

Original Research Article

# Indonesian Inclusive Schools: Unravelling Parents' Hopes and Concerns for the Future of Children with Disabilities

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Inclusive education is a miniature society that prepares children with disabilities to live in society after their education. This study aimed to explore parents' experiences of expectations and worries in schools, hopes and concerns for the future of children with disabilities attending inclusive/mainstream schools.

**Methods:** Ten parents, representing primary, middle, and secondary school education levels with varying disabilities, were interviewed face-to-face using a semi-structured interview guide. This study uses reflexive thematic analysis to examine the research results.

**Results:** Five primary themes were examined: parents' strategies for addressing their expectations and concerns regarding education, and their hopes and concerns regarding the future. Sub-themes presented some parents' perspectives on children's development, third-party support, and parents' resilience efforts to overcome worries and concerns, subsequently building expectations and hopes.

**Conclusion:** Inclusive education can show a positive relationship between children, parents, teachers, school authorities, and policymakers. Parents have complex struggles when they send their children to inclusive/mainstreaming schools. Long-term support gives parents optimism and the ability to seek other resources both when the child is undergoing education and for their future. Meanwhile, low support from mainstreaming schools and/or severe disability conditions creates more anxiety and frustration for parent about the development of their child's education and future.

**Limitations:** Measuring parents' hopes, concerns, and strategies for sending their children to inclusive/mainstream schools with limited participants creates challenges for researchers. This research aims to describe social constructivism built from the experiences of parents who have children with disabilities, so it cannot be generalized. However, it would support transferability for further research that is more specific to the group of parents who had children with a common disability and or similar school level in another setting study.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education; parents' hopes and concerns; parents of children with disabilities; parents' strategies

**Editor:** Solomon Mekonnen

### Publication History:

Received: October 08, 2024

Accepted: November 16, 2024

Published: April 25, 2025

**Citation:** Yohanes Subasno, Martinus Irwan Yulius, Anselmus Samulia. Indonesian Inclusive Schools: Unravelling Parents' Hopes and Concerns for the Future of Children with Disabilities. *DCIDJ*. 2025, 36:1. doi.org/10.20372/dcidj.816

**Publisher:** University of Gondar

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## INTRODUCTION

Although the number of inclusive schools continues to grow alongside the development of new educational policies, children with disabilities still face significant barriers

in accessing equitable education opportunities (UNICEF Indonesia, 2023). These barriers are often rooted in systemic factors such as the limited number of inclusive schools that are genuinely prepared to accommodate children with special needs, insufficiently trained educators, inadequate infrastructure, and low levels of awareness among parents and communities (Pratiwi, 2015). As access to special education institutions remains limited, inclusive schools are frequently positioned as the most viable alternative for children with disabilities. However, this perspective often reinforces the implicit notion that children with disabilities are better served in segregated settings rather than within mainstream education. Such assumptions risk undermining the very principles of inclusion (Natadireja et al., 2023; Tugiah & Trisoni, 2022). Furthermore, inconsistencies between national regulations such as the Ministry of Education Regulation No. 70/2009 on Inclusive Education and Law No. 8/2016 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reflect a lack of policy integration, which contributes to confusion and unequal implementation at the school level (Anggraini et al., 2022). The national initiative promoting child-friendly schools, intended as a benchmark for child-friendly cities, also poses practical challenges for educational institutions, particularly in creating learning environments that are genuinely inclusive and safe for all learners. A case study conducted in Malang highlights these challenges, revealing that both inclusive and mainstream schools struggle to provide appropriate support not only for teachers but also, and most critically, for children with disabilities and their families who seek equitable access to quality education.

