

**PREJUDICES TOWARDS CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL
DISABILITIES (IDs) AT INCLUSIVE PRE-SCHOOL AND ITS
CONSEQUENCES ON CHILDREN’S SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL
DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY ON PARENTS’ PERCEPTION IN DHAKA**

By

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A thesis submitted to Brac Institute of Educational Development in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Early Childhood Development

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Brac University
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Ethics Statement

Title of Thesis Topic: “Prejudices towards Children with Intellectual Disabilities (IDs) at Inclusive Pre-schools and Its Consequences on Children’s Social-emotional Development: A Study on Parents’ Perception in Dhaka.”

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1. Source of population

Parents of children with mild and moderate Intellectual Disabilities (IDs) (both Mother and Father).

2. Does the study involve (yes, or no)

- a) Physical risk to the subjects- no
- b) Social risk- no
- c) Psychological risk to subjects- no
- d) discomfort to subjects- no
- e) Invasion of privacy- no

3. Will subjects be clearly informed about (yes or no)

- a) Nature and purpose of the study- yes
- b) Procedures to be followed- yes
- c) Physical risk- n/a
- d) Sensitive questions- yes
- e) Benefits to be derived- yes
- f) Right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study- yes
- g) Confidential handling of data- yes
- h) Compensation and/or treatment where there are risks or privacy is involved- yes

4. Will Signed verbal consent for be required (yes or no)

- a) from study participants- yes
- b) from parents or guardian- yes
- c) Will precautions be taken to protect anonymity of subjects?- yes

5. Check documents being submitted herewith to Committee:

- a) Proposal- yes
- b) Consent Form- yes
- c) Questionnaire or interview schedule- yes

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Abstract

Prejudice, in other words, the opinion formed based on personal convictions and preconceptions without real knowledge of the facts and people involved, strongly influences a misleading evaluation and may hinder the inclusion of children in schools, regardless of specific limitations. Inclusion is based on the social justice concept; however, the inclusion of children with IDs in schools depends on others' attitudes toward them. By interviewing nine parents of pre-school children with mild and moderate levels of IDs, the research shows that while parents broadly value the benefits of inclusive pre-schools that involves promoting diversity and equal opportunity where every child feels accepted, respected, and supported; children with IDs are vulnerable to prejudice and a lack of readiness of teachers and peers to allow for the inclusivity of children with IDs undermines the social-emotional development of these children. Teachers' verbal abuse and exclusion of children with IDs from class activities, and peer victimization, e.g., labeling them as different and excluding them from groups, resulted in social distance, power imbalance, emotional distress, and low self-esteem and confidence. Hence, the research suggests inclusive pre-schools to a) enhance peer sensitization by celebrating diversity; and initiating buddy programs, cooperative learning models, peer leadership training, and children's awareness campaigns, and b) build teachers' capacity to eliminate prejudice and foster human potential and well-being. The research seems beneficial for cultural and social psychology research, applying the concept to study other marginalized groups, and stakeholders willing to develop models centered on the socio-emotional well-being of children with IDs.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Intellectual disabilities; Prejudice in schools; Parental perceptions; Bangladesh; Social-emotional development.

Dedication

To the parents who endeavor every day to guarantee their children's education, self-respect, and inclusion, a posture and firm passion light the way toward a more just society.

And to the teacher and peer who encompass compassionateness and empathy in the classroom, this survey is also for you, as an admonisher of the profound deviation that credence and apprehension can make in the life of a child.

May this inquiry contribute, in its own manner, to construct an inclusive school in Bangladesh and beyond, where every kid is valued, respected , and given the chance to bloom.

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List of Acronyms

- **AAIDD:** American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
- **AAMR:** American Association on Mental Retardation
- **APA:** American Psychiatric Association
- **CWD:** Children With Disabilities
- **ECCE:** Early Childhood Care and Education
- **ECD:** Early Childhood Development
- **GPA:** Grade Point Average
- **IDIs:** Intellectual Disabilities (A typographical variation of IDs)
- **IDs:** Intellectual Disabilities
- **IE:** Inclusive Education
- **IP:** Inclusive Practices
- **IQ:** Intelligence Quotient
- **KG:** Kindergarten
- **LDs:** Learning Disabilities
- **M.Ed.:** Master of Education
- **MoE:** Ministry of Education
- **MS:** Master of Science
- **NEP:** National Education Policy
- **PEDP:** Primary Education Developmental Program
- **PWDs:** Persons with Disabilities
- **SLD:** Students with Learning Disabilities
- **TBD:** To Be Determined
- **UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- **UNCRPD:** United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- **UNICEF:** United Nations Children's Fund
- **WHO:** World Health Organization

Chapter – I : Introduction & Background

Introduction

Prejudice, in other words, the opinion formed based on personal convictions and preconceptions without real knowledge of the facts and people involved, put differently, a negative and unjustifiable stance toward a group and its members based only on their membership in the group”, strongly influences a misleading evaluation and may hinder the inclusion of children in schools, regardless of their specific limitations and disabilities (Marcone and Caputo, 2023; Sherifi, 2012). In general, inclusion is based on the concept of social justice that states that all children are entitled to equal access to education opportunities, regardless of disability; however, inclusion of children e.g., with intellectual disabilities (IDs), in various settings, including schools, depends not only on their competencies but also on the attitudes that others have toward them (Marcone and Caputo, 2023). From this perspective of inclusion, therefore, it is important to explore prejudices towards IDs in schools.

Furthermore, inclusive education has become one of the prioritized educational policies in many countries ever since the release of the “UNESCO Salamanca Statement in 1994 for children with special needs” (UNESCO, 1994). Parents who hope that the implementation of inclusive education would help their children to strengthen their social skills and contribute to their personal development generally support the implementation of inclusive education, for example, by contributing to the improvement of sensitivity towards respecting differences (Ummah et al., 2021). Hence, it is essential to understand parents’ perspectives towards the way they value inclusive education and how prejudice in inclusive schools hinders children’s social-emotional development. Pre-school is an important area of concern when considering prejudice in schools because research shows that disabled children are not accepted in kindergartens, in other words, Child Development Centers, and are prejudiced, which hinders the development of their potential capacities (Sherifi, 2012). Previous research suggests that exposure to prejudice in schools hinders the social-emotional development of children (Haft et al., 2023) and thus illustrates negative consequences on children with IDs.

This research addresses these viewpoints by exploring parents’ perceptions of inclusion, specifically inclusive education; and teachers’, and peers’ direct or overt and subtle or covert prejudices towards children with IDs in inclusive pre-schools; and the consequences of such prejudices on the social-emotional well-being of mild and moderate levels children with IDs.

In Bangladesh, the government is at the forefront of inclusive education. The Primary Education Developmental Program (PEDP), one of the largest educational initiatives in Bangladesh, works to promote and implement inclusive education (Malek et al., 2013). Additionally, children with intellectual disabilities have the right to complete and effective participation in integrated or unified education at all educational levels (The Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act, 2013). For special needs children to develop self-care, social skills, everyday living abilities, and productive community involvement, early childhood education is crucial (Dogru & Kayili, 2012). However, attitudinal barriers and discriminatory practices continue to prevent the full participation of learners with disabilities in developmental learning contexts (Mokobane, 2024). Hence, information is needed to support these children's meaningful participation and social- emotional development in inclusive schools.

