

Children with Autism: Views of Parents, Educators, or Principals towards Inclusive Settings in an Urban Area of Bangladesh

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My family, my supervisor, my mother.

ABSTRACT

Purpose

The inclusion of children with autism into general educational settings is a global trend, a practice that has been the subject of ongoing investigation and discourse in schools. The most important condition is transforming educational institutions into adaptable frameworks so that all diverse-needs students can be part of the inclusive education community. This research investigates the integration of children with autism in mainstream primary educational settings. To achieve this, it is essential to understand the obstacles experienced by students with autism in Dhaka, Bangladesh's mainstream primary school classrooms, and the potential interventions that will support their inclusion in the educational settings. By understanding the unique challenges students with autism face in traditional primary settings, policymakers and educators can develop targeted initiatives to support their academic and social development.

Background

Autism is a form of neurodivergence. Students with autism may experience varying degrees of difficulties and strengths that impact their social and academic development in mainstream environments. Obstacles determining success in mainstream educational settings include teachers' knowledge, school support, awareness, and acceptance. The inclusive approach is not a one-size-fits-all solution but rather a case-specific, exploratory approach to help students with autism reach their maximum potential alongside their neurotypical peers. I aimed to explore key issues in mainstream educational settings from the perspectives of Bangladeshi parents of children with autism, teachers, and principals, aiming to improve the education system for autistic students.

Participants

In this research, eight parents of children with autism, eight teachers, and four principals were recruited for semi-structured interviews using a purposive sampling technique. This approach enabled the collection of rich data and allowed for in-depth conversations. All participants in this research were originally from Dhaka, Bangladesh, and their native language was Bengali. The participants were chosen for this research based on their experience and knowledge of working with children with autism in mainstream settings, and the challenges they faced in regular schools. I conducted the interviews in Bengali to facilitate clear communication and understanding between the interviewer and interviewee.

Method

The qualitative methodology following grounded theory was chosen for my research because it allows for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. Semi-structured interviewing was seen to be the best technique for gathering participants' experiences and opinions.

Interviews with parents of students with autism were conducted virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the COVID situation improved, in-person interviews with teachers were carried out. However, since the four principals were unavailable for online or in-person interviews, the interviews were conducted over the phone.

Framework

This research is based on Inclusive Education Theory, as articulated by UNESCO (UNESCO, 1994) and the Salamanca Statement (1994), and methodologically guided by a qualitative analytic approach combining thematic analysis and grounded theory. The theoretical model was established inductively from the data, which was collected through semi-structured interviews from parents of autistic children, teachers, and principals who were involved in the mainstream education settings for the autistic children. To analyze the data, a thematic analysis strategy was conducted in this research. Through systematic coding, themes related to inclusive practices, stakeholder roles, institutional support, and challenges within mainstream settings were identified. This approach provided transparency into each participant's daily life experience while engaging children with autism. Building on these themes, grounded theory procedures, informed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), were adapted to give a richer description of the development of theory. The themes were further refined into categories and analytically linked through constant comparison to identify relationships among conditions, actions, and consequences. Systemic challenges—such as lack of teacher training, insufficient resources, rigid curricula, policy issues, cultural factors, lack of awareness and acceptance, and inadequate support services—appeared as central conditions affecting inclusive practices. The combination of thematic analysis and grounded theory enabled the development of a theoretical model explaining how inclusive education is enacted in mainstream settings and how obstacles constrain the academic and social development of children with autism. This model remains grounded in participants' perspectives while conceptually aligned with international inclusive education principles.

Findings

This research explored obstacles faced by autistic children in mainstream educational settings using a qualitative, grounded theory approach. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from parents, teachers, and school principals. Eight themes of challenges were revealed through thematic analysis. Key findings highlighted gaps in knowledge of autistic traits, a lack of teacher preparation and training opportunities, especially on autism, and school-related constraints. Principal and policy-related themes further clarified the emphasis on access to support and resources in mainstream settings. At the same time, cultural perspectives on autism explained a view of negative attitudes and expectations. Lack of awareness and acceptance appeared in this research as a crucial factor that affects both peer interaction and successful inclusion for children with autism. These findings highlighted barriers in mainstream settings and the necessity of systemic modification that

addresses awareness, acceptance, training, policy, and cultural beliefs to foster an inclusive environment for autistic learners.

Keywords: children with autism, mainstream primary educational settings, inclusive education, obstacles, Bangladesh, Dhaka.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder)
- IMPACT (Integrated Movement for the Planning and Advancement of Children in Bangladesh)
- National Education Policy (NEP)
- Education for Children with Special Needs (ENCSN)
- Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project" (SEQAEP)
- Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- United Kingdom (UK),
- United States of America (USA)
- Theory of mind (TOM)
- Attention deficient hyperactive disorder (ADHD)
- Education for All (EFA)
- Millennium Development Goal (MDG)

Note that Special Educational Needs (SEN) is referred to 24 times in the document (due to the context whereby the cited journal in the sentence refers to SEN). However, the term disabilities is referred to 129 times and not as children with SEN, due to the nature of the sentence; i.e., it was deemed more appropriate e.g. "The notion of inclusion posits that all children with disabilities should be educated...".

1 Introduction



Image 1. Researcher's reflections on inclusive education

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This research is guided by the following research questions, focusing on the perspectives of parents, teachers, and principals regarding the inclusion of autistic children in mainstream educational settings in urban Bangladesh:

- a. What do Bangladeshi parents of students with autism say are the most important obstacles that affect the social and academic development of their children in mainstream educational settings?
- b. How do teachers in Bangladesh view mainstream settings for children with autism?
- c. How do principals in Bangladesh view mainstream settings for children with autism?
- d. What distinguishes the views of parents of students with autism from those of teachers and principals?
- e. What do the findings mean for mainstream education settings in Bangladesh, taking everyone's points of view and recommendations into account?
- f. How do these views fit with the policy on inclusive education in Bangladesh?

Children with autism can be classified as those who have a range of strengths and challenges (Vo & Webb, 2024). Some might require additional support strategies and accommodations to achieve academic and social success. The degree of support required, however, may depend on how difficult their situation is (Vo & Webb, 2024; Majerechová et al., 2026). Autism is defined by difficulties in social skills, repetitive behaviours, and communication issues. No specific “universal laws” can ensure that students with autism develop academically and socially in the desired ways in their educational settings (Pervin, 2016; Roberts & Webster, 2022). Instead, the awareness, knowledge, experiences, acceptance, and positive attitudes of every individual involved are crucial (Tweedy & Jean, 2016; Barrera & Moliner, 2024).

The integration of students with autism has been found to be a significant concern within the educational community, encompassing both general and special education (Brede et al., 2017; Boutot & Bryant, 2005). In society, individuals must coexist, and each person must acknowledge the existence of others. Consequently, this may be achieved by fostering acceptance among individuals within the school system. Accordingly, the school should embody inclusivity for all students, serving as an institution for everyone (Riehi, 2009; Jardinez & Natividad, 2024).

The traditional approach to educating children with autism often involved segregation. Specialised schools were designed specifically for this group of students (Norwich, 2008; Lansey et al., 2023). However, the landscape has dramatically transformed over the past several decades (1980–2018), driven by legislative changes, research findings, and evolving perspectives on neurodiversity rights and educational equity (R.K. & Arseniev-Koehler, 2023). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its emphasis on the least restrictive environment have fundamentally reshaped how educational placement for children with diverse needs is understood, creating a legal framework that presumes inclusion while recognising the need for individualised approaches (Wolfe & Harriott, 1998; Bleak & Abernathy, 2022).

The notion of inclusion posits that all children with disabilities should be educated in the same classroom as their peers. Every student possesses unique educational requirements and abilities, necessitating a tailored educational curriculum (Rohwer, 2024; Holmes, 2024).

Various disciplines are concerned with the social and academic development of students with autism in mainstream settings. The integration of these children into mainstream educational institutions largely relies on the acceptance, knowledge, understanding, perceptions, sufficient resources, and experience/training of teachers and other caregivers involved with this age group (Sepadi, 2025; Warhurst & Maynard, 2025). The risk of inadequate school support intensifies deficits in adaptive behaviour, thereby complicating integration. Teachers and other individuals working with students with autism are essential for successful inclusion (Roberts & Webster, 2022; Dyer, 2022).

The inclusive practice scenario in Bangladesh differs from that in developed countries such as the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia (Ahsan, 2006; Shahin, 2025). In Bangladesh, the inclusion of children with diverse needs, particularly those with autism, in general educational settings remains a relatively recent development (Hridi et al., 2021; Naznin & Islam, 2023). While developed nations continue advancing inclusive practices in education and employment, Bangladesh still encounters obstacles in implementing inclusive policies and initiatives due to limited resources and infrastructure (Sarker & Unzum, 2023; Hossan & Milon, 2025). To address diverse learning needs effectively, teachers require additional assistance and training (Bruggink & Koot, 2016; Larios & Zetlin, 2023). Additionally, increased awareness and advocacy efforts are required to guarantee adequate support for individuals with additional needs in Bangladesh (Nuri et al., 2022; Ahmed & Islam, 2026).

Under these conditions, this study attempts to understand the situation of students with autism in mainstream primary settings in Dhaka. The aforementioned themes were categorised from the research data into teacher-related themes, school-related themes, and policy-related themes that inevitably impact students with autism in learning and social interaction, aiming to clarify the obstacles encountered in mainstream settings. By doing so, this research identifies deficiencies in current practices that may impede the full inclusion of students with autism.

It also presents recommendations derived from the perspectives of three participant groups (teachers, principals, and parents of children with autism), which may be implemented to support optimal social and academic development. Furthermore, it aims to facilitate inclusion by addressing specific challenges and raising awareness among educators, schools, parents, and policymakers. This research seeks to bridge theory and practice to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for children with autism (Zander, 2004; Price & Romualdez, 2025; Wong, 2023).

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Bangladesh, the eighth-most populous country in the world, serves as the setting for this study. Due to several common challenges, eight South Asian nations – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka – frequently fail to adequately address the high prevalence of mental illnesses (Trivedi et al., 2007).

In Bangladesh, available data on children with disabilities is limited and often unreliable, frequently underestimating prevalence due to varying definitions of disability and inconsistent data collection methods (Rabbi, 2008). Surveys conducted by the government over the past decade indicate disability prevalence ranging from 1.4% to 9% of the population (Pervin, 2016).

There has been limited epidemiological evidence regarding autism prevalence in rural Bangladesh. Data from the Centre for Neurodevelopment & Autism in Children at Bangabandhu

Sheikh Mujib Medical University indicate that higher numbers of autistic children in urban areas seek therapy services (Akhter et al., 2018). A national-level study conducted in 2013 reported an ASD prevalence of 1.5 per 1,000 population (30 per 1,000 in Dhaka city and 7 per 10,000 in rural areas) within a sample of 7,200 individuals. Rural prevalence was estimated at 0.075%. Among four identified ASD cases, three were boys and one was a girl aged between 20–30 months, all diagnosed using ADOS assessment procedures (Rahman et al., 2016).

The findings also showed limited parental awareness in rural communities, with therapy mainly accessed through government or local facilities rather than specialised centres. Social stigma and barriers were identified as major challenges (Rahman et al., 2016). Disabilities are sometimes perceived as divine punishment or consequences of parental wrongdoing, contributing to social exclusion and discrimination. Individuals with disabilities receive limited support, and children with developmental disabilities remain among the most vulnerable groups in society (Pervin, 2016).

Traditional teaching pedagogy has often exacerbated these challenges, contributing to exclusion from school environments. However, recognition of inclusive education globally has gradually influenced Bangladesh's education landscape. Inclusive institutions have emerged where children with and without disabilities learn together. Nevertheless, inclusive education remains relatively new, and the effectiveness of mainstream settings for autistic students within a developing-country context continues to require investigation (Pervin, 2016).

1.2.1 Pre- and Post-Colonial Era in Bangladesh

The education system in Bengal during the colonial period was designed to civilize non-Europeans and reinforce colonial authority, while the subsequent era of neocolonialism encouraged dependency on European norms, embedding Eurocentric perspectives in governance and education (Alam, 2025). Prior to British rule, religious education was administered by the Ulema, primarily through Persian, Urdu, and Arabic instruction. Bangladesh's education system has historical roots dating back to the Pala dynasty, evolving from Buddhist monastic schools to Muslim administrative structures, and incorporating a Sanskrit-based curriculum in the 12th century to prepare upper-class boys for official roles (Rabbi, 2008; Al, 2025).

Compulsory primary education was introduced in 1947 but abolished in 1957, and efforts to expand rural education remained inadequate (Mamun et al., 2023; Rahman, 2014). East Bengal had fewer schools than West Bengal due to the additional requirement of Urdu instruction, which slowed learning progress (Lahiri & Rana, 2023). The 1952 Language Movement fueled Bengali nationalism and ultimately contributed to Bangladesh's independence in 1971, highlighting the role of language and culture in shaping national identity (Alam, 2023; Mahbub, 2025). After independence, the Mujib

administration prioritized primary education, resulting in improved retention, with completion rates rising from 52% in 1995 to 67% in 2000 (Al Masum, 2025, p. 201).

Subsequent administrations, including those of Zia, Khaleda Zia, and Hasina Wazed, implemented initiatives to expand access to education, introduce free schooling, and establish universal primary education. These governments also undertook efforts to adapt curricula and improve educational infrastructure (Rabbi, 2008; Dutta, 2024). Despite these measures, dropout rates remained high, and resource shortages continued to hinder progress. Additional factors affecting the quality of education included regional disparities between East Bengal and West Pakistan, religious influences, and broader systemic challenges (Ahmed & Acheampong, 2023; Alam, 2023).

1.2.2 The Education System in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's primary education system comprises government and private schools. Government schools are state-funded and attract a large student population due to lower fees, whereas private schools often provide higher-quality education but require significantly higher tuition (Waston et al., 2024; Aboud & Hossain, 2011). The Director of Primary Education (DPE), established in 1981, is responsible for ensuring universal primary education and monitoring the quality of government, registered, and community primary schools (Mallik, 2025; Talukder et al., 2021). Despite serving nearly 19 million primary-aged children across approximately 800,000 institutions, schools face challenges including corruption, mismanagement, poor ethics, and teacher absenteeism, which affect education quality (Rabbi, 2008; Concha et al., 2024).

English Medium Schools (EMS), which follow British curricula under the regulation of the British Council, cater to affluent families, accounting for less than 1% of total enrollment. This highlights the socioeconomic divide in access to quality education, as most students continue to attend public schools, reinforcing cycles of poverty and limiting social mobility (Hamid & Jahan, 2015).

In 2019, government education spending amounted to only 1.33% of GDP, significantly below the World Bank's recommendation of 4%. A large portion of this budget is allocated to employee salaries rather than infrastructure or educational improvement (World Bank, 2013; 2022). In terms of language education, while EMS curricula may include Bangla, English is often prioritized, reflecting ongoing tensions between nationalist ideals and practical educational policy (Alam, 2025; Hamid et al., 2023).

Parental engagement in education has been promoted through policies such as the Disabilities Act and the National Education Policy (Acharja, 2025; Ahmed & Islam, 2026). However, more structured mechanisms are needed to involve parents, especially regarding the education of children with disabilities (Kabir & Akter, 2014; Hossain, 2021). The interaction of educational policies, socio-economic factors, and linguistic priorities continues to shape the educational landscape in Bangladesh.

1.2.3 The Prevailing Understanding of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh

Bangladesh, classified as a developing nation, is progressively evolving its inclusive education framework, aiming to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. The government has adopted a functional definition of inclusive education based on international standards, emphasising the right to education for all children, regardless of their differences. The goal is to eliminate barriers to learning and maximise educational opportunities for marginalised students, particularly those with disabilities (Ahsan & Burnip, 2007; Islam, 2019; Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006).

Assistive technology is essential for improving participation and learning for children with disabilities (Abdelwahab et al., 2025). However, access remains limited in Bangladesh, with availability ranging from 5% to 15%. Assistive technology enables children with disabilities, as well as neurotypical children, to participate fully in their communities (Karki et al., 2023). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) emphasises the requirement for accessible assistive technologies and services for all children (Encarnação & Cook, 2023; Smith et al., 2024). A UNICEF-WHO discussion paper recommends international cooperation to improve access, yet barriers such as lack of awareness, governance challenges, affordability, and limited services persist (Uchitel et al., 2022; Isnawati et al., 2025). Many families are unaware of the benefits of assistive technology or its availability for their children (Assistive Technology for Children with Disabilities, 2015). The government should implement CRPD recommendations to improve access to assistive technology for children with disabilities (Smith et al., 2024; Weerts et al., 2026).

Numerous NGOs, such as BRAC, Shuchona Foundation, and SCF, play a significant role in supporting autistic children (Jahan et al., 2024; Ahmed & Islam, 2026). BRAC provides non-formal education to neurodiverse students and integrates these children into its schools to improve educational access. Other organisations, including the Shuchona Foundation, ACWF, SWAC, and SCF, provide therapeutic interventions, vocational training, and educational support (Khan & Mullick, 2024; Jahan et al., 2024). ACWF focuses on family support and awareness, SWAC on vocational rehabilitation, and SCF on customised educational and therapeutic programs for neurodiverse students (Khanom & Aktar, 2022).

Since 2008, under government supervision, BRAC has implemented an inclusive curriculum, aiming to include at least three neurodiverse students in each of its 35,000 primary schools, potentially reaching 105,000 students with disabilities (Kaikobad, 2024). Other NGOs could adopt similar strategies, promoting the welfare and integration of autistic children in Bangladesh.

An Individualised Education Plan (IEP) is crucial for tailoring educational programs to meet the needs of students receiving additional support services under IDEA (Rashid & Wong, 2023; Karaan et al., 2025). The IEP process requires family involvement, regular monitoring, and assessment of

strengths and challenges (Jachova et al., 2018). Unlike developed countries, Bangladesh lacks a comprehensive IEP system, limiting support for diverse learners (Jachova et al., 2018; Shahin, 2025). Collaboration among stakeholders is essential for the long-term academic and social success of children with disabilities (Salminen et al., 2025).

In summary, Bangladesh is making progress toward inclusive education through the efforts of NGOs and government initiatives. However, challenges remain, including limited teacher training opportunities, issues with policy enforcement, and insufficient resources, all of which need addressing to help children with disabilities reach their full potential.

1.2.4 The Perspective on Disability in Bangladesh

Disability in Bangladesh is primarily viewed through a medical lens (Haque, 2020). Metts (2004) emphasises that disability is a complex issue influenced by biomedical, social, and environmental factors, which remain underexplored. Individuals with disabilities in Bangladesh face marginalisation and restrictions on fundamental rights due to social taboos, creating barriers in education and contributing to poverty (Ahmed & Kashem, 2015; Rahman et al., 2023).

Although government policies and awareness campaigns (e.g., cartoons, workshops, slogans) aim to reduce discrimination and promote equality (Anis, 2017; Ackerman et al., 2005; Alam & Ballard, 2023; Azim & Zaman, 2024), many still perceive disabilities, particularly autism, as a curse (societal blame, not researcher's perspectives or blame towards children with autism), denying affected individuals appropriate care and support (Islam & Howard, 1993, p. 493). Families often experience social exclusion and limited access to education and resources (Alam, 2019; Mizu, 2024; Haque et al., 2022).

Cultural biases and lack of information exacerbate these problems, as traditional beliefs in rural areas may favour unqualified healers who perceive disability as supernatural (Smith et al., 2023; Alam et al., 2025; Preity et al., 2017; Akhter et al., 2025; Faruk et al., 2025). Widespread stigma results in social and emotional challenges for both parents and children. Societal perceptions hinder open discussions about autism, while systemic barriers limit educational equity for marginalized groups (Ahmed & Kasem, 2015; Uddin & Ashrafun, 2023; Hussain & Raihan, 2022; Hussain et al., 2024; Faruk & Rosenbaum, 2023). Better awareness, education, and resources are needed to create an inclusive society addressing the needs of people with disabilities in Bangladesh (Khatun & Azad, 2026; Tuli & Habib, 2026).

1.2.5 Cultural Stigma Manifestation in Bangladesh

Bangladesh, a densely populated country of roughly 170 million people, has a Muslim majority of about 91% (Haider et al., 2023). Many Islamic teachings and educators demonstrate limited

acceptance toward individuals with disabilities, perpetuating stigma (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2010; Shahidullah & Islam, 2022). Autism is often perceived as a punishment from Allah, with parents, particularly mothers, being blamed (Alqunaibet, 2021; Uddin & Ashrafun, 2023). (To be absolutely clear, I do not blame autistic children for their symptoms or hold this view regarding a punishment from Allah). This creates feelings of guilt and social humiliation. Interpretations of "gunah" (sin) reinforce stigma and diminish family social standing (Matta, 2025; Upoma et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2019).

Conversely, concepts such as "rahma" (mercy) can foster inclusivity if promoted by well-informed religious leaders (Düzgün, 2017; Mostofa & Siddiqui, 2024). Families with autistic children often face social isolation, limited marriage prospects, and employment challenges (Jerin, 2024; Rakib, 2014; Naomi, 2024). Gender compounds stigma: females with autism face additional societal expectations regarding motherhood and propriety, leading families to conceal situation (Turnock & Jones, 2022; Uddin & Ashrafun, 2023).

1.2.6 Autism and Inclusive Education

Autism is a lifelong neurodivergence with a set of traits affecting communication and behaviour. Despite these differences, children with autism can progress in mainstream settings if adequate support is provided (Rahman et al., 2016; Zander, 2004; Hossain et al., 2017).

Inclusive education aims to provide essential services in mainstream classrooms, valuing every individual regardless of social, emotional, or linguistic differences (Solomonidou, 2014). Successful inclusion is multifactorial, influenced by the child, teacher, and school environment. The knowledge, attitudes, experiences, and collaboration of all stakeholders involved with children with disabilities are critical for effective inclusion (Saleem & Mahmood, 2013).

Teachers' early cultivation of positive attitudes toward children with disabilities is essential (Ahsan & Mullick, 2013). Negative attitudes can result in discrimination, stereotyping, poor self-evaluation, helplessness, and dissatisfaction (Hunt & Goetz, 1997). McMillan (2008) emphasises that teachers' and school officials' attitudes can significantly impact stigma experienced by children. Positive attitudes, coupled with social contact in classrooms, improve inclusion and student outcomes (Umesh & Joanne, 2012; Sani, 2016; Eleweke & Rodda, 2000; Pappas et al., 2018; Burak & Gumus, 2026).

Although Bangladesh has adopted national and international inclusive education frameworks (Salamanca Statement, UNESCO 1994; Dakar Framework, 2000; UNCRPD), research shows the education system remains under-equipped to meet individual needs (Janice et al., 2004; Ahsan & Mullick, 2013; Azam & Mullick, 2009). Only 14% of children with special needs receive formal education, with high dropout rates (Malak, 2013). Current discourse attributes academic

underachievement more to systemic deficiencies than to student shortcomings, framing it as an equity issue (Falkmer et al., 2015; Aboagye, 2017; Hornby, 2011; Riddell, 2009; De Boer & Simpson, 2009).

Successful inclusion depends on school environment, teachers' views, experiences, and knowledge, as well as the involvement of the children themselves (Saleem & Mahmood, 2013; Solomonidou, 2014). This section has highlighted Bangladesh's educational background, efforts toward inclusive education, challenges, achievements, and comparison with developed countries.

1.3 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

I sought to identify obstacles in mainstream settings that might jeopardize autistic children's social and emotional well-being and to acknowledge the difficulties in mainstream classrooms that may impact their academic and social progress. This research also aims to comprehend the benefits of regular classroom settings for autistic children from the perspectives of parents, educators, and administrators. Furthermore, it seeks to provide recommendations for creating more inclusive and supportive environments for autistic children in mainstream educational settings. Additionally, I hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of how to promote the social and emotional development of autistic children within these environments.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

I interviewed teachers, parents of autistic children, and principals to obtain insights into obstacles within the mainstream education system while educating autistic children. From the perspectives of these three groups, ideas that would assist these children in reaching their full potential, as well as aspects of their emotional and intellectual development, are discussed. By considering the viewpoints of multiple stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and principals, I can provide practical recommendations to support autistic children in reaching their full academic and emotional potential.

A qualitative grounded theory approach, involving open-ended questions, was used in the interviews, and a thematic approach was adopted during data analysis. The qualitative grounded theory method was selected because it was anticipated to yield extensive, rich information on the current support system while remaining suitable for further inquiry, comparisons, and analysis concerning areas for improvement. The findings of this research may guide interventions and support systems aimed at enhancing the general well-being and educational outcomes of students with autism in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research aims to examine the academic and social development of students with autism integrated who, in Bangladesh, are required to be integrated into mainstream classrooms (due to the National Education Policy of 2010) and to identify challenges that hinder their development as a result.

It seeks to enhance support systems for students with autism in regular classrooms by reviewing participant perspectives. The research questions also help develop a theoretical framework, incorporating existing literature on neurodiversity rights and inclusive education curricula, to advance discussions on including students with autism in regular classrooms.

The primary research questions are:

- a. What do Bangladeshi parents of students with autism identify as the most important obstacles affecting the social and academic development of their children in mainstream educational settings?
- b. How do teachers in Bangladesh view mainstream settings for children with autism?
- c. How do principals in Bangladesh view mainstream settings for children with autism?
- d. What distinguishes the views of parents of students with autism from those of teachers and principals?
- e. What do the findings imply for mainstream education settings in Bangladesh, considering all stakeholders' perspectives and recommendations?
- f. How do these views align with the policy on inclusive education in Bangladesh?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE

Inclusive Education Theory is a well-established framework within mainstream educational contexts. It underscores the necessity of offering all students, irrespective of their abilities, equitable opportunities for learning and engagement. Inclusive education and its implementation methods are still relatively new in Bangladesh. This research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the complexities in mainstream educational settings. Therefore, this research is crucial for understanding mainstream settings and preparing schools to foster positive development for students with autism.

Moreover, research on students with autism and inclusion in Bangladesh has been limited. This study aims to inform policymakers and relevant stakeholders by highlighting real needs, challenges, and potential directions for facilitating inclusive education. Additionally, it seeks to provide a foundation for further research and to support parents, autism support groups, and administrative bodies in refining existing approaches for learners with autism in Bangladesh.

1.7 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This research adopted a qualitative methodological approach. Initially, I conducted interviews with parents of students with autism in mainstream settings. Based on findings from eight parents, I selected eight teachers and four principals for in-depth interviews to gather comprehensive views and insights. During data analysis, a simple thematic analysis method was used. Bryman (2008) defines thematic analysis as a way of categorizing data and recognizing broad patterns and themes in qualitative data. This method was chosen for its accessibility and theoretical flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6).

Qualitative research was employed to explore the main obstacles in inclusive practices from the perspectives of parents, teachers, and principals. Creswell (2003, 2007, 2013, 2016) defines qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human issue” (p. 17). The literature review further examines social and cultural perspectives and the challenges of effectively integrating students with autism into Bangladeshi educational and social institutions.

1.8 POSITIONALITY

My reflections as a former special education teacher provide an important foundation for this study. Being from Bangladesh, she was naturally interested in assessing the country’s readiness to provide full support for students with autism to reach their academic and social potential. This exploration allowed her to evaluate the current state of special education in Bangladesh, identify areas for improvement, and suggest potential interventions. By combining my personal experience with broader insights into the country’s readiness, she hopes to contribute meaningfully to advancing inclusive learning opportunities for students with autism in Bangladesh. She examined the roles of parents, teachers, and healthcare professionals in supporting these students and emphasized the importance of early intervention and inclusive education.

By sharing findings and recommendations with policymakers and educators, she aimed to drive positive change and improve the overall well-being of students with autism. This involves analyzing best practices globally while ensuring initiatives are culturally sensitive and tailored to the needs of Bangladeshi students with autism. Through collaboration and advocacy, I seek to remove barriers and foster a more inclusive society.

1.9 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

My motivation stems from a desire to better support students with autism in her classroom. Understanding autism enhances her ability to create a welcoming and inclusive environment and to adapt teaching strategies to meet each student's unique needs. Achieving this goal requires partnerships with government agencies, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions to establish comprehensive support systems, improving the quality of life for individuals with autism in Bangladesh.

1.10 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter 1: In urban Bangladesh, the research will investigate perspectives on mainstream settings for students with autism. This introduction includes the research questions as well as the study's background and objectives.

Chapter 2: Based on earlier studies, this chapter will be reviewed the literature on autism and education in Bangladesh, giving a thorough picture of the current situation based on all participants' opinions. Furthermore, it can draw attention to gaps in the current literature and offer potential directions for future research to improve knowledge and assistance for the country's students with autism.

Chapter 3: The section on reflexivity will discuss researcher's reasoning for selecting the topic. This chapter will also cover the potential impact of researcher's biases and life experiences on the study's findings.

Chapter 4: The methodology chapter will cover the research design, data collection strategies, and analysis methodologies employed in the research. The methodology chapter will also discuss the study's shortcomings and the methods used to resolve them. It may also illuminate the ethical considerations involved in conducting research.

Chapter 5: This chapter will provide an overview of the diverse perspectives and experiences of all research participants.

Chapter 6: The discussion section will explore the similarities and differences among all participants' statements, the implications of the study, the average experiences of the participants, and potential recommendations for practitioners and policymakers who work with Bangladeshi students with autism.

Chapter 7: Lastly, a concluding chapter will highlights the significance of encouraging inclusivity for all students with autism students, highlights the main findings, offers recommendations for how to improve the situation that each participant is in, considers the study's shortcomings, and suggests areas for further research.

Table 1. Chapter Overview

1.1.1 SUMMARY

I have outlined the challenges and progress related to students with autism in mainstream educational settings in Bangladesh. This section also discusses the rationale for selecting this topic for investigation and the potential implications for future research in the field. The following sections will examine Bangladesh's general education system, relevant policies, and developments in inclusive education. Additionally, the study will provide an overview of the characteristics of autism and the importance of including autistic students in regular classrooms. I will explore the impact of inclusive education on students with autism and assess the effectiveness of current teaching strategies in meeting their needs. Furthermore, the methods and approaches implemented in Bangladesh to support inclusive education for children with autism are discussed, along with areas where the educational system requires improvement to better facilitate their inclusion.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1.1 Integration in Education

There has been constant research and discussion regarding the inclusion of children with autism in regular classes (Avramidis & Burden, 2000; Paulsrud & Nilholm, 2023). Inclusion demands to educate all children together and provide the required adjustments in the school to meet the diverse needs (Delport et al., 2020; Ferguson & Smith, 2001).

This idea of a new educational approach is to create such an educational setting where all students will be supported equitably, regardless of their race, gender, or other characteristics (Airton, 2023). The present pedagogical approach focuses on improving the education of all children, including those with and without disabilities, and changing the platform for an inclusive environment (Kozibroda et al., 2022; Siahaan, 2022). Previous research indicates that the right curriculum differentiation and teaching methods can help children with special educational needs succeed in regular schools (Goyibova et al., 2025; Strogilos et al., 2023). This diverse approach is beneficial for all students, including those who have autism, as it helps them develop a positive attitude towards neurodiversity (Wilson & Dallman, 2025; Hamilton & Petty, 2023).

2.1.2 What is Inclusive Education

(Foreman, 2008; Gonzalez et al., 2025) stated that the campaign for inclusive education for children with disabilities started in 1960, long before the word "inclusion" became popular. The UNESCO conferences promoted inclusiveness by holding conferences and making multiple pronouncements. The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, aimed to make education available to everyone and promote fairness (Islam, 2019; Vantieghem et al., 2023).

The World Conference on Exceptional Requirements Education in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994 stressed the need for legislative changes so that conventional schools may better serve children with diverse educational requirements (Boukhari, 2025; Cardim & Fernandes, 2024). The 2000 Dakar summit emphasized that every child has the right to education (UNESCO, 2009; Islam, 2019). The Salamanca Conference advocated that all children be educated in mainstream schools and reduce discrimination (UNESCO, 2009, p. 11). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), established in 2006, emphasized equitable access to education and the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream schooling without discrimination (Minou, 2011; Ferguson, 2014; Chan & Nankervis, 2025).

2.1.3 Purpose of Inclusive Education

The primary goal of inclusive education is to educate all children, with or without disabilities, in the same educational settings regardless of their unique traits (Woolfson, 2025; Sahani & Patel, 2023). Successful implementation requires a collaborative approach between educational institutions and communities, allowing all children (Pattiasina et al., 2025; Muslim et al., 2026) to feel a sense of belonging and access social and academic growth within these educational settings. According to Arvaniti (2025), inclusive education encourages accessibility in schools irrespective of differences. In Bangladesh, the concept of inclusive education in regular settings is relatively new and requires ongoing efforts to achieve full implementation (Karpava, 2025; Rahaman et al., 2024).

2.1.4 Obstacles Influencing Integration

Integrating children with disabilities into mainstream settings requires addressing several challenges (Hussain & Begum, 2024). Each child needs to be assessed in Individual Educational Plans (IEPs), which will determine the type of support they need for their academic and social growth (Rashid & Wong, 2023; Auer et al., 2023). Adequate resources, collaborative approaches, and effective teaching strategies are essential to creating a safe and comfortable learning environment (Rashid & Wong, 2023; Kayyali, 2025). Challenges may include classroom setup, teacher training, and curriculum modifications. Children with diverse needs require more attention, and overcrowded classrooms can hinder inclusion success (Bessarab et al., 2025; Fitri et al., 2022).

Parental engagement is crucial since they play a major role to choose the educational placement for their children. Parents' perceptions influence educational placement (Urkmez & Guzen, 2023; Attard & Booth, 2023). Counseling can help parents navigate inclusion challenges, ensuring a secure educational experience for children (Fu & Zhuo, 2024; Rahi et al., 2024). Tracking development and providing appropriate support is essential for effective transitions. Addressing societal understanding and acceptance, especially regarding children with autism, is vital to prevent social isolation and bullying (Daghustani et al., 2025; Gkatsa & Antoniou, 2024). Strong policy enforcement ensures students receive necessary support and are included in school life, fostering a more inclusive environment (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024; Amrisal & Hamdana, 2024).

2.1.5 Concept of Mainstream Settings and Inclusive Education

In mainstream settings, a primary general educational classroom is one where both typically developing children and children with a disability are educated together (Jornevald et al., 2024; Caballero, 2024). In these situations, many children with the disability might need different levels of support, but fundamentally, they are following the same curriculum, syllabus, and classroom structure as their peers (Farooq et al., 2023). On the other hand, inclusive educational settings are committed to

providing all educational support, physical placement, different instruction, classroom practice, adequate resources, and a culture of diversity to meet individual needs based on each child's strengths and weaknesses (Shaw, 2017).

Schools must provide essential support services and accommodations, such as curricular modifications and targeted teacher training, to enable meaningful participation (Strogilos & Ward, 2023; Garrad et al., 2022). Ainscow (2005) describes inclusive education as removing obstacles to being present, participating, and doing well. For this to happen, teachers, parents, and experts must work together to create a supportive environment (Nayyar & Kashyap, 2024; Mann et al., 2023).

To facilitate meaningful participation, schools must provide necessary support services and accommodations, including curriculum adaptations and focused teacher training (Strogilos & Ward, 2023). Ainscow (2005) defines inclusive education as addressing barriers to presence, participation, and achievement, with collaboration between teachers, parents, and specialists being critical for fostering a supportive atmosphere.

Inclusive education emphasizes including all children with diverse needs, where mainstream education should create a culture based on their unique needs (Sharma & Gill, 2024; Karim, 2023). This includes curriculum modification, teaching strategies, and overall supportive manners in order to create an inclusive environment for all learners (Sharma, 2024). This approach will not only benefit children with diverse needs but also enrich the educational platform for all kinds of students, where a collaborative learning culture will be promoted (Sharma & Gill, 2024; Udvari-Solner & Thousand, 1996).

Exploring challenges and gaining knowledge related to any particular situation in education may lead to developing/improving the education system more generally (Tweedy & Jean, 2016; Garba, 2024). The inclusive approach cannot be implemented just by following a specific set of school rules (Lindner et al., 2023). Additionally, it cannot be the sole goal of inclusive education to bring children with disabilities or autism into mainstream settings unassumingly; the process is more of a case-specific, exploratory one of striving to help individual children reach their maximum potential (Tweedy & Jean, 2016). We classify children with special educational needs (SEN) or disorders as those who require additional support and accommodations to achieve academic and social success (Лопатинська et al., 2023).

2.1.6 Summary

This chapter presents the theoretical framework on inclusive education and the inclusion of autistic children in mainstream classrooms. It explains inclusion, the purpose of inclusive education, mainstream settings, and obstacles affecting successful integration. Barriers and strategies for creating supportive environments are highlighted, forming a foundation for the study.

3 Literature Review

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A literature review gives the reader an understanding of the concepts and research findings related to inclusive education and children with disabilities in those settings. It also justifies the study's focus by presenting a thorough analysis of the current knowledge in the area.

This literature review starts with the historical development and current conceptualization of inclusive education in developed countries and the context of the Global South. It provides insight into the general perspectives in different parts of the world about the inclusive approach. Next, the literature discusses the challenges encountered in implementing inclusive education for children with disabilities across the globe, including the lack of expertise and the need for teacher training, the issue of social exclusion, and the question of the most effective inclusive education practices.

This chapter also includes a brief overview of the current condition of the educational institutions in Bangladesh. I provided an overview of the concept of inclusive education, the status of educational opportunities for children with ASD in Bangladesh, and the ideal academic environment for these children. Furthermore, I analysed the impact of cultural beliefs and societal attitudes on the education of children with ASD in Bangladesh. Additionally, recommendations for policy changes and community involvement to support inclusive education for children with ASD are discussed.

3.1.1 Literature Search

I aimed to explore obstacles to give clarity about the required support systems for students with autism in mainstream educational environments by integrating diverse views in Bangladesh. The growing prevalence of autism in schools and the demand for more thorough and customised teaching methods led to its selection. Thus, the final literature review question became the following:

- a. What do Bangladeshi parents of autistic children say are the most important factors that affect the social and academic development of their children in mainstream educational settings?
- b. How do teachers and principals in Bangladesh view mainstream settings for autistic children?
- c. What distinguishes the views of parents of autistic children from those of teachers and principals?
- d. What do the findings mean for mainstream education settings in Bangladesh, taking everyone's points of view and recommendations into account?

I sought to define, assess, and analyse the articles identified by the systematic literature review. Furthermore, the procedures for data collection and analysis employed in the literature were rigorously assessed, as they may impact the research design of the current study. A literature review constitutes

both an activity and an outcome. This activity predominantly engaged me for a period, typically following the selection of overarching research questions. Each research topic and its corresponding research questions possess a corpus of information that is beneficial for me in undertaking the investigation.

Sources such as academic journal indexes, websites of organisations known to work on the topic, generic search engines (such as Google and Google Scholar), and pertinent databases were searched in order to find evidence and analysis.

I highlighted abstracts, books, journals, dissertations, and both print and electronic media as the predominant sources for the literature review. Video documentaries, such as TED Talks, were also utilised as general knowledge for reviewing the material.

A concise literature review concerning the mainstreaming of students with autism is presented below, aiming to investigate how various documents interpret mainstream education for students with autism in Bangladesh. These offered diverse viewpoints to me for enhanced attention and comprehension of the obstacles.

Finding well-known authors and organisations and their works, looking through the citations of pertinent research, and speaking with subject matter experts to get recommendations were all ways that searches were enhanced. The search encompassed grey literature, quantitative and qualitative research, and peer-reviewed publications. As previously mentioned, there was a dearth of reliable data on autism in Bangladesh. Despite the limitations in data availability, the study on autism in Bangladesh drew upon as much pertinent information as possible. This review includes several case studies and conclusions about Ghana and other industrialised and developing nations. The implications of including studies conducted outside of Bangladesh, such as in the UK, Canada, Australia, Finland, and Malaysia, were considered on several levels.

In summary, the review highlighted the current scenario of children with autism in Bangladesh and potential areas for further research. This research included information from various previous studies, which added more depth and context to the outcomes of this research, believing this will enrich awareness for future researchers.

Few studies in Bangladesh exist regarding children with disabilities in regular education settings, highlighting the importance of more research on how this group of children is doing in regular settings. Understanding the obstacles and the academic/social achievement rate in mainstream settings can guide policy and practice, creating a more supportive system for this group of children, including a wider range of South Asian cultural views and experiences. Gathering information from neighbouring countries about children with autism in mainstream settings also provides clarity about how Bangladesh should proceed for better outcomes for this group of children.

A systematic review of the literature was carried out in January 2020. The initial scoping review supported the creation of the most relevant parameters and inclusion and exclusion criteria. The systematic review aimed to analyse existing research on the topic and provide a comprehensive overview of current knowledge. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure that only relevant studies were included in the final analysis.

I conducted searches using only the English language while focusing on previous research using a range of keywords such as “autism,” “mainstream settings,” “inclusive education,” “cultural view,” “teachers’/principals’/parents’ perception,” and online papers published after 2002. The time period for the most recent papers was included, up until 2025, when the literature review was completed. Due to limited research in Bangladesh, mainly on autism in primary settings, older studies before 2002 were also reviewed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical context and evolution of research on the Bangladeshi educational system and autism in Bangladeshi communities.

3.2 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF BANGLADESH'S EDUCATION SYSTEM



Image 2. Bangladesh map

In Bangladesh's history of education, the emphasis on the expansion and development of modern education began in the early 20th century. However, before the introduction of British rule, Bangladesh was universally known as a country with a rich heritage and a traditional cultural environment (Latif, 2004). Muslim missionaries established "Maktub" primary-stage religious schools in the country, teaching basic Qur'anic and Persian literature (Sanaullah, 1995). Various parts of the country established Madrasahs, higher religious schools that taught advanced levels of Persian

literature, Islamic philosophy, and theology (Sanaullah, 1995). The spread and forwarding of English education to this part of the world was inspired by the great civilizing mission of the 19th century. The British introduced a new educational structure in Bangladesh through administrative changes, with the primary goal of spreading English education and liberal ideas to transform and enlighten orthodox Muslim society, as per Basu's 1941 report.

The British were the first to establish a modern Western-type educational institution in Bengal, establishing the Calcutta Madrasa in 1781 which offered a comprehensive and integrated system of religious and Western education. The British education policy introduced secondary schools in 1904, leading to a significant increase in Bengal's number of government-aided schools, with the number of "English schools" surpassing "high English schools" by 132.7% by 1930 (Rabbi, 2008). The introduction of this British modern education resulted in evolutions in schools, courses, and examination methods. Each English school housed three student classes, with first-division students preparing for entrance exams (Basu, 1941).

Bangladesh's educational history was marked by the need to rebuild the system after independence (1971), which was damaged during the liberation struggle (Rabbi, 2008). The new government implemented several reforms, including the Bay Order (1972); the National Education Policy (NEP) (1974); the primary education compulsion; the Upazila (chapter-based secondary education), the formation of the Education Commission, and a national campaign against illiteracy (National Education Policy, 2000). In 1972, the government also established the National Education Commission to gather feedback on the people's needs and wants for an education system. The commission aimed to review the entire education network and organize it based on the needs and wishes of the population. This review reflected the economic and social development of a newly independent and democratic country (Anis, 2022).

Due to economic neglect in rural areas, particularly within agriculture, Bangladesh's education system was slow to develop after the civil war and the 1971 split from the Pakistani split, resulting in significant educational disparities. Low pay in Bangladesh has demoralized teachers, resulting in extended absences. Around 75% of the country's buildings require urgent repair. Furthermore, natural disasters have destroyed many schools, causing additional disruption in remote communities (Rabbi, 2008). Despite these challenges, the government has taken steps to modernize the education system, including the "Education for All" plan set to conclude in 2015 (EFA, 2000).

However, the country's unstable and poorly functioning education system remains a challenge. Bangladesh faces significant challenges in modernizing its education system, including reforming examination systems, increasing teachers' capabilities, investing in higher education, and ensuring curriculum progress (Education Watch Report, 2005). Despite these limitations, a favourable prospect for modernization is evident in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has seen significant expansion in primary

education since 1971, now covering over 90% of children. The country's literacy rate is increasing, with 64,815 primary schools and 539 branch schools. The government has implemented policies and programs to improve elementary education, focusing on law and order, quality and equity, and specialized education for disabled students (Ardt, 2005).

3.2.1 Inclusive Education Policies in Bangladesh

Inclusive education in Bangladesh began in 1988, with the Ministry of Social Welfare overseeing special education for children with difficulties. In 1999, the government initiated progress in inclusive education by implementing a model in 15 upazilas across 15 districts in four divisions. Introduced in 2000, Bangladesh's national education policy advocates for inclusive education for all children, irrespective of their physical, intellectual, emotional, or cognitive deficiencies. It mandates government provision of necessary infrastructure, special education facilities, and appropriate curricula (Rabbi, 2008).

The Ministry of Education in Bangladesh is in the process of implementing an in-service training program for teachers focused on special education and ICT facilities. The national education policy aims to improve education opportunities, quality, capacity, efficiency, and accountability (UNESCO, 1990). The national plan of action for education for all aims to provide equitable access to education for all children with special needs by 2015, eliminate gender disparities by 2005, and promote flexibility in the education system (Rabbi, 2008). The National Steering Committee for Education, Technology and Special Education is implementing a plan to help children with special needs to overcome learning barriers by emphasizing the need for enhanced resources for teachers' professional development, practical training programs, and the integration of child-centered and flexible learning techniques (UNESCO, 2005).

Bangladesh enacted the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act to ensure inclusive education and eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities (UNESCO, 1994). The act mandates government measures and policies. The provision prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities, covering various aspects of life, including service delivery and public space design, ensuring comprehensive protection against all forms of discrimination. The act mandates educational institutions to provide reasonable accessibility to individuals with disabilities, although the definition of "reasonable accessibility" remains debatable (Anis, 2022).

The Bangladesh Education Policy 2010 and PWD Act 2013 foster inclusive education by addressing the diverse needs of learners through increased participation, reduced exclusion, and adherence to the UN's equalization rules, thereby promoting equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. The PWD Act of Bangladesh, a social and health protection law, aims to reserve quotas for persons with disabilities in public services, development works, and poverty reduction programs,

promoting inclusive education and awareness of their rights to education and employment (Nuri et al, 2021).

3.2.2 Impact and Future Outlook of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh

Inclusive education initiatives have benefitted disabled children and society by fostering friendships, enhancing social relationships, and mitigating discrimination. Teachers agree that disabled and non-disabled children benefit from inclusive education, which promotes respect for diversity in society. In addition to academic achievement, inclusive education also improves communication, behavioural development, confidence, personality, and problem-solving skills in disabled children (Barr, 2013).

Disabled children in Bangladesh face significant barriers to accessing education and healthcare, and financial responsibilities for such access are usually borne solely by family members. Furthermore, 45% of the population lives below the poverty line, making their income insufficient to cover basic expenses (Rabbi, 2008). Lack of finance thus presents a major obstacle to developing children with special needs. Despite the provision of free elementary education, the funding for mainstream settings is insufficient. The World Bank reports that 115 million children worldwide lack the necessary support from the educational system. This lack of resources can significantly impact the growth and advancement of children with special needs in Bangladesh, hindering their access to essential education and care (The World Bank, 2005).

Teachers report that they often feel inadequately trained in inclusive education due to a lack of practical experience and understanding of appropriate methodologies for teaching children with autism. This lack of training can lead to feeling overwhelmed and ill-equipped to assist all students in their classrooms. Therefore, establishing an inclusive atmosphere that caters to all students' needs is crucial for teachers (Rahman, 1986). Bangladesh's education system faces challenges in promoting inclusive education, especially for disabled students, due to a lack of non-discriminative measures and poor training among teachers and non-teaching staff. This leads to stigma as children with disabilities continue to face discrimination in society (Mehtab, 2014).

The education sector in Bangladesh faces several persistent issues, including high-quality education, the importance of the curriculum, lack of competence in teachers through inadequate training, dilapidated school infrastructure, insufficient safety measures, accountability issues, efficient evaluation instruments, insufficient research resources, a lack of competent administrators, and a lack of collaboration with key players. These issues hinder the development of a well-structured and effective education system in Bangladesh (Rahman & Sutherland, 2012).

In conclusion, tackling these difficulties is essential for enhancing the overall quality of education in Bangladesh and ensuring that students with special needs students acquire the necessary

skills and knowledge to thrive in a fast-evolving world. Cooperation among government entities, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders is crucial for developing lasting solutions to these intricate problems.

3.2.3 The State of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh Compared with That Of Developed Countries

Bangladesh is introducing and practising inclusive education, although it remains a relatively new concept (Mehtab, 2014). The government has taken various legislative measures and programs to make education accessible and available for all children in Bangladesh. For example, the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2010 and the Education for Children with Special Needs (ENCSN) of 2004 make specific provisions for creating an inclusive education system (Anis, 2022). Furthermore, the government has created "Primary Education Stipends for Socially Disadvantaged Children" (2001) and the "Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project" (SEQAEP) to improve the sustainability and quality of inclusive education as well as increase access to secondary-level education for children with special needs (Reza, 2017).

The Prime Minister's social safety net program has given special attention to the employment of people with disabilities. The Disability Rights Fund also empowers people with disabilities to advocate for equal access. In the 1990s, the Disability Rights Fund allocated \$1.14 billion, and over six years, it directed \$2.6 billion to organizations serving individuals with disabilities. Government spending on education increased from 0.9% in 1973-1974 to 2.2% in 1997-1998. However, to ensure equitable access to education for all, government financing is insufficient, and additional resources and support are required to address the ongoing challenges faced by this marginalized population (Rabbi, 2008).

The organization has undertaken nationwide advocacy for larger resource allocations. These positive movements towards inclusive education in Bangladesh have made significant progress and are now justifiable. Bangladesh is establishing its own identity in the world through successful, inclusive education. It is believed that the development of inclusive education in Bangladesh is just the start, with more to come. We must reform the current state of secondary and higher education, as well as the quality of general education, to accommodate all learners and ensure that educational excellence coexists with inclusion (Mehtab, 2014).

To achieve a more inclusive education, many areas still require improvement. For example, despite providing preliminary education opportunities to children with special needs in the inclusive education system, there is a deficiency in established policies and services for their transition to secondary education (Ahsan and Mullick, 2013). Additionally, with a lack of professional development and participation in research and practices, teachers' outmoded methods and thinking dominate

activities and teaching strategies in various schools. In such a fragmented educational system, it is not easy to assess the effectiveness and improvement of inclusive education practices (Mehtab, 2014).

In developed countries such as the United Kingdom, the prevailing policy increasingly endorses the inclusion of learners with special educational needs in mainstream education. The shift is from a philosophy of integration, which is more about placing the child in an existing mainstream school, to a more inclusive approach. The United Kingdom has now firmly established inclusion for children with special needs (Gardiner, 2017). In Scotland, the 2004 Support for Learning (Additional Support for Learning in Scotland) reforms shifted the focus towards providing for the diversity of the learner, with a new concept of 'barrier to learning' and the recognition that children learn in different ways (Essex & Macaskills, 2020). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 strengthens the rights of children with special educational needs to share the same mainstream education (Garry, 2011).

The UK strictly protects disabled students from discrimination and provides them with a variety of accommodations and support. According to the 2011 Government's SEN and Disability Strategy for Children and Young People, the UK implemented a new code of practice for identifying and assessing students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The code specified that schools are required to use their best endeavours to ensure that a child with SEN gets the support they need and that the views of the child and their parents are taken into account. Furthermore, the child should be supported to engage in the activities of daily life, and the child and their parents should be actively involved in the decision-making processes (Garry, 2011).

In Australia, the drive towards inclusive education has been ongoing since the early 1990s, particularly in the regular school system, where the number of special schools and classes is decreasing. It is the schools' responsibility to provide a quality education for all students, regardless of their learning needs, and to be inclusive of all students in regular classrooms (Garry, 2011). Accommodating and supporting students with disabilities in regular schools is considered important in maintaining and developing a full learning potential for every individual. For inclusive education to be successful, the Australian education reform agenda has focused on the need for supportive national governance as well as the implementation of systemic infrastructure and processes to achieve effective and sustainable change. Hence, the approach has been about differently located sets of learning and organizational practices that need to stand in close relationship with a desired social engagement and personal growth (Garry, 2011).

Conversely, the United States provides a valuable case study for examining the implementation of inclusive education in other developed countries (Sani, 2016). Over the years, the number of students who receive their education in a mainstream classroom has increased. The number of special schools and institutions, as well as the number of students enrolled in them, has decreased significantly. Federal

laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act stipulate that children with disabilities have a right to free public education. The availability of services should match the extent to which they meet the requirements of diverse need students. As a result, most students with diverse background are increasingly seeking placement in a general education classroom with additional support (Sani, 2016).

Compared to the successful adoption of inclusive education in these developed countries, Bangladesh still has a long way to go. However, Acharja et al (2021) assert that inclusive education is not achievable and manageable without the express provision for economic necessities and social support. The success of inclusive education will largely depend on building a unified society based on civic engagement and social justice solidarities. He suggests that other than the traditional regulatory practices, the adopted curriculum in teacher education should fully utilize dialogue, case studies, and professional debate, focusing on the principles of reflective practices in a research-based approach.

3.2.4 Summary

Inclusive education is a concept that aims to teach all students effectively and create a diverse, inclusive education that benefits all learners, not just those with diverse needs. As evidenced above, developed countries have widely accepted and practiced inclusive education. In Bangladesh, the implementation of special education has been a pioneer in extending the education system to all learners, irrespective of their various needs, weaknesses, strengths, and backgrounds. The government of Bangladesh initiated it in 1992 by providing support for the development of infrastructure, materials, and human resources necessary for the delivery of special education.

However, there is a sharp contrast in perceptions of what constitutes inclusive education between developed countries and the Third World. Disability education in Bangladesh has been characterized by incorrect views about people with disabilities held by the broader society. The failures of inclusive education stem from powerful groups limiting the potential of those perceived as vulnerable, thereby limiting their opportunities to realize their full potential. Inclusive education is essential for the overall learning experiences of all children, improving teaching conditions, fostering social cohesion, and improving school governance. It is now widely known and accepted by human rights and development organizations and governments, including the United Nations, that there is a need for shifting education systems and management from the prevailing traditional and exclusive contexts to inclusive policies and practices.

The following section will discuss traits of autism, the impact of inclusive education, benefits for children with autism, practical support strategies, and the importance of teacher training and assistance. The study's goal is to investigate the efficacy of inclusive education for children with autism.

3.3 AUTISM: UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS

3.3.1 Introduction

A child with autism may have differences in social communication and restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities in the way they communicate. The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fifth Edition) is used to diagnose autism (Soares et al., 2020). The etiology of autism is multifactorial, with potential contributors including genetic predisposition, perinatal complications, as well as other physical and environmental influences. Certain individuals with autism may need significant support with everyday activities, while others may lead independent lives and pursue higher education (Hridi et al., 2020). Individuals with autism can lead fulfilling lives with the right support, despite the diverse range of symptoms they may experience (Preity et al., 2017).

3.3.2 Prevalence of Autism

Autism incidence is rising globally, with an average prevalence of 1 in 59 children in the US, partly due to improved diagnostic methods and a broader definition (Soares et al., 2020). Autism experts in Bangladesh are scarce, and are mainly situated in metropolitan areas. The CDC and WHO estimate autism cases, and proper diagnosis requires a multidisciplinary approach involving neurologists, psychiatrists, and clinical psychologists. Bangladesh is a recent development in research on autism, with a projected 1.5 million individuals with autism in the country (Hridi et al., 2020). A 2020 study by Hridi et al. found gaps in understanding case definition, screening devices, and criteria in eight South Asian nations. Six publications examined the prevalence of ASD in Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka, with rates of 3% in Dhaka, 0.905% in India, and 1.07% in Sri Lanka. The study highlights the need for improved understanding and screening methods in these regions.

