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PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE SIBERIAN SCHOOL CASE

Inclusive education in the 21st century, as education for all children in the general classroom, is a global legal and moral imperative. However, the degree of real educational and societal inclusiveness increases slowly. The number of serious empirical studies on the parents' attitudes towards inclusive education is critically low, especially in Russia. The main research question of this article is: How do parents of children with disabilities and parents of normotypical children perceive inclusive changes in schools? The theory studies the attitude of parents to inclusion, the positions they take, i.e. parental involvement and parental participation, as well as their interaction and inter-relationships with the educational environment at the micro, meso, and macro levels. The empirical basis of the study was the results of a survey of 327 parents of students from one of the schools in the city of Tyumen. The study was conducted using the author's questionnaire, which included 33 indicators rated on a five-point Likert scale. The cluster analysis made it possible to divide the parents into five groups: supporters share the values of inclusive education (17%); observers (25 %) take a neutral position; antagonists (14%) oppose the promotion of ideas of inclusion in school; supervisors (21 %) are

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anxious because their child is studying in an inclusive school; skeptics (23 %) do not trust the ideas of inclusion. In general, parents rate the cooperation with the school quite highly, especially the interaction with the class teacher. The study showed that the quality of collaboration between the school and parents significantly determines parents' attitudes toward inclusive education. Parents are an underestimated resource in the development of inclusive education. The results can be used to develop programs aimed at involving parents in the development of inclusiveness, and improving the quality of communication between the school, teachers, and the parent community.

Keywords: inclusive education (IE); parents' attitude to inclusive education (IE), students with disabilities, students with special educational needs, inclusive culture, inclusive policy, inclusive practice, cooperation

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Promoting inclusion in education and involving all actors in the life of the school is one of the most important strategic objectives of education (UN 2006; UNESCO 2020; UNICEF 2014; FZ-273 2012). Given a choice between a mainstream and special school for a child with a disability, most parents choose mainstream school. Their hope and belief that the child will be socially involved and accepted by his or her peers prevails (Elkins 2003). For successful implementation of inclusive education (IE), positive attitudes are a key factor (Kos-tikova 2009; Schwab 2018). However, today there are critically few works devoted to the perception of IE by parents, especially in Russia (O'Connor et al. 2005). This is surprising since legislation defines parents' responsibility for their children's upbringing as their natural right. The history of IE shows that parents are the driving force behind the inclusive movement in many countries. Being one of the main participants in education, parents take the most active part in the upbringing and education of the child, contributing to the formation of his or her worldview (Antipkina 2017; Ogorodnova et al. 2022; Yarskaya-Smirnova, Loshakova 2003). Parents' subjective experience is a meaningful context for children's development, which in turn is determined by the socio-cultural space. Parents shape their children's childhood through the internalization of cultural schemes prevailing in society and school. Therefore, the global framework for inclusive education relies on the role of parents as active participants and partners in schools and communities and considers their positive attitudes towards IE as one of the key factors for its success (UNESCO 2021). The purpose of this study is to explore parents' attitudes towards inclusive school transformation processes and their satisfaction and involvement in these processes.

Parental involvement as a resource for inclusive education

Research on parental attitudes and perceptions of IE began in 1993 (de Boer et al. 2010). When entering the keywords 'parental attitude' and 'inclusive education,' the Web of Science Core Collection database yields 103 results with a total

of 942 citations for the period from 1993 to 2021. Of these, the largest number of articles was in 2019 and 2020 (18 and 19 publications, respectively), and the most cited publication (254 citations) was a literature review on parental attitudes to IE (Ibid). Clearly, the total number of papers over such a long period suggests that researchers have 'bypassed' parents as subjects of IE. At the same time, the considerable popularity of individual articles points to the demand for this topic.

Research on parental attitudes toward IE is informed by theories of parental involvement in children's education and school life. The parental involvement paradigm is primarily based on Bronfenbrenner's 4-level ecosystem theory of education (Bronfenbrenner 1979). There are many different levels of the environment that can influence a child's development, ranging from the people and institutions around them to the nationwide cultural forces (Ibid). In this model, parents are viewed as a significant element in the interactions at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the system that condition the successful development of children.

