



Dynamics of Parental Acceptance and Resistance to Inclusive Education Implementation in Elementary

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<i>Inclusive education; parental acceptance and resistance; elementary schools;</i>	<i>Inclusive education is increasingly promoted to ensure equitable access to learning. however, its successful implementation in elementary schools is often shaped by parental attitudes, particularly those of parents of regular students. This study seeks to explore the dynamics of acceptance and resistance among parents of regular students regarding the implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with parents of regular students in inclusive elementary schools. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved coding, categorization, and theme development to identify recurring patterns of perception and response. The findings reveal that parental acceptance is generally linked to moral values, empathy, religious beliefs, and awareness of children's rights, while resistance is primarily driven by concerns over academic quality, classroom effectiveness, and a limited understanding of inclusive practices. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of school communication and parental involvement programs in fostering supportive attitudes. These findings underscore the need to strengthen collaborative strategies between schools and families to mitigate misconceptions and create a more supportive environment for the implementation of inclusive education.</i>

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Inclusive education has emerged as a global priority, aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) strongly affirms that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes and fostering inclusive societies. This principle is further reinforced by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Nations, 2006), which mandates equal educational opportunities within inclusive systems at all educational levels.

In Indonesia, inclusive education is formally supported through national regulations and policies from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, which encourage mainstream schools to accommodate students with diverse learning needs. Despite advancements in policy frameworks, practical implementation at the elementary school level remains complex and inconsistent. Research indicates that successful inclusive education relies not only on teacher preparedness and school infrastructure but also on the broader social ecosystem, including parental support (Ainscow, 2020; Loreman et al., 2013; Sharma et al., 2012).

Parents of regular students have a crucial yet often overlooked role in shaping the climate of inclusion. Their perceptions significantly affect children's attitudes toward peers with special educational needs and overall school harmony (de Boer et al., 2011). However, parental responses are not universally supportive. While some parents show acceptance based on moral, humanitarian, or religious values, others express resistance due to concerns about academic standards, classroom management, and potential negative peer influence (Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009). These varying attitudes highlight a complex interplay of cognitive beliefs, emotional responses, and social contexts.

Although there is a growing body of research on inclusive education, much of it focuses primarily on teachers' attitudes, instructional strategies, or institutional readiness (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Loreman et al., 2013; Sharma et al., 2012). Fewer studies examine the perspectives of parents of regular students, especially within elementary school contexts in developing countries. Understanding these dynamics is essential, as parental acceptance or resistance can either support or hinder the sustainability of inclusive policies.

This study, therefore, aims to explore the dynamics of acceptance and resistance among parents of regular students toward implementing inclusive education in elementary schools. By investigating the psychological and social factors influencing parental attitudes, this research seeks to enhance the understanding of inclusive education implementation and propose strategies for strengthening school-family collaboration.

Problem of The Study

Despite the widespread adoption of inclusive education policies, resistance from parents of regular students remains a persistent challenge in practice. The research problem this study addresses is the limited understanding of how and why parents of regular students either accept or resist inclusive education in elementary schools. Specifically, there is a lack of empirical exploration into the psychological, social, and contextual factors shaping parental attitudes and how these attitudes impact the implementation process. Without this understanding, schools may struggle to develop effective engagement strategies that promote inclusive school cultures.

Research's State of the Art

Extensive research has explored inclusive education from various perspectives. Studies have underscored the significance of teacher efficacy and training in promoting inclusive practices (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Sharma et al., 2012). Other scholars have highlighted systemic and leadership factors that influence the development of inclusive schools (Ainscow, 2020).

Research on parental attitudes, however, has yielded mixed results. A meta-analysis by de Boer et al. (2010) found that parental attitudes toward inclusive education vary significantly and are influenced by previous interactions with students with disabilities and perceived classroom impacts. Ruijs and Peetsma (2009) reported that parents of regular students often express concerns about academic achievement and the distribution of teacher attention. In contrast, some studies suggest that inclusive settings can positively influence the social development and empathy of regular students.