Based on the estimation from the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention's Autism and Developmental Disease Monitoring (ADDM) network, approximately 1 in 68 children who are 8 years old are identified as having ASD (Islam et al., 2023). The incidence of autism in Bangladesh is underdiagnosed because of cultural and linguistic disparities, notwithstanding possible limitations in diagnostic efficacy. Parents often assume their children will progress naturally, which may deter them from pursuing a formal diagnosis and thus fail to implement necessary therapies, thereby impacting their child's development and quality of life (Pervin, 2016).

3.3.3 Historical Perspective

Early in the 20th century, Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler used the word "autistic" to characterize the withdrawal symptoms experienced by schizophrenia patients (Genovese & Butler,

2020). Dr. Hans Asperger's 1944 study identified a subset of students with autism known as "Asperger's Syndrome," characterized by advanced linguistic and cognitive abilities as well as the ability to interact socially with adults. Dr. Asperger's research has had a significant influence on the comprehension of autism, notwithstanding this dispute (Vicedo, 2023). The term "students with autism psychopathy" refers to the type of autism that Leo Kanner first identified in 1943 (Genovese & Butler, 2020). Kanner's study on children with autism, the first effort to identify and improve the disability, transformed the popular perception of autism. He claimed emotional detachment and aloofness stemmed from elevated intellect rather than inadequate parenting. This research differentiated autism from other disabilities and facilitated the development of more individualized and compassionate therapy approaches for persons with autism (Vicedo, 2023).

3.4 SUPPORT STRATEGIES AND ACCESS REQUIREMENTS

Support strategies or adjustments are essential for children with autism, including educational and behavioural modification support, speech and language therapy, occupational and physical therapy, medications, and alternative access requirements. Early support strategies, such as speech therapies and parent education, are effective for babies and toddlers from birth to three years old. They focus on improving communication, social skills, and daily living activities. Research shows that early intervention significantly improves overall development and long-term outcomes (Sharma et al., 2015).

3.4.1 Speech and Language Therapy

Speech therapy is a crucial support strategy for language difficulties in children with autism, focusing on individualized needs and collaboration with experts. It entails replacing activities with more effective strategies to empower and coordinate muscles and improve grammar and coordination skills. Speech therapy is an essential supplemental service for individuals with autism, focusing on non-speaking communication methods like sign language or picture schedules (Koly & Saba, 2024).

3.4.2 Occupational and Physical Therapy

Occupational and physical therapy are effective therapies for children with autism, particularly those with sensory processing disorders. These therapies use engaging exercises to regulate sensory processing and assess issues. Occupational therapy helps develop physical and social skills, while physical therapy uses exercises and games to move the body. Early intervention can significantly improve the quality of life for children with autism, addressing sensory differences and promoting overall development (Akter, 2018).

3.4.3 Medications and Alternative therapy

Students with autism often exhibit symptoms similar to those of other disabilities, resulting in the administration of drugs such as SSRIs, antipsychotics, and stimulants to mitigate anxiety, sadness, and obsessive-compulsive behaviours. Nonetheless, studies regarding the efficacy of medication are few. Alternative therapies such as dietary modifications, vitamin supplementation, and biofeedback are gaining popularity owing to their non-invasive characteristics and minimal adverse effects. Access to expert assistance and reassurance is essential for students with autism (Genovese & Butler, 2020).

3.4.4 Behavioural and Educational Interventions

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention endorses Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) therapies for autism, including teaching-family and crucial response therapy methodologies. Both methodologies tackle emotional and behavioural challenges, promoting enduring improvement in a child's life (Tweedy, 2015). Structured teaching is crucial for children with autism, helping them understand situations and reduce anxiety. The 'TEACCH' program uses structured activities and visual schedules (Tweedy, 2015). The National Institute of Mental Health advocates for organized therapy, such as early intensive behavioural programs, to facilitate the development of critical abilities in students with autism for academic and life success. Special education services must be customized to address each child's distinct requirements and foster their independent functioning (Sharma et al., 2015). Play therapists can also assist students with autism in developing structured play sessions that enhance their social skills, communication abilities, and emotional regulation (Parker & O'Brien, 2011). Furthermore, Sequeira & Ahmed (2012) found that meditation can enhance focus, reduce anxiety, improve social skills, decrease sensory sensitivities, and improve emotional regulation in children with autism.

3.5 IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The success of an inclusive program for students with autism in Bangladesh depends heavily on the preparedness and knowledge of regular and special education teachers, the school environment, and support services. Different countries, including America, Canada, and China, have studied the impact of inclusive education on children with autism. In most studies, the focus is often on students' academic progress in mainstream settings, as well as their social and emotional development.

Research has shown that inclusive education is very beneficial for students with disabilities in general and students with autism in particular. Inclusive education enhances the development of children both with and without disabilities and prepares them for a better adult life (Ferguson, 2018). There are many direct and indirect benefits to inclusive education.

One of the most important benefits of inclusive education is that it provides the opportunity for interaction and communication among children with and without disabilities (Narumanchi &

Bhargava, 2011). When children are educated in a place where they belong, they value each other's unique strengths and will help each other in their challenges (Price, 2018). The social interactions that are built in the mainstream classroom are significantly beneficial for the child's social and emotional development (Das, 2011). As Paraskevi (2021) suggests, providing readily available opportunities for students to interact with and learn from diverse others is one of the main benefits of inclusive education. Moreover, mainstream settings prepare and expose students with autism to real-life challenges, empowering them to navigate societal contexts independently. Such skills are imperative for their future independence, decisions, and choices (Pervin, 2016).

The previous study (Sander, 2021) revealed that students with autism who attend inclusive education make better progress toward achieving self-independence and self-advocacy skills when compared to those in special educational settings. Typically, inclusive education helps children develop self-advocacy skills that are critical for their academic success. On the contrary, the previous study (Das, 2011) reveals that students with autism in special education settings might have less opportunity to develop social and communication skills because most of their peer interactions are adult-guided.

Furthermore, the previous researcher (Keener, 2018) asserts that inclusive education not only benefits children with special needs but also imparts essential life skills to neurotypical students, such as empathy, compassion, and acceptance of diversity. In inclusive education, neurotypical students are taught to be socialized and made to understand common humanity by creating awareness about the complexities of the human condition and the many differing ways in which our lives are lived creatively and productively. According to Aboagye (2017), exposure to this type of environment is extremely beneficial for building positive self-esteem. An environment in which students learn to disclose and are able to become vulnerable to one another fosters supportive, authentic peer-to-peer relationships that will last a lifetime.

Neurotypical students in inclusive classrooms also learn to celebrate diverse societies, languages, and belief systems and thus prepare them to become culturally responsive citizens in their adult lives (Hehir et al, 2016). Furthermore, neurotypical students learn to understand the concept of interconnectedness among all living things in the world, as well as acquiring respect for diversity (Sander, 2021). This helps to bridge communication gaps among children of different abilities and cultural and social backgrounds, thus reinforcing meaningful friendships that will be very beneficial for the children's cognitive development.

The constant exposure to new ideas, beliefs, and challenges within the inclusive classroom will help cultivate students with the ability to view the world from various angles. The shared knowledge and experiences will cultivate a wealth of expertise, competencies, and confidence (McMillan, 2008). The previous study, such as Worth (2005), posits that inclusive education fosters empathy in children.

When students become accustomed to interacting with peers of differing abilities and backgrounds, they will come to a point where they start understanding the feelings and needs of others.

Furthermore, as they work to develop and implement activities to support all learners, students develop a deep sense of appreciation and validation for the uniqueness of each individual. When realizing that every individual has something valuable to teach and something unique to contribute, an inclusive atmosphere is fostered where students are respected in their own right. This type of supportive environment thus sustains the motivation in students to identify and further develop their areas of strength (McMillan, 2008).

Teachers and other students can serve as role models for all students by demonstrating real-life experiences of sharing, turn-taking, helping, and cooperation. Both disabled and non-disabled students can engage in a reciprocal relationship where both parties benefit. This aligns with the principles of social constructivism, which views learning and teaching as a collaborative process (Paraskevi, 2021).

Contrary to what some may believe, inclusive education, when administered expertly, can significantly benefit students with autism. When included in general education classrooms, students with autism demonstrate noteworthy academic progress. In such an environment, the children have a chance to be exposed to the same curriculum as their non-affected peers. Typically, developing students can then serve as examples of what academic progress should look like (Shafiqur Rahman, 2018).

However, extensive research (Goodman, 2014) has once again demonstrated that self-advocacy practices educate both teachers and children. Such parties help the children concerned to develop a voice as well as the ability to know when, where, and how to advocate. Therefore, the authors recommend placing students with autism who have average intellectual ability in mainstream settings, provided they receive the necessary support services.

Yet, a number of prior studies (Kawser et al., 2016; Alam, 2018; Lindsay et al., 2013; Ampotenteng et al., 2019) further support this claim, particularly because parents from various nations, including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Ghana still struggle with accessing inclusive education for their students with autism children, even though they believe it to be highly helpful. Therefore, to effectively support and provide resources for inclusive education programs, it is vital to understand the issues that parents in these nations confront. Such understanding will eventually help teachers and legislators in those nations understand the difficulties, which will subsequently benefit children with autism. By consciously acknowledging and then addressing these obstacles, we may endeavour to provide an environment that is more welcoming and encouraging for all children, regardless of their skill level. We should emphasise the benefits of inclusive education and the necessity of improving the resources accessible to children with specific disabilities.

3.6 THE CHALLENGES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUCCESSFUL INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is the most densely populated and disadvantaged country in the world. The country's acute poverty rate is about 40%. Bangladesh has also been struggling to provide proper education and physical access to its population. Education in Bangladesh is the key to eradicating poverty and will facilitate economic growth, empowerment, and social transformation (Azam & Mullick, 2009).

The Government of Bangladesh is a signatory to the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA)(UNESCO, 1990). In concordance with the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) (UN, 2006) of achieving universal primary education, it has undertaken various measures to improve access to education for all, especially physical access for persons with disabilities, such as ramps, adapted toilets, and resource rooms. Another essential factor is the improvement in academic performance and accomplishment. However, a lack of awareness, resources, physical access, and professional development for teachers is hindering the development of education for children with special needs (Asim, 2011).

Although the Government of Bangladesh has established numerous policies and laws, including the National Education Policy 2010, the National Policy for Children 2011, the Disability Welfare Act 2001, and others, implementation has yet to take place in terms of universal design, accessibility, and children's participation, particularly in the mainstream classroom. Despite the endorsement of inclusion and the apparent availability of structured educational support for students with autism in Bangladesh since 2011, the inclusive ethos, rationale, policy, and practice remain unclear. Numerous academics (Ahsan & Mullick, 2013; Prodhan, 2016, Anis, 2022) have noted that there is a lack of understanding and inadequate information about autism in the nation. To successfully implement inclusive education in Bangladesh, it is necessary to address these limitations and challenges thoroughly and efficiently.

It seems that there is a limited amount of research on students with autism in Bangladesh (Azam & Mullick, 2009). Bangladeshi children with autism, particularly those attending primary school in mainstream educational settings, encounter a multitude of challenges. Exploring 'Inclusive Education for Students with autism in Bangladesh Mainstream' is pertinent at this juncture due to the recent progressive direction in the provision for special needs, that is, the Education for Children with Special Needs project, which started in 2011. While it is still in its transitional phase and may take a little while to complete, this project provides a glimpse of hope for the institutionalization of inclusive education in the near future (Tareq & Mullick, 2013).

Bangladesh's concentration on test scores, combined with both the lack of a school-based diagnostic and assessment system, and the scarcity of specialists to advise teachers make it difficult to implement inclusive education. These advisors, also known as resource teachers or integrated education instructors, visit schools solely to aid students enrolled in their program; they do not provide support in cultivating an inclusive learning environment (Ahmed et al, 2018). Additionally, there is a lack of steady funding for staffing levels and in-service training that is required to sustain flexible, education-based, specialized support services. Having insufficient support and training for teachers is another big barrier to adopting inclusive education (Alam, 2018). To organize and execute instruction in a way that takes into account the diversity of learners' needs and learning styles, teachers must possess the necessary knowledge and abilities (Alshams et al, 2024).

Furthermore, misconceptions about autism and policy issues may impede the use of inclusive education practices. To establish an atmosphere where all students may grow and succeed, schools must overcome these challenges. The sections that follow will provide a more in-depth discussion of the obstacles and tactics for advancing inclusive education. Furthermore, this research will emphasise the crucial role of cooperation among teachers, parents, and other relevant parties in overcoming these challenges (Saleh 2019).

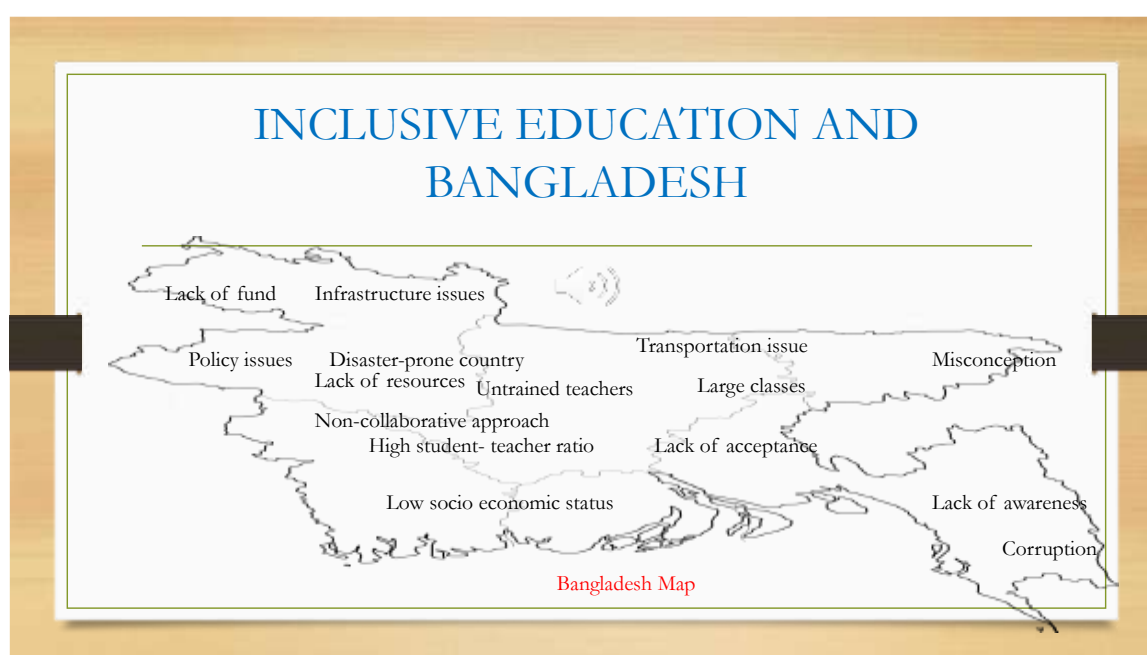


Image 3. Factors in Inclusive Education in Bangladesh

3.6.1 Lack of Awareness

First, as detailed above by previous research, inclusion is a new concept in Bangladesh, and most people lack proper knowledge, information, and experience about inclusive education. Historically, society has marginalized and devalued students with special educational needs, resulting

in insufficient social acceptability. The general population thus maintains a prevalent negative perception and lacks knowledge about inclusive education. Raising awareness and disseminating correct information on inclusive education is essential to solving this issue (Senoo et al, 2024). Prior research indicates that teachers and students exhibit verbal, physical, or visual discrimination toward children with special educational need (Rajib & Saira, 2017).

The lack of awareness and understanding among various stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and peers, who are either unaware of or do not fully understand its values, presents significant challenges to the implementation of inclusive education in Bangladesh (Kawser et al, 2016). Misconceptions about inclusive education persist, including the notion that it is only for children with special needs. However, convincing research finds evidence to show that inclusive education applies to all children, irrespective of their disability (Ainscow, 2003). Adverse perceptions of disability can arise from an insufficient understanding of medical and social concepts of disability (Kawser et al, 2016).

Children with disabilities often face discrimination and negative attitudes, such as bullying in school playgrounds, which can lead to social isolation. This discourages parents from enrolling their children in inclusive education, which would challenge these negative attitudes and exacerbate the social and learning experiences of marginalized individuals, including children with disabilities and their families (Alam, 2018). These challenges significantly impact efforts to establish inclusive education (Basir et al, 2014). Previous research (Akter et al, 2023) highlights poor educational achievement and limited employment opportunities (Davies et al, 2021) for students with autism students, advocating for intensive research and knowledge integration in education practice.

Teachers in Bangladesh have an inadequate understanding of integrative education, concentrating primarily on special education needs. A lack of understanding of inclusive practices may obstruct the implementation of inclusive education in schools (Hasne et al, 2018). Teachers need the essential knowledge and competencies to provide an inclusive educational environment that caters to all learners (Indina & Istiomah, 2019).

3.6.2 Limited Availability of Resources

The scarcity of resources is another significant barrier that previous researchers (Azam & Mullick, 2009; Asim, 2011; Tareq & Mullick, 2013; Ahsan & Mullick, 2013; Prodhan, 2016; Tarjiah & Riyanti, 2019; Siska & Habib, 2012; Ahsan et al., 2012) identified. Bangladesh's schools lack essential facilities and support for inclusive education, including training materials and aids. The lack of visual aids, Braille pads, hearing aids, and specific furniture in mainstream schools makes it challenging for teachers to adopt resource-based teaching styles to meet the needs of diverse learners, making it difficult for schools to implement inclusive education (Hasne et al, 2018).

Bangladesh needs to reconstruct many schools to make them physically accessible for disabled learners. Existing facilities lack lift allocation and essential amenities such as disabled-friendly restrooms, classrooms, specialist subject areas, and safe play areas (Kawser et al, 2016; Begum et al, 2019). The task requires meticulous planning, significant investment, structural changes, and a huge shift in prevailing attitudes toward disabilities. Although some schools provide separate toilets for disabled students, authorities and teachers often use them as storage rooms or offices, reflecting a culture of attitude that lacks situational awareness (Begum et al., 2019). Despite economic growth, the implementation of measures to create a disability-friendly environment for children remains uneven (Prodhan, 2016).

The Bangladeshi education system lacks an appropriate curriculum for students with special needs, leading to an overreliance on lecture-based, chalk-and-talk methodologies. The conventional curriculum restricts students' abilities and interests to certain courses until Grade 10, preventing them from taking secondary school certificate tests due to a lack of alternative papers that align with the curriculum (Rajib & Saira, 2017). The Curriculum Development Team, a government-led initiative, should focus on providing individualized education to each child, considering their capacities, deficiencies, and preferred learning methods (Kawser et al, 2016b). This approach can enhance inclusive practices, facilitate maximum capabilities, and improve academic success. To be implemented successfully, Bangladesh's inclusive educational strategy still requires more training and resources (Al shams et al, 2024).

3.6.3 Insufficient Training and Support lead to a lack of teacher knowledge

In Bangladesh, the majority of teachers are inadequately trained to instruct students with disabilities, leading to negative perceptions of inclusive education (Prodhan, 2016). Teachers with previous knowledge and support have a more positive disposition, but those without sufficient assistance often demonstrate discomfort or reluctance to embrace pupils with disabilities. Teachers often feel a diminished sense of self-worth when teaching children with disabilities, especially those with autism, due to inadequate training and support (Francis, 2017). Despite feeling comfortable teaching children with physical disabilities or other disabilities, they tend to decline to teach children with autism. Students with autism have learning and behavioural difficulties that can be challenging to manage without adequate help and training (Aboagye, 2017). Teachers in Bangladesh are often ill-prepared to teach these children due to a lack of strategies and practical teaching methods, leading to a sense of helplessness and frustration, potentially affecting the quality of education for students with autism (Tareq & Mullick, 2013).

According to Narmunanchi and Bhargava (2011), approximately 90% of general and special education teachers want to acquire novel strategies and expertise to enhance their assistance for

students with autism children. Insufficient training impedes educational progress and exacerbates stress, worry, and feelings of inadequacy among teachers. Research indicates that teachers may feel inundated when they lack the requisite knowledge and abilities to instruct and assist children with autism. Previous research in Bangladesh and other developed countries (Azam & Mullick, 2009; Tarjiah & Riyanti, 2019; Siska & Habib, 2012) assert that the majority of general education program teachers and autism professionals lack the necessary training to comprehend the learning styles of children and youth with autism.

Teachers and autism specialists must continue their professional development to enhance special needs education since they are frequently untrained in understanding students with autism children's learning preferences. Special education teachers benefit from hands-on training, cooperation, and a multidisciplinary approach. Participating in seminars (Sani, 2014), collaborating with colleagues, and integrating assistive technology (Ary, 2017) can improve inclusiveness and engagement in classrooms (Mallick & Sheesh, 2013). Collaborating with experts and colleagues can provide valuable insights (Abbasi, 2017). Teacher training should focus on improving educational experiences for children with autism, offering comprehensive preservice education and professional development experiences. Cross-disciplinary collaboration between general and special education is essential, demonstrating the benefits of collaborative practice (Alam 2018).

Teachers need adequate resources to access content and support students with diverse learning needs, ensuring optimal education for all students, regardless of their specific needs. According to Pervin (2016), in Bangladesh, a lack of resources, and the absence of high-quality teacher preparation hinders effective inclusion because it can lead to fear, negativity, and disengagement towards students with learning needs, which can impede social and academic advancement.

Some teachers face limited access to training programs due to financial and temporal constraints (Umesh & Joanne, 2012). Inclusive education is crucial for all students, and supplementary training is essential for teaching students with autism (M., A. T & Jahirul, 2013). Globally, teacher education programs often lack evidence-based techniques for students with autism students (Tweedy, 2014). In Bangladesh, the current curriculum often only briefly mentions autism and neurodiversity, undermining the preparedness of future teachers for dealing with students with autism (Sarkar & Anzim, 2024).

In Bangladesh, there is a lack of professional development opportunities for full-time teachers, particularly those with autism. This leads to teachers focusing solely on test preparation, neglecting the well-being of children with disabilities (Azam & Mullick, 2009). This issue is prevalent among teachers, causing apprehension about unfamiliarity and a lack of ongoing professional development opportunities (Oliveira, 2005).

Previous researchers (Pervin, 2016; Alam, 2018; Linsay, 2013) have underscored the importance of including inclusive education courses in teacher preparation programs and establishing effective methods for training current teachers. Another proposal is to introduce undergraduate or graduate courses specific to autism and related interests. The goal of this increased system knowledge is to encourage individual knowledge changes and influence their actions.

Teachers face challenges in accommodating diverse pupils, especially those with special needs, due to time constraints and large class sizes. They struggle to balance personalized attention and diverse learning methodologies. Consequently, teachers need support teachers or special education teachers to provide personalized assistance for students with exceptional needs, ensuring a comprehensive and encouraging learning atmosphere (Alam, 2018). Effective collaboration between teachers and support personnel fosters a positive, intellectually stimulating educational experience for all students (Tarjiah & Riyanti, 2019).

Teachers who receive crucial information and support for their interactions with children feel secure and validated, leading to a strong commitment to inclusive education (Hasson et al, 2022). The government must thus address the lack of training and support for special needs teachers by creating a comprehensive system of ongoing professional development that emphasises inclusive education. This will help teachers exhibit dedication and a positive disposition toward inclusive education (Ary, 2017).

3.7 THE IMPACT OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

According to Kamruzzaman et al. (2018), certain autistic children may have difficulty receiving and organising sensory information. These children often find noises, sights, scents, tastes, and touch to be overpowering. For instance, some students with autism may have a heightened sensitivity to loud noises, which may lead to feelings of frustration and anxiety. According to Hossain et al. (2017), such behaviours might result in difficulty in sustaining attention and concentrating on tasks that require prolonged concentration, which can influence their capacity to participate in activities essential for their growth and learning if they are not provided with the required assistance and accommodations to regulate their sensory experiences.

According to McDonald (2010), some autistic children are unable to speak at all, have a limited vocabulary, or struggle with how they interact with other people. A significant number of autistic children experience a loss of their ability to communicate when they are in unfamiliar or unsettling environments. To effectively communicate their needs and feelings, people working with these children may rely on alternative forms of communication, such as pictures or gestures. To help students with autism grow and create a more inclusive environment, caretakers and educators must understand

these subtleties (McDonald, 2010). Additionally, when students with autism display typical childhood behaviours, such as temper tantrums, people often mistake them for being mischievous or disruptive due to a lack of knowledge on common autistic traits (Kodak & Bergmann, 2020).

Prior research has demonstrated that in advanced nations like the UK, Canada, and the USA, a teacher in a typical school setting may be responsible for overseeing a class of twenty to thirty students (Sani, 2016). Nevertheless, in Bangladesh, class numbers occasionally surpass 100 (Kawser et al., 2016). Large classrooms can be overwhelming for children with autism, leading to violent behaviour and ensuing increased teacher irritability. Crowded classrooms also make it difficult for teachers to provide extra attention to exceptional children. This highlights the need for reduced class sizes and tailored assistance for students with autism in Bangladesh, emphasizing the need for tailored support (Kawser et al, 2016). Minimizing sensory stimuli can help children adapt to their surroundings and alleviate sensory overload. Addressing the root cause of sensory overload, such as excessive noise, can help reduce anxiety in students with autism (Scambler et al, 2007). Teachers can identify and eliminate the noise, promoting a more tranquil environment (Sharma, 2015).

Students with autism often encounter communication obstacles, such as nonverbal signals, challenges in conversation, and restricted vocal expression, resulting in misunderstandings and social isolation. These impediments may lead to misinterpretation and conflict if not addressed effectively. I notes that parents and teachers, as primary mentors for children, must receive training both at home and in educational institutions (Kodak & Bergmann, 2020). This training should emphasise effective communication strategies, including visual aids, social narratives, and explicit directions. Equipping adults with essential skills and knowledge enables students with autism to navigate social interactions more effectively and cultivate lasting connections (Faisal et al., 2017).

Routine is crucial for children with autism, as it helps them stay organized and focused in class. This reduces anxiety and confusion and ensures they understand their teacher's expectations. This predictability also enhances their focus and attention, leading to better learning outcomes. Therefore, establishing a consistent routine greatly benefits the educational experience for students with autism (Sharma et al., 2015). Furthermore, each child with autism is different, displaying strengths and weaknesses to differing degrees. Therefore, it is crucial to approach each child as an individual and tailor interventions and support to their specific needs. Recognizing and respecting these differences can significantly improve outcomes for students with autism (Eleweke & Rodda, 2010).

3.7.1 Social Interaction Challenges

Autism diagnosis is based on social communication and interaction difficulties, with students with autism often struggling with a complex 'hidden curriculum' of social rules and nuances. The National Autism Society emphasises understanding and processing social and emotional information,

but students with autism may struggle. The social world expects students with autism to learn implicit rules, but the autism community acknowledges the need for explicit teaching of these rules (Worth, 2005).

Students with autism struggle with social and emotional skills, such as sharing, playing, and body language, which are essential for meaningful relationships. They may also struggle with recognizing and labeling feelings, helping themselves, and asking for help. They may feel the same emotions as others, but they may either express them inappropriately or not recognize their own needs. Respondents noted difficulties in helping students with autism understand their own emotions, and the lack of experts or professionals further complicates this situation (Sharma, 2015; Preity et al., 2017).

3.7.2 Cultural and Social Barriers

Cultural beliefs about disabilities are the root cause of these barriers, leading to exclusion and marginalization. Studies show a high rate of social discrimination, with children with disabilities reporting that they cannot attend school due to social stigma (Asim, 2011). People often view disability as a medical necessity, not a social discrimination or human rights issue. People usually treat disabled individuals as inferior, leading to their exclusion and marginalisation in society. This cultural and social attitude hinders the potential development of diverse need children as well as the chances of successful inclusive education, as people tend to protect their rights rather than respect their potential (Siska & Habib, 2012).

Discriminative cultural and social attitudes continue to cause disability discrimination. We need a national plan to address this issue and change societal attitudes. Governments and NGOs (Siag et al, 2020) can increase public awareness through media and social events, while teachers and lecturers in educational institutions should adapt their approaches to better support students with different needs (Samnani et al, 2023). This includes providing different formats of reading materials and assessments, as attitudes remain a significant barrier to disability discrimination (Pervin, 2016).

3.7.3 Stigma and Prejudice

Tushar et al (2020) argues that the stigmatization of autism stems from societal perceptions and narratives, often presenting people with autism as burdens or challenging individuals. This internalization can reinforce the stigma surrounding the condition, leading to a lack of understanding and respect. Previous research (Sorin, 2015) shows that internalized stigma can affect students with autism, affecting their self-esteem and confidence. Students with autism may thus perceive themselves as inferior, which can lead to negative mental and emotional well-being. In response, they use masking, a common coping strategy, to conceal their true selves and evade judgment.

Masking is a detrimental practice that requires significant emotional and mental effort and can damage mental health. In inclusive education, stigma and prejudice can influence expectations and attitudes towards children with autism. To foster an inclusive society, the education system should provide an autonomy-supportive environment, fostering understanding and acceptance of differences in society rather than a "cure-seeking mentality" approach towards autism. This approach promotes respect and value for students with autism, children's unique qualities and potential (Soroni, 2015).

3.8 INADEQUATE POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Bangladesh needs to implement changes in its policy and legal framework for inclusive education to ensure equitable access to high-quality education for all students, regardless of abilities or backgrounds. This will not only benefit individual students but also contribute to the nation's progress and prosperity. Inclusive education can reduce inequality and promote social cohesion by dismantling obstacles and fostering mutual understanding among diverse groups (Abbasi, 2017).

All fifty- six ministers from the Council of Europe adopted a declaration in 2011, emphasising the importance of transversal skills development in inclusive education and society. The declaration calls for member states to prioritize policies serving children's best interests and values aligned with democracy, human rights, and social justice (Price, 2018). However, the policy and legal framework do not officially recognize inclusive education, nor do they provide strategic, programmatic, or legal support. This impedes the implementation of common European principles as well as the development of teacher education curricula and training programs. Despite this, inclusive education has gained worldwide recognition as a means to protect educational rights (Abbasi, 2017).

Parents of students with autism often face challenges in accessing healthcare professionals and waiting for a diagnosis, indicating a lack of adherence to policy goals. This uncertainty leads to family exclusion and isolation. Policymakers must address service gaps and provide resources to ensure families receive the necessary support. This will empower families, reduce stigma, and promote acceptance in society by increasing awareness and education about autism.

3.9 THE GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

Bangladesh has still not fully embraced inclusive education as a phenomenon. Google Scholar searches yielded only six papers with more than ten citations on the topic of inclusive education and students with autism with special needs. The absence of sufficient research highlights a significant gap in understanding and addressing the needs of students with autism in inclusive education settings in Bangladesh. Conducting more studies is essential to inform policies and practices that foster the inclusion of all children in the education system.

No previous studies (Pervin, 2016; Hridi et al, 2020) on inclusive education in Bangladesh for students with autism conducted a collaborative analysis that includes parents, teachers, and principals in order to examine the problems encountered by students with autism in mainstream settings in the same research paper. The existing research in Bangladesh delineates the emotional and intellectual developmental challenges encountered by students with autism in natural environments in a somewhat limited manner. Existing research primarily focuses on either teacher-related or school-related factors, such as insufficient resources and inadequate teacher expertise, with minimal exploration of child-related themes in inclusive education (Mehtab, 2014). Further research is therefore needed to understand the emotional and academic challenges faced by students with autism in mainstream settings, including communication, sensory sensitivity, and social interactions, for effective inclusive education in Bangladesh.

Furthermore, I was unable to locate any studies that focused solely on specific criteria of students with autism in inclusive primary environments in Dhaka. Certain research (Kabir & Akter, 2014) addressed inclusive environments for studentism children, specifically focusing on data gathered from rural regions. Another study (Mehtab, 2014) has been undertaken on students with autism in Dhaka; however, this research focused on the overall population of students with autism. The study did not say what age group, other disorders, or length of the study were used in the mainstream. These details are important for understanding how well inclusive primary environments work for students with autism in big cities in Bangladesh, such as Dhaka. This gap in the literature underscores the need for further study, especially targeting students with autism in mainstream primary environments in metropolitan locales, such as Dhaka. Comprehending the unique challenges and requirements of these children in mainstream settings could facilitate the development of more effective therapy and support solutions.

From the perspective of principals, there is no research available on inclusive education for students with autism in Bangladesh. The principal's perspective is equally crucial for understanding any school-related or teacher-related issues that may affect the effective implementation of inclusive education for children with autism. Soliciting feedback from principals might provide significant insights regarding obstacles and possibilities for fostering an inclusive school atmosphere for these pupils.

Constrained research on inclusive education primarily focuses on children with special needs, rather than those with autism. Prior research has primarily collected input from teachers, which often limits the perspectives of parents of children with autism. A future study must include parents' viewpoints to gain thorough knowledge of the difficulties and accomplishments of inclusive education for those with autism.

This thesis provides a more thorough understanding of the subject by addressing the gaps in the literature review above. This new research enables a more nuanced analysis of the research findings and their implications. The thesis emphasises the importance of including perspectives from all stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges students with autism face in inclusive education. Adopting a collaborative approach can result in the development of more effective strategies and interventions to support students with autism in mainstream settings. To further understand which age group of children is in need, I also focused on a particular group of students with autism in an urban area of Dhaka. Through concentration on a particular group and area, the study author was able to offer focused suggestions for enhancing inclusive education practices in that particular setting. In cities such as Dhaka, this method may result in more specialized and effective interventions for children with autism.

4 Reflexivity

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Qualitative researchers have moved away from being an anonymous, unseen third party and towards being seen and held accountable. This is where Is' reflexivity came from. So, researchers started using the "first person pronoun," or "I" in their work and writing (Seaman, 2022). This chapter explores reflexivity from my perspective.

4.1.1 Definition of Reflexivity

Reflexivity means being aware that I, and the study topic, research aim, research question, design, etc., affect each other in the research process. In other words, "researcher reflexivity" means thinking about how we came to feel the way we do, how our ideas constantly change as we learn more, and how this affects our research (Haynes, 2012). Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) suggest that reflexive research involves two key components: interpretation and reflection. Interpretation involves analysing data based on assumptions, values, and language, whereas reflection examines My self, research community, and intellectual and cultural conditions that shape the research context. Both elements are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the research (Haynes, 2012).

Reflection enhances researcher awareness, recognizing the impact of research objectives on process and outcome and how new knowledge influences pre-existing beliefs, ultimately influencing research (Haynes, 2012). Simply put, it is often called the process by which research turns back on itself and looks at itself, called ways of seeing that act back on and reflect ways of seeing that already exist (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Jennifer A. Moon (2005) claims reflective thinking is crucial for understanding complex problems and learning more. It involves in-depth learning by clarifying meaning and modifying meaningful presentations. We can reformulate our perceptions by thinking about purpose and presentation, leading to greater understanding and improved learning outcomes.

Some researchers may wonder what the difference is between reflection and reflexivity. Hibbert, Coupland, and MacIntosh (2010) distinguish between reflection and reflexivity, arguing that reflection involves observing and examining our actions, while reflexivity involves questioning our experiences and focusing on subjective, multiple-constructed realities, using logic and theory, according to Cunliffe (2004). As a result, reflexivity includes more than just reflection on the research process and findings (Haynes, 2012).

4.1.2 Reflection and Experiential Learning

Reflection is crucial in enhancing experiential learning, as it helps individuals learn through everyday experiences, guiding them in making informed decisions and taking appropriate action, making it a valuable component of education (Craft, 2005). According to Kolb (1984), reflective thinking and writing are crucial for experiential learning, as they help individuals form a unique perspective. This, in turn, means that the learners develop conceptual ideas, explore them, understand their function, and are able to align such ideas with their pre-existing beliefs.

Many learners believe writing about reflection leads to more reflection, and keeping reflective journals provides a permanent record of thoughts and experiences that provide a foundation for research. Craft (2005) suggests that unaltered entries in diaries allow learners to explore and think deeply about ideas, leading to deeper learning. Organization is not necessary for reflective journaling, but the learner's capacity for thought and reflection can foster learning. Regularly engaging in this practice helps learners better understand themselves and their learning processes. Burrows et al. (2001) found that reflective journals can enhance learners' thinking and writing skills, leading to a deeper understanding of situations. Reflection helps learners improve their attitudes toward learning, self-awareness, and critical thinking skills. Encouraging reflective practices empowers learners to take ownership of their learning journey and strive for continuous improvement.

4.2 MY BACKGROUND

My background has acted as a springboard to becoming an explorer for students with autism regarding inclusion in mainstream settings. As I began to think about reflection for my research, I was told to keep a journal in which I would write about myself during my Master's thesis. Since I do not regularly practice writing down my ideas and beliefs on paper, this was a new experience for me. Therefore, I began to have some questions. For example, how does reflective journaling affect my learning? How can it help me figure out my ideas? What adjustments do I need to make to my beliefs through reflection and writing? All these inquiries compelled me to seek out solutions. I then began writing in my journal.

"Today, I am going to write my reflective journal, where I am asked to put my thoughts, beliefs, experiences, and opinions from everyday life on a piece of paper. I am not sure if I will be fully capable of doing that or not, as I am not very familiar with writing or expressing my thoughts or feelings on paper. It certainly is something out of my comfort zone. I never kept a diary as a child. But I plan to take it as a challenge and want to see how I can pen down my thoughts, feelings, and experiences during my whole research journey" (Extract from the Reflective Journal, March 1, 2020).

4.2.1 Positionality

In 2014, I started working as a special teacher in Bangladesh, mostly with students with autism and other special needs (ADHD, selective mutism, and dyslexia). I hold a professional degree in Child Psychology, including learning disabilities, counselling, speech development education, nutrition for children with disabilities, and certification in mindfulness and meditation for children with diverse needs. I was motivated to conduct this research on this topic in this manner so that I could better understand the unique needs of each child with autism and provide more effective support and interventions. My goal is to continue expanding my knowledge and skills to make a positive impact on the lives of children with disabilities.

4.2.2 A Journey of Self-Exploration and Learning

When I began journaling, I came to understand how my previous experience as a teacher influenced my decision to pursue a career in special education research for professional growth. Through this assignment, I attempted to take a quick look back at my previous life experiences, and by reflecting on them, I attempted to increase my awareness by learning more about this topic.

At the time, I lacked knowledge about my job and the needs of children. I lacked the necessary skills to handle additional student needs. As I reflected on my actions, numerous questions arose: "Was my attitude professional? Ethical? I presume". These questions prompted me to reflect extensively on my previous work as a teacher when working with students who had varying degrees of cognitive ability, and as a result, I felt compelled to write the following entry in my journal:

I decided to go into the field of computer engineering when I first started working. I completed my degree in computer engineering. I had an abundance of drive to establish a successful career in the field of engineering. Not only did I work as an engineer, but I also tutored students. My first encounter was with a student who was only seven years old at the time. In the class, I recall finding him to be very hyperactive, aggressive (this was many years ago, before I had training and knowledge on working with students with autism), and less focused than the other students. The hour-long lesson that we had was very much like being in a battle. This class started off making me angry, and as the day went on, my frustration turned into annoyance. On both fronts, the circumstances posed a significant amount of anxiety. I could easily picture how each day would cause me a significant amount of mental strain. On the other hand, his behaviour became increasingly unacceptable with each passing day. At one point, I became anxious and decided not to continue instructing that young man. In my opinion, he was a very mischievous and impolite young boy. In the end, I concluded that I would not be taking his class (Reflective journal, June 7th, 2020 – note that 2020 was not when I thought this, that event happened many years before I understood the nature of Autism.).

On the day that I refused to take him, his mother said to me, "You could try." I can still vividly remember those words: "He is not a wicked boy. He has autism. I can recall not even being aware that his mother had commented" (Reflective journal, June 7th, 2020).

After my initial unsuccessful experience teaching children with autism, I remained unaware of any implications. I harboured a long-lasting sense of guilt when I observed my students with autism, nephew. I saw how my aunt was suffering and struggling with her son. It made me reflect on my past with that 7-year-old boy with autism. I felt that my behaviour had been completely unethical. I began to question myself: "Did my innate fear and ignorance trigger my rage, or was there another factor at work?" Consequently, I decided to expand my knowledge of children who have additional needs. My previous experience was in the field of computer engineering, and I perceived this field as a challenge due to its complete disconnection from my existing knowledge.

Having said that, I relocated to the UK to study special education requirements and began working with children with autism, gaining a deeper understanding of their surroundings, Bangladeshi school culture, the challenges the students with autism face, and the emotional journeys of their parents. Despite working with children with additional needs and my prior experience teaching students with disabilities, I did not introduce the term "inclusion." This gap highlights the need for increased understanding and support for inclusive education in the United Kingdom.

As time progressed, I became more and more aware of the significance of researching the precise definition of inclusion as well as other factors that, in the context of Bangladesh, have an implicit relationship to inclusive practices in educational environments. After conducting some research on the topic of autism and inclusive education, I became concerned about the potentially contentious nature of this situation. Firstly, in Bangladesh, the concept of inclusion is relatively new compared to other developed countries such as the UK, USA, and Canada, etc. Secondly, the complexity and severity of autism may influence the implementation of inclusive education on an individual basis.

"Is Bangladesh ready for it?" is the question that emerges.

Having been born and raised in Bangladesh, I was keen to see the extent of the country's commitment to completely supporting students with autism to achieve their academic and social potential. Consequently, I determined that it would be prudent to consider both my own professional experience as a teacher and various critiques of the published research on inclusive education for children with autism. My motivation led me to understand the importance of exploring the true meaning of inclusion and other factors that, within the Bangladeshi context, indirectly impact the academic and social development of children with autism. Consequently, I resolved to reflect on both my prior teaching experiences and my preliminary evaluations of the literature on inclusive education for children with autism. This holistic approach will enable me to cultivate a more nuanced

comprehension of the issue and make informed judgments in formulating successful educational techniques for students with autism in Bangladesh. By integrating real experience with academic knowledge, I want to foster a more inclusive and supportive educational atmosphere for children with autism.

4.3 REFLECTING ON INCLUSION

Inclusion is a process where all children, with or without disabilities, are included in the same classroom, henceforth called mainstream. Inclusive practice aims to give all essential services to children from different backgrounds in the same classroom, regardless of their social, emotional, cultural, or linguistic differences. The philosophy of inclusion is to value every person regardless of their challenges (Ainscow, 2003).

The trend of inclusion has spread to many nations. Janice et al. (2004a & 2004b) claim that the definition of true inclusion is still ambiguous. Inclusion in education involves increasing the participation of all students, regardless of their difficulties, in mainstream settings. Some view it as a system that values all children, regardless of their backgrounds or needs (Anis, 2022). At the same time, others argue that inclusion is a philosophy where children feel accepted and valued by others rather than a process where all students have the right to study with peers without disabilities (Alam, 2018). Since 1981, generally, there has been uneven integration in everyday settings, leading to ongoing debates about the effectiveness of inclusion and the best ways to support students with diverse needs (Sani, 2016).

According to Janice et al. (2004b), usually, many schools lack the necessary resources to cater to individual needs. As a result, the market is dictating the evolution of the educational system. Exclusion from the competition occurs for students with disabilities or challenges who fail to meet established academic requirements due to inadequate performance on standardized exams like the SAT or who pose challenges in the classroom (Alam, 2018). This isolation engenders emotions of inadequacy and dissatisfaction, eventually culminating in disengagement from the educational system. The withdrawal rate of children with special needs in Bangladesh cannot be disregarded (Malak, 2013a).

I question, "How can inclusion be implemented for every child, especially children with disabilities, in such a competitive environment within the specific academic benchmark where children are more pressured to achieve academically than socially?"

Undoubtedly, in many nations, inclusive methods are creating a diverse and equal work environment and are fostering cooperation and creativity. Children with disabilities, historically marginalized due to religious influence, cultural prejudice, or misinterpretation (Trembley, 2007), have benefited particularly from this. Inclusive methods now raise community awareness about the worth

and rights of children with disabilities, integrating them into mainstream settings alongside their classmates. This has led to increased cooperation and innovation among team members. Nonetheless, several hurdles in mainstream classrooms, including insufficient resources, inadequate teacher training, and limited support for children with various needs, might obstruct the effective execution of inclusive strategies.

Moreover, attitudes regarding inclusion might influence the efficacy of inclusive environments, since adverse perceptions may hinder complete involvement and acceptance for all students. Notwithstanding these challenges, establishing mainstream settings is crucial for fostering diversity, equality, and comprehensive student achievement (Saleem and Mahmood, 2013; Malak, 2013a & 2013b). Cultural factors may be the biggest obstacles preventing the mainstream education of students with autism (Sani, 2016). When reflecting on my own experience, one of the parents of my student who had never attended school before made the following comment:

‘I want to send my child to a mainstream school, but I am afraid, sometimes ashamed, and I do not know how other people will treat him and me’ (Reflective journal entry from May 15, 2021). I suggest that such fear is likely a result of the constant challenges her parents face in their community, family, or close relationships.

I do not think inclusion can succeed today if we solely understand it as a framework for integrating children with disabilities with other children. Successful inclusion relies on knowledge, acceptance, and awareness as its supporting pillars. Once again, I contemplated which comes first, acceptance or knowledge? If I do not accept students with autism? How would I find the motivation to learn more and support them? Could knowledge help me understand their challenges and prepare for their acceptance? I imagined that we must first openly accept this group of children and recognize their place in our community. Then, we must adequately prepare ourselves to instruct them based on their unique needs, weaknesses, and strengths. The belief that they are different, or that they cannot do anything, should not cause us to give up. When we acknowledge and accept our differences, we are better equipped to handle them.

I was interested in exploring some key issues that have emerged from my reflective journal, my personal experiences, and the literature review.

- What are the main things that prevent students with autism from being successfully included in mainstream settings in Bangladesh?
- How can we define and measure genuine inclusion?
- Which term – "inclusion or fusion" – is correct?

- Is it morally and ethically appropriate to include all children with autism in mainstream settings without sufficient resources?
- Should schools change to meet the needs of the children, or should the children change to meet the needs of the schools?

I suggest it is important to view inclusion from a situated rather than a solely educational perspective. Janice et al., (2004b) assert that in specific settings, the beliefs of individuals and their participation patterns in learning may be shaped by families, other organizational settings, and community members rather than just by schools, teachers, or peers. Therefore, to truly understand what it means to be included in a child's life, we must all change how we think about, act towards, and view all children with special needs so that their knowledge can be effectively constructed.

4.3.1 Inclusion and Fusion

For children with disabilities in mainstream settings, there is also the ongoing pressure to blend in with peers or adults. Every child is different and has different needs. I object to the phrase "special need." When I say "special need," it means that I need something that is "special" compared to other people's regular needs. We believe such children are different from us because they have a special need, a disorder, a disability, or something else. Instead, I prefer using individual needs, which means we have unique needs, strengths, and challenges.

Furthermore, the term "disability" or "disorder" implies an imbalance or an inability to perform a task considered "normal" in our culture. My question is, "Why do they require this acceptance from us?". Embracing diversity and understanding that everyone has unique strengths and challenges can lead to a more inclusive and accepting society.

Inclusion should not be a means to an end in school; it should be the end goal when all groups of children, with or without disabilities, are ascribed equal value in society, the workplace, or any other situation. We should view inclusion not only from educational perspectives but also from situated perspectives. According to Janice et al. (2004b & 2004a), not only schools, teachers, or peers but also families and other organizational settings can shape the beliefs of an individual and their participation patterns in situated learning.

The goal of inclusion should be to bring together different kinds of experiences to help people learn, create, and think in new ways. We need to integrate children from diverse backgrounds into mainstream settings, acknowledging their unique strengths and weaknesses, just like their peers. In the classroom and the community, each person should propose novel solutions. Rather than preparing students with autism to adapt to our skills or system, the power of inclusion lies in blending and forging

new fusions. This fusion fosters a diverse and supportive community that values each individual for their unique contributions.

4.3.2 Inclusion as a Human Right or Moral Imperative

I believe that all students should have the autonomy to study in an environment where they feel most comfortable and are valued equally. Everyone should understand and respect the feelings and thoughts of each individual. Human rights may allow all children to receive education together, but ethical considerations must be taken into account if a student struggles to fit in due to a lack of school preparation.

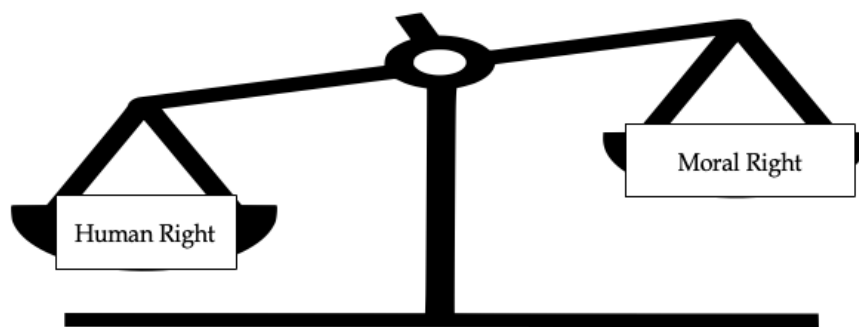


Image 4. Human rights vs moral rights

I would argue that prioritizing changes and readiness for students with autism is crucial for integrating them into mainstream environments, as determining their optimal placement can be challenging due to a lack of preparation in mainstream settings. According to Watson et al. (2013), sometimes a lack of resources and the overwhelming nature of mainstream classrooms for students with autism can lead to withdrawal from mainstream education, underscoring the need for improved learning environments.

My nine-year-old student with autism was nonverbal and experienced sensory differences. Some days, she was attentive in my one-on-one session, but other days, she threw tantrums, banged on the wall, or lay on the floor. When I inquired about her inconsistent behaviour, her mother responded as follows:

"Whenever she goes to school, the noise in the classroom triggers her hyperactivity, and she becomes anxious and uncomfortable when teachers yell at her " (Reflective Journal, 22/04/21).

Later, this mother relocated her daughter from a mainstream setting to a special setting. When considering students with autism or those with disabilities, it is crucial to arrange environments where this group of students can feel a sense of belonging and be supported. Our goal is to support the development of children with autism, and for that, the school must be ready with all necessary supports and acceptance.

4.3.3 A Cockroach Theory in Inclusive Practice

One day, I was browsing Facebook idly. I immediately came across one of the insect's stories. The anonymous writer recounted her frightened reaction upon seeing an insect, a cockroach. The author shares a personal story about an insect, a cockroach, and this post serves as an example of a motivating narrative that imparts lessons on overcoming fear and adversity. The narrative of the cockroach overcoming fear really connected with me and motivated me to confront my own concerns directly. This succinct story prompts profound contemplation on how each of us handles challenging situations in our personal lives.



Image 5. Cockroach theory

In my story,

"I was sharing a cup of coffee with one of my friends. Suddenly, a large cockroach appeared out of nowhere and landed on my coffee table. Out of sheer panic, I started shouting. I sprang into action, hurriedly swatting at the cockroach with both hands as I yelled, my face and voice shaking. I was trying to get rid of the insect as quickly as possible. The housekeeper came running over to offer assistance. My housekeeper kept her cool, held her ground, and stared at the cockroach that was crawling on the floor. As soon as she deemed it safe to do so, she grasped the cockroach with her fingers and hurled it out the window" (Extract from 21st August 2023).

Several thoughts occurred to me, leading me to speculate if the cockroaches were responsible for my frenzied behaviour. If it were true, why did the housekeeper exhibit no concern? She managed

the incident flawlessly, with no disturbance. I realized it was not the cockroach itself that disturbed us, but rather our response to the cockroach.

This anecdote prompted me to reevaluate my views toward children with disabilities. I realized that my primary concern while interacting with my first student with autism was not the tantrums associated with their condition or their cognitive limitations, but rather my inability to manage the disruptions caused by their improper conduct or lack of ability to cope with adverse situations. My reaction to the problem, rather than the issue itself, generated uncertainty in my mind and dissuaded me from educating many students with autism. I started to contemplate my prejudices and limitations, seeing that it was my discomfort and lack of comprehension that were obstructing my capacity to educate these pupils successfully. To have a meaningful impact, I saw the need to challenge myself and acquire skills to more effectively serve and accommodate children with special needs.

I suggest that while responses are always the result of careful consideration, reactions are always the result of instant action without awareness or knowledge. Knowledge and real-world experience may successfully blend to create positive attitudes. According to Alderman (2004), the knowledge base of motivation is so extensive that the crucial factor is making the best choice for a particular problem. The lack of a broad motivational knowledge base limits our options. By expanding our knowledge base, we can improve our ability to effectively address a variety of complex situations. Recall that emotions frequently drive reactions, whereas knowledge and experience guide responses. When we learn to respond instead of react, we become more aware of our actions and eager to learn how to respond appropriately while staying fully mindful of our surroundings. The Cockroach incident taught me, as a teacher, not to react when children behave inappropriately but instead to educate myself on how to handle such behaviour.

4.3.4 Inclusion in Equity or Equality

The notion that children with disabilities require equity or support based on equality is another issue. Despite the similarity in sound between the terms equity and equality, their application to marginalized individuals can lead to significantly different outcomes. Equality means giving everyone the same resources and opportunities. Equity distributes the precise resources and opportunities necessary to result in an equal outcome while taking into account the fact that each person has particular circumstances (OECD, 2012). The current debate centres on whether "equality or equity" is more important in terms of the social welfare and education of children with autism.

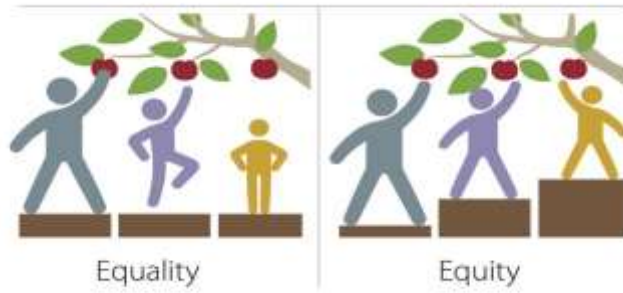


Image 6. Equality Vs Equity

In image 6 above, the three individuals each have uneven access to a system—in this case, a tree that provides fruit. Even when they receive equal help from evenly dispersed tools, in this case, the platforms, their access to the fruit is still uneven, and the tallest person still has an advantage. The equitable strategy, however, distributes the precise resources that each individual needs to obtain the fruit, leading to favourable outcomes for all three.

The disputed definitions of "just" and "fair" complicate equity beyond equality. However, equity has fallen short in supporting students with autism fairly. It is important to recognize that everyone is unique and must adapt their daily routines to ensure success. Everyone's unique strengths and weaknesses may cause unintentional barriers (Mehtab, 2014). For instance, if a school provided the same resources, attention, and opportunities to both neurotypical children and children with autism, would they be able to achieve equality? Is it reasonable to assume everyone succeeds similarly? While equality secures the right to the same chances, equity offers help based on need.

For instance, we can make accommodations in a classroom setting for students with autism who struggle with sitting in a circle with peers due to their sensory differences. Forced seating may cause disruptions for the entire class, not just the students with autism. Teachers can make adjustments, such as allowing the child to sit on a specific chair or cushion in the circle (Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity, 2003). This may seem unfair or be perceived as a "special approach" by other children, but it creates a more positive learning environment for not only the students with autism but also the entire class. Such an approach promotes diversity, inclusion, and equity in the classroom. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that individuals with autism may require different levels of support and accommodations to thrive. By providing equitable resources and tailored interventions, we can promote true inclusivity and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential (Anis, 2022).

It could be argued that putting all children in the same box and expecting them to succeed will not yield positive outcomes. To underscore this point, simply providing them with the same opportunities as their classmates, such as school attendance and test-taking opportunities, is

insufficient. Equal opportunities exist here, but justice does not. Many children with special needs attend school with their classmates, even though they cannot communicate or learn as well. In many areas of their lives, they require additional assistance. Students with autism do not all have the same abilities or issues. Equity occurs when schools take these variations into account and provide assistance depending on each individual's needs (Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity, 2003).

