

PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF EMPATHY AMONG TYPICALLY DEVELOPING CHILDREN IN A FULLY INCLUSIVE SCHOOL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education plays a strategic role in fostering social empathy among children, particularly non-special needs children who interact with peers with special needs. This study explores parents' perceptions of social empathy development in non-special needs children at Aluna Montessori Kindergarten Jakarta, which implements a full inclusion model. Employing a descriptive phenomenological approach, five parents were selected through purposive sampling as participants. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological procedure. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and member checking with participants. Research findings indicate that daily interaction experiences within a fully inclusive environment facilitate the development of affective empathy, cognitive empathy, and prosocial behavior in non-special needs children. Children demonstrate spontaneous emotional responses, understanding of peers' varying needs, and attitudes of tolerance and acceptance toward diversity that become internalized both within school contexts and broader social settings. Findings underscore the significance of inclusive social experiences from early childhood periods in supporting authentic and sustainable social empathy formation in children.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a global movement aimed at ensuring equitable access to education for all children. In Indonesia, this policy not only provides equal learning opportunities for children with special educational needs (SEN), but also creates a social space in which all children can learn to understand and appreciate diversity from

an early age. Learning, particularly in early childhood, cannot be separated from the social and cultural contexts in which individuals interact (Nurhidayati, 2017). Recent studies indicate that inclusive educational environments have positive impacts not only on children with SEN, but also on typically developing children in fostering their social skills and empathy.

Inclusive education does not merely emphasize acceptance; it also nurtures social empathy as a foundation for mutual understanding and interaction among children with and without special needs (Hoffman, 1996; Kurniawan et al., 2025; Sandra & Zuhroh, 2021). Social empathy is a fundamental capacity that enables individuals to recognize, understand, and respond appropriately to others' emotions. From a constructivist perspective, social values and understanding, including empathy, are constructed through children's interactions with their social environment and their reflection on lived experiences (Nurhidayati, 2017). This ability does not develop automatically, but is shaped through repeated social experiences and meaningful interactions.

Siregar et al. (2025) emphasize that the development of empathy in children is strongly influenced by multilayered environments, including the family, school, and community. Within the context of fully inclusive education, typically developing children have unique opportunities to develop both affective and cognitive empathy through daily interactions with peers with special needs. Babik and Gardner (2021) further demonstrate that empathy among children without disabilities significantly predicts positive attitudes toward the participation of children with special needs in classroom activities.

Although the benefits of inclusive education have been widely documented, its implementation continues to show considerable variation. A recent meta-analysis revealed that inclusive preschool education has a significant positive impact on child development for both children with disabilities and typically developing children (Sharma et al., 2021). Nevertheless, substantial gaps remain in the Indonesian inclusive education literature. Most existing studies focus primarily on the experiences of teachers and children with special needs, while the perspectives of parents of typically developing children remain largely underexplored. Ihram et al. (2025) highlight the importance of parental perspectives in determining the quality of inclusive education; however, the limited availability of valid instruments has constrained research in this area.

This gap becomes even more evident when examining the dynamics of school–family relationships within inclusive settings. Alfayyadl (2023) reports that families of children with special needs expect to be involved in reciprocal and respectful partnerships with educational professionals. More recent studies also reveal that parents' attitudes toward inclusive education strongly influence preschool children's acceptance of peers with special needs (Salma et al., 2024).

In response to these gaps, the present study explores parental perceptions of the development of social empathy among typically developing children in Aluna Montessori Kindergarten, Jakarta, which implements a fully inclusive model. Aluna Montessori Kindergarten was selected because it applies Montessori principles through individualized learning and provides shadow teacher support for children with special needs based on individual assessments. The study focuses on children aged three to six years, a critical period for the development of prosocial competencies.