Problem statement

Children with intellectual disabilities (IDs) are vulnerable to prejudice in schools (Haft et al., 2023) and a lack of readiness of teachers and peers to allow for the inclusivity of children with IDs undermines these children's human potential and well-being (Marcone and Caputo, 2023). Research showed that teachers' attitudes towards children with IDs often differ from those towards children without IDs and that teachers' negative attitudes and/or expectations are significant barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive classrooms (Marcone and Caputo, 2023). Researchers argue that the severity of disability and type of disability are associated with teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The more severe a child's disability is in the classroom, the less positive the teachers' attitude toward that child's inclusion and teachers are generally more supportive of including children with physical and sensory disabilities than those with intellectual and learning disabilities (Marcone and Caputo, 2023). Prejudice of peers without IDs towards children with IDs may result in "peer victimization", in other words, the experience of being targeted, harassed, or mistreated in the forms of physical aggression, verbal abuse or social exclusion by one's peers which can result in power imbalance between the perpetrators and the victim within the classroom (Haft et al., 2023). It could be possible that these biases in the form of exposure to prejudices and negative attitudes in the scholastic context do not facilitate, but rather block the symptomatic improvements associated with the disabilities by limiting children with IDs in the activities they choose to pursue, preventing them from achieving their goals, and impacting mental health including increased anxiety and depression and thus are detrimental

to marginalized groups such as children with intellectual disabilities (Haft et al., 2023; Marcone and Caputo, 2023).

In Bangladesh, parents think inclusive education helps kids with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, but in reality, it does not help kids reach their developmental objectives (Malek et al., 2013). Teachers' and peers' conventional opinions about these kids' acceptance at pre-primary age are one important issue (Khan, 2012). This makes it difficult for kids to participate in school and meet developmental goals. According to a 2021 poll, 45% of participants had good opinions on CWD education, demonstrating the persistence of social stigma around disability (Ambia & Rahman, 2021). However, social stigma, discrimination, and unfavorable opinions about CWDs in schools can prevent them from being included and fully participating (Sarker & Unzum, 2024). The majority of the educational environment frequently falls short of creating a feeling of acceptance and belonging for every student. Bullying, marginalization, and a sense of loneliness can result from negative attitudes toward CWDs and marginalized groups (Hossain et al., 2019). There are major obstacles to participation because of the prevalent social stigma associated with marginalization and disability (Alam & Khan, 2018). In addition to having an impact on specific students, this deters families from sending their kids to school. Effective implementation of inclusive education is hampered by parents, and educators, ignorance of its tenets and practices (Islam et al., 2016). Attitude barriers for implementing IE include a lack of social acceptance, including misconceptions and prejudices among various people (Kawser et al., 2016), the frequent teasing and slanging of students with disabilities by others (Mullick et al., 2012), and teachers' propensity to avoid classroom situations due to a misperception of their learning abilities (Malak et al., 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe parents' views about the prejudices of teachers and peers towards children with IDs in inclusive pre-schools in Dhaka. Understanding of parents' concerns about the consequences of these prejudices on these children's social-emotional outcomes is another important purpose of this research. Learning about how parents value inclusive education will help explain how parents' hopes are disrupted by the prejudices in schools.

Significance of the Study

Inclusive education opens opportunities and chances in fulfilling educational rights of people with disabilities, especially people with intellectual disabilities at school in the sense that they can learn

together with friends. The nation's national laws and policies demonstrate its dedication to the need for inclusive education. In addition to the Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act of 2013, which guarantees protective frameworks for their inclusion, the National Education Policy of 2010 emphasizes inclusive education for all pupils and thus demonstrates that the policy is prepared for inclusion. Although the phrase was not used when creating the Act of Compulsory Education, the 1997 National Education Commission report acknowledged inclusive education and recommended that the system include the less fortunate students (MoE, 1997 quoted in Ahsan and Mullick, 2013). In the meantime, Bangladesh has ratified the aforementioned convention and declaration, as well as the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000, the Salamanca Statement and Framework in 1994 pertaining to special needs education, and another convention pertaining to the rights of persons with disabilities in 2006 (Malak et al., 2014). In order to ensure that everyone receives a high-quality education, the Bangladesh National Education Policy (NEP) 2010 adopted the concept of inclusion and instructed that all children be included regardless of their gender, color, disability, ethnicity, social background, or area (MoE, 2010). In other words, the aforementioned frameworks and policies have mandated and supported educators and practitioners to use IE in order to lessen unfairness and inequality in children's results. Despite having specific policies, laws and services, disabled children in Bangladesh are facing troubles in obtaining education and thus, inclusion of children in schools is not satisfactory (Shakiba, 2020; Ambia and Rahman, 2021; Ahmed and Kashem, 2015). Hence, there is a need for information regarding constraints experienced by children with disabilities, more specifically, intellectual disabilities, who attend pre-primary education, known as the preparatory stage before primary school, in Bangladesh.

Previous research aiming at exploring challenges experienced by children with disabilities attending general and specialized primary and secondary schools in Bangladesh revealed that disabled children often fail to receive proper cooperation and mental support from their schools (Ahmed and Kashem, 2015). Research also explored the challenges in inclusive education in primary schools of Bangladesh and found that an unfriendly situation, inadequate materials and non-conforming curriculum, misinterpretation and mismanagement by stakeholders, restricted political and social backing, and adverse physiography are the main concerns (Ambia and Rahman, 2021). However, prejudices as the root cause of school pull-outs, micro-exclusions, and other forms of isolation of children with IDIs in pre-schools remain hidden in academic literature in Bangladesh. Hence, a more comprehensive understanding of prejudice in inclusive pre-schools that is harmful to children with IDs is needed. This

research will contribute to the scholarly literature by exploring parents' perceptions of inclusive education, the prejudices of preschool teachers and peers towards children with mild and moderate levels of intellectual disabilities that hinder the implementation of inclusive education in preschools and impair the social-emotional development of children with IDs.

The findings of the research may help in understanding the relationship between parents' views of the benefits of inclusive education and the consequence of prejudice on children's including girls' and boys' socio-emotional outcomes in inclusive schools, which has the potential to inform cultural and social psychology research, as well as policy makers and relevant stakeholders to develop models/interventions focused on socio-emotional well-being in young children with intellectual disabilities. Given that those with higher levels of prejudice towards IDs are men and older people compared to females and younger people who show lower levels of prejudice towards people with IDs (Marcone and Caputo, 2023), the research findings will help to identify appropriate content needed for male and female teachers' capacity building. In this way, learning about teachers' as well as peers' stereotypical attitudes will be useful to eradicate the negative perceptions and attitudes towards children with intellectual disabilities in the classroom. Additionally, the concept of the research can be applied to other marginalized groups of children to understand how they experience prejudice and the consequences of such lived experiences on their lives.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do parents perceive inclusive education for pre-primary-aged mild and moderate level intellectually disabled children?
2. In which ways do parents view the prejudices that teachers and peers display towards children with mild and moderate levels of intellectual disabilities at inclusive pre-primary schools?
3. What are parents' understanding about the consequences of teachers' and peers' prejudices on mild and moderately levels of intellectually disabled children's social-emotional development?

Operational Definitions

Inclusive education: Inclusive education is a cornerstone of equality and empowerment at the elementary stage, aiming to provide all students, regardless of their background or abilities, with equal opportunities for learning and growth.

Inclusive preschools: Inclusive preschools provide an environment where all pre-school-aged children, regardless of ability or background, are fully supported to access and participate in learning and social activities. Children in inclusive preschools develop greater sensitivity to their peers' needs.

Pre-primary-aged children: Pre-primary-aged children refer to children who attend pre-schools from age 3. Pre-schools for these children are designed for 3 years.

Prejudice: Prejudice is a preconceived judgement about children with intellectual IDs based on their perceived membership in the social group, often rooted in stereotypes rather than their actual attributes.

Mild and moderate levels of intellectual disabilities: Children with mild IDs are slower in all areas of conceptual development and social and daily living skills. Moderate intellectual disability involves more significant limitations, with children requiring more support for self-care and daily tasks.