#### **The role of parents of children with disabilities in education**

A growing body of research underscores the critical role of parental involvement in the educational development of children with disabilities. While educators and schools serve as the primary facilitators of learning, the consistent engagement of parents is widely recognized as a key determinant of academic and developmental success for these children (Elmira & Negmatzhan, 2022; Novitasari et al., 2023). Nevertheless, studies reveal that many parents remain unaware of the significance of their involvement or are uncertain about how to effectively support their children's learning processes (Pratiwi, 2015; Tugiah & Trisoni, 2022). These studies, however, often stop short of investigating the underlying causes of this lack of awareness. Parental participation is shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including economic constraints, prevailing parenting norms, and the severity of the child's disability (Logan et al., 2023). In contexts where systemic or institutional challenges arise, parents are expected to advocate for their children's rights; however, many are reluctant to do so, particularly when such advocacy appears to contradict official policies or institutional authority (Mann et al., 2024). In Indonesia, cultural and religious traditions further complicate this dynamic. Deeply rooted Asian values and religious beliefs often position teachers as authoritative figures who should not be questioned, influencing parental behavior and engagement in school settings (Arifin, 2021; Yasin et al., 2023). For example, the Javanese philosophical concept of *'nrima ing pandum'* which encourages individuals to accept one's circumstances as part of divine will—can lead to passive acceptance rather than proactive advocacy (Mutia et al., 2023; Rakhmawati, 2022). Such cultural influences highlight the need for more context-sensitive approaches to fostering meaningful parental involvement in inclusive education.

#### **The Impact of Inclusive Education on Parents' Psychological Condition**

Inclusive education is widely perceived by parents as a promising avenue to fulfill the fundamental right to education for every child, including those with disabilities. It represents a hope that their children will have the opportunity to develop, learn, and grow alongside their typically developing peers (Jesslin & Kurniawati, 2020; Nur & Jafar, 2022). Meaningful collaboration and sustained support between schools and parents are critical in reinforcing these parental expectations both regarding the quality of education in

inclusive settings and the long-term prospects of their children (Heryati et al., 2019; Logan et al., 2023; Mann et al., 2024; Novitasari et al., 2023; Novriani et al., 2023). Despite these positive aspirations, parents often encounter significant social and legal obstacles when navigating the realities of inclusive education systems (Logan et al., 2023; Mann et al., 2024). One of the most pressing concerns involves the vulnerability of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, particularly in relation to peer bullying and exclusion, which not only undermines their right to a safe learning environment but also heightens parental anxiety (Subasno et al., 2023). The interplay of hope and fear, shaped by both the potential and the risks of inclusive education, profoundly influences how parents conceptualize the educational journey of their children with disabilities. This emotional and cognitive tension forms the central focus of the present study.

## OBJECTIVE

Inclusive education represents a critical dimension in the pursuit of equitable development and future opportunities for children with disabilities, affirming their right to be educated alongside their peers without disabilities. This study aims to investigate the lived experiences of parents whose children with disabilities are enrolled in inclusive or mainstream educational settings. Specifically, it explores how these parents perceive their children's developmental progress within such environments and the nature of the support provided by schools. The findings shed light on recurring themes related to parental expectations, anxieties, and the adaptive strategies they employ to navigate the complex interplay between hope and concern as their children engage with inclusive education systems.

## METHOD

### Study Setting

This study was conducted in the Greater Malang area, which comprises Malang City, Batu City, and Malang Regency, located in East Java Province, Indonesia. Among these regions, Malang City has positioned itself as a pioneer in inclusive education, having officially declared its commitment to this model ahead of the surrounding jurisdictions (Pemerintah Kota Malang, 2012). The local government has emphasized that no educational institution is permitted to reject students on the basis of disability. Within this context, two distinct types of schools can be identified: (1) inclusive schools, which provide special education teachers (also known as shadow teachers) with additional costs typically borne by parents, and (2) mainstream schools, which may accept children with disabilities but require families, particularly in cases of severe disability, to independently arrange for support personnel. Despite these policy declarations, reliable and comprehensive data remain limited. The Working Group of Special Assistance Teachers in Malang City has not yet compiled detailed statistics on the number of inclusive or mainstream schools, nor on the population of students with disabilities currently enrolled in those schools. Furthermore, data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) recorded 2,638 persons with disabilities in Malang City in 2021; however, this figure lacks disaggregation by age, gender, educational level, or other relevant demographic and educational variables (BPS Kota Malang, 2023). This data gap presents a challenge for the effective planning and evaluation of inclusive education initiatives in the region.

### Study Participants

Participants in this study were selected using purposeful sampling techniques, as recommended for qualitative research aiming to gain in-depth insights from information-rich cases (Creswell, 2015; Galloway, 2005). The researchers identified potential participants through personal networks involving parents of children with special needs

enrolled in inclusive or mainstream schools, as well as through referrals from the Special Assistance Teacher Working Group and the District Parent Support Group. Out of the 15 individuals contacted—either directly by the research team or via intermediaries such as teachers and parent group representatives—a total of 10 parents, each representing a different school in Malang City, consented to participate in the study.