The novelty of this study lies in its in-depth exploration of the perspectives of parents of typically developing children within a fully inclusive Montessori-based educational context an area that has received limited attention in the Indonesian inclusive education literature. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize the experiences of teachers or children with special needs, this study specifically examines how parents of typically developing children observe and interpret changes in their children's empathic behaviors in everyday interactions. By capturing parental perceptions, this study is expected to offer valuable insights for educators and policymakers in designing learning experiences that foster empathy, acceptance, and equity from early childhood, as well as in strengthening school family partnerships to support more effective and meaningful inclusive education.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore parents' experiences regarding the development of social empathy among typically developing children in a fully inclusive school setting. This approach enabled an in-depth understanding of the meanings embedded in participants' lived experiences by describing the phenomenon as it was directly experienced, without imposing excessive interpretation. It aligns with the purpose of capturing the essence of parents' experiences in observing their children's empathic development through everyday interactions with peers with special educational needs.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a strategy widely applied in qualitative research because it enables the recruitment of individuals who possess rich and relevant experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Scavarda, 2024). The inclusion criteria were: (1) parents of typically developing children aged three to six years; (2) children who had attended Aluna Montessori Kindergarten, Jakarta, a fully inclusive school, for at least one year; (3) parents who were actively involved in school activities and maintained regular communication with teachers; and (4) parents who were willing to openly share their experiences. Five parents participated in the study. The sample size was determined based on the achievement of data saturation.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, conducted in one to two sessions per participant, with each session lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. Semi-structured interviews were selected to allow flexible and in-depth exploration of participants' experiences while maintaining focus on key topics. All interviews were audio-recorded with written consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy.

The interview guide was designed to explore children's social interactions with peers with special needs, observed changes in behaviors reflecting empathic development, teacher parent communication regarding children's social emotional development, and parents' interpretations of togetherness and diversity in inclusive classrooms.

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological analysis procedure, which emphasizes a systematic and in-depth disclosure of the meanings embedded in participants' experiences. The process began with repeated readings of the transcripts to obtain a holistic understanding of the narratives. Significant statements directly related to parents' perceptions of social empathy among typically developing children were then identified. Meanings were formulated for each statement while preserving the original context, and subsequently clustered into themes representing shared experiential patterns.

To ensure credibility and interpretive accuracy, preliminary findings were returned to participants through member checking. Data trustworthiness was further strengthened through source and method triangulation, including comparisons across participants and cross-checking with observational notes and school activity documents.

The study was conducted in accordance with strict research ethics principles. All participants received an informed consent form explaining the study objectives, procedures, potential benefits and risks, their right to withdraw at any time, and assurances of confidentiality. Participants' names and children's identities were anonymized in transcripts and reports. All data were securely stored on password-protected devices and were accessible only to the research team. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee prior to data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved five parents whose typically developing children were enrolled at Aluna Montessori Kindergarten, Jakarta. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the criterion that their children, aged three to six years, had attended the inclusive school for at least one year. Data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological procedure, yielding three major themes that describe parents' perceptions of the development of social empathy among typically developing children in a fully inclusive school environment.

Participant Characteristics and Research Context

The participants consisted of five parents with diverse backgrounds who shared a strong commitment to inclusive education. Their children were aged between 3.5 and 6 years and had experienced learning in a fully inclusive setting for at least one academic year. Aluna Montessori Kindergarten, Jakarta, was selected because it implements a full inclusion model that integrates Montessori principles with systemic support for children with special needs. The school provides shadow teachers based on individual assessments, creating an adaptive and responsive learning environment that accommodates diverse student abilities.

Family contexts varied in terms of children's early social experiences prior to entering the inclusive environment. Several parents reported that their children previously had limited social interaction due to relatively homogeneous play environments (Fitriani et al., 2024). Parents' motivations for choosing an inclusive school reflected a strong understanding of diversity and empathy values. One parent explained their commitment to instilling inclusive values from an early age, viewing differences as a natural reality of social life that should be accepted and respected.

Affective Empathy: Spontaneous Emotional Responses of Typically Developing Children

The first theme, consistently reported by all participants, was the development of affective empathy among typically developing children. Affective empathy refers to the capacity to emotionally resonate with others and respond spontaneously, without necessarily engaging in complex cognitive appraisal of the situation. All five parents reported that their children displayed genuine emotional responses when they observed peers with special needs experiencing difficulties. These responses were expressed through helping behaviors, comforting actions, and accompanying peers who required emotional support.

One parent described, "When a friend has difficulty, my child likes to help." This helping behavior was not the result of direct instruction, but rather reflected a natural sensitivity to others' needs. Another parent stated, "Farzan approaches his friend when the friend looks sad," indicating sensitivity to non-verbal emotional cues and an intrinsic motivation to provide comfort.