Social-emotional development: The social development of young children is characterized by the child's ability to form close and comfortable bonds with older people and peers, which includes experiencing, focusing, and communicating feelings in socially appropriate ways. Emotional development can be defined as a person's positive and negative feelings, such as cheerfulness, delight, affection, anger, and sad, which produce physiological reactions involving conscious experiences and events that result in one's behavior, in interpreting a situation, communication with others, and actions in responding to the situation.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of related literature about prejudice and children with intellectual disabilities (IDs). The literature encompasses national as well as international studies relevant to this topic. To gain a comprehensive knowledge base about the research topic, a significant volume of literature has been incorporated from a variety of different sources, such as journal articles, books, websites, and relevant documents. Following a review of the literature, the chapter has been divided into four themes, which are described below.

2.1 Understanding inclusive education, intellectual disability, and mild and moderate levels of intellectual disability

Inclusive education is a strategy aimed at meeting and addressing the varied needs of every learner by enhancing participation in learning and minimizing exclusion in and from education” (UNESCO, 1994). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a global human rights agreement aimed at promoting, safeguarding, and guaranteeing the complete and equal enjoyment of all human rights and basic freedoms for all individuals with disabilities (UNCRPD, 2007). UNICEF seeks to build a more inclusive world by the year 2030 (Dipas, 2022). The approach emphasizes enabling children with disabilities, guaranteeing their access to assistance and resources, and fostering their participation in all facets of life.

Inclusive education also refers to an educational setup where children with diverse learning needs are accommodated in a general classroom and have equitable opportunities for quality education (Singh & Prajapati, 2021). By addressing the diverse needs of all children, inclusive practices in education help to accomplish results and guarantee social justice in society. By reducing and eliminating obstacles to learning and discrimination, inclusive education aims to enhance the educational system (Amran & Obaidullah, 2019). Inclusion is a complex and multifaceted notion that widely addresses diversity in terms of individual rights and curriculum affirmation (Bearne & Kennedy, 2014). It is a procedure to guarantee students' success by removing barriers to participation and attendance (UNESCO, 2017). In educational institutions, inclusive practices (IP) are crucial, particularly to guarantee equal access for all children, to accept and comprehend their abilities, geniuses, personalities, and expectations, to establish an atmosphere that encourages participation in the learning process, and to attain the competencies necessary to reach the objective (Amran &

Obaidullah, 2019).

The term intellectual disability can be used to refer to a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning); which started before adulthood with a lasting effect on development (Department of Health (United Kingdom,2001). “Intellectual disability” (mental retardation) refers to a particular state of functioning that begins prior to age 18, characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour (AAMR, 2002). Mild special needs refer to individuals who have learning difficulties but can generally communicate their needs and engage in most daily tasks with some support. Very moderate special needs, on the other hand, describe individuals who require more day-to-day support and may struggle with areas like mobility or personal care. The cognitive inefficiencies of children with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities lead to persistent problems in academic achievement (Turnbull et al., 2004). Children with mild intellectual disabilities are better at decoding words than comprehending their meaning (Drew & Hardman, 2007) and read below their own mental-age level (Katims, 2000). Children with intellectual disabilities may be able to learn basic computations, but may be unable to apply concepts appropriately in a problem-solving situation (Smith et al., 2006).

Evidence shows the features of mild and moderate levels of intellectual disability. By definition, they obtain scores above 50 but below 70 on standard IQ tests (APA, 2013). They also show developmental delays in cognitive, motor, and social development and are slower to acquire problem-solving skills, coordination, and social skills (APA, 2013). There are no characteristic physical features mentioned (WHO, 2023) but can be instructed in practical living skills, such as cooking, personal hygiene, and other self-care habits, with supervision (AAIDD, 2021). They learn educational skills in the range of third to sixth grade (HealthyPlace, n.d.). While they do become socially adapted, they may need help with difficult interactions (APA, 2013). They can accomplish daily activities independently and are generally mildly affected, comprising around 85 percent of all intellectual disability worldwide (WHO, 2023).

Nevertheless, individuals with mild intellectual disability have an IQ score between 35 and 49 (APA, 2013) and might experience more delay in growth. They are usually behind in fine motor skills, such as walking or picking things (WHO, 2023). Physical features, such as a protruding tongue or unusual facial characteristics, can be observed (AAIDD, 2021). They use simple sentence structures and non-verbal communication (Healthy Place, n.d.), and through structured teaching, can be taught to

learn basic health and safety skills, such as brushing teeth or crossing the road (APA, 2013). Just as they require help in meeting personal needs like eating and hygiene, they also have to be helped on a continuous basis (AAIDD, 2021). They are mostly capable of moving around in known surroundings, i.e., to a corner store (HealthyPlace, n.d.), but struggle with the interpretation of social cues, e.g., sarcasm or body posture, or in the development of relationships (APA, 2013). Because of these requirements for assistance, most live in supervised settings like group homes and still benefit from continued activity of daily living training (AAIDD, 2021).

2.2 Benefits of participating in inclusive education

Fostering social relationships, community building, access, unconditional acceptance, setting goals based on each student's needs and abilities, motivating peers, involving parents, and creating an environment of respect and belonging are just a few of the many benefits of inclusive education (Hutchinson & Specht, 2020). The inclusion of students with various needs in the classroom is "the entrance to full involvement in society" and "promotes inclusive and tolerant societies," according to the United Nations Toolkit of Disability (n.d.) (Module-14). Accordingly, when impaired children are given the chance to engage with their peers who are not disabled, the potential of preschool educational environments to promote social competency among peers is created (Guralnick et al., 2007). Additionally, young children who participate in pre-school educational programs experience a variety of social and academic development (Diamond & Hong, 2010). Children go through several stages of peer interaction in tandem with their physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and ethical development (Beyazkürk et al., 2007).

People often assumed that both people with disabilities and those without them would be able to socialize with their peers at a relatively young age. When children with special needs are given the chance to connect with peers who are not disabled, there is a significant chance that they will develop social competence in pre-primary education (Guralnick et al., 2007). Children begin attending pre-primary educational programs voluntarily in early childhood, which improves their academic and social performance in comprehensive ways (Diamond & Hong, 2010). When kids with disabilities have the opportunity to engage with their peers, they move through many stages that coincide with their development in the social, emotional, cognitive, and ethical domains (Beyazkurket et al., 2007). Children with mild to moderate disabilities may develop the language and social skills necessary to live freely and establish their own families if they receive enough care (Marwaha et al., 2023).

2.3 Prejudice held by peers in class and teachers towards children with intellectual disabilities and their consequences on children's social-emotional development

Research has shown that students with learning disabilities (SLDs) fear judgment or unfair treatment stemming from negative group prejudice. In educational settings, SLD label can prejudice individuals – for example, leading teachers label them negatively as “disorder” or “disability”; to have lower educational expectations of individuals with LDs in comparison to their similarly achieving peers; separate them physically from classmates during the school day for special education or tutoring instruction, demarcating them as different; label them as “stupid,” “lazy,” or “careless,” or as “cheaters” or “needy” in the context of academic tests or assessment; and leading peers without SLDs to sustain the practice of bullying and peer victimization of their classmates with SLDs within the classroom (Haft et. al., 2023). Consequently, these children with learning disabilities may display self-endorsement of prejudice such as academic self-concept; experience higher level of anxiety and depression, and lower level of self-esteem/worth; coopt cognitive resources, and impair achievement motivation and engagement, thus, may underperform on evaluation tasks in the stereotyped domain; display lower level of school belonging; and interpersonal concerns such as reputation concern and a sense of relatedness (Haft et. al., 2023). Studies specifically highlight unfavourable peer attitudes and challenges experienced by special educators and suggest that unfavorable peer attitudes can be a significant obstacle to social development and participation, resulting in social isolation (McDougall et al., 2004). Hence, building healthy peer connections and promoting acceptance and awareness of differences in the classroom are challenges for special educators (Ainscow, 2014).