4.4 SUMMARY

Reflection significantly informed my approach to the research process. It made me realize how individuals involved in children's lives can contribute to advancing society in the future. I realized that understanding the potential and power of inclusion is crucial for its successful implementation. It is essential to acknowledge the long-term results of inclusion and assess its impact on society. I am aware of the complexities, difficulties, and limitations that come with reflexive engagement, but I didn't see it as a burden. Being reflexively aware of oneself is valuable and beneficial. It can inspire, educate, and encourage readers to develop a deeper understanding. Expressing unspoken thoughts can empower both I and the participant. This process of reflexive engagement can lead to a deeper understanding of power dynamics and biases within research, ultimately leading to more ethical and impactful outcomes. Acknowledging and embracing the complexities of reflexivity enhances the validity and credibility of research, thus promoting social justice and inclusivity.

5 Methodology

5.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PHILOSOPHY

5.1.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an account of the conceptual framework, research design, and methods employed in this study. It proceeds to discuss the study's participants, methodology, data collection tools, and approach to qualitative analysis. Considerations such as trustworthiness, credibility, validity, and ethical issues, such as participant protection, are also outlined.

In this research, I found inclusive education to be a recent phenomenon in Bangladesh and that there had been very little research on parents', teachers', and principals' perceptions of it, especially in the primary section. It was hoped that by examining the experiences of parents, teachers, and principals with students with autism, I would be able to present various viewpoints on mainstream settings.

The following Figure 1 illustrates the framework for this study:

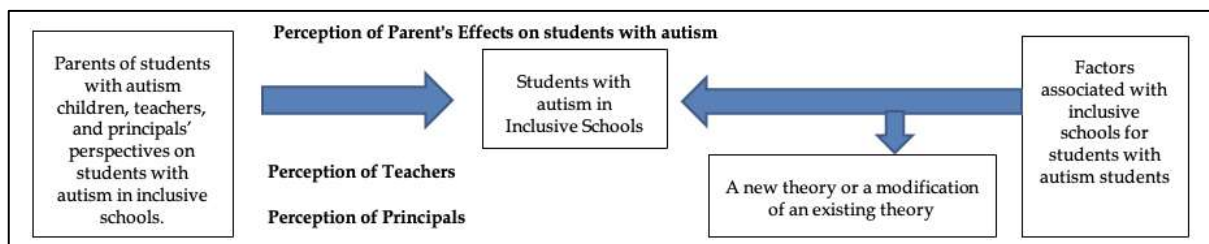


Figure 1. Framework of Study

It was important for parents of students with autism to have their voices heard because they can play an important role in their child's life when educational placement is determined. Not only that, but the day-to-day experiences that parents have in mainstream settings can explain what their children are going through and what problems need to be addressed for their children to have a better academic and social scenario.

After gradually gathering information from the children's parents, it was important to gain an understanding of the challenges teachers experience as a result of this condition, as well as their perspectives on how these challenges can be overcome. Studies (Sani, 2016; Solomonidou, 2014) have shown that an educator's perceptions have a big impact on how a child with special needs develops as a whole while they are teaching that child.

In addition, it was thought that teachers' accounts might both support what parents said and disclose their unique struggles or ideas about how to include children with autism. Due to this, I was interested in how inclusive practices are used in mainstream classrooms, how students with autism

cope, and any other obstacles that may affect students with autism academically or socially from the educator's perspective.

Last but not least, after progressively gathering data from teachers, it appeared that the majority of the issues related to the school. To find out what they felt about this issue and what they believed might be done to remedy it, I also decided to speak with a principal.

5.1.2 Settings

Bangladesh is the study area for this research, and the participants came from the Dhaka area (see Image 7). The Dhaka region was chosen because its rural and urban areas are very different in terms of population size, development, division of labour, social mobility, and the environment. All of these things may have different effects on educational quality and support, which could change the results of the study. To obtain the most information from a certain place, I chose only urban areas instead of both urban and rural ones. On this issue, only people from Dhaka were asked to take part.



Image 7. Map of Dhaka (Study area)

5.1.3 The Research Design

The COVID situation at the time made a face-to-face interview with the participants impractical, necessitating an online interview with the parents of children with autism. Teachers and principals continued to have the option of in-person, online, or phone interviews as the COVID situation improved. I used a personal computer and Zoom to conduct the online interview with parents of students with autism at home. However, all principals picked phone interviews, while the teachers had face-to-face interviews.

5.1.3.1 Theoretical assumptions:

Before choosing a research paradigm, identifying philosophical presumptions is crucial because, when they are stated explicitly, they expose the assumptions that researchers are making

about their research, influencing decisions about the study's research questions, aims and objectives, research design, methodology, and data collection methods, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data. I will now speak about her philosophical viewpoint (Figure 2 & 3) in the section that follows.

5.1.3.2 Ontology

Ontology is the study of "being" and "what is" or what we can know about the world (Saadi, 2014). Ontology is what we think about what reality is and how it works. Also, Bryman (2008) brings up the idea of "social ontology," which he defines as a philosophical consideration in research about the nature of social entities, i.e., whether these social entities are or can be objective entities that exist independently from social actors or whether they are social constructions in and of themselves, made up of the perceptions, actions, and interpretations of the people in society (Saadi, 2014).

5.1.3.3 Epistemology

In general, epistemology is what we believe about the kind or nature of knowledge or how we can learn about the world (Saadi, 2014). Crotty (1998) says that epistemology is a way to look at the world and figure out what is going on in it. He goes on to say that epistemology is the study of the nature of knowledge, its possibility (what can be known and tried to be known and what cannot, its scope, and its rightness. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) say that epistemology is about the assumptions people make about the very foundations of knowledge—its nature and form, how it can be acquired, and how it can be communicated to other people (Saadi, 2014).

5.1.3.4 Different Positions of Ontology and Epistemology:

There are many different epistemological (Interpretivism and Constructionism) and ontological (Positivism and Objectivism) positions or ways of looking at the world and how we know what we know. I have to decide which beliefs or practices I agreed with. I selected interpretivism and constructivism as appropriate for the study's aims and objectives. I will explain the rationale for this action below.

5.1.3.5 Positivism and Objectivism

Positivism and objectivism are based on the idea that natural science is the best way to study human knowledge. It uses the same methods and tools as natural science to collect data and figure out what it means, such as testing hypotheses, giving causal explanations, and making models. Proponents of this view say that we learn more about the world by testing propositions than by carefully observing it (deductive reasoning) (Saadi, 2014).

5.1.3.6 Interpretivism and Constructionism

On the other hand, interpretivism and constructionism say that knowledge is gained by exploring and understanding the social world of the people being studied by focusing on their meanings and interpretations, i.e., meanings are socially constructed by the social actors in a particular context. It also attempts to decipher what their participants say. Also, most of the research process is thought to be "inductive," which means that the goal is to come up with a theory based on the collected data instead of using the data to test an existing theory. Lastly, in the interpretive and constructivist schools of thought, the methods used to study the natural sciences cannot be used to study the social world, and social reality cannot be accurately captured or shown because people have different ideas about what reality is (Saadi, 2014).

5.1.4 Ontological and Epistemological Stance in this research

I adopt a subjectivist ontological position and reject the positivist approach that social reality exists outside of the people who construct it (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), instead I take an anti-positivist epistemology where I believe that knowledge and meaning are shaped by interpretations of social contexts and lived experiences (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). My interest in this world is evident from the use of interpretive design research methods and techniques, such as semi-structured interviews, to determine how participants experience mainstream settings and what they are thinking. The use of a qualitative study with grounded theory as a method for this research also brings the participants' opinions, feelings, experiences, and thoughts to the forefront and allows for the emergence of new concepts from the root. This innovative approach may influence the framework of inclusion policy or provoke new ways of thinking, along with heightened awareness among teachers, principals, and parents. I take a constructivist view of how we know what we know. According to Ahmed (2008), constructivism is the view that all knowledge and, by extension, all meaningful reality is dependent on human practices, being built in and out of interactions between people and their world, and developed and passed on in an essentially social context. Thus, meaning is not found, but it is made. I sought to identify the key themes influencing the social and academic development of students with autism in mainstream educational settings by conducting a grounded theory study. To begin with, I explored the question: "What do Bangladeshi parents of students with autism say are the most important factors that affect the social and academic development of their children in inclusive educational settings?" by conducting a semi-structured interview with eight participants, all of whom were parents of students with autism. Next, I gathered additional information from the participants' statements to answer the question from eight teachers and four principals using the same qualitative method: "How do teachers and principals in Bangladesh view mainstream settings for students with autism?"

Taking each participant's points of view and recommendations into account, I further considered the questions: "What distinguishes the views of parents of students with autism from those of teachers and principals?" and "How do these views align with the policy on inclusive education?"

The interviews and the later chapter on findings and discussion show that parents of students with autism, teachers, and principals communicated how they made sense of things in a social context.

The answers to the question from all participants (parents, teachers, and principals): "What do the findings mean for inclusive education settings in Bangladesh, taking everyone's points of view and recommendations into account?" are presented in the chapter on implications, where I suggested new ways to implement inclusive practices effectively. This does not imply that these ideas are true or correct; instead, the research is a call for a new way of looking at the issues.

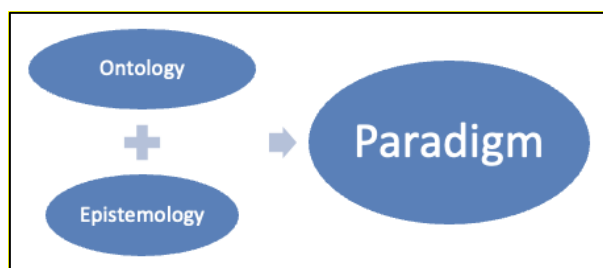


Figure 2. Study Paradigm

When it comes to the nature of knowledge and how it is gained (which is what epistemology means), I take an interpretive view, which emphasises a close relationship between I and the social world, i.e., that the two are not separate but affect each other. In other words, a researcher cannot separate himself or herself from the research process. On the contrary, they are always coming up with new meanings and ways of looking at things based on their own experiences and reflections, as well as those of the participants. As a result, knowledge of the world and social phenomena, such as exploring obstacles in mainstream settings in this research, is based on understanding, which comes from how participants think about and interpret events (Saadi, 2014).

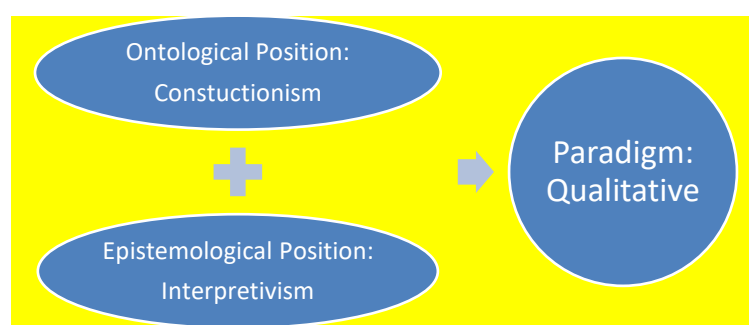


Figure 3. Philosophy in Research

Qualitative research also has the potential to change the thing being studied since interviews, for example, enhance experience instead of just reflecting it (Seaman, 2021). Additionally, it might

create new theories or illuminate existing theories in fresh ways. I found these points of view interesting on a personal level because making new meanings felt more interesting and satisfying than testing hypotheses. When deciding on a methodology, it was also essential to determine the outcomes that this research was hoping to find. According to Leavy (2015/1975: 273), research should illuminate, educate, transform, or emancipate" (cited in Seaman, 2021).

5.1.5 Researcher's Temperament

Seaman (2021) says that the personality of I may also affect the choice of method. My personality, education, and work history all lean toward the human and social sciences. As a special teacher who cares deeply about people with special needs, both personally and professionally, I bring this perspective to the study.

My epistemological and ontological assumptions about social research have come from early reflections on professional practice with children with disabilities and the teaching context in which I is a part, even though I did not have the right words to describe them at the time. However, readings in the fields of epistemology and ontology have helped I develop a better understanding of these philosophical arguments. They have also encouraged I to learn more about this situation in its context and think critically about it.

This broad focus allowed for the investigation of a wide variety of potential factors that may obstruct the process of successful inclusion. It is possible to make the case that the results of the research not only help advance my professional growth but also help other professionals benefit from the findings. I was also interested in how people make sense of their experiences and how identities are formed through interactions with other people and the world around them.

I believe that how participants experience the issues examined in this research is very important, but also recognises that their different points of view will lead to different kinds of understanding. These ontological and epistemological positions are especially important to this work because it aims to examine how obstacles influence the success of inclusive practice in the context of Bangladesh through the eyes of the participants themselves.

5.1.6 Methodological consideration

When designing research, the word "paradigm," coined by Kuhn (Garry, 2015), describes a crucial concept that has been employed in research to increase its influence. A paradigm is a collection of hypotheses that may address the relationship between people and their environment, general knowledge, and various global phenomena (Cohen et al., 2000). Since it emphasises the value of subjectivity and claims that reality is built differently by each individual, for the study's goals to be met, the method chosen must be useful and appropriate (Solomonidou, 2014)

5.1.6.1 The Qualitative Continuum

The purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the actions that they take within that reality. Since the social sciences can- not penetrate what lies behind social reality, they must work directly with an individual's definitions of reality and with the rules he/she devises for coping with it. While the social sciences do not reveal the ultimate truth, they do help us to make sense of our world. What the social sciences offer is explanation, clarification, and demystification of the social forms that an individual has created around himself (Cohen et al., 2007).

Since the aim of this research was to look into the obstacles that determine the quality of inclusive education in the context of Bangladesh from the perspectives of parents of students with autism, teachers, and principals, my research was not measuring and calculating to test a theory or hypothesis; instead, it looked into what real people experience. Therefore, a qualitative research approach was adopted.

Stern (1980), cited in Strauss and Corbin (1998/1990), says that qualitative methods can be used to add new information to what is already known or to look into new areas where information is lacking. Strauss and Corbin (1998/1990) found that people's views, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values, and opinions can be used to learn a lot about how they see the world and what they think about it (Chrysanth, 2014).

If Silverman's (2017) statements are taken at face value, the decision to use a qualitative methodology for my research seems appropriate. He contends that qualitative research is crucial because it enables researchers to gain a thorough understanding of the participants' thoughts and feelings through the use of open-ended questions during interviews. This semi-structured interview gives the participants the chance to express their feelings openly about their daily lives and how they adjust to or deal with the changes in their environment.



Figure 4. Principles of Qualitative Methodology

Additionally, Creswell et al. (2018) have made a useful list of what qualitative research is and how it works (see Figure 4). One thing about qualitative research that is relevant to this discussion is that it uses a process called "induction" to build theories and new knowledge from the collected data instead of using the data to prove or disprove a theory. According to Saadi (2014), grounded theory maintains similar viewpoints, which are discussed further below.

The motivation for this research was to focus not only on the challenges associated with mainstream classrooms but also on the consequences of these issues and "how" these challenges can be overcome to implement successful inclusion. Since I had no idea what theory might emerge from the interviews, the most obvious theoretical approach for this type of research was grounded theory. This led to the discovery of a specific grounded theory at the end of the study. When there is no more new information from the participants and a full picture has been drawn from the notes on all the personal interviews, the grounded theory becomes clear (Khan, 2014).

5.1.6.2 Background to Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is defined by its original proponents, Glaser & Strauss (1967), as the process of developing a theory from data. Grounded theory methodology was largely a protest against the positivism that permeated most social research and the methodological climate in which qualitative research was regarded as an introduction to the "real" methodologies of quantitative research (cited in Cullen & Brennan, 2021). Grounded theory research aims to interpret the data gathered to ascertain its significance (Cullen and Brennan, 2021).

Researchers who use grounded theory do not start with a hypothesis. In the course of conducting research, theory develops as a result of the ongoing interactions between data collection, data analysis, and theory production (Cullen & Brennan, 2021). The developing theory encourages additional data gathering and analysis, which advances the theoretical constructs (theoretical sampling) (Cullen and Brennan, 2021).

Grounded theory employs theoretical sampling, as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which involves systematically collecting data and deciding what to collect based on the theory and categories that emerge from the data. In practice, this means collecting data and deciding what data to obtain depending on the theory and categories that emerge from the data itself (Cullen and Brennan, 2021; Lawrence & Tar, 2013). The process involves intentionally selecting participants or sources of information that will help further develop and refine an emerging theory so that a fuller understanding of the phenomenon being studied can be reached (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2023). In this way, grounded theory provides for additional research if it is required for concepts already identified and coded, say in a first interview. This iterative process continues until theoretical saturation is reached, which means

no further collection will elicit new information or insight (Thornberg & Keane, 2022). By following the grounded theory approach in this way, the insights that appear from the literature review can systematically be explored, refined, and incorporated into the emerging theoretical framework.

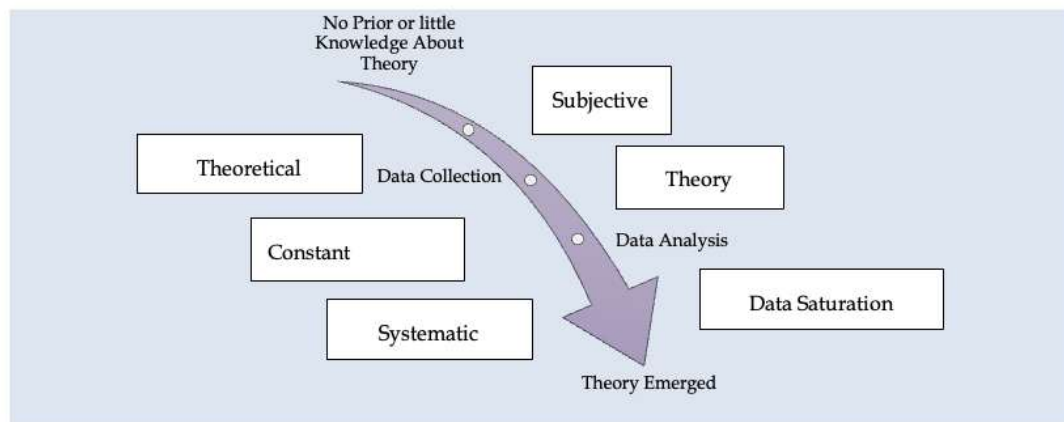


Figure 5. Grounded Theory's Fundamental Principles.

As mentioned in Figure 5 above, grounded theory is a good way to develop a theory. Grounded theory makes it easier to record and understand the subjective experiences of individuals. Through a method called "theoretical sampling" and "constant comparison," it is possible to turn the subjective experiences of individuals into "theoretical statements" (Cullen & Brennan, 2021). Grounded-theory methodology, especially Corbin and Strauss's (2015) systematic approach, has set rules for how to do research and understand data (Cullen & Brennan, 2021).

5.1.6.3 Theory and Concept

Critically, the point of grounded theory is not to say what is true about reality. Instead, it is to say what social actors and interview participants think about reality. The goal of grounded theory is to get new ideas about how social actors interact with each other in patterns and how these relationships and interactions shape reality (Cullen & Brennan, 2021).

However, a theory is a claim that makes clear the possible connections between categories that concern a subject or phenomenon, and so helps us understand social reality, but a theory is only a tentative explanation of a phenomenon and cannot be taken as absolute truth. Strauss and Corbin (1998) say that theory can show the connections between ideas that come from facts and that it helps us understand the social world by shedding light on its categories (Tweedy & Jean, 2015).

I adapted a few of grounded theory's guiding principles and emphasised thematic analysis as the method of data analysis, which is described in the data analysis section.

5.1.6.4 Variation of Grounded Theory

There are three distinct and influential perspectives on the use of grounded theory in research today: 1) interpretive grounded theory (IGT), 2) classical grounded theory (GT), and 3) constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Sebastian, 2019). All three types of grounded theory share a few fundamental presumptions, but there are many more steps, procedures, and philosophical presumptions that are open to debate. To conduct this research, I utilized an IGT approach. The reasons described below for choosing IGT.

While CGT permits interpretive understandings and iterative logic, IGT emphasises interpretivism through individual perspectives because GT philosophically aligns with positivist thinking (or is not defined by any paradigm, according to Glaser). GT and IGT disagree on the use of prior knowledge, literature, or experiences but are, at the very least, in agreement on the use of core categories when it comes to data collection and analysis (Sebastian & Kailah, 2019).



Figure 6. IGT Themes

It can be seen in Figure 6 that IGT contends that these are opportunities (individual perspectives, use of prior knowledge) that could strengthen the entire project, whereas GT contends that prior knowledge should not affect a research study or the data it collects. The exception would be CGT, which emphasises the claim that prior knowledge and a researcher's experience can become significant within a research study, but does not use core categories (Sebastian & Kailah, 2019).

According to Sebastian & Kailah (2019), a researcher cannot claim to be unaware of everything that has already been written about the topic that they are researching. For this very reason, I chose IGT for this study. Literature from the past can be utilized to compare data, improve observations, support or clarify findings, and improve the quality of observations. According to Strauss and Corbin, researchers ought to be aware of and acknowledge the existence of the aforementioned kinds of influences to prevent their research focus, data collection, or categorization from being altered or steered unfavourably. These specifics can be adapted to enhance both the quality of the research as a whole and its focus (Sebastian & Kailah, 2019).

5.1.6.5 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis may be used to explore complex phenomena and allow for a fully nuanced understanding of individuals' perspectives (Ahmed et al., 2025). Searching for patterns and connections in the data may reveal subtle insights that other methods may overlook (Rosairo, 2023). Thematic analysis helps researchers sort narratives into themes by showing how participants' experiences relate to the research question (Naeem et al., 2023). Patterns in participants' narratives may help researchers

understand the meaning and implications of their results. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of multiple perspectives and may yield nuanced, complex findings that contribute to advancing knowledge in the field. Thematic analysis is also suitable for interviews, focus groups, texts, articles, and social media posts (De Paoli, 2024). Thematic analysis helps researchers discover subtle insights that surface-level observations may not capture by delving deeper into the data (Ahmed et al., 2025). Systematically identifying and analysing themes may help researchers better understand the issue at hand. By analysing what people say, how they say it, and why they say it through thematic analysis, researchers may gain deeper insight into people's experiences (Dawadi, 2020). I chose thematic analysis because this research conducted semi-structured interviews to understand all participants' perceptions and experiences, and this approach allowed me to identify patterns across narratives.

This topic, this question, and this way of collecting data were all good for Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun et al., 2012). In a contextualist framework, stories and experiences are socially mediated, but language can be used to get to the truth. It shows an example of inductive TA, where researchers mostly code from the data and the experiences of the participants (meaning that my analytical lens does not completely override their stories), and this was supposed to lead to a hypothesis (Tweedy & Jean, 2015).

The research questions' objectives were:

- To learn what the most significant obstacles are that affect their children's social and academic development in inclusive educational settings, parents of students with autism, teachers, and principals in Bangladesh were surveyed.
- To comprehend how Bangladeshi parents of students with autism, teachers, and principals feel about mainstream settings for students with autism.
- To distinguish between and analyse the outcomes of claims made by parents, teachers, and principals.
- What the findings of my research mean for mainstream educational settings in Bangladesh, taking into account each point of view and recommendation,
- After considering all accounts, give the inclusion policy more thought.

After gathering information from interviews, the findings were thematically evaluated by following the steps that will be discussed in the data analysis/findings (see Table 2).

First, Become Familiar with the Data

Generating Initial Codes
Look For Themes
Reviewing Potential Themes
Defining and Naming Themes
Creating a Report.

Table 2. Thematic analysis process

5.2 THEORY OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is a technique for systematically locating, classifying, and providing insight into patterns of meaning (themes) throughout a dataset with great flexibility. Thematic Analysis enables me to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences by focusing on meaning across a dataset (Braun et al., 2012).

The constant comparative method is often used in thematic data analysis; therefore, it makes sense that it has been compared to grounded theory. It has been said that although GT and TA analysis are nearly identical, the coding process differs slightly. For example, GT data analysis is different from thematic analysis because of how the text is coded. In GT, you can code text by incident, line, or word. In contrast, thematic analysis does not tell me how to code a certain length of text. Some researchers who use thematic analysis also do not use a constant comparison method or explain their coding strategies well enough (Floersch et al., 2010).

The two main reasons to use TA are that it is flexible and easy to use. TA helps researchers who are new to qualitative research understand a way to do research that would otherwise be unclear, mysterious, hard to understand, and too complicated. It helps researchers get started with qualitative research by learning how to code and analyze qualitative data systematically. This data can then be linked to more general theoretical or conceptual issues (Braun et al., 2012).

Since statistical tests of significance are not available for thematic methods, data of a qualitative nature that can be linked to themes is important for the following reasons:

I may identify new themes and validate existing themes documented in the literature (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). I posit that the coding process is systematic (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). I used TA because of its flexibility. I systematically categorized every word and line and, where necessary, each paragraph (Braun et al., 2012). I disregarded several sentences since they were irrelevant to the study

issue. Owing to the link between my inquiries and the participants' replies, I intermittently used both queries and answers to interpret codes.

5.2.1 Research Quality

5.2.1.1 Criterion for Evaluation

The main proponents of grounded theory prefer to use the term "credibility" when discussing research quality rather than terms like "validity" and "reliability." Instead of using the word "truth," the preferable word is "credibility" (Cullen & Brennan, 2021; Shenton, 2003). According to Golafshani (2003), "Reliability and validity are tools of an essentially positivist epistemology" (p. 598).

Results are trustworthy and credible because they represent participants', researchers', and readers' experiences with a phenomenon, but the explanation is just one of several "plausible" interpretations that may be made from the data (Cullen & Brennan, 2021). According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), effective qualitative research relates to the reader's and participant's personal experiences, combines conceptualization with adequate descriptive detail to allow the reader to infer conclusions about the data and assess the validity of my data and analysis, and inspires discussion and additional research on a given subject (Cullen & Brennan, 2021; Carcar, 2009). This extended engagement increased the credibility and validity of the findings, which are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

5.2.1.2 Credibility in the Research

The credibility of a qualitative study's research relies on the use of rigorous methodologies and methods to collect data, which are then thoroughly examined with a focus on validity, reliability, and triangulation. My qualifications, experience, track record, and positionality also have an impact on the outcome. The philosophical conviction in the significance of qualitative research encompasses qualitative methodologies, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling, and holistic thinking (Noble & Heale, 2019; Golafshani, 2003).

The research exhibits a dedication to maintaining the criteria of qualitative research and ensuring the reliability of its results. Furthermore, my self-awareness and openness in recording their choices and procedures further strengthened the trustworthiness of the study. I sought to understand the phenomenon and develop theories from the ground up. The subjectivity of the research necessitated a qualitative approach. Based on her experience as a special teacher and previous articles, I developed the research questions:

- "What do Bangladeshi parents of students with autism say are the most important obstacles that affect the social and academic development of their children in mainstream settings?"

- "How do teachers and principals in Bangladesh view inclusive environments for students with autism?"
- "What distinguishes the views of parents of students with autism from those of teachers and principals?"
- "What do the findings mean for inclusive education settings in Bangladesh, taking everyone's points of view and recommendations into account?"
- "How do these views fit with the policy on inclusive education?"

5.2.1.3 Triangulation

Triangulation is a method used to increase the credibility of research findings (Noble & Heale, 2019). It is an effective method in qualitative research that enhances the rigour and validity of findings by utilising the convergence of information from various distinct data sources (Wilczewska & Nazarko, 2024). The use of triangulation is generally advised because it offers significant ways to lower the possibility of misinterpretation in all grounded theory research (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023). Most of the time, interviews and documents are used as evidence in the best-grounded theory research (Tweedy & Jean, 2015; Shenton, 2004; Golafshani, 2003). I gained the most knowledge from the interviews with each participant regarding what took place in the actual classroom and what the events meant to them from their perspective.

I employed various data sources (e.g., three distinct groups of participants, different schools) to cross-validate the findings. I was aware of the potential implications that this finding could have for the validity of the research. As a result, I decided to also interview the teachers and principals because I believed that including the teachers' and principals' perspectives would enable the research to contain more information about inclusive practice. According to the principle of data triangulation, one of the most important ways to determine how reliable the findings are as a whole is to compare and contrast the views of different people who have different opinions (Tweedy & Jean, 2015; Noble & Heale, 2019).

5.2.1.4 Dependability and Transferability

To generalize to a larger population, there needs to be a greater number of participants and a greater diversity of schools in metropolitan areas. It was not possible to get a larger number of participants because the study was on a smaller scale, and the available time frame was short. Also, many parents, teachers, and principals were afraid to show their feelings because there was a cultural gap and the subject matter was sensitive, which made it hard to get a large number of participants (Shenton, 2004).

Even though parents of students with autism took part in an online interview, which gave a detailed description and clarity on mainstream environments, it was still important to observe the

inclusive practices in the school to gain the most clarity possible, but this was not possible because of COVID. The pandemic placed limits on what could be observed; nothing could be done that would have provided a clearer picture of both what the participant said and what was occurring (Shenton, 2004).

Also, many parents do not have the knowledge and education needed to fully understand the situation and know what to expect from their children and the educational system. This could affect what the person says during the interview and make it hard to gain a clear picture of settings or practices that are inclusive. However, I used information from two other sources (teachers and principals), which added additional clarity to the situation. While the principals only permitted phone interviews, teachers conducted in-person interviews (Shenton, 2004). In this instance, I aimed to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings on inclusive practices in the school by acquiring additional information from three sources. Through the process of triangulating data from several sources, I can offer a more thorough and balanced comprehension of the problem, thus strengthening the credibility of the study.

The use of grounded theory is something that researchers do so that they are not influenced by any previous or current concept. The participants' information was extensively used in the development of a theory or explanation. I documented the findings in a journal, notebook, or memo to eliminate the possibility of bias. These notes helped I better understand the results by allowing reflection on actions, behaviours, or cognitive processes as well as those of the participants (Carcary, 2009; Shenton, 2004).

Moreover, I had spent nearly 19 years away from the country and possessed very limited knowledge regarding the situation of mainstream settings in Bangladesh. The concept of "inclusion" was completely novel to me. As a consequence of this, I did not make any personal comments to the individuals or exert any kind of pressure on them in any way.

Nevertheless, other aspects, such as the COVID circumstance, have the potential to affect the participants' responses. Because of events occurring in their personal lives, they may have felt more anxious and stressed than usual, which may have affected the results. In addition to this, they may occasionally be required to make comparisons between themselves and another child who leads a trouble-free life. The frequency with which they compare themselves to other children may give rise to high expectations, which may or may not be met (Shenton, 2004).

I anticipated the length of time this research would take. Even if the research is conducted over a significant period and educational progress is made, it is reasonable to assume that many factors will still be present after a few years because inclusion is a new phenomenon in Bangladesh, and rapid change cannot be anticipated in the next few years. Within the initially anticipated time frame, I finished

gathering and analysing the data, revealing helpful information about the current situation of students with autism in mainstream settings in Dhaka, Bangladesh (Shenton, 2004).

Furthermore, the process and outcomes of data collection are susceptible to change if any of the participants' children switch schools during the study. The amount of time it takes to develop a researcher's observational skills can be reduced or increased depending on the amount of information and experience they have. Due to the passage of time, the original data might become less clear or need to be changed, both of which could affect the final result (Shenton, 2004). There is no information indicating that any child with autism whose parents were interviewed was transferred to a different school during the study period.

In this research, no pre-test or post-test was conducted because it was a qualitative study. If the participants allow, I could conduct the interview more than once to confirm the information they provide. However, there is a possibility that the participants will become accustomed to the interview and the questionnaire, which may lead them to say things that are not as natural to them. There may be an issue with the study's apparent validity due to the subjective nature of the research (Shenton, 2004).

In the sampling section, it was ensured that none of the participants had any prior contact with I, minimizing the potential for personal bias. The study employed theoretical sampling methods, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, and research objectives as its foundational approach. This theoretical sampling approach, as outlined by Shenton (2004), contributed to the increased reliability of the study.

Everyone who took part in the study, including the parents of students with autism, teachers, and principals, had never been interviewed in this manner before and had no idea what kind of questions would be asked during the conversation. As a consequence of this, the information that they provided was based on their personal experiences. Therefore, from a completely subjective point of view, any relationship that is formed between the participant and I can be valued for the information it provides and how it helps the overall goal of the research (Shenton, 2004).

5.2.1.5 Confirmability

In qualitative research, validity, reliability, and confirmability are interconnected concepts that ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the study's findings (Ahmed, 2024). Validity refers to the accuracy and genuineness of the research, ensuring that the findings accurately reflect the subject of study (Yanti et al., 2025). Reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of the research methodology, signifying that the same results would be obtained if the study were repeated (Adeyemi, 2024). Confirmability ensures that the findings are not solely shaped by my biases but are grounded in the data and may be corroborated by others (Ahmed, S.K., 2024). It ensures that the interpretations and

conclusions are based on the participants' experiences rather than my subjective perceptions. The essential elements of confirmability are researchers striving to reduce their biases and preconceptions throughout data gathering and analysis. Regarding transparency, I maintained a comprehensive audit trail that delineates the methodology employed for data collection, analysis, and decision-making throughout the study process (Mertens et al., 2025).

In qualitative research, validity represents the reliability and credibility of the research outcome (Coleman, 2022). It examines the accuracy of the outcome of the research findings based on participants' real experiences and perceptions. It also evaluates the extent to which the interpretations are substantiated by the data. On the other hand, quantitative research often gives more focus on generalization, whereas validity in qualitative research emphasizes the comprehensive understanding of the specific area being studied (Almusaed et al., 2025).

There are some essential elements in validity, which are how data are collected and analyzed, my reflection on my own perception, and data triangulation (Ahmed, 2024). These elements ensure the reliability of the findings of the research. In qualitative research, validity focuses on how the findings are real and trustworthy, while reliability refers to how the outcome of the research is consistent and repeatable.

To boost validity, reliability, and confirmability, I employed the following strategies:

I compiled a thorough documentation of all research operations, encompassing data collection tools, coding schemes, and analytical techniques in this research. I kept an audit trail to document any modifications made during the research process, providing transparency and accountability in the findings. I provided a comprehensive overview of the research design (e.g., qualitative, grounded theory), details regarding the population (teachers, parents of children with autism, principals), and the sampling methodologies employed (purposive sampling, theoretical sampling), alongside specific data collection techniques and instruments (e.g., semi-structured interviews conducted in person, online, and via telephone), as well as data analysis approaches such as thematic analysis. I compiled a list of all data files, their formats, and their interrelationships. I retained the raw data for potential future analysis or verification of findings. I verified that all obtained data was properly maintained and protected to uphold confidentiality and integrity during the research process.

I kept all details about the reason for code selection and also recorded updates of any further changes or alterations that happened during the data analysis process. During the process of data analysis, I gave detailed information about the coding process, even if it was line by line, sentence by sentence, or paragraph by paragraph. Overall, by doing this, I aimed to maintain maximum transparency and clarity of the data process. All information, data, and procedures employed were appropriately cited. I regularly updated and revised the documentation as the research advanced.

5.2.1.6 Reflexivity

In qualitative research, due to its subjective nature, it is impossible to eliminate bias (Handa, 2022). Although I employed some strategies, such as reflexivity and the triangulation process, in an attempt to minimize bias, this does not ensure that I eliminated all bias from this study. I kept diary entries, recorded thoughts, and reflections about the study to promote ongoing self-awareness and critical evaluation of potential biases (Karcher et al., 2024).

5.2.1.7 Peer debriefing

Peer debriefing is another factor that enhances the credibility of qualitative research (Saber, 2024). In this process, other external reviewers present feedback and different viewpoints on my interpretation, analysis, and outcome of the research (Saber, 2024). In this research, I discussed and took feedback from two supervisors about each process I applied in my research, such as methods, methodology, data analysis, and even choosing the literature review. This collaboration helped me gain a comprehensive idea about my own work, minimize bias, and enhance the validity of the research.

5.2.1.8 Member checks

Member checking is a technique used in qualitative research in which researchers share their findings with participants to ensure that the data and interpretations resonate with them (Soysal et al., 2024). This process helps ensure that the research accurately reflects the perspectives and experiences of the participants. Member checking is one of the most important steps in improving trustworthiness and validity in qualitative studies (McKim, 2023). I sent the participants an email with their interview transcripts attached for verification. Participants were asked to review summaries of their comments or key findings and assess my interpretations of their data. After reading transcripts and interpretations, participants were asked for any feedback or suggestions to ensure that their views were accurately represented. This process allowed for necessary changes to be made before finalizing study results. Participants had the opportunity to provide any other information they might have missed during their first interview; this ensures that results are thorough and reflective of participants' experiences. Additionally, this feedback loop promoted transparency and trust between participants and me (Blom et al., 2025).

5.2.1.9 Prolonged engagement:

Validity in qualitative research is about how well the interpretations match with external reality (Brod et al., 2024). It stresses research methodologies and trustworthiness regarding the appropriateness of the research for its intended purpose. It has to do with how true or accurate data findings are, providing an authentic representation of reality (Ebbesen & Konečni, 2024). Reliability has been traditionally associated with quantitative research and emphasizes statistical validity (Fischer et

al., 2023). In qualitative research, reliability is most often achieved through a detailed description of the design and application of techniques, methods, or instruments so that exact replication could occur (Green, 2018; Aslan, 2025).

Prolonged involvement in the research process is another significant methodology to enhance validity (William, 2024). I spent sufficient time in the field to truly understand both the setting and what people go through. For example, I conducted initial semi-structured interviews with one sample (parents of autistic children), then followed up with iterative interviews to dig deeper into richer details. Also, after interviewing parents of autistic children, I collected further information from teachers and principals to gain maximum clarity. This required significant time spent on creating questions, interacting with participants, and doing more analysis to fully understand the topic.

Data triangulation was also adopted, which provided further clarity in this research (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023). Additionally, member checking, which involved sharing the transcript of the discussion with all participants and taking their feedback about what they said and how it was interpreted (McKim, 2023), was another useful technique to reflect on the accuracy of understanding in the discussion (Villamin et al., 2025). This broad approach ensured that I could provide a well-thought-out and insightful analysis in the final report.

The overall sampling process in this research, including purposive sampling, theoretical sampling, data saturation technique, and different types of interview questions, enhanced the applicability of the findings through a rich, diverse context. It explains the validity, alleviates potential bias, and develops trustworthiness of the research findings.

I recorded my personal opinions about coding, provided explanations of each theme, and justified the choices I made. I also discussed the study's possible shortcomings and recommendations for enhancing future related research. To preserve the study's integrity, I ensured that the data gathering and analysis procedures were honest and transparent. I carefully recorded all methods and provided concise justifications for the analysis of the data. This transparency enabled the creation of an audit trail and reflexivity (Shenton, 2004).

Since it offers a thorough record of all transactions and activities that have occurred during the research, an audit trail is the most widely used technique to establish confirmability. This is because it facilitates the tracking of any changes or discrepancies, making it easier to verify the accuracy and integrity of the data. The procedure for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting the data is described in depth below. A thorough description of the findings and their implications for further research is also given. Any original subjects or trends in interest that surfaced throughout data gathering are also noted (Shenton, 2004).

A qualitative researcher needs to consider how their own experiences and perspectives affect the research process. By reflecting on myself, I ensured that my prejudices did not unnecessarily affect how the findings were interpreted. I remained open to criticism from others and continuously challenged my assumptions to attain reflexivity. This was necessary to maintain the research process's objectivity and rigour. I archived and preserved a contemplative diary. Throughout the research process, I used a notebook as a tool to record my ideas, biases, and reflections (Shenton, 2004).

In general, confirmability plays a critical role in guaranteeing the reliability and validity of study findings. It is crucial to remember that a study's confirmability does not ensure its quality on its own. To guarantee the validity and robustness of their findings, researchers must also take into account additional aspects, including generalizability, validity, and dependability (Shenton, 2004).

5.2.1.10 Ethical Issues

Initially, the first step I took was to submit a request for approval to my superiors. I subsequently prepared a detailed report outlining the objectives of the study as well as the overall methodology. Approval was sought from the department's ethics committee (Ethics Committee for Studies Involving the Use of Human Participants) at the University of Hertfordshire. The University of Hertfordshire Social Science, Arts, and Humanities Ethics Committee Delegated Authority granted ethical approval. Ethical approval was based on established standards of ethics. The ethics protocol number is acEDU/PGR/UH/05008(1).

Before conducting any interviews, I provided participants with an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, as well as potential benefits and risks of participation. Additional clarifications regarding the research procedure and confidentiality concerns were offered. After reviewing the terms of the study and agreeing to them, participants completed a consent form and returned it to me (Khan, 2014; Chrysanth, 2014).

At the beginning of the research project, participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used to protect their privacy and ensure their safety (Tweedy & Jean, 2015). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym or code name, which was used in note-taking and in the writing process (Khan, 2014). This allowed me to code the notes objectively while safeguarding participants' identities for potential scholarly publication or professional use.

I was aware of the ethical considerations inherent in the study. Interviews were conducted in Bengali, the native language of the participants. I also sent an electronic copy of the Bangla transcript of the interview to each participant for verification and to allow for any necessary edits. All Bengali content that was subsequently translated into English was notarized to ensure accuracy.

Participants were informed that no compensation, gifts, or items of value would be provided for their participation (Tweedy & Jean, 2015; Khan, 2014). Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, some

participants may have experienced feelings of stress or anxiety. To address this, I provided participants with contact details, including my own, as I am a certified counsellor and mediation practitioner who could assist if any distress occurred during the interview process (Tweedy, 2015). Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time and were instructed that they could skip any questions that made them feel uncomfortable.

All data were documented on my personal laptop using Microsoft Word. The laptop was stored in a filing cabinet in my home, secured with passwords, and I held the only key to the cabinet. Throughout the research, I was the sole person with access to this secure space. After creating each observation note and transcript, the files were also stored in my Microsoft Drive account at the University of Hertfordshire, ensuring complete confidentiality and security of sensitive information (Tweedy & Jean, 2015).

All raw data from the interviews were kept strictly confidential and used exclusively for this research. Upon completion of the study, the data will be securely disposed of. Participants were given copies of their interview transcripts to verify accuracy and provide feedback. I encouraged participants to review the findings to ensure their perspectives were correctly represented.

5.3 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

5.3.1 Introduction

In grounded theory research, the research problem, the research questions, and the methods used to answer these questions should all align coherently (Cullen and Brennan, 2021). It has been argued that grounded-theory methods should be sufficiently clear to demonstrate that I followed the core analytic principles—namely, theoretical sampling, constant comparison, and data saturation—during the conduct of the study (see Figure 7). This clarity allows readers to evaluate how I utilized the data to develop the main categories of ideas (Montgomery and Bailey, 2007).

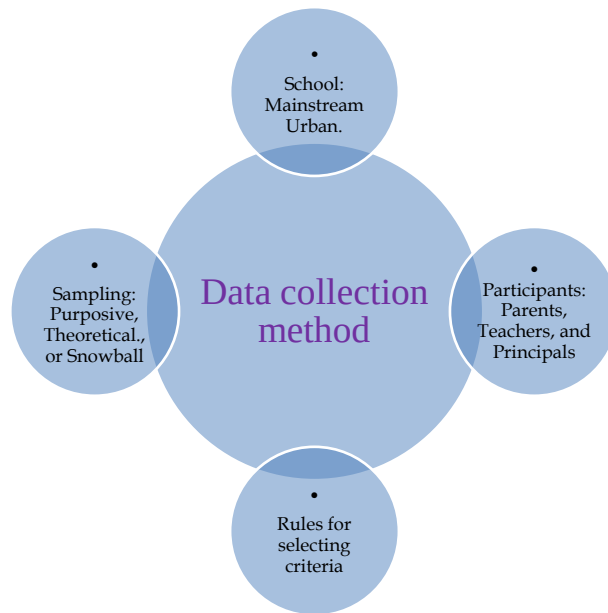


Figure 7. Data Collection Method

5.3.1.1 Recruitment

In qualitative research, recruiting is an essential stage in ensuring that the correct participants are selected to provide meaningful opinions and insights. This process involves determining precise inclusion criteria, contacting potential participants through a variety of methods, and clearly outlining the goals and objectives of the research. To obtain a diverse pool of participants, recruitment tactics may include using social media platforms, online forums, or community associations. The process I used to find participants will be described in the next section.

5.3.1.2 Sampling Strategies

Purposive sampling is preferred in qualitative research because it enables me to select participants based on judgment when identifying and selecting participants, cases, or events that can provide the most relevant information to achieve the study's objectives (Tweedy, 2015). In purposive sampling, participants are chosen based on the belief that the information they provide will significantly influence the development of a theory. This means I intentionally select information-rich cases to enhance understanding of the phenomenon or topic (Solomonidou, 2014). In this research, purposive sampling was used to choose participants. It was also combined with snowball or chain sampling, a method in which individuals who have already participated in research assist in identifying other people who may be interested (Solomonidou, 2014).

5.3.1.3 The Purposive Sampling Process

I aimed to understand participants' perspectives on inclusive education in Bangladesh, as well as their experiences with mainstream education for children with autism. The main objective of the study was to gather information from parents of children with autism. This strategy relied on thematic data analysis and open-ended questions.

Following purposive sampling, I created flyers detailing the study and the criteria for participation (see "Flyer for Research" in Appendix E). The flyer was posted on a Facebook page. Unfortunately, no one responded to the invitation. I then obtained phone numbers of mainstream school principals from Google and contacted them. The principals were informed about the type of participants sought, such as parents of children diagnosed with autism who had spent at least two years in an inclusive environment. The principals shared my contact information with interested parents, who then reached out for additional information.

Following the snowball sampling principle, I requested a few school principals, participants (parents of students with autism), and friends to recommend additional individuals from the same or other schools who might be interested in participating (Solomonidou, 2014). Miles and Huberman (1984) claim that this is an acceptable strategy for recruiting participants (Sani, 2016).

5.3.1.4 Theoretical Sampling

In qualitative research, theoretical sampling is a type of sampling in which I is not constrained by predefined selection boundaries (Alordiah & Oji, 2024). Instead, it involves gathering and analyzing data to determine what data to collect next and where to locate it, so that theory can be developed (Sebastian, 2019). For example, in response to information gathered from parents of children with autism, theoretical sampling was later adapted to include the views of teachers and principals.

The teachers and principals who participated were carefully chosen after cross-examination of the claims made by parents through online interviews. To locate teachers, I contacted principals of various mainstream schools. Only twenty teachers from one mainstream context were identified (Sani, 2016). I attempted to use snowball tactics (asking other administrators, participants, and acquaintances) to identify additional teachers from other schools but was unsuccessful.

After speaking with teachers, I adopted a different viewpoint from the principals' perspective, because both teachers and parents indicated that school-related issues were significantly impeding the effectiveness of inclusive practices. The principals' perspectives were crucial to understanding the situation clearly. I conducted phone interviews with several principals whose contact information was already available and obtained additional phone numbers from Google.

I recognized that limiting the number of participants could make it difficult to compare notes continuously and reach saturation (Hussein, 2014). All participants were informed that interviews would continue until theoretical saturation was reached (Montgomery & Bailey, 2007). Theoretical

sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, and the study objectives were the guiding framework (Shenton, 2004).

5.3.1.5 Selection Criteria

The focus on participant perspectives is based on the belief that it will provide rich information relevant to this study. All samples were drawn from mainstream schools in Dhaka. I chose participants from this area to ensure the data was relevant and meaningful. Data were not collected from rural areas, which helped maintain consistency and focus on the target population. All participants were selected based on clear criteria, regardless of social status, race, religion, or caste (Carcary, 2009). This research included three samples: parents of children with autism, teachers, and school principals. The selection criteria (inclusion and exclusion) for each group are described below.

5.3.1.6 Participants

Data were collected through interviews to understand the perspectives of stakeholders involved in the education of children with autism. Inclusion and exclusion criteria are outlined below.

5.3.2 Inclusion Criterion

5.3.2.1 Parents of Children with Autism

Participants were required to be older than 18 years. Grandparents or other caregivers were not included, as the focus was on parents (father, mother, or both). Age restrictions ensured that participants could fully understand and articulate their experiences. The minimum education requirement for parents was a secondary school certificate (S.S.C.), as lower educational levels might limit understanding of common autistic traits and related challenges.

I selected parents based on specific criteria, including their children's status as students with autism in mainstream schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The focus was on children aged 6 to 17 to account for variations in autistic traits and functioning, even though primary school students are typically 5–11 years old. This age range allowed flexibility to recruit additional participants as needed. I emphasized that students should have been enrolled in the same school for at least two years, ensuring that difficulties in mainstream settings were not solely due to adjustment challenges.

5.3.2.2 Teachers

Teachers were required to work with children diagnosed with autism in mainstream schools in Dhaka. Special education credentials were encouraged but not mandatory. During interviews, I asked about their training, experience, and skills in working with children with special needs. This information helped tailor subsequent questions and interviews to explore their practices and insights.

5.3.2.3 Principals

Principals were required to be in charge of mainstream schools in Dhaka with students diagnosed with autism currently enrolled. Age and educational requirements were not specified, as all principals possessed sufficient maturity to provide relevant insights. I emphasized two criteria: length of service as a principal and any specialized training. Experience was prioritized over formal special education certification, as practical experience improved understanding of mainstream challenges.

5.3.3 Exclusion Criteria

Participants could leave interviews at any time if uncomfortable. I also removed any data from participants found to provide false information. No participant received payment or reward (Solomonidou, 2014). These criteria applied to all three participant groups.

5.3.4 Participants' Demographics

The demographics of participants—parents of students with autism, teachers, and principals—considered for the research are outlined below (see Tables 4, 6, 7).

5.3.4.1 First Sample: Parents of Students with Autism

Participants were aged 37–48, with good physical and mental health. Three held master's degrees (P1, P7, P8), three were graduates (P2, P3, P5), and one had completed H.S.C. (P6) and S.S.C. (P4). The sample included two men (P3, P4) and six women (P1, P2, P5–P8), and all their children diagnosed with autism attended mainstream schools in Dhaka.

Name	Gender of Parents	Age	Qualification	Mental Health
P1	Female	42	Masters	Ok
P2	Female	40	Bachelor of Arts	Ok
P3	Male	41	B.B.A	Ok
P4	Male	46	S.S.C	Ok
P5	Female	48	Bachelor of Arts	Ok

P6	Female	45	H.S.C	Ok
P7	Female	37	Masters	Ok
P8	Female	42	Masters	Ok

Table 3. Demographics of participants (Parents of Students with autism children)

5.3.4.2 Children

Three of the children in this research were 11 years old, except two who were 17 (C6) and 16 (C5). Not a single child in this research had attended their current school for less than two years. Of the eight children, two were boys (C1, and C4) and five were girls (C2, C3, C5, C6, C7and C8). All of them received an autism diagnosis. Only two children received diagnoses for co-occurring disorders, including Down syndrome (C8) and ADHD (C3). All the children were in primary school, ranging from first to sixth grade.

See Table 5 below for the summary of child demographics.

Name	Age	Gender of Child	Diagnose	Duration of Study in Same School
C1	12	Boy	Autism	Five
C2	11	Girl	Autism	Two
C3	11	Girl	Autism with ADHD	Three
C4	12	Boy	Autism	Three
C5	16	Girl	Autism	Ten
C6	17	Girl	Autism	Five
C7	12	Girl	Autism	Six
C8	11	Girl	Autism with Down syndrome	Two

Table 4. Information on students with autism

5.3.4.3 Second Sample: Teacher

The participants in this research ranged in age from 32 to 48 (see Table 6). All the selected participants were in good mental and physical health. As can be seen from the Table below in this investigation, only one of the teachers had a bachelor's in science (T1), while the other seven had master's degrees. All of the teachers came from Dhaka's mainstream settings, and they all attended the same school. Out of the total of 8 instructors, only two (T1, T5) received training specifically focused on children with special needs. However, the duration of this training varied, with one teacher receiving 12 days of instruction and the other receiving three days of training. All teachers have limited experience educating students with special needs in mainstream settings.

Name	Gender of parents	Age	Qualification	Teaching Experience with SEN	Training for Special Needs	Primary Teacher
T1	Female	56	B.S.C	12 years	12 days	Yes
T2	Female	43	M.S.C	3 years	No	Yes
T3	Female	48	Masters	2 years	No	Yes
T4	Female	41	Masters	8 years	No	Yes
T5	Female	37	M.B.B. S	12 years	3 days	Yes
T6	Female	46	M.S.C	17 years	No	Yes
T7	Female	35	M.S.C	14 years	No	Yes
T8	Female	32	M. S. S	8 years	No	Yes

Table 5. Demographics of teachers

5.3.4.4 Third Sample: Principal

Three of the four principals in this research were female. They are all principals at mainstream schools in Dhaka (see Table 7). The principals lacked any formal education about special needs children. Meanwhile, all of them had prior experience working with students with special needs in their schools.

The principals have a considerable amount of practical expertise in working with children who have special needs, with an overall experience span of 5 to 9 years.

Name	Gender of Parents	School	Special need training	Experience
A1	Female	S1(Urban)	No	5 years
A2	Female	S2 (Urban)	No	4 years
A3	Female	S3(Urban)	No	7 years
A4	Male	S4(Urban)	No	9 years

Table 6. Demographics of principals

5.3.5 Summary

In this section, I covered the steps involved in gathering data, including participant demographics, sampling techniques, and recruiting. The methods and resources that researchers utilized to collect data will be covered in the section that follows.

5.4 PROCEDURE OF DATA COLLECTION

5.4.1 Introduction

The initial phase involved obtaining statements from the parents of children diagnosed with autism. I subsequently explored the perspectives of teachers and principals to gain a deeper understanding of the analysis. The analysis depicting parents' viewpoints indicated that aspects related to teachers and schools had reached a critical threshold, prompting further investigation. After conducting interviews with teachers, it was essential to conduct additional interviews with principals to obtain their perspectives on the issue. Triangulation of multiple data sources can yield a more comprehensive understanding of the various factors that impact the experiences of students with autism in educational settings. By incorporating several viewpoints, I can more effectively discern patterns and correlations that may not be readily evident from a single source.

Once the selection of participants for the research was finalized, the subsequent task was to actively seek and enlist individuals to participate in the interviews. The recruitment process followed a systematic approach, including identifying suitable participants, contacting them, and obtaining their informed consent to participate in the study. The following section delineates the recruitment procedure for three distinct groups: parents of children with autism, teachers, and principals. It

describes how I successfully recruited these groups to gather data for the interviews. Recruitment is a crucial part of the interview process, as it ensures that the data obtained are both representative and reliable for analysis.

5.4.1.1 Procedure for recruiting parents of children with autism

I first collected school addresses from the Google database. I then contacted the school principals by telephone to request participants. Before selecting any participants, the nature of the study and the inclusion criteria (see Appendices F, G, and H) were explained to the principals, and the information was also emailed to them. The principals subsequently forwarded the details to interested candidates.

I initially sent a message by phone to all interested participants, informing them of a suitable time for a call. Since many participants were unfamiliar with email or did not have an email account or computer skills, phone communication was primarily used. Later, participants received assistance from their spouses or children to download Zoom or WhatsApp.

When interested participants responded, I called them at a time that was convenient for them. Prior to conducting any semi-structured interviews, I engaged in warm and casual conversations with the participants to explain the goals of the study (see Figure 8).