Parents also reported that affective empathy emerged in informal situations. One participant explained, "At school, at first they were taught that when a friend falls, you should help and not just watch." Although such behaviors were initially guided by teachers, children appeared to have internalized empathic values, as empathic responses increasingly occurred spontaneously in daily situations. The transfer of empathy to the home environment was also evident. One parent reported, "He has become more caring toward his younger sibling. He seems more mature," indicating a meaningful transfer of empathic learning from school to family contexts.

Cognitive Empathy: Understanding Perspectives and Differences in Needs

The second theme concerned the development of cognitive empathy among typically developing children. In contrast to affective empathy, which is primarily emotional, cognitive empathy involves the ability to understand others' perspectives, thoughts, and specific needs. Four out of five parents reported that their children had begun to demonstrate an understanding of differing needs and communication styles when interacting with peers with special needs, as reflected in their behavioral adjustments during social interactions.

Children's ability to recognize and adapt their communication strategies emerged as a salient indicator of cognitive empathy. One parent explained, "My child knows that the way to communicate has to be different when talking to a friend who uses a hearing aid." This adaptive process was also illustrated during the interview when a parent described conversations with their child about playing with peers who use hearing aids, noting that the child understood that they could still play together while adjusting how they communicated.

Parents further reported that children actively asked questions about differences they observed among their peers. One participant explained, "At the beginning of school, my child asked why some children are like this and others are like that." The development of cognitive empathy was also facilitated by teachers' explanations, as

described by one parent: “I think my child understands because the teacher explains it, including how to communicate with friends who have special needs.”

Prosocial Behavior: Empathy Manifested in Concrete Actions

The third theme concerned the development of prosocial behavior as a concrete manifestation of social empathy. Prosocial behavior refers to voluntary actions intended to benefit others, such as helping, sharing, comforting, and demonstrating acceptance. All participants reported that their children consistently displayed prosocial behaviors in interactions with peers with special needs, both at school and outside the school environment, reflecting the internalization of inclusive values.

The most frequently reported form of prosocial behavior was helping peers who encountered difficulties. One parent stated, “When a friend has difficulty, my child likes to help.” Prosocial behavior was also evident in children’s willingness to accompany and interact with peers with special needs without avoidance. This was reflected in a participant’s statement, “All the children are just the same; nothing feels strange,” indicating a normalization of diversity in children’s perceptions.

Parents reported that children’s prosocial behaviors extended beyond the school context. One participant explained that when their child encountered individuals with special needs in public spaces, the child responded naturally and without avoidance: “When we are outside and my child sees a child with special needs, it feels normal to them.” This demonstrates the generalization of social learning to everyday situations. Tolerance and non-discriminatory attitudes were also salient dimensions of children’s behavior. One parent stated, “Children are different, but they are just normal to each other no one stares.” Furthermore, children demonstrated patience in social interactions and made efforts to understand their peers’ conditions. When children asked about assistive devices used by their peers, parents provided explanations regarding hearing limitations, which supported children’s understanding and acceptance of their peers’ needs.

Table 1. Summary of Themes and Subthemes of Parents’ Perceptions of Social Empathy among Typically Developing Children

Main Theme	Subtheme	Number of Participants	Example Narrative
Affective Empathy	Spontaneous emotional responses to peers’ difficulties	5 of 5	“When a friend has difficulty, my child likes to help.”
Affective Empathy	Comforting peers who are sad	5 of 5	“Farzan approaches his friend when the friend looks sad.”
Affective Empathy	Transfer of empathy to the family context	4 of 5	“He has become more caring toward his younger sibling.”
Cognitive Empathy	Understanding differences in communication styles	4 of 5	“He knows that he needs to communicate differently.”
Cognitive Empathy	Asking questions about peers’ conditions	3 of 5	“Why is there a child who uses an assistive device?”
Cognitive Empathy	Adjusting interactions based on peers’ needs	4 of 5	“He speaks more slowly when communicating.”
Prosocial Behaviour	Consistently helping peers	5 of 5	“He helps without being asked.”
Prosocial Behaviour	Tolerant and non-discriminatory attitudes	5 of 5	“All children are just the same; nothing feels strange.”
Prosocial Behaviour	Normalisation of diversity outside the school context	5 of 5	“He does not feel awkward when seeing people who are different at the mall.”