2.4 Parental Attitudes towards Inclusive Education

Parent involvement has been universally acknowledged as being important to student achievement, yet surprisingly little research has actually investigated parents' attitudes to inclusion specifically for their child. For instance, Fan and Chen (2001) and Hattie (2009) have both highlighted the part that home–school relationships have to play in ensuring good outcomes for students. Following this, Duhaney and Salend (2000) undertook a survey of parents' experiences and determined that most parents of disabled children held positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Parents believed that inclusive education is beneficial for their child's learning and also for their social development. Nevertheless, Duhaney and Salend also indicated that parents expressed concern regarding schools being capable of managing their child's needs (Boer et al. 2010). Following a review of ten studies published after 1998, De Boer and colleagues concluded that the majority of parents in these studies advocated for

positive attitudes toward inclusion.

Parents have a strong impact on their own outside of the educational setting. Researchers believed parents may be more hesitant about including their children in an inclusive setting (Nelson, 2001). A few parents believe their child would not be welcomed or their child would place a burden on the teacher and the class. The parents were also worried the teacher may not be accommodating toward their child. “It may be true that views regarding inclusion are often related to perceptions of the general education system itself” (Palmer et al., 2001). If a classroom lacks control, parents are less likely to favour inclusion. For students to associate with children like themselves, some parents believe their child should be placed in a classroom with children with similar disabilities (Palmer et al. 2001). The emphasis of inclusion should not be based solely on a child’s placement in a general education classroom, but should also be open to a child’s individual needs and wants, as well as the family's. Numerous studies show that children's learning competency, healthy social relationships, emotional attachment, and fewer behavioral issues are all correlated with parental encouragement, support, involvement, and positive attitude (Collins et ai., 2005). The purpose of inclusion is to provide fair and equal education to every student, including those with and without disabilities. Students, peers, teachers, and administrators have developed their own positive and negative feelings about inclusion. The groups having negative feelings toward inclusion may not have seen an educational environment that provided a positive effect on those included in the inclusive setting.

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter offers an overview of the research design of this study, including research approach and design, research site, research participant, participant selection procedure, data collection tool, data collection method, data management and analysis, validity and reliability of the research tool, ethical issues, and limitations of the study.

3.1 Research Approach & Design

The study follows a qualitative approach to the exploration of parents' perception of teachers' and peers' prejudices towards children with mild and moderate IDs in inclusive pre-schools, the consequences of prejudice on these children's social-emotional wellbeing, and parents' perception of inclusive education. Qualitative methods are most appropriate for this purpose because I am interested in understanding participants' lived experiences, beliefs, and the meanings they attribute to things. Through interviews, the research will describe parents' knowledge and attitudes towards different prejudices and their consequences on children. Exploratory qualitative research will provide rich narrative data to determine the prevailing themes in parents' perceptions. By placing parents' voices at the center, the research will yield invaluable information that can inform and shape inclusive preschool practice and policy.

Referring to the strength of this method in terms of acquiring attitudes and experiences that can be lost within quantitative approaches. Generally, the qualitative method guarantees that parents' real-world experiences contribute to the findings, rendering them highly applicable to eliminate prejudices in inclusive preschools in Bangladesh.

3.2 Research Participants

The participants include parents of children with disabilities (PWDs) who have children aged 3-7 (those who have intellectual disability and get pre-primary education till the age of 7 because they have some gap in mental age) years who are currently attending pre-primary education in an urban primary school. The parents were expected to have a bare minimum of three years of experience in the education setup.

3.3 Research Site

This study took place in urban schools in Dhaka, where general education systems were progressively integrating methods of co-teaching. Specifically, this research included schools that have established

special education and support services, such as shadow teachers, for students with disabilities.

Many urban schools have a higher level of development along with specialized training programs for teachers, enabling them to support children with disabilities. The study concentrated on the parents of children with mild to moderate disabilities to gain insight into their perceptions and experiences of prejudices in inclusive education in urban environments. By addressing this inquiry, the research sought to evaluate the advanced educational landscape in urban schools and the inclusion of students with disabilities, while also identifying potential challenges to the successful implementation of inclusive education.

3.4 Sampling/Participant Selection Procedure

Following purposive sampling, nine parents were chosen from an English-medium pre-school. These parents had children with a mild or moderate level of intellectual disabilities (IDs). These children have been studying at the school for at least the last three years. Among the nine parents, five had girl children and four had boy children.

3.5 Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview guideline was prepared with open-ended questions and with questions prompted by the flow of the interviews for data collection. The tool was divided into three parts. Part one focused on opening questions titled “Parents’ Perceptions of Inclusive Education”. This part was designed with questions focusing on the meaning of inclusive education and the benefits of attending inclusive schools for children with IDs.

Part two was titled “Teachers’ and Peers’ Prejudice towards Children with IDs”. This part was divided into two sections. Section one was designed with questions focusing on parents’ experience with teachers’ prejudice in line with teachers’ gender towards their children with IDs. Teachers’ prejudice was explored in relation to teachers’ acts and comments, teachers’ labelling the children with IDs during class participation and assessment, separating the children with IDs from regular students, and teachers demonstrating lower educational expectations towards these children. Section two was designed with questions focusing on parents’ experience with peers’ prejudice towards their children with IDs. Peers’ prejudice was explored in relation to acts and comments of peers without IDs towards children with IDs, peers labelling the children with IDs during class participation and assessment, and peer bullying in general.

Part three was titled “Consequences of prejudice on children’s social-emotional development”. This part was designed with questions focusing on influence on children’s interpersonal concerns, such as reputation concern and a sense of relatedness, children’s loss of school belonging, children’s increased level of anxiety and depression, children’s loss of academic motivation, and children’s self-concept, including academic self-concept, self-esteem, and worth as a result of experiencing prejudice.

The questions in the data collection tool were piloted with a group of people who share similar characteristics with the research participants for this study to understand if the questions make sense. Understanding of the Bangla language that emerged from piloting was helpful to revise the questions before interviewing research participants.

3.6 Data Collection Method and Procedure

Data collection involved gathering in-depth data about parents’ perception using a formal and planned interview by making appointments with the parents, in other words, the research participants. This type of interview was little more than a casual conversation, as during the interviews, the researcher probed participants’ responses to enquire about teachers’ and peers’ prejudices.

The individual interviews that consisted of a one-time session with each participant in natural settings, i.e., in the school premises, ranged in length from 40 to 60 minutes. Before initiating an interview, the researcher sought consent from participants and built rapport and trust with participants to gain adequate responses. The interviews were facilitated by listening more and talking less, waiting for responses when participants were thinking, avoiding leading questions, using open-ended questions, helping them to be focused and asking for concrete details, asking follow-up questions, asking questions when the researcher did not understand participants’ views, and being non-judgmental about participants’ views and beliefs.

Data were collected following an audio recording of the interviews, which helped to gain a verbatim account of the interview sessions. Additionally, these tapes were convenient and reliable and ensured that the original data were available at any time. Before using audio-taped interviews, the recording machine and the batteries were checked carefully.

3.7 Data Management and Analysis

The qualitative data were managed following a few steps. These steps included writing dates (month, day, year) on all notes; sequencing all notes with labels (e.g., 6th set of notes); labeling notes according

to type (such as transcript from interviews); making two photocopies of all transcripts and retaining original copies; organizing computer files into folders according to data type and stages of analysis; making backup copies of all files; reading through data and making sure all information is complete and legible before proceeding to analysis and interpretation; and beginning to note themes and patterns that emerge.

Data analysis in this qualitative research involved summarizing data dependably and accurately. Given the narrative, descriptive and non-numerical nature of data, it was not possible to quickly reduce the data in a manageable form like quantitative data. The researcher's patience and reflective process were crucial to analyzing data during and after data collection.