In Indonesia, research has primarily focused on policy implementation, teacher readiness, and institutional barriers, with limited qualitative exploration of parents of regular students as active stakeholders. Consequently, the socio-psychological aspects of acceptance and resistance remain underexplored, particularly at the elementary school level, where parental involvement is typically substantial.

Gap Study & Objective

The existing literature indicates that while teacher-related and institutional factors in inclusive education have been thoroughly investigated, the dynamic attitudes of parents of regular students, especially in elementary schools within developing contexts, have not been sufficiently examined. Moreover, previous studies often quantify attitudes without delving into the underlying reasons for acceptance and resistance or exploring how schools can strategically address these responses.

This research aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth qualitative analysis of the dynamics of parental acceptance and resistance toward the implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools. The study's objectives are: (1) to identify the forms of acceptance and resistance among parents of regular students; (2) to analyze the psychological and social factors influencing these attitudes; and (3) to propose evidence-based strategies for enhancing parental support in inclusive education contexts.

By situating parental perspectives within the broader discourse of inclusive education, this study aspires to contribute both theoretically and practically to the advancement of inclusive schooling.

METHOD

Type and Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the dynamics of acceptance and resistance among parents of regular students toward the implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, beliefs, and social interpretations, which are central to examining attitudinal dynamics (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

The study adopted an interpretive orientation, seeking to understand how parents construct meaning regarding inclusive education within their social and educational contexts. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee of the researchers' affiliated university. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation, and anonymity was ensured through the use of pseudonyms.

Data and Data Sources

The primary data were obtained from in-depth interviews with 12 parents of regular students enrolled in inclusive elementary schools. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure variation in educational background, gender, and grade level of their children.

Data saturation was achieved when recurring themes appeared consistently and no substantially new information emerged, in line with qualitative research standards (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2020).

Supporting documents such as school inclusion policies and parent communication materials were also reviewed to strengthen contextual understanding and triangulate interview findings.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants.

Participant Code	Gender	Educational Background	Child's Grade
P1	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Grade 3
P2	Male	Senior High School	Grade 4
P3	Female	Master's Degree	Grade 2
P4	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Grade 5
P5	Male	Diploma	Grade 3
P6	Female	Senior High School	Grade 6
P7	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Grade 4
P8	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Grade 2
P9	Female	Master's Degree	Grade 5
P10	Female	Senior High School	Grade 3
P11	Male	Diploma	Grade 4
P12	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Grade 6

Data collection technique

Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews carried out over a period of two months. Each session lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted either in person or via an online communication platform, depending on participants' preferences and availability.

The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit comprehensive responses regarding several key areas: parents' conceptual understanding of inclusive education, their emotional responses to inclusive classroom settings, perceived advantages and potential challenges, concerns related to academic and social consequences, and their experiences engaging with school policies and teachers.

With participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim. In addition, field notes were prepared immediately following each interview to document contextual details, non-verbal cues, and preliminary analytical insights that could support deeper interpretation during the data analysis process.

Data analysis

The data were examined manually through a rigorous thematic analysis framework following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2021), without the use of qualitative data analysis software. The process was conducted systematically and iteratively to ensure depth and clarity of interpretation.

First, the researcher engaged in thorough data familiarization by reading and rereading the interview transcripts to obtain a comprehensive understanding of participants' viewpoints and experiences. This immersion allowed patterns and recurring ideas to emerge naturally from the data.

Second, initial coding was carried out by identifying and marking significant statements related to acceptance, resistance, concerns, and expectations. These codes were written manually alongside the printed transcripts to preserve close engagement with the raw data.

Third, related codes were organized into broader conceptual groupings. For example, codes reflecting empathy and fairness were clustered under "moral acceptance," while statements expressing worry about classroom performance were categorized as "academic anxiety," and expressions of uncertainty were grouped under "information gaps."