This approach was further developed in a model that specifies the factors (beliefs, self-efficacy, knowledge skills, education level, income, socioeconomic status) that determine the level of parental involvement in school environment and its outcomes (see Figure 1) (Hoover-Dempsey, Sandler 1995). This model has also been significantly influenced by Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

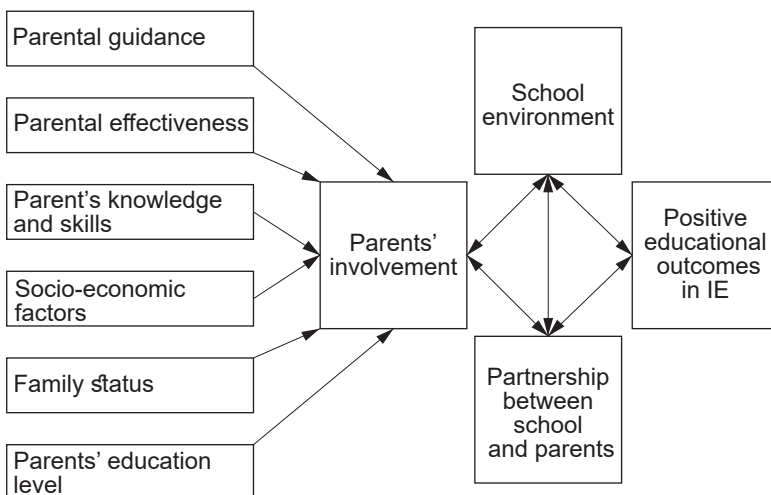


Figure 1. A conceptual framework for parental involvement in the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler school environment model

The choice of measurement tools is important in parental involvement research. Parental involvement is described by the synonymous, but distinguishable markers (participation, engagement, involvement) indicating the level/degree

of parental involvement. In the field of theoretical frameworks of parental involvement, Joyce Epstein's typology is widely recognized (Epstein 2001), who identified six types of parental involvement in children's education: nurturing, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and advocacy, and community collaboration. Studies based on this approach convincingly prove the importance of parental involvement in improving children's educational outcomes, motivation, socialization, their subjective well-being of friendly atmosphere, and school reputation (Antipkina 2017; Epstein, Sanders 2002; Jeynes 2003; 2005; Afolabi 2014; Fan, Chen 2001).

Studies of the modern model of intensive parenting, based on the paradigm of detocentrism, describe multidirectional psychological consequences (stress, guilt, satisfaction), which positively and negatively affect the subjective well-being of parents and their children, and attitudes towards inclusion (Basina 2021). One of the directions of research is the analysis of government policies that develop parental involvement. A good example is the case of the UK, where the government's strategy for parental involvement was first outlined in the 1997 White Paper 'Excellence in Schools,' which includes three elements (a) providing parents with information, (b) giving parents a voice, and (c) encouraging parental partnerships with schools. It has been implemented through a wide range of activities, including enhancing the role of PTA governors, participation in inspection processes, and reporting and providing information on the curriculum and performance of the school (Desforges, Abouchaar 2003). Similar initiatives have been adopted in the EU, Finland, Australia and other countries (Afolabi 2014).

For successful implementation of inclusion, positive attitudes towards IE and children with special educational needs (SEN) are key (Kukuev et al. 2021; Volosnikova et al. 2017; O'Connor et al. 2005). Attitudes are defined as a set of dispositions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Boer de et al. 2010). The social dimension of IE covers various aspects, such as the presence of positive contact/interaction between children with SEN and their classmates, acceptance by their classmates, social relationships/friendship between children with special needs and their classmates, and students' perception of being accepted in the classroom (Koster et al. 2009). The attitudes of parents of normotypical students play a key role here. Children form their attitudes by being guided by and adopting their parents' views (Katz, Chamiel 1989; Holden 1995; Hong et al. 2014).

Variables affecting parental attitudes toward IE are categorized as follows: 1) child/disability related variables; 2) resource (environment) related variables; 3) personality related variables, including age and gender, socioeconomic status, level of education, and experience of inclusion (Avramidis, Norwich 2002). This categorization is fully applicable to parents: the type and level of a child's disability influences parental attitudes toward IE and acceptance of children with SEN (Ibid; Paseka, Schwab 2020). Research on personality factors shows that female parents demonstrate more positive attitudes towards inclusion of children with special educational needs in the general classroom; the higher the

level of education and family income, the more positive the parents' attitudes towards IE; the experience of educating a child in an inclusive classroom is also a variable significantly contributing to positive parental attitudes towards inclusion (Leyser, Kirk 2007; Gasteiger-Klicpera, Klicper 2013).