Prosocial Behaviour	Willingness to accompany and play with peers	5 of 5	“He still wants to play together and does not differentiate among friends.”
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This table summarises the principal findings of the study derived from the phenomenological analysis of narratives provided by the five participants. The results indicate a high level of consistency in the themes of affective empathy and prosocial behaviour, whereas cognitive empathy demonstrates greater variation across participants. This variation suggests the presence of individual differences in both the pace and depth of children’s cognitive empathy development.

Empathy as a Multidimensional Construct in Inclusive Contexts

The findings of this study confirm that social empathy among typically developing children in a fully inclusive setting develops as a multidimensional construct comprising affective, cognitive, and behavioural components. This developmental pattern is consistent with theoretical models proposed in previous research, which conceptualise empathy as an integration of the capacity to emotionally resonate with others, to cognitively understand others’ perspectives, and to respond to others’ needs through prosocial actions (Harahap, 2025).

Repeated experiences in inclusive environments provide a natural context in which children can simultaneously develop these three dimensions of empathy, although the rate of development may vary both across individuals and across dimensions. The spontaneous emergence of affective empathy among typically developing children suggests that early exposure to diversity facilitates the development of emotional sensitivity without the need for extensive explicit instruction. Children learn to recognise emotional cues through direct observation and everyday interactions, and gradually develop the ability to resonate with others’ feelings (Fitriani et al., 2024). This experiential learning process differs fundamentally from learning through verbal instruction or simulated activities, as it involves direct emotional engagement that is deeper and more meaningful. These findings reinforce the argument that inclusive environments offer a form of social emotional learning that cannot be fully replaced by other pedagogical approaches.

Although cognitive empathy was less consistent across participants than affective empathy, the findings indicate that children begin to construct a conceptual understanding of differences in needs and perspectives. The ability to adjust communication strategies according to the characteristics of interaction partners reflects the development of more complex theory of mind processes (Maghfiroh et al., 2025). Children do not merely understand that others possess different thoughts and feelings; they also begin to recognise that information processing and modes of expression may fundamentally differ between individuals. Such understanding is essential for the development of broader social competence, as it enables children to interact more effectively with peers who have diverse communication profiles.

Notably, the variation in cognitive empathy development across participants suggests that individual factors such as age, temperament, and prior experiences play an important role in shaping the pace and depth of cognitive empathy development. Some children may acquire conceptual understanding more rapidly through direct interaction, whereas others may require more explicit guidance from adults to develop similar interpretive frameworks (Qistan et al., 2024). These findings highlight the importance of differentiated approaches to supporting empathy development, whereby teachers and parents adapt facilitation strategies according to children’s individual characteristics and needs.

The consistent presence of prosocial behaviour across all participants indicates that empathy does not merely develop as an internal psychological capacity, but is also expressed through concrete actions that benefit others. The consistency of prosocial behaviour suggests that children have internalised inclusive values and incorporated them into their emerging social identities (Lessil, 2023). This internalisation is critical, as it implies that prosocial behaviour is not simply a form of compliance with external norms, but rather an authentic expression of an internal disposition to care about others’ well-being. A high level of internalisation increases the likelihood that prosocial behaviour will be sustained over time and generalised across social contexts.

The Role of Inclusive Environments in the Normalisation of Diversity

One of the most salient findings of this study is the role of fully inclusive environments in shaping the normalisation of diversity in typically developing children's perceptions. Normalisation refers to a process through which differences that may initially appear unusual or concerning come to be viewed as a natural part of social reality (Rahayu & Saskia, 2025). Parents reported that their children perceived the presence of peers with special educational needs as ordinary and unremarkable, indicating that inclusive experiences had reshaped children's normative frameworks regarding diversity. This perceptual shift has important long-term implications for the development of inclusive attitudes and resistance to discriminatory beliefs.

The process of normalisation occurs through repeated exposure and meaningful interactions with peers with special needs in everyday contexts that do not emphasise difference as exceptional or pathological. School environments that implement full inclusion by avoiding the physical or social separation of children with special needs create conditions in which differences do not become the primary focus of attention (Salma & Martono, 2024). Instead, diversity is understood as a normal variation within the spectrum of human characteristics, similar to differences in preferences, talents, or personalities. This approach differs fundamentally from segregated or partially integrated models, which may inadvertently reinforce the perception that children with special needs constitute a distinct category requiring special treatment.