This sample size is consistent with established qualitative research standards and was deemed sufficient to reach data saturation, a point at which no new themes or insights were emerging from additional interviews (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The diversity of school settings and family backgrounds among the participants further contributed to the richness and depth of the data collected.

Participant's inclusion criteria:

1. Participants were parents of children with disabilities attending inclusive/mainstream schools in the Greater Malang.
2. Many types of children's disabilities
3. Their children attended school from primary, middle, and secondary/vocational school.

### Data Collection

This study adopted a social constructivist approach to guide the data collection process. Rooted in Vygotsky's theory, social constructivism emphasizes how individuals actively construct knowledge through interactions within their sociocultural environment (Davis et al., 2017). In this context, the lived experiences of parents whose children with disabilities attend inclusive or mainstream schools served as the central source of data. To capture these experiences, the researchers conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes each. All interviews were conducted face-to-face to foster trust and allow for a more nuanced exploration of participants' narratives. Prior to each interview, the researcher introduced themselves, explained the purpose and scope of the research, and provided participants with a brief proposal summary outlining issues of confidentiality, anonymity, and participants' rights. Participants were given sufficient time to review this information and to ask questions before signing the informed consent form. The interviews were initiated using open-ended questions designed to elicit reflective and personal responses. The core guiding questions included:

1. Could you describe the forms of support and the challenges your child encounters in inclusive or mainstream schools, as well as your own experiences as a parent?
2. What are your expectations and concerns regarding your child's education in inclusive or mainstream settings?
3. What are your hopes and anxieties concerning your child's future?

These questions were designed to explore the dualities of hope and worry that characterize the parental experience in inclusive educational environments, aligning with the study's overarching aim to understand the emotional and practical dynamics that shape parental perspectives.

### Data Analysis

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) as the primary method for processing and interpreting the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012; Byrne, 2022). The RTA approach was selected for its alignment with the study's constructivist epistemology, which emphasizes the co-construction of meaning between researchers and participants. Following the data collection phase, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and carefully reviewed by the researcher. The analysis process began with initial coding, where segments of the data relevant to the research questions were identified and labeled. These codes emerged inductively, grounded in the

participants' narratives, and were subsequently organized into overarching themes through a process of critical reflection. In accordance with the reflexive nature of the analysis, the researcher's subjectivity was acknowledged as an essential component of meaning-making. Rather than relying on a predefined codebook or seeking inter-rater consensus, the researcher engaged in an iterative and interpretive process that prioritized the depth and richness of participants' lived experiences. This approach allowed for flexible and evolving theme development, reflecting the diverse and nuanced perspectives of parents of children with disabilities in Malang City. The thematic findings are presented and discussed narratively, situated within the broader sociocultural context of inclusive education in Indonesia. The transparency of the analytical process enables critical engagement and opens the findings to further dialogue, ensuring both rigor and reflexivity in the interpretation of results.

### Ethics Approval

This study received ethical clearance from the Research and Community Service Unit (UPPM) of STP-IPI Malang, in accordance with the institution's Research Implementation Guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). Ethical standards were rigorously upheld throughout the research process to ensure the protection and dignity of all participants. First, informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to data collection. Participants were provided with clear and comprehensive information regarding the study's aims, methodology, potential benefits, and any foreseeable risks. They were given adequate time to consider their involvement before signing the informed consent form. Second, confidentiality and privacy were strictly maintained. All personal identifiers were anonymized in the transcripts and final report to ensure that individual participants could not be identified. Data was stored securely and used solely for academic purposes. Finally, participants were informed of their rights, including the right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any form of penalty or adverse consequence. These measures reflect the researcher's commitment to upholding ethical research practices in line with national and institutional standards.

**Table 1.** Informants' Socio-demographic

Characteristic	Range Group	Total	Percentage
Sex	Female	9	90%
	Male	1	10%
Disability	physical disability	1	10%
	non-disability	9	90%
Age group	30-40 (years old)	3	30%
	41-50 (years old)	5	50%
	51-60 (years old)	2	20%
Ethnic	Javanese	10	100%
	Others	0	0
Religion	Islam	9	90%
	Catholic	1	10%
Education	Secondary	7	70%
	Undergraduate Degree	3	30%
Employment	Housewife	5	50%
	Home-based Businesses	3	30%
	Freelancer	1	10%
	Civil servant	1	10%
Children's Disability	Hereditary	1	10%
	Non-Hereditary	9	90%
Children's Education	State School	6	60%

	Private School	4	40%
Children’s Grade Educational	Primary school (1 – 6 grade),	4	40%
	Middle school (7 – 9 grade),	3	30%
	Secondary school (10 – 12 grade)	2	20%
	Vocational school (10 – 12 grade)	1	10%
Number of Children	1	1	10%
	≥ 2	9	90%

**Table 2.** Parent’s Information

Code	Sex	Role in School for Their Child	Child’s Disability	School	Grade
P1	Female	Shadow teacher until 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	Asperger	Islamic inclusive school	3 <sup>rd</sup>
P2	Female	Shadow teacher until now	Low Vision	Inclusive school	6 <sup>th</sup>
P3	Female	Assisting if needed until 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Physical	Islamic mainstream school	8 <sup>th</sup>
P4	Male	-	Learning	Mainstream school	9 <sup>th</sup>
P5	Female	Assisting if needed until 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Physical	Mainstream school	11 <sup>th</sup>
P6	Female	Assisting if needed until 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Learning	Inclusive vocational school	12 <sup>th</sup>
P7	Female	-	Hearing, Slow-learner, and Epilepsy (3 years)	Islamic mainstream school	12 <sup>th</sup>
P8	Female	-	Hearing	Islamic inclusive school	4 <sup>th</sup>
P9	Female	-	Hearing	Mainstream school	4 <sup>th</sup>
P10	Female	-	Autism	Mainstream school	8 <sup>th</sup>

**Table 3:** The result of reflexive thematic analysis

Theme	Sub-theme
Parents' expectations of their child in education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social (religion) and academic development</li> <li>• Availability of a safe school environment</li> <li>• The child is socially acceptable</li> <li>• Independent</li> </ul>
Parents' hopes for their child's future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting a decent job</li> <li>• Achieving goals</li> </ul>
Parents' worries for their child during education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social acceptance from peers (bullying, abuse)</li> <li>• Teachers' ability to handle children with disabilities</li> <li>• School support</li> <li>• Financial support</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> </ul>
Parents' concerns in the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unable to get a job</li> <li>• Living alone</li> </ul>
Parents' strategies to deal with their worries and concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase self-optimism, motivate and assist children</li> <li>• Increase children's independence</li> <li>• Seek the help of a third-party; teacher or parent support</li> <li>• Resignation to the God/pray and not having high expectations</li> <li>• Deliver the expectations to siblings without disability</li> </ul>

**Parents' expectations during education**

Parents whose children have disabilities, but not serious behavioural or cognitive problems are optimistic and supportive of their children's development. They even make sure that teachers at school respect their children.

"I saw, oh he has talent, right, he can sing, can perform. Then he was confident." (P1)

"My child should get a better education." (P4)

"I honestly informed the teachers that my son has a physical disability but otherwise performs well (good grades in academics)." (P5)

Parents always strive to ensure their children are in the right school environment. In schools labelled as inclusive, the expectations of support from the school and teachers are stronger than in mainstream schools that are willing to accept children with special needs. This also applies to regular schools with few students. Even if, parents should pay additional fees.

"For my son, the teacher focuses on (changes in) behaviour.... and later for the lessons, at home too. ... the teacher also supports the lessons." (P1)

"Fortunately, the teachers here know, if she's not in the mood, she can't be forced. I get permission to go home." (P2)

Expert teacher who acts like a parent. The additional fees are reasonable for the student's needs, providing parents with peace of mind. I believe it is running well and remains monitored." (P6)

"(the teacher and his friends) are okay to accept my son." (P7)

"Even though she is deaf, she must learn and pursue knowledge and religion." (P8)

"I hope she can be more enthusiastic, better. Can take the lessons." (P9)

Stories of acceptance of children with disabilities in previous classes or schools continue to lead parents to hope that their child's environment is discrimination-free. Parents' perspective is a good social environment also encourages their child's courage and independence.

"There is a change, he is more interacting with his friends. Perhaps it is because there is a role of the teacher who can bring students to mingle, and the students too (want to interact with my son)." (P3).

"His friends accepted him, even awarding his helper a prize. In high school, his friends (and teacher) continued to support him, guiding and helping him to various events. He has become independent, without parental assistance." (P5).

