her to the market, parties or other social gatherings, and we know she is different from others. We understand that ultimately, she has to live in this society." (Parent PS7)

The parent PS3 expressed overt optimism towards the prospect of inclusive education, which would provide the necessary impetus that this process needs. The participant opined:

"This policy should be implemented as soon as possible, and as parents, we will fully cooperate in making it a success. As parents, we will do whatever is required to effectively implement this policy." (Parent PS3)

Similar sentiments were echoed by other parents, as quoted below:

"It is important to create social awareness and bring those children with disabilities to the fore by way of inclusivity and connect them with the social mainstream." (Parent PS10)

"In a special school, my child only sees CwSN, but in a regular school, she will get a chance to interact with all kinds of students. In my opinion, all parents would want to send their children with special needs to a regular school, because the development of social skills and social acceptance is very important." (Parent PS7)

Lack of positive attitudes of teachers

Notwithstanding spontaneous optimism displayed by parents, most parents were deeply concerned on a few counts. The main concerns expressed by the parents were a lack of training in general teachers (*in handling CwSN*), and their negative attitudes. The opinions of parents are quoted as follows:

"Attitude of the teachers is of utmost importance as they should know how to lovingly handle children with special needs. It will not be in the best interest of the school and the child, just in case they (general teachers) lose their temper while dealing with CwSN.....The teacher's attitude is very important; otherwise, he (her son) would not like the teachers..... We have observed this, as sometimes, even we get irritated, and are not able to control ourselves. So, you can imagine what the teacher in the school might experience. If the child persistently troubles the teacher, then the teacher is bound to get irritated". (Parent PS2)

"If the teacher is not able to deal with him and is irritated by his behaviour, then there is no point in sending him to a school with other normal kids." (Parent PS4)

"Only thing, teachers must love him. He is a very clever and bright guy. he needs to have social compatibility too." (Parent PS5)

A few parents expressed a lack of necessary skills, on the part of general teachers, that are required to handle children with disabilities, as one parent said:

"The teachers should be adequately and appropriately trained in mainstream schools to undertake this important initiative, so essential for bringing equality and equity among all members of the society." (Parent PS10)

"My child has been studying for the past five years, and he should have been much better by now. I really do not know whether there are some shortcomings with our grooming or inadequacies with the schoolteachers. Although there are a few good teachers in the present school." (Parent PS6)

One parent narrated his experience of teachers lacking concern about CwSN, as follows:

"Yes, sir, initially, I did send him to a normal school, but my experience was not good. My child was beaten up in that school, and he had slap marks on his face. So, I discontinued sending him there..... They used to tie him down to a chair. So, in a way, it gets registered in the child's mind that, till the time he was stuck with that chair, he had no choice but to sit. This is not a very healthy way of teaching a child.....They did not give him any special care and expected him to behave like other kids. When he retaliated, he was beaten up. After that, I did not send him there as I

did not trust them with my kid..... I used to visit him at school and have witnessed it.” (Parent PS4)

Another important aspect that emerged was that of maintaining the flow of communication between the teachers and parents on a regular basis to drive this initiative collaboratively. One parent opined:

“The teacher should take down the complete behavioural history of the child from the parents and should keep that in mind when attending to the child. Every child has their own challenges, like difficulty in walking or eating, and that should be noted by the teacher..... As parents, we will show full cooperation and make sure that we provide whatever is needed for the development of our child. We will take suggestions from the school and work with them to enhance the growth of our child.” (Parent PS3)

Coping skills of CwSN in a regular classroom

A few parents expressed a lack of coping skills in their children as a hindrance to inclusivity. Most attributed those inadequacies to the nature and severity of disabilities, while a few attributed the lack of social skills in their children. The following few quotes are testimony to their sentiments:

“No, I do not believe it will make much of a difference, as he will not be able to open up and play or interact with them. Playing with normal children is ok, but I do not think that will help since he does not like to mix and interact with other children much”. (Parent PS2)

Few parents understood the nature and severity of disabilities in their children, and have reconciled to the fact that their children would not be able to adjust to the environment in normal schools, as expressed by the parents:

“As you know, our brain controls our body. My son slobbers, and that is why other children do not play with him. My child understands that he is not good-looking, and his friends do not like him. But we cannot blame other students; after all, they are also children.” (Parent PS1)