The normalisation of diversity was also evident in the generalisation of inclusive attitudes beyond the school setting. Parents reported that their children did not display discomfort or fear when encountering individuals with special needs in public spaces, indicating that learning experiences in inclusive schools had fostered relatively stable dispositions (Salma & Martono, 2024). This transfer of learning is particularly important, as it suggests that inclusive values are not confined to the specific contexts in which they are learned, but become part of children's broader orientations toward human diversity. The ability to generalise social learning across contexts reflects a deeper and more stable level of internalisation.

Interestingly, several parents reported that their children's inclusive attitudes extended beyond the domain of disability. One participant described their child as demonstrating openness and acceptance toward cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences (Vogel-Campbell, 2025). This finding suggests that inclusive experiences may have broader character-shaping effects, fostering an orientation toward diversity across multiple social dimensions. Learning to accept differences in one domain may transfer to other domains, thereby cultivating a more general disposition toward pluralism and respect for individual uniqueness.

Importantly, the normalisation of diversity does not imply that children become insensitive to the specific needs of peers with special educational needs. On the contrary, children appear to develop a more sophisticated form of sensitivity that integrates acceptance of difference with awareness of differentiated needs (Fitriani et al., 2024). They learn not to categorise peers based on labels, while remaining responsive to individual requirements. This balance is essential for the development of authentic inclusive attitudes that do not erase individual uniqueness in the pursuit of equality.

The Contributions of Parents and Teachers in Facilitating Empathy Development

Although direct experiences within inclusive environments constitute a primary driver of children's social empathy development, the role of parents and teachers in facilitating and reinforcing these experiences is equally significant. Participants' narratives indicate that parents play an important role in providing interpretive frameworks that help children make sense of their inclusive school experiences (Maghfiroh et al., 2025). When children raise questions about observed differences, parental responses that are factual, non-judgemental, and supportive contribute to the development of accurate understanding and positive attitudes toward diversity.

Parent child communication regarding inclusive experiences also serves as an opportunity to reinforce empathy and acceptance. Several participants reported actively discussing the importance of understanding and respecting

differences, using children's school experiences as concrete examples (Fitriani et al., 2024). Such discussions help children consolidate their learning and integrate inclusive values into their personal value systems. Parents' roles as mediators of social emotional learning are therefore critical in ensuring that inclusive experiences produce enduring and meaningful outcomes.

Teachers in fully inclusive schools likewise play a pivotal role in creating and sustaining learning environments that support empathy development. Parents reported that teachers consistently model inclusive behaviours and provide guidance on how to interact with peers who have different needs. Modelling empathic behaviour is particularly powerful, as children learn not only through verbal instruction, but also through observation and imitation of respected adult figures. When teachers demonstrate patience, understanding, and equitable support for all students, they provide concrete illustrations of how inclusive values are enacted in everyday practice.

Several participants also emphasised the importance of pedagogical approaches that avoid singling out children with special needs as a separate category. Teachers who integrate all children into classroom activities without unnecessary differentiation help create environments in which diversity is normalised (Vogel-Campbell, 2025). This approach contrasts with practices that overtly highlight the "specialness" of children with special needs or rely heavily on labels, which may unintentionally reinforce categorisation and stereotypes. By treating all children as unique individuals with diverse needs, teachers support the development of authentic empathy and help prevent paternalistic or stigmatising attitudes.

Collaboration between parents and teachers was also identified as a crucial factor in supporting children's empathy development. Several participants reported maintaining regular communication with teachers regarding their children's social emotional development, enabling coordinated strategies between home and school environments (Vogel-Campbell, 2025). Consistency in messages and approaches across contexts strengthens children's learning and increases the likelihood that inclusive values will be internalised. Effective parent-teacher partnerships thus create a coherent learning ecosystem in which children receive consistent reinforcement of empathy, acceptance, and respect for diversity.