"I hope she doesn't feel inferior when he hangs out with her friends" (P8)

"(children with disabilities) are embraced... So, no special treatment, no specific treatment, but don't make the environment being uncomfortable. that's all." (P10)

### Parents' hopes for their child's future

Parents who have sent their children to junior high or high school or are critical of their children's development can more clearly describe their hopes and expectations for their children's future. They want their children to be independent, continue their higher education, get a decent job, or achieve whatever ideals their children hope for. Education is an important thing to change their future.

"I just think his future has to be bright someday. ... So, maybe his college will be in the language department or something, later. It's a long way off, but it's starting to appear. So, maybe he'll take a course or tutoring, later." (P1, housewife)

"I said, this child must be independent. Don't be demanded (her academic achievement)" (P2, housewife)

"He wants to be a preacher. Yes, Mom can only pray, I said, I hope what you want you to pursue, and I said may Allah answer." (P3, home-based industry)

“Can be independent... or self-employed. Can fulfil their own needs. So, that children do not depend on others. The only way is with this education. There's nothing else.” (P4, home-based industry)

“If he can prove that even though he's like this (has a disability), he can be (compared) to a normal child. He can go to college, and after college, he can work like a normal child.” (P5, housewife)

“So, for the time being, the hope is that there will be skills that can help her to be independent in the future.” (P6, freelancer)

“In terms of work, maybe he can open (and develop) his (our) own business ...; I am an online worker. I'm also disabled, so I can't work outside.” (P7, female with a disability)

“I hope she can work or can get a job or what is the term can face challenges in the future” (P8, civil servant)

“I hope she can continue her (higher) education like ordinary children. Right now, there are a lot of successful children with disabilities, right?” (P9, housewife)

“If it's academic, I won't pursue it. ... he can work or make it happen, yes, what is it called, his dream is to work, have his own business.” (P10, housewife)

### Parents' worries about their children's education

In line with parents' main expectation in school of better social relationships for children with disabilities, ostracization, and bullying are major worries. Although parents ensure the social environment is safe for children with disabilities to get involved in school, previous classroom or school bullying to their children's experiences and news of peer bullying in some schools fuelled these traumas. 4 participants said that their children had been bullied. The potential for state schools to be unsafe for children with disabilities tends to be higher, 3 out of 4 students with disabilities who have experienced bullying in mainstream schools, attend state schools.

“I'm afraid of adults too. I'm afraid there will be bullying (to my son). But so far nothing.” (P1, her son in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade)

“At home, if (at school) there are ignorant friends, when I ask my son, He doesn't want to answer. He sleeps all day. He doesn't want to communicate.” (P3, her son in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, had been bullied in private primary school and had shadow teacher)

“(Worried) because he doesn't know where the place is. Because he never goes out to interact. Once, he got his lunch (box) kicked (by his friends). Only one time. 8<sup>th</sup> grade.” (P4, his son in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, had been bullied in 8<sup>th</sup> grade state middle school)

“(Primary School) His friends. Some were willing to accept him, some weren't. The problem is that nowadays there is a lot of bullying, how, well ... But my son, how, well... my son wants to be more advanced. you know.” (P5, her son in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, had been bullied in state primary school and had shadow teacher)

“I'm afraid of being bullied. My child won't be able to think and learn.” (P6, her son in 12<sup>th</sup> grade)

“Yes, I was worried about bullying at school, but I saw that since kindergarten (till now), all her friends were nice.” (P9, her daughter in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, had been (feel) intimidated in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade when her friends (accidentally) knew she used hearing aid under a headscarf, state primary school, now the girl often do not attend class)

“In 7<sup>th</sup> grade, there was no problem, he was comfortable. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade, ... XY pulled his shirt. Then his friend told my son to date the girl. His friend said my son will be ganged up on” (P10, her son in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, had been bullied in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, state middle school).

Parents in inclusion schools are more likely to evaluate their child's development than parents in mainstream schools. Moreover, the presence of limited special teachers,



the competency of class teachers to assist children with disabilities, and the capacity of parents as shadow teachers also cause long-term anxiety and fatigue in inclusive schools, especially for mainstreaming schools that don't have proper support. This problem also affects parents with insufficient to pay for a shadow teacher while the children need special assistance at the state school.

"Previously in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, I was in the same class. But since the end, (I realize) why am I the one who goes to school?" (P1, private inclusive school)

"I mean, the teachers are also not specifically assisting children with special needs. So, well, sometimes we are confused. My child has little concentration, well. If she doesn't want to learn, she can't be forced. So, yes sometimes (I) get tired too. I also can't force her; there are times when I am down, well." (P2, state mainstreaming school)

"Private (special schools near house) and the fees are expensive. ... Entry in secondary school inclusion is different. The fees are different from the regular (students). But parents have a sense of calm; (the children) are supervised." (P6)

"Now, I'm also tired. Parenting, taking care of that child, that one. Not to mention the other one, the other one is disabled, the other one is small, home affairs, and then I'm tired so I'm not organised." (P7, female with a disability)

"I heard and felt it hurt, what it, the language (used by the class teacher) was more towards being impatient. ... I heard it outside the fence (quietly). Hey, why is it like this (accompanying a child with disabilities). (But) where can I confide in, because I have been placed in this (school). ... If I want to move (to another school), I also have to provide special assistance teachers who... the price (must be paid) for one month is also quite expensive." (P10, mainstreaming school)

Parents who have children with little barriers caused by their disability also have anxiety while they are leaving their children in school. Parents worry that if something happens to their children under certain conditions, there are no friends or teachers to help or protect them, especially for (teenage) girls.

"If you are worried, you are still worried. Children with physical limitations, afraid. Maybe falling afraid that no one will help." (P3, female)

"I expressed my concerns about the internship requirements to the teacher. I worried that the work environment wouldn't be fully inclusive and that the teacher wouldn't be able to monitor her closely during the internship. As my child is a girl, I fear potential negative experiences." (P6, female)

For parents who have children with physical disabilities, accessibility is an issue that needs to be considered when choosing and/or mobility at school.

"My son uses a wheelchair there, so if his mobility is obstructed or it is difficult for him to mobile..." (P3)

"I'm afraid my child will go to the bathroom. Then he wants to pray, he wants to do activities. ... I'm looking for a school (for my son), not a multi-storey building." (P5)

### Parents' concerns in the future

Parents' anxiety about their children's future tends to increase when their children are about to end their school years. Parents who want their children to be independent in society also have high concerns. Especially when the types of disability require full assistance to carry out activities or they do not have siblings.

"My husband said, our child is an only child. Poor, (alone) has no siblings." (P1, female)

"(If) I demand academics, but she doesn't have the independence. I'm afraid that later, where will she work? She can't take care of herself yet (starting to cry). I don't

always accompany her to that point, well... I don't insist that her education must be this, this, no. Because I know what are my daughter's limits (crying)." (P2, female)

"Many graduates of this vocational school who are inclusive students are also accepted in certain hotels, which accept children with disabilities. But, what kind of disability? Won't my child get in? That's still the case. Concern." (P6, female; child with learning disability 12<sup>th</sup> grade, state vocational school)

"I'm afraid, my son won't be able to work in the future. There will be no job opportunities. I'm afraid. The matter is, he can't work with a hard job. He also (started) having seizures (epilepsy) in 9<sup>th</sup> grade in middle school." (P7, female with disability)

"my daughter is, oh, she's so lazy. (can she want to continue education)" (P9)

"(I afraid) I can't accompany him until he is an adult." (P10)

### Parents' strategies for dealing with worries and concerns

Parents often face more challenges in caring for children with disabilities. Some parents revealed that they had tried to think positively, motivate their children not to socially withdraw and dare to face situations in their environment, educate them to avoid bullying, assist their children in increasing their potential and monitor their social interactions. Some parents hold on to their optimism that their children's abilities will continue to develop during their education.

"But I'm sure he has the potential that he will be able to develop in the future. ... Maybe one day he can be a successful person. I'm sure. You can't think about the bad things. Because I'm afraid it will happen. So, I think good things, he can do it." (P1, female)

"We try to adjust to the child with a disability (to the lessons and school conditions because not every teacher understands about the child with a disability). Then I also train her to be independent (for daily activities)." (P2, female)

"If someone is fighting, you avoid it. Tell the teacher. ...; I tell my son that he must know how to defend himself and carry himself. To that person not be ignorant and mean." (P3, female)

"I told my son that he needs to be self-reliant and not hold grudges against those who don't like him. He should always show good manners at school. As for future concerns, I see this as an ongoing educational process, and I hope my son will become more advanced through it." (P4, male)

"Yeah whatever, we'll just follow you, we said that. The important thing is that we support everything he wants." (P5, female)

"My daughter, although she has a disability. Same as her older sister, who is normal. From their childhood, I taught her to always tell everything she did that day (in school)." (P6, female)

When parents encounter challenges in their children's education, their first point of contact is typically the teacher. Establishing good communication with teachers enables parents to make informed decisions regarding their child's education. Furthermore, teachers can offer support in addressing issues faced by students with disabilities, fostering their potential, and facilitating the development of positive social skills in each child.

"I explained the situation ... then they was prepared to handle such children at 'M' (inclusive) school. My son was the first child with special needs to enrol there. ... If we told the teacher, well (the teacher) immediately responded (to handle the bullying experienced by my child)." (P4, male)

"(When he was little, I asked my son's therapist at "Q" special school), Sir, how much does it cost here? (He answered) It's a bit expensive here. This child is fine. It's just physical disability. Try a state primary school. He said that. I asked again, "Will he

be accepted, Sir?" God willing, he will be accepted, Ma'am (he answered). If he's not accepted, just come here." (P5, female)

"My daughter doesn't need a shadow teacher. So, I just need, what, well. Yes, I talked to her teacher to save my daughter from bullying (if any) from her friends." (P6, female)

"Starting from class, in the first grade, I asked how your friends, whether they were good or not." (P9)

Parent support groups in each sub-district in Malang City are also one of the stakeholders who are a source for parents to overcome anxiety about their children's future. Information on skills training or business development obtained from the local/province Social Services, CSR, or other institutions for people with disabilities is provided through parent support groups. This can encourage parents' hopes to start integrating children with disabilities into productive communities after school.

"So, my plan is, later when she graduates, InshaAllah, through the parent support group, I want to include her in skill training so that (it can be) provision (for her future)." (P6, female)

Religious and/or cultural values are held firmly by parents as the foundation of their lives to continue to grow with their children. They express an attitude of resignation to the path of life that God has given to their family or children. By not having high expectations for children with disabilities, parents can reduce excessive worries about education and concerns future of children with disabilities.

"I saw on social media, those studies (Tausyiah – forums for teachings of religion), that people with disabilities are special. They can help us in heaven and so on. So that's what makes me strong too." (P1, Islamic primary inclusive school)

"I can't ask for more. Because I also see the condition (his condition), right? ...; In my (religion), I am taught, I pray, (I convey) to God, I entrust my child to my God." (P3, Islamic middle mainstreaming school)

"It's okay if we (get) God's temptation like this, its fine. Just be grateful. Children are just a gift from God. What else can I do? If it's about work, maybe I can open (and develop) his own business. But for the rest, I surrender. Just surrender. Surrender to God." (P7, Islamic secondary mainstreaming school)

"I think, I pray first. Let's us pray for it." (P8, Islamic primary inclusive school)

"... pray, ask for God's protection, I emphasize that. Because Mom can't protect you. Only God and angels can protect us." (P10, state middle school)

The last resort of parents when the socialization ability or potential of the children with disabilities is still developing is family members. Some parents who have more than one child and are not disabled can place their expectations and hope for the protection and supervision of children with disabilities on their siblings. This is an anticipation when parents realize that one day, they will face death.

"I have always made my older children aware of their younger sibling's physical limitations and urged them to care for him. I emphasise that when I'm no longer around, at least one of them should be there for their younger brother, including him in family activities to prevent feelings of isolation." (P3, she had 3 children)

"In time, she will have to be on her own. Whereas, her (old) sister also (will) have her own life. So, even from the beginning, I tell her. Her (old) sister. When I'm not around (or die), she has to take care of his (younger) sister." (P6, she had 2 children)

"I said (to her old brother), your little sister has a disability. You must be a good example and be able to provide help or protect him when he needs it" (P8, she had 2 children)

“I told (my children) that if father and mother were not there (passed away), you would live together (live in harmony). Therefore, if possible, those more prosperous help those less fortunate.” (P10, she had 3 children)

## DISCUSSION

The experiences of parents of children with disabilities present diverse social constructivism in inclusive education settings. The qualitative research design sought to explore the perspectives of those who have multiple roles in the family and at school. This study presents five major themes as findings [1] parents' expectations and [2] worries during their child's challenging education. This theme leads to [3] hopes and [4] concerns for the future of children with disabilities. The relationship between the first to fourth themes found [5] kinds of parents' strategies as resilience for facing worries and concerns towards their child's education and future.

Parents who seek help from third parties (teachers, therapists, neighbours, or members of their community) and receive (long-term) support tend to have high optimism (Slattery et al., 2017). They accept their children's conditions and continue to explore their children's potential with the help of third parties. Teachers who do not have an inclusive education background but are open can provide support for parents, as well as parents who are open to providing support for teachers. Parents are also more optimistic about their children's development and future. This also applies to cases of bullying experienced by children with disabilities in class or during elementary school.

Bullying of children with disabilities (because they appear different from students in general) in mainstream schools is still a concern for parents (Subasno et al., 2023). However, the development of socialization skills of children with special needs over time has made these concerns slowly fade. This is shown in children who have experienced bullying in elementary school and have experienced changes in self-confidence and social interaction skills in positive environments in inclusive/mainstream schools. When parents make further decisions, the involvement of children's roles is also important in their social development, which is considered to have increased significantly. In student activities outside of school, the acceptance and involvement of children with disabilities is more evident. This experience gives parents great hope that when their children complete their education, they will be better prepared to live in society like others (Juvonen et al., 2019; Khusheim, 2021).

Parents with dual roles and limited third-party support often feel confused and overwhelmed (Antwi, 2023). Frustration arises from expectations that their children will develop like their peers, compounded by the limited availability and competence of teachers for children with disabilities. Balancing the needs of their child requiring full assistance, caring for other siblings, and managing work and household responsibilities increases parental anxiety about their children's academic progress. However, previously frustrated parents felt more positive after opting for full educational support at school through special teacher assistance. This support, however, incurs additional costs, raising new concerns for parents with limited income.

Spiritual values from religion and culture help parents release anxiety when supporting children with disabilities (Gur & Reich, 2023; Kavaliotis, 2023). Parents of children nearing the end of school often surrender to God for guidance and strength. While they hope their children can secure a decent job, they lower expectations due to the disability. Parents of younger children with mild disabilities tend to remain optimistic. In some families, siblings protect their disabled siblings to ensure they live safely and decently when parents are no longer around.

Parents' experiences in inclusive education reveal that a child's disability severity significantly influences their attitudes, hopes, and concerns about education and the future

(Paseka& Schwab, 2020). Those with mild disabilities mainly worry about the social environment at school and the support from teachers and peers to enhance their child's confidence and academic success. In contrast, parents of children with more severe disabilities face dual concerns regarding academic and social skills. All parents require spiritual, financial, and social support, alongside a clear education system and relevant information, to uphold their children's educational rights and secure a prosperous future. Inclusive education should promote the active involvement of children, teachers, parents, schools, and the community to challenge stereotypes, foster self-confidence, and encourage collaboration (Anggraini&Subasno, 2022; Lopatynska et al., 2023). For parents, education is essential for securing their child's future, making it a non-negotiable priority.

This study shows that government and school strategies to ensure inclusive education policies and child protection have not been effectively felt by all children with disabilities. So, the government needs to review the substance and implementation of the policy in inclusive education and child-friendly schools starting from management to sources that can be utilized. The development of education is expected to truly provide support for the hopes of parents who want their children to obtain the fulfilment of educational rights and equal future opportunities.

## LIMITATIONS STUDIES

Measuring parents' hopes, concerns, and strategies for sending their children to inclusive/mainstream schools with limited participants creates challenges for researchers. This research aims to describe social constructivism built from the experiences of parents who have children with disabilities, so it cannot be generalized. However, it would support transferability for further research that is more specific to the group of parents who had children with a common disability and or similar school level in other setting studies.

## CONCLUSION

This research aims to convey the message that positive relationships between children, parents, teachers and policymakers can help parents find strategies to deal with concerns and encourage parents' expectations to be more realistic for a decent and quality future for children with disabilities. On the other hand, forms of support created in relationships with low frequency and communication can increase parents' anxiety about their child's future. These findings should be taken into consideration to open up better opportunities for inclusive education in the future.

## RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- The research findings from the perspective of parents who have children with disabilities help researchers to develop future research.
- There is a need for guidance and counselling support for parents of children with disabilities even at the primary school level and parent support groups so that parents can increase their children's potential and be guided in making further educational choices.
- In general, the school needs to consider providing psychological consultation services for students and teachers at school. This is expected to support parents that their children are safe in the school environment without bullying and or abuse.
- The government needs to review the substance and implementation of the policy in inclusive education and child-friendly schools

**Acknowledgements:** We express our gratitude to the Ditjen Bimas Katolik at the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia for funding this research. We also extend our thanks to the Malang City Education Office for granting permission for this study.

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