During data collection, the researcher followed a series of steps and iterations: gathering data, examining data, comparing prior data to newer data, writing up field notes before going back to the research sites, and making plans to gather new data. After data collection, the researcher attempted to make sense of the data as a whole. The analysis is based on induction: the researcher started with a large set of data and sought to narrow it progressively into small and important groups of key data. From these data, meanings were constructed by identifying codes, themes and patterns.

Before starting data analysis, the transcripts were read and reread, and notes were written in margins and underlined sections that seemed important to the researcher. Additionally, because meaning is influenced by context, a comprehensive description of the participants was provided to convey the rich complexity of the research. Data were interpreted by asking questions, such as what is important in the data, why it is important, what can be learned from it, and so what. The analysis was extended by contextualizing findings in the literature.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Validity in this qualitative research was addressed by using trustworthiness and understanding. In other words, the researcher contributed to the trustworthiness and understanding by addressing: a) descriptive validity, which includes factual validity, in other words, writing accurately the quotations from participants; b) interpretive validity, in other words, valuing participants' perspectives; and c) evaluative validity, in other words, being objective enough to report the data in an unbiased way, without making judgements and evaluations of the data.

A few strategies were followed to ensure the validity of this qualitative research. Examples of the strategies include: talking less and listening a lot to think probing questions and to wait patiently for

the research participants to respond in order to enhance the trustworthiness of enquiries; beginning to write down the researcher's reflections in journals early to fill the blanks, for example, questions that were needed to ask the next day; reporting fully without being fearful of discrepant data; seeking feedback from the supervisor and external faculty during proposal and dissertation presentation about the research; and writing accurately by examining the language that was used in the research report communicate clearly. Additionally, the primary data in narrative accounts, in other words, all interview transcripts, were shown to the supervisor to let her see the data for themselves.

Reliability of the techniques used to gather data was taken into consideration. The researcher assumes that the qualitative data will be collected consistently if the same interview technique is utilized over time.

3.9 Ethical Issues

The researchers must adhere to ethical guidelines to ensure good research practices, including respect for participants, informed consent, conflict of interest, confidentiality, anonymity, reporting back, trustworthiness of research, and translation issues, while also considering the responsibilities of their audience, society, and academic communities (Mirza et al., 2023). Accordingly, the study prioritized all ethical considerations. Approval was taken to conduct this study from the academic committee of BRAC IED, BRAC University. Before collecting data, the researcher clearly explained the study's purpose, management, and consequences and obtained final assent and consent from the participants. The researcher maintained the interview protocol written in the approved guidelines and used the local dialect, and provided necessary explanations if needed. The researcher was careful about bias and beliefs and ensured equal participation. Participants' respect, dignity, and privacy were protected, and their right to withdraw at any moment was described. All the identities were kept confidential in the interview.

3.10 Limitations

- Parents concerned about sharing sensitive information regarding their children.
- Some parents exaggerated views of their child's development due to the researcher being their child's teacher.
- Certain questions on social-emotional bonding were avoided due to limited understanding.
- Despite high education levels, some parents had knowledge gaps about inclusive education.
- The research intended to identify training content for male and female teachers' capacity building,

given that previous research suggests that those with higher levels of prejudice towards IDs are men and older people compared to females and younger people who show lower levels of prejudice towards people with IDs (Marccone and Caputo, 2023). Despite the fact that the interview guideline addressed this aspect, it was not possible to explore the idea.

Chapter IV: Results/Findings & Discussion

Results/Findings

This research aimed to explore prejudices towards children with intellectual disabilities and their social-emotional development. In line with the research questions, the research findings are presented, grouping them into themes and sub-themes. The key three themes include: parents' perceptions of inclusive education, teachers' and peers' prejudice towards children with IDs, and consequences of prejudice on children's social-emotional development. The section begins with demographic information of the research participants.

4.1 Demographic Information

All nine female research participants aged 35 - 50 years were well aware of their child's needs and holistic development. They had either a girl or a boy child with IDs. All of them were graduates from different institutions, and four of them were working in non-government jobs. Among the four, three participants were doctors and 1 participant was the head of HR. The interviews were conducted in schools, which is a natural place for the parents because they visit the school for different purposes almost every school day. The school was located in Dhaka city, and it followed the Cambridge curriculum. The children of the selected parents have been studying in this school for the last three years. From the interview data sets, the following themes, sub-themes, and patterns have emerged.

Theme 1: Parents' perceptions of inclusive education

The first theme was intended to discover parents' perceptions and experiences with inclusive education.

1.1: Understanding of inclusive education. The findings revealed that parents held diverse understandings of inclusive education, ranging from basic notions of integration to more sophisticated conceptions that align with international definitions of inclusion. Regarding this, one of the parents said, *“Inclusive education means all children, regardless of abilities or disabilities, learn together in the same classroom. It values diversity, promotes equal opportunities, and ensures every child feels accepted, respected, and supported.”* Thus, parents' understanding demonstrated an in-depth grasp of inclusive education, emphasizing diversity, equity, and belongingness.

Parents also describe that in inclusive pre-schools, special needs children get scope for learning together with other neurotypical students, and the special needs children get support from special educators for learning and behavior management. Regarding this idea, a participant states, *“By inclusion, I understand that he will be in a regular school, will be with regular children, but the teachers will give him a little extra care...Then the teachers will try to work with him more closely and attentively.”* Thus, the participant describes inclusive education in terms of physical placement in a mainstream classroom with a greater focus on expectation towards teachers’ extra support and individualized care.

In line with this expectation, parents praised the teachers of an inclusive classroom by highlighting that, because all students learn together, children with IDs are supported by the teachers’ practice of reinforcement, forbearance, and alternate explanations. This idea is reflected in one parent’s voice as she said, *“Inclusive instruction means all students learn together in the same schoolroom. For some children who need more clip or learn otherwise, the instructor supplies excess reinforcement, forbearance, and alternate explanation to assist them to grok the same stuff.”* Thus, these parents’ descriptions illustrated that children with IDs are supported by teachers in schools.

1.2: The benefits of attending inclusive pre-schools

According to the research participants, inclusive education offers a variety of academic and social advantages for students with intellectual disabilities. For example, learning in inclusive settings can foster strong and meaningful relationships with peers without disabilities. According to a parent’s point of view, *“Inclusive schools offer immense benefits by fostering adequate opportunity, and making a supportive community. They let students with particular needs learn alongside their peers in the same schoolroom with individualized reinforcement, which helps in raising consciousness for everyone”.*

Parents also mention the benefits of attending inclusive preschools by stating that prejudice is not practiced in inclusive schools. According to one of the parents, *“Gratefully, I haven't seen that behavior. Today's teachers are knowledgeable and cognizant of these issues...teachers are now more knowledgeable and equipped to manage them.”*

This research shows the practice of integrating children with IDs with regular students, which is another benefit of attending inclusive pre-schools. Interestingly, some parents also mentioned that their children received additional after-school support sessions, creating a hybrid inclusion model: mainstream placement during school hours coupled with specialized interventions afterward. Parents

viewed this arrangement positively, as it balanced social integration with individualized skill development. While acknowledging the need for extra effort and resources, they highlighted that the mainstream classroom experience remained the most critical component in fostering belonging, resilience, and peer acceptance. One of the parents expressed her experience by saying, *“In my child’s school, they don’t separate children during regular classes. Sometimes, if behavior becomes an issue, they sit them in a corner for a while. Since my child requires extra support, after school hours, she attends additional separate classes.”*

Regarding the pre-school syllabus, parents underscored that many inclusive preschools prioritized the holistic development of children with IDs and they supported the school’s idea of not minimizing the syllabus for children with IDs. An example, such as *“No. Not even the syllabus has been minimized for these children, so it’s good. Sometimes it is very challenging for teachers, but it’s going well so far”* illustrates the opinion. These ideas align with de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert’s (2011) critique of deficit-based approaches, which often emphasize what children with disabilities cannot do. Instead, inclusive preschools in this study were perceived as promoting a strengths-based approach, cultivating resilience, social skills, and emotional security.

1.3 Pre-schools’ emphasis on social-emotional development and fostering well-being

According to parents, the pre-school places greater emphasis on social-emotional well-being of children with IDs than on strictly academic performance. They mostly appreciated the ways in which happiness and social adjustment of children with IDs are valued in the pre-school over the narrow academic benchmarks. As a parent said, *“Yes, sometimes teachers directly say that it is important that she is attending school, that she is mixing with other children. Don’t expect too much from education.”* Such meaning concerning the importance of social-emotional development is expressed by another parent, as she said, *“They focus more on her overall adjustment and happiness, rather than expecting academic achievement.”* By centering well-being, teachers contributed to children’s self-confidence and long-term adjustment, ensuring that inclusion was not merely symbolic but substantively beneficial.

Theme-2: Teachers’ and peers’ prejudice towards children with IDs.

Parents’ responses indicate that children with intellectual disabilities (IDs) often face prejudice and negative attitudes stemming both from teachers’ deficit-based perceptions and from peers’ stereotypical attitudes, which can hinder their social integration.

2.1 : Teachers displaying stereotypical views towards children with IDs

Despite the awareness that has been developed against prejudice towards children with IDs in schools, most parents mentioned that such prejudice exists largely. Regarding such prejudice, a parent shared her experience by saying, *“Yes, I’ve seen this. My kid’s instructor makes disconfirming remarks such as, she won’t be capable of doing it, and excludes her from participating”*. This remark indicates that children experience verbal abuse and social exclusion by teachers in inclusive pre-schools. Teachers’ attitudes and classroom practices thus reveal both implicit and explicit beliefs that students with intellectual disabilities (IDs) differ from their peers without disabilities.

2.2 Peers’ stereotypical views towards children with IDs

Students without intellectual disabilities often perceive classmates with IDs as kind but less competent. This perception leads to offering help in a patronizing way rather than fostering equal partnerships, which in turn creates greater social distance—such as reluctance to form friendships, collaborate in group activities, or spend time together outside class. A research participant mentioned the way children label a child with IDs. This labeling includes “special”, “special needs”, and “you cannot act with us”. For example, according to a parent,

Yes, sometimes children say things like she is special or she has special needs. They observe that she gets extra help from a teacher or cannot do certain tasks, so they say what they see. I don’t take this negatively, because they are just expressing what they notice (Interview, July 2025).

Similarly, another parent said how children with IDs are labeled and excluded from group activity by peers in school. According to the parent, *“Yes, I frequently see this. When a child with particular needs can’t keep up, the others frequently say that you can’t act with us and organize their own grouping alternatively.”*

Similarly, children’s acts and comments show that children with IDs are different from regular students. Peers’ behaviors and remarks often reveal the notion that children with IDs are not the same as their typically developing classmates, which can be considered as an obstacle to social inclusion. Parents are concerned about it because their child will be deprived through these actions. Pre-school students (KG-I, KG-II) sometimes show cooperative behavior, and sometimes they are trying to neglect children with IDs. Many parents observe that neurotypical students are trying to avoid them indirectly.

One of the parents expressed her frustration by saying, *“Not insult exactly she’s still very young, so it’s not in that sense. But she probably doesn’t realize she’s different; however, when they talk to me, I can tell they see her differently.”*

Additionally, during class participation and assessments, children with IDs are often labeled by peers in ways that emphasize their limitations rather than their strengths. Terms such as “slow,” “special,” or “different” are frequently used “when children without IDs observe a child with IDs getting extra help from a teacher or cannot do certain tasks, they say what they see”, which fosters negative stereotypes and reduces acceptance among classmates.

Theme 3: Consequences of prejudice on children’s social-emotional development

Prejudice and discrimination seriously undermines children’s emotional well-being, social confidence, and moral development.

3.1 Children’s sad feelings, low self-esteem, and low confidence as a result of experiencing prejudice.

Exclusion or discouragement in class often left children upset and questioning their worth. Regarding this idea, most of the participants said that their children are not capable of expressing their emotions and feelings properly, but sometimes their facial expressions showed that they are upset or feeling uncomfortable with exclusionary practices. As a parent said,

Umm, sometimes when he is discouraged from participating in the classroom, he gets upset. Of course, he talks about that, why I am not asked to participate, something like that. But it’s not always. So it’s something that they sometimes feel low confidence. So, when he sees other kids are encouraged to participate, it sometimes creates low self-esteem (Interview, July 2025).

3.2 Children’s loss of academic motivation as a result of experiencing prejudice.

Parents also reported that prejudice dampened their children’s motivation to learn and to continue schooling. Regarding this, a mother explained, *“When she is rebuked, her commitment drops. She cries and refuses to continue her schooling ... wholly closes down if she feels irritated.”*

3.3 Children's increased anxiety as a result of experiencing prejudice.

Parents' discussion indicates that children often displayed signs of anxiety when confronted with prejudice. Regarding this, a parent reflected as:

“Of course, this is harmful—because the way we understand children—that no, they don’t understand anything—that’s not the case. They are also human beings; maybe they can’t express, but negativity brings restlessness in them. They can understand that they are being looked at differently” (Interview, July 2025).

Another parent demonstrated worry about long-term consequences by saying, *“If he understands, in the future, it will surely affect him. This must be given attention to.”*

Overall, the findings reveal a dual reality of inclusive education. Parents widely recognized its value for promoting social-emotional development, particularly through peer interaction, teacher support, and an emphasis on holistic well-being. However, persistent prejudice from teachers and peers continues to undermine these benefits. Deficit-based expectations, labeling, and exclusion contribute to sadness, loss of motivation, and heightened anxiety among children with IDs.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings by comparing results with other studies done in the same field. More specifically, the section discusses the ways in which the three themes confirm the findings of other studies.

Theme 1: Parents' perceptions of inclusive education

Parents' understanding demonstrated an in-depth grasp of inclusive education, emphasizing diversity, equity, and belongingness. They broadly recognized inclusive education as a framework that supports not only learning but also emotional belonging and social participation. They also reflect a view of inclusion that combines integration with specialized support. In other words, parents also describe that in inclusive pre-schools, special needs children get scope for learning together with other neurotypical students, and the special needs children get support from special educators for learning and behavior management. They praised the teachers of an inclusive classroom by highlighting that, because all students learn together, children with IDs are supported by the teachers' practice of reinforcement, forbearance, and alternate explanations. Parents' emphasis on reinforcement, patience, and individualized explanation resonates with Avramidis and Norwich's (2002) views that illustrate that inclusion requires differentiated teaching approaches rather than "one-size-fits-all" instruction.

Parents consistently described inclusive preschools as valuable environments that foster both academic and social growth. They emphasized the role of inclusive classrooms in creating supportive communities, facilitating opportunities for peer interaction, and reducing stigma. Thus, parents perceived inclusion as a vehicle for normalization, whereby children with IDs could experience everyday school life alongside peers, rather than being confined to segregated special schools. This reflects Florian's (2008) critique that segregation not only limits learning opportunities but also reinforces stigma and marginalization.

Additionally, regarding segregation, previous research also suggests that the practice of separating children with intellectual disabilities (IDs) from their typically developing peers, often through special schools or resource classrooms, is rooted in the belief that these students require individualized support that mainstream classrooms cannot always provide (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2015). While such segregation may offer tailored instruction, critics argue that it reinforces stigma, limits social interaction, and restricts opportunities for inclusion (Florian, 2008). Research shows that separating

students with IDs can foster deficit views by emphasizing differences rather than capabilities, thereby hindering the development of positive peer relationships and a sense of belonging (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Inclusive education advocates highlight that segregation often perpetuates inequality and fails to prepare children with disabilities for participation in broader society (UNESCO, 2009).