Implications for Inclusive Education Policy and Practice

The findings of this study carry several important implications for inclusive education policy and practice in Indonesia. First, the results indicate that full inclusion models, in which children with and without special needs learn together in shared environments without segregation, are more effective in fostering social empathy than partial integration or segregated models. Inclusive education policies should therefore encourage schools to adopt full inclusion supported by adequate systemic resources, rather than merely placing children with special needs in regular classrooms without appropriate support. Effective implementation of full inclusion requires strong institutional commitment, sufficient resources, and fundamental changes in school culture.

Second, the critical role of teachers in facilitating empathy development highlights the need for high quality teacher training and professional development in inclusive schools. Teachers should be equipped not only with adaptive instructional strategies, but also with a deep understanding of how to create social emotional environments that foster empathy and acceptance (Lessil, 2023). Teacher education programmes should include components on modelling inclusive behaviours, facilitating positive peer interactions, and normalising diversity within classroom contexts. Investment in teacher competence represents a long-term investment in the quality and sustainability of inclusive education.

Third, this study underscores the importance of parental involvement in supporting children's social emotional learning in inclusive environments. School policies and programmes should actively engage parents through regular communication, parent education initiatives on inclusive values, and opportunities for parental participation in school activities (Fitriani et al., 2024). Schools may consider developing workshops or parent discussion groups addressing inclusive practices, strategies for supporting empathy development at home, and opportunities for parents to share

experiences. Strong school family partnerships contribute to a coherent ecosystem that supports children's inclusive character development.

Fourth, the generalisation of inclusive attitudes to contexts outside school indicates that inclusive education has the potential to contribute to broader social change. Children who grow up with inclusive attitudes and respect for diversity are more likely to become members of society who support equality and social justice. Investment in inclusive education from early childhood should therefore be understood not only as an investment in individual learners with special needs, but also as an investment in the development of a more inclusive and equitable society. Education policies should explicitly recognise the long-term social value of inclusive education and allocate appropriate support accordingly.

Fifth, the observed variation in cognitive empathy development indicates that not all children benefit equally from inclusive environments without additional support. Schools should therefore develop differentiated strategies to support children who require more explicit facilitation in building conceptual understanding of diversity. A one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient for complex social emotional learning processes; instead, responsive and individualised approaches are necessary.

Sixth, the findings emphasise the importance of introducing inclusive education from early childhood, when children are in formative periods of value and attitude development. Inclusive experiences at the preschool and kindergarten levels provide a strong foundation for the development of inclusive character that may persist throughout life (Fitriani et al., 2024). Educational policies should prioritise the development and support of inclusive programmes in early childhood education, ensuring that infrastructure, teacher training, and systemic support are available from the earliest stages of formal education. Early interventions aimed at fostering inclusive attitudes are more effective and efficient than attempts to modify attitudes that have become entrenched later in life.

This study highlights the need for longitudinal research that follows children's social empathy development from early childhood into adolescence and adulthood. Cross-sectional studies such as the present research provide valuable snapshots of empathy development at a single point in time, but cannot capture long-term developmental trajectories or identify factors that influence the stability of empathy over time (Vogel-Campbell, 2025). Longitudinal research would offer more comprehensive insights into the long-term impacts of early inclusive education on character development and social behaviour, as well as the mechanisms through which early inclusive experiences shape later attitudes and actions.

CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study reveals that full inclusive education at Aluna Montessori Kindergarten, Jakarta, plays a significant role in fostering social empathy among typically developing children through authentic and repeated interactions with peers with special educational needs. Analysis of the perceptions of five parents generated three fundamental themes: affective empathy, manifested in spontaneous emotional responses; cognitive empathy, reflected in children's understanding of differences in communication needs; and prosocial behaviour, consistently demonstrated through helping actions and non-discriminatory attitudes. The findings indicate that inclusive experiences not only enhance children's emotional sensitivity within the school environment but also contribute to the normalisation of diversity in children's perceptions, which becomes internalised and extends to broader social contexts.

Synergistic collaboration between parents and teachers emerged as essential in facilitating the consolidation of inclusive values. This study strengthens theoretical arguments that early childhood represents a critical period for the formation of stable and enduring empathic character. The practical implications include the need for systematic implementation of full inclusion models, the continuous development of teachers' pedagogical competencies, and the

strengthening of school–family partnerships to create an educational ecosystem that effectively supports the development of social empathy from an early age.

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