Alongside attitudes, IE resources are seen as a key factor in influencing parental attitudes towards IE. They can be categorized into human resources, training materials, and special resources (Paseka, Schwab 2020; Rafferty, Boettcher 2001). The main factor driving parents' cautious attitudes toward IE is lack of resources. In 2019–2020, German parents' attitudes toward IE were measured through the lens of school resources: material resources, cooperation with parents, and inclusive teaching methods (Paseka, Schwab 2020). Studies have confirmed that the quality and intensity of cooperation with parents are significant factors in positive attitudes toward IE (Schwab et al. 2019; Brooke 2015). The new generation of 21st century parents is more critical of IE compared to the generation of parents of the 1990s because it is based on actual long-term practices rather than expectations (Paseka, Schwab 2020). Parents of normotypic children have more positive attitudes toward IE than parents of children with SEN. Both groups of parents consider social effects as the main effect of IE, while noting that it is associated with risks (Schwab 2018). The type of disability of the child influences attitudes towards IE (Paseka, Schwab 2020).

Parents demonstrate ambivalent attitudes toward IE, emphasizing not only the benefits but also the risks for their children, especially parents of children with SEN (Innes, Diamond 1999; Leyser, Kirk 2007; Gasteiger-Klicpera, Klicper 2013). Nevertheless, parents agree that IE benefits all children. Research has shown that 46% of parents surveyed agreed with the statement that the idea of inclusion is generally good. However, most parents are not prepared to invite a child with special needs to spend the night in their home (Boer de et al. 2010: 171; Palmer, Borthwick-Duffy 1998).

The analysis of the theoretical discourse allowed us to identify the underlying theories on which this study is based: the theory of parental involvement and the ecosystem theory of inclusive education, in which parents are the participants (active agents) of inclusive change.

Materials and methods

In our research, we rely on a broad understanding of special educational needs. This category includes children with disabilities, gifted children, and schoolchildren with disabilities.

The data for analysis were collected by the survey method in one of the schools of Tyumen. A total of 327 parents of pupils in grades 7–11 were interviewed. The majority of respondents, or 311 people (95,1%), were women, mothers of pupils. In comparison with men's answers, they more critically evaluate all indicators of satisfaction of relations with the school. Distribution

of the respondents by grades: 33,3% were parents of 7th graders, 26,6% were parents of 8th graders, and 19,6% were parents of 9th graders. Parents of 10th and 11th graders were less represented. The majority of families bring up two children (58,7%), 22,3% raise an only child, and 16,2% of families have three children. The majority of the respondents, or 272 parents (83,2%) have tertiary education, 45 (13,8%) have secondary vocational education, and 10 (3,1%) have secondary education. The share of parents who have children with SEN is 23 parents (7%).

Parents were surveyed using the author's methodology, including the following indicators: 1. Satisfaction with the quality of education and upbringing; 2. Satisfaction with interaction with teachers and administration; 3. Satisfaction with the child's relations with classmates; 4. Satisfaction with the child's safety level; 5. Satisfaction with the class teacher; 6. Satisfaction with participation in school activities. The questionnaire contained 33 indicators that the respondents were asked to rate on a five-point Likert scale. The exploratory factor analysis was performed in the space of assessed indicators, which allowed for reducing the dimensionality of the space under consideration to three factors: assessment of cooperation with parents, assessment of school infrastructure and organization of the educational process, and assessment of the school's implementation of inclusive policy. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0,952, indicating that factor analysis was appropriate. The total percentage of variance explained by the selected factors is 54%.

The first factor 'Assessment of cooperation with parents' has the highest informativeness and explains 24,3% of the total variance. The following indicators have the highest factor loadings: School teachers take note of parents' concerns and worries (0,733), School informs parents how to help their child at home (0,679), School explains to parents the benefits of inclusion for all children (0,675), and School informs parents about inclusive policies (0,663). The second factor 'Evaluation of school infrastructure and organization of the educational process' explains 15,7% of the total variance. The following indicators have the highest factor loadings: The school has created conditions for gifted children's education and their successful self-realization (0,706), The school has a good material and technical base (0,668), and In our school any student can find a suitable for him/her circle, section, club, and choose an interesting activity after lessons (0,633). The third factor 'Evaluation of school implementation of inclusive policy' explains 14% of the total variance. The following indicators have the highest factor loadings: At school, pupils with disabilities and SEN do not create problems for other pupils (0,751), Building an inclusive environment at school brings parents and teachers closer together (0,681), and Children, gaining experience of life in an inclusive environment, pass it on to their parents (0,636).

The quantitative values of the selected factors were obtained as arithmetic averages of the corresponding indicators. The obtained results were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software toolkit.