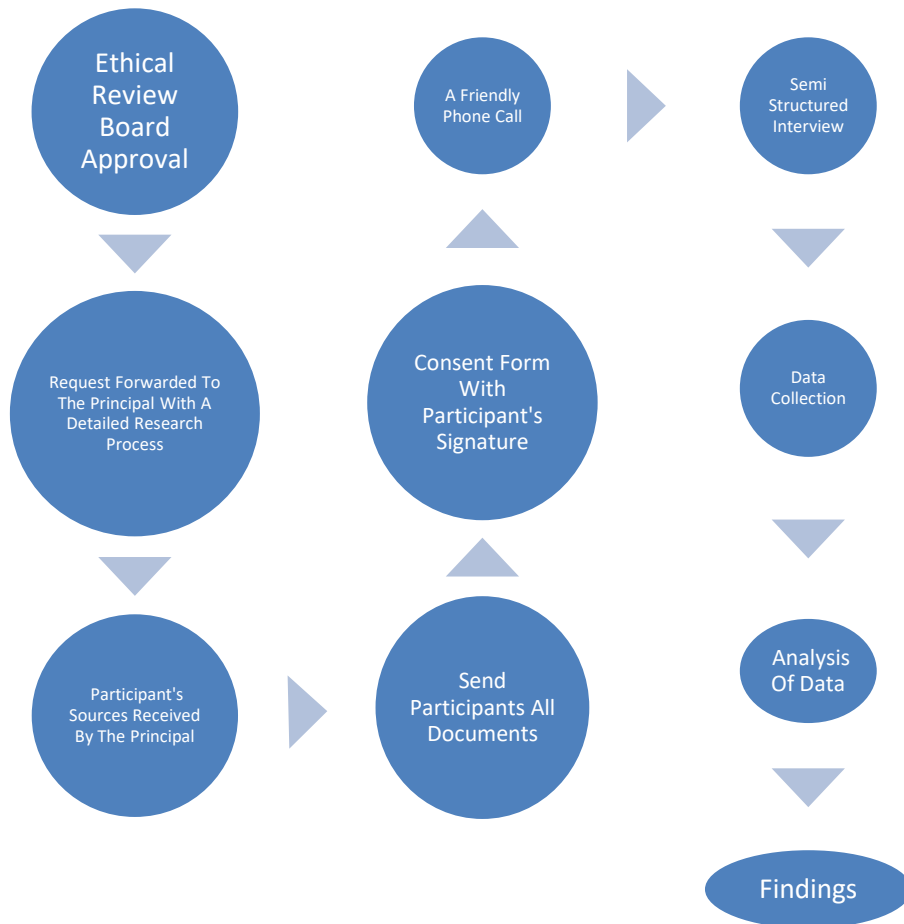


Figure 8. Procedure for data collection

I then presented participants with crucial documents in both Bengali and English (questionnaire, information sheet, consent form, and all ethical rules) through an informal online meeting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) (see appendix A, F, G, H, J, and K). After all participants consented to participate in this study's interview, they completed the basic questionnaire form (see Appendix A) about themselves in English and their children, and emailed it back to me. Those who were unable to send emails used WhatsApp instead. By signing the consent form, all participants demonstrated their readiness for a semi-structured interview. Furthermore, all participants were informed that a follow-up personal interview would be conducted for further clarification. Participants were informed that they would be assigned a pseudonym to protect their identities. This procedure was agreed upon by all.

Initially, I selected three schools and invited 17 individuals. The seventeen participants for the research were chosen as follows: the principal of a mainstream school, a friend of a friend, and

participants who provided my phone number to other interested individuals, who then contacted I directly to express their interest (Sani, 2016).

The sample size ($P = 17$) was considered adequate according to grounded theory studies. However, five of the participants did not respond when contacted during the data collection process for unexplained reasons. When the data from eight interviews with the remaining twelve individuals demonstrated redundancy or identical circumstances, indicating the achievement of a saturation threshold, data collection was considered complete (Tweedy, 2015). All interviewees were informed of this situation prior to the interviews and provided their agreement. Finally, six mothers (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6) and two fathers (P7 and P8) from three mainstream schools in an urban area volunteered to participate in this manner (see Figure 9).

In research, a pilot study is a scaled-down version of a larger study intended to evaluate the feasibility of research protocols and methods prior to a full-scale investigation (Janaka et al., 2024). It assists in identifying potential issues and improving research methods, tools, and recruitment practices (Aschbrenne et al., 2022). Essentially, it serves as a "test run" to ensure that the primary study proceeds efficiently. The remaining seven participants for the doctoral study were interviewed on March 20, 2023, while one participant had previously been involved in a pilot study conducted by I at the University of Hertfordshire on July 20, 2022.



Figure 9. The number of participants (parents of students with autism children).

Choosing participants from three mainstream schools provided a variety of learning situations and experiences that were beneficial. It also helped minimize bias, and none of the participants had prior experience with this type of interview. I had intended to conduct a follow-up interview to compare the results of the first interviews, but difficulties in recruiting volunteers resulted in only one participant being available for the follow-up.

Reciprocity was considered essential for all study participants, as they contributed their time and insights to assist me in achieving the study's objectives (Tweedy, 2015). This involved acknowledging the participants' contributions and thanking them for their time. When interviewees

asked for advice on how to support their children, I provided therapeutic suggestions and guidance. I also personally thanked all participants over the phone.

A high-speed connection called "Link" was used to minimize network latency during the interviews. This ensured that no network or other disturbances interrupted the flow of conversation. However, some participants experienced difficulties with slow internet, which posed a challenge. All participant data collected during the research process were stored on my personal, password-protected laptop in a secure location. After each interview, all audio, video, journal entries, and transcriptions were saved on the University of Hertfordshire-provided secure OneDrive system.

5.4.1.2 Recruitment of Teachers

After conducting interviews with parents of children with autism, it became necessary to conduct interviews with teachers to gain further insights and perspectives. I developed a strategy to identify and interview teachers. A list of potential schools was created using the Google website, and principals were contacted to schedule interviews with teachers. Difficulties arose due to conflicting schedules, but teachers from one mainstream school in Dhaka were successfully identified. The school principal agreed to provide the contact details of participants for the interviews.

I contacted the principal of the school, who responded and confirmed that the school's pool of teachers could participate in the study. Before selecting participants, the principal was informed of the nature of the study and the inclusion criteria (see Appendices F, G, and H). The principal also arranged a private interview room and scheduled a date and time (i.e., February 21, 2023). The principal identified approximately 20 teachers to participate and requested that the interviews be completed within three hours.

An information sheet, a permission form, and a list of ethical guidelines were provided to the principal in a separate, locked envelope for distribution to the teachers on February 19, 2023, prior to the interviews. Since many teachers were occupied with daily responsibilities and might not check their email, I did not send documents electronically.

All teachers were invited to read the information prior to participation. They completed and signed the consent forms after agreeing to participate in the study. I personally collected all signed consent forms. Once consent was obtained, the semi-structured interviews commenced.

On February 21, 2023, at 9:00 a.m., I reported for the interviews. Prior to conducting any semi-structured interviews, I explained the content of the consent form and ethics information, as well as the interview process. Participants were informed that interviews could be concluded if repetitive

information emerged, but new information would allow the interview to continue. All participants agreed to this process.

It is important to note that all teachers declined permission for video recording; however, they allowed audio recording, and only a few expressed interest in participating in a follow-up interview. The principal arranged for the interviews to take place in a private room.

At 9:40 a.m., I began the interviewing process. Participant details were recorded on a basic questionnaire, including the respondent's name, age, level of education, years of teaching experience, and any special needs training or its duration. Each interview lasted between 15 and 25 minutes.

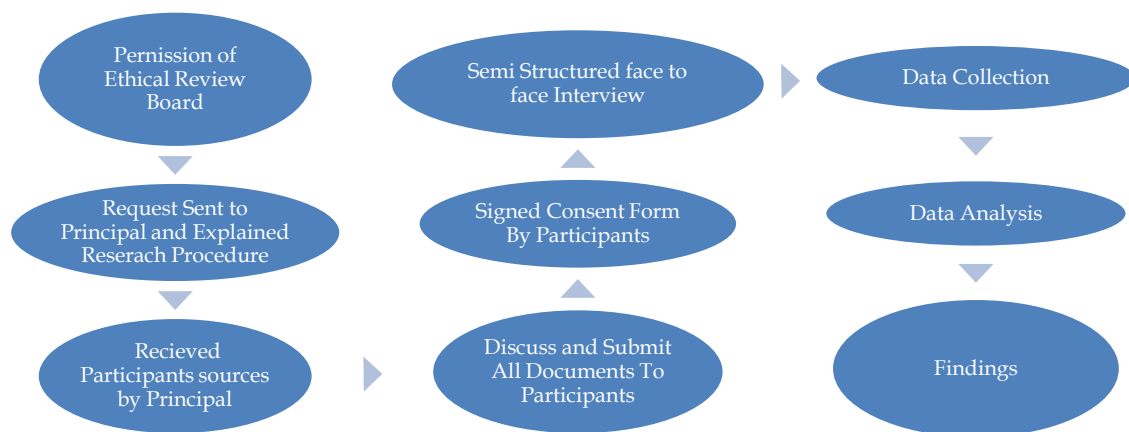


Figure 10. Data collection procedure (parents of students with autism).

Initially, I gained 20 participants from the same school (see Figure 11). When I was about halfway through the data collection process with the other teachers, seven of them left because they were too busy to participate. However, there remained 13 participants. After interviewing eight teachers, I decided to stop because the results showed that the defined categories were being filled with repeating data and/or identical conditions, which is another way of saying that they had reached a saturation point (Tweedy & Jean, 2015; Cullen and Brennan, 2021).



Figure 11. To show the number of participants (teachers).

In this manner, eight teachers from one mainstream school in an urban area (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, and T8) volunteered their time. Two of the eight teachers expressed interest in participating in a follow-up interview in the future, if necessary.

In the spirit of reciprocity (Tweedy, 2015), although it was not mandatory, I provided teachers with helpful therapeutic suggestions when they requested advice on supporting children with special needs. I also thanked all participants who took part in the study. Prior to this study, no similar interviews had been conducted, highlighting that teachers could share information based on their personal experiences and beliefs (Khan, 2014). Additionally, the process offered teachers an opportunity to reflect on their teaching practices and exchange valuable knowledge with colleagues.

The interviews were conducted in person, and I used a phone to record the conversations. After each interview, all audio recordings, journal entries, and transcripts were saved on the University of Hertfordshire-provided secure OneDrive system and deleted from the phone. This system was password-protected and securely stored in my locker (Creswell et al., 2018).

The interviews were conducted in a culturally active Bengali language room, where students and teachers entered without knocking, and the room lacked a locking mechanism. During the interviews, I took the opportunity to observe the surroundings, including the playground, classrooms, and overall school building. These spontaneous observations served as the foundation for the field notes and anecdotes in the study. This observation was valuable, as it provided insight into the school's layout, which was subsequently discussed by teachers and parents on several occasions and can be considered naturalistic observation.

5.4.1.3 Recruitment of Principals

As the investigation progressed, I sought to understand teachers' perspectives on inclusive education more deeply. The next step involved contacting principals to obtain additional insights for the study.

To recruit principals, I first contacted two principals with whom prior acquaintance existed. This familiarity had been established through earlier interactions with parents of students with autism and teachers associated with their schools. Both principals agreed to participate in the study. I then employed the snowballing technique (Sani, 2016; Tweedy & Jean, 2015; Solomonidou, 2014), requesting that these principals provide contact details for additional principals at other schools. In this way, the initial principals assisted me by suggesting further potential participants. Additional principals' contact numbers were also collected from Google and contacted directly by me.

Seven principals initially expressed interest in participating. Due to health issues, two principals were unable to take part in data collection. Among the remaining five participants, one had to postpone the interview multiple times due to a busy schedule and later ceased responding to phone calls. Ultimately, I completed the study with four principals (A1, A2, A3, and A4) from four mainstream schools in an urban area. I then proceeded to contact the participants who had provided consent.

I called the principals to arrange interviews. Most principals requested that all documents be sent via WhatsApp rather than email, as they rarely checked their email accounts. Participants received the documents in Bengali via WhatsApp, including my ID, information sheet, permission form, relevant ethical guidelines, and the interview schedule and location, on May 15th, 2023, during a casual phone conversation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). All participants indicated their preparedness for the semi-structured interview by signing the consent form one week before the scheduled interview.

When participants expressed interest, I conducted friendly, informal conversations about the study's objectives and the significance of their perspectives prior to the interviews. This step was carried out to establish a favorable rapport with participants before the formal interview process commenced.

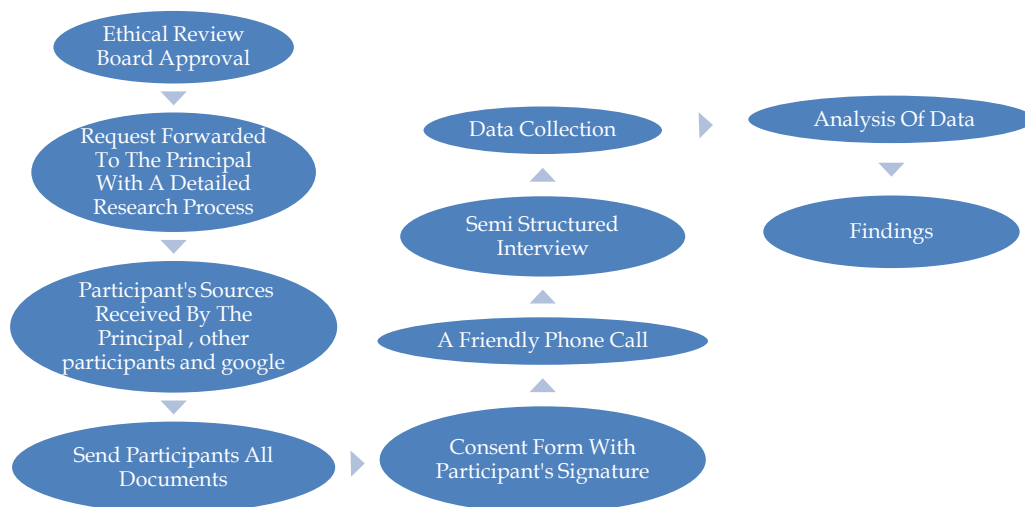


Figure 12. Data collection procedure (teachers).

Even though new contributions will always lead to new data, i.e., that we have reached a saturation point after taking four participants' interviews, no new themes arose in the final interview. As a result, I stopped finding more samples for data gathering from other sources (Tweedy, 2015). To further clarify the initial interviews, I asked for a follow-up interview if required. Only two individuals agreed to this procedure.

In terms of reciprocity (Tweedy, 2015), I personally thanked each participant. The principals were also aware that their participation in the study could increase awareness, which would be beneficial for this group of students in the future. This awareness could help them manage the needs of these students more effectively and with less stress in mainstream settings.

Instead of using a network call such as WhatsApp, I made personal phone calls to each participant. This ensured that the interviews proceeded without network or other technical issues that could disrupt the conversation. Although I could not observe the participants' facial expressions, the tone and emphasis in their voices – such as when they were loud, angry, displeased, or unhappy – were clearly perceptible. The notes and anecdotes in the study were based solely on the principals' statements, and I did not include personal feelings or opinions (Carcary, 2009).

All audio recordings, video files, diary entries, and transcripts were deleted from my phone and securely stored on the University of Hertfordshire-provided OneDrive system. Both the OneDrive account and physical storage were password-protected and kept in my locker (Creswell et al., 2018).

5.4.1.4 Challenges to Recruitment

In the context of Bangladesh, gathering participants for interviews was extremely challenging due to unspecified concerns. For instance, it was difficult for Bangladeshi principals to express their opinions and sign the consent form. Despite assurances from me that all information would be kept confidential, some principals were concerned about potential exposure. Although the principals eventually agreed to sign the consent form, some asked if they could participate in the phone interview without signing the form. This process caused some discomfort for both parties. It is reasonable to assume that even when principals participated in the interview and followed all guidelines, they may have withheld some information out of fear or mistrust, which could reduce the clarity and effectiveness of the study.

Initially, parents were hesitant to participate due to the sensitive nature of the condition. Many parents believed that their situation would not improve as a result of their participation. Additionally, they feared being judged negatively by others if they disclosed information about their child's condition, which led to reluctance in sharing details. Regarding teachers, while many expressed interest in the study, some were hesitant to fully share their perspectives due to unspecified fears.

5.3.2 Summary

This section discusses the recruitment process and the challenges encountered while gathering data for the research. Recruitment involves identifying potential participants and persuading them to participate in the study, while difficulties in obtaining responses or reaching specific populations can impact data collection. Researchers should consider these factors when planning studies to ensure the collection of high-quality and reliable data.

5.5 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

5.5.1 Introduction

Polanyi said on page 60 of the 1958 Lindsay Memorial Lectures that "human thought grows only through language". On the other hand, Seaman (2021) claims that language will always "miss the mark" since it is fundamentally a social phenomenon and cannot, therefore, properly explain experience.

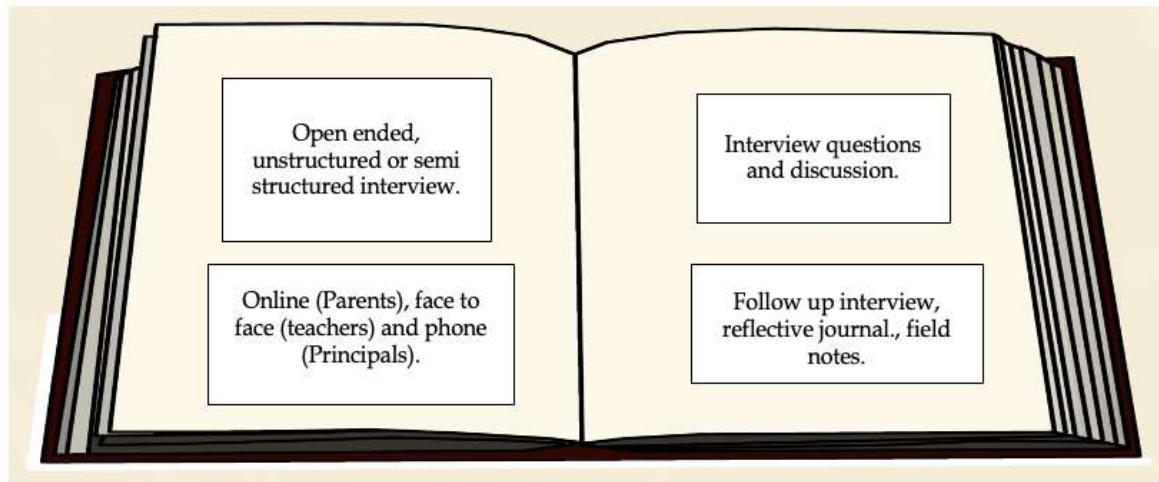


Image 8. Tools for collecting data

5.5.1.1 Interviews

For more than 20 years, interviews have been used in approximately 90% of social science studies (Seaman, 2021). Interviews can provide "unique access to the lived world of the subjects, who in their own words describe their activities, experiences, and opinions" (Kvale, 2007: 9; cited in Seaman, 2021). In line with this study, the semi-structured interview was selected as the method most capable of allowing participants to express their experiences and opinions concerning inclusive education for children with autism.

However, Alvesson et al. (2008b), in their review of identity literature, argue that although interviews are frequently used, there is growing skepticism regarding their ability to accurately and realistically represent a person's situation. The authors highlight the potential influence of interviewer preconceptions (Seaman, 2021). Conversely, according to Denzin's (2001: 24) "utopian" theory, reflexive interviews can illuminate social injustices and inequalities while also indicating moral directions for a more humane society (Seaman, 2021). Seaman (2021) further asserts that face-to-face observation is valuable in qualitative research interviews, which can be conducted at the participant's

convenience and are potentially highly responsive. The use of multiple data-gathering techniques is recommended to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Seaman, 2021).

As an additional data collection tool, I invited participants to share their thoughts and experiences in mainstream settings via email or WhatsApp (Ryan et al., 2009). Despite potential sensitivity issues, none of the participants expressed interest, likely due to various stressful circumstances. I refrained from exerting pressure on participants, recognizing the delicate nature of the situation. Participants were hesitant to dedicate additional time for sharing information, indicating limited engagement regarding experiences in mainstream settings.

Semi-structured interview

The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of participants who had students with autism enrolled in regular schools. While certain themes can influence whether mainstream settings are successful or unsuccessful, it is not always clear which challenges are unique to individual students with autism or which may pose a risk regardless of the student. Consequently, I sought to understand participants' perceptions of inclusive environments and their daily experiences. An interactive approach was found to be most effective during a semi-structured interview.

For example, if a question was not fully answered during an interview or if participants did not fully understand the question, I was able to clarify, reword, or ask the question differently on the spot—an approach not possible with a questionnaire sent via email or post. Moreover, facial expressions can reveal substantial information about participants' emotions and mental states (Tweedy, 2015; Ryan et al., 2009).

A semi-structured interview also provides flexibility, which is essential for capturing subtle factors in mainstream settings, particularly those that are often implicit and require interpretation (Tweedy, 2015). During the interviews, I had the opportunity to modify questions as needed (Saldana, 2013). Semi-structured interviews also allow researchers to explore whether new theories can emerge from the data (Janice et al., 2004). Questions could be adjusted and narrowed based on participants' responses to capture more relevant insights (Saldana, 2013; Ryan et al., 2009).

When conducting interviews, I carefully considered the rationale behind each question, ensuring that they were both relevant and understandable, in order to obtain meaningful information from participants. This considered approach facilitated the collection of rich data, which contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive education practices (see Appendices O, P, Q, R, S).

5.5.1.2 Types of Questions

Several types of questions were asked during the interviews, including questions accompanied by large pictures (see Appendices B, Q, and R), follow-up questions (see Appendices P and S), and contrast and comparison questions (Krosnick & Presser, 2019). Certain interview questions were developed by I, while others were adapted from previous studies (Sani, 2016; Ryan et al., 2009).

Open-ended questions were used to elicit detailed responses from participants (Cohen et al., 2000). Questions with obvious or binary answers, such as “yes” or “no,” were avoided to obtain high-quality data. I ensured that all questions were clear, simple, and easy for participants to understand (Solomonidou, 2014). Deeper questions and prompts were used during subsequent interviews to encourage further reflection, for example: “Can you tell me more about...” or “Do you have any examples to give?”

A balance was maintained between encouraging participants to speak expansively and asking anchoring questions, such as: “If you were asked to give your views about teachers' knowledge of successful inclusion, how would you describe it?” According to Van Manen (2016b/2015), sometimes asking direct questions is the most effective way to explore participant responses (Seaman, 2021). Brief clarifying questions were also used, such as: “So, are you saying that the school is not ready for inclusion?”

Occasionally, participants raised inappropriate or unrelated topics, such as: “Can you help me find a groom for my daughter when she grows up?” or “Can you tell me how I can help deaf or blind children in my class?” I carefully redirected participants without causing offense, guiding them back to the interview topic (Seaman, 2021).

Different types of interviews and follow-up questions were developed for each participant group to serve distinct purposes (Appendices O, Q, R). For instance, questionnaires for parents of children with autism were developed first. Interview questions for teachers were then formulated based on parents' responses to obtain richer insights, and principal questions were developed after analyzing the responses from both parents and teachers, ensuring a comprehensive perspective. Supplementary follow-up questions were also created for parents (Appendix P) and principals (Appendix S) to clarify their experiences and perspectives.

Each set of interview and follow-up questions was tailored to the respective sample. The primary objective of this approach was to address the research questions from multiple angles, ensuring a thorough understanding of the topic (Appendix N). This strategy allowed for a holistic analysis of the data, resulting in richer and more nuanced interpretations of the findings.

Among the three samples – parents of children with autism, teachers, and principals – parents were interviewed via online video due to COVID-19 restrictions. Teachers were interviewed in person,

while four principals were interviewed by phone because they were unwilling to participate in either in-person or online interviews.

5.5.1.3 Interview Process

The interview schedule was divided into three stages: Stage 1 involved collecting information from parents of students with autism; Stage 2 involved collecting information from teachers; and Stage 3 involved collecting information from principals. The second and third stages were informed by the responses from parents of students with autism. After identifying a key issue involving teachers' and principals' responsibilities in mainstream settings from parents' experiences, it became necessary to incorporate the perspectives of teachers and principals. The insights from these groups were mapped to inform future strategies for inclusive education and to understand how students with autism are supported in mainstream schools.

One parent participant and two principals were contacted for follow-up phone interviews to clarify points raised in their initial interviews, with prior consent. Issues identified during the initial interviews were addressed during Stage 2 follow-up interviews.

According to Smith et al. (2009), maintaining a flexible interview plan is recommended, as participant circumstances may require adjustments. If interviews became too sensitive or emotionally taxing, I offered participants the option to postpone or end the session. This was particularly relevant when a few parents of children with autism became emotional during the interviews.

At the end of each interview, participants were asked whether they had shared all the information they wished before the recording was stopped, to ensure no significant contributions were missed. With participant consent, the recording was restarted if they wished to add additional information (Tweedy, 2015).

This section details the three participant groups interviewed: parents of children with autism, teachers, and principals.

5.5.2 Parents of Children with Autism

5.5.2.1 Preparation

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted at mutually convenient times and locations, lasting approximately one hour each. Zoom was used for online interviews. A calm, comfortable, and informal room setting was maintained to create a conducive environment. I anticipated and minimized interruptions and distractions (Seaman, 2021).

Before starting the interviews, participants were asked if they were ready. Once ready, I confirmed responses from the questionnaire regarding participant and child information, including

health, school, child disorders, age, and the school selection process. I then requested permission to activate the recording device.

5.5.2.2 Initial Interview

Interview questions for parents of students with autism were carefully designed to explore mainstream educational environments, including topics related to teachers, principals, academic resources, peers, and parents of peers. The initial interview schedule for parents of students with autism included approximately 12 semi-structured questions (see Table 7).

The stage 1 interview questions are briefly described in the Table below.

1. How old is your child?
2. When did you become aware that your child experienced ASD?
3. Can you tell me your experience when you first came to know that your child has autism?
4. What are the reasons for choosing mainstream settings instead of special settings?
5. What measures do you expect the school to take to accommodate your child?
6. How do you feel about the teacher's engagement with your children's academic progress in mainstream settings?
7. Could you please explain more about the teacher's role in your children's social progress in mainstream settings?
8. According to you, how can the school play a significant role in your child's overall development?
9. How is your child socializing in mainstream settings, and how is the school assisting them?
10. What are your expectations from mainstream settings to support children experiencing ASD?
11. How do you communicate with teachers regarding your child's educational and social development?
12. What measures does the school take to assist children with ASD?

Table 7. A sample 1 interview question

5.5.2.3 Follow-up Interview

The follow-up interviews with parents of students with autism started approximately four months later via Zoom to obtain further insights into participants' experiences regarding the educational and social development of students with autism in mainstream educational settings in Dhaka, Bangladesh, during the research process. This round also aimed to capture any potential reconsiderations or reflections on the initial interview, facilitating the identification of changes and enabling a comparison of data over time (Sukumaran & Shalini, 2015). To obtain further understanding, the interviewers extended an invitation to the participants to bring up a few further inquiries (see Table 8 below). The subsequent interview conversation employed a method similar to the initial interview. The main objective of this second interview was to further strengthen the fourth research question, "What implications do the findings have for inclusive education environments in Bangladesh, considering both perspectives and recommendations?" See Table 8 below for a summary of the follow-up questions.

Reflecting on your previous and current experience, can you describe your overall view of mainstream settings?
Would you like to share your thoughts on integrated settings?
Do you have any concerns about your children's future?
How do you see him in the future, both socially and professionally?

Table 8. Follow-up interview questions for parents of students with autism

5.5.3 Interview Process for Teachers

After interviewing the parents of children with autism, additional questions were developed to speak with teachers. There were seven interview questions for teachers (see Table 9 below). The interviews with the teacher started approximately eight months later, face-to-face, to learn more about teachers' opinions about including autistic children in mainstream settings as well as to see if I found any clarity or different thoughts in the statements of the parents of students with autism that she could put into any additional insight or compare data over time.

5.5.3.1 Preparation

One-on-one, in-person interviews with teachers were conducted at times and locations that were convenient for both parties, based on the principal's recommendations. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 40 minutes. The principal arranged a private classroom within the school to ensure a relatively quiet setting. However, the room was not completely free from disturbances. I attempted to minimize distractions by closing the door and informing people outside not to enter during the interviews. Despite these efforts, the day coincided with a cultural event at the school, resulting in a busy environment. Additionally, the door was malfunctioning, and numerous individuals opened it repeatedly out of curiosity.

5.5.3.2 Interview Questions

The semi-structured interview questions had been planned before the interview. These questions asked about the participants' teaching experiences, problems, ideas, integrated settings, principals, and academic resources, as well as what they had learned from those experiences and, finally, their suggestions. I made connections between research questions and interviews to gain more insight into how the data gathered will support the study goals. This alignment ensures that the interview questions are focused and relevant to the study's goals, ultimately leading to more meaningful and insightful data analysis (see Appendix N).

The interview questions are briefly described in Table 9 below.

1. Would you please share your thoughts on placing special needs children in mainstream settings?
2. How would you use a creative idea to help children with special needs?
3. How would you encourage parents to enrol their children in the mainstream settings?
4. In your opinion, what can teachers do most effectively to help students with autism feel included in the school community?
5. Which of your ways of running a classroom is best for helping students with autism?
6. When teaching in a mainstream setting, which teaching method do you prefer to use?
7. Explain the primary role in mainstream settings.

Table 9. Interview Questions for Teachers

5.5.3.3 Procedure of Interview

Before any questions were asked, participants were asked if they were ready to begin the interview. Once they confirmed readiness, I asked a few general questions about the teachers' experience with children with special needs, the length of their training, their age, and their level of education (see Table 6). I then explained the objectives of the study and provided participants with an information sheet and a consent form to review. After reading and signing the consent form, participants were asked for permission to activate the recording device.

All eight teachers initially agreed to a follow-up phone interview to clarify points raised in their first interviews. However, none of the participants expressed interest in responding to my follow-up calls for further clarification on some topics covered in the initial interview, citing time constraints (Tweedy, 2015).

5.5.4 Interview Process for Principals

5.5.4.1 Preparation

The statement made by teachers who work in traditional settings and parents of students with autism served as the foundation for this sample. There were not many strict guidelines to follow while choosing the principles, except that all principals had to be from mainstream settings.

Before doing any interviews, participants received my name, the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of the data they provided, and information about an audio recording. After obtaining their consent, I started the semi-structured interview at their convenience.

Semi-structured one-on-one phone interviews lasted about twenty minutes each and were conducted at mutually convenient times and places. Interviews were conducted in a welcoming, comfortable, and relaxed manner. There was no disruption during the phone interview.

5.5.4.2 Interview Questions

There were five questions in the semi-structured interview. However, these five interview questions were broadened based on the feedback from the participants.

The interview questions are briefly described in Table 10 below.

How do you see inclusive education?
What are the benefits you see from inclusive education?
What are the challenges you experience from inclusive education?
How can we successfully implement inclusion?
What is your perception of integrated settings?

Table 10. Interview Questions for Principals

5.5.4.3 Follow-up Investigation

The follow-up interview was conducted approximately one week later by phone to gather additional information regarding inclusive policy and government functions, as well as to determine whether participants had any reflections or second thoughts about the initial interview that they wished to share (Sukumaran & Shalini, 2015). I aimed to obtain more detailed responses from participants by asking follow-up questions (see Table 11). The approach used in the follow-up interview mirrored the methodology applied in Stage One.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, the follow-up interview focused exclusively on two research questions: “What do the findings mean for inclusive education settings in Bangladesh, taking both viewpoints and recommendations into account?” and “How do these views align with the policy on inclusive education?”

Would you kindly explain the inclusion policy in place to guide children with special needs?
I would like to know if you could go into further detail on the challenges relating to government support.

Table 11. Follow-up interview questions for principals

5.5.5 Natural Observation of Gesture

Nonverbal cues can provide valuable information about participants’ thoughts and feelings regarding specific topics or areas of concern (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Ambady & Rosenthal, 1998; Chand, 2025). By observing these nonverbal cues, I can gain a better understanding of participants’ perspectives and enhance the overall quality of research findings (Lavee & Itzchakov, 2023). As a trained counsellor, I observed participants’ facial gestures, vocal tone, rigid expressions,

tears, and body language to obtain a deeper understanding of their emotions and behaviours during interviews.

Throughout each interview, I carefully monitored participants' responses, focusing on vocal tone, pitch, and other distinctive features. During in-person interviews, facial colour, expressions, and body language were also observed and subsequently recorded in descriptive field notes. Instances of pauses, interruptions, or other verbal cues that indicated the participant's level of engagement and comfort were documented (Tweedy, 2015). These observations facilitated a deeper understanding of participants' viewpoints and emotional states, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive analysis of the collected data (Patil et al., 2024; Hurst, 2023).

However, accurately observing body language over the phone proved challenging, which may have limited the clarity of the field notes. Additionally, field notes could not fully capture the subtle emotional nuances typically conveyed during direct, in-person interactions. This limitation may have restricted my understanding of participants' emotions and nonverbal signals. Future studies could mitigate this issue by using video conferencing or in-person interviews to more effectively capture these subtle distinctions.

5.5.6 Summary

This section addresses the types of interview questions, interview formats, and the use of natural observation. Researchers must be prepared with a variety of questions and formats to collect comprehensive information from participants. Natural observation allows researchers to assess participant behaviours and reactions in real-time. The subsequent chapter will detail the data analysis process.

5.6 DATA ANALYSIS

5.6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores all participants' understanding, experiences, and perceptions of the academic-social challenges and advantages for students with autism in a mainstream educational setting in Bangladesh, as identified through the previously described research methods.

Five key areas of interest emerged from the three samples of participants: parents of students with autism, teachers, and principals (Figure 13). The resultant themes begin with themes connected to teachers, schools, and children that may have an impact on how students with autism are included.

Following that, themes relating to the government, societal acceptance, and awareness catch the participants' attention.

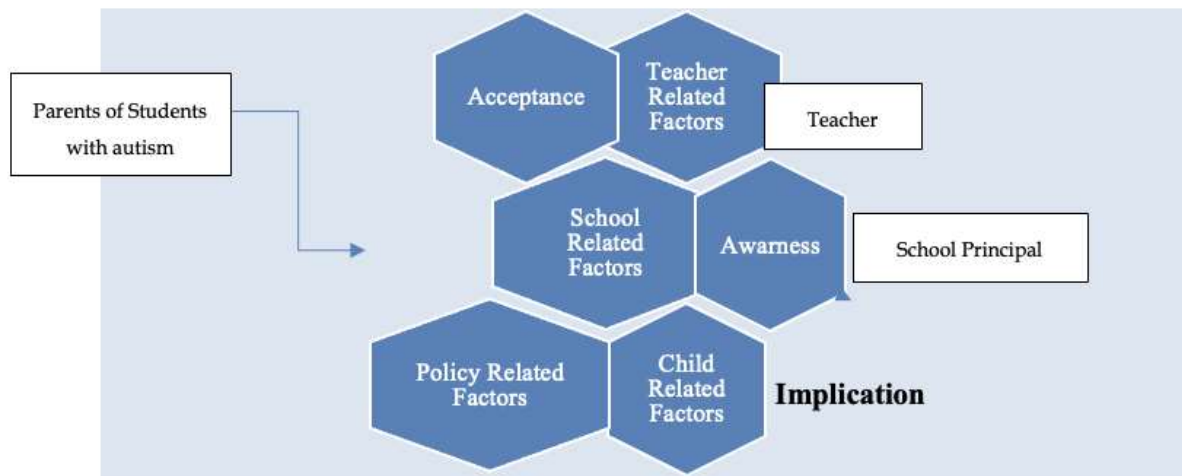


Figure 13. Illustration of themes in a mainstream setting using three samples

There will now be a discussion of the procedure of the thematic analysis to find statements from all three samples and then an exploration of the views of parents of students with autism, teachers, and, lastly, principals. The final section will go through the parallels and discrepancies between the remarks from the three samples.

5.6.2 Thematic Analysis

The outcome from the data was analysed through "thematic analysis," in which six procedures took place (Boyatzis, 1998).

1. Familiarizing
2. Generating the initial code
3. Generating Themes
4. Reviewing Themes
5. Defining and Naming Themes
6. Creating Report

5.6.2.1 Familiarizing

The goal of this stage is to become thoroughly familiar with the information in the dataset and to start noticing details that might be pertinent to the research question. This phase entailed becoming completely immersed in the data by "reading and rereading" textual data (such as interview transcripts), as well as listening to audio recordings and watching video data before transcribing them

into English. Because Bengali is my first language, it was convenient to read the material before transcribing it. In this stage, I takes initial notes on the information as she reads or listens to it (Figure 14).

Once I had a thorough understanding of the data, she translated it into English and obtained notary certifications to ensure its accuracy. She made notes on the entire dataset. At this point in the process, taking notes is more observational and casual than systematic (see Appendix V).



Figure 14. Illustration of the familiarization with the data

I used various methods while making notes, such as a journal, an electronic file, or highlighting sections of data (see Appendix V & W). Reading data entails actively engaging with the words on the page, critically analyzing them, and beginning to consider what the data means rather than simply accepting their surface meaning. Inquiries like, "How does this participant make sense of their experiences? How do they interpret their experience? What presumptions do they make?" are part of this process (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

I wrote reflective, analytical memos to record perceived connections among the data during all three phases of coding (Saldana, 2013).

"Even though there are a lot of schools that train teachers to teach children with disabilities, the teachers themselves are not yet qualified to do so. Why does the government make rules to include these children in the school system, but there are no guidelines for teachers on how to educate them?" It might be a difficult with the teacher training program's special needs curriculum or a policy issue. (19th September, 2021).

5.6.2.2 Generating the Initial Code

In this study, I coded using Word and sometimes manually. One advantage of this method is that I can check my coded text as I coded it and later recode or delete it if necessary.

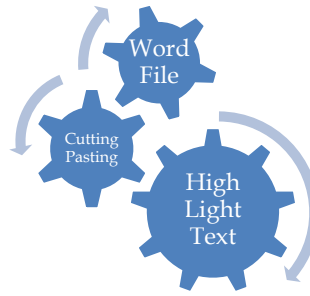


Figure 15. Example of a coding method

During the “open/initial coding,” the participants’ line-by-line phrases were taken for coding that organically existed (Saldana, 2013). In open coding, certain words or phrases might come up repeatedly with their specific meanings, in which case, these words or phrases become coding titles that may carry specific blocks or types of information that are relevant to the study, or they may emerge as new categories in themselves until data saturation occurs (Tweedy, 2015). Example below:

Table 12. Statement from the principal

Extract	Initial Coding
For those with special needs, we do not have a system in place to accommodate them here, and as a result, they cannot continue their education further.	Special need children lack of support system, They can't continue further.

Table 13. Statement from parents of autistic children

Extract	Coding
They (teachers) never discuss with us (parents) about the progress of my child in studies.	no discussion regarding the child's academic progress.

Table 14. Statement from the teacher

Extract	Initial Coding
We do not get the time to provide them with special care.	lack of time no special care

Latent or semantic levels of meaning can both be coded. Codes can describe the content of the data or give a summary of a portion of the data; these descriptive or semantic codes usually stick closely to the meanings of the participants and the content of the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), sometimes codes can be used as shorthand that I can understand. They do not always need to be complete explanations. I did not develop full explanations at this stage (the initial coding stage) because those can come later.

Table 15. Statements from parent's of autistic children

Extract	Initial Coding
Teachers teach children in the traditional way	Traditional teaching strategies
Teachers do not know different methods to teach this group	lack of special needs teaching strategies
Teachers are ignoring special need	Ignoring

5.6.2.3 Generating Themes

The main way to come up with themes and subthemes, which are parts of a theme, is to group or cluster codes that seem to have something in common so that they describe a clear pattern in the data and reflect it (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Extract	Coding	Sub theme	Theme
Although there is little response		Prefer Moderate/mild autism	Mainstream not suitable for all

in terms of quicker improvement, autistic children with minor challenges – that is, those who are not overly active – can participate in group communications. Nevertheless, more room is needed at our school to accommodate these children. We can't offer them anything exceptional.	autistic children with minor challenges little response in terms of quicker improvement, can participate in group communications. more room is needed to support them can't offer them anything exceptional.	Can engage in activities lack of support system in mainstream	autistic children

Table 16. Principal statement

Extract	Coding	Sub theme	Theme

I am definitely in favour of enrolling autistic children in schools. I want them to come to school and learn and mix with everyone. By doing this, they will improve.	favour of enrolling autistic children, Come to school and learn and mix with everyone, they will improve.	Positive thought, Acceptance	Educators related themes

Table 17. Teacher statement

Extract	Initial Coding	Sub Themes
Teachers teach special children in the traditional way	Traditional teaching strategies	Lack of knowledge of how to integrate special needs/ students with autism children
Teachers do not know different methods to teach this group	Do not know different methods	Lack of training on students with autism
Teachers are ignoring special need	Ignoring special child	Lack of acceptance /attention

Table 18. Parents of autistic children's statement

In this study, I found that codes about children's fighting, hitting, and snatching tended to group. When I looked at these codes in more depth, I found that the children with autism's responses to snatching, biting, hitting, and avoiding can be considered "behavioral issues" under the subtheme. Then, I made a second sub-theme out of all the codes: child-related themes, which eventually led to the main theme, "factors in mainstream settings," shown in Figure 16. form below:

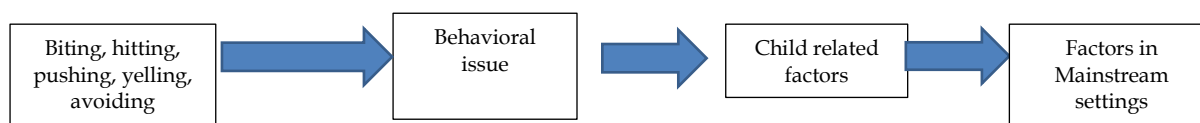


Figure 16. Procedure for creating themes

At this stage, it is also important to start figuring out how the themes relate to each other and how they will work together to tell a story about the data as a whole. Some important themes are unique and can stand on their own, but they also need to work as a whole. In this analysis, one main theme or idea may tie all or most of the other themes together or explain them. For example, "child-related factors" can explain the overall story of students with autism.

At the end of this phase, I drew a thematic map from a table with candidate themes and all the data extracts that are relevant to each theme (see Figure 17 above). Then, I was ready to start the process of reviewing themes.

5.6.2.4 Reviewing of Potential Themes

Once I had a set of themes that were clear and worked well with the coded data extracts, she moved on to the next step of the review process. The goal of this step is to find a set of themes that show the most important and relevant parts of the data and the overall tone of the data about the research question. At this point in the revision process, I added a few more themes, changed some of the ones she already had, or omitted some of them (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

5.6.2.5 Defining and Naming Themes

"Theoretical Coding" was used, which allowed me to explore the core categories leading to the final theory (see Table 20). In the process of theoretical coding, I linked all the categories and sub-categories with the materializing core category, which explains what the study is about. For example, "the factors in mainstream settings "can tell an overall story about teachers, schools, and children in mainstream settings.

Extract	Initial Coding	Coding	Sub theme	Theme	Main theme
The question papers are for all, and the time is the same.	Same question paper	Need Curriculum modification	Lack of educational resources	School related theme	Factors In Inclusive Education

Everyone is required to finish their answers within the allotted time for the exam.	Same exam time for all	time extension in exam			
My child can't write answers well, so she needs extra time.	A fine motor skills issue. Need extra time	Children need extra time.			
Different question papers should be made for them, and the time limit should be increased if required.	Need a different question paper Time limit should be increased	Need individual education program			

Table 19. Example of theoretical coding from parents of autistic children

Extract	Initial Coding	Coding	Themes	Main theme
Teachers teach special children in the traditional way	Traditional teaching strategies	Lack of Knowledge	Teacher Related Themes	Factors In Inclusive Education
Teachers do not know different methods to teach special children	Do not know the different method	Lack of training		

Teachers are ignoring special need	Ignoring special child	Lack of acceptance/attention

Table 20. Example of theoretical coding (Statement from parents of autistic children)

The materializing core category appeared after the reflective analysis of the other categories, during which I explored their relevance and similarities to one another to create a new theory.

I was checking to make sure the topics did not overlap or recur. They also have to provide a direct response to the research question. A theme may occasionally have subthemes. If we examine Table 21 as an example, the primary theme is "social acceptance," and several subthemes, such as "bullying," "abusive words," "hitting," and so on, fall under the second subtheme. These are useful when the data only contain one or two major patterns that are relevant to the study issue, and each pattern manifests itself in several ways (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Main theme	Theme	Subtheme	Respondent
Factors in Mainstream settings	Lack of Social Acceptance	Bullying	By Peers
		Hitting	By Parents of peers/teachers/peers
		Avoiding	By Teacher/peers
		Abusive words	By Teacher/parents of peers
		Threatening	By Teacher/principals

Table 21. Naming Themes (statements from parents of autistic children)

Main Theme	Theme	Subtheme
Factors in inclusive education	Lack of government	Stigma

	Related inititaives	
		No sufficient training opportunity
		Lack of support for resources

Table 22. Naming themes (Statements from principals)

5.6.2.6 Producing the Report

In data analysis, researchers use the data to tell a story about the data. Data must be understood and related to research questions, as well as the academic disciplines in which the work falls. In this study, I used the phrase “result and discussion” which is shown in Table 23).

Braun and Clarke (2012) claim the first step in analyzing that extract is to look at some of the data features that give researchers clues about a larger practice of minimization and individualization, which is a pattern across the dataset. There are both detailed and specific analyses of what happens in a particular data extract and more general analyses that show how the whole dataset relates to the theme.

First, it starts with a general summary of the theme's main idea. Then, it goes into more detail by giving specific examples of different parts of the theme that are shown through short excerpts. Once enough information has been given to show how big the theme is, the longer excerpt goes into rich, vivid detail about what this meant for one participant (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In descriptive analysis, data are often used as examples, while in conceptual or interpretive analysis, extracts are often looked at in more depth, often to find the hidden meanings they contain (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Question	Extract	Code	Sub-theme	Theme	Result and discussion
Questions: can you tell me how teachers are teaching these groups of students?	They have said they do not know how to teach the special children along with the usual children, They asked me to put him in a special school.	They do not know how to teach asked me to put him in a special school	Lack of teaching strategies Lack of knowledge Low confidence	Teachers related themes	The teacher's mainstream involvement worried the mother. The mother said teachers often criticize her child and ask her to remove her from regular settings. Teachers feel helpless academically. It can be assumed that a lack of teaching strategies may have lowered teacher confidence. Many teachers feel anxious to teach students with autism students. Many previous studies (Sani, 2016; Crysanthy, 2014)) mentioned this.

Table 23. A short example of data analysis

I chose "Inclusive education and students with autism from parents, teachers, and principals' perspectives" as the main theme because it talks about participants' daily experiences in mainstream settings for their students with autism. These experiences and views can shed light on some important factors that might affect children with autism's social and academic progress, and the rest of the

analysis will refer to them. From there, it made sense to talk about how students with autism study in mainstream settings and how they have improved in school and their relationships with other people (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

I decided that the next step was to focus on the three main themes (school factors, children's factors, and teacher factors) because the themes of "coming out" and "being out" were closely linked to the academic and social development of students with autism and how teachers and schools help them reach their full potential. Another important emerging aspect was how a child's students with autism traits can affect his or her social and academic growth.

The other theme (acceptance) was about how people who work directly or indirectly with students with autism should accept them and be aware of them. These people needed to know how acceptance and awareness can help students with autism make progress in their lives as a whole. Another significant theme that can play a big role in inclusion is government-related issues or policy modifications.

"Being a parent of a student with autism " is the last theme, and it talks about the stress and pain that parents of students with autism feel. It was not as clear how it fit with the fifth identified theme, but it did fit well with the first three. When parents are honest about the worries, stresses, and difficulties they experience, it becomes clear how each situation negatively affects them and how to make improvements.

The contrast between inclusive and special settings is the last subject to be covered. This theme describes the circumstances in both settings from the perspective of the parents' experiences, which adds to the evidence of the variations in the advantages and disadvantages of traditional and non-traditional educational settings. Based on that, another useful perception came out from all participants: integrating settings. I was more inspired to investigate the viewpoint of integrated settings after reviewing this subject, as revealed in the ensuing interview.

5.6.3 Reflections on the Thematic Analysis

The above procedures explain how I tried to do a thematic analysis (TA). However, like any other kind of analysis, TA can be done well or badly. Common mistakes include giving data excerpts with little or no analysis (no explanation of how the data helps answer the research question) or just paraphrasing or summarizing the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Using data collection questions as themes is another common mistake. The best way to find themes is to look at what participants say, not the questions they were asked.

On another level, an analysis can be weak or not convincing if its themes do not fit together. Analysis can also fail when there isn't enough proof. Researchers need to show enough examples and

analyze enough data to convince the reader that the pattern they described is clear. A TA does have to be related to patterns in your dataset as a whole. This does not mean that every piece of data has to show every theme, but it does have to be more than just random. TA can also fail if the data and analysis do not match or if the type of TA done does not match the theoretical position of the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). When writing and revising the analysis, I made sure that the claims she made based on data were true and that those claims fit into her overall theoretical position.

In this study, when coding, I read each piece of data carefully and coded each piece of data in its entirety before moving on to the next. I tried to start coding with both interpretative and descriptive elements. I was not producing a code for every line of the transcript, as the TA does not tell you how to divide the data as you code. I coded in big and sometimes small chunks, and some chunks were not coded at all.

Extract
Can you look for a groom for my daughter?

Table 24. An example of unnecessary information

Codes can also provide an interpretation of the data's content. These interpretive or latent codes reveal meanings that are hidden beneath the data's semantic surface. For instance, the phrase "negative attitudes" was used since a few participants stated, "Many teachers were rude to her." Another example: while some participants consistently used the phrase "teachers asked me to put her in a special school" to describe their experiences in mainstream settings, the code "lack of acceptance" drew on a frame of reference to interpret (see Table 21) their accounts (Braun and Clark, 2012). This does not mean that interpretive codes are "better"; it just means that they are sometimes harder to "see." What's important is that codes should help answer research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Many teachers were rude to her	Negative attitudes
Teachers asked me to put her in a special school	Lack of acceptance

Table 25. An example of interactive coding (from a pricipal's statement)

This is Government policy to enrol this child. We cannot do anything.	Lack of acceptance
Parents need to be trained	Lack of awareness among parents

Table 26. An example of interactive coding (from a principal's statement)

When I finds something related to the research question, she marks it with a code. For example, "teachers do not know how to teach because they are not trained" was coded as "lack of training". Even when I was not sure if a piece of data was important or related to the research question, but still coded it, for example, "Even medical facilities for students with autism are not good". It is much easier to get rid of codes than to go back through the whole dataset and recode the data, even though some recoding is part of the coding process.

As mentioned in previous research (Braun and Clark, 2012), interpretive ways of coding come with time and practice. Each time, I attempted to improve her coding ability through repetition. For example, in the initial stage, when the participant said, "My son used to push and hit others when he was angry," it was coded as "pushing and hitting when angry". Later on, when I followed interpretive ways of coding, it was "inappropriate behaviour".

After making the first code, I kept reading the data until she found the next possible relevant excerpt. Then, I decided if she could use the code she had already made or if she needed to make a new code to get that piece of data. Researchers did this with each piece of data and sometimes with the whole dataset. As I got better at coding, she also changed old code to include new information. For example, the original name of the code "being a parent of students with autism " was "parents' stress from mainstream settings". Because participants also mentioned struggles in medical and other fields, I changed the term "parents' stress from mainstream settings "to "being a parent of a student with autism " to make it more consistent with what participants said.

It is a good idea to go back and look at what was coded at the start because the code is likely to have changed as I progressed. I recorded and recorded some of the data already coded (Braun and Clark, 2012). I finished this stage when all the data had been coded, and the data for each code had been put together.

In qualitative analysis, it is important to be able to "let go" of coded material and even tentative themes if they do not fit with the rest of the analysis. My job is to tell a story about the data that answers their research question when they analyze and report it. For example, two participants asked about

finding a marriage partner (see Table 20) for their children in the future and talked about challenges in the medical field. These codes may end up being part of new themes or thrown away. Another example (see Table 23 below) of a miscellaneous theme in this research.

"I thought if I get a good job then I can start my career".	Mother wanted to start a career

Table 27. An Example of Miscellaneous Themes

Some issues can cut across themes and provide a framework for telling a coherent story about what's going on in the data as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For example, some teachers show negative attitudes by ignoring students with autism and threatening to kick them out of school, but a few other teachers show positive gestures by asking them about their health and snacks. I attempted to extract clarity from the issue while keeping both points of view in mind.

However, if I has too many themes, then the analysis may not make sense. The most important thing is that themes are presented in enough depth and detail to show how rich and complicated the data is. I discovered that all the data was incredibly clear-cut, succinct, and simple to comprehend.

Summary

This chapter clarifies the process by which I analysed the data gathered throughout the study to draw conclusions and generate interpretations. The procedure entails identifying patterns, themes, and connections within the data to provide significant insights into the research inquiries. I employed thematic analysis to classify the data into primary themes and sub-themes, facilitating a more profound comprehension of the results. I successfully conducted a thorough analysis of the data, which effectively supported the aims of the study. The following section will look at the findings derived from the data analysis and their relevance to the study's objectives. In the next chapter, she will also present suggestions for further study or practical applications based on the findings.

6 Findings

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The research's outcome was influenced by the participants' experiences and opinions, which included themes related to schools, children, and teachers, as well as their awareness and understanding of disorders and mainstream settings. The final section explores participants' viewpoints, discusses implications for practice, and highlights the significance of social acceptance (see Figure 17).

The findings revealed several additional factors, such as the initial feelings of parents of students with autism and the distinction between mainstream and special settings. Although there was initially no direct connection between these themes and the three primary themes (the teacher/child/school relationship variable), the challenges, expectations, or concerns that emerged from these themes ultimately elucidated their link to the obstacles observed in mainstream settings. I conducted a thorough analysis of the themes affecting inclusive education. This in-depth analysis contributes to the assurance of the research's comprehensiveness and offers insightful information for enhancing inclusive education methods (see Appendix L).

The research questions are relevant to these findings. Listed below are the research questions:

- What do Bangladeshi parents of students with autism say are the most important obstacles that affect the social and academic development of their children in inclusive educational settings?
- How do teachers and principals in Bangladesh view inclusive environments for children with autism?
- What distinguishes the views of parents of students with autism from those of teachers and principals?
- What do the findings mean for inclusive education settings in Bangladesh, taking everyone's points of view and recommendations into account?
- How do these views fit with the policy on inclusive education?

Following the completion of the data analysis, I found eight themes that are present in mainstream settings for children in Bangladesh who have autism. These aspects include: 1. Acceptance, 2. Awareness, 3. School, 4. Child, 5. Teacher, 6. Principals, 7. Cultural perspectives, and 8. Policy reform. According to the findings, these characteristics have a considerable influence on the educational experiences of students with autism who are enrolled in mainstream settings. Better assistance and outcomes for these children in Bangladesh can be achieved through a better understanding of these

themes and by taking action to address them. In addition, this highlights the importance of continuous support and collaboration among multiple stakeholders in order to successfully adopt inclusive education methods for children with autism in Bangladesh. In the next sections of this research, each piece of information is discussed in greater detail.

6.2 BEING A PARENT OF A STUDENT WITH AUTISM

It is thought that parents who are highly stressed or who are unaware of their children's strengths and challenges may be impeding their children's ability to grow up, both academically and socially. The important questions to ask were how it affected them, how they learned about it, and what other factors might have made them feel more stressed as parents of students with autism.

I began the interview by asking the participants (parents of children with autism) about their initial impressions when they first learned about their children's disorders. The vast majority of respondents acknowledged that they had never heard the term "special child" before.

In terms of their initial feelings about the disabilities, all parents agreed that when they learned of their children's common autistic traits for the first time, they were mostly unhappy and worried about the future. Additionally, they were unsure about how to handle the issue and what kind of care to give. They experienced great sadness upon seeing that their child did not behave in a "neurotypical" manner with other children. Some even believed that everything would be alright as they aged.

As P1 noted:

"You do not believe the sky broke over my head; I cannot believe what happened in my life, why it happened. I did various analyses, did it happen due to any issue in pregnancy, or when I came to Dhaka (a city in Bangladesh), he was only two years old? I did not give him much time; I was busy with studying. Many different thoughts came to mind. What I will do now, or how I will make him well, I cannot make you understand how I felt."

Another parent (P5) said, "It was too difficult for me to communicate with my own emotions when I first knew that my children had autism."

Every parent has moments of denial or finds it hard to believe that their child will behave differently from other children their age. Almost all participants cited shock, depression, denial, sadness, and emotional emptiness as their initial reactions to learning of their child's diagnosis. However, after dealing with their initial trauma, they began to look into the reality of where their children fit, academically and socially.