Fourth, these categories were further refined into overarching themes that represented the central dynamics shaping parental attitudes toward inclusive education.

Finally, the themes were interpreted using Attitude Theory, particularly its cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, in order to deepen the analytical explanation of how parental perspectives were formed and expressed.

To enhance credibility, member checking was conducted with selected participants to validate the accuracy of interpretations. Additionally, peer debriefing with two colleagues was undertaken to minimize potential researcher bias. The study's trustworthiness was reinforced through sustained engagement with the data and careful documentation of each analytical step, consistent with the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Overall, this reflective and iterative manual analysis enabled rich, nuanced interpretation while preserving methodological rigor.

RESULTS

The qualitative analysis revealed three key themes that highlight the complex relationship between acceptance and resistance among parents of regular students regarding the implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools: (1) Value-Based Acceptance, (2) Academic Performance Concerns, and (3) Institutional Trust and Information Transparency. These themes illustrate that parental attitudes are multidimensional and context-dependent, rather than simply supportive or oppositional.

1. Value-Based Acceptance

Many parents expressed their support for inclusive education based on moral, religious, and humanitarian values. They highlighted the importance of equality, empathy, and character development as primary reasons for their acceptance.

One parent shared:

"In my opinion, all children have the same right to learn. If we reject them, we are not giving them the opportunity to grow." (P3)

Another parent added:

"My child is actually learning empathy. He talks about how his friend with special needs needs help. To me, that's a great character education." (P7)

These comments indicate that acceptance is closely tied to moral reasoning and emotional empathy. Parents see inclusive education as beneficial not only for students with special needs but also for promoting social sensitivity and character development among regular students.

2. Academic Performance Concerns

Even with a moral agreement on inclusive principles, some parents voiced concerns about academic outcomes. Their main worries revolved around teacher workload, classroom management, and the achievement of curriculum goals.

One parent expressed:

"I'm not against it, but I worry that the teacher will focus more on the child with special needs, leaving my child less attended to." (P2)

Another participant questioned:

"When there are such diverse abilities in one class, will the curriculum targets still be met?" (P10)

These findings suggest that resistance often stems from practical concerns rather than ideological opposition. Parents were particularly anxious about how attention would be distributed in the classroom and its potential impact on academic standards.

3. Institutional Trust and Information Transparency

A third significant theme was the importance of communication and transparency in shaping parental attitudes. Parents who received clear explanations and regular updates from the school were more likely to show stronger acceptance.

One participant mentioned:

"To be honest, I don't really understand how the system works. I'm not sure if there are special teachers or not." (P5)

Another added:

"If the school provided more detailed explanations, parents might worry less." (P8)

These insights highlight that gaps in information contribute significantly to uncertainty and resistance. Trust in school management appears to play a crucial role in influencing the level of parental support for inclusive practices.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that parental acceptance and resistance toward inclusive education should not be understood as two opposing and fixed positions. Instead, they move along a dynamic continuum in which support and hesitation may coexist within the same individual. In line with Attitude Theory, parents' perspectives were shaped by interconnected dimensions: cognitive understanding of inclusive education, emotional responses such as empathy or anxiety, and behavioral tendencies reflected in support, doubt, or conditional approval. This interplay explains why many parents simultaneously expressed moral agreement with inclusion while still voicing practical concerns.

The theme of value-based acceptance resonates with previous research suggesting that parental support becomes stronger when inclusive education is framed through the lenses of human rights, fairness, and character development (Paseka & Schwab, 2019). Parents who perceived inclusion as a way to cultivate empathy and social awareness in their children tended to view it positively. For these parents, inclusive classrooms were not merely institutional arrangements but meaningful environments for moral learning and social growth.