Results of the study

The analysis showed that all the respondents gave high scores to the factor 'Evaluation of cooperation with parents' (from 3,44 to 3,99), noting that the school is friendly towards parents and students and is in constant contact with them, informing them about the implemented activities in a timely manner. Parents of children with disabilities are more optimistic about the degree of cooperation between the school and parents, school infrastructure, and the implementation of inclusive policy (Fig. 2). The indicator 'Satisfaction with classroom management' (from cf. 4,17 to 4,47 out of 6,0) was rated highest by parents. According to Student's criterion for independent samples, the differences between parents of normotypical pupils and pupils with disabilities are statistically significant for all indicators ($p < 0,001$). Parents are least satisfied with children's participation in school activities (cf. 2,68–3,10 out of 6,0).

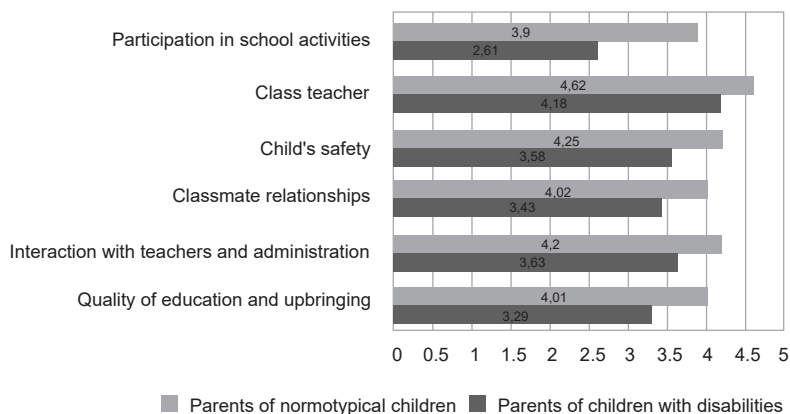


Figure 2. Average indicators of school satisfaction of parents of normotypical children and children with disabilities

The 'age dynamics' in parents' satisfaction with various indicators of students of different grades is registered. Parents of 9th graders rated as low as possible: Participation in school activities ($M=2,27$), Satisfaction with the quality of education and upbringing ($M=3,04$), and Satisfaction with the child's relations with classmates ($M=3,11$). At the same time, according to a one-factor analysis of variance, the class a child attends has a statistically significant effect only on Satisfaction with the child's relations with classmates ($p=0,008$) and Satisfaction with the child's safety level ($0,005$).

Parents of boys, as a rule, tend to give higher assessments of school performance. However, communication with classmates and teachers, especially in 10th and 11th grades, is rated more highly by parents of girls. Such data can be explained by the fact that girl pupils themselves are more oriented towards social approval; they are more communicative and actively involved in the social life of the school.

Cluster analysis in the space of selected factors of parents' attitudes towards IE allowed the identification of five groups of parents (Fig. 3). *Cluster 1* – IE supporters – included 56 parents (17,23 %), who highly evaluated the indicators of all three factors of attitude to IE at school (from 4,52 to 4,67 out of 5,0). Almost 40 % take part in inclusive activities of the school, including as organizers, and only 14 % are not involved in inclusive processes. At the same time, this group records the highest possible percentage of those who have a positive attitude towards their child's learning in an inclusive environment (87,5 %) and accept inclusive values (55 %). It can be said that these are the parents whose support and involvement help to create an overall inclusive school environment.

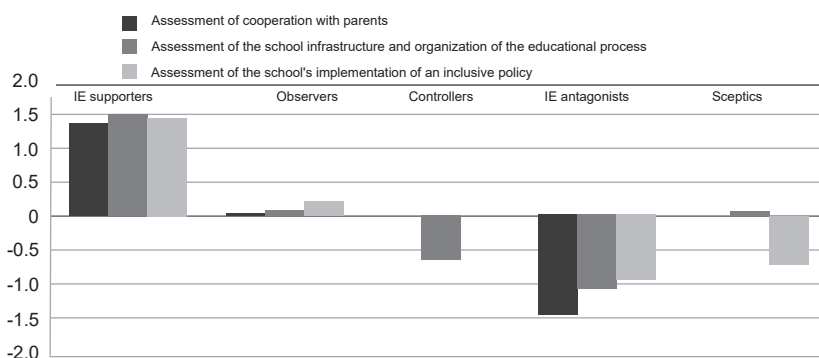


Figure 3. Profiles of respondents of different cluster groups in the space of attitudes towards IE

Cluster 2 – Observers – consisted of 80 parents (24,62 %), whose level of satisfaction with all factors of attitude towards IE was average. They rated the implementation of the school's inclusive policy more highly than the other factors (3,61 out of 5,0). Here, there are fewer of those who are involved in inclusion at school: 26 % are not involved at all, 24 % (19 people) participate in school activities but in a limited way, and two parents responded sincerely that they do not accept inclusive values and would not want their child to learn in an inclusive environment. In general, parents take an observant stance towards inclusion and show a neutral attitude towards it. Parents in this group are the most numerous and represent a reserve for educational work: their neutral position (65 % of parents find it difficult to answer the question about acceptance of inclusive values) indicates that they may be either 'for' or 'against'.