6.3 THE MEDICAL FIELD

As they explained, the journey of being parents of students with autism, their initial anguish stems from the medical industry. Many parents struggle to get a diagnosis for their children or are occasionally perplexed about the best course of action in Bangladesh. Parents also encounter several misdiagnoses as a result of this problem since healthcare professionals in various districts exhibit a lack of autism understanding.

As many parents said, “In our country, there is a lack of knowledge about this matter. When autism was first identified in our child, we were confused about what to believe and what not to believe.” Furthermore, all parents agree that there is a lack of inclusive environments in hospitals for children with autism.

As a result of this phenomenon, families may experience increased challenges in caring for their children with autism, leading to heightened levels of anxiety among parents over time. Furthermore, it has an impact on their psychological well-being. Some parents (P1, P5, P7) echoed that when waiting somewhere for therapy, after many days, they did not find therapy, and they felt broken down and could not find a way to do the screening and get guidance. Other parents (P5, P8) became fed up in waiting rooms, especially because their children were hyperactive and could not wait, and even saw parents hitting their children as they waited for treatment.

6.4 MAINSTREAM

Nevertheless, the greater the challenge for parents when they endeavour to assimilate their children into the broader social fabric, the parents face numerous challenges when attempting to enrol their child in an educational institution, including special settings. Some inclusive educational institutions may choose to decline applications from prospective children, while others may admit them without offering support or aid. A few parents (P1, P6, P8) commented that the mainstream schools are taking these children on as a great favour and will not take any responsibilities after that.

Mainstream vs. Special Settings

I was curious to understand the reasons behind parents' preferences between mainstream settings and specialized settings. It was to know the perception, which might explain some expectations parents have towards inclusive education or special settings.

Parents think that children learn best when they are in their natural environment, with peers. Through social interaction, they can organically develop their social abilities. Nearly all of the participants thought that special settings were only for children with more serious problems and that their children did not have any major disorders. As P2 asserts, “In specific environments designed for autistic children with more support needed, my child can develop more odd behaviours.” One participant (P2) offered an example of how, when her daughter was placed in particular situations, her

conduct changed and became more violent, including pinching, crying, beating, and other acts. Even though she did not get any social or intellectual support, her behaviour did change once she integrated into mainstream settings.

However, although parents generally acknowledge the benefits of mainstream educational environments, they also express concerns regarding certain limitations. Participants' clarification of a variety of stresses and potential problems that could occur in mainstream settings due to autism traits, as elaborated upon below, helped to highlight the concerns in mainstream settings and improve understanding. I kept an open mind to identify any components that could lead to successful integration.

Understanding a student with autism's characteristics—behaviour, reaction, learning style, etc.—is crucial to understanding them properly. Having a better understanding of students with autism features can help avoid misunderstanding and shed light on the support they actually need in mainstream settings and the acceptance of the success of inclusion.

Considering the aforementioned ideas, the parents of students with autism were engaged in a discussion regarding the social, behavioural, and emotional challenges that their children experience as a consequence of their disorder. These difficulties have the potential to impede the successful inclusion of children with autism. The subsequent section will examine the perspectives expressed by the parents of students with autism regarding these attributes.

The subsequent aim in this research was not to portray the autistic child's traits as a challenge, but rather to understand whether teachers and schools have adequate awareness of these traits to prevent misunderstandings and to ensure they are prepared to support every child with autism. What appropriate actions should they take to instruct such children? How prepared are they for the current circumstances? This will be the topic of discussion for all concerned parties.

6.4.1 Child-related themes

Numerous prior studies have emphasised the need to comprehend the characteristics of children with special needs while also acknowledging their unique talents and abilities (Pellicano et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2023; Gilmore et al., 2024; Wittwer et al., 2024; Devi et al., 2024). By recognising and using these strengths, educators and carers may more effectively facilitate the growth and learning of children with exceptional needs (AL Jaffal, 2022; Senoo et al., 2024). It is also stated that educators need specialised training in autism to adequately address the requirements of these children (Wittwer et al., 2024). The absence of information may lead to misunderstandings for this group of children, resulting in obstacles to their learning and social engagement (Leonard & Smyth, 2022).

I enquired of parents of children with autism, as well as teachers and principals, about their comprehension of the behaviours shown by students with autism and the ways in which those children might receive enhanced assistance within educational environments. Their expertise in managing students with autism in mainstream settings is crucial for comprehending all the challenges and successes associated with fostering an inclusive environment.

Almost all participants in this research discussed the different range of strengths and challenges in autistic children they have experienced while dealing with or educating them daily in terms of sensory processing (P1, P2, P7), social interaction, communication, learning, and behaviour. For example, some children show repetitive behaviour, some have high tolerance for pain (P1, P2, P5, P8), many prefer solitary or structured play (P1), many children have a different way of interacting with peers (P1, P2, P3, P7), and some show difficulty understanding social cues (P1, P2, P3, P4, P7) and maintaining eye contact (P3, P6).

However, there are other autistic children who demonstrate strong abilities in specific areas, such as writing, mathematics, or artistic skills (P1, P6). According to one parent, her son stood first in an art competition. Many autistic children are calm and quiet in the classroom and follow classroom instruction (P6). Many previous studies have demonstrated that these challenges should not be considered shortcomings but viewed as important aspects of their children's unique ways of experiencing and interacting with the world. Therefore, understanding the traits of autistic children is essential to provide adequate support, foster positive social engagement, and enable children with autism to reach their full potential.

6.5 TEACHER-RELATED THEMES

In Bangladesh, many parents of students with autism expressed a range of emotions regarding their worries about the teacher's involvement in traditional settings and their responsibilities. Regarding how students with autism will develop intellectually and socially, parents' expectations and faith in teachers were rather low. A very direct comment was made by P1 on this matter: "They (teachers) are not aware of this group of children. They do not know how to handle them and teach them".

6.5.1 Lack of Responsibility

Participants mentioned that teachers do not even try to modify their lesson plans or methods, nor do they assign assignments that are tailored to the skills of their children. "They do not know that they had to teach my child separately and in a different method," P1 remarked. The teachers do not adhere to either flexible or individualized instructional practices. The tasks assigned to these individuals are similar to those allocated to their peers. An exemplification of this phenomenon can be

observed in: "If they give her more straightforward math and help her understand, then she would improve, but it does not happen". It was also mentioned that a lot of students with autism learn on their own sometimes, with their mothers helping them at home or sometimes in school.

6.5.2 Lack of Communication

A significant number of participants claimed that teachers rarely initiate communication with parents regarding their children's academic status and strategies for providing support. Parents have been known to express their concerns by occasionally contacting the school to register complaints regarding their children. Based on parental perspectives, teachers maintain a diary but often fail to engage in diligent monitoring. There is a lack of observed accountability on their part. Participants assert that the teacher displays a lack of concern over the attendance of children with special needs in the classroom. By affixing their signature to the attendance form, teachers endeavour to fulfil their duty.

According to Mother P6:

"They never meet with me about the progress they can make in her studies, what they can teach her more of, or how to increase her improvements. If my child leaves the classroom early, teachers do not bother; they just sign the attendance paper and let us go. Even if my child does not go to school for a long time, they will not bother to call or ask for the absence".

However, an additional parent reported that her daughter's teachers had contacted her to inquire about her progress and offer feedback. The other six parents, on the other hand, claimed that nobody had called them to discuss how to help their children instead of just to complain.

6.5.3 Lack of Knowledge

Several parents made regrettable remarks concerning the strategies employed by teachers to facilitate the social development of students with autism. Parents said that social interaction is a common challenge for children with autism. They lack the self-motivation to initiate interactions with their peers. They need help from others or from a teacher to be more socialized. However, teachers do not teach social skills to special children, and classmates do not encourage them to play with special children either.

It was reported that numerous teachers do not even encourage classmates to help or sit close to students with autism—they do not even offer suggestions on how to communicate with them or make any positive contribution to children with autism; instead, they recommend their peers not to assist children with autism. Teachers believe that it is a waste of time because these students with autism have little hope for the future. As one participant stated, "It would be better if teachers could teach them to mix up with others; otherwise, it would be hard for them to learn alone. Some of them have hypertensive tendencies, so a trained teacher must take care of them".

6.5.4 Lack of Empathy

The participants expressed a wide range of emotions, including anxiety about the teacher's negative attitudes and rejection. For example, many teachers act violently at times, beating and swearing at their students with autism. One (P4) remark, "If teachers knew not to hurt them," actually served as a subliminal message concerning how teachers treat students with autism concerning teachers' negative sentiments towards these children.

Some parents said that there was nowhere for their children to fit in. One parent (P1) remarked that her son felt unwanted even at class parties, and occasionally, teachers urged them to leave early. This leads to a great deal of tension, worry, and inferiority in the mother. As one mother, P1, said, "I suffered a lot from an inferiority complex. My son came to the class party, but he could not enjoy it at all; instead, they asked him to leave early". A maximum number of parents said that teachers generally treat students with autism poorly and frequently threaten to pull their children from mainstream settings. "If I ask the teacher to give her more time for the exam, she will threaten to throw her out of school and ask me to send her to a special school" (P2).

6.5.5 Lack of Training

It could be argued that sometimes, a lack of experience and knowledge puts their self-esteem down. Therefore, many teachers often avoid teaching children with autism. One participant (P3) said, "They (teachers) didn't have any special training, so they always tried to avoid these students with autism child". According to all parents of students with autism, teachers are poorly trained, and there should be a proper system to train them.

However, another two (P3, P6) participants had made contradictory statements. They say that a lot of teachers get along well with the parents and this specific group of children. These two participants show their gratitude for the support that their children receive from their teachers. P6 is mentioned as "Teachers are assisting my child with writing on the whiteboard, assigning homework, and reviewing completed assignments". Those two participants also said that to promote their children's social growth, a few teachers are asking that other neurotypical peers sit with their students with autism.

In response to my question about the severity of their children's indications, both participants said that their children do not have any serious cognitive or behavioural concerns. However, this circumstance made a few things clear. Even in cases where teachers show kindness and assist certain students with autism, it seems that this is primarily the case for children who are slightly or moderately autistic. As P5 mentioned, "My daughter is good at writing. She does not need a lot of help in the classroom; she is very quiet and understanding. Teachers like her and assist her". Another participant said, "She can understand if teachers help her a little. She is not harsh".

6.5.6 Summary

The aforementioned remarks could be seen as evidence of how crucial teachers are in providing inclusive environments for the intellectual and social development of children with autism. This implies that teachers' involvement and commitment, in addition to their knowledge and sensitivity, play a significant role in teaching students with autism in mainstream Bangladeshi settings. All respondents did, however, also voice additional unsatisfied school-related concerns, which are listed below. The other school-related issues that participants expressed dissatisfaction with need to be addressed as well, even though teachers' commitment and involvement are essential in mainstream settings. This suggests that teacher involvement may not be enough for the general well-being of students with autism in mainstream Bangladeshi settings.

6.6 SCHOOL-RELATED FACTORS

6.6.1 Classroom Structure

A significant number of participants expressed dissatisfaction with the building's design and the classroom's surroundings. The overwhelming majority of participants said that the high number of children in the class keeps teachers incredibly busy. There is one teacher for every 50 to 80 children who is solely responsible for managing a large classroom. The classroom is also extremely crowded. There is not even room for children to sit. As P1 noted: "One small classroom is occupied with 65–80 children, sometimes more. It is very congested. If three children are sitting on one bench, I see that they sit huddled, which is why many children leave school early because they cannot get proper places to sit". Another parent, P8, said, "The classroom size is very small. If three children are sitting on one bench, I see that they sit in a huddle. Children cannot keep any bags, and they cannot take out the tiffin box to eat".

Many teachers seem to be in a rush to get their lessons done and do not seem to be interested in working with their students with autism. Furthermore, teachers are unable to create individualized plans or provide students with autism with extra attention due to the demands of a large classroom. When working with children who have autism, teachers may become less optimistic as a result of this distressing situation in the classroom. According to all interviewees (P1 to P8), teachers cannot take extra care of students with autism after covering all the other problems of their neurotypical peers in 40 minutes.

Additionally, Bangladesh experiences intense summer temperatures frequently exceeding 40 degrees Celsius, coupled with high humidity. One Parent (P1) expressed their concerns about the limited availability of a single fan in the classroom. The task of sitting with a large number of children

during the summer presents a considerable challenge. On occasion, children depart from the classroom prematurely due to this circumstance. Other parents also agreed on this situation.

6.6.2 Professional Support

All participants agreed that having professional support is important. A speech therapist, counsellor, or occupational therapist's absence would be one example. Based on P5's remarks, "If there is speech therapy, occupational therapy, and counselling, it would be helpful to the students with autism." Additionally, participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5) stated that there are no facilities in Bangladeshi mainstream settings that may be used to provide parallel support or shadow teachers. Since parents bring their children to school, schools believe that it is the parents' responsibility to make sure their children grow up to be healthy, happy adults. Parents of students with autism have to give students with autism all the help they require as a result.

All parents emphasised the value of providing parallel support, depending on the level of social and intellectual support that students with autism require. They believe that these children need ongoing social and intellectual support. Even on rare occasions, for their everyday necessities, including going to the bathroom, cleaning their hands, using a bench, flipping a page, etc., many students with autism can exhibit excessive energy and aggression. They leave the classroom a lot. Sometimes, many students with autism need guidance on what to do and what not to do, both socially and academically. It is crucial to offer them parallel support as a result. One of the parents, P1, stated:

"This is his security in my absence. Because these children need one-on-one care, they can go to the toilet, run away, or go to another classroom. If he goes to another classroom, he cannot come back to his room. He does not have that memory. A shadow teacher can sit with him for sometimes two hours, one and a half hours, or sometimes 45 minutes if my son does not want to stay in school longer. If the shadow teacher calls me, I can go and pick him up. This is a very big support for me" (P1).

Many parents claimed that some students with autism might have trouble expressing their needs and asking for help on their own. "See, even my daughter knows the answer, but sometimes she does not understand the questions, and she needs assistance," remarked one parent (P2). "If someone beside her or the teacher helps her open the page, she can open it," stated another parent (P7). Parents feel safe and secure, believing that a trained parallel teacher can stay with the special children, make them feel secure, help them understand what the other teacher is teaching, and help them mix up with other children and pick up from them. It would be highly beneficial if the special teacher provided support to facilitate their understanding. Many mothers (P1, P7, P8) claim that they are bound to stay with their children at school due to this lack of support, which is quite stressful for them.

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of adequate play facilities in schools, which fail to provide the essential amenities necessary to engage and entertain children. All participants

complained that the playgrounds were too small for children to play in, and that the games available were not arranged. Participants were informed that the possession of toys is not sufficient.

To ensure safety, educational institutions should appoint a supervisor (P1, P5, P7, P8) who will oversee the play area. This supervisor will be responsible for the well-being of both students with autism and their classmates. Students with autism may exhibit behaviour differently in social understanding, which could result in conflicts or misunderstandings with their peers. The educational institution does not provide any kind of support in this matter.

The curriculum and assessment procedures are significant additional considerations, according to all parents (P1-P8). To cultivate an inclusive curriculum, educational institutions must provide students with autism with picture books and adapt their examination materials accordingly. Parents expressed their concerns regarding the exam questions given to children with autism. All other children, neurotypical or not, receive the same homework assignments and test questions. Thus, students with autism are not picking up any knowledge.

It is recommended that children diagnosed with autism be afforded extended time to complete tasks. Even though the inclusive policy guideline states that children with disabilities should be given extra time to complete each task during the exam due to their difficulties with delayed processing, teachers sometimes do not give children extra time, and when parents ask for it, one participant (P2) responded quite harshly: "Even if they are given more time, what are they going to learn?"

It is also important to remember that students with autism frequently have a talent for a particular subject, such as music, art, painting, math, and so on. Numerous mothers' accounts serve as examples of this. However, the educational institution is unable to offer even the above-mentioned painting course. Children, as a result, show a lack of motivation to engage with educational institutions. Additionally, many mothers have recommended a particular eating plan for children with autism. As P5 said, "Some of them have gut issues; they need a diet. The facilities should be provided to meet their needs."

The vast majority of parents claimed that picture books could improve their children's ability to learn. There are no picture books like these available in classrooms. The book contains occasional images, but not enough for children with autism. Parents assert that larger, clearer pictures are necessary for students with autism.

Many parents went on to say that many principals have unfavourable attitudes about children with autism, saying things like not guiding the teacher on how to assist children with special needs. Children are occasionally denied the opportunity to take the exam. They thought that these children would be unable to perform well on the test. The principal of that school told me, "not to permit her to

take the exam," said another participant. The policy appears to be the only reason they are taking them to their school.

When I asked how, if they were unable to take the exam, they would advance to the following class, all parents mentioned that students with autism occasionally go to the next level and obtain age-appropriate promotions. One participant (P7) declared, "They (the teachers) will promote her to class four when she is old enough." This clearly illustrates the promotion of children with special needs to the next level without acquiring the necessary knowledge. This implies that the educational system should reassess its standards for promoting children with special needs to guarantee they are receiving suitable education and assistance.

Many participants claimed that principals argued that placing their students with autism in mainstream settings is the best thing they can do for their children. As a consequence of this, participants voiced worries about possible outcomes if they approached the school administration for help, worrying that their students with autism would be expelled as a result. Here is one participant's (P8) account of such an encounter: "I finally managed to enrol my daughter in one school, but I could not expect any support from that school. I had to guide her in school. If I ask for any support, they might suspend her from school."

6.6.3 Social Acceptance

Parents of children with special needs can endure neglect and stigma from the community and schools. One of the parents stated their immediate family members' reactions after knowing about their child with autism: "Whispers were flying about that my child was not expected". Another parent, P1, stated: "I experienced a lot with the inferiority complex. Not only does autism render my son helpless, but it also renders me incapable".

It is possible that these themes contributed to the participant's high regard for acceptance. According to P1, "academic achievement is not as important as acceptance. Yes, this is a very big problem. "They do not want to accept us," as another father (P3) stated. Many participants claimed that some people make them feel extremely humiliated and offended. These students with autism are not even permitted to visit anyone's home.

Almost all parents reported that peers bully students with autism on occasion for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. As P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, and P6 highlighted, their children were physically hurt. Similarly, by making fun of them, using foul language, or rejecting them, peers may also cause them emotional pain. They are more likely to be the targets of bullying from their peers and receive less acceptance overall. According to P2, "due to peer bullying, my child in eighth grade left the previous mainstream school".

Many participants contended that there are moments when teachers say nothing, stay silent, or do nothing at all while students with autism are bullied. Regretfully, they can sometimes be a poor role model for children with autism. "The teachers used to let her sit in the last row," P8 said, which is one instance of this. Many parents (P1, P2, P3, P5) claim that teachers do not always give their children guidance on how to engage with children who have autism. Instead, a lot of teachers advise children not to help or offer assistance. "The peers want to help her, but the teachers do not want them (peers) to talk to her because teachers think peers will be academically behind if they waste their time on her (students with autism)," is how P8 put it. Participants (P1-P8) concluded that teachers ought to take the lead in preparing the friends of their children to stand by and accept this group of children.

Some other parents, though, had different thoughts. They said that some teachers also try to protect their children from bullying. As P6 stated, "The teachers are taking care of my child. They are concerned about it; therefore, they will not let other children bully my child". According to a different parent, friends may occasionally help her students with autism academically and will occasionally share their snacks with her. "A few other boys and girls also assist her with speaking and writing," claims P2.

The remarks made by parents regarding acceptance were another significant factor. They assert that autistic students with less support are more welcome than autistic students who need more support. It is because autistic children with more support are frequently unable to manage their behaviour in the way society understands /peer understand. P2 put it the best way: "My child is not that challenging, so she is welcomed well, but I saw other parents' struggles".

When asked if their children felt accepted by their parents, peers, and teachers, several parents gave inconsistent answers. Many parents (P1, P3, P5, P6, P8) reported that some teachers and the parents of peers adore them. For instance, teachers inquire about their children if they are absent. Teachers occasionally inquire about the snack. Furthermore, some peer parents let their children play with children who have special needs. "They (parents of peers) get along nicely with my daughter and me," P6 remarked. Nonetheless, some individuals asserted that when students with autism miss school, a lot of teachers do not seem to care about the causes behind their absence.

Regarding parents of peers, numerous respondents (P1, P3, P7, P8) said that although certain parents interact well with their students with autism, they also engage in gossip (P1)when the parents of children with special needs are not around. They have never, for whatever reason, invited their students with autism into their family(P1, P7). According to other participants' (P2, P3, P4, P5) experiences, several parents of peers have a very negative attitude toward this group of children, such as using abusive words. "

Sometimes, parents of peers do not allow their children to play with children with autism; instead, they insist they not play. Other comments included, "Many times if my child tries to mix up with other children, they (the parents of peers) do not let her do that because they do not want to. Their parents forbid them (peers) to do so" (P2).

According to many parents of students with autism, sometimes this attitude, both from teachers and parents, depends on the autistic students' strengths and challenges. Many individuals assume that because some students with autism communicate well, parents and teachers do not perceive this group of children as a threat. Therefore, many parents of peers and teachers may not exhibit any unfavourable sentiments toward them. From the preceding discussion on social acceptance, we can assume that only parents of children with autism who need less support report their children's acceptance by both their peers and parents. Parents of autistic students who needed more support did not receive the same level of acceptance as reported.

Nonetheless, a lot of parents of students with autism continue to think that both teachers and parents of peers find it hard to fully embrace this group of children in the settings, for whatever reason. "The teachers want me to send her to a particular school," one parent (P6) said. Another parent, P8, said, "No, they (parents of peers) do not appreciate it. I've tried enough. The children (peers) want to socialize with her (the student with autism), but their (peers) parents do not let them (peers) do that. I bought their (parents of peers) children food to make them happy, but their parents didn't let it happen". This causes mothers to feel stigmatized and discriminated against.

When I asked parents if they should bring up this matter with the principal, nearly all of them replied that even the principal is uninterested in hearing about concerns and ignores these challenges. Occasionally, principals may also be reluctant to admit members of this group. According to P3 and P2, the principal does not want to admit the unique children. All participants agreed that a general lack of understanding or a lack of resources may prevent others from accepting this specific group of children.

6.6.3.1 Lack of Awareness

Parents assert that several factors, including cultural influences and a lack of knowledge or awareness that creates misconceptions about autism, could be to blame for the lack of acceptance. One parent (P1) stated something similar: "They asked if I had any disease, so she was born like that," which raised the question of awareness. Parents (P7, P8) say that a lot of people believe that autism is a disease, a sin, or a divine retribution (not researchers' perspectives, social view in Bangladesh according to participants).

Furthermore, teachers seem to believe that students with autism have no prospects. It would be useless to try to teach them. For fear of their own children's safety, some members of society will not

let students with autism into their homes. "Some parents experience fear when they see a child with autism," said P7.

Almost all parents claimed that they also experienced challenges, and the teachers treated them disrespectfully due to their children's autism traits. Many parents or peers shout at them if their children do anything wrong. On this matter, P2 said, "Suppose, after that incident, the neurotypical child's parents shouted at the mother of the student with autism so much as if it was her fault that her son pushed their child".

Parents seemed to claim that the lack of knowledge of autism may be the cause of society's prejudice against their children. Raising awareness of autism in each sector is therefore crucial in all domains. It is in this vein that P4, like other parents, remarks, something similar: "In terms of social acceptance, it demonstrates a lack of knowledge or awareness on the part of other parents and peers".

Parents also expressed dissatisfaction over the fact that a large number of people in Bangladesh, including doctors, were either ignorant of this neurodiversity or occasionally misled, which made them more anxious. There is a lack of knowledge in many domains, including general knowledge, education, and health, as a result of the complexity of autism. It could be the reason why even students with autism are given a subpar or inaccurate diagnosis. Nevertheless, it is moving forward. Here is a parent (P5) comment:

"There was a time when my child was diagnosed. Only one parent in 5,000 knew what autism was. But time has changed; people know about autism now. They know that children can be extraordinary at different levels. The last five to ten years have seen a rise in awareness of the existence of a condition known as autism.

Parents may decide against receiving early intervention or any other kind of assessment because of their distrust. In P8's words: "In my family, no one has this type of child. What we thought was that since he is a boy, once he grows older, he will be fine. I did not have any idea about special children. When I first visited the doctor, I asked, "What do you mean by special child?" The greatest achievement for parents, in their opinion, would be for everyone to be aware of the condition and to genuinely accept it.

The theme concerning the "Parents' Suggestions for Improvement" section that follows will include some ideas from parents of students with autism on how we may spotlight the development of students with autism.

6.7 PARENTS' SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Parent participants' recommendations for effectively reinforcing students with autism in a mainstream classroom are incorporated into the most important issue of "Acceptance and awareness," which encapsulates all of their recommendations. "Putting students with autism in mainstream settings will not guarantee that they will be accepted, valued, and included," parents assert. According to all parents, it is impossible to develop inclusive education without acceptance. Parents believe that without "awareness," this group of children cannot find acceptance in society. "Awareness and acceptance come together," according to them.

According to all parents of students with autism, "awareness and acceptance" could be defined either as supplementary training for each person who is involved with students with autism, such as teachers, peers, parents of peers, principals, parents of students with autism, or even in policy. Almost all participants agreed that "awareness training is fundamental" and "awareness should be made in all categories".

The current research provides an overall assessment of the integration of students with autism in mainstream settings in Bangladesh, as well as the potential challenges that may arise. Concurrently, they assist in identifying gaps in support and resources for these children in mainstream educational settings in the country. The findings indicate a requirement for further investigation and intervention to guarantee the successful integration of students with autism into regular educational institutions in Bangladesh.

6.7.1 Teacher-Related Suggestions

First of all, training teachers is a crucial component in mainstream environments. Whether as pre-service or in-service training, this needs to be given top importance. Teachers must possess the necessary educational tools to uphold an inclusive school culture and aid in the social, emotional, and intellectual growth of children with autism. The education of mainstream teachers ought to include instruction on how to handle a specific student, as illustrated by this parent's (P5) recommendation: "There should be a part in the training of mainstream teachers on how to deal with a particular child. Just like our doctors can identify a unique child and provide suggestion, our teachers should be educated like that".

Parents seemed to believe that teachers should adopt a methodical approach and plan to help students with autism develop their social and academic skills, which are lacking in the majority of Bangladesh's mainstream society. According to another parent, P8: "Teaching children with special needs, teaching them to follow different strategies, using different technical tools when teaching them, making them understand, supporting their academic progress, helping them to play with others – no, they are not doing anything like that. They do not have training". Every parent felt that, while teaching this group of children, teachers had to be properly trained in various teaching techniques. Nearly every

participant stressed the value of having hands-on experience working with children with autism. They added that if teachers are not getting practical training, they will have a hard time handling children with autism.

Almost all parents of students with autism suggested that teachers must pay more attention, be more adaptable at work, take on more responsibility, have positive attitudes, care, and demonstrate empathy. Many parents (P3, P4, P6, P8) argued similarly that their child would improve faster if the teachers were more caring and gave more attention to their child's study, more individual time, and more special care.

Parents (P1, P5, P6, P7, P8) said that their school should have an active parent-teacher association for parents of students with autism. In this way, parents and teachers could get to know each other well so that they can talk about the child's growth and difficulties. With the parents' support, teachers could make a personalized learning plan for each child, determine the best assessment methods based on the child's strengths and shortcomings, and keep an eye on the child's overall growth. It can help students with autism person do better in school and give them more drive. As a result, communication between parents and teachers could be based on a partnership between the home and school. This is of extreme significance for the growth and learning of children with autism.

In addition, according to all parent's of autistic children in this study, teachers must take on additional duties and concerns to help students with autism. These duties and concerns include keeping track of the children's progress, allocating extra time, creating an individual education plan (IEP), integrating the classroom, utilizing flexible pedagogy, a peer-mediated approach, good teaching practices, informing parents and peers about this particular group of children, etc. Many parents (P1, P3, P5, P8) expressed that some teachers should have research-based training. These students with autism can learn more quickly and make better progress if teachers follow research-based practices while educating students with autism. Consequently, educational institutions must offer teachers research-driven training and assistance to successfully instruct children with autism. In addition, establishing a nurturing and compassionate atmosphere for these students can significantly improve their educational journey and advancement.

6.7.2 School-Related Suggestions

A variety of suggestions emerged from all parents in terms of school-related factors. According to them, children should be supported based on their unique needs. Not all children will have the same needs. Some children cannot walk. They need equipment. Some of them have health issues; they need a specific diet. Therefore, the facilities should be provided according to their needs. If students with autism are not supported with adequate resources to meet their needs, then successful inclusion will be far away. Their suggestions for resources are categorized in the following sections:

6.7.3 Environmental Resources

Teachers may need more planning and extra time to teach autistic children, which is not possible due to the overburden of a large classroom. It is hugely affecting teachers' ability to deal with this large classroom, so many teachers find it impossible to educate special children in this scenario. In terms of environmental appearances, first, the classroom size needs to be modified according to all participants. As mentioned in the findings chapter, there are 60–80, sometimes 100, children in one class and only one teacher. Parents suggested making the classroom larger or maintaining balance when enrolling children in one class, as suggested in the comment: "Classroom size is very small. I feel it will be good if the size of the classroom is bigger. It is better to reduce the number of children in the classroom" (P2).

Students with autism can be different in the way they behave differently at times, and they can hurt themselves as well as their peers. According to the parent (P1), classrooms need to be carpeted, which can avoid such behavioural accidents. A few participants (P1, P7) also suggested organizing classrooms like a kindergarten. Participants (P1, P5) stated that the school should set up the classroom like a kindergarten, given their slow mental development. This method entails creating a highly engaging and visually appealing environment to meet the needs of children with slower cognitive development. Incorporating features such as vibrant decorations, interactive tasks, and specially designated play zones could enhance the educational experience for these children by making it more captivating. Participants also asked for a hygienic classroom, And cleanliness should be maintained.

On occasion, parents expressed a particular desire for their students with autism to be provided with specialized accommodation, including additional time and individual sessions. All seemed to believe that students with autism might need different and flexible teaching strategies, such as extra lessons, easy math, IEP, and flexible homework. As this parent (P1) says, "They do not have any extra lessons or anything for her. The same homework has been given to her. If they give her more straightforward math and help her understand, then she would be improved. But it does not happen". Additionally, they also recommended there should be developmental activities for the development of IQ through games in the school.

Next, participants voiced strong complaints about the playground's insufficient space and lack of sports tools. There is a demand for essential equipment on the playground, such as a slide, swing, horse rider, treadmill, gym ball, and trampoline, which might reduce hyperactivity in students with autism (P1). These tools would benefit students with autism and create a more inclusive and stimulating environment for all children to play and improve their physical abilities. Designing playgrounds with inclusivity in mind is crucial to fostering social engagement and physical exercise among all children.

Many children with disabilities follow special diets, such as gluten- and casein-free, due to digestion issues, which can affect their mood and behaviour as well. "You know very well that children with autism need gluten-free, casein-free, and sugar-free food," said P2. According to parents, schools should maintain the proper special diet for students with autism.

6.7.4 Educational Resources

All parents seemed to believe that picture-based books can benefit not only students with autism but also their neurotypical peers. Students with autism learn much better when they are given instructions with pictures. According to their suggestion, schools must provide more picture-based books.

"They need a picture-based book. It would have been the best for addition, subtraction, if you need any identification, for anything" (P3).

Additionally, they asked for some audio-visual equipment to be added. Students with autism need to be prepared and guided with different strategies, such as social stories or small steps, to reach their potential level, according to all parents. Hence, the curriculum needs to be modified (P1, P2, P7), and schools should provide more brain developmental activities (P8)) or clauses based on their interests. Parents also suggested changing the exam question paper or homework based on the ability of students with autism to have extra time to finish tasks.

Parents explained that students with autism children's interests or skills can be specific in some subjects like art, singing, painting, etc., but there is no painting or such class in the school. Therefore, children do not feel any interest in going to school. It is important to add such classes for those children, as illustrated in this parent comment, for example:

"She enjoys drawing pictures. But this class does not hold much in the school, so she does not go to school because she finds no interest" (P2).

Some parents (P7, P8) also asked for a singing class for all children.

6.7.5 Professional Resources

Another area lacking will be a special teacher or other professional teacher or therapist, such as a parallel professional, counsellor, speech therapist, occupational therapist, or counsellor. All parents mentioned the requirement of a counsellor for each individual: parents, teachers, and child, if possible, as in this comment: "The parents of special children have their struggles, so they need counsellors" (P8).

Another parent (P3) of students with autism said, "Having a counsellor in the school is always helpful to the children, both additional needs and neurotypical children, and the parents and teachers".

Parents explained more about this matter. Students with autism need a variety of professionals because many students with autism have a lack of communication and interaction issues that make them unable to understand many things in real life, such as game rules, engage in games, or make friendships with others. Additionally, students with autism might have a lack of motor coordination, which makes their muscle construction weak enough to participate in any game like others. Both poor and nonverbal communication skills are common in children with autism. Therefore, professional resources in school are a must if a child with autism needs to develop academically and socially.

6.7.6 Shadow Aid and Supervisor

I have put this section separately to give it greater importance as all parents (P1 to P8) explained their significant stress due to the lack of parallel teachers for their students with autism. The experience of two parents who were also teaching in mainstream settings explained the necessity of this paraprofessional requirement very specifically, and almost all parents concurred.

Parents also complained that there is no PE teacher or supervisor to monitor children in the playground, which is required not only for students with autism but also for other peers so that they do not get hurt or if there are any accidents. According to parents, sometimes these children are more prone to accidents because of their hyper nature and/or dyspraxia. As a result, parents think that they need to be under official supervision.

6.7.7 Collaborative Approach

Nearly all parents(P1, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8) stress how crucial it is to have appropriate parent-teacher communication regarding their students' development with autism. According to them, schools should monitor this system and run it effectively for all students with autism, even the autistic child who needs more support. Parents also suggest that principals could be more supportive of children with autism; they could monitor children's progress and encourage teachers to be more positive about this group of children. The principal could also teach students with autism how to socialize.

6.7.8 Awareness Raising

A lack of awareness can create different perceptions of and discrimination against students with autism in society. One parent explained that if people are aware of autism, then they will develop more acceptance for this group of children (and later as adults). To do this, parents put the emphasis first on changing people's mistrust of autism. All parents argued that people's mentalities must be changed and that even doing this on its own will improve the situation. To do that, participants gave importance to creating awareness through suggestions such as: Firstly, the teachers must have the proper training, especially on autism. They should get the opportunity to attend a seminar and workshop on autism. Since Bangladesh has almost 91.04% Muslim people and they go to mosques for

prayer, one parent (P3) elected the religious area to create awareness about autism. He seemed to believe that when Muslim people learn more about autism through priests, they might start viewing autism in a more positive light.

Another option P3 and P2 gave was that books based on information about students with autism should be taught to their peers at an early age. They explained further that the sense of acceptance does not build up automatically in children, so social and family values should be introduced more in books to increase humanity, as illustrated by this comment below:

“In class five, there is a story named "Life Is Beautiful" where a woman called Maria faced various problems but dealt with them and gradually gathered confidence. If there is a story showing good behaviour towards the special children, not making fun of them or not doing physical harassment to them, it would be better”, according to P3.

Nearly all parents stated that teachers must be aware of autism and demonstrate compassion and understanding for children with autism. When students with autism attempt to adjust to the environment, teachers must recognize that, while students with autism may have an ethical right to be included, there are limitations, requirements, time, and support that the child needs to adjust to the circumstances. For example, “If an awareness could be made in the teachers that these children also have feelings if the teachers could be softer minded to them that if they hurt them, then they cannot be improved, that they are also a part of society and they are also citizens, then it would be better” (P7).

Parents recommended that teachers foster a welcoming environment and have favourable attitudes toward children with autism. Parents suggested that teachers should teach other peers how to accept and interact with students with autism children, play with them, and share items with them. For instance, one parent remarks, “If they (peers) help her find the right page in the book, it will be better” (P2). In this way, peers will consequently emulate it and show an students with autism youngster’s greater compassion. Additionally, parents recommended that teachers assist and instruct peers in communicating with children who have autism.

6.7.9 Policy Change

According to parents, unfortunately, there is no clear legal guidance on how existing infrastructure, teaching-learning methods, curriculum, and syllabus will be inclusive-friendly. The school teachers and staff are not duly trained, and the legal framework does not clarify how they should be. The legal framework didn’t specify any action plans or strategic techniques to implement for children with autism. For example, “bullying might be illegal., and there might be some rules about the duties of the teachers on policy,” according to the parent (P1).

According to all participants, the government should declare that if any unique child is to be seen anywhere, people should help him immediately. "Social help is necessary for special children. Some laws regarding acceptance should exist," according to P2. One participant gave an example that "the police, traffic police, or anyone else should come and help students with autism cross the road".

P3 suggested that the government or the social affairs ministry suggest the Imams (Muslim priests) talk about these things in the mosque; the people will accept it soon and teach them in their homes since Bangladesh is a Muslim country. Parents seemed to believe that if the government makes such a rule, no one can ignore it and instead has to support children with special needs.

6.7.10 Training for Peers and Parents of Peers

Parents suggested that neurotypical children need to be aware of students with autism traits so that they can also learn how to interact with them. In this way, neurotypical peers will not be confused about this group of children. They will develop more empathy and a supportive nature towards them. Parents also said that teachers should play a significant role in training peers, for example: "If the teachers tell them to support her, they will be more supportive. They should teach other children, too, how to deal with a unique child. The teachers should discuss these things in class"(P5).

6.7.11 Parental (Parents of Students with autism Children, Peer's Parents) Training

Parents explained that if parents of typical children treat the special children well if they start thinking that students with autism also have the right to mix up with others, it will make a big difference. Therefore, parents of peers need training on autism.

Parents are also aware of their training in autism. They believe that training will help them understand how to develop support skills for their children with autism. Sometimes, due to a lack of knowledge, parents do not understand their children's issues. In consequence, they do not provide any therapy to their children, which is needed. Additionally, they also hide their child's issues and feel shame. Therefore, sometimes, these groups of children do not get useful therapy at the right time. "When I went for the speech therapies in Mohakhali, I noticed many parents used to hide their child's problems," according to P1.

6.7.12 Self-Contained Placement

All parents talked about implementing a partial setting for children with autism. An integrated or partial setting is an educational environment that provides individualized assistance to children with special needs while also promoting their inclusion with neurotypical peers. This particular setting

facilitates social engagement and inclusivity while simultaneously offering essential support for specific requirements.

According to all parents, students with autism student's educational and social needs cannot be met in a general educational setting. They may require more specialized attention in more controlled settings. In a self-contained class, students with autism can get various levels of textbooks and curricula based on their unique levels. Specially trained teachers can use a variety of teaching strategies and materials. At the same time, many students with autism can continue to access some general educational settings for some social activities, such as lunchroom, recess, or any special classes, art, singing, or music, when they are ready.

"A unique child and an average child cannot move together in schools. So, I think there should be a part of school time for special children. They would do some classes jointly. That's how they will get the chance for mutual interaction and particular time and attention. Suppose a school has two classes of exceptional children. They will get their special classes as scheduled and have one or two periods of classes together with neurotypical children. These classes would help the neurotypical children learn how to deal with special children, and the special children would learn how to interact with and pick up from the neurotypical children. If it can happen, then it will change the whole society"(P1).

Thinking of this scenario, participants were happily saying that when students with autism get enough space to learn through one person or, at the same time, get the opportunity to mix with other neurotypical peers, participants believe that this partial setting will provide them with personal spaces where they can stay for 1-2 hours, while mainstream settings give them room where they can be mixed up with other neurotypical children. In this way, they will not be overwhelmed by any settings. However, when students with autism are assessed for partial inclusion, it needs to be planned carefully, and students with autism should be supported fully; otherwise, the aim of partial inclusion will not be fulfilled properly.

6.8 SUMMARY

Parents' feedback has revealed several elements, including aspects related to the school, the teacher, the child, the principal., and the parents of their classmates. Collaboration among parents, teachers, and school officials is crucial in addressing these concerns to guarantee a conducive and encouraging learning environment for all children. Parents provided recommendations for enhancement. The proposals encompassed a wide range of ideas, including enhancing parent-teacher communication and introducing more inclusive activities for children. By incorporating these suggestions, the school can foster a more synergistic and efficient educational experience for all

participants. In light of this recommendation, it was crucial to understand the opinions and suggestions of teachers and principals, as explained below.

6.9 TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES FOR MAINSTREAM SETTINGS

6.9.1 Introduction

To begin with, teachers were asked about teachers' perceptions of enrolling students with autism in mainstream settings; all of them had mixed opinions. Some teachers were positive and said confidently that this group of children needed to be enrolled. Students with autism can make rapid social progress if they are educated in a regular setting. They have more chances to interact with regular children, which can improve their social skills. "Students with autism can overcome their challenges by mixing with regular children if they get admission to mainstream schools. They will learn something even if they do not learn as much as regular children" (T1).

Some other teachers (T1, T3, T5) also believe that mainstream education is not beneficial only for special needs children; peers are also learning how to respect these groups of children. They learn how to support them and have more sympathy for them. In this way, they learn to accept people of different abilities in society, which helps to decrease bullying.

Even though many teachers believe in the benefits of mainstream settings, they also feel insecure and less confident when talking about the wide range of challenges in autism in those settings. According to them, since many children with autism can interact, and will be able to learn more than autistic children who more support. Some of these children also have high functional skills and, as a result, can give more focus. Many students with autism can easily engage in conversation with them. These children can learn more effectively when their teachers are interacting with them.

On the other hand, sometimes handling a high support need autistic child can be challenging due to their differences in social understanding and communication, which might create misunderstanding in neurotypical peers. They stated that there are times when autistic students with more support needed, disabled students with autism act aggressively towards other peers by biting and pushing. The teacher in this passage says that many children with disabilities need more help and guidance. They illustrated this point by stating that if a mother is present in the classroom with their children, the children are more likely to remain calm; in contrast, if the mother is absent, the classroom is more likely to devolve into chaos. It clearly explains that these children need constant support, which the school cannot provide at the moment. While some teachers argue that placing many students with autism in mainstream settings can be advantageous, it is widely believed that many with autism should be placed in specialized settings. This is because mainstream settings are currently ill-equipped to provide the necessary resources for effectively educating children with autism.

The difficulties that teachers encounter in traditional classroom settings and their recommendations for bettering the circumstance, which are outlined below, were urged to be shared with me. This resulted from the teachers' dual perspectives on including students with autism in inclusive environments. Every teacher's statement resembled those of the parents of children with autism. They asserted that in inclusive environments, administrative issues, a lack of acceptability, inadequate resources, and teacher training deficiencies can all have a substantial impact (see Figure 18).

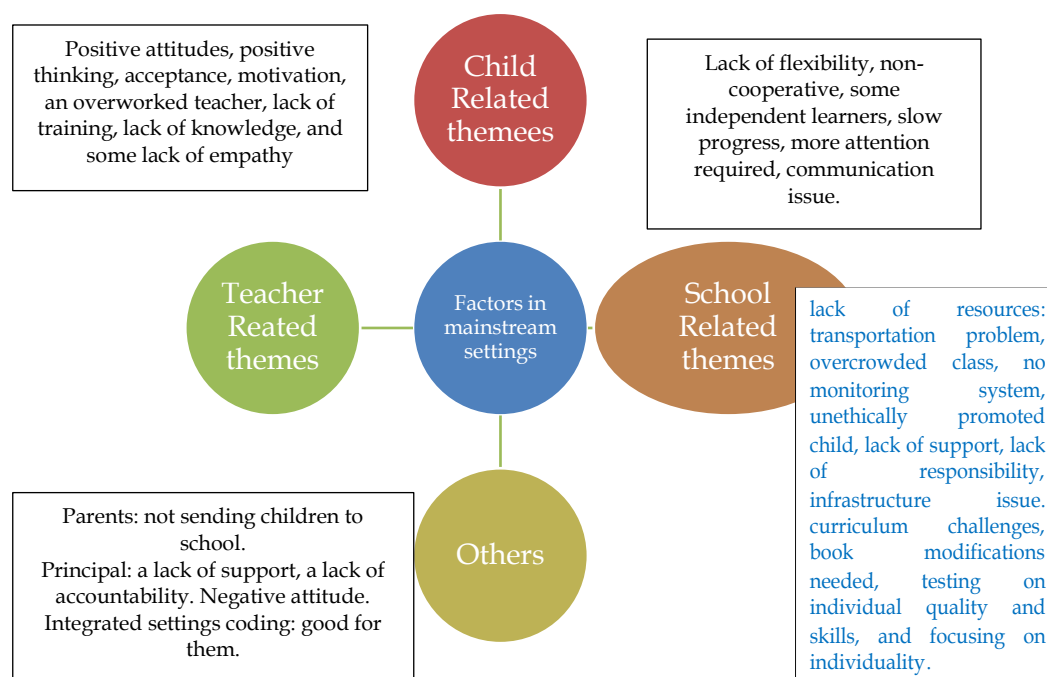


Figure 17. Teachers-related themes

6.9.2 Teaching Strategies

All teachers were describing the skills that teachers need to have to teach children with autism. For them, different instructional methods are required for a wide variety of subjects. They explained with a lot of certainty that students with autism cannot understand the same things as their other neurotypical peers. Giving an example, they said, "Many students with autism cannot comprehend even basic operations like multiplication and division. Many of them might have a cognitive or intellectual deficiency to handle it; others might do very well in many subjects". Therefore, teachers need to make an individual educational plan, use different teaching strategies, and pay more attention to putting that plan into action for each child.

When I asked teachers if they were aware of any strategies for teaching children with autism, they stated that only one teacher has 12 years of experience teaching students with autism, and she suggested some strategies to other teachers about different strategies to teach students with autism. Another teacher T3 said:

“None of the school's nineteen or twenty teachers has received this training. One teacher has only received training for six months. We try to care for the children according to what the teacher tells us. I think it would be better if they were given separate schools and facilities”.

Following her guidance, many teachers practised some strategies in the classroom, such as following a practical and visual approach when teaching math.

As teachers said, “I will try to teach practically. For instance, I will bring two children before the class, get two more of them, and then ask them how many there are now. With the help of the materials, I would explain the basics through exciting stories”(T2).

They further explained that they put students with autism in the front row or on the first bench so teachers can keep an eye on them or ask them to write on the whiteboard. Parents of students with autism also stated that teachers who have experience, even if they do not have training, have more patience with this group of children.

One can assume that they are attempting to support them more through the experiences of daily life. All teachers were aware that these strategies were not enough; instead, they needed to have the right kind of experience or knowledge to teach children with special needs. "I didn't learn what method to apply because I didn't get the training"(T8). All teachers strongly recommend that “training is necessary”. Many of them (T2, T3, T4, T6, T7, T8)) said that they do not have any training, and a few (T1, T5) said they do, but they took only three days (T5)/ twelve days (T1)of training, which is not sufficient at all. As a result, students with autism are not learning anything. All teachers argued that the children did not learn from mainstream sources, as general teachers did not know how to teach them.

6.9.2.1 Developing Empathy

In terms of teachers' attitudes, parents who participated in stage 1 of the interview mentioned that some teachers show nice gestures to their children; however, they also claimed that the majority of teachers showed negative attitudes or had a tendency to avoid teaching special needs, children. They argued that teachers should have compassion, empathy, patience, and a genuine interest in the children they are teaching to be successful, for example, “If the teachers are sympathetic towards the children if they pay more attention to their individual needs and give priority to the children, then these children will be more interested in learning”(T1).

On this matter, teachers are inclined to believe that a supportive atmosphere in class may help children achieve their full potential. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to create an environment of love, trust, acceptance, respect, and patience in the classroom. Almost all teachers reported that some teachers are avoiding it because they are ill-equipped to do so. They are aware of the need to foster

bonding between themselves and students with autism for their development, but they are not well prepared to do that due to a lack of training.

6.9.3 Parents and Teachers' Collaboration

I raised this question to the teacher to understand the communication with parents, because many parents from the stage 1 interview gave contradictory comments on this matter. When I asked this question to teachers, I found some contradictory statements from teachers.

According to some teachers, when they talk to parents about children's academic or social challenges, many parents avoid these responsibilities and ask teachers to handle their children without giving them any pressure. They further stated that sometimes parents do not send their children to school regularly. Some other teachers said that they try to communicate and support as much as they can based on their knowledge, which might not be up to par with what parents expect. They also said that they give a little extra attention to special children as per their level of expertise. As one teacher comments (T4):

"Many times, children have various problems at home. When the child misbehaves in class, we do not know the learning environment or how they are taught at home. So, we try to address those issues. We call the guardians and talk to them. Then, we try to give a little more time to a child if there is a problem at their home".

6.9.4 Training

Most teachers stated they did not even check students with autism's exam papers: "No one sees the answer sheet. Even the child is automatically promoted from class 7 to class 8" (T8). They even allow children to copy papers from others. They believe that these children should not be left behind. They need to be promoted. By doing so, they will learn, even a little but gradually, as illustrated by this teacher's comment "The intellectually disabled child will not understand everything like regular children. But he cannot be made to fail. He has to learn a bit to get to the upper class" (T2).

When I asked the reason behind this behaviour, the teachers said that they feel helpless and demotivated because they do not know how to teach them. Even though they know students with autism are lacking in any topic, they do not have any training to teach them. For example, "We have not received the kind of training required to teach such children. So, we try to help (not check paper, let copy from others) these children as much as we can" (T5). Another teacher T4 said, "Teaching someone who cannot speak is different. Training is required on this. How can you communicate with that child if you do not get proper training? We get stuck at the first step".

However, one teacher with little special needs training and a few teachers with practical experience working with children with special needs provided them with the confidence to teach

children with autism. Even though they are not adequately trained, their practical experience with special needs children has motivated them to support special needs children at a certain level.

6.10 SCHOOL-RELATED THEMES

6.10.1 Lack of Resources

In this particular instance, everybody agreed that only training and experience wouldn't be sufficient for students with autism. They need more support and educational resources from school, which they lack. All teachers stated that without these resources, it is challenging for such children and that they needed more materials that they could not supply. Moreover, many of them have extra talent in some specific area, such as drawing or singing, but schools cannot provide that support to enhance their skills further.

All teachers agreed that teachers need to be knowledgeable and use interesting ways to teach, such as stories, songs, visual materials, organized classrooms, and increased opportunities for cultural engagement that can motivate children to learn. "We could combine knowledge with an exciting teaching approach and then communicate with them through support materials, stories, and songs to make the studies more interesting. In this way, lesson acceptability among these children will increase (T1)".

Another significant factor came out regarding the question paper, homework, exam timing, and individual educational plan. Teachers discussed the fact that the same question paper is given on the day of the exam, which is something they do not recommend at all. According to teachers, the questionnaire ought to be more adaptable and simpler for students with autism to understand. There should be different educational curricula, question papers, and homework systems for special needs.

"They do not understand things like regular children do. For instance, they do not understand the mathematics lessons that are suitable for regular fifth-grade children. When we teach decimal multiplication and division, special children cannot comprehend them. They require a more individualized educational plan; "the lessons should be devised in a suitable manner for special children"(T3).

Teachers further said that for these children to answer the test questions correctly, they need more time and attention. It is not advisable to make them sit in the exam centre with the same question paper and allocated time as their peers; "they need some extra time inevitably," according to all teachers. Upon My inquiry regarding the reason for limiting more time for special needs children, the inclusive education policy explicitly stated the justification. All teachers mentioned their incapacity to take on

this role because of their significant workload. They sought further assistance to complete that assignment.

6.10.2 School Infrastructure

Another example is that schools cannot even give one playground to children; “it is impossible to give children enough room to play. There should be more sports equipment”(T5). Teachers added that this situation will not encourage them to learn, and it may have a negative effect on their academic performance.

Classroom sizes have been another big topic in this study. One teacher is responsible for almost 80–100 children in a single classroom at any given time. Due to this, teachers get frustrated and avoid working with SEN children. Students with autism need constant, one-on-one guidance and support, which can be hard for a classroom teacher to provide. Therefore, all teachers stated that it is unthinkable that a single teacher could be responsible for accommodating children with special needs, for example, “We have 50 to 70/80 children. Last year, we also had a class with 100 children. There was only one teacher” (T7). In this scenario, all teachers are stressing how important it is to have another assistant teacher to help with the large number of children. According to all teachers, having two teachers to work with special children is better.

Given the current condition, according to some teachers, mainstream schools should not admit students with autism if they cannot provide the adequate facilities they need. They feel they are admitting it due to policy. They believe these children need special classes and attention, which mainstream schools cannot give, so it is better to send them to a special school with facilities as seen in this comment: “We cannot give special needs children the attention they need. So, in this case, children with special needs are admitted for the sake of admission. We cannot take proper care of them. I think it would be better if they were given separate schools and facilities”(T1).

6.10.3 Child-Related themes

Teachers have mixed perceptions about children with autism. They appear to believe that the progress of students with autism depends on their needs and support from the school.

See the comment herewith: “Actually, not all children are the same. Some autistic children are difficult to manage”(T7). Academically, teachers also mentioned that many special needs children are not coping with the curriculum. They do not understand many subjects, for example, math.

However, teachers also stated that many students with autism are very interested in learning. They cooperate in class and follow class rules, for example: “Let's talk about a girl child. She is very interested in learning. She comes to the front of the class to take notes in the notebook from the

board. However, her writing is somewhat understandable. With that notebook, she came to the teachers and asked for signatures"(T6).

Almost all teachers mentioned that, even though many of them have difficulties to learn as their other neurotypical peers, some students with autism are very talented in specific subjects, such as drawing. Some students with autism have very good handwriting, and some are very good at indoor games. "Some children cannot do academics but excel in other areas. Someone may draw beautiful pictures, and someone's handwriting is lovely. They score 20 out of 20" (T1).

All teachers believe that these children should be encouraged and given a specific interest lesson plan, and then they will develop. Additionally, this group of children needs to be taught special manners, and teachers need to specialize in that.

6.10.4 Policy-Related Challenges

The majority of teachers expressed concern about the shortage of an inclusion policy that guides how to support children with autism. This was perceived as a significant obstacle to establishing a more inclusive and fair learning environment. According to them, enacting an inclusion strategy could effectively handle these concerns and foster a more inclusive school atmosphere. Firstly, they emphasised reducing the number of children in the classroom. They said the rule of policy is to take 30 children into the classroom, but no one followed that. The administration is enrolling all children in the catchment area, whoever is coming for admission. It is almost impossible for them to take care of any special children's responsibilities in the classroom, as illustrated in the comment here: "We have admitted 70 children, whereas 30 are supposed to be accepted according to the rules. It is not right. How is it possible for a teacher to manage 70 children? If there are children with special needs, how will I care for them?" (T8).

Teachers also said that principals are also helpless. Sometimes, they cannot reduce the number of children due to the pressure of upper management. There is also stress among residents of the area. According to teachers, as long as local children come to school, they must admit them. As a result, students with autism do not get enough care due to overcrowding. They are not sure if this lack of policy guidance or some other issues need to be monitored.

There is no such strict rule or policy regarding individual education plans, flexible books, exam question papers, or even class homework for children with autism, knowing that students with autism cannot cope like peers. Teachers argued that regular textbooks or test questionnaires are not appropriate for students with autism children. That they cannot learn like regular children. They need it to be a little easier for them. And that there was no separate system for homework or test papers for these children.

In terms of the time limit for an exam, all teachers said that according to the government's policy, the time limit is flexible, but there is no special guidance about it. If students with autism cannot finish within the given period, they sometimes wait for them. However, they do not know how long they can wait. They suggested that if policy can provide such clear guidance about the extended time period, it would be useful for both children and teachers.

6.10.5 Social Acceptance

I inquired about acceptance in mainstream settings for children with autism. My first objective was to comprehend teachers' receptiveness to children with autism. Hence, I aimed to ascertain the degree to which teachers perceive inclusion as advantageous for children with autism. One could interpret this response as an indication of acceptance. Most teachers agreed that mainstream schooling can be beneficial for this particular group of children. Another few teachers (T6, T7, T8, T9) argued that they would improve by coming to school and mixing with regular children; that they want them to come to school. Other teachers argued that just going to school and interacting with the other children will help them (students with autism) grow and learn. And they strongly encourage them to attend class regularly. According to T3, "If such a child stays at home, she/he will become weaker and lack proper mental development".