At the same time, concerns regarding academic performance reflect patterns documented in earlier studies (Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009), where hesitation is often driven by apprehensions about instructional effectiveness rather than negative attitudes toward children with special needs. In this study, parents' worries centered on teacher workload, classroom management, and curriculum attainment. Such concerns suggest that resistance is largely pragmatic, emerging from perceived risks to academic quality rather than from ideological opposition to inclusion itself.

Another important dimension highlighted by the findings is the role of institutional communication. Consistent with more recent scholarship (Boer, 2012), transparent and consistent collaboration between schools and families appears to significantly strengthen parental trust. When schools clearly explain inclusive teaching strategies, differentiated instruction methods, and support mechanisms, parental anxiety tends to decrease. Conversely, limited information often fosters uncertainty and conditional skepticism.

Taken together, these findings emphasize that inclusive education is not solely a pedagogical or structural matter but also a socio-psychological process that involves community engagement. Policy mandates alone are insufficient if parental perceptions and concerns remain unaddressed. Schools need to actively cultivate open communication, demonstrate academic accountability, and meaningfully involve parents in inclusive planning initiatives to ensure sustainable implementation.

The study suggests several practical implications. First, schools should design structured parent education programs that clearly explain inclusive pedagogy, classroom adaptations, and support systems. Second, implementing transparent academic monitoring and reporting mechanisms may help alleviate concerns related to learning outcomes. Third, creating regular collaborative forums where teachers and parents can exchange perspectives may foster mutual understanding and trust, strengthening long-term support for inclusive practices.

Future research may build upon these findings in several ways. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insight into how parental attitudes evolve over time as inclusive practices mature. Comparative research between urban and rural schools may reveal contextual differences in perception and acceptance. Quantitative approaches could complement qualitative findings by measuring the prevalence and intensity of specific attitudes. Additionally, incorporating children's perspectives would enrich the analysis and offer valuable triangulation of parental narratives, contributing to a more holistic understanding of inclusive education dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This study was designed to understand how parents of regular students respond to the implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools. The findings show that parental acceptance and resistance are not fixed or opposing categories. Instead, they move along a flexible continuum shaped by personal values, academic expectations, emotional responses, and the degree of trust parents have in schools. In line with the objectives outlined in the introduction, acceptance generally emerges from moral awareness, empathy, and recognition of inclusive education as part of equal rights principles. Resistance, in contrast, is more commonly linked to practical concerns, especially worries about academic quality and limited understanding of how inclusive practices operate in the classroom. These results affirm that inclusive education cannot depend solely on formal regulations. It must also address the perceptions, emotions, and expectations that exist within the school community.

Regarding its contribution, this research offers an important perspective that is often overlooked. Many discussions about inclusive education focus primarily on teachers, curriculum, or institutional readiness, while the voices of parents of regular students receive less attention. Through in depth qualitative exploration, this study demonstrates that support and hesitation can exist simultaneously within the same parent. By applying Attitude Theory, the analysis illustrates how cognitive understanding, emotional reactions, and behavioral intentions interact in shaping parental responses. This approach enriches existing knowledge by highlighting that successful inclusive education depends not only on structural preparation but also on relational trust and meaningful community involvement.

Several limitations must also be acknowledged. The participants were drawn from a limited number of schools, which may not fully represent wider social and cultural diversity. The study was conducted within a specific period of time, so it does not capture how parental attitudes may develop or change in the long term. In addition, the findings rely on self reported interview data, which may not always reflect deeper or evolving viewpoints. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to examine changes over time, involve participants from more diverse regions, and integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches to strengthen analytical depth. Comparative studies across different contexts and research that includes students' perspectives would also provide valuable extensions of this work.

Overall, the implications of this study emphasize the importance of strengthening collaboration between schools and families. Clear communication about inclusive teaching strategies, transparent academic monitoring, and consistent opportunities for dialogue can reduce uncertainty and build trust. Parental concerns should not be viewed as obstacles but as opportunities for constructive engagement. When parents feel informed, involved, and respected, inclusive education is more likely to develop in a sustainable and meaningful way.

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