“It all depends on his mind. If his mind were a little more stable and he could cover up the syllabus, then I would have said yes to you. But I know my son will not be able to cope with the syllabus till the time his speech improves. Children with severe disabilities cannot be included.” (Parent PS2)

Inadequate infrastructure

Appropriate and adequate infrastructure in mainstream schools is a prerequisite for making inclusivity a success. Most parents were alive to that fact, and their genuine concerns got reflected in their statements, as quoted below:

“At a normal school, he will not get the special treatment that he needs. In his present school, he is being given speech therapy, which is essential for children with such special needs. They make him do all those activities, which a special child should be trained at”. (Parent PS2)

“If there are proper arrangements for his well-being and he is well taken care of at such a school, it will be a good step for his overall development. The school will have to make

extra efforts to make sure he is getting the right environment and will have to give him extra care as compared to other normal children.” (Parent PS3)

One parent indicated that due to the large classroom size and poor teacher-to-student ratio in a normal classroom, it would be difficult for general teachers to ensure that there was no peer harassment, as quoted below:

“In normal classrooms, we have 28-30 students per teacher. In a special classroom, it is 8-10. We must have adequate teachers in a normal school to maintain that kind of teacher-to-student ratio, so important for the education of CwSN. The teachers must ensure that CwSN are not made fun of. I do not know how the normal students will behave. After all, they are children, too. Since it is happening for the first time, how will the normal children be controlled? They must be trained and sensitised too.” (Parent PS6)

Lack of peer acceptance in a regular classroom

Another major concern expressed by parents of CwSN was their apprehension about the absence of peer acceptance, and at times, even peer harassment that their children might be subjected to in a regular classroom. This angst of parents got reflected in the voices of some parents, as given below:

“It is difficult to answer as to whether my child will do better in a normal school. It will all depend on the type of students he will be put up with. Like in our society or locality, other children do not talk or play with him, despite knowing him for the last two years or so. So, we cannot expect that normal students, who do not even know him, will accept him in a regular school. In any case, it is a two-way process, and I do not even know how or whether my child will accept them or not.” (Parent PS1)

“Normal children might not accept him as one of them, which we have seen even outside school. Usually, kids do not like playing with him...In our society, children do not play with him. Even though my child does not get hyper, just in case he does, then how will the school authorities control him?” (Parent PS2)

“Yes, we can send him to a school that practices inclusive education, but at the same time, we also have to look into how the other kids react to his presence. If he is bullied at school or there is name-calling by other children at school because of his disability, then there is no point in sending him to such a school”. (Parent PS4)

“It (inclusive education) provides a lot of opportunities to the child to participate and develop friendships with others. But at the same time, it can have a negative effect also, being bullied and excluded by peers, facing academic issues, etc.” (Parent PS9)

Findings from interviews with respect to parents of normal children

Parental awareness of inclusive education

Like parents of CwSN, parents of normal children were equally unaware of the concept, except one parent (Parent PN1), who learnt about the concept during her B Ed.

Notwithstanding, most parents were extremely positive in their approach and welcomed the concept. She also said,

“My opinion is that it is a noble concept, and it is OK. It should be implemented.” (Parent PN1)

Parental participation and positive involvement

Parents of normal children underscored the significance of their active participation in the entire process. They acknowledged that parents of normal children needed to educate and sensitise their children about the peculiar needs of CwSN. Their thoughts were depicted in quotes below:

“I can talk about my daughter. Yes, it might come to her mind as to why that special child is behaving strangely. But then, as a parent, I will make her understand. Parents should play an important role since children listen to their parents more than anyone else.” (Parent PN1)

“All I can do, as a parent, is to sensitise and educate my child. I can ask my daughter to be more sensitive towards CwSN. My daughter should understand the special needs of those children; treat them with care, not to retaliate even if they act violently, and not to complain. Maybe they (CwSN) can be told verbally, but there should never be any physical manhandling whatsoever.” (Parent PN3)

Perspective towards inclusive education

All parents were quite excited about inclusive education. They were more than inclined to embrace the process despite initial challenges.