Cluster 3 – Controllers – included 68 parents (21 %), who showed an average level of satisfaction with the implementation of inclusive policy in school (3,45 out of 5,0) and cooperation of administration with parents (3,5 out of 5,0). This group includes not only parents who participate in school activities (28 %), but also those who are involved in organizing and planning activities (6 %) and even participate in

decision making (6%). At the same time, 18% do not accept inclusive values, 50% find it difficult to answer this question, 7% have a negative attitude towards their child being educated in an inclusive environment, and 34% are anxious. The active position of parents in this cluster can be explained by the need to control everything and to 'keep a hand on the pulse' in order to be able to protect their child.

Cluster 4 – IE antagonists – is the least numerous, 45 parents (13,85 %) rated all three factors lower than the average for the general population of the sample. These parents are least satisfied with the quality of the school's co-operation with parents (2,36 out of 5,0), school infrastructure (2,52 out of 5,0), and the implementation of inclusive policies (2,78 out of 5,0). About half of the parents (47 %) are informed about the existing programs and activities in the school, but 38 % are not yet involved in the inclusive events of the school. As many as 46,67 % of parents are anxious about their child learning in an inclusive environment and find it difficult to accept inclusive values. The parents who made up this group present the greatest difficulty in changing their attitudes towards IE. The reasons why they do not accept the values of inclusion are not clear and, therefore, this group needs to be targeted.

Cluster 5 – Skeptics – consisted of 76 parents (23,4%) who have the average level of satisfaction with school infrastructure and organization of educational process (3,49 out of 5,0). They are dissatisfied with the school's implementation of inclusive policy (2,96 out of 5,0). Here is the maximum number of those (30) who are not involved in the inclusive processes of the school. Only two (2,6%) are involved in organizing and planning activities, eight (10,5%) are involved in these activities, and only five (6,6%) are involved in decision making. In addition, 18 % of parents do not accept inclusive values, 16 % have negative attitudes towards inclusion, and 55 % are anxious. For parents in this cluster, the tipping point may be the process of incorporating their interests into the life of the school. Low levels of self-involvement may be associated with anxiety and mistrust of inclusion.

Thus, it can be said that the inclusive transformation of schools is being 'tested' today. Few parents truly share inclusive values and are actively involved in the implementation of inclusive school policies. One third of parents take the position of outside observers. About 14% of parents oppose the promotion of IE ideas in school, and 43% of parents are concerned about their child being educated in an inclusive environment, and try to determine and even adjust the inclusive policy of the school because they do not accept IE values. The involvement of parents in the participation, organization and planning of inclusive school events is associated with greater parental acceptance of IE values. Lack of, inadequate, or distorted information about the school's inclusive policies contributes to parents' anxiety about their children's well-being. At the same time, parents' participation in the implementation of the school's inclusive policies does not always mean that they accept the values of IE. The indicator 'Participation in school activities' received the lowest scores from parents. Our study emphasizes that the school still performs the tasks of preparing children, more likely performing the

functions of a social observatory, and does not work as a socio-cultural center that unites all the subjects of education. It is impossible to overestimate the institution of classroom management in the formation of a positive attitude of parents to IE. Our research shows that parents who do not receive sufficient and timely information about school events, who are not satisfied with class management and school-parent cooperation, become the antagonists of IE at school.

Discussion of findings and conclusion

Our findings correlate with other studies of factors influencing parental attitudes toward IE (Elkins, Kraayenoord 2003; Hong et al. 2014; Boer, Pijl 2010; Rafferty, Boettcher 2002). The study has two limitations: 1) it was conducted in a single school and the results cannot be extended to all parents in the region; and 2) the majority of parent participants in the study (95 %) were mothers. The findings also highlight the need for research in the framework of organizational psychology. At present, inclusion is mainly based on the human factor and is not implemented in the plane of system solutions and organizational conditions.

The study shows that parents are an undervalued resource in promoting inclusion. UNICEF guidance notes: 'Involving parents and communities is an important principle of quality inclusive education, both inside and outside the classroom' (FL 2012). Strengthening dialogue with parents can make them strong partners in the process of engaging all children in successful learning and socialization.

Abbreviations

IE – inclusive education; SEN – special educational needs

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