Parents in this research reported that inclusive teachers were more knowledgeable about stigma reduction strategies and proactive in promoting equality. This finding echoes UNESCO's (2009) emphasis on teacher preparedness as a cornerstone of inclusive education. For many parents, the presence of trained teachers capable of balancing academic demands with social inclusion reassured them that their children's needs were being taken seriously.

Theme-2: Teachers' and peers' prejudice towards children with IDs.

In this research, parents' responses indicate that despite the awareness that has been developed against prejudice towards children with IDs in schools, most parents mentioned that such prejudice exists largely. In other words, in inclusive pre-schools, children with intellectual disabilities (IDs) often face prejudice and negative attitudes from both teachers and peers, which can hinder their social integration.

Parents' remark indicates that children experience verbal abuse and social exclusion by teachers in inclusive pre-schools. Teachers' attitudes and classroom practices reveal both implicit and explicit beliefs that students with intellectual disabilities (IDs) differ from their peers without disabilities. Consistent with these findings, previous research suggests that remarks that label these learners as "slow" or "special" reflect deficit-based perspectives that focus more on limitations than on strengths or potentials (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). Moreover, students with IDs are often excluded from higher-order discussions and problem-solving activities, reflecting lowered confidence in their abilities (Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010). In addition, subtle behaviors such as excluding them from complex questions, restricting them to simplified assignments, or offering excessive praise for basic achievements communicate lowered expectations (Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008).

Additionally, educators may provide simplified activities, lower academic demands, or assign separate seating for students with IDs, unintentionally reinforcing perceptions of difference (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Such practices reflect what Avramidis and Norwich (2002) identify as deficit-oriented assumptions, where children with disabilities are perceived as incapable of engaging in complex learning. Similarly, de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2011) note that over-praising for minimal

tasks may unintentionally reinforce stigmatization by signaling lowered expectations.

Teachers may hold lower expectations for students with IDs, sometimes perceiving them as less capable of achieving academically or socially, which can affect the quality of instruction and support provided (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Teachers often hold reduced expectations for students with intellectual disabilities (IDs), which affects the quality of instruction they receive. Research shows that educators frequently assign simplified tasks and reduced academic demands, assuming these students are incapable of handling complex work (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

Besides teachers, students without intellectual disabilities often perceive classmates with IDs as kind but less competent and label them as “special”, “special needs”, and “you cannot act with us”, “different”, and exclude them when forming small groups. Such labelling seems detrimental for fostering equal partnerships, but supportive for creating greater social distance, such as reluctance to form friendships, collaborate in group activities, or spend time together outside class. These experiences resonate with Nowicki’s (2006) findings that peers often perceive children with disabilities as kind but less competent, leading to unequal relationships.

Research indicates that students without disabilities may express stereotypes by calling them “slow” or “unable,” providing help that was not asked for, or excluding them from classroom tasks and social settings (Nowicki, 2006). Additionally, research suggests that labeling contributes to stigma, as students with IDs are perceived as less capable and are frequently excluded from group learning activities (Nowicki & Sandieson, 2002). These practices not only diminish the confidence and self-worth of learners with IDs but also reinforce social separation in the classroom environment (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2012).

Siperstein et al. (2007) found that labeling and exclusion hinder genuine friendships, creating subtle but powerful forms of social isolation. In other words, such actions and words contribute to a sense of distance, as students with IDs are regarded as kind but less capable, which results in supportive yet unequal relationships rather than genuine cooperation (Siperstein et al., 2007). Peers frequently refrain from forming close friendships with students with IDs, viewing them as outsiders in both academic and recreational activities (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2012). Labeling during evaluation situations may lead peers to form biased judgments, focusing more on the disability itself rather than the student’s actual abilities or performance (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

As de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2012) argue, peer acceptance is critical to the success of inclusion, and without it, children with IDs remain vulnerable to stigma. However, Peer prejudice is also common, as children with IDs are at higher risk of rejection, bullying, and social isolation compared to their non-disabled classmates (Koster et al., 2010). These prejudices not only limit opportunities for inclusion but also negatively influence the self-esteem and mental well-being of children with IDs.

Theme 3: Consequences of prejudice on children's social-emotional development

Prejudice faced by children with IDs had tangible consequences for their self-esteem, confidence, academic engagement, and emotional well-being.

According to the parents of this research, children with IDs experience sad feelings, low self-esteem, and low confidence due to their exposure to teacher and peer prejudice. This finding supports Maciver et al. (2018), who argue that children internalize negative stereotypes, eroding self-confidence. Similarly, Lindsay and McPherson (2012) highlight that stigmatizing school climates foster sadness and social withdrawal, while Guralnick (2010) shows that repeated discouragement undermines self-efficacy over time.

The present research also discovered that prejudice dampened their children's motivation to learn and to continue schooling. Consistent with this finding, the literature states that experiencing prejudice can substantially decrease children's motivation to learn by weakening their self-esteem, sense of inclusion, and belief in their own abilities. Children who face prejudice—whether based on disability, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background—may internalize negative stereotypes, lowering their confidence and persistence in academic tasks (Steele, 1997). This reflects Steele's (1997) theory of stereotype threat, where fear of confirming negative stereotypes undermines performance and persistence. Exclusion from classroom participation disrupts the sense of belonging essential for motivation, as emphasized by Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory. If such patterns persist, children risk long-term disengagement from education (Eccleston & Major, 2006).

Similarly, literature suggests that prejudice can trigger stereotype threat, where children worry about confirming negative expectations associated with their group, leading to stress and poorer academic outcomes (Aronson, 2004). Furthermore, exclusionary behaviors and attitudes from peers and teachers reduce children's feelings of connectedness in the classroom, an essential element for supporting intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Over time, these factors may result in academic

disengagement, reduced participation, and declining achievement (Eccleston & Major, 2006).

In the present research, parents' discussion indicates that children often displayed signs of anxiety when confronted with prejudice. These accounts echo Priest et al. (2010), who found that discrimination heightens stress and social fears in children, while Pascoe and Smart Richman (2009) argue that repeated prejudice erodes resilience and increases vulnerability to anxiety disorders.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore parents' perceptions of prejudices towards children with IDs at inclusive pre-schools and the consequences of such prejudices on children's social-emotional development. By interviewing parents, the research shows that while parents broadly value the benefits of inclusive pre-schools, specifically in line with strengthening children's social-emotional development, prejudice in inclusive pre-schools hinders the development of children's potential capacities, including the social-emotional development of children with IDs.

Parents value inclusive pre-schools and education because such education values diversity, promotes equal opportunities, and ensures every child feels accepted, respected, and supported. Additionally, all children, regardless of abilities and disabilities, can learn together in the same classroom, which fosters meaningful relationships among all children. Such a relationship supports the social development of children with IDs, helps them to adjust in different circumstances, and promotes happiness, which contributes to fostering emotional well-being. Despite these potentials of inclusive preschools, children with IDs are exposed to prejudice by teachers and experience verbal abuse and exclusion from participating in class activities. Additionally, prejudice of peers without IDs towards children with IDs results in a lack of acceptance of children with IDs and "peer victimization" in the form of labelling as different who lack abilities and are slow and less competent, which strengthens limitations instead of strengths, fosters stereotypes, and power imbalance among peers. Though there is evidence of peers treating children with IDs as kind, it is common that children without IDs intentionally avoid interacting with children with IDs and practice social exclusion by forming groups only with abled children. Consequently, greater social distance is fostered in schools, instead of strengthening equal partnerships between children with and without special needs.

As a result of such a school culture, where both teachers and peers nurture prejudice in the form of verbal abuse and social exclusion, children with IDs experience emotional distress in terms of feeling sad and increased anxiety in terms of being restless; develop low self-esteem and low confidence; and lose academic motivation. In a few instances, children also struggle to cope with the aversive situation that arises because of the exposure to prejudice by teachers and peers. In such cases, they adopt avoidance coping strategies by crying and refusing to continue schooling.

Thus, prejudice towards children with IDs, in turn, risks perpetuating the cycles of inequality and marginalization, undermining the purpose of inclusive education itself. Therefore, inclusive education

must move beyond tokenistic integration to become a truly transformative practice. Strengthening teacher training, raising parental awareness, sensitizing peers, and enforcing supportive policies are all essential steps. Schools must become spaces where diversity is celebrated, stereotypes are challenged, and every child is given the tools and respect needed to succeed.

This study thus underscores that inclusive education is not merely a legal obligation but a moral and social responsibility. By addressing prejudice and providing holistic support, schools can ensure that children with intellectual disabilities are not only present in classrooms but are also active, respected, and valued members of their learning communities. True inclusion lies in creating an environment where differences are not deficits but opportunities for unfolding human potentials and collective growth, and practicing compassion and shared humanity.

Recommendations

1. Enhancement of Peer Sensitization towards accepting and respecting diversity, including children with IDs, is instrumental because neurotypical students sometimes label their classmates with IDs as “slow” or “special,” or “cannot act with children without IDs,” or exclude them from group interactions. Given that such prejudice undermines social-emotional development and belongingness of children with IDs, inclusive pre-schools could initiate a range of programs, such as **Celebrating Diversity in Schools**, which means that schools could organize “Inclusion Weeks” where all children celebrate differences through art, music, and cultural events; **age-appropriate Awareness Campaigns** in the form of storytelling, role-plays, puppet-shows, and films to build compassion and understanding among children without IDs; **Buddy Programs** in which a child with IDs can be paired with a neurotypical “buddy” for group work, play, and daily support to foster the attitude of cooperation among children without IDs; **Cooperative Learning Models** which teachers can follow, and ensure that each member in group tasks contributes, and make every student’s role valuable; **Peer Leadership Training** for student councils or class leaders who could act as role models to promote kindness, compassion and prevent bullying towards children with IDs.

2. Capacity Building of teachers is crucial because teachers’ attitudes strongly influence the social-emotional development of children with IDs in inclusive pre-schools. Evidence from this study indicates that some teachers demonstrate prejudice by displaying verbal abuse or indirectly excluding children with IDs from participating in class activities. Hence, pre-service and in-service teacher

training should integrate modules on the purpose of inclusive education, teachers' and peers' prejudice towards children with IDs and its consequences on these children's social- emotional development, and strategies supportive of diminishing prejudices towards children with IDs in school settings and unconscious bias towards children without IDs. Additionally, experienced inclusive educators can mentor new teachers to provide hands-on guidance.

3. Research and Evaluation

Inclusive education must be evidence-based and continuously improved. Hence, inclusive pre- schools should promote **Action Research by teachers** to support teachers in documenting how prejudice towards children with IDs is practiced and eliminated in schools by deliberate efforts, in other words, effective strategies to eliminate prejudice towards these children. Additionally, **longitudinal research** by universities and research institutes should explore the long-term impact of teachers and peers without prejudice on children's social-emotional development in the context of Bangladesh. Furthermore, **qualitative research** in Bangladesh should also discover how parents can contribute to support inclusive pre-schools by sharing their concerns regarding the practice of prejudice with school management and the suggestions they offer to improve the practice. Besides these parents' aspects, qualitative research should also disseminate its learning about policy reviews regarding prejudice in inclusive pre-schools, in the sense that the government should revise policies every few years based on new evidence and stakeholder input.

In summary, strengthening inclusive education requires a multi-layered approach that involves parents, teachers, peers, policymakers, and communities. By addressing prejudices and building strong support systems, schools can transform from mere service providers to nurturing spaces where every child—regardless of ability—is valued, respected, and empowered to unfold human potentials.

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Appendices

Annex-A: Consent Form for Parents

Research Title: Prejudices towards Children with Intellectual Disabilities (IDs) at Inclusive Pre-schools and Its Consequences on Children's Social-emotional Development: A Study on Parents' Perception in Dhaka.

Researcher: Tahmina Tanmoy Tonu

Purpose of the research

I am conducting this research as a part of my master's degree requirement from the Institute of Educational Development (IED), BRAC University. This research aims to explore parents' perceptions about prejudices towards children with intellectual disabilities at inclusive pre-schools and their consequences on children's social-emotional development.

Expectation from you

If you agree, you will be expected to share your perceptions, views, and thoughts about prejudices towards very mild and moderate levels of children with intellectual disabilities at inclusive pre-schools and their consequences on children's social-emotional development. The interview may take 40 to 60 minutes, depending upon your response.

Risks and benefits

There is no risk to you for participating in this study, directly or indirectly. Parents, children, and policymakers may benefit in the future.

Privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality

All information collected from you will remain strictly confidential.

Future use of information

Some of the information collected from this study may be kept for future use. However, in such cases, information and data supplied to other researchers will not conflict or violate the maintenance of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of information identifying participants in any way.

Right not to participate and withdraw

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and you are the sole authority to decide for and against your participation in this study. Refusal to take part in the study will involve no penalty.

If you agree to my proposal of participating in my study, please indicate that by putting your signature in the specified space below.

Name of the Parents:

Name of the Researcher: Tahmina Tanmoy Tonu

Signature of the Parents:

Signature of the Researcher:

Thank you very much for your cooperation. For any further query, please contact me: 01629230376

Annex-B

Interview Guideline (Approximate Duration: 40-60 minutes)

Prejudices towards Children with Intellectual Disabilities (IDs) at Inclusive Pre-schools and Its Consequences on Children's Social-emotional Development: A Study on Parents' Perception in Dhaka

Name of the parent of girl child:

Name of the parents of boy child:

Part A: Parents' perceptions of inclusive education:

1. What is the meaning of inclusive education?
2. What are the benefits of attending inclusive schools for these children?

Part B: Teachers' and peers' prejudice towards children with IDs?

1. Do you have any experience with how teachers display stereotypical views towards your child? Pls explain.

1.1 Is there any evidence of teachers' acts and comments that show that children with IDs are different from regular students? Pls explain in line with the teacher's gender.

1.2 Is there any evidence of teachers labeling the children with IDs during class participation and assessment? Pls explain in line with the teacher's gender.

1.3 Is there any practice of separating the children with IDs from regular students? Pls explain in line with the teacher's gender.

1.4 Is there any evidence of teachers demonstrating lower educational expectations towards these children? Pls explain in line with the teacher's gender.

2. Do you have any experience with how peers display stereotypical views towards your child? Pls explain.

2.1 Is there any evidence of peers' acts and comments that show that children with IDs are different from regular students? Pls explain.

2.2 Is there any evidence of peers labelling the children with IDs during class participation and assessment? Pls explain

2.3 Is there any practice of peer bullying? Pls give examples.

Part C: Consequences of prejudice on children's social-emotional development

1. Is there any influence on children's interpersonal concerns, such as reputation concern and a sense of relatedness, as a result of experiencing prejudice? Pls explain

2. Is there any influence on children's loss of school belonging as a result of experiencing prejudice? Pls explain

3. Is there any influence on children's increased level of anxiety and depression as a result of experiencing prejudice? Pls explain

4. Is there any influence on children's loss of academic motivation as a result of experiencing prejudice? Pls explain

5. Is there any influence on the self-concept, including academic self-concept, self-esteem, and worth, among children who experienced prejudice? Pls explain.