“It may be implemented. If we try sincerely, it will be implemented.....This concept can surely be implemented. But maybe we will take some time before the system gets stabilised.....There are no negatives. Everything is positive in this concept, in my understanding and must be implemented.” (Parent PN1)

The positive attitudes of parents of normal children originated from their genuine concerns about CwSN not getting equal opportunities that they richly deserve, otherwise being part of the same society. This was expressed by several parents, as under:

“It will be very beneficial. The confidence of CwSN will grow. Their mentality will be developed. They will feel part of mainstream education; otherwise, they may feel that they are moving away from it.” (Parent PN1)

“In a normal school, the development of CwSN will be better. Because in a special school, their thought process and exposure will be totally different from those in a normal school. In a normal classroom, CwSN may try to emulate the behaviour of normal children and get better over time. That is what I think. Not sure what others think.” (Parent PN2)

“CwSN will get to learn a lot by watching the normal children. CwSN will try to imbibe behaviours of normal children. After all, CwSN also deserve to get equal opportunity like others.” (Parent PN4)

A few parents mentioned that inclusive education would not only be beneficial to the CwSN, but it would be advantageous to the normal children, too. Such positive perspectives were spelt out by the following parents:

“This system, once implemented, will benefit both types of children. Like my child, who is a normal child, will be able to understand that there are children who are differently abled and have their special needs. Looking at the challenges being faced by CwSN, a sense of empathy in normal children will be generated.” (Parent PN4)

One parent opined that even the performance of his child would get enhanced in an inclusive classroom, as quoted below:

“The normal children will realise how lucky they are, and then they will perform even better not only in academics but in other fields, viz., sports and games, etc. This concept will benefit both for sure.” (Parent PN4)

Concerns of parents of normal children towards inclusion

Despite being able to identify the positive outcomes of inclusive education for their children, parents also expressed concerns that their children might suffer due to a lack of attention from teachers in the classrooms, as was expressed by the following parent repeatedly:

“Even the teachers will have to devote more time to CwSN. The normal children who are higher in IQ may finish their class work faster and then wonder what to do next. We need to be considerate of the requirements of those children, too.” (Parent PN1)

Lack of positive attitudes of teachers

All parents agreed that the role of a teacher was very crucial to the entire process, as expressed by them:

“The role of teachers is very important, maybe the most important stakeholder in the entire process of inclusion. Teachers should know how to handle both special and gifted children at the same time. The teachers need to adopt an innovative and flexible curriculum with different teaching methodologies.” (Parent PN1)

The parents also expressed their share of concerns about the preparedness of teachers to usher in this concept, but not to the extent that the parents of CwSN did. The parents felt that general teachers were somewhat competent to manage inclusive classrooms, as quoted under:

“I have seen only a few teachers during online classes of my daughter. The teachers who are teaching my child are competent to handle CwSN. I am sure that they will be able to handle it. I have not seen other teachers; therefore, I cannot comment on their readiness.” (Parent PN1)

Coping skills of CwSN in a regular classroom

The parents of normal children feared that CwSN might become violent in their behaviour, which could pose problems to their children, as quoted below:

“Yes, there could be negatives too, like a special child may become hyper and behave violently. Then the situation may go out of control. There could be problems for other normal children.” (Parent PN3)

One parent expressed her anxiety that she would be hurt if her child were beaten up by a CwSN when they become violent.

“I will not feel nice if my daughter gets beaten up or hurt. But at the same time, I understand that a special child cannot think judiciously and may have beaten my daughter without any intention to hit. But I will still feel bad for my daughter if she gets hurt. However, we can try to handle the special child accordingly.” (Parent PN3)

Inadequate infrastructure

Parents also believed that a poor teacher-to-student ratio could add to the problems of teachers in managing their classrooms:

“Yes, I think so. However, 40 students in a single classroom is slightly on the higher side. I think 30 students will be more manageable. We need to be careful with the teacher-to-student ratio in such classrooms.” (Parent PN1)

Lack of peer acceptance in a regular classroom

On the aspect of peer acceptance or lack of it, most parents were of the view that once the system is implemented and the normal children start studying along with the CwSN, they would develop empathy towards the CwSN and eventual friendship. This ardent belief was communicated by a few parents as follows:

“The normal children will laugh at CwSN and make fun of them initially. But over a period of time, they will get habituated. And once they start realising that not every child can be as normal as they are, then slowly they will adopt CwSN in their classrooms. Moreover, normal children will understand that not every child is the same.” (Parent PN1)

“When my daughter was studying in Delhi, there was a special child in her class. My daughter became a very good friend of that special child. I have seen that normal children try to understand CwSN in their class and help them. But since normal children are also children after all, sometimes they wonder why the CwSN exhibits certain behaviours which are not common.” (Parent PN3)

The necessity of teachers playing an onerous role in the transition process emerged as the most crucial factor. As per the views of most parents of normal children, the teachers should not only pay attention to the CwSN but must take care of their children too, and the challenge lies there. The statement of the following parent summed it up in an appropriate manner:

“This (inclusive education) should be implemented. And teachers need to play an even bigger role in making it happen. However, at the same teachers must also ensure that the aspirations of gifted children are also looked after adequately so that they are also able to realise their potential. Teachers should take all the children along in the classroom. Not that all the CwSN will become hyper, but the

possibility of a few becoming hyper does exist. Teachers need to formulate a strategy to ensure the growth of each child in the classroom. If required, assistant teachers can also be employed.” (Parent PN1)

Analysis of qualitative data with respect to the parents of normal children

Based on semi-structured interviews of parents of normal children, the following emerged: -

- 1) Most parents were unaware of the concept of inclusive education.
- 2) The parents of normal children, however, expressed their readiness to embrace this concept of inclusive education.
- 3) Although initial teething problems and associated challenges in the implementation process were envisaged by most parents, they were optimistic that the process would stabilise over a period of time.
- 4) Parents of normal children underscored the significance of their active participation in the entire process.
- 5) They acknowledged that parents of normal children needed to educate and sensitise their children about the peculiar needs of CwSN. The requirement to be sensitive to CwSN in a normal classroom was highlighted by most parents.
- 6) The parents of normal children expressed their genuine concerns about CwSN not getting equal opportunities that they otherwise deserve, being part of the same society.
- 7) Most parents were anticipating definite improvements in the performance of their children in an inclusive classroom setup.
- 8) A few parents expressed apprehensions that the academic progress of their children might suffer due to a lack of attention from teachers towards them in an inclusive classroom. Therefore, despite being able to identify the positive outcomes of inclusive education for their children, parents also expressed concerns.
- 9) Almost all parents stated that teachers needed to play the pivotal role in the entire process, duly supported by proactive participation from the parents.
- 10) The parents also expressed their share of concerns about the state of preparedness of teachers to usher in this concept.
- 11) A few parents were anxious that CwSN may become violent in the classrooms and hurt other children.
- 12) Most parents opined that large classroom size could make controlling children in an inclusive classroom unmanageable.

Overall, the parents of normal children were thrilled about the concept and willing to shoulder additional responsibilities in sensitising their children on how to be sensitive towards the requirements of CwSN. They were sanguine that with time, normal children will be able to get along with CwSN, and in the process will turn out to be better citizens. They were optimistic about cultivating healthy peer acceptance in an inclusive classroom, and that might provide the right kind of environment required to make inclusivity a success. Overall, parents of normal children exhibited positive attitudes.

7. Discussion

Parents of CwSN

Parents of CwSN were mostly unaware of the concept of inclusive education. This aspect was quite surprising and calls for educating and sensitising them. Post-explanation, and having understood the subtleties, most parents agreed that the concept should be implemented. The majority of parents believed that inclusive education was essential for their children, which would not only meet the educational needs of their children but would also enhance their social skills.

Most parents acknowledged and expressed the importance of parental participation in resolving learning hurdles and attaining success in the inclusive process. They did, however, indicate that their involvement grows when school officials are kind. In the present study, the majority of parents of CwSN were apprehensive and anxious that the lack of peer acceptance in a regular school could be a real impediment to the process.

They opined that since children emulate the behaviour of their parents, there was a requirement to educate parents of normal children. A few parents narrated their experience of their children getting ill-treated by fellow students, and, at times, even by general teachers. They attributed such incidents to a lack of training, skills, and requisite attitudes of general teachers to manage CwSN in their classrooms.

A few parents, however, were reluctant to engage their children in the process due to the severity of their children's disabilities. Severity of disabilities is one of the variables that has been found in earlier research, as stated by de Boer et al. (2010), that several variables were found which relate to parents' attitudes, such as socioeconomic status, experience with inclusion and type of disability. Others believed that CwSN would be better served in special schools, where they are expected to receive a higher quality and amount of support than in ordinary schools, as was opined by Grieve (2009). The global picture shows that the vast majority of countries continue to provide a large proportion of their CwSN in partially or fully segregated special education settings, which is far from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) vision of all countries transitioning to fully inclusive education systems (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020).