As an indication of acceptance, this demonstrates unequivocally that teachers support the integration of students with autism in conventional classroom environments. Nevertheless, teachers have also argued that these children require individualized care and should receive their education in specialized educational settings. Specialized education for students with autism is seen as essential to address their distinct requirements and guarantee their academic achievement, which may be unattainable in a conventional classroom environment.

The interview with parents of students with autism brought up another issue. Many parents claimed that due to a lack of acceptance of students with autism in the classroom, teachers often avoid parent-teacher communication for their children's academic or social development. When the researcher asked teachers about this matter, every teacher stated that they make an effort to talk to parents about emotional struggles and the academic difficulties their children are facing. Occasionally, teachers do lack knowledge on how to evaluate the intellectual or social development, as well as how to provide them with appropriate assistance. That's why many teachers do not communicate with parents effectively. We can presume that this could be a contributing factor to teachers' ineffective communication with parents of students with autism about their child's social or academic growth, as they struggle to offer support to the child or resolve the issue.

Concerning peer attitudes towards children with autism, teachers made contradictory comments. According to them, sometimes peers show positive attitudes towards them, like cooperating

with them, but sometimes they poke them, bully them, or disturb them. According to many teachers, sometimes some of their regular children help them in the classroom, and some children often disturb them. But most children help them. They (Peers) do not understand autism as well as they do. They tell them not to misbehave with children with special needs. But moments later, they come back to poke those special-needs children.

Teachers also said that even some students with autism are not behaving well with their peers. Here, almost all teachers gave one statement that cleared the shadow of negative attitudes from peers towards children with autism. Teachers claimed that it mostly happens when some children behave aggressively, and due to that behaviour, accidents occur. "Those whose children are disturbed do not like to have special children in the mainstream. And if the child with special needs is aggressive, a fight happens" (T1). However, teachers also believe that, with time, the situation will improve. It could be peers' lack of understanding about students with autism traits.

The important inquiry was about peers' parents' acceptance of students with autism in mainstream environments. The reason for this is that peers, who are studying alongside children with special needs, may develop acceptance and include students with autism in their social circles if their parents have a positive mindset for children with autism. Parents' favourable attitudes have a significant impact on how well-integrated and accepted students with autism are in mainstream settings. Teachers' responses to My query on how much acceptance these students with autism experience in inclusive environments were inconsistent.

Though they are generally more understanding than in the past, teachers agreed that parents of peers do not always like this set of children. "They are improving more than ever and are more compassionate than ever, but exceptions exist", according to T8. Another teacher T5 stated, "Some parents are compassionate towards their children with autism, but some may act negatively. Furthermore, teachers stated that many peers' parents welcome students with autism in the classroom as long as they are not disruptive.

6.10.6 Principals

In terms of the principals' attitudes, teachers gave contradictory comments. Some teachers said that principals are not very supportive. Although some principals have little training, they are not teaching teachers how to deal with children with autism; instead, principals say to learn by themselves. For example: "Principals in the primary sector cannot do much. They undergo training, but they do not teach us anything. They keep the knowledge they gain from training to themselves. They say we should deal with the children as best we can" (T8). On the contrary, other teachers (T4, T5, T6) said that their principal tries hard to meet all their needs. But they also mention that the principal is helpless.

All teachers agree that it is critical to lower the enrolment rate. The principal has the authority to lower the number of children admitted. But by doing this, the principal will have to fall under the pressure of upper management. There is also pressure from residents of the area. Due to this, it is impossible to admit fewer children. Students with autism do not get enough care due to overcrowding.

Regarding the principal's responsibilities, teachers have expressed that they are sometimes supportive during the enrolment process, but once enrolled, they do not assume any responsibility for this particular group of children. Teachers believe that principals sometimes enrol these children solely based on policy. Although the principal plays a vital role in admitting students with autism, they sometimes cannot provide all the facilities they need. Teachers also noted that this does not necessarily indicate a lack of acceptance, but rather a lack of funding. They argue that their principal is unable to provide the necessary facilities, even with their best efforts, without financial support from the government (T1, T3, T7, T8).

6.10.7 Awareness

When the conversation came to an end, most teachers made the association between awareness and a lack of acceptance. They seem to be saying that no one, not even teachers, peers, or parents of peers, parents of students with autism, is aware of the trait of students with autism. They misinterpret autism when they say, "There's nothing but superstition to explain this" (T1). They claimed that a large number of parents of students with autism are ignorant of the diagnosis and available therapies for children with special needs.

Many parents' peers thought that their children would act strangely when they were near children with autism. Some teachers think that students with autism are incapable of learning anything and have no future. Teachers consequently exhibit unfavourable or negligent attitudes. This lack of understanding and misinformation can lead to the stigmatization and exclusion of children with autism. One could argue that a lack of knowledge and understanding about autism is the main cause of all unfavourable attitudes towards children with autism. It is crucial to take every necessary action to increase awareness, as failing to do so may result in prejudice against and obstacles to social inclusion for children with autism. This may have detrimental long-term implications for their growth and well-being.

6.11 TEACHERS' SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The last significant issue incorporates the teachers' suggestions for how their efforts to include students with autism in a mainstream classroom might be reinforced. All their suggestions could be summarized with the word "support". The term "support" explains all factors that need to be modified or improved.

6.11.1 Academic and Professional Support

To begin with, support could be defined as a teacher's training is a high priority due to teacher demand. Until now, teachers did not know how to teach children with autism. "Some children are interested in learning, but we do not know how to teach them"(T6). All teachers agreed that training with practical experience is needed.

Besides, teachers should have the mentality of caring for these children. Teachers stated that when they deal with children with patience and empathy, it gives great pleasure to parents of students with autism. The parents of the children also express their gratitude to the teachers. They thank teachers for patiently dealing with their children and caring for them. Therefore, the inclusive education training curriculum should be modified with practical practice and an empathy lesson.

It was also strongly advised that students with autism have adequate educational and professional resources, such as occupational therapists, speech therapists, and psychologists, to support their social, emotional, and intellectual development. Another need for all teachers was the presence of special teachers with training in special education or parallel support contributions. In the classroom, teachers stress the importance of teaching assistants. They also mentioned that they are unable to teach any games to students with autism due to their busy schedules. They recommended having a play therapist there to instruct children in the game's mechanics.

6.11.2 Classroom Support

All teachers suggested a change in classroom structure, which means a more organized, spacious, exciting, and decorated classroom along with useful teaching material such as a laptop, and educational toys. There must be a change in the classroom. "For a child with autism, the need for an exciting classroom is even greater" (T1).

They also agreed that Autistics get excited just by looking at the pictures. Materials are different for children with autism. They will like it if there are useful materials to teach them. If they want a laptop or computer, they have to give it to them. Additionally, teachers advised placing students with autism in separate classrooms on occasion because they might need to take breaks from busy classrooms.

6.11.3 Educational Resources

All teachers made it clear that if certain curriculum modifications, book changes, IEP goals for special needs, adaptable or individual need question papers, and longer exam periods are not implemented, these children will not improve. To be more precise, picture books, one-on-one instruction, a more flexible curriculum, and textbook variation are essential. Additionally, teachers state that the question paper and instructional plan should be tailored to the children's IQ. The teachers and

the parents arrived at the same conclusion: children with special needs need easier, more adaptable educational methods and procedures. The same concern: These textbooks are not appropriate for them" (P1 to P8; T1 to T8) all argue that their level of understanding is different and that most textbooks are not appropriate for them.

A teacher (T5) also said,

"No, special children cannot go that far. For them, we are a little more lenient. Our approach to their exam paper is different from the regular ones. The questionnaire is the same. But it should not be. If they pay more attention to their individual needs and give priority to the children, then these children will be more interested in learning. Lessons should be devised in a suitable manner for special children".

For children with autism, teachers suggested more singing, sketching, and other cultural activities; these activities would also have a favourable effect on the children. Their motivation to engage in school activities would increase. Some students with autism are curious about a certain topic and desire to learn more about it. Teacher (T1) claims that if children with autism identify their abilities, they may engage in a variety of activities, as stated below:

"We have to test them based on what they are good at and what they are motivated to do. If they like sports, you have to make them interested. There was a boy who entered a drawing competition. He stood first in the competition. He has grown up and does not come to school anymore. We cannot provide him with that class".

6.11.4 Communication Support

They went on to say that it is not just children with autism who are unable to attend; some children with neurotypical development are also unable to do so since their homes are located in remote areas and the school does not provide transportation. In the opinion of teachers, it is of the utmost importance to provide transportation facilities for all children.

6.11.5 Awareness

There is a consensus among teachers that it is of the utmost importance to increase knowledge of autism among all members of the school staff, peers, and parents of children who have autism. With this understanding, it is possible that awakening and acceptance of everyone will occur, which can help to create an environment that is hospitable to children who have autism. Every teacher has given the same advice: "To cultivate them, we should come forward and be knowledgeable" (P7). The provision of continuous training and resources for staff, students, and families is imperative for schools to raise awareness. A more welcoming and encouraging school community can be achieved, for instance, by holding workshops, having guest lecturers, and introducing autism education into the curriculum.

6.11.6 Policy Modification

According to the debate that was presented earlier, all of the teachers stated that numerous aspects of training need to be altered or developed. These aspects include the curriculum, resources, books, question papers, and the issue of school infrastructure, all of which cannot be altered without the alteration of policies. To make this system better, it is necessary to implement several key measures. As an illustration, there should be more opportunities for teachers to receive training, laws regarding the enrolment of children, sufficient academic and professional resources, and strict guidelines to monitor the progress of children. The policy ought to be altered in such a way that no students with autism should be enrolled in the program without first being evaluated and having a treatment plan in place.

6.11.7 Cooperative Approach

According to all teachers, each member of the school directly involved with students with autism should establish a close relationship with each other, aiming at exchanging ideas, working together to build the child's educational plan, selecting the most appropriate evaluation method based on the child's interests, skills, and weaknesses, and evaluating the student's overall progress. Working together can result in a more thorough understanding of the child's needs and strengths, which will ultimately help the student receive an education that is more efficient and individualized. By fostering open communication and mutual respect between all parties involved, the child can receive the support and guidance necessary to thrive in their academic environment.

6.11.8 Self-Contained Settings

All teachers have come to the crucial realization that students with autism require more individualized attention in special settings while also needing to learn how to gradually adapt to natural settings, even though the term "integrated settings" is not very common in their experiences. Students with autism will have the space and opportunity to develop and adapt on their own in this way. Indeed. They were able to interact with typical children and attend different classes. When two approaches are combined, they will grow. They asked to learn both methods' concepts in a single context, as detailed in the comment below:

“This setting is essential for children with autism. Students with autism do not learn much in classes with regular children. If there is an exclusive class system for them, they can learn from it. Again, by taking classes with regular children, students with autism can socialize with them and improve their social skills. I hope students with autism can improve faster by combining two classroom methods” (T6).

As T5 said,

“It will be better for them. They can mix and talk with regular children. My sister has a child who is four years old and still does not speak. Her ear and throat were diagnosed. But still, she does not speak at all. Later, the doctor advised her to admit the child to primary school. His opinion was that playing and interacting with schoolchildren would solve the matter. So, I think putting children with special needs in such a setting for regular interaction is better”.

Additionally, children can be provided with tailored attention, individualized curricula, individualized question papers or assignments, and specialized material that is more adaptable to the circumstances associated with these scenarios.

6.11.9 Summary

This part addressed the perspectives of teachers regarding inclusive environments for children with autism. Expanding upon the thoughts of teachers, the subsequent part will examine the viewpoints of principals in inclusive environments for children with autism. When it comes to creating an inclusive environment for these children, principals are vital. Their comprehension and assistance can have a significant impact on how well these children develop socially and academically. We can learn a great deal about what strategies and guidelines principals use to promote inclusivity and improve the general well-being of students with autism by investigating their points of perspective.

6.12 PRINCIPAL’S PERCEPTIONS OF MAINSTREAM SETTINGS

As a result of the fact that the statements made by both parents of students with autism and teachers revealed a few difficulties, I decided to take statements made by principals of the mainstream schools to gain additional clarity. The comprehensive analysis of the data set identified significant areas of interest, which will be addressed in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

Presumably, although all principals think mainstream education can benefit students with autism, mainstream education is still a long way from being prepared to completely meet these students' special needs. Figure 21 that follows shows the findings of the principal's interview: the seven key criteria (Figure 20) that emerged were thought to be the primary obstacles to successfully implementing inclusion for children with autism. These include views about the mainstream, government-related themes, school-related themes, child-related themes, teacher-related themes, and social acceptability awareness. The following paragraph discusses each factor (see Figure 19).

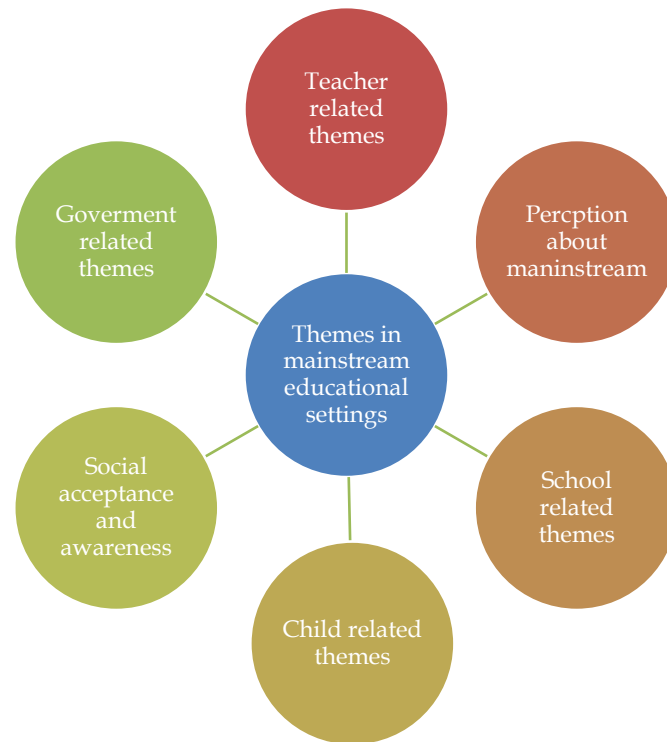


Figure 18. Factors emerged from principals' interview

6.12.1 Perceptions of Mainstream Education for Students with autism

The principals were questioned about their thoughts on inclusive environments for children with autism. I attempted to gain an understanding of their interest in including students with autism by obtaining an understanding of their perceptions. Every person expressed both positive and negative viewpoints.

They appeared to think that students with autism can benefit from education in mainstream settings in a variety of ways, including the enhancement of social and communication interaction, the adaptation of a more natural environment, and many other advantages. All of the principals believed that these children could improve their ability to engage with other people, such as by participating in activities with their classmates in groups, as demonstrated in one comment below:

"I am seeing a lot of benefits. Firstly, when a neurotypical child is going to class in school, these children see those with special needs differently, but when they are mixing and playing with one another, their social differences become short. There used to be a distance, which is shortening, and they are becoming compassionate with sympathies. They are playing by keeping one's shoulder to another; they are running in the field, so I am observing these benefits" (M3).

Even though they are aware of all the benefits, almost all principals (M1, M2, M3) continue to believe that students with autism should be educated in special settings. A lack of training in teachers,

inadequate resources, an inflexible curriculum, and, more specifically, various policy issues, as well as the fact that children's range of strengths and challenges can sometimes make mainstream settings more uncertain for students with autism children, are some of the challenges that principals believe students with autism should be educated in special settings. Additionally, principals reported that these children are retiring after a certain amount of time and are unaware of what will happen to them after that. The comments below illustrate these points:

"Those who are disadvantaged, we do not have a system of keeping them here, as they cannot continue further. It would have been preferable for them to have been provided with specific teachers at the school and for those teachers to have helped them grow further. The thing is, keeping them in government primary schools will teach them the same education that is taught to general children, which is problematic for special children. If they had a different school or a distinct environment, it would have been quite fruitful" (M2).

When I asked principals the reason for registering these children, because they believed that they should be placed in special settings, they said that it was because of a rule that was issued by the government. They have no choice but to enrol them because of the policy that "since the school is governmental, it is obligatory to take as many as possible".

On the other hand, only one principal (M1), among others, stated that he is enrolling these children because he believes they have the right to learn with other children of the same age. The individual in question believes that these children will be able to live their lives freely if they are educated in mainstream settings among other children their age. On the other hand, he thinks that if they were to provide more assistance and adequate resources to children with autism, then and only then would this child be able to progress, which is something that they are unable to accommodate, see below:

"No, not by the governmental law, but rather without it; even before that, we used to let students with autism be admitted to our school. They are not abandoned by society; even if they can hold their heads high, they can live their lives so that they become independent. If they are given support, then they can earn and get help in their studies". (M1).

Another principal (M3) claimed that several factors have emerged, including those relating to teachers, the school, children, and legislation, as well as elements of government support. The issues that were tied to policy and the absence of assistance from the government were key considerations, according to all of the principals. On the other hand, elements linked to teachers were highly unambiguous and straightforward, and they were also believed to be a lack of support from the government and guidelines.

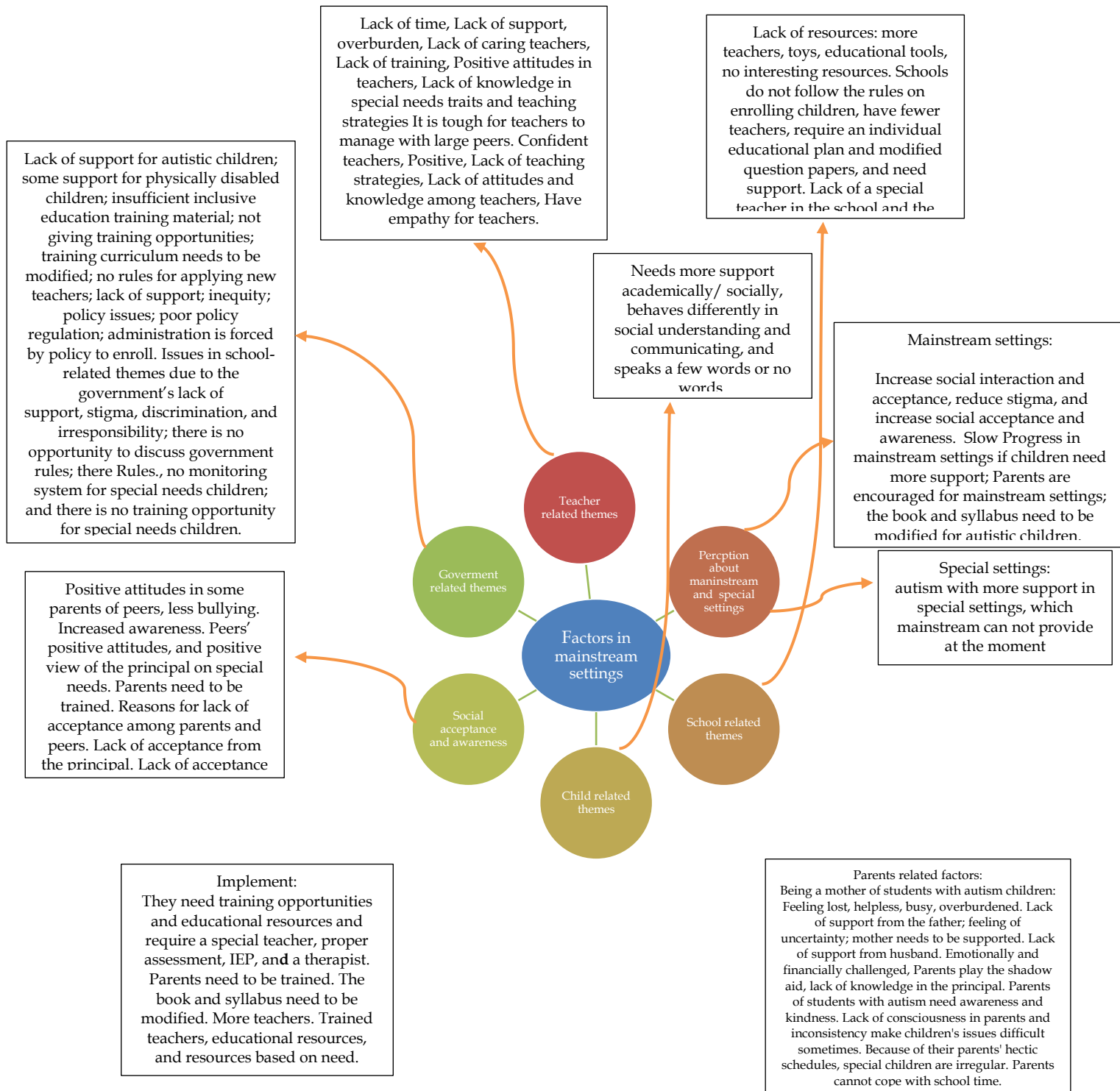


Figure 19. Subthemes of factors emerged from the principals' interview

6.12.2 School-Related Themes

It would appear that when I asked the question about the role that teachers play in the lives of children with autism, they did not express any negative views. Instead, according to all principals, teachers are not trained. There is a maximum amount of time that teachers can try to encourage children for a few days, but eventually, they will have to cease because of their lack of understanding: "We do not have the expertise to provide them with the specialized care that they require"(M4).

All principals agree that educational and professional resources, in addition to training, are crucial factors that could potentially affect the success of students with autism's inclusion: "Teachers should receive this training, but do not get it. They need training to teach them the skills, like how to deal with these children". They strongly believe that these children need trained teachers and teaching tools like computers, but this would not be possible without assistance from the government. The principals in question require the assistance of paraprofessional teachers who can provide them with direction while they are in the classroom. For the most part, the mother of students with autism is required to fulfil this job with the authorization of the school administration. They also cited the absence of government-sponsored teacher training opportunities as another factor.

All of the participants agreed that because of the enormous number of children in their classrooms, teachers are incredibly busy and are unable to give children additional attention. As a direct result of this, these children are abandoned, as shown in the comment here: "The teacher does not have time. Our class has a lot of children, 50 to 60 children in the classroom. We do not have time to give the child this extra care. which results in these children being a few steps behind"(M4).

Regarding training for principals, some teachers asserted during the phase 2 interview that although principals possess training, they do not instruct teachers on how to effectively manage children with autism. In response to this inquiry, the principal said that while training has been completed, it is insufficient and unrelated to inclusive education. For example, "We received training, but it was only three days of training and not related to inclusive education. We are taught only to enrol them in the classroom and not how to teach them, which is not sufficient" (M1).

Additionally, principals clarified that these children's groups were not appropriate for general class books, exams, or curricula. They contend that "this curriculum is a big burden for them" and that if students with autism had attended a special school, the test questions and curriculum would have been tailored to their strengths. Regarding the educational setting, they suggested a quiet classroom, which is completely impractical. Additionally, all children must follow a certain routine, which students with autism find extremely difficult to comply with. The resources available cannot even provide a sufficient amount of space for playing.

6.12.3 Child-Related themes

When I questioned the principals about how autism traits can impact the inclusion process, nearly all of them respond that a child's success in inclusive environments can be impacted by the amount of need or support the child requires from the mainstream settings, which means the range of the child's autism traits. They believe that while many autistic students who need less support may benefit from mainstream settings because they can occasionally manage on their own, managing autistic students with more support needs might be extremely challenging in the absence of staff and qualified professionals.

Additionally, many students with autism exhibit hyperactivity, lack of focus, and challenging behaviour, according to the participants. A principal explained a recent incident in which a student with autism strangled the principal. Principals further explained that the mothers of some children had to sit with them. They will make an intolerable noise when someone sits close to them, drumming on the bench nonstop and occasionally dashing out of the classroom and back in again. These unsettling situations occur frequently in regular classes, for example: "I have faced situations like these. I was attacked too. Never have I pondered how something like this could happen. I got slapped twice, quite hard" (M3).

Peers also avoid students with autism because of the way autistic children communicate. Principals also explain why this happens: because the children are all very young, peers are unaware of the traits of students with autism, and do not comprehend why students with autism behave in particular ways. They are unsure of how they should assist them or how they should respond to them.

Principals (M1, M3), on the other hand, have stated that every type of student with autism has a unique quality. Among them, some are exceptionally talented at sketching, while others excel at something else, such as singing or having excellent handwriting. Nothing, though, can be improved without sufficient backing, according to all principals. Principals further clarified that many children with autism are passing the tenth grade because their teachers are automatically grading them.

However, the majority of students with autism struggle in Secondary School Certificate (SSC), particularly in arithmetic, where they struggle with comprehension (word problems). It is challenging for them to pass the SSC exam once they get there. Even some children drop out of school.

6.12.4 Policy-Related Themes

The principals all concurred that the government should give students with autism all of the professional and educational help they require. All the principals argued that there were no orders from the government to provide all of these things.

Another crucial factor to take into account is the lack of access for principals if they need to discuss specific inclusive education-related issues with the government. Without open lines of communication between principals and government officials, important decisions regarding inclusive education may be delayed or overlooked. This lack of access could hinder progress in creating more inclusive learning environments for all students. For instance, principals are unable to get in touch with any approved individual if schools want additional teachers in the classroom. If they need to, they are unable to discuss any issues about special needs children because they do not have any scope to talk to anyone regarding any issues. The government has provided that 40 children will be assigned to one teacher. Unfortunately, there is not even one teacher assigned to every 40 students.

All principals agree that the policy includes a mechanism for keeping an eye on neurotypical children, but regrettably, it does not have one for children with autism. Teachers are not equipped with the information needed to teach children with autism. There are no such guidelines or opportunities for special education training for teachers. The principals continued by stating that they only received one letter that contained the enrollment requirements for children with special needs. That letter instructs them that as long as these children do not cause any trouble or hurt other children, they can let them into the school. Letters of this kind come in the mail.

Due to a lack of government support, all principals stated that they are unable to even give physically disabled children the assistance they need, such as a wheelchair. As they were discussing the inefficient wheelchair at the school, the principal said, "Sometimes the demand is greater than the supply" (M1). They stated that while five to ten wheelchairs are required, just one wheelchair may be supplied. They think that this is because the government is not doing enough to help. Sometimes, the school administration will compel a parent to buy a wheelchair, but due to financial constraints, parents are unable to comply.

Parents may encounter challenges when it comes to transporting their special child to school or other family responsibilities. Some people come late enough to miss their classes. "The children in classes four to five miss some of the educational content," stated one principal (M3). Then, it will be "troublesome" to enrol any kind of special needs child in mainstream settings if the educational arrangements are not properly overseen and provided. As a result, when a guardian observes that their child is difficult to handle and that the teacher is unable to teach them, they may decide to stop taking their child to school altogether.

6.12.5 Awareness

Every principal was in favour of parents being aware of their children with autism. They assert that parents of peers and peers are now highly aware, in contrast to prior times. Peer parents are interacting more and showing concern these days. The social distance is getting less. "Thankfully, the

days of peer scorn and judgment of students with autism are behind us," stated M4. Caring for students with autism children, letting them sit next to each other, and paying attention to what they have to say are all ways that peers can show kindness.

Principals report that even parents of students with autism are becoming more aware. Many of them used to hide their students with autism from other people in the past. That anxiety is fading now that families are sending their special needs children to school, for example:

"They were mentally distinct; I mean, they used to be isolated in their homes alone and tended to hide from others. In that case, this tendency has decreased a lot. As far as I have seen, the father and mother are now inspired to bring their students with autism to our school" (M2).

Principals, on the other hand, also noted that different guardians have varying perspectives regarding special needs children. In contrast to children with autism, most guardians get along with other special children, such as the deaf-blind. Not all parents are accepting of children with autism. They gripe and refuse to acknowledge that schools are instructing children with autism. They think students with autism will harm their children. But teachers and principals are attempting to persuade them by saying: "We tell them they will not face any problems, nor will their children. We tell them to observe if these children do anything or not" (M3).

The principals all concurred that although public awareness has grown, more needs to be done to educate people about children with autism. They think that to help students with autism more, everyone must have a thorough understanding of the behaviour patterns, difficulties, and strengths of students with autism. The principal further asserted that the level of comprehension required to support them is completely insufficient, as illustrated in the next comment:

"If I want to merge with him, then I need to have a clear picture of autism in my brain. What is inside of him? What is his behaviour? I also need to have a clear concept of autism. But this sort of concept is not sufficient for me or the teachers" (M3).

All of the principals responded to research questions about teachers' attitudes towards and interactions with students with autism by saying that while teachers are kind, they are not trained to help children with autism. Every principal agrees that for teachers to effectively support children with autism, they require additional training and resources. The government ought to offer an opportunity to receive training. Additionally, principals emphasised the importance of ongoing professional development to ensure teachers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge. They also highlighted the need for increased funding to provide resources such as specialized materials and support staff for students with autism in schools.

6.13 SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT FROM PRINCIPALS

Following the aforementioned conversation, all principals concurred that this group of children cannot advance intellectually or socially in society without the right supplements. The principals made some recommendations based on this regarding how to enhance the circumstances for students with autism in mainstream settings. Based on their recommendations, three main areas were investigated for improvement: awareness, policy, and school-related. These are covered in more detail below. The principals all concurred that there is no purpose in maintaining students with autism in inclusive classrooms if they are not provided with sufficient resources, as they recommended: "It is better not to keep them. I think it will do them good if they choose a field in which they will develop their expertise; something like this can be constructed, as it will help them learn" (M4).

6.13.1 School-Related Suggestions

First, the principals recommended that students with autism need educational resources for better development, like educational toys, paint and pencil drawing kits, a large play area with sporting goods, computers, and so on. If they do not have these resources, they will not be motivated to attend school and learn anything, as in the example here: "The spacious playground is essential, and they (students with autism children) could benefit if they were provided with toys. Drawing kits and tools like paint and pencils should be provided" (M1).

Another example: "I think it would have helped if they had been given more tools or other things. For them to be interested in this school, they should be given an educational toy. The children will be eager to go to school because of this. If these things are there, they might want to go to school. We only have children and nothing else" (M3).

Principals recommended that textbooks, curricula, syllabuses, and electronic support be modified immediately. They contend that not all students with autism are as capable of learning as their classmates. There are several types of students with autism in the classroom. Each of them has a unique weakness and strength. They are also unable to learn in the same environment as their peers. Since students with autism learn best visually, principals have observed that picture books are vital for their education and have made a strong demand for them. Subsequently, they proposed altering the course material and syllabus in conjunction with their strengths in contrast to their neurotypical classmates, see comment below:

"They do like picture-attached books, and sometimes students with autism can have problems with their eyes. The fonts of the words in the book are small, so if they are enlarged enough, there could be scope to colour the pictures as well. In their classes, multimedia can be used, and I believe it will be a lot better" (M1).

In addition, all principals think that this strategy is advantageous for neurotypical classmates as well. They also said they (students with autism children) require a different syllabus that will fulfil their needs and be up to their limits. The syllabus must be made according to their demands.

Every principal proposed a slight enhancement to the infrastructure standards as well. They believe that for all children to see properly during classes or to understand what teachers are writing on the board, the seating arrangements in the classroom should be adjusted, for example: "If our school could transform their classrooms into cinema halls where the children at the back can see, due to the raising of the benches using a stair-like system, the further back you go, the higher the seats will be. Then even the children in the back would be able to see the lectures properly. This is a way for them to benefit" (M2). Many children diagnosed with autism often have other physical or co-occurring conditions, such as hand or leg irregularities, cognitive challenges, or hearing losses. They require additional accommodations or assistance, such as a wheelchair, a ramp, spectacles, hearing aids, etc.

In terms of professional support, one principal (M2) said "When an expert works, according to his needs, to find his expertness out, then if he is aided in that direction, it will be better for them". Consequently, this Principal proposed the hiring of a special assistant with expertise in special education who can recognize the requirements of children with special needs and tailor help accordingly, like certified special teachers, saying, a special assistant is needed for students with autism child (M1 to M4).

The principal went on to say that this specific set of children also needs therapy, and that's why schools should have this kind of facility where children can go to get professional advice about whatever problems they're having. These children can grow when they get professional therapy, such as speech, occupational, and counselling. Long-term, it would have been advantageous. There are limitations; teachers cannot meet every requirement of children.

The following comment demonstrates how beneficial it will be to create an educational plan that works for students with autism if a professional therapist, or therapist, spends a month visiting various schools. By observing different teaching methods and environments, therapists can tailor educational plans to meet the unique needs of children with autism. This personalized approach can lead to improved academic performance, social skills development, and overall well-being for these students. Every principal recommended adding a teacher to the classroom. "If I had a teacher who was well-trained, then it would have been helpful. I think one or two teachers are enough for this. They can also aid these autistic children in getting ahead in their studies during class time; that's what I think" (M3), and "autistic children with more challenges may improve after therapy, and that is better" (M1). All principals recommended adding one or two more teachers to the classroom in addition to the paraprofessionals so that teachers would have adequate time to teach these children.

Furthermore, every principal stressed the importance of teacher preparation. They made it clear that "training is a must". Teachers must receive training to be prepared to work with these children who have autism. One principal recommended that the school hold more workshops and training sessions.

6.13.2 Policy-Related Suggestions

Every Principal seemed to agree that since the government runs their school, the government ought to provide the training. Occasionally, one or more orientations take place in a single day. However, that is insufficient to dispel uncertainty on the issue: "A substantial amount of time is required for this"(M1). They therefore recommended that the government offer training for a minimum of five to seven days.

Some went on to say that policies should have explicit guidelines for training children with special needs. Bengali and English should be the two languages used for the instruction. They also said that for teachers and other authorized personnel to properly understand the issue, there should be sufficient opportunities for gaining practical experience in addition to theoretical understanding. It implies that teachers will not be aware of a child's behaviour even after learning about autism if they do not visit the classroom to interact with the children. Thus, the training guide also requires practical experience.

Another principal (M2) stressed that everyone who works with children with autism, including themselves, needed to receive training, assuming that it can raise awareness across all industries. One principal (M4) explained an experience:

"We received training to instruct children from a variety of backgrounds, such as those with autism, children of sex workers, and children of third genders. These children are all eligible for admission to elementary schools. As a result, we received instructions not to discriminate in any way. The government should make a policy to encourage the chairman, vice chairman, assistant teacher, and principal of each location to participate in the training during those three days".

The government has merely passed legislation permitting special needs children enrollment; it has not assumed any additional responsibility to support these children. Instead, the government has stated that the schools must find a way to handle this situation: "They state that we should admit the special children and try to manage somehow" (M2). This is why, according to all principals, they are unable to provide any support in managing students with autism in the classroom. Other principals (M1, M4) asserted that the government lacks a support system for children with autism, even though students with autism require additional teachers and other necessary supplies. They believed that, as a result, the government must take great care in handling these responsibilities.

The principal made another crucial recommendation to parents of children with autism. Parents should make sure their children attend school every day, according to each principal. Parents sometimes bring their students with autism once every 15 days or once a week. Autistic children need some time to get familiar with the settings. A few principals (M1, M3, and M4) wanted policies to establish strict guidelines and government assistance for all parents to guarantee that parents feel secure, comfortable, and motivated to send their children to school every day. The other principals (M1, M3) also suggested establishing stringent guidelines specifically for mothers of students with autism to prevent these mothers from receiving unfair therapy or blame from their families for having a child with autism.

6.13.3 Awareness

Every principal recommended that all individuals who are involved with students with autism take extra caution and increase their awareness of the condition. This includes teachers, therapists, and family members. By educating themselves on the unique needs of children with autism, they can provide better support and create a more inclusive environment for them. Additionally, understanding different communication styles and sensory sensitivities can greatly improve interactions with children with autism. This knowledge can lead to more effective strategies for managing behaviours and promoting their overall well-being. To increase awareness, it is also important to advocate for resources and support services for students with autism in schools and communities. By working together to create a more understanding and accommodating environment, we can help students with autism thrive and reach their full potential, a view according to all principals in this study. Furthermore, seeking guidance from professionals in the field of autism can also be beneficial in gaining a deeper understanding of how to best support children with autism.

6.13.4 Self-Contained Settings

Principals seemed to agree that both environments should be available to children with autism. By offering both when needed, self-contained and mainstream classroom options, along with proper individual educational support, schools can better cater to the autistic students. In this way, in addition to receiving training specifically designed to meet their requirements, children can engage and learn with their peers in a traditional classroom setting. It makes it possible to provide students with autism with a more comprehensive education that meets their specific learning needs as well as their social needs. This approach allows for a more inclusive educational experience, promoting social interaction and integration for children with autism. This approach also helps to foster a sense of belonging and acceptance among all students, promoting a positive and supportive learning environment.

6.13.5 Summary

This section covered the main viewpoints of the school principals on mainstream settings. Overall, all participants expressed support for mainstream settings, citing benefits such as promoting diversity and fostering a sense of community among students. However, some also raised concerns about the need for adequate resources and support to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive practices. The next chapter will offer a thorough synopsis of the viewpoints obtained from teachers, parents of students with autism children, and principals of students with autism. It will highlight the contrasts and similarities observed in mainstream settings, shedding light on the variety of viewpoints present.

7 Discussion

7.1 MAIN DISCUSSION

Bangladesh, a nation of over 165 million people, faces significant challenges in ensuring inclusion for students with autism in mainstream educational settings. While the country has made considerable strides in expanding access to primary education and improving literacy rates, integrating autistic children into general education remains fraught with obstacles. These barriers limit educational opportunities, perpetuate social exclusion, and impede the development of a truly inclusive society.

The prevalence of autism in Bangladesh is estimated to align with global rates, affecting approximately 1 in 68 children, according to various studies. However, the lack of comprehensive data collection and diagnostic infrastructure means that many autistic children remain unidentified and unsupported within the education system. This invisibility exacerbates their challenges, as teachers, administrators, and policymakers struggle to address needs they cannot fully recognize or understand.

The barriers to inclusion in mainstream schools are multifaceted, encompassing systemic, cultural, economic, and pedagogical dimensions. These challenges hinder autistic children from accessing quality education, social integration, skill development, and future independence. Understanding these barriers is crucial for designing strategies that foster inclusive educational environments capable of accommodating the diverse needs of all learners.

Since independence in 1971, Bangladesh's educational system has undergone significant transformation. The government has prioritized expanding access to primary education through initiatives such as the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP) and stipends to encourage enrollment, especially among girls and marginalized communities. Nevertheless, these initiatives have primarily focused on quantitative expansion rather than qualitative improvements or inclusive practices.

The country's educational framework is largely structured around a traditional, teacher-centered model that emphasizes rote learning and standardized assessment. While cost-effective and familiar, this model creates inherent challenges for students who learn differently, including autistic children. Large class sizes, rigid curriculum structures, and limited teacher training in special educational needs contribute to an environment that is often inhospitable to neurodivergent learners.

Recent years have seen progress in recognizing the rights of children with disabilities. The Disability Rights and Protection Act of 2013 and the National Education Policy 2010 both acknowledge the importance of inclusive education. However, a substantial gap remains between policy intentions

and ground-level implementation, with many schools lacking the resources, training, and infrastructure required to support students with diverse learning needs effectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated existing inequalities, as the shift to remote learning highlighted the digital divide and created additional challenges for autistic children, who often rely on structured, predictable environments and face-to-face interaction to thrive academically and socially.

This research aimed to understand the reasoning behind choosing mainstream settings for children with autism. Observations indicate a decrease in concerns about resource inadequacy in mainstream classrooms compared to specialized ones. Nearly all participants agreed that children requiring substantial support benefit more from specialized settings, whereas those needing minimal support derive significant advantages from mainstream education. Parents, teachers, and school principals consistently reported that autistic children with lower support requirements benefit from inclusion in general education. These findings align with prior studies by Narmunanchi and Bhargava (2011).

Johnson et al. (2018) demonstrated that children with neurodivergent conditions achieve positive academic and social outcomes in mainstream settings. The study emphasized that while mainstream classrooms enhance social integration and peer relationships, this success is contingent upon the provision of appropriate support.

Participants frequently highlighted the benefits of inclusive mainstream environments for children requiring minimal support. At the same time, they identified several challenges, including the absence of individualized education plans, insufficient teacher assistance, inadequate resources, cultural stigma, and limited understanding of factors shaping attitudes toward students with autism (Robert, 2024).

The discussion of these findings encompasses the following key themes:

- * Teacher-related theme
- * School-related theme
- * Child-related theme
- * Social acceptance
- * Awareness and advocacy
- * Policy modification
- * Self-contained classrooms
- * Cultural perspectives

Sub-Themes: Child

Behavioral Issue:

Biting, hitting, pushing, lack of attention, hyper, aggressive

Lack Of Interaction:

Isolated

Lack Of Communication:

don't play or ask to play

Lack Of Motivation:

No initiative

Lack Of Social Skills:

No friends

Lack Of Cognitive Skills:

Difficult to adapt normal functioning Skill

Nonverbal/poor verbal

Learning Disorder:

Academic Challenges (Read / write)

Some good comprehend skills

Require Special Guidance

Some Physical Disability

Visual impairment/mobility

challenges/Motor coordinator impairment

Severity Of Autism:

(Mild autism, severe)

Autism With Concurrent Disorder:

Down syndrome

ADHD

Sensory Processing Disorder

Positive Traits in Some:

Friendly Attitude

interact with others

Motivated/interacting/imitating

follow instruction

have Adapting skills

playful

take initiative to play

Sub Theme:

Being A Parent of Autistic Children:

Struggling / sufferings/ anxious

Sub -Theme:

Lack of acceptance:

Sources: School, Parents, Peers, Community, Teachers: Bully, Stigma, Neglected

Contradictory comments:

Sometimes Generous: Nice Gesture

Sub Theme:

Mainstream Vs Special Setting:

Mainstream:

More Natural/Child learn Interacting / Less Support/Untrained Teacher

Special Setting:

Trained Teacher/ More Support / Appropriate for Severe Autism / Child Learning Aggressive

Sub -Theme: School

Lack Of Resources:

Academic/ Play/ Professional: Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy/ Over Occupied Class/ No Professional Assistant/Congested Room/ Infrastructure Issue/ Lack of Personal Space for Autistic Child's Stimulation/ No Special Diet/Lack of Safety Issue/ Lack of Support for Teacher

Policy:

Lack Of Systematic Policy for Practice/Funding Issue

Administration:

Lack Of Support: Ignoring, Threatening, Irresponsible

Sub -Theme: Teacher

- ☐ Lack Of Knowledge
- ☐ Lack Of Awareness
- ☐ Lack Of Positive Attitudes
- ☐ Lack Of Support
- ☐ Lack Of Parent's Teacher Communication
- ☐ Lack Of Motivation
- ☐ Lack Of Empathy
- ☐ Lack Of Responsibility
- ☐ Lack Of Training Trained
- ☐ Lack Of Support
- ☐ Lack Of Experience
- ☐ Lack Of Acceptance
- ☐ Lack Of Special Attention
- ☐ Lack Of Parent's Teacher Communication
- ☐ Over Burden
- ☐ Contradictory Comments:
- ☐ Capable Of Learning from Experience
- ☐ Some Shows Positive Attitude

Sub Theme:

Parent's Initial Feeling:

Anxiety / Anxious/ Denial/Confusion

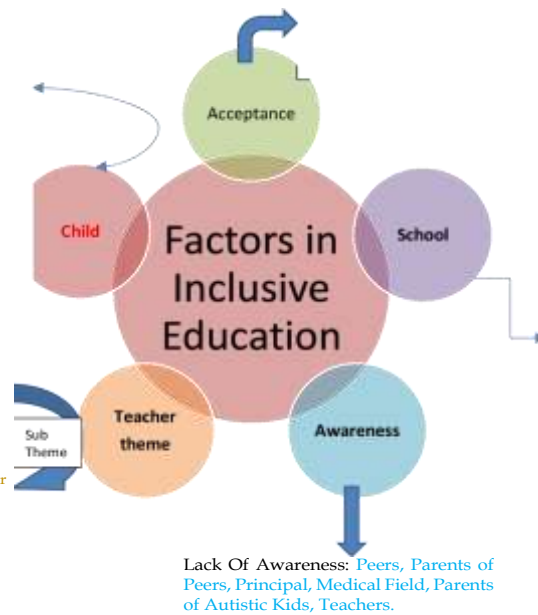


Figure 20. Teacher-Related Themes

- Recommendations:
- Specialized learning materials
 - Tailored teaching approaches
 - Individual educational need (IEP).
 - Sufficient Resources
 - Assistive technology
 - Enhance teaching training and support
 - Parents teacher collaboration
 - Collaboration with the disciplinary team
 - Peers' support and acceptance
 - Increase awareness and understanding
 - Strengthening policy
 - Self-contained classroom

Research studies have consistently demonstrated that numerous teachers perceive themselves as inadequately prepared to instruct students with autism effectively. Research by Jaffal (2022) in Saudi Arabia revealed that many teachers feel inadequately prepared to teach children with autism, while most teachers confessed to avoiding such teaching due to insufficient understanding. Johnson's (2016) study revealed that merely 20% of the interviewed teachers had undergone formal training in teaching strategies for children with autism, highlighting a considerable deficiency in knowledge and skills among teachers. These findings highlight the pervasive lack of understanding and training among teachers regarding the instruction of children with autism. Consequently, they often refrain from educating students with autism due to this lack of familiarity (McGregor & Campbell, 2001; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Senoo et al., 2026).

According to all three samples, students with autism often struggle with social interactions; they find it hard to form relationships and experience feelings of isolation or exclusion. They may also have heightened sensitivity to sensory stimuli, impacting their focus and engagement in classroom activities. Teachers must be aware of the challenges faced by students with autism and implement strategies to support their social interactions and sensory sensitivities, as a lack of support can lead to loss of confidence and disengagement. These findings align with prior research (Qorib et al., 2024).

Numerous parents of students with autism (P1, P3, P4, P6, P7) have observed that teachers' experience and expertise are crucial for maintaining positive attitudes toward students with autism in the classroom; otherwise, teachers may exhibit neglect or negative attitudes toward these children. Likewise, negative attitudes from teachers might lead students with special needs to experience feelings of neglect and stigma (Kawser et al., 2016).

Principals and numerous teachers discussed their experience and expertise in educating children with autism. T1, T2, T3, P1, and P3 contended that this knowledge shortage renders teachers more vulnerable when teaching children with autism, leading to reduced confidence. Insufficient self-efficacy in teachers can lead to negative attitudes toward children with autism, causing exclusion and misunderstanding. In Bangladesh, 89% of children with special needs face exclusion due to unwelcoming teacher responses (Tareq et al., 2012). Teacher attitudes significantly impact learning environments for children with special needs.

7.2 LACK OF TRAINING

In terms of teacher training regarding pedagogical strategies, awareness, and understanding of autism traits or any special needs children, it is either not included or receives minimal attention in addressing diverse learning needs in the classroom within the Bangladesh teacher training programme (Naznin et al., 2023; Siddik, 2025). This knowledge gap leaves teachers unprepared and less confident

when teaching autistic students in the classroom (Nuruddin et al., 2025). Without a proper understanding of autistic traits, how this group of children learns, the pedagogical strategies that need to be followed, or how their behavior and learning skills can be supported, it is very difficult for teachers—or anyone involved with these children—to teach effectively.

When teachers are not prepared, they often feel frustrated or misjudge children with autism (Rahman, 2024). Sometimes, teachers are motivated to teach autistic children, but their lack of knowledge leads them to avoid this group of students (Ahmed et al., 2025). In-service teacher training programmes in Bangladesh provide very limited opportunities or access for teachers to learn about diverse student needs (Ahmed et al., 2025). This situation poses challenges in both urban and rural areas, but it is especially concerning in rural regions (Taskin, 2025).

The ignorance of Bangladeshi teachers is a crucial factor contributing to the challenges encountered by children with autism, underscoring the necessity of teacher training and expertise in inclusive situations. This finding indicates that equipping teachers with training and assistance can significantly enhance the educational experience for students with autism (Malek, 2012; Hridi et al, 2021). Johnson et al. (2019) discovered that teachers who received special education training expressed increased confidence and competence in assisting children with autism, resulting in enhanced outcomes for both the students and the overall classroom environment.

Research suggests that teacher training is crucial for ensuring positive outcomes for students with special needs (Rahman et al, 2025). Teachers with relevant training are better equipped to handle behavior, manage classrooms, and effectively use teaching strategies (Long & Lewis, 2025). Previous studies, including those by Abeer et al (2024), highlight the importance of training teachers who work with children with autism, demonstrating that such teachers have an advantage in understanding each student's unique needs and promoting learning effectively.

One of the teachers interviewed in this research provided such an instance. For example, one participant (T1) with prior experience working with students with autism provided guidance to other teachers, demonstrating her confidence in helping them overcome obstacles. This aligns with a study by Yim (2023) & De Weerd (2024), which found that teachers with professional training have higher self-efficacy and a more cooperative nature. This focuses on the importance of collaboration in teaching. Addressing counterarguments and providing comprehensive training for teachers is crucial for effective children with autism (Folostina et al, 2022; Devi et al, 2024). This includes managing behavior, creating inclusive learning atmospheres, and implementing individualized instruction.

Positive dispositions and teacher training are essential in instructing students with special educational needs (SEN) (Kheng & Rusli, 2025). Professionally qualified teachers cultivate robust relationships, confidence, motivation, and a supportive attitude (Butnari et al, 2025). In turn, this

cultivates a respectful classroom environment, mitigates behavioral problems, and produces favorable results. Teachers must comprehend diverse methodologies for engaging with children with special educational needs (SEN) to facilitate their relaxation and adjustment (Kumar & Madhuri, 2025).

7.3 PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

All three samples agreed that teachers need practical experience while educating SEN students to adapt instructional and class management skills, foster positive attitudes, reduce anxiety, and increase motivation. Researchers from the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom underscore the importance of incorporating practical experience into teacher training programs (Karampelas, 2024). Practical experience in teacher preparation programs enhances understanding of students with special education needs, fosters empathy, and helps implement inclusive practices (Riera et al, 2023). It helps teachers manage anxiety and academic challenges and mainstream classroom adaptations (Tweedy, 2014). Practical experience enables teachers to enhance their understanding of personalized education plans (IEPs) and learn about assistive technologies for students with special needs. Integrating practical experience into teacher preparation programs helps aspiring teachers reflect on biases and assumptions about neurodiversity (Alassaf, 2025).

In Bangladesh, sometimes, teachers receive only two or three practicum sessions during training, limiting their preparation for working with SEN students in classrooms. This presents an obstacle to implementing inclusive practices in mainstream contexts, as highlighted by a teacher's study on teacher attitudes (Siddique & Kawai, 2020). Solomonidou's (2014) study in a Greek mainstream classroom on teacher attitudes revealed that academics contribute 50% of a teacher's knowledge, with classroom experience accounting for the remaining 50%.

7.4 SCHOOL-RELATED THEMES

7.4.1 Resources are scarce.

The significance of having sufficient resources in mainstream settings to meet the needs of autistic children was emphasized in all three sample responses. Nearly all participants believe that students with autism may not receive the assistance they need to succeed in mainstream environments if resources are insufficient. Communities and schools must prioritize providing these children with the tools and support necessary to thrive.

A study (Mehtab, 2014) found that teachers and parents of children with special needs are concerned about the lack of resources in mainstream classrooms and the importance of smaller teacher-student ratios in addressing individual educational plans for these students. Kabir and Akter's (2014)

study contacted 200 parents of children with special needs, revealing a significant demand for picture-based books and reduced class sizes among respondents. There is a broad consensus regarding the significance of modest teacher-student ratios, as they allow teachers to provide increased attention and develop individualised educational programs for students with special needs (Jaswandi & Kurniawati, 2023).

Resource limitations extend to educational materials and assistive technologies (Karki et al., 2024). Schools often lack access to visual supports, communication aids, sensory tools, or other resources that could help autistic students access the curriculum more effectively (Macoskey, 2023). The absence of these basic supports means that even well-intentioned teachers struggle to implement effective accommodations.

Physical infrastructure also presents barriers (Liban & bin Ahsan, 2024). Many school buildings lack proper lighting, acoustics, or ventilation, creating sensory environments that can be distressing for autistic students (Rahman & Alam, 2025). The absence of quiet spaces where students can retreat when overwhelmed, or specialized areas for therapeutic activities, limits schools' ability to support students with sensory processing differences (Mowell et al., 2023).

7.4.2 Limited Family and Community Support Systems

In Bangladesh, cultural factors also play a vital role when a family has children with autism or other special needs (Uddin & Ashrafun, 2023). Mothers of autistic children have very limited ability to participate in their children's support system at school or within the family (Shajahan, 2024). Similarly, many fathers of autistic children play a minimal role and have less involvement in supporting them (Islam, 2024). Most families in Bangladesh are extended families, and many hold highly stigmatizing beliefs about autism, which create additional stress for parents (Sultana et al., 2024). Discrimination, social exclusion, or negative stereotypical thoughts toward autistic children and their families can create extra burdens and tension for both the children and their families (Jerin, 2024). These attitudes may lead to increased misunderstanding and rejection not only in schools, workplaces, and social circles but also in other areas of life (Haque & Kabir, 2022).

7.5 PRINCIPAL

Parents also discussed their engagements with the school's principal. Many principals were even more depressing than teachers, they said. A parent described a situation where a school denied their child admission on the grounds of special needs, even though their child met all academic requirements. Another parent recounted the principal's apparent lack of interest in facilitating their

child's inclusion and his reluctance to help when asked for assistance. These specific instances highlight the negative views of principals regarding inclusiveness and reinforce the claim that the parents involved believed that the principal's lack of support and comprehension obstructed their child's education.

The investigation of parents of children with autism, which corroborated numerous previous studies (Rice et al, 2023), highlighted the principal's uncooperative and negative disposition, along with a lack of self-motivation to effectuate change or facilitate inclusion. Additional Bangladeshi previous studies (Ahmed et al, 2025; Hussain et al, 2025) corroborated this conclusion. Moreover, teacher samples and previous literature reviews indicate that the primary barrier to inclusion in Bangladesh is insufficient support from school principals and negative attitudes (Rahman & Conn, 2020; Sarkar et al, 2023). Coupled with a lack of teaching resources and training necessary for instructing students with disabilities (Tareq, Deepler, 2012), principals' negative attitudes towards inclusion can hinder the inclusion process within the school system, leaving teachers feeling unsupported and lacking necessary resources, necessitating an urgent need to address these negative attitudes (White, 2018; Uddin et al, 2023).

Researchers have extensively studied the numerous reasons behind the historically unfavorable views of principals. Some principals assert that admitting students with special needs could affect the school's standing (Mathur & Koradia, 2018). Additionally, the government lacks trained teachers, appropriate educational resources, and professional support for children with special needs, leading to feelings of helplessness and reduced confidence. (Kamran et al, 2023; Ahsan, 2006; Solomonidou 2014). It revealed commonalities in the principals' statements. It demonstrates that numerous principals become impotent when confronted with these issues, losing the impetus to implement inclusive procedures.

It can be assumed that without the support of principals, teachers may struggle to meet diverse needs and may feel overwhelmed. Lack of support can lead to a negative school climate and hinder the success of inclusion efforts (Johansson, 2016; Rice et al, 2023).

7.6 PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

The parents' remarks highlight the inadequate communication between parents and teachers. This finding, consistent with other research (Griffin, 2014; Sarkar et al, 2023 ; Siddik et al , 2023), indicates that numerous schools in Bangladesh fail to engage parents in extracurricular and academic activities, volunteer opportunities, or advancements pertaining to their children's education.

Studies show that collaboration between parents and teachers is crucial for children with special educational needs, leading to improved academic performance, better grades, and improved

behaviour, ultimately resulting in happier lives (Kharom & Aktar, 2022). Smith et al. (2016) found that children with special education needs who received collaborative support from parents and teachers experienced higher self-esteem and overall well-being. Teachers can better support students with autism by consulting parents before developing interventions, fostering inclusive environments, and understanding fundamental issues to mitigate behavioral, social, and academic challenges (Paraskevi, 2021).