Parents of Normal Children

Like parents of CwSN, most parents of normal children were unaware of the concept of inclusive education. However, once explained, they expressed their eagerness to embrace this concept of inclusive education. The parents envisaged problems and associated challenges in the initial phase of the implementation process, but were optimistic that the process would stabilise over a period of time. But for successful implementation, they underscored the significance of their own active participation in the entire process and were more than willing to undertake the onerous responsibilities.

The parents accepted that CwSN are an integral part of society, and expressed their concerns that CwSN were not

being afforded equal opportunities, as they otherwise deserve. They acknowledged that they were required to play a significant role in educating and sensitising their own children about the typical needs of CwSN. The requirement to be sensitive to CwSN in a normal classroom was highlighted by most parents.

Most parents were anticipating definite improvements in the performance of their children in an inclusive classroom setup. This finding is similar to other literature available on inclusive education, which found that parents of normal children appear to have a positive attitude towards inclusive education, especially due to the belief that it would benefit their children in being able to become more aware of the needs of others, as well as enhancing a positive outlook on the social integration of individuals from an array of different backgrounds. Similar research on inclusive education reinforces this hypothesis by claiming that including CwSN in a classroom with regular children may improve their pro-social qualities (de Boer et al., 2010; Duhaney & Salend, 2000).

Notwithstanding, a few parents expressed genuine apprehensions that the academic progress of their children might suffer due to a lack of attention from teachers towards them in an inclusive classroom. Therefore, despite being able to identify the positive outcomes of inclusive education for their children, parents also expressed concerns. This theme is supported by literature on parents' attitudes towards inclusive education (Narumanchi & Bhargava, 2011; de Boer et al., 2010; Duhaney & Salend, 2000).

The parents stated that teachers needed to play the most important role in the entire process, and simultaneously expressed their concerns about the lack of preparedness and the attitude of teachers to usher in this concept. The opinions of the parents that general teachers do not have adequate understanding find similar results in earlier research by Boitumelo et al. (2020), who opined that a lack of understanding often exists among general teachers in relation to the implementation of inclusive education in general education classrooms. Even in other studies, most parents believed that teachers were not sufficiently prepared to support the variety of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Stevens & Wurf, 2020).

Overall, the parents of normal children were excited about the concept and were willing to shoulder additional responsibilities in sensitising their children on how to be sensitive towards the requirements of CwSN. Positive views expressed by a parent toward their child's education are frequently indicated to be a key component in determining how successful their child will be in their schooling careers (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). They were sanguine that with time, normal children will be able to get along with the CwSN, and in the process will turn out to be better citizens. Therefore, they were optimistic of healthy peer acceptance, and that might provide the right kind of environment required to make inclusivity a success.

8. Conclusion

The study's goal was to identify and investigate the problems connected with the transition process from the existing paradigm of segregated education to an inclusive form of education. The most encouraging component of the study was the mindset of most parents of CwSN, who were enthusiastic about the concept and eager to send their children to mainstream schools as soon as feasible. Such positivism, tinged with optimism, is required to propel this endeavour. However, other parents were resigned to the likelihood that their children would not recover, most likely due to the type and degree of disabilities that those children had. Their voice and body language reflected their frustration and anger.

It was evident from the responses of all parents that to implement the system, it should not only be a top-down approach but it should be a pull model too, wherein the government along with school management must drive the initiative by equipping the schools and arming the teachers with training (top driven approach) and the school should be in the state of absolute readiness, by all counts, to welcome CwSN in their classroom (pull model). Such a situation would create the necessary confidence in the parents and the society to embrace inclusivity.

9. Limitations of the Study

Only a limited number of parents of normally school-going children were interviewed in this study. The opinions expressed by them may not be generalizable.

10. Implications for Future Research

Given the small sample size of qualitative research, the current study makes no claims for generalizability; however, the findings may aid in understanding the perspectives of various stakeholders regarding their roles and responsibilities in initiating a collaborative approach to implementing inclusive education more effectively.

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The author contributed to the study conception, design, data collection, data analysis, and drafting.

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