A possible counterargument is that logistical challenges, such as competing schedules or language barriers, may make it more difficult to foster collaboration between parents and instructors. Martinez et al. (2019) suggest that schools can improve communication between parents and teachers by offering flexible platforms and training programs, thereby fostering a more conducive environment for collaboration.

7.6.1 Child-related theme

All three samples argued that autistic children have different ways of communicating with other people due to their differences in social and cognitive development. Without proper training, individuals working with autistic children might misunderstand these differences. Therefore, I felt the need to ask all participants about their understanding of the nature of autistic children in the classroom. Many children with autism may display different ways of connecting with others, which might cause lots of confusion if their traits are not well understood (Iqbal et al, 2023). Due to a lack of knowledge about their traits, they might not get proper support. These groups of students must receive knowledge-based support and a proper understanding of their autistic traits to avoid further confusion (LaRoche et al , 2022; Abda, 2022).

Additionally, almost all participants noted students with autism often face both language and interaction challenges, leading to disinterest in peer interaction. They sometimes behave differently due to their social understanding of other neurotypical peers, and struggle with understanding and expressing emotions, leading to social communication difficulties and feelings of isolation. Overall, participant responses align with the research. Students with autism exhibit lessened communication skills, hindering their capacity to engage with peers or accurately express their intentions (McLean, 2021).

According to Feldman et al (2022), peer rejection negatively impacts students with autism students' social skills, mental health, self-esteem, academic development, motivation, performance, loneliness, isolation, and school dropout rates. Adolescents lacking social skills and empathy may face difficulties in forming meaningful connections and managing social settings throughout their lives.

It is essential to recognise that although several students with autism encounter challenges in comprehending social signs and participating in significant interactions, some persons with autism

may demonstrate exceptional abilities in specific domains, such as visual processing. In this study, a number of principals (M1, M3), teachers (T1, T3, T6, T7), and parents (P1, P2, P4, P5) mentioned this.

A study by Thompson et al. (2019) indicated that some students with autism exhibit superior capabilities in visual information processing. It is essential to address the challenges faced by most students with autism and provide support and guidance to help them overcome these difficulties. This may ultimately lead to improved quality of life and increased opportunities for success. According to Monson (2017), visual communication is effective for comprehension, learning, and retention of knowledge, so teachers should use implicit communication strategies like tailoring instructions, breaking phrases, slowing down, and using visual cues. All of the samples agreed that visual instruction helps students with autism understand concepts more accurately.

7.7 ACCEPTANCE

All parents of students with autism report that they frequently experience discrimination and stigma due to the use of derogatory language in educational settings, which prevents these children from receiving an inclusive education and integrating into society. Amin (2015) asserts that individuals with special needs in Bangladesh experience a very questionable and derogatory approach from other individuals, with the government using pejorative language to describe them. Sani (2015) asserts that the government rarely refers to children with special needs by their actual names, instead identifying them by their disabilities in an unrefined and harsh manner. Research indicates that in Bangladesh, parents of children with special needs often face stigmatization and neglect from both their communities and educational institutions (Islam, 2019).

Research indicates that cultural themes, especially associated stigmas, represent significant barriers to the education of students with autism in mainstream environments. Many parents may reconsider enrolling their children in school due to the related embarrassment, discrimination, and prejudice (Mathur & Koradia, 2018). It is indisputable that numerous private organisations, workshops, and seminars in Bangladesh are enhancing public awareness of autism (Higginson, 2023). For example, the Bangladesh Autism Foundation and ABC Autism Care are conducting workshops and seminars to raise awareness about autism in the country.

Moreover, in 2011, the World Health Organisation, Autism Speaks, and the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) hosted a major international conference on autism and NDD in Dhaka. In addition to other laws like the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2013, Bangladesh's National Steering Committee for Autism and NDD (NSCAND) established "Bolte Chai" and "Autism Batra" in 2012. These programs provide parents with information and support, empowering them to make informed decisions about their child's education (ASMR, 2024).

The three samples all indicated that students with autism face significant bullying from peers, consistent with Cook et al.'s (2016) research which revealed that bullies primarily target children with special educational needs. Research by Cappadocia et al. (2012) indicates that students with autism are considerably more susceptible to bullying than their neurotypical counterparts. Other research, which examined a substantial sample of the general populace, indicated that students with autism endure elevated incidences of verbal and social bullying, including name-calling, rumour dissemination, and intentional social exclusion (Wang & Susumus, 2024).

Teachers often struggle to identify and address bullying, which can hinder support for students with special needs. To combat bullying, teachers should foster acceptance and empathy, avoid defensive postures, and address the emotional impact. Implementing comprehensive anti-bullying initiatives, including education for teachers, students, parents, and children with special needs, as well as peer mentoring strategies, can significantly reduce bullying incidents (Hebron et al, 2015).

7.8 LACK OF AWARENESS

One of the most significant barriers facing autistic children in Bangladesh's mainstream schools is the widespread lack of awareness and understanding of autism among educators, administrators, and the broader school community. Several parents of students with autism (P1, P2, P6, P8) failed to recognize the difficulties their children face because they thought their inappropriate behaviour was typical for their age group.

Parents of students with autism may experience feelings of shame, reluctance, and anxiety, leading to misunderstandings, increased stress, and heightened anxiety that may cause withdrawal or high expectations for teachers. Similarities have been revealed in the perspectives of parents, as reported by Kawser et al. (2016) and Bashir et al. (2014). Parents who have received autism training are more likely to collaborate with school staff, apply appropriate behavioural care, and employ effective communication strategies, according to a different Smith et al. (2019). According to research by Azano et al (2017), Khanom & Aktar (2022), and Rohwer (2024), everyone who is directly or indirectly involved in the academic and social development of students with autism should be aware of these children's characteristics and receive the necessary training to effectively support their needs.

According to research, autism-trained teachers better meet student needs and create inclusive learning environments; additionally, aware peers promote positive social relationships with classmates with autism. Understanding autism helps teachers support students with autism children's academic and social development, promoting academic success, social inclusion, and acceptance (Rahman & Conn, 2020).

Every principal discussed the issue of inadequate funding (Yazıcıoğlu, 2021). It is thus reasonable to assume that many schools do not have the funding to recruit outside trainers or to give their employees continual training. Implementing the required training programs may also be challenging due to funding issues, which need to be addressed.

7.9 POLICY ISSUE

The principals' sample revealed a policy-related issue: despite numerous policies, the educational research community lacks the necessary input for successful inclusive classroom practices. This absence is similar to that found by previous studies (Malek et al., 2013), thus suggesting a need for collaboration and further research to ensure the effective implementation of inclusive practices. The lack of clear policies and training for teachers on inclusive education practices can exacerbate implementation issues, making it challenging for teachers to meet diverse student needs and establish an inclusive learning environment (Obaydullah & Amran, 2019). For example, a recent law requires educational institutions to offer assistive technology and physical accommodations such as ramps to students with disabilities. However, it is unclear how many schools have implemented these changes and what effect they've had on including children with disabilities (Mukhtarly et al, 2025).

The focus on exam achievement often overlooks the diverse needs and abilities of students, hindering their overall development. Teachers should have autonomy and flexibility to tailor teaching methods. Many parents in this research appear to share the belief that their students with autism are merely awaiting the opportunity to pass the test without acquiring any knowledge (Uithayakumar & Rabi, 2020).

The policy texts for the Bangladeshi IE environment are low-leverage instruments that emphasise external change—how things appear—and focus on intrinsic change (how things function). This means that whilst these restrictions may have had an influence, they may not necessarily change behaviour or cognitive processes (Malek et al., 2013). To effectively support inclusive education in Bangladeshi schools, it is therefore crucial to focus on developing a welcoming and inclusive school culture, providing teachers with professional development opportunities, and involving parents as well as other community members in the process to foster acceptance and belonging among students (Understanding Autism, 2025).

7.10 SELF-CONTAINED SETTINGS

Autistic people are neurodivergent with a different series of challenges and talents. All participants agreed that it might not be appropriate for students with autism to be fully involved until

they are not ready and adequately supported in mainstream education due to their unique sensory differences and social communication understanding. For many students with autism, individualised attention and smaller class sizes are necessary due to their sensory differences. Many participants emphasized the partially self-contained setting with mainstream so that their children are not overwhelmed.

To create an inclusive and productive learning environment, it is critical to assess each child's learning style and ensure that they receive the support and resources necessary for their academic performance and general development (Islam, 2019). Since inclusive environments are helpful for children with disabilities, it is crucial to include all children in them. Nevertheless, a significant percentage of special needs children drop out of school (Rahman & Conn, 2020). This is why schools must be prepared to educate so that they can reach their full potential. first. Individualised education plans, specialised support services, and ongoing communication with parents and carers can achieve this.

7.11 CULTURAL STIGMA FOR AUTISM

Bangladesh is a South Asian nation that is deeply rooted in cultural dominance, a lack of awareness, religious interpretations, misbeliefs, and socio-economic differences (Hashmi et al., 2022). It is important to develop a theoretical framework that will address these challenges in order to implement successful inclusive practices (Rahman et al., 2024). This framework can help create a platform where cultural sensitivity and fundamental rights for autism are honoured simultaneously.

In Bangladesh, it is said that the rate of autistic children is 1 in 68 children, although this rate is not accurate due to a lack of sufficient data (Akhter et al., 2025). This is because most autistic children in Bangladesh are underdiagnosed and marginalised within their own communities (Begum et al., 2023). This was confirmed in Section 5.3 by parents of autistic children. According to many parents of autistic children in Section 5.7.3, people view them as a source of shame, a punishment from God (not my perspective, but a societal view in Bangladesh) due to parents' sins, or as a threat and burden to society (Ashrafun et al., 2025). This cultural stigma not only creates barriers for children with autism but also affects their whole family, placing them in a shameful and vulnerable situation (Uddin et al., 2023).

Bangladesh is an Islam-dominated country (Alam & Miah, 2024), and this has a significant impact on how autism is viewed. These religious ideas can create deep feelings of guilt and shame for parents, who might blame themselves or feel punished for past sins (Uddin et al., 2023; Jegatheesan et al., 2010). Religious leaders and scholars are very important in shaping how communities perceive this issue, and they can become strong supporters of acceptance if they are properly engaged, educated

about autism, and supported (Parveen et al., 2025; Chowdhury et al., 2025). This is further confirmed by teacher P3 in Section 5.8.9, who mentioned that religious leaders in the Bangladeshi context can create awareness among people.

7.12 FAMILY HONOR AND SOCIAL STANDING

In Bangladesh, family honour is deeply culturally rooted. Families with a child who has autism may feel ashamed and believe they are losing honour in front of others (Uddin et al., 2023; Begum, 2023; Khan, 2025; Naomi, 2024). Additionally, most people in Bangladesh live in extended or joint families, where many relatives reside together (Wohid et al., 2024). Therefore, decisions regarding therapy, diagnosis, and perspectives concerning individuals with autism come from multiple viewpoints, which can cause significant stress for parents. In Bangladesh, marriage is highly valued culturally (Mahmudulhassan et al., 2024). However, arranged marriages often depend on family reputation and honour when choosing a partner (Islam & Khatun, 2024).

7.13 INADEQUATE DIAGNOSTIC AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Almost all parents of autistic children stated in this research that the support systems surrounding autistic children in Bangladesh are often inadequate, creating additional barriers to successful inclusion in mainstream settings. Many families lack access to information about autism, early intervention services, or advocacy resources, leaving them unprepared to support their children's educational needs effectively. The absence of comprehensive public services means that families must often choose between basic necessities and therapeutic support for their autistic children (Jahangir et al., 2024; Mallick & Begum, 2023).

According to many parents in this research and previous studies, the shortage of qualified professionals who can diagnose autism and provide ongoing support services creates significant barriers to appropriate educational placement and intervention. Bangladesh has very few developmental paediatricians, child psychologists, or other specialists trained in autism assessment, particularly outside major urban centres (Pervin & Hagmayer, 2022).

This diagnostic gap means that many autistic children remain unidentified, preventing them from receiving appropriate educational accommodations or support services. Even when autism is suspected, families may face long waiting lists, high costs, or geographic barriers to accessing diagnostic services. The lack of early identification and intervention can result in missed opportunities for skill development and increased challenges in school settings (Tollan et al., 2023; Burkett et al., 2025). The absence of ongoing support services compounds these challenges. Even when autistic children are identified, schools often lack access to consultation from specialists who could help develop

appropriate educational plans, provide teacher training, or offer direct services to students (Punzalan et al., 2025; Ciurana et al., 2025). This isolation leaves teachers and families to navigate complex challenges without expert guidance or support (Liu et al., 2026).

The limited availability of therapeutic services, such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, or behavioural intervention, means that autistic children may not receive the support they need to develop communication skills, manage sensory challenges, or learn appropriate social behaviours. These skill deficits can create additional barriers to success in mainstream educational settings (Sivapalan et al., 2026; Syriopoulou et al., 2026).

Avramidis et al. (2000), Emam & Kazem (2014), and Smeets (2009) indicate that students with autism may display unique social and communicative difficulties. These children may require support from counsellors, occupational therapists, speech therapists, teaching assistants, or special education teachers. A considerable number of parents, along with principals and teachers, recognised the necessity of providing children with additional professional assistance. All three samples concurred on this point (Rahman & Hasan, 2025).

Ahmed & Islam (2026) emphasise the disadvantage faced by the majority of Bangladeshi children with special education needs (SEN), who struggle due to a lack of professional support services in mainstream settings. Malek Pervin (2014) discovered that professional assistance in affluent nations such as the USA, Canada, and Australia facilitates the development of communication and social skills in children with autism. Research has also demonstrated its ability to alleviate the burden on teachers and promote inclusive practices within the classroom (Higginson, 2023).

8 Conclusion

Bangladesh requires a nuanced understanding of how inclusion should be practised and implemented within the existing cultural framework to create true inclusion. The inclusion model in Bangladesh should be based on awareness of cultural thought, the nature of society, community perspectives, and the honour of family values. This means that when discussing inclusion, successful inclusion must be addressed not only by supporting the autistic child but also by incorporating family values and cultural perspectives, including engaging with community leaders and integrating local customs that promote acceptance and understanding of autism. Since Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority country, a religious model can be used to promote inclusion for autistic children. Through Islamic teachings about compassion, acceptance, and support for autistic children, a crucial role can be played in reframing autism within positive cultural and religious narratives.

8.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The research highlights the importance of personalized education programs for students with autism for both the academic and social success of children with autism. It advocates for continuous support and training for teachers and school personnel in order to create an inclusive environment. Schools should allocate resources for professional development to improve understanding of autism and effective strategies for assisting children with autism. Cooperation among parents, teachers, and experts is crucial for the successful implementation of individualised education programs. Policymakers should prioritize financial assistance for resources and programs addressing students with autism specific needs in educational institutions. NGOs and advocacy organisations play a crucial role in raising awareness of autism and advocating for students with autism rights. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders can establish a more inclusive and equitable educational system. We should establish self-contained classroom practices to provide specialised assistance for children with autism. Teachers' continuous professional development on optimal strategies for assisting students with autism can significantly improve educational quality in schools.



Figure 21. Empirical Framework: Factors in Inclusive Education in Bangladesh

Figure 21 above illustrates an empirical framework for the inclusion of students with autism in Bangladesh's educational system. This research studied eight domains: policy, awareness, acceptability, and lack of knowledge on traits of autistic children, culture, schools, teachers, and principals. I

proposed recommendations based on these characteristics to improve the inclusion of students with autism in mainstream settings in Bangladesh. These proposals seek to improve policy execution, elevate understanding and acceptance, and provide assistance to children with autism, students, teachers, and school principals to foster a more inclusive educational atmosphere.

The policy encompasses curriculum, textbooks, examination materials, teacher training programs, collaborative initiatives, parental engagement techniques, limited training opportunities, and financial shortfalls. The lack of policy execution has resulted in disparities in educational standards across various areas, impeding the overall quality of education throughout the nation. Furthermore, it has led to a deficiency in accountability and transparency within the school system, complicating the tracking of progress and the implementation of essential adjustments.

All interviewees indicated a lack of understanding among instructors, parents of children with autism, principals, and classmates. My research has held teachers, parents, classmates, principals, the community, and the government accountable for the deficiency in acceptance. The absence of understanding and acceptance may result in the stigmatization and exclusion of students with autism in educational environments.

This research expressed significant concerns about teacher-related difficulties, which included insufficient knowledge, negative attitudes, lack of acceptability, and poor training. This can lead to frustration and hinder the learning process of students, ultimately creating a negative atmosphere in the classroom. Moreover, teacher-related factors may influence teacher retention rates and overall school efficacy.

School-related challenges include a deficiency in academic resources, a lack of professional resources, infrastructural inadequacies, and a paucity of training possibilities that need substantial improvement. Resolving these challenges is essential for establishing a positive and supportive educational atmosphere for both students and teachers.

The identified principal-related difficulties include unfavourable attitudes, a lack of acceptability, insufficient knowledge, and inadequate training, all of which require improvement. Such negative factors may create barriers to effective school leadership and hinder the general operation of the educational institution. By addressing these issues through targeted professional development and support, principals can more efficiently accomplish their duties and improve student outcomes.

Many autistic children may experience difficulties in various areas of development, including cognitive deficits, behavioural challenges, or physical disabilities. It does not imply that these children are incapable of completing their daily assignments; rather, it means that the school should adapt to their individual learning preferences and offer the right kind of assistance to ensure their success.

Based on the above factors, I suggest several recommendations for improving inclusive educational practices, to include: increasing funding for resources, improving school infrastructure, providing more training for teachers, and creating personalized support plans (IEPs) for children with autism. Besides, consistent communication and cooperation among teachers, parents, and experts are crucial for establishing a comprehensive support system for children with disabilities in self-contained classrooms. This research also highlights peer training, which can enhance inclusion and support for students with autism in the mainstream classroom environment.

In Bangladesh, more research should be done on autism, and programs should be started to teach people about the reasons, signs, and tools that are available for people with autism and their families. Such projects can help get rid of the stigma surrounding autism in Bangladesh and make it easier for people with autism to be accepted and get help. A lot of the participants who took part in this research also said that some doctors don't know how to screen for autism and that there are no stimulation rooms for students with autism to use while they wait for medical help. What this shows is how important it is to give healthcare workers better training and make hospital surroundings more sensory-friendly.

It's not enough to just set up models for putting methods into action; the system needs to be watched over all the time. This means checking in on support services on a daily basis and getting feedback to make sure they are working well and meeting the needs of people with autism. We can better help people with autism in Bangladesh deal with the unique problems they face by constantly reviewing and improving the system. This proactive method not only encourages everyone to feel welcome, but it also gives people and their families the tools they need to be more involved in their neighbourhoods. We can make a long-lasting support system that improves the quality of life for people with autism by forming relationships with neighbourhood groups and organisations.

The research is unique as it further substantiates and enriches the results with suggestions derived from three samples. My research provides a comprehensive strategy for enhancing educational achievements for students with autism by integrating diverse viewpoints and experiences. This research aimed to encompass all relevant aspects, such as schools, teachers, children, policies, acceptance, and awareness, thereby ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential for advancing inclusion.

This research focused on self-contained classrooms, where students with autism receive individualized educational plans and simultaneously participate in mainstream educational settings to enhance their learning capacity and social integration. This dual approach may provide a comprehensive educational experience that addresses the varied requirements of students with autism and cultivates a feeling of belonging within the school community.

This leads to the following recommendations:

- Tailored Teaching Approaches
- Enhance teaching, training, and support
- Teacher Training and Capacity Building
- Specialized learning materials
- Assistive technology
- Individual educational program (IEP)
- Sufficient Resources
- Accommodations and Modifications
- Parents teacher collaboration
- Collaboration with the disciplinary team
- Peers' support and acceptance
- Increase awareness and understanding
- Self-contained classroom
- Diagnostic and Support Services
- Theoretical model for the modification of cultural beliefs
- Monitoring and Evaluation Systems
- Strengthening policy

Each of the above recommendations is described in detail below.

8.1.1 Introduction

Before integrating students with autism into the classroom, there are several things we should establish in the school culture. In the absence of this, students with autism may not obtain the necessary assistance and comprehension required for their successful integration into a regular school environment. It is crucial to impart knowledge about autism to teachers, staff, and students, foster acceptance and inclusion, and ensure the provision of essential resources and accommodations. This section will outline precise approaches for establishing a conducive environment for students with autism in the classroom. By using these strategies, we can assure that all children, irrespective of their neurodiversity, have the chance to acquire knowledge and thrive in a hospitable and all-encompassing school environment.

8.1.2 Tailored Teaching Approaches

When instructing children with autism, teachers should customize their instructional approaches to suit the specific requirements of each student. Instructing students with autism necessitates the qualities of patience, adaptability, and a profound comprehension of their distinct

learning modalities. Creating a friendly and inclusive learning environment is crucial for promoting the social, emotional, and academic development of students. This section will explore strategies for teachers to provide effective support for students with autism in the classroom.

8.1.3 Enhanced Teacher Training and Support

Bangladesh's school system recognizes the need for inclusive education and has been implementing a consolidated pre-service teacher training curriculum since 2009. Nevertheless, the current curriculum in teacher education is deficient in terms of inclusivity, leading to a shortage of 2,000 academic credits and 650 hours of practical vocational experience. Hence, it is imperative to revamp the current curriculum to include inclusive education (Siddik & Kawai, 2020).

Implementing inclusion in mainstream educational settings is critical for fostering a more comprehensive and efficient education system. It is critical to enhance teachers' ability to deliver training and encourage inclusive practices in teacher education. It is essential to close the divide between the development of inclusive education policy and its execution. Conventional teachers need to enhance their knowledge, abilities, and comprehension of inclusive education by engaging in collaborative learning and collaborative inquiry concepts. This will finally facilitate a transformation in the methods of teachers and enhance overall education (Raemae et al, 2019).

Inclusive education is an essential component of the educational system to offer a high-quality education to all students, including those with neurodiversity. The government bears the responsibility of overhauling teacher education, with a specific emphasis on implementing inclusive policies. Improving teacher training and support is a crucial approach to addressing obstacles to inclusive education in Bangladesh. This technique has the potential to fulfil the criteria outlined in the United Nations Articles and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (Situation analysis of the right of person with disability in Bangladesh, 2022).

Education professionals play a crucial role in creating inclusive classrooms that offer essential assistance and resources to all students, irrespective of their abilities. This includes instruction on inclusive pedagogical approaches, the use of assistive technologies, and comprehension of the distinct requirements associated with various situations. Regular assessment and surveillance of inclusive education programs are crucial in guaranteeing their ability to effectively overcome cultural and social obstacles, promoting an education system that embraces and appreciates the variety of all students (Assistive technology for children's disabilities, 2015).

8.1.4 Specialized Learning Materials

Various pedagogical approaches are being employed to cater to the needs of students with autism and enhance their learning outcomes. Therefore, students with autism exhibit positive reactions

to educational programs that are well organized and utilize visual elements. Structured education uses visual aids such as visual schedules, cues, and prompts to facilitate comprehension and attention to expectations for children with autism. Additionally, the use of visual schedules can help to decrease anxiety and prevent meltdowns, while incorporating special interests into lessons can promote attention and motivation (The Little Book of autism resources, 2021).

Specialized learning materials refer to instructional content specifically created to facilitate the growth of skills for a certain group of pupils, with a special focus on children with autism. These materials are tailored to accommodate their learning styles, interests, and pace, enabling them to learn at their preferred speed. Interactive software equipped with both voice and text outputs enables students with autism to have control over presentation and reading duration, as well as the ability to select between audio and text options. The Lovaas Institute for Early Intervention uses ABA principles to teach children with autism, emphasizing the use of visual prompts like sign language, token rewards, and schedules to enhance their learning and cater to their individualized educational needs (Adkins, 2022).

Research has demonstrated that the implementation of visual timetables is effective in reducing the time it takes for students with autism to transition between tasks and in mitigating negative behaviours associated with transitions. Visual countdown calendars help students with autism understand and transition to new activities or events, reducing anxiety levels. They help maintain order in their day and teach acceptable behaviours. Predictability and consistency make appropriate transitions between people, places, or activities. Visual schedules should be used alongside other interventions and teaching strategies to help children make sense of their environment (Higginson, 2023).

8.1.5 Assistive Technology

Active involvement in the education system is critical for revising and rediscovering innovative practices in special education and mainstream settings. This includes improving teacher quality and modernizing the teacher education system. New initiatives and research into the effectiveness of modern technology within special education can help strengthen inclusive education implementation.

Technology has become a crucial tool in education, particularly for students with autism students. It aids in communication and language understanding, providing a means for skill development and self-reliance. Programs like "First Then Visual Schedule," "Proloquo2Go," "I Communicate," "Visual Lessons for Autism," and Board Maker are examples of technology that can help students with autism learn and communicate effectively. Social media and video modelling can also be used to promote self-reliance.

Technology can tap into areas of expertise enjoyed by these individuals, reducing the risk of teasing and harassment. By integrating technology, the chances of success increase for children with high-functioning autism who may struggle with navigating computers (Assistive technology for children disabilities, 2015).

8.1.6 Individualized educational program

In Bangladesh, the "Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (SEN) Act" requires reasonable accommodations and adaptations for pupils with special education requirements, including those with autism (Special Education Need and Disability (SEND) framework, 2022). This involves developing an individualized education program (IEP) for every child with autism. The IEP serves as a structure for teachers, parents, and support providers to address the unique educational requirements of the child by implementing the necessary adjustments and changes. For example, an accommodation or modification that is suitable for a child with low support needed autism may not be suitable for a child with high support need autism (Kaffemaniene et al, 2021). This approach should encompass the development of the student's cognitive, social, emotional, and functional abilities.

Teachers should modify classroom instructions by employing strategies such as task breakdown, offering additional organizational frameworks, utilizing visual aids and technological tools, establishing explicit and consistent expectations, and reducing environmental distractions. Gradually, the teacher will collect data about the student's progress and preferences to adapt and personalize teaching methods (Rahman & Conn, 2020).

8.1.7 Allocating Sufficient Resources

It is critical to provide educational and professional resources in mainstream settings when teaching people with autism. In Bangladesh, the allocation of sufficient resources is a challenge that both the government and many NGOs face (Amin, 2015). Sufficient resources encompass more than just funding; they also include human and material resources. We should allocate funding for a comprehensive approach that prioritizes staff training, curriculum adaptation, and the enhancement of the learning environment (Kaffemaniene et al, 2021). It would be more beneficial to allocate resources towards forward-thinking strategies and real long-term sustainable development for education rather than attempting to meet immediate demands. On the other hand, in areas with no provisions or support for children with disabilities, there are real concerns about whether an inclusive model would work. For example, in rural and remote areas, there can be little or no supportive infrastructure or specialist help.

8.1.8 Accommodations and Modifications

The legal framework in Bangladesh is crucial for the effective implementation of special education within the education system. It requires a comprehensive review of existing policies, regulations, and action plans to ensure inclusiveness and effective teaching.

The rigid curriculum and assessment systems that currently characterize Bangladesh's education system need to be modified to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities (Aman, 2024; Bashir, 2024). The development of individualized education plans (IEPs) for autistic students would ensure that their specific needs are addressed systematically (Findley et al., 2022). Alternative assessment methods should be developed and implemented to allow autistic students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in ways that align with their strengths and abilities. This could include portfolio assessments, project-based evaluations, or modified testing conditions (Costa et al, 2023). The curriculum should be enhanced to include autism awareness and acceptance education for all students (Roberts and Webster, 2022). This would help create more inclusive school cultures and reduce bullying and discrimination against autistic students. Accommodations and modifications are required to provide equal access to educational content and learning materials, while modifications alter certain aspects of the classroom environment.

Schools need access to appropriate resources and materials to support autistic students effectively. This includes sensory tools, visual supports, communication aids, and quiet spaces where students can retreat when overwhelmed (Abraham, 2025). A national resource center could be established to develop, distribute, and maintain these materials (Kakooza-Mwesige et al, 2022). Physical infrastructure improvements should prioritize creating sensory-friendly environments with appropriate lighting, acoustics, and spatial organization (Kirk, 2025). Technology resources, including assistive communication devices and educational software designed for autistic learners, should be made available to schools (Khasawneh, 2023; Lynch et al, 2024). Training programs should be developed to help teachers effectively integrate these technologies into their instruction (Montes et al, 2023). These modifications, combined with homogeneous grouping and consistency, can help children adapt to new situations (Grandin, 2010).

There is a pressing need to address the infrastructure issue in mainstream settings, including the lack of vast play areas, sports facilities, and community centres. Not only would this encourage inhabitants to engage in physical activity and socialize with one another, but it would also enhance the overall well-being and development of the community. In addition, it is necessary to ensure adequate illumination in the classroom and appropriate seating arrangements. Furthermore, it is imperative to ensure adequate upkeep of these facilities to maintain their benefits for the community over an extended period. Sufficient financial resources and assistance from the local government will be critical to efficiently addressing these infrastructural requirements (Mallick, 2016).

8.1.9 Collaborative Efforts for Inclusion

The government should consider special budget allocations to finance the development of a new system of local educational psychologists and therapists. It is critical to provide ongoing assistance to the existing ineffective family support services in meeting their needs. The policy should prioritize the collaboration between parents and teachers to ensure that students receive constant support both at home and in the classroom. This collaboration can help the learner detect any potential issues early and foster a more unified learning environment.

8.1.9.1 Parents Teacher Collaboration

Parents and caregivers facilitate inclusive education for students with autism by developing collaborative partnerships with teachers. These partnerships include family-school collaborations, capacity-building workshops, advice, and active involvement in the design and implementation of educational strategies. Parents provide valuable insights into a student's personal history, behaviour at home, and relevant services, while teachers explain their teaching strategies. A good flow of communication aligns educational goals and generalizes learning experiences between home and school. Frequent structured communications, such as initial interviews and annual reviews, support this collaboration (Paraskevi, 2021).

Kaffemaniene et al (2021) recommends that parents communicate everything about their students with autism child, including their strengths, preferences, interests, and effective coping mechanisms. This can help teachers and therapists create more effective intervention plans that cater to the child's individual needs. School newsletters, parent information sessions, workshops, and open days can help link parents and school teams, educating them about the nature of autism and building a consistent learning environment for students with autism across different settings. Effective parent involvement significantly enhances the educational experience of children, leading to improved academic performance, better school attendance, and adaptive behavioural outcomes. However, the level of involvement depends on the unique circumstances of each students with autism child (Abbasi, 2017).

Previous research (Paraskevi, 2021) elaborates on the importance of fostering a participatory culture among parents and teacher. By integrating parents into team collaboration, “teachers and parents can create an environment where children feel understood and supported, which is crucial for their growth and learning” (Qorib et al, 2024; pg. 566). This approach not only strengthens the relevance of parents' opinions but also promotes knowledge sharing, ultimately leading to holistic and dynamic care for children with autism.

Rapid advancements in communication technology have led to a growing trend toward supporting learning and knowledge sharing through technology-mediated platforms. These platforms

provide greater accessibility, breaking down barriers due to time and geographical distances. This fosters more fluid and sustained parent involvement. However, parents should adopt ICT to their strengths and interests and evaluate any technological initiative to ensure it is in the best interest of children with special needs (Hridi et al, 2020).

8.1.10 Collaboration within Disciplinary Teams

The academic curriculum and therapeutic stakeholders play a critical role in developing an integrated support team for an students with autism child. This team is responsible for promoting coordination and accord between the child's school and other relevant professionals, such as assistant teachers, special teachers, psychologists, and therapists (Rahman & Hasan, 2025). The goal is to create a sound assessment structure that provides individualized support, focusing on the child's learning and engagement within a progressive model. Effective collaboration among team members requires special considerations, including clear guidelines for roles and responsibilities. These guidelines should outline information sharing, dispute resolution, and key elements for visitation plans. Team members can ensure efficient and effective collaboration by following these guidelines (Rohwer, 2024).

8.1.11 Peer Support and Acceptance

Classrooms are integrating students with autism through collaborative efforts, emphasizing peer acceptance. This entails recognizing and accepting one another's differences while providing each other with practical., emotional., and physical support. This method promotes independence and self-worth in children with autism, and increases good social reactions(Crompton, 2022). Teaching all students about autism and appreciating each person's individuality can promote inclusive education. Teachers can benefit from attending seminars and speeches given by local students with autism groups, as well as helping young people better understand autism. It is possible to transform mainstream education into an inclusive system that values variety and society's strengths by providing teachers and students with extensive training that builds their competence (Lishea et al, 2022).

8.1.12 Increasing awareness and understanding

Inclusion in a mainstream settings is a novel and emerging development in our country's education system for children with disabilities and learning disorders. To move forward, we must implement and operate several effective strategies. To increase awareness and understanding of inclusive education among school administrators, teachers, parents, and the community, many training programs should have been organized and made available for them. These programs aim to develop a positive attitude and trust in inclusive education.

Both governmental and non-governmental actors have significant responsibilities in this respect (Amin, 2015). Together, they will plan various public awareness campaigns and sway public

opinion in favour of inclusive education. Due to widespread misinformation, many social workers and parents of children with disabilities are still unaware of the inclusive education system (ASMR, 2024). To cultivate positive public attitudes towards inclusive education, this activity will take a great deal of time and careful attention. Since teachers are the first to have the authority to implement inclusive education, it is equally crucial to foster the same positive attitudes in them. To achieve this, teachers must be enrolled in demanding training programs that enable them to comprehend and value the inclusive educational philosophy (Alassaf, 2025).

Additionally, the government should take action to develop a widely accepted catchphrase similar to "Education for All". You can find these common slogans and signboards everywhere – on the street, on buses and trains, in markets, and so on. These awareness boards' primary goal is to raise public awareness of inclusive education through both media and open spaces. Modern technology can be used to create computer and smartphone programs that can teach children with neurodiversity the fundamentals of information and communication technologies. This would help to expedite the process of acquiring and implementing inclusive education by giving the theoretical concept of inclusive education a practical form (Campaign toolkit, 2017).

We should provide teachers and teacher trainees with opportunities to learn how to integrate diversity and inclusion practices into their daily routines. This may include ways to differentiate instruction for diverse learners, create a supportive and inclusive learning environment, and develop partnerships with families and the community. It is critical to ensure that each teacher and support staff is aware and has sound knowledge of their roles and responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act and the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice. All head teachers and staff should have access to a continuous professional training program on inclusive education (Rohwer, 2024).

Finally, including the students with autism child and their parents in the education planning process will help empower self-advocacy and decision-making skills, develop self-awareness of their strengths and challenges, and cultivate an awareness of autism within the education community. An inclusive educational environment can embrace and celebrate the value of diversity and uniqueness by engaging students and teachers in activities that promote understanding and acceptance of differences (Mathur & Koradia, 2018).

8.1.13 Diagnostic and Support Services

The development of a proper diagnostic process for individuals with autism is crucial to early intervention and the necessary support at the right time. Training programmes need to be developed to increase the pool of qualified professionals able to diagnose autism and provide follow-up support services (Koly et al, 2024). Mobile diagnostic teams can be created in order to reach out to rural and

underserved areas so that geographical barriers do not deny children access to required services (Majebi & Hamza, 2022; Emmett et al, 2022). Such teams can also train and consult local healthcare providers and educators. Additionally, there should be a therapeutic service system in the school for individuals with autism, such as occupational therapy, speech therapy, behaviour intervention therapy, and counselling. These services are crucial for autistic children for their success in mainstream educational settings (Devita-Raeburn, 2016).

8.1.14 Theoretical model for the modification of cultural beliefs

The challenges of cultural beliefs, social structure, stigma, and a lack of awareness are some of the main barriers to implementing successful inclusion for individuals with autism (Aftab et al, 2023; Clarke et al, 2024). Therefore, it is important to implement a theoretical framework, which will provide essential tools to improve people's knowledge with respect to their cultural values. By eliminating misbelief, we can create a society that caters to diverse needs. For example, in the context of Bangladesh, the social model of disability (Oliver, M., 2023) can help create a disability-free environment by increasing awareness of how cultural beliefs contribute to the stigma faced by autistic children operate at multiple levels of society (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al, 2025)). Intersectionality theory explains how stigma hurts autism, and these individuals face a significant number of challenges in their daily lives, which require an immediate response (Ahammed, 2024).

The target of successful inclusion should be grounded in comprehensive knowledge about cultural viewpoints, and community engagement needs to be addressed (Kenny et al, 2023; Morelle & Morelle, 2024). Therefore, the model of inclusive practice should move beyond the Western approach and instead prioritize Bangladeshi values and culture when discussing the inclusion of children with autism in the educational sector. Additionally, religious leaders and community influencers support families in navigating cultural challenges, improving healthcare and educational systems, and fostering an inclusive atmosphere (Tushar et al., 2020).

Comprehensive knowledge about cultural viewpoints should underpin successful inclusion, and it is crucial to address community engagement (Eden et al, 2024). Therefore, the model of inclusive practice should move beyond the Western approach and instead prioritize Bangladeshi values and culture when discussing the inclusion of children with autism in the educational sector (Sarker & Unzum, 2023). A community-based monitoring system should be established to develop culturally appropriate assessment tools and a method for evaluating the challenges encountered during the transformation of cultural improvement (Hussain, 2021).

In the future, more research should be done on cultural factors that are causing another barrier to inclusion for children with autism in the educational sector or on social platforms. Policy should be maintained in such a way that inclusion can be balanced with cultural sensitivity. The ultimate goal

should be to create a platform where individuals with autism can be engaged fully while cultural values will be respected but not dominated in inclusion practice (Hussain, 2021). Although Bangladesh is making progress towards the true inclusion of autistic individuals, there is still a long way to go on this journey. This journey can be smooth by adapting the theoretical framework and practice strategies from different stakeholders, autistic individuals and their families, professionals, policymakers, and social and educational community leaders. Through collaborative practice, it is possible to create a more inclusive society that honors both cultural beliefs and human rights.

8.1.15 Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

There should be a robust monitoring system and evaluation system to track the progress of inclusive education and the outcomes for children with autism (Rahi et al, 2024; Adako et al, 2025). In this system, multiple processes should be included, such as data accuracy on enrolment, withdrawal rates, social and academic achievement, and IEP progress; proper diagnostic and assessment opportunities; and an ongoing yearly report. The reflective review should be enhanced on the policy and practice for further improvement or to identify areas of improvement. The collaboration review from all stakeholders, including the perception of autistic children, needs to be addressed while modifying any system in terms of inclusive practice (Vlcek et al, 2024). Evidence-based practice should be applied while dealing with children with autism in educational settings. More research should be done and monitored on ongoing policy development and at what rate the inclusive practice has picked up, and aim for the next target.

8.1.16 Strengthening Policy and Legal Framework

Policy development should focus on creating supportive frameworks for autism inclusion while respecting cultural values and practices. This includes education policies that promote inclusive practices, healthcare policies that ensure access to culturally competent services, and social policies that address discrimination and promote participation. Policy advocacy should involve multiple stakeholders, including autistic individuals and their families, community leaders, professionals, and government officials. This requires building coalitions and partnerships that can effectively advocate for policy change. International frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities should be adapted and implemented in ways that are culturally appropriate and responsive to local contexts and priorities.

In order to implement successful inclusion, Bangladesh has to reform its comprehensive policy (Anis, 2023). There is a need to develop clear autism guidelines like other developed countries so that schools, teachers, and even parents can get clear direction (Ahmed and Isla, 2026). This guideline should clearly mention all necessary tools, such as academic/social support, assessment procedures, and any kind of modification needed for autism (Kabir & Hasnat, 2025).

According to all teachers and principals in this research, all stakeholders such as parents, teachers, principals, the whole school staff, community leaders, policy advocates, and disability advocates' opinions and suggestions were taken into account during the development of the policy. This task force should be used to develop the standards, monitor progress, and work on any improvements needed for the system to implement successful inclusion. Funding support is crucial for establishing inclusive education (Sarker & Unzum, 2023). For example, educating children with autism requires budget allocations for adequate educational resources, teachers' training programs, workshops, seminars, medical facilities, therapeutic support, and infrastructure modification. At the beginning of the implementation phases, Bangladesh can take support from international partnerships and donor support for domestic resources.

Current policies in Bangladesh have several limitations. Among these is the lack of systematic identification of children with special need to ensure their access to education, as well as the inaccessibility of school support services for these children. The study further complains that the National Education Policy in Bangladesh is more than 30 years old and that there is no disability-specific education policy in place, thereby limiting the rights of children with disabilities to access education (Malak et al., 2013).

The research recommends that the government of Bangladesh should bring about legislative changes to ensure that educational institutions provide reasonable accommodation for children with disabilities and facilitate the enjoyment of rights equally by children with disabilities, particularly in relation to access to education. The state should ensure that students with disabilities have the right to an education without discrimination and based on equality before the law. We should embrace inclusion to ensure that every student with disabilities has equal opportunities for development, realization, and potential, free from discrimination. Also, the policy study recommends that Bangladesh should come up with a disability-specific education law, essentially to set out the challenges and limitations inherent in the current state of provisions of education for children with disabilities and highlight the amendments and expectations of the disability-specific law.

Furthermore, the study advocates for the creation of both substantive and procedural rules to implement the provisions of the disability education law. These rules should aim to simplify the process for parents or guardians of children with disabilities to seek redress, either through specific assistance or other means, to safeguard their educational rights. The research suggests adopting substantive and procedural rules to establish standards and guide compliance in all matters related to the education of children with disabilities. We suggest revisiting all existing policies for marginalized groups, including street children, children with disabilities, and children from underprivileged communities, and developing a new policy of inclusive education based on those policies.

8.1.17 Recommendations for Policy Implementation

I divided recommendations for implementing the inclusive education policy in Bangladesh into three parts. The first part describes government initiatives; the second part highlights the importance of collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society; and the last part suggests parent and community involvement in this task.

8.1.17.1 Government Initiatives

UNICEF funds the Inclusive Quality Education for Children with Disability (IQECD) project, an initiative that promotes inclusive education. However, to demonstrate its commitment to sustainable development, the government must recognize the need for continuous reform and actively work towards offering inclusive education to all children. This includes addressing infrastructural and transportation-related access barriers, as well as providing teachers with sufficient resources and training (Chowdhury & Sarkar, 2018).

Incorporating inclusive education into teacher curriculum training programs is vital to guaranteeing that teachers have the requisite talents and understanding to assist students with disabilities in the classroom. To effectively implement inclusive policies, it is imperative to offer teachers continual professional development opportunities and training options (Siddik & Kawai, 2020).

Furthermore, it is critical to work in tandem with parents, community members, and pertinent stakeholders to establish a network of support that cultivates an atmosphere in which all students may thrive. It is imperative to provide easily accessible educational and professional resources, such as assistive technology and specialized teaching methodologies, to guarantee equitable educational opportunities and enable students with disabilities to realize their full potential. Teachers can work together to create an inclusive environment where every student feels valued and supported in their learning journey (Anis, 2022).

It is recommended to create precise policy guidelines with strict enrollment requirements and monitor the student-teacher ratio in traditional classroom settings (Paul et al, 2021). Students with autism may feel overwhelmed in high teacher-student ratio situations due to their sensory sensitivity, which can intensify in crowded areas, potentially impeding their learning abilities. To properly manage all of the children in the classroom, teachers must also have access to teaching assistants or classroom aides (Chowdhury & Sarkar, 2018).

Other developed nations, like the United States and the United Kingdom, also put up monitoring systems like Ofsted reports to verify school advancement and ensure responsibility. These systems monitor the success of educational policy and assist in identifying areas that require improvement (School inspection on handbook, 2018). Bangladesh should implement such a program

to ensure equality and enhance the quality of education across the country. Bangladesh can work towards fulfilling its educational objectives and international standards by putting in place a monitoring system that includes procedures to measure and assess educational development akin to those in other industrialized nations.

Misconceptions and cultural differences can have a big influence on Bangladesh when it comes to special needs children. We need strict guidelines and standards to foster compassion and assistance for children with special needs in all facets of society. Bangladesh, for instance, might hold seminars and awareness campaigns about treating children with special needs with respect. Increasing the number of cartoons and visual stories about special needs children that young children see will help them develop empathy and compassion for these children, allowing them to grow up to be sympathetic and compassionate towards children who have unique needs. All efforts to implement support for children with special needs, including financing special education programs and supplying resources, should be handled by the government (Sarker & Unzum, 2023).

8.1.17.2 Collaboration with NGOs and Civil Society

In addition to intensifying the efforts of the government and initiating high-impact policies, government sectors can move towards more decentralization, transparency, and an interdisciplinary approach. And here, collaboration with NGOs can be a perfect example.

Bangladesh boasts a large number of community-based organizations, including over 20,000 NGOs, with decades of experience in running programs funded by major aid donors. These organizations are crucial in the education, health, and climate adaptation sectors, contributing to the country's development. In 2016, the United Nations released a guideline recognizing the significant role of NGOs and civil society in achieving national challenges and the Sustainable Development Goals. Successful international NGOs often collaborate with local NGOs for project design and implementation. Successful development relies on strong partnerships and organizations without direct control. These organizations offer diverse ideas and expertise, contributing significantly to various sectors (Malak, 2013a & 2013b).

However, some NGOs face challenges due to suppression and a lack of democracy, which impact their functional capacity and sustainability initiatives. The trial of new technologies and systems in NGOs can lead to long-term sustainability, but competition for donor money may affect implementation objectivity (Disability Inclusive Education Practice in Bangladesh, 2021). Neo-colonialism may occur, especially in projects requiring extensive planning and input from donors. The primary responsibility of the government and NGOs lies in implementing policies and strategies with a clear vision and existence standard within the national framework. A stronger legal framework is

necessary to hold the government accountable and promote active participation by civil society. Successful "mobilization" demonstrates the potential of NGOs' expertise (Khanom & Aktar, 2022).

8.1.17.3 Parent and Community Involvement

Previous research (Paraskevi, 2021) emphasises the importance of community leaders and parents in promoting inclusive education in Bangladesh. The NAG study identified parental participation as a major barrier to successful inclusion in education. To improve inclusive education, teachers need training, support, and funding for community networks and programs. Creating a platform for dialogue between parents and teachers is crucial (Kaffemaniene, 2021).

The United Nations places great emphasis on the significance of inclusive education for parents, asking them to comprehend their children's learning and actively assist schools in fostering it (Amin, 2015). The UN Special Rapporteur highlights the importance of parents forming their opinions based on unbiased knowledge rather than preconceived notions. The government should collaborate with parents to discern biases and eradicate societal obstacles, cultivating a genuinely inclusive society (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2015).

Clear policies are necessary to establish the specific duties and responsibilities of parents in inclusive education programs to promote successful collaboration between schools and families. Parents can actively participate in developing personalized education plans for their children, attending frequent meetings with teachers to discuss their progress, and engaging in school events and activities to foster a sense of community and provide support for all students (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). Furthermore, parents may promote inclusive practices in schools by collaborating with principals and legislators to guarantee that every child, irrespective of their skills, has equitable access to a high-quality education. This initiative will facilitate the establishment of a more conducive and all-encompassing atmosphere for every student, irrespective of their circumstances (Buchanan & Clark, 2017).

8.1.17.4 Conclusion (Of Recommendations)

The barriers facing autistic children in Bangladesh's mainstream educational settings are complex and multifaceted, reflecting broader challenges in the country's educational system and societal attitudes toward disability and neurodiversity. These barriers not only limit the educational opportunities and life prospects of autistic children but also represent a significant loss of human potential for Bangladeshi society as a whole. The theoretical frameworks discussed in this analysis provide essential tools for understanding these dynamics and developing effective interventions that honor cultural values while promoting inclusion and acceptance.

The social model of disability, when adapted for the Bangladeshi context, helps illuminate how cultural beliefs and practices create disabling environments for autistic individuals. Ecological systems theory provides insights into how stigma operates across multiple levels of society, from individual families to broader cultural systems. Intersectionality theory reveals how autism stigma intersects with other forms of marginalization, creating unique challenges that require targeted responses.

However, the challenges are not insurmountable. With comprehensive policy reforms, systematic capacity building, adequate resource allocation, and sustained commitment from all stakeholders, Bangladesh can develop an inclusive educational system that serves all children effectively. The recommendations outlined in this discussion provide a roadmap for transformation, but success will require coordinated effort, adequate funding, and long-term commitment to change.

The benefits of creating truly inclusive educational environments extend far beyond the immediate impact on autistic children and their families. Inclusive education promotes understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of human diversity, creating more compassionate and equitable communities. It also ensures that all children, regardless of their differences, have the opportunity to develop their potential and contribute meaningfully to society. Bangladesh's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4 on quality education, requires addressing the barriers that prevent autistic children from accessing appropriate educational opportunities.

The path forward requires courage, creativity, and collaboration. It demands that educators, policymakers, families, and communities work together to challenge existing assumptions, develop new approaches, and create educational environments where every child can thrive. While the journey may be challenging, the destination—a truly inclusive society where all children are valued and supported—is worth the effort.

Autistic children in Bangladesh cannot wait for perfect conditions or complete solutions. They need immediate support, understanding, and opportunities to learn and grow alongside their peers. By taking concrete steps to address the barriers identified in this discussion, Bangladesh can begin the transformation toward a more inclusive and equitable educational system that serves all children effectively.

The success of this transformation will be measured not only in policy changes or program implementations but in the lived experiences of autistic children and their families. When autistic children can attend their neighborhood schools with confidence, when teachers feel prepared and supported to meet diverse learning needs, when families feel welcomed and valued as partners in education, and when communities embrace neurodiversity as a source of strength rather than a burden to bear—then Bangladesh will have achieved truly inclusive education.

This vision is achievable, but it requires sustained commitment, adequate resources, and the collective will to create change. The barriers are significant, but they are not permanent. With determination, collaboration, and a shared commitment to the rights and dignity of all children, Bangladesh can break down these barriers and build an educational system that truly serves every child, including those with autism.

8.2 LIMITATIONS

It is crucial to consider certain restrictions when conducting the research. I always considered these constraints. We identified the following restrictions during the research process.

The research was restricted to a small number of mainstream schools in Dhaka city—four schools for principal interviews, three schools for parents of children with autism, and one school for teachers. The present research sheds light on the experiences of only eight autistic children, namely from the perspective of their parents. By concentrating on more schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh, I may have included more samples.

Moreover, more examples from other parts of Bangladesh might provide a more comprehensive understanding of the country's educational system. This broader approach could uncover regional variations in educational practices and attitudes towards autism, highlighting the unique challenges faced by families in different contexts. According to Islam (2019), it is important to recognise that students with autism have unique needs.

Collecting data from different perspectives and contexts can give clarity about the support system in that specific context. Otherwise, a one-size-fits-all approach can fail to address the individual needs in a particular area. For example, if we are collecting data from an urban area and try to build an inclusive practice in a rural area, then overall inclusion in Bangladesh will fail. There are significant differences between rural and urban areas in terms of the concept of disorder, economic status, social view, and educational placement.

Since I have prior knowledge about inclusive education from her master's degree in special education, it is possible that the outcome of the research, interview questions, sampling strategies, and interpretation can be dominated by her prior knowledge. This potential bias can minimize the authenticity throughout the research process.

However, I had been away from Bangladesh for approximately 19 years, which may have affected her perspective and understanding of the current state of the nation's mainstream education system, despite having completed her master's degree in special education in the UK. It means I might not be fully aware of the reality of the current situation in Bangladesh about inclusive education.

Additionally, as a novice researcher, I can be inexperienced about the interpretation, such as thematic analysis and it might have an impact on the outcome of me. Therefore, during the research process, I took feedback from the experienced supervisor to seek guidance.

During the interview, I was required to translate the material from Bengali to English. In some instances, it may be challenging to ascertain the true significance of certain information based on the translation of the data. However, I made a concerted effort to provide the true details about the data included in the study.

In the context of Bangladesh, autism presents a highly sensitive matter for parents of children with autism. They may avoid sharing their true feelings due to fear of judgement, and many are hesitant to discuss their experiences. This silence may perpetuate stigma and limit the availability of clarity for the current situation in the mainstream educational setting.

8.3 SUMMARY

This research emphasises the need to address the challenges that hinder the implementation of inclusive education. While examining inclusive education practices, I have explored various components of inclusive education mechanisms. The challenges include not only the general population's lack of awareness but also the system's policies and practices. The principal's role in implementing inclusive education is of utmost importance, as they have overall leadership and strategic management responsibilities for the school. The uneven distribution of resources is also a great hindrance to implementing inclusive education. In light of this research, the greatest barrier to effective inclusive education in Bangladesh is the lack of teacher education to deliver inclusive education.

Students require assistance from trained teachers who understand how to meet their needs. The integration of general education and special education into broader educational improvement efforts is critical for inclusive education's success. However, inclusive education is gaining attention in Bangladesh, and the government has taken successful steps in this direction. For example, 2 out of 8 education development programs (PEDP-3) aim for inclusive education, and the government envisions showing significant progress in the last two years. Additionally, the 'Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP),' a new project in collaboration with the 'Directorate of Primary Education' (DPE), aims to enhance the inclusivity of primary education in Bangladesh.

Every department and individual must come together to assist students with disabilities in achieving their aspirations. Every stakeholder in the industry, including guardians, teachers, researchers, and policymakers, needs to take on their role in implementing inclusive education to make a meaningful change in children's learning and development. I hope that political will and clear leadership can overcome the barriers to effective inclusive education in Bangladesh and that the evidence from

research and practice will become powerful. We must seize this crucial time and opportunity in Bangladesh to make a lasting and positive impact on future generations who will grow and contribute to society; it is our work today that makes a better future for them.

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10 Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire for parents of students with autism

**Inclusive education
Questionnaire**

Name: _____

■ Phone number: _____

■ Email: _____

1. Are you 18+?
☐ Yes
☐ No

2. Is your minimum educational qualification S.S.C | secondary school certificate?
☐ Yes
☐ No

3. Are your children diagnosed with autism?
☐ Yes
☐ No

4. Are your children diagnosed with autism with other co-current disorder?
☐ Yes
☐ No

5. If yes, write down name .
◆ Other disorders are

6. Are your children age limit between 6-12 years old?
☐ Yes
☐ No

7. Are your children going to mainstream school?
☐ Yes
☐ no

8. Which class they are in ?
◆

9. Are your children in same school at least two years?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Appendix B: Interview questions for parents of students with autism

1. How old is your child?
2. When did you become aware that your child experienced ASD?
3. Can you tell me your experience when you first came to know that your child has autism?
4. What are the reasons for choosing mainstream settings instead of special settings?
5. What measures do you expect the school to take to accommodate your child?
6. How do you feel about the teacher's engagement with your children's academic progress in inclusive school?
7. Could you please explain more about the teacher's role in your children's social progress in inclusive settings?
8. According to you, how can the school play a significant role in your child's overall development?
9. How is your child socializing in mainstream settings, and how is the school assisting them?
10. What are your expectations from mainstream settings to support children experiencing ASD?
11. How do you communicate with teachers regarding your child's educational and social development?
12. What measures does the school take to assist children with ASD?

Appendix C: Interview questions for parents of students with autism in Bangladesh

১. আপনার সন্তানের বয়স কত?
২. আপনি কখন সচেতন হয়েছিলেন যে আপনার সন্তানের অটিজম রয়েছে?
৩. আপনি যখন প্রথম জানতে পেরেছিলেন যে আপনার সন্তানের অটিজম আছে, তখন আপনি আমাকে নিজের অভিজ্ঞতা বলতে পারেন? (Feelings)
৪. বিশেষ সেটিংসের পরিবর্তে অন্তর্ভুক্তিমূলক সেটিংস বেছে নেওয়ার কারণগুলি কী? (Reason)
৫. আপনার সন্তানের সুবিধার জন্য স্কুল কী ব্যবস্থা নেবে বলে আপনি আশা করেন? (Expectation/Implementation)
৬. অন্তর্ভুক্ত বিদ্যালয়ে আপনার বাচ্চাদের একাডেমিক অগ্রগতির ক্ষেত্রে শিক্ষকের সমর্থন সম্পর্কে আপনি কী অনুভব করেন? (how school can help them/ support/resources/awareness)
৭. অন্তর্ভুক্তিক সেটিংসে আপনার বাচ্চার সামাজিক অগ্রগতির জন্য শিক্ষকের ভূমিকা সম্পর্কে আরও ব্যাখ্যা করতে পারেন? (Teachers role)
৮. আপনার মতে স্কুল কীভাবে আপনার সন্তানের সার্বিক বিকাশে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা নিতে পারে? (academic/social)
৯. আপনার শিশু কীভাবে অন্তর্ভুক্তিক সেটিংগুলিতে সামাজিকীকরণ করছে এবং স্কুল কীভাবে এটির সাথে সহযোগিতা করছে? (what is happening)
১০. অটিজম শিশুদের সমর্থন প্রদানের জন্য অন্তর্ভুক্তিক সেটিংস থেকে আপনার প্রত্যাশা কী? (expectation specially for children with a autism)
১১. আপনার সন্তানের শিক্ষামূলক-সামাজিক বিকাশ সম্পর্কিত কীভাবে আপনি শিক্ষকদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন? (communication with teacher)
১২. অটিজম বাচ্চাদের সুবিধার্থে বিদ্যালয়ের কী ব্যবস্থা রয়েছে? (resources/support)

Appendix D: the table of elements in mainstream settings contingent upon the number of parents

Parents initial feeling (P1,P6)	Parents journey	Teacher	School	Lack of knowledge	Principal	Peer	Parents of peer	Mainstream vs special settings	Social acceptance	Awareness	Country
Isolated (P1)	Handling children alone in school (P4,P6)	Negative attitudes (P1, P4, P6, P7)	No progress (P1, P4, P6, P7)		Unpredictable (P1)	Lack of acceptance (P1, P4, P6, P7, P8)	Lack of acceptance (P1, P4, P6, P7)	More opportunity to interact with peers (P1, P6)	Lack of acceptance, especially an awareness (P1, P7)	Progressing (P1, P6)	Complicated (P1)
Insecure (P1,P2,P3,P4)	Tired many school (P4,P6)	Lack of empathy (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Require special educator (P1, P4, P6, P7)		Good relationship (P1)	With disabilities (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Lack of knowledge (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Special progress/withdrawn/looking outward behavior (P1, P6)	Lack of acceptance (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Lack of knowledge (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Lack of knowledge in medical field (P1, P4, P6, P7)
Hesitant (P1,P2,P3,P4)	Social pressure (P6)	Lack of knowledge (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Require different social activities (P1, P4, P6, P7)		Lack of knowledge (P1)	Peer (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Lack of awareness (P1, P4, P6, P7)	For severe special child special school (P1, P6)	Some advice (P1, P4)	Mistaken (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Ethical issue in medical field (P1)
	Frequent change school (P6)	Lack of motivation (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Need therapies for both (P1, P4, P6, P7)		Lack of empathy (P1)	Some supportive (P1)	Need to talk them (P1, P4, P6, P7)	No progress (P1, P6)	Some accept (P1, P4)	Need to create awareness in all community (P1)	
Tired (P1)	Mental pressure (P1)	Lack of experience (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Not enough space to play (P1, P4, P6, P7)		Negative attitude (P1)	Physically abuse (P1)	Refuse to allow children to play with them (P1, P6)	Mainstream more natural (P1, P6)	Stigma (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Stigma mother (P1)	
Exhausted (P1)	Traumatic experience (P1)	Lack of awareness (P1, P4, P6, P7)	No equipment in play ground (P1, P4, P6, P7)		Lack of support (P1)	Some peer positive (P1)	Parents call for play sometimes (P1)	Special school not for moderate and able students (P1)	Neglected (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Lack of awareness in father (P1)	
Regret (P6)	Fear of rejection from school (P1,P6,P7)	Lack of positive attitudes (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Complicated and dark classroom (P1, P6)		Need to be trained (P1)	Some peers have empathy (P1)	Stigma (P1)	Not learning anything from mainstream (P1)	Emotions to abuse (P1)	Need to create awareness (P1, P6)	
Resilient (P1)	Little knowledge about treatment (P1,P7)	Lack of acceptance (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Need more visual based book (P1, P4, P6, P7)			Lack of awareness in bully (P1)	Devotion (P1)	Devotion (P1)	Devotion (P1)		
Miserable (P1)	Lack of guidance (P1,P6)	Lack of special attention (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Need question paper or homework for individual cases (P1, P4, P6, P7)								
Anxious (P1,P6,P4,P6)	Neglected (P1)	Lack of involvement (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Need inclusive curriculum and settings (P1, P4, P6, P7)								
	Mother reach only (P1,P4)	Lack of communication (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Improved outward behavior (P1)								
Utterly sad (P1)	Not sure about good placement (P1,P6)	Lack of communication (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Need professional support (P1, P4, P6, P7)								
Isol (P1,P2,P4,P6)	Stigma (P1,P4,P6)	No training (P1, P4, P6, P7)	Disrespect withdrawn behavior (P1)								



The poster is divided into three main sections. The top section has a dark purple background with the text 'PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH' in white. The middle section has a light purple background and contains contact information. The bottom section has a dark blue background with the text 'ARE YOU A PARENT OF A CHILD ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM?' in white.

PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Interview may take place at researcher's home or participant's home or anywhere participants feel comfortable.

Email: taniazarinkhusbu@gmail.com

Phone : 01731976511

TANIA ZARIN KHUSBU
DOCTORATE CANDIDATE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION, AUTISM, UK.

ARE YOU A PARENT OF A CHILD ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM?

Appendices F: Ethics approval form



SOCIAL SCIENCES, ARTS AND HUMANITIES ECDA

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO Tania Zarin Khusbu
CC Professor Helen Payne and Dr Claire Dickerson
FROM Dr Brendan Larvor, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities ECDA Vice Chair
DATE 05/01/2023

Protocol number: acEDU/PGR/UH/05008(1)

Title of study: Children with autism: views of parents, educators, or principals toward inclusive settings in an urban area of Bangladesh.

Your application to modify and extend the existing protocol as detailed below has been accepted and approved by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

No additional workers named

Modification:

Revised title
Additional Workers

Original protocol: Any conditions relating to the original protocol approval remain and must be complied with.

Permissions: Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

External communications: Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Invasive procedures: If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.

Submission: Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Appendices G: Form EC3

FORM EC3

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDIES INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

I, the undersigned

.....

.....

Of email address:

.....

.....

Hereby freely agree to take part in the study entitled.

Children with autism: views of parents, teachers, or principals towards mainstream settings in an urban area of Bangladesh.

.....

(UH Protocol number).

1 I confirm that I have been given a questionnaire first to collect information about me and my children (my age, my educational qualification, children's age, children's duration of study in the same school, geographical location, and children's other disorders with autism). In addition, I have also been given a Participant Information Sheet giving particulars of the study, including its aim(s), methods and design, the names and contact details of key people and, as appropriate, the risks and potential benefits, how the information collected will be stored and for how long, and any plans for follow-up studies that might involve further approaches to participants.

2. I have also been informed of how my personal information on this form will be stored and for how long. I have been given details of my involvement in the study. I have been told that in the event of any significant change to the aim(s) or design of the study, I will be informed and asked to renew my consent to participate in it.

2 I have been assured that I may withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage or having to give a reason.

3 In giving my consent to participate in this study, I understand that voice recording will take place, and I have been informed of how/whether this recording will be transmitted/displayed.

4 I have been told how information relating to me (data obtained in the course of the study and data provided by me about myself) will be handled: how it will be kept secure, who will have access to it, and how it will or may be used.

5 I understand that my participation in this research may reveal findings that could indicate that I may require emotional support. In that event, I will be informed of relevant local organizations who can help and advised to consult my GP.

6. I acknowledge that, following discussion, I may be required by the University to withdraw from the study if, during the study, evidence comes to light that I may have a pre-existing medical condition that may put others at risk, I understand that the University will refer me to the appropriate authorities and that I will not be allowed to take any further part in the study.

7 I understand that if there is any revelation of unlawful activity or any indication of non-medical circumstances that would or have put others at risk, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate authorities.

8 I have been told that I may, at some time in the future, be contacted again in connection with this or another study.

Signature of participant.....Date.....

Signature of (principal) investigator.....
.....Date.....03/03/2020.....

Name of (principal) investigator [in BLOCK CAPITALS please]

Appendices H: Form EC6

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

(‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’).

FORM EC6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

1 Title of study

Bangladeshi parent’s perspectives for their students with autism towards mainstream settings.

2 Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a study. Before you decide whether to do so, you must understand the study that is being undertaken and what your involvement will include. Please

take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask us anything that is not clear or for any further information, you would like to help you make your decision. Please take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. The University's regulation, UPR RE01, 'Studies Involving the Use of Human Participants' can be accessed via this link:

<https://www.herts.ac.uk/about-us/governance/university-policies-and-regulations-uprs/uprs>

(after accessing this website, scroll down to Letter S, where you will find the regulation).

Thank you for reading this.

3 What is the purpose of this study?

I would like to cover your experience of mainstream education for your child. I would like to hear about your experience and perspectives on inclusive education in Bangladesh.

4 Do I have to take part?

It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. Agreeing to join the study does not mean that you have to complete it. You are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time or a decision not to take part at all will not affect any care that you may receive (should this be relevant).

5 Are there any age or other restrictions that may prevent me from participating?

Your age limit will be 18+. The children's age limit will be 6-12 years. Children should be diagnosed with autism. Students with autism will be studying in the mainstream, Dhaka, for a minimum of two years.

6 How long will my part in the study take?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be involved in it for a maximum of 45 minutes for the interview. Then, for further clarification, the transcribed copy can be sent to you if necessary.

7 What will happen to me if I take part?

At first, you will be informed about the study. You will receive the participant's information sheet. Then, you will be given a consent form to sign if you are interested. You will be involved in a face-to-face meeting or a Skype meeting. The interview will be audio-recorded to help with my research.

8 What are the possible disadvantages, risks, or side effects of taking part?

There are no possible significant risks, or side effects have been identified in this study. For any reason, if you feel uncomfortable answering any question or you wish to withdraw any data/information collected from you, it will not be used and destroyed. Furthermore, if you do not want to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw at any point in time without any questions asked or consequences.

9 What are the possible benefits of taking part?

By taking part in this research, you can put your contribution towards the progress of inclusion. In addition, you can develop your awareness and knowledge about the current condition and quality of inclusion.

10 How will my taking part in this research be kept confidential?

The interview questions will focus on your views about inclusion in mainstream schools for your children. I may use some quotes from your interview, but you will not be identified.

11 Audio-visual material

You will be involved in a face-to-face or Skype meeting interview. I would like to audio record the interview. This would be deleted as soon as I will make a transcription, which would be anonymized. Both the recording and the transcription will be kept safe on the hard drive of a secure personal laptop.

12 What will happen to the data collected within this study?

- The data collected will be stored electronically in a password-protected personal laptop from May 2020 to July 2014. After this, it will be destroyed under secure conditions.
- The data will be anonymized before storage.
- You will be asked to sign a 'Contributors' Release Form' to allow the transmission of the audio/visual material to which you have contributed.

13 Will the data be required for use in further studies?

The data will not be used in any further studies;

14 Who has reviewed this study?

My research has been reviewed by:

- The University of Hertfordshire Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority

The UH protocol number is 18053265

15 Factors that might put others at risk

Please note that if, during the study, any medical conditions or non-medical circumstances, such as unlawful activity, become apparent that might or have put others at risk, the University may refer the matter to the appropriate authorities and, under such circumstances, you will be withdrawn from the study.

16 Who can I contact if I have any questions?

If you would like further information or would like to discuss any details personally, please get in touch with me in writing, by phone, or by email: phone number: 008801731976511; Email: taniazarinkhusbu@gmail.com.

Although we hope this is not the case, if you have any complaints or concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during this study, please write to the University's Secretary and Registrar at the following address:

Secretary and Registrar

University of Hertfordshire

College Lane

Hatfield

Herts

AL10 9AB

Thank you very much for reading this information and giving consideration to taking part in this study.

Appendices I: FORM EC5 - HARMS, HAZARDS AND RISKS

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
(‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’).

FORM EC5 - HARMS, HAZARDS AND RISKS:

ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION

Name of applicant: Tania Zarin Khusbu Date of
assessment: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Title of Study/Activity: Bangladeshi parents of children with autism: their perspectives on inclusive educational settings. Urban area.

If you are required to complete and submit a School-specific risk assessment (by the requirements of the originating School), it is acceptable to make a cross-reference from that document to form EC5 in order not to have to repeat the information twice. The purpose of Form EC5 is to consider how a participant might react to the activities in the study and to indicate how you will manage such reactions; the Form also addresses the safety of the investigator and how any risks to the investigator will be managed.

Activity Description	WHO COULD BE HARMED & HOW?		EVALUATE THE RISKS		ACTION NEEDED
IDENTIFY RISKS/HAZARDS					
Activities/tasks and associated hazards Describe the activities involved in the study and any associated risks/ hazards, both physical and emotional, resulting from the study. Consider the risks to participants/the research team/ members of the public. In respect of any equipment to be used read manufacturer's instructions and note any hazards that arise, particularly from incorrect use.).	Who is at risk? e.g. participants, investigators, other people at the location, the owner / manager / workers at the location etc.	How could they be harmed? What sort of accident could occur, eg trips, slips, falls, lifting equipment etc, handling chemical substances, use of invasive procedures and correct disposal of equipment etc. What type of injury is likely? Could the study cause discomfort or distress of a mental or emotional character to participants and/or investigators? What is the nature of any discomfort or distress of a mental or emotional character that you might anticipate?	Are there any precautions currently in place to prevent the hazard or minimise adverse effects? Are there standard operating procedures or rules for the premises? Have there been agreed levels of supervision of the study? Will trained medical staff be present? Etc/	Are there any risks that are not controlled or not adequately controlled?	<u>List the action that needs to be taken to reduce/manage the risks arising from your study</u> for example, provision of medical support/ aftercare, precautions to be put in place to avoid or minimise risk or adverse effects NOTE: medical or other aftercare and/ or support must be made available for participants and/ or investigator(s) who require it.
	Participants	Emotional risk such as	Before the interview I can create a	No	If participants become very sensitive or

This research will explore the factors in mainstream settings for children with autism. For that, parents of students with autism voice will be considered. Researcher will take semi structured interview where parents will explain their experience and perception for students with autism on daily basis regarding what they are facing and feeling in mainstream settings, urban area in Bangladesh. Since, autism is a form of neurodivergence with different grade of strength and challenges and many research mentioned that parents of students with autism are more stressed than parents of other disorder. Sometimes, during interview, participants can be overwhelmed and sensitive while they are talking about their children with autism, especially children's difficulty and challenges. It can trigger their emotional response. There are certain things can happen during interview such as; over crying, emotional outburst, impulsiveness, frustrated, not able to discuss more during	(parents of children with autism)	feeling overwhelmed, oversensitive, frustrated, crying, depressed, not able to discuss, unable to stay on topic, bringing other emotional stressful topics unrelated to research questions etc.	friendly, safe atmosphere (greetings, small talk regarding their hobby/liking). Before/ during/after interview, researcher can offer small breathing exercise to participants to help them relax.. Before taking the interview, researcher can mention about all ethical considerations such as at any time they can stop the interview if they want/ or they can take a break etc. During interview, if emotional triggers happen, researcher will stop the interview immediately, ask them to take rest, offer water and can offer a meditation exercise or suggest leaving the interview for another time if participants choose.	emotionally triggered, I will stop the interview, suggest they obtain a drink of water, ask if they would like to carry on or postpone for another day, and provide all necessary information for counselling such as counsellor address, phone number or I will offer debriefing/ counselling at a later date since researcher is certified counsellor and meditation therapist. Researcher will provide necessary list if participants are emotionally triggered: Resource list: Counselling: Bangladesh ABA Centre for autism Phone: 01854784445 Autism BD Phone: 01931405986 Tania Zarin Khusbu 01731976511 (low cost) Autism Page: Autism in Bangladesh (Facebook). Parents Support Group: Autism Connect Phone: 8802 8019238 Email: info@acwf-bd.org http://www.acwf-bd.org

interview, can be totally shut off etc.					



NEW-AL MADINA TRANSLATION CENTRE

Govt. T.L. No. 3 & Regd. No. PF-31038/06



হার্টফোর্ডশির ইউনিভার্সিটি

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

মানবিক অংশগ্রহণকারীদের ব্যবহারের ক্ষেত্রে অধ্যয়ন কালে নীতিশাস্ত্র সমিতি
(নৈতিকতা সমিতি)

ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
(‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’)

এই ফর্মটি বৈদ্যুতিকভাবে অংশগ্রহণকারীদের জন্য প্রেরণ করা হবে।

THIS FORM WILL BE SENT TO PARTICIPANTS ELECTRONICALLY.

ফর্ম ইসি ৬: অংশগ্রহীত্ব তথ্য একত্রিত কাগজ

FORM EC6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



১. অধ্যয়নের শিরোনাম:

অর্টিজম বাচ্চাদের পিতামাতারা: বাংলাদেশের একটি শহরে অঞ্চলে অন্তর্ভুক্তিক শিক্ষার বিন্যাসগুলির প্রতি তাদের দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি।

২ ভূমিকা:

আপনাকে এই গবেষণায় অংশ নিতে আমন্ত্রণ জানানো হচ্ছে। আপনি এটি করবেন কিনা তা সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার আগে, এই গুরুত্বপূর্ণ পড়াশুনা কেন করা হচ্ছে এবং আপনার কী কী জড়িত থাকবে, তা বোঝা দরকার।

নীচের তথ্যটি মনোযোগ সহকারে পড়ার জন্য সময় দিন এবং আপনার ইচ্ছা থাকলে অন্যের সাথে এটি আলোচনা করুন। আমাদের কাছে কিছু জিজ্ঞাসা করতে দ্বিধা করবেন না। এই গবেষণার বেপারে যদি কোনো কিছু আপনার কাছে পরিষ্কার না থাকে, বা কোনো প্রশ্ন থাকে, বা কোনো সিদ্ধান্তের জন্য যদি সাহায্য চান, তবে এরকম আরও বিভিন্ন তথ্যের জন্য আমাদের জিজ্ঞাসা করুন। আপনি অংশ নিতে চান বা না চান, দয়া করে আপনার সময় নিবেন।

বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের নিয়ন্ত্রণ, ইউপিআর আরইএস ০১, ‘মানব অংশগ্রহণকারীদের ব্যবহারের সাথে জড়িত ষ্টাডিজ’ এই লিংকের মাধ্যমে প্রবেশ করা যেতে পারে:

<https://www.herts.ac.uk/about-us/governance/university-policies-and-regulations-uprs/uprs>

ATTESTED

24 JUN 2021

D. BAERUL ALAM
B. (Hons) M. Sc. (Eco.), LL. B.
Adv. Solicitor, High Court Division
Notary Public, Dhaka-1000
Phone: 9569580

1/8, D.I.T. Avenue, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000



MD. HOSSAIN

Translator
New Al-Madina Translation Center
1/8, D.I.T. Avenue, Motijheel C/A
Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh
Phone: 9569580

02-9569580 E-mail: newalmdina3@gmail.com

**NEW-AL MADINA TRANSLATION CENTRE**
Govt. T.L. No. 3 & Regd. No. PF-31038/06



হার্টফোর্ডশায়ার বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় University of Hertfordshire UH
নৈতিকতা কমিটি
ফর্ম ইসি ৩ (Form EC3)
মানবিক অংশগ্রহণকারীদের অধ্যয়নের জন্য সম্মতি ফর্ম:

আমি স্বাক্ষরিত:

ইমেল ঠিকানা:

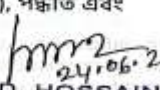
এত দ্বারা স্বাধীনভাবে গবেষণায় অংশ নিতে সম্মত জানাই।

অতিজম বাচ্চাদের বাংলাদেশী বাবা-মা:
অতিজম বাচ্চাদের নগর অঞ্চল অতর্ভুক্তিমূলক শিক্ষার বিষয়ে বাংলাদেশী পিতামাতার
দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি।

(ইউএইচ প্রোটোকল নম্বর)

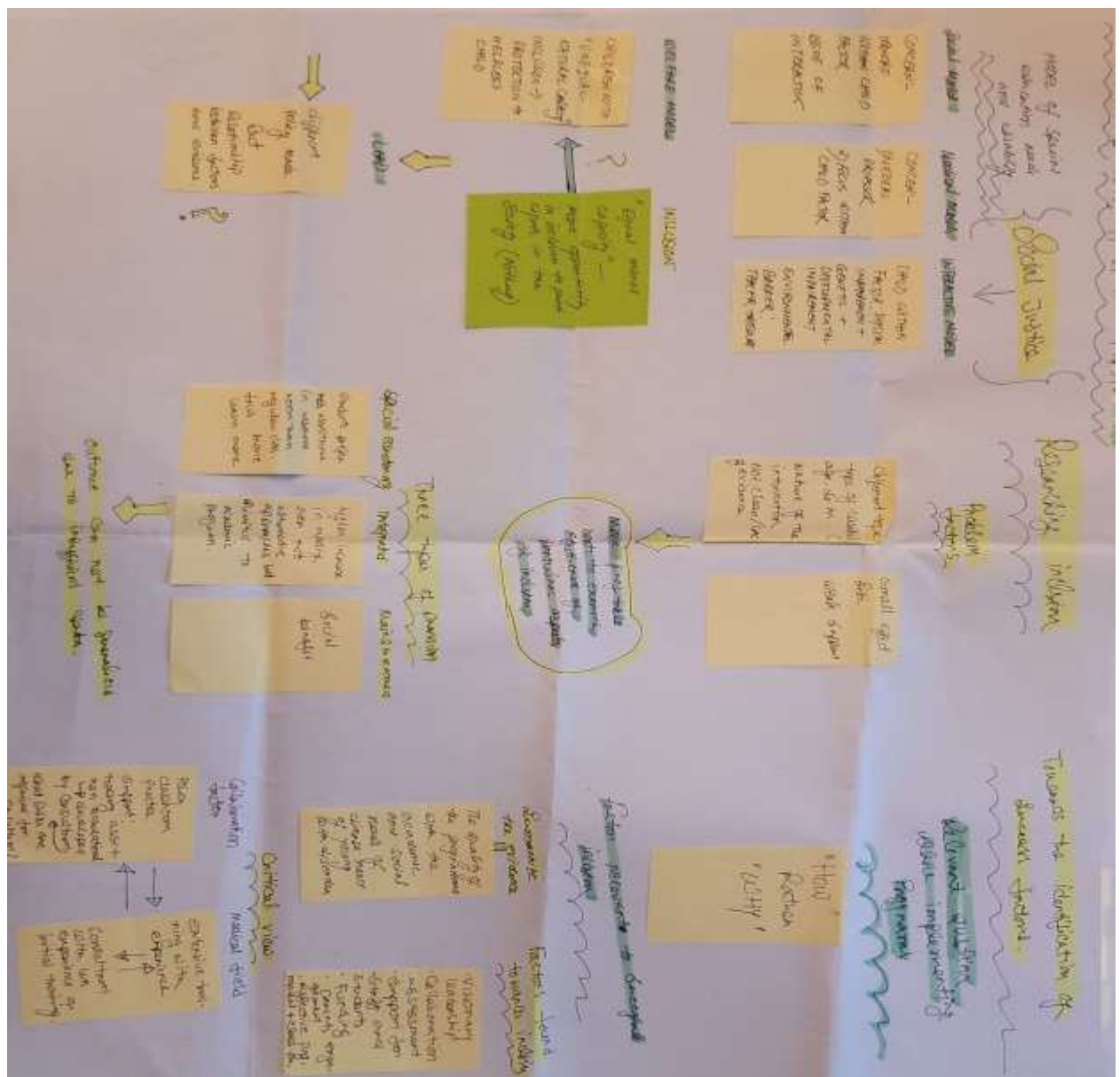
১. আমি নিশ্চিত হয়েছি যে, আমাকে এবং আমার বাচ্চাদের (আমার বয়স, আমার শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা, বাচ্চার বয়স, একই বিদ্যালয়ে বাচ্চাদের পড়াশোনার সময়কাল, ভৌগলিক অবস্থান, অতিজম বাচ্চাদের অন্যান্য অসুবিধাগুলি) সম্পর্কে তথ্য সংগ্রহের জন্য, আমাকে প্রথমে একটি প্রস্তাব দেওয়া হয়েছিল। তদুপরি, আমাকে অংশীদারি তথ্য পত্রও দেওয়া হয়েছে যাতে অধ্যয়নের বিশদ বিবরণ দেওয়া হয়, এর লক্ষ্য (গুলি), পদ্ধতি এবং

ATTESTED
24 JUN 2021
MD. BADRUL ALAM
B. S. S. (Hons) MA S. S. (Econ.), LL.B
Advocate, Supreme Court, High Court Division
S. Notary Public, Whole of Bangladesh
11, Arambagh, Dhaka-1000
1226701000, Mobile 9969580

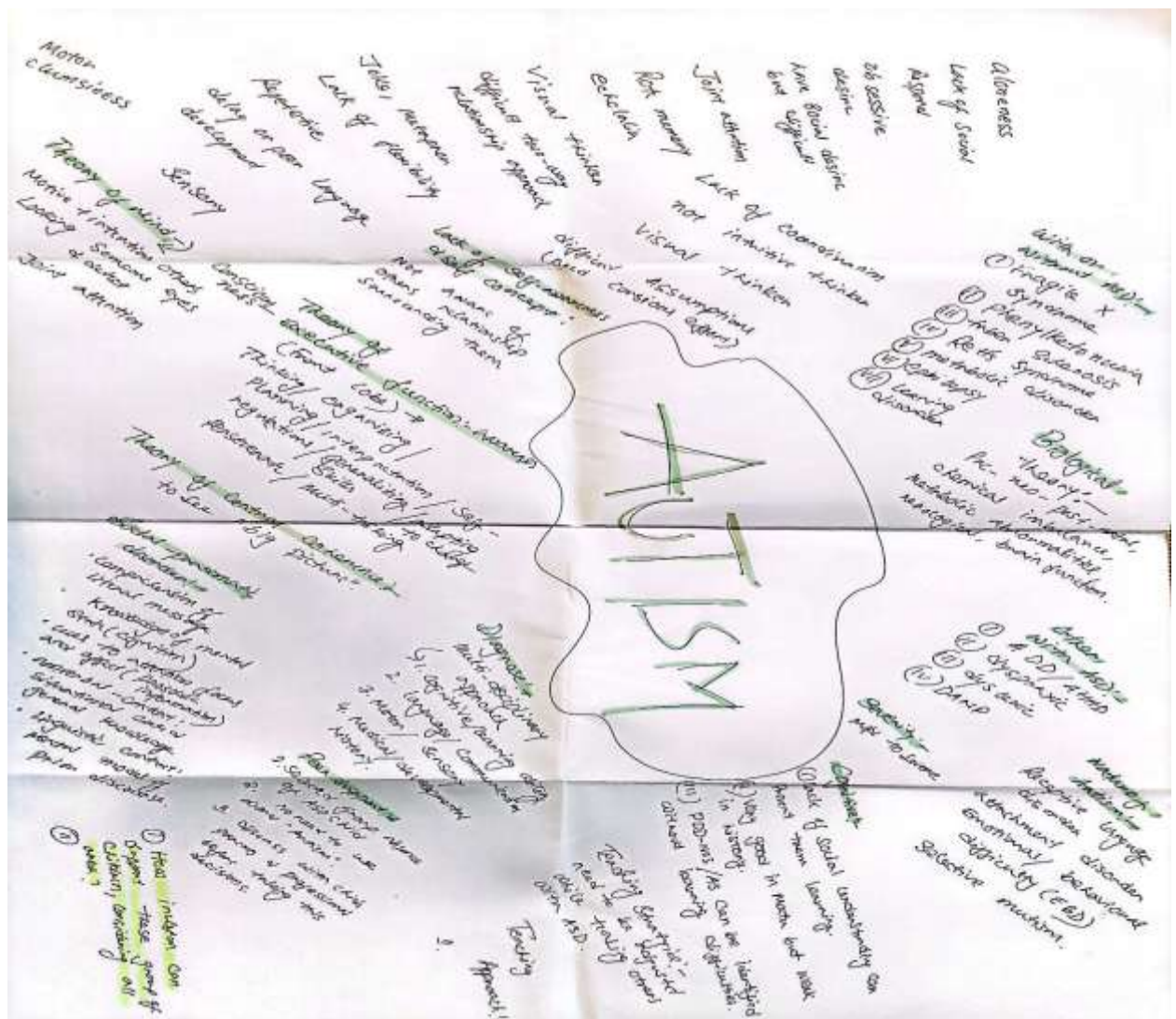

MD. HOSSAIN
Translator
New Al-Madina Translation Center
1/B, D.I.T. Avenue, Motijheel C/A
Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh
Phone: 9569580

D.I.T Avenue (Ground Floor), Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000 (Dainik Bangla Turn), Phone : 02-9569580 E-mail : newalmdina3@gmail.com

Appendix L: Critical review of themes influencing inclusive education



Appendix M: The features of autism



Appendix N: The links between research and interview questions

1. How old is your child?
 2. When did you become aware that your child experienced ASD?
 3. Can you tell me your experience when you first came to know that your child has autism?
 4. What are the reasons for choosing mainstream settings instead of special settings?
 5. What measures do you expect the school to take to accommodate your child?
 6. How do you feel about the teacher's engagement with your children's academic progress in inclusive school?
 7. Could you please explain more about the teacher's role in your children's social progress in mainstream settings?
 8. According to you, how can the school play a significant role in your child's overall development?
 9. How is your child socializing in mainstream settings, and how is the school assisting them?
 10. What are your expectations from mainstream settings to support children experiencing ASD?
 11. How do you communicate with teachers regarding your child's educational and social development?
 12. What measures does the school take to assist children with ASD?
- What do Bangladeshi parents of students with autism children, teachers, and principals say are the most important factors that affect the social and academic development of their children in inclusive educational settings?"
 - "How do teachers and principals in Bangladesh view inclusive environments for students with autism children?"
 - What distinguishes the views of parents of students with autism from those of teachers and principals?
 - "What do the findings mean for inclusive education settings in Bangladesh, taking everyone's points of view and recommendations into account?"
 - How do these views fit with the policy on inclusive education?

This research study aims to investigate the issues faced by students with autism in mainstream settings in Bangladesh. The authors will assess the interview questions to confirm their suitability for the studied population and their alignment with the research goals. Additionally, the study explored

potential improvements to question techniques to enhance data collection accuracy and reliability. In this manner, I was careful while choosing interview questions. There is a correlation between interview questions and research questions, as the inquiries must closely align with the research's goal of providing significant data for analysis. Following the findings, the literature review also revealed a connection. By enhancing the interview questions, I can guarantee that they are accurately collecting the experiences and viewpoints of students with autism in inclusive environments in Bangladesh.

Interview Questions	Research question Covered	Justification of Question	Reference
Interview questions (6,7,11) and follow-up interview questions (1,2,3,4) (parents), the teacher interview (2,4,5,6,7), and the principal interview (1, 3, 4).	Yes	The following teacher themes are highlighted as having an impact on inclusion: knowledge, experience, and training of the teacher.	Previn, 2016 Chrysanthly, 2016 Tarjiah and Riyanti, 2019.
Parents: (4,5,8,9,10,12), teachers (1,5), and principals have posed interview questions (1,3,4).	Yes	The following school-related factors have been highlighted as potential barriers to inclusion: resources (classroom settings, social or group activities), assistance (assistant teachers, special teachers), and safe stakeholder collaboration with parents, teachers, and administration.	Naznin, 2016 Taylor and Adelman (2004).
The interview questions (7, 9, 11) for parents of students with autism children, teachers (1,7), and principals (1,4)	Yes	Researcher was curious to know the relationships with peers and teacher support are crucial for successful inclusion.	Tweedi, 2014
Parents: 1,2,3	Yes	This question focused on parents' initial emotions toward their children and other factors that may exacerbate those feelings. For example, parents' initial emotions may be depressive, sad, or neglectful, but a lack of school support may exacerbate those feelings and have a negative impact on their children.	Sani, 2014
Parents: 1,2	Yes	The age at which students with autism are typically diagnosed was highlighted because early identification is essential so that the child can receive support.	Solomonidou, 2014. Hridi et al, 2020
The interview questions for teachers (1) and principals (5) and Follow-up	Yes	To identify any policy-related difficulties that may impede the successful implementation of inclusive education for students with autism pupils.	Pappas and Drigas, 2018. Malak et al, 2013. Kawser and Ahmed, 2016.

interview questions for principals			

The interview questions (6, 7, 11) and follow-up interview questions (1,2,3,4) for parents of students with autism children, the questions from the teacher interview (2,4,5,6,7), and the principal interview (1, 3, 4) mostly focused on teachers' competencies, capabilities, and dispositions about students with autism in inclusive environments. Is aimed to investigate the influence of instructors' views and actions on the educational experiences of students with autism in inclusive environments. This will offer insightful information about possible areas for improvement as well as the efficacy of Bangladesh's current inclusive education policies. This interview covered the research question of how teachers' attitudes and skills affect the educational experiences of students with autism in inclusive environments. The findings from my research can inform policymakers and teachers on how to better support students with autism in mainstream settings. Additionally, previous research (Sani, 2016; Tweedy, Azam, & Mullick) found that teachers' knowledge and attitudes have a significant impact on the overall success of inclusive education for students with autism children.

Parents of students with autism (4,5,8,9,10,12), teachers (1, 5), and principals have posed interview questions (1,3,4) regarding school-related factors that may impede inclusion: classroom environments, social or group activities, support from special education or assistant teachers, resources, and effective collaboration among parents, teachers, and administration. The replies offered significant insights into the difficulties encountered by students with autism students within the academic environment and underscored the need to foster a friendly and inclusive educational atmosphere. The results of these interviews may guide initiatives to enhance the overall educational experience for students with autism youngsters. The previous research also found challenges regarding school-related factors for students with autism children.

I was interested in understanding how interactions with peers and teacher support are essential for effective inclusion. The interview questions (7, 9, 11) for parents of students with autism children, teachers (1,7), and principals (1,4) emphasised the significance of healthy connections and communication within the school setting. The results underscored the need for robust relationships among students, teachers, and parents to provide a supportive and inclusive school environment for children with autism. Prior research has underscored the need for cooperation and comprehension among all stakeholders in fostering a supportive learning environment for children with autism. Furthermore, it indicated that cultivating a sense of belonging and inclusion within the school community is critical for these pupils' overall well-being and academic achievement.

This inquiry (1, 2, 3) focused on parents' early emotions for their children and other circumstances that may intensify such sentiments. For instance, parents' first sentiments may include depression, sadness, or neglect, but insufficient school support may intensify these feelings and

adversely affect their children. Moreover, social constraints and financial difficulties might influence parents' early feelings and subsequently affect their capacity to provide emotional support to their children. Parents must pursue assistance and resources to tackle these problems and provide a pleasant environment for their children. Prior research indicates that parents who have help and advice are more adept at managing their emotions and fostering a secure, supportive environment for their children. This may result in enhanced mental health outcomes for both parents and children over time.

The age of typical diagnosis for students with autism is important, as early identification is crucial for the provision of care. The inquiry (1,2) focused on parents' understanding and awareness of the indicators and manifestations of autism, together with their experiences in pursuing a diagnosis for their kid. Furthermore, it sought to identify any obstacles or difficulties parents have in obtaining resources and assistance for their students with autism children. Prior research indicates that early intervention may enhance outcomes for children with autism, underscoring the importance of parents being aware and proactive in pursuing a diagnosis. By mitigating obstacles or difficulties encountered by parents, healthcare practitioners may more effectively assist families in obtaining the resources and services essential for their child's development. This research topic aims to investigate the effects of early intervention on children with autism, as well as parents' involvement in obtaining diagnoses and accessing services. The research will provide significant insights for healthcare practitioners to enhance assistance for families of students with autism children.

The study question, "How do these views align with the policy on inclusive education?" was mainly aimed at teachers and principals to understand their challenges in effectively implementing inclusion for students with autism children. The interview questions for teachers (1) and principals (5) and Follow-up interview questions for principals were designed to identify any policy-related difficulties that may impede the successful implementation of inclusive education for students with autism pupils. This method sought to provide insights into possible enhancements in policy alignment with inclusive education practices. The prior research also highlighted legislative problems that may be exacerbating the difficulty encountered by teachers in delivering inclusive education for students with autism pupils. By tackling these policy-related impediments, it is anticipated that teachers would enhance their ability to accommodate the varied needs of all children within an inclusive environment.

Appendix O: Initial interview (parents of students with autism children).

The initial interview schedule includes approximately 12 questions (Table 27).

1. How old is your child?
2. When did you become aware that your child experienced ASD?
3. Can you tell me your experience when you first came to know that your child has autism?
4. What are the reasons for choosing mainstream settings instead of special settings?
5. What measures do you expect the school to take to accommodate your child?
6. How do you feel about the teacher's engagement with your children's academic progress in inclusive school?
7. Could you please explain more about the teacher's role in your children's social progress in mainstream settings?
8. According to you, how can the school play a significant role in your child's overall development?
9. How is your child socializing in mainstream settings, and how is the school assisting them?
10. What are your expectations from mainstream settings to support children experiencing ASD?
11. How do you communicate with teachers regarding your child's educational and social development?
12. What measures does the school take to assist children with ASD?

The reasoning behind the interview questions

Questions (1,2,3):

Is' initial line of inquiry centered on the initial reactions a parent might experience upon discovering their child's mental disorder. What emotions do parents feel when they first learn about their child's struggles and wonder, "How is it affecting their mental strength?" Because autism is a condition that persists throughout a person's life, dealing with students with autism calls for a great deal of support, patience, and strength on the part of the caregiver. Both how parents experienced this situation and the initial concerns that came with it were of interest to Is who conducted this study. We need to ask ourselves, "Are they mentally prepared to support their children effectively?" This concern will determine their analytical ability and the next step they take, which is to decide what they want and how they want it to happen for the better future of their children.

Questions (4,5,6,7,8,10):

Emphasizing the feelings and expectations of parents about the role of school for their students with autism (4,5, 8,8,10) is a response to their expectations regarding their children's social and academic growth. A glance at the literature review revealed that there are specific challenges and difficulties within the Bangladeshi educational system. A standard recommendation is to implement more trained, experienced, and professionally developed teachers to promote successful inclusion in mainstream settings (Sani, 2014; Ahmed et al., 2009; Malek, 2012). My questions (6, 7) addressed the level of satisfaction that parents have and enquired about their perspective on how the current educational system compares to the standards that they have in mind.

Questions (10,12):

I conducted these inquiries to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by students with autism students in the classroom and the necessary resources required to support them. Factors in inclusive environments prompt the question, "Do teachers encounter any difficulties when instructing students with autism in mainstream settings?" In addition to training, do they have enough school resources and support?" I aimed to look into how teachers are handling this pressure and what impact it is having on students with autism students.

Questions (11):

This question drew My attention to the difficulties in parent-teacher communication and how overcoming those difficulties can improve students with autism students' academic performance. The strengths and weaknesses of their students with autism are better known to parents. They understand the causes of children's potential temper tantrums and bad days. Parents' influence on students with autism can be significant or not, particularly in terms of their social and educational development (Sani, 2014). I wanted to know how schools are taking responsibility for these issues.

Questions (7, 9):

Since students with autism have deficits in social and communication skills (Solomonidou, 2014), I was curious to learn what it was like for them to learn in mainstream settings alongside their peers when she posed this question (9). I was interested in understanding how students with autism attempt to learn and socialize in regular classrooms despite their lack of communication and interaction skills and how teachers support students with autism students in addressing this issue (7). I was also interested in learning more about how peer pressure affects students with autism and how schools deal with the problem.

Questions (12,10,5):

These questions allow us to focus on the effectiveness of inclusion implementation from the perspective of the parents. This could provide valuable insights into the level of support and satisfaction parents feel with the inclusion practices at their child's school. Understanding their perspectives can help teachers make informed decisions on how to improve and enhance inclusive practices in the future.

Appendix P: the rationale behind the follow-up interview question (parents of students with autism children)

1. Reflecting on your previous and current experience, can you describe your overall view of mainstream settings?
2. Would you like to share your thoughts on integrated settings?
3. Do you have any concerns about your children's future?
4. How do you see him in the future, both socially and professionally?

Table 28: Follow-up interview questions

I slightly changed the first question's focus to emphasise the participants' reflections on the inclusiveness of the current situation after the first interview, as well as any additional thoughts they may have had. Concentrate on the second objective, which pertains to integrated settings. It is because few parents showed interest in them during the initial interview, and many parents thought that neither inclusive nor special settings were best for their students with autism children.

The third set of inquiries focused on the participants' expectations for the future of their students with autism children. I hoped the responses to these queries would clarify what parents can reasonably anticipate from schools. I also aimed to discover the extent of parents' knowledge about their children's abilities and whether they harbor unrealistic expectations for inclusive environments.

Appendix Q: Rationale behind interview question selection (teacher)

1. Would you please share your thoughts on placing special needs children in inclusive environments?
2. How would you use a creative idea to help children with special needs?

3. How would you encourage parents to enrol their children in the inclusion program?
4. In your opinion, what can inclusion teachers do most effectively to help students with special needs feel included in the school community?
5. Which of your ways of running a classroom is best for helping students with special needs?

Table 29: Interview questions for teachers

I think it is challenging to discuss inclusive practices if teachers have not taught students with special needs before. Even a little bit of experience can help teachers predict inclusive practices. Based on those experiences, teachers may have some ideas about how inclusive practice works. Therefore, it was crucial to ascertain whether they had any prior experience speaking about inclusive education. I intended the first question, "How much experience do you have working with students with special needs?" to prompt teachers to reflect on their actual knowledge of working with students with special needs. The majority of parents said that teachers did not know how to teach students with autism with special needs well enough. In light of this claim, I questioned teachers to learn more about these issues.

The second query, "How would you use an idea that could help children with special needs creatively?" will probe the teacher's knowledge of instructional techniques in inclusive environments. Additionally, it will discuss resource issues and how they plan to address them for students with autism children.

The third question probes the teacher's degree of comfort with accommodating students with autism with special needs in mainstream classes: "How would you encourage parents to enroll their children in the inclusion program?" Many parents said that teachers frequently disregarded their children and did not accept them like other children. Another complaint from parents was the lack of communication between teachers and parents regarding their students with autism children's school performance. Studies have shown that teachers need to make the classroom a friendly place and get the other students to help these special students. Also, children with special needs can do much better in school and with their friends if they maintain effective communication with their parents. (Malek,2013). Therefore, it was crucial to understand the teachers' perspectives on this group of students with autism children, which might come across in their ideas or others' encouraging remarks when they refer to a special students with autism child. So, I asked, "How do teachers get parents to let their children be a part of mainstream settings?" Without empathy and acceptance for students with special needs, teachers may lack the motivation to persuade parents to enroll their children. I wanted to gain a clear picture of the situation, so she asked this inquiry.

The fourth query is, "In your opinion, what can inclusion teachers do most effectively to help students with special needs feel included in the school community?" I sought input on teachers' responsibilities for inclusive practice. Some parents expressed dissatisfaction with the teachers' lack of responsibility when dealing with students with autism during the first stage 1 interview. By posing these queries, I sought to both confirm this and ascertain the rationale behind it. According to research, many teachers in Bangladesh are reluctant to accept responsibility for these students' education and do not offer much support. There could be a variety of causes, including a lack of knowledge, inadequate training, or lack of experience (Sani, 2014; Malek, 2014). To get clarity, it was crucial to ask this question.

The fifth query, "What do you want to say about the principal's role in the inclusive practice?" had to do with the principal. Since the principal is the person in charge of determining whether or not students succeed in inclusive environments and effectively serves as the school's chief executive (Sani, 2014), Several parents of students with autism voiced their dissatisfaction with the principal's attitudes, arguing that they should bear greater responsibility for monitoring resources and monitoring the development of special needs children. Other parents complained that many of the principals had threatened to expel their children from school. Therefore, more research was required into how teachers perceived the principal's role in traditional settings.

The sixth query is, "Which of your ways of running a classroom is best for helping students with special needs?" This question focuses on the teacher's experience and desire to work with students who have special needs. This query will also highlight the skills a teacher needs to learn to assist students with special needs. These inquiries will also show how motivated the teacher is to instruct this particular group of students. Many parents of students with autism claim that they lack the knowledge and motivation required to teach them. Parents have also spoken out against the way some teachers have treated this particular group of students. Malek and Saiful (2013), Sani (2016), and Solomonidue (2014) claim that a teacher's lack of knowledge can make them less motivated to work with students who have special needs and may frequently become frustrated while doing so.

The seventh inquiry, titled "What is your opinion of integrated settings?" focused on this concept. This inquiry was made to determine the best course of action for their students with autism children's future, particularly for the autistic students with more support needed students with autism child. Given the frequent mention of integrated settings by parents of students with autism children, I hoped the responses to this question would illuminate teachers' perspectives on how to best support students with autism academically and socially.

Appendix R: Rationale behind interview question selection (principal).

1. How do you see inclusive education?
2. What are the benefits you see from inclusive education?
3. What are the challenges you experience from inclusive education?
4. How can we successfully implement inclusion?
5. What is your perception of integrated settings?

I asked the first question to deepen our understanding of the participants' perspectives and ideas about how inclusive the current scenario was. The discussion topic for the second and third questions focused on the advantages and challenges of inclusive environments for students with autism children. By asking these two questions, I could clarify how the principal was aware of these children and what problems they were having daily as a result of introducing them into the classroom.

In the fourth question, I sought the principal's views on the successful implementation of inclusion policies in an educational setting. This will demonstrate the principal's awareness of and duty towards children who have special needs, as well as the requirements that such children have, according to the study. This research also focused on the participants' expectations for the potential outcomes for students with autism in the not-too-distant future.

The fifth question focused on the concept of integrated settings as the topic of discussion. The rationale for this is that during the original interview, many teachers and a large number of parents indicated that neither inclusive nor special settings were the most beneficial for special needs children and that they would do better in a setting that was a combination of the two. They demonstrated a significant interest in participating in integrated settings. I was also interested in getting the school's principal's opinion.

Appendix S: Rationale behind follow-up interview question (principal).

1. Would you kindly explain the inclusion policy in place to guide children with special needs?
2. I would like to know if you could go into further detail on the challenges relating to government support.

Because many parents and teachers complained about the principal's lack of accountability, the first question centered on the participant's knowledge of the policy. The purpose of this question was to assess how well principals were aware of the policies and standards for inclusive workplaces. I hoped that the answers to these questions would shed more light on what participants might anticipate from the policy.

The second series of questions focused on the difficulties and recommendations for enhancing the situation of children with autism. The study aimed to pinpoint the underlying causes of this carelessness. Perhaps principals face challenges in delivering the resources they are responsible for, or they may bear sole responsibility. Despite facing accusations, they might still encounter difficulties in supplying the necessary resources, or perhaps there is a deficiency in accountability.

Appendix T: A letter to the principal

Date: [Insert Date]

The principal

X School, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Ma'am/Sir,

I am a doctoral student at Hertfordshire University, where I am studying special education. As part of this study, I will conduct research to gain knowledge about parents' experiences raising students with autism in mainstream settings. I am hopeful that their observations will significantly contribute to my research and give me a thorough grasp of the potential and difficulties associated with providing inclusive education for children with autism.

I invite parents to participate in the interview to gather more information about the topic. The interview will last 30 to 45 minutes and be audio and video recorded. I'll schedule the interview online at a time and day that's convenient for the parents.

I will keep all participants' identities confidential and not reveal them under any circumstances. Furthermore, participation in the interview is voluntary, and participants can withdraw at any time without consequence. I will only use the collected information for research purposes and will not share it with any third parties.

I will share the research findings and outcomes with parents to raise their awareness of ways to enhance their children's education and social development. I will send all other research-related information directly to the interested parents via email.

I would like to request permission to conduct interviews with parents of students with autism at your school. Your cooperation will greatly contribute to the success of my research project. Thank you in advance for considering my request. Your participation will be invaluable in advancing our understanding of how to best support children with autism.

Please let me know your decision so that I can move forward with the necessary steps and procedures. Looking forward to your cooperation.

Yours Sincerely,

Tania Zarin Khusbu
Email: taniazarinkhusbu@gmail.com

Appendix U: Researcher's newspaper articles (English & Bangla):

1. [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.t
hedailystar.net/author/tania-zarin-
khusbu&ved=2ahUKEwiS9uHih8KIAxVLR2wGHdaxIIYQFnoECBIQAQ&usg=AOvVaw0mh
Yy5Oox4Tf7HcqzycibE](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.t
hedailystar.net/author/tania-zarin-
khusbu&ved=2ahUKEwiS9uHih8KIAxVLR2wGHdaxIIYQFnoECBIQAQ&usg=AOvVaw0mh
Yy5Oox4Tf7HcqzycibE)
2. [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.it
tefaq.com.bd/626937/%25E0%25A6%25B6%25E0%25A6%25BF%25E0%25A6%25B6%25E0%2
5A7%2581%25E0%25A6%25B0-
%25E0%25A6%25B8%25E0%25A6%25BE%25E0%25A6%25AE%25E0%25A6%25BE%25E0%25
A6%259C%25E0%25A6%25BF%25E0%25A6%2595-%25E0%25A6%2593-
%25E0%25A6%25AE%25E0%25A6%25BE%25E0%25A6%25A8%25E0%25A6%25B8%25E0%25
A6%25BF%25E0%25A6%2595-
%25E0%25A6%2586%25E0%25A6%259A%25E0%25A6%25B0%25E0%25A6%25A3%25E0%25
A6%2597%25E0%25A6%25A4-
%25E0%25A6%25B8%25E0%25A6%25AE%25E0%25A6%25B8%25E0%25A7%258D%25E0%25
A6%25AF%25E0%25A6%25BE&ved=2ahUKEwi1bqFiMKIAxXRSmwGHe_LOM8QFnoECB
UQAQ&usg=AOvVaw2Cm8CMHe67noW05zY-q_Db](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.it
tefaq.com.bd/626937/%25E0%25A6%25B6%25E0%25A6%25BF%25E0%25A6%25B6%25E0%2
5A7%2581%25E0%25A6%25B0-
%25E0%25A6%25B8%25E0%25A6%25BE%25E0%25A6%25AE%25E0%25A6%25BE%25E0%25
A6%259C%25E0%25A6%25BF%25E0%25A6%2595-%25E0%25A6%2593-
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A6%25BF%25E0%25A6%2595-
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A6%2597%25E0%25A6%25A4-
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A6%25AF%25E0%25A6%25BE&ved=2ahUKEwi1bqFiMKIAxXRSmwGHe_LOM8QFnoECB
UQAQ&usg=AOvVaw2Cm8CMHe67noW05zY-q_Db)
3. [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.it
tefaq.com.bd/622992/%25E0%25A6%2585%25E0%25A6%259F%25E0%25A6%25BF%25E0%2
5A6%25B8%25E0%25A7%258D%25E0%25A6%259F%25E0%25A6%25BF%25E0%25A6%2595-
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5A6%25AC%25E0%25A7%2587&ved=2ahUKEwi1bqFiMKIAxXRSmwGHe_LOM8QFnoECC
UQAQ&usg=AOvVaw31WGlgV82Yi7MMKDpC6hfZ](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.it
tefaq.com.bd/622992/%25E0%25A6%2585%25E0%25A6%259F%25E0%25A6%25BF%25E0%2
5A6%25B8%25E0%25A7%258D%25E0%25A6%259F%25E0%25A6%25BF%25E0%25A6%2595-
%25E0%25A6%25B6%25E0%25A6%25BF%25E0%25A6%25B6%25E0%25A7%2581%25E0%25
A6%25B0-
%25E0%25A6%25AF%25E0%25A6%25A4%25E0%25A7%258D%25E0%25A6%25A8-
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%25E0%25A6%25AF%25E0%25A7%2587%25E0%25A6%25AD%25E0%25A6%25BE%25E0%2
5A6%25AC%25E0%25A7%2587&ved=2ahUKEwi1bqFiMKIAxXRSmwGHe_LOM8QFnoECC
UQAQ&usg=AOvVaw31WGlgV82Yi7MMKDpC6hfZ)
4. [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.t
hedailystar.net/author/tania-zarin-
khusbu&ved=2ahUKEwi1bqFiMKIAxXRSmwGHe_LOM8QFnoECBQQAQ&usg=AOvVaw0
mhYy5Oox4Tf7HcqzycibE](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.t
hedailystar.net/author/tania-zarin-
khusbu&ved=2ahUKEwi1bqFiMKIAxXRSmwGHe_LOM8QFnoECBQQAQ&usg=AOvVaw0
mhYy5Oox4Tf7HcqzycibE)

Appendix V: Example of initial thematic analysis of parents of students with autism children

to get the books, chapters, or any schools or phones wouldn't be disclosed. All I need, Madam?

Guardian: Okay.

Madam: Okay then, I'm starting the interview. First, I'd like to ask you which period of your child's age you want to discuss.

Guardian: In our country, there is a lack of knowledge about this matter. When first autism was identified in our child, we were confused about what to believe and what not to. The diagnosis started when my child was only two and nine months old. That's the time when the story began. But she has faced the problem before that. She was underway during my seventh month of pregnancy. So my story starts even before she was born. Thank God she had already participated in the P.S.C. exam through a regular school when she was twelve. What my child has achieved in that school most of the others couldn't. We have to face many problems as we don't have enough understanding sources. We don't have a clear idea about what to learn, what to believe, and where to go regarding this matter. The people of the education system, even our teachers, don't know yet that there is some research work on this matter. They don't know what should be done, and they don't know what problems we are facing, even in special schools. It's a complicated situation in this country for those who have autistic children.

Madam: At what age of your child did you get to know your child has autism?

Guardian: When my child was two and a half years old, I noticed she was not behaving like an average child. As I have a son two and a half years older than her, I saw the difference between them from what I saw three years back in my son. She was not responding when I called her, didn't play with other children, and used to stay alone and play by herself. When I started noticing something was wrong with her, I didn't know about autism. I was clueless that it could be a disease. I had a relative working in the P.G. hospital who told me there was a unit in their hospital on child neurology. He suggested I consult with their doctors. In the meantime, my brother was a software engineer in Canada in a medical forwarded me some information relating to autism which I found matched my child. My mother took her to the neurologist of P.G., and at the age of two and a half years, she had her first diagnosis. First, I couldn't believe this, so I cross-tested everything. I tested my child's hearing, but her hearing was perfect. Then I took her to another hospital, to their neurologists, just to re-ensure that my child has autism.

Madam: Sorry to interrupt you in the middle, but I have a question for my research. What did you feel when you learned that your child has autism?

Guardian: I was shocked, sad, and lost at a time. I couldn't find out what I should do. Still, it makes me emotional when I remember that moment. And it's a story of every guardian in our country who has an autistic child. Another hard time was when I took her for the diagnosis for the first time. I'm very grateful to you for helping us with this information. In our country, there is so little information. Even the people of medical facilities are not so honest. There is a fear of a wrong diagnosis here.

Madam: What kind of school did you prefer for your child for the first time? Was it a regular school or a school for special children?

Guardian: When I got confirmation from different places that my child had autism, I went to a school for special children in Mohammadpur started by a guardian of an autistic child. I couldn't remember its name.

Madam: You don't have to mention the name. No problem.

Guardian: When we went to that school, they did some autism tests on my child and reconfirmed it. They have several kinds of tests that have to be done in steps. They told me that my child won't be able to talk ever and have to express her words through flashcards. Even at that time, I was in denial. I couldn't agree with their words, so I didn't admit my child to their school. Then I got to know where I had the hearing test for my child; they have a school for

Awareness in Country/School

Parents feeling

? How? with whom help most?

Teacher.

Awareness Child

Parents awareness

Parents awareness

Parents feeling

awareness

Child Condition

Parents feeling.

Appendix W: Example of coding in thematic analysis of parents of students with autism children

initial coding list:

