

***A Critical Exploration of
Family Support and
Educational Experiences for
Visually Impaired Students
in a Chinese Coastal City***

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Educational equity for students with disabilities is a fundamental reflection of a society's commitment to inclusive development (Elliott, Stanbridge and Branigan, 2024). Among various disability categories, visual impairment presents distinct challenges: students must navigate educational systems designed primarily for sighted learners, requiring specialized materials, assistive technologies, and pedagogical adaptations (Li et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2021). In China, where special education has lagged general education in resource allocation and policy attention (Wang and Feng, 2014), therefore, understanding how visually impaired students experience schooling is critical for developing contextually appropriate interventions (Li and Muhamad Gina Nugraha, 2025). This study investigates the influence of social determinants—including family support structures and policy implementation—on the educational development and lived experiences of visually impaired students in Zhuhai, Guangdong Province. While the Chinese government has undertaken sustained efforts to advance special education (Wang and Feng, 2014), with research agendas broadening beyond traditional disability categories (Zhang and Miao, 2022), the translation of these macro-level developments into improved classroom experiences and family engagement remains underexplored (Zhang and Miao, 2022; Qu, 2024). This study addresses this gap through micro-level analysis in one strategically selected city.

Despite progress toward inclusive education through the 'Learning in Regular Classroom' (LRC) policy framework (State Education Commission, 1994) initiated in the 1980s (Wang and Feng, 2014), significant gaps persist between policy ideals and classroom realities for visually impaired students. These gaps manifest across multiple levels. Systemically, shortages of qualified teachers with specialized training in visual impairment pedagogy, inadequate funding, and limited access to assistive technologies constrain effective implementation (Wang and Feng, 2014; Chen et al., 2021). At the instructional level, visually impaired students face significant difficulties accessing textual information, with challenges amplified in economically disadvantaged areas lacking specialized devices and accessible resources (Li et al., 2009; Awang, Rani, and Hock, 2024). These challenges are not isolated technical issues but reflect deeper structural tensions (Jia, Tan and Santi, 2022). The LRC policy

emphasizes physical integration—placing students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms—yet often fails to provide the specialized support systems necessary for genuine inclusion (Qu, 2022). This creates what might be what Skinner, Katz and Knight (2022) term ‘presence without participation’: students attend regular schools but cannot fully access the curriculum or engage meaningfully with learning activities. Moreover, prevailing societal attitudes and low expectations regarding visually impaired individuals’ learning capacity (Song et al., 2014; Wang and Mu, 2014) further compound these barriers. These attitudinal barriers restrict not only immediate educational access but also students’ long-term developmental trajectories (Cheng and Sin, 2020). To explore and understand these mechanisms, this study investigates how macro-level policies and resource allocations translate into the daily educational experiences of visually impaired students in a specific urban context.

Zhuhai, a prefecture-level city in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and designated Special Economic Zone with preferential policies for economic and social development, presents a strategically valuable case for examining these implementation dynamics. The city’s economic background— with a GDP of 447.906 billion yuan in 2024, representing 3.5% growth and a high per capita GDP of 178,700 yuan—indicates a superior financial capacity for supporting social welfare and educational initiatives (Zhuhai Municipal Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

However, these quantitative indicators reveal a paradox central to this research. While Zhuhai’s universal enrolment and extensive financial subsidies—such as the 12-year fee waiver—suggest a state of "saturation" in resource provision, recent scholarship (Qu, 2024) and the city’s own development targets suggest persistent challenges in translating these resources into effective pedagogical practice. According to data from Zhuhai Municipal Bureau of Statistics (2024), the guaranteed high enrolment rate and fiscal input may mask an "implementation capacity gap": the difficulty of evolving from "declarative implementation" (where students are physically present and funded) to "substantive inclusion" (where their specific visual needs are pedagogically met). These challenges—including shortages of specialized teachers, gaps in curriculum adaptation, and limited integration of assistive technologies—reflect systemic tensions between resource provision and utilization capacity (Fullan, 2016).

This disjuncture between resource availability and educational outcomes mirrors broader tensions identified in China's inclusive education literature (Qu, 2022) but remains underexplored at the city level. Moreover, Zhuhai's position as a mid-tier coastal city—neither a resource-rich megacity like Beijing or Shanghai nor an under-resourced inland region (Wei, 2012)—makes it particularly instructive. The challenges observed here are likely representative of a substantial portion of China's rapidly developing urban areas, enhancing the transferability of findings beyond this single site (Yin, 2018). The city's policy documents emphasize developing a "holistic education framework" ensuring "universal access" (Zhuhai Municipal Education Bureau, 2024), yet the gap between these high-level financial aspirations and the daily realities of visually impaired students requires systematic investigation.

This study addresses these gaps through field-based qualitative research in selected special education school in Zhuhai. By examining how teachers, administrators, and families navigate the tensions between policy ideals and local realities, it illuminates specific barriers and facilitators affecting visually impaired students' educational experiences. The findings offer both theoretical insights into inclusive education implementation dynamics and practical recommendations relevant to educators, policymakers, and families supporting children with visual impairments.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction: The Evolution of Special Education in China

China's special education system has undergone substantial transformation over recent decades, marked by a gradual shift from segregation toward inclusive educational practices (Deng and Manset, 2000). This evolution has been driven primarily by policy reforms responding to international frameworks and domestic social development (Wang and Feng, 2014). Following China's endorsement of the 1994 Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), the national agenda began establishing frameworks for integrating students with disabilities into mainstream educational settings.

Two landmark policies have fundamentally shaped this trajectory. The Compulsory Education Law (1986) mandated nine years of free education for all children aged six and above, though initial provisions inadequately addressed students with disabilities, revealing early limitations in inclusive commitments (Piao, 2004). The Learning in Regular Classrooms (LRC) policy, formally institutionalised through the 1994 trial measures (State Education Commission, 1994), emerged primarily as a pragmatic response to limited special school availability in rural areas rather than from rights-based philosophical foundations (Chen, 2023). Subsequent legislative refinements—particularly the 2006 amendments to the Compulsory Education Law and the 2008 Law on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities—formally established legal obligations for mainstream schools to enrol students with disabilities, marking China's progressive movement from marginalization toward inclusion (An, Hu, and Horn, 2018).

Despite these policy advancements, significant implementation challenges persist. Research consistently documents tensions between inclusive education ideals and operational realities, including uneven resource distribution, inadequate professional preparation, and institutional barriers that hinder policy translation into effective practice (Lu et al., 2021; Qu, 2022). These challenges are particularly acute for students with visual impairments, who require specialized materials, assistive technologies, and adapted pedagogical approaches that existing systems often fail to provide adequately (Huang et al., 2024). To understand why these gaps persist despite legislative progress, it is necessary to examine the specific systemic and social dimensions that shape the daily educational experiences of these students.

2.2 Policy Frameworks and Implementation Challenges

China's inclusive education policy framework, while progressive in intent, encounters substantial implementation challenges revealing systematic gaps between macro-level directives and micro-level operational realities (Qu, 2024). The Learning in Regular Classrooms (LRC) policy, introduced in the 1980s, mandates that students with disabilities receive education in mainstream settings whenever feasible (Deng and Guo, 2007). However, research consistently documents disjunctions between LRC's inclusive aspirations and practical manifestations. Qu (2022) characterizes this as "presence without participation", which stands for students physically integrated yet

lacking specialized support, adapted curricula, and qualified instruction necessary for meaningful engagement. This reflects fundamental structural barriers in educational systems designed primarily for typically developing students (Rose and Meyer, 2002).

Several systemic factors impede effective policy implementation. The examination-oriented curriculum framework, centred on the gaokao (college entrance examination), creates institutional pressures privileging academic achievement measured through standardized assessments (Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Qu, 2022). This examination culture produces teacher evaluation systems emphasizing test score improvements, leaving limited incentive or capacity for educators to invest additional effort in accommodating diverse learning needs. For visually impaired students, whose educational progress may require alternative assessment approaches and non-standard timelines, these structural features create conditions where nominal inclusion masks actual marginalization (Wang and Andrews, 2017).

Resource allocation mechanisms compound these challenges. Despite national policies mandating appropriate support, implementation responsibility devolves to local authorities operating under resource constraints (Bardhan, 2002). Research documents substantial regional disparities, with developed coastal areas demonstrating stronger infrastructure while inland regions struggle with basic provision (Pang, 2019). Even in well-resourced contexts, translation of policy intentions into sustainable practice encounters "implementation capacity gaps" (Fullan, 2016), which means the distance between possessing mandates and having organizational systems, expertise, and resources to execute them effectively.

The gap between policy frameworks and operational realities manifests in multiple domains documented by recent research. Schools may establish resource classrooms as required by policy yet lack specialized teachers to staff them adequately (Deng and Manset, 2000). Assistive technologies may be purchased to demonstrate compliance yet remain underutilized due to insufficient training or technical support (Huang et al., 2024). Individualized education plans may be developed formally yet implemented superficially (Wu, 2025) when teachers managing large classes lack time and skills for genuine individualization. These patterns suggest that policy advancement alone proves insufficient; effective inclusive education requires corresponding development of implementation infrastructures—the organizational mechanisms, professional

capacities, and accountability systems that translate policy intentions into daily practice (Wang and Feng, 2014; Qu, 2022).

Cross-sector coordination deficiencies further hinder implementation effectiveness. Inclusive education for visually impaired students ideally involves collaboration among educational institutions, rehabilitation services, social welfare systems, and community organizations. However, institutional fragmentation and unclear responsibility demarcations impede integrated service delivery (Alduais and Deng, 2022). The absence of systematic mechanisms coordinating across sectors means families often navigate disconnected systems independently, with service quality dependent on family advocacy capacity rather than institutional coordination (Jiang and Thompson, 2025).

These implementation challenges directly affect visually impaired students' educational experiences. When policies mandate inclusion without ensuring corresponding support systems, students may experience superficial inclusion, which means physical presence without genuine participation in learning opportunities (Wang and Andrews, 2017). Consequently, the implementation of inclusive education in China remains a complicated process that often struggles to gain traction at the grassroots level (Qu, 2024). However, the effectiveness of these policy frameworks is not solely dependent on legislative mandates; it is fundamentally constrained by the availability of specialized resources and the professional readiness of the educators tasked with their delivery.

2.3 Resource Systems and Teacher Professional Capacity

Beyond policy frameworks, the quality of inclusive education for visually impaired students depends fundamentally on resource availability and educators' capacity to utilize those resources effectively (Cowley, 2011). Research consistently identifies resource scarcity and inadequate professional preparation as interrelated constraints (Miyachi, 2020) limiting educational quality and accessibility.

2.3.1 Educational Resource Scarcity and Distribution Inequalities

The shortage of specialized educational resources constitutes a primary barrier to effective instruction. Wang and Feng (2014) document persistent deficiencies: insufficient specialized schools in underserved regions, acute teacher shortages, and limited adapted instructional materials. Scarcity of Braille textbooks, large-print resources, and tactile materials forces schools to rely on teacher-generated adaptations of variable quality (Azizah Awang, Rani, and Hock, 2024). This operates not merely as material deficit but as systematic barrier in production and distribution systems inadequately scaled to meet specialized needs (Qu, 2022).

Geographic inequalities intensify these challenges. While developed coastal regions have established comprehensive infrastructure, inland and rural areas struggle with basic provision (Pang, 2019). This uneven distribution means students' opportunities depend substantially on regional location rather than individual needs (Wu, 2025), indicating challenges extend beyond funding to systemic issues in how materials are produced, distributed, and sustained (Wang and Feng, 2014; Pang, 2019).

2.3.2 Assistive Technology: Availability and Challenges

Assistive technology represents essential infrastructure for overcoming information access barriers (Stock, Davies, and Wehmeyer, 2004). However, current provision demonstrates gaps between technology availability and effective integration. Many schools lack fundamental technologies including Braille printers and screen readers, while those possessing equipment often struggle with implementation. Huang et al. (2024) further note that technical support emphasizes physical 'presence' over systematic training in pedagogical application, limiting educational impact.

Research reveals general education teachers demonstrate higher technological pedagogical content knowledge than special education teachers, suggesting inadequate preparation for integrating assistive technologies into specialized instruction (Huang et al., 2024). Assessment tools similarly remain insufficiently adapted for visually impaired students (Chen et al., 2021). This represents superficial technology adoption (Huang et al., 2024)—equipment presence without the training, support systems, and pedagogical frameworks necessary for effective utilization.

2.3.3 Teacher Professional Development and Workload Challenges

Teacher capacity critically determines whether available resources translate into effective instruction. Wang and Mu (2014) identify a dual crisis: insufficient numbers of qualified special education teachers combined with inadequate specialization among existing educators. Mainstream teachers accommodating visually impaired students typically lack fundamental knowledge of specialized instructional strategies and differentiated teaching skills, reflecting teacher education programs emphasizing general pedagogical principles over disability-specific competencies (Huang et al., 2024).

Professional development proves inadequate for developing specialized expertise. Teachers value practical, immediately applicable skills training, yet programs frequently prioritize abstract principles disconnected from classroom realities (Wang and Mu, 2014). Resource scarcity compounds capacity challenges by expanding teachers' roles beyond curriculum delivery into material production. When schools cannot provide adapted materials, teachers must develop resources individually, creating role overload (Beltman, Mansfield, and Price, 2011)—a phenomenon similarly observed in Chinese contexts whereby responsibilities extend substantially beyond standard instructional duties.

Assessment systems further constrain individualization capacity. Current frameworks rely on standardized testing lacking appropriate alternatives for visually impaired students (Chen et al., 2021). This inflexibility, combined with curriculum rigidity inadequately accommodating diverse learning characteristics, creates structural conditions wherein individualized instruction remains challenging even for committed educators, suggesting improvement requires transforming organizational and evaluative frameworks, not merely enhancing individual teacher competencies (Fullan, 2016).

2.4 Home-School Partnerships in Special Education Contexts

Effective education for visually impaired students depends substantially on collaboration between schools and families (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011), yet research reveals complex challenges in establishing productive partnerships, particularly when

students present complex disabilities (Ma et al., 2023). Understanding partnership dynamics requires examining theoretical frameworks, family engagement patterns, and contextual factors shaping expectations.

2.4.1 Theoretical Frameworks for Home-School Collaboration

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) identify multiple barriers to effective partnerships in special education: conflicting goals and expectations between families and educators, communication difficulties, and resource constraints limiting family engagement capacity. Their framework proposes successful partnerships require shared understanding of student needs, clear communication, and alignment around educational objectives. However, this assumes expectation alignment represents an achievable and desirable goal—an assumption research on families of children with complex disabilities increasingly questions.

Partnership effectiveness depends on schools' capacity to work within families' varied resources, priorities, and cultural frameworks rather than expecting uniform engagement (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). For visually impaired students, partnerships must navigate technical complexities including specialized materials and assistive technologies that may exceed families' existing knowledge (Wang and Feng, 2014), creating expertise imbalances requiring careful negotiation (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011).

2.4.2 Parental Expectations and Involvement Patterns

Family socioeconomic status and parental education substantially influence engagement (Pang, 2019). Parental involvement positively affects student achievement, particularly for students with disabilities when schools provide adequate support (Xia, 2024), though effectiveness varies based on families' educational capital and confidence (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011).

Parental expectations demonstrate heterogeneity influenced by disability type and context. Ma et al. (2023) found some Chinese parents hold diminished academic expectations, potentially reflecting pragmatic system capacity assessments. Li, Xue, and You's (2024) "pragmatic expectation adjustment" describes how families calibrate

aspirations based on realistic assessments of children's capacities and available supports, suggesting apparent "lowered expectations" may represent rational adaptations to structural constraints rather than lack of commitment.

2.4.3 Disability Complexity and Differentiated Family Priorities

Disability nature and severity substantially shape parental priorities, with important partnership implications. For students with sensory disabilities alone—visual impairment without cognitive co-occurring conditions—families may maintain academic expectations comparable to typically developing children, viewing disability as requiring technical accommodations rather than altered educational goals (Li et al., 2009). However, for students with complex disabilities, family priorities often shift toward functional independence, social integration, and quality of life considerations that may diverge from schools' academic emphases (Ma et al., 2023).

This divergence reflects not lack of commitment, but different conceptualizations of educational success grounded in families' intimate knowledge of children's needs and realistic system capacity assessments. Li, Xue, and You (2024) argue families' pragmatic adjustments respond to experiential understanding of what systems can deliver and what outcomes matter most for children's well-being. When schools interpret such adjustments as insufficient support, partnerships may founder due to fundamentally different value orientations that communication alone cannot resolve.

2.4.4 Cultural Factors in Chinese Contexts

Partnership dynamics in China operate within specific cultural contexts. High dual-employment rates mean grandparents frequently serve as primary caregivers, particularly for children with disabilities (Li, Xue, and You, 2024). These arrangements may introduce complexity as grandparents' educational philosophies, disability understandings, and academic expectations may differ from parents' and teachers' perspectives. Cultural emphases on academic achievement and Confucian educational values (Dello-Iacovo, 2009) coexist with values prioritizing children's well-being, creating tensions when disability raises questions about realistic academic goals.

General understanding on disability from traditional cultural perspective often rooted in medical models emphasizing deficits, it may influence family expectations (Alduais and Deng, 2022). While inclusive education policies promote social models recognizing disability as environmental interaction, family belief systems may lag behind policy frameworks (Deng and Manset, 2000). These cultural attributions suggest effective partnerships require fundamental attention to how cultural contexts shape families' disability understandings, educational values, and engagement capacities, necessitating differentiated collaboration approaches responsive to varying family circumstances rather than universal partnership models.

2.5 Social Attitudes and Inclusion Climate

Beyond structural resources and policies, inclusive education quality depends substantially on social attitudes toward disability and relational climate within educational settings (Qu, 2022). For visually impaired students, social perceptions shape peer interactions and opportunities for genuine participation (Wang and Feng, 2014).

2.5.1 Societal Perceptions of Visual Impairment

Historical attitudes toward visual impairment in China have been governed by medical model frameworks emphasizing deficits rather than environmental barriers (Alduais and Deng, 2022). Traditional perspectives contribute to persistent stereotypes, notably the cultural expectation that blind individuals pursue massage careers (Li, Xu, and Hu, 2022), constraining both labour market opportunities and educational aspirations as families and educators may calibrate expectations based on perceived post-school limitations (Ma et al., 2023).

These attitudes extend into educational contexts. When societal perceptions frame visual impairment through deficit lenses, schools may approach inclusion as charitable accommodation rather than rights-based practice (Deng and Manset, 2000). Social cognitive changes lag substantially behind institutional reforms (An, Hu, and Horn, 2018), meaning that even as policies mandate inclusion, underlying attitudes may perpetuate marginalization through reduced expectations, limited peer acceptance, and social isolation (Wang and Andrews, 2017).

2.5.2 Contact Theory and Inclusion Climate

Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) contact hypothesis demonstrates that intergroup contact reduces prejudice when certain conditions obtain: equal status, cooperative activities, common goals, and institutional support. Inclusive classrooms theoretically provide contexts meeting these conditions, positioning schools as microsystems for attitude change (Ainscow and Miles, 2008).

However, contact alone proves insufficient. Superficial integration—physical proximity without genuine interaction—may fail to reduce prejudice and can reinforce stereotypes (de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert, 2012). For visually impaired students, effectiveness depends on whether contact facilitates authentic relationships or positions students as objects of curiosity. Teachers and peers may demonstrate interest in disability characteristics while failing to recognize students as fully dimensional individuals (Jiang and Thompson, 2025)—a form of subtle marginalization wherein students remain perpetually marked as different (de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert, 2012).

Creating genuinely inclusive climates requires cultivating "cultures of collaboration" (Ainscow and Miles, 2008) that reconceptualize diversity as educational resource rather than pedagogical challenge (Rose and Meyer, 2002), involving systemic transformation in how communities understand disability and structure learning environments.

2.6 Regional Context: Special Education in Zhuhai

Understanding inclusive education implementation requires attention to regional contexts shaping resource availability, policy translation, and educational opportunities. China's substantial geographic and economic disparities create markedly different conditions for special education provision, with coastal developed areas demonstrating advantages over inland and rural regions in infrastructure, qualified personnel, and specialized resources (Pang, 2019).

Zhuhai, a prefecture-level city in Guangdong Province within the Greater Bay Area, represents a relatively well-resourced urban context for special education. As detailed

in the introduction, the city demonstrates relatively substantial economic capacity and policy commitment. Additionally, Zhuhai's position as a mid-tier coastal city makes it representative of China's rapidly developing urban areas (Wei, 2012).

However, the relationship between resource availability and implementation quality in such advantaged contexts remains underexplored. While Zhuhai possesses strong infrastructure, resource classroom coverage does not automatically translate into effective utilization (Fullan, 2016; Qu, 2022). National research identifies persistent challenges including teacher preparation gaps (Wang and Mu, 2014; Huang et al., 2024) and family navigation difficulties (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011), but these studies predominantly examine under-resourced contexts. Whether similar challenges persist when foundational resources are present—and what alternative barriers emerge—remains an open empirical question. This gap motivates the current study's focus on Zhuhai as a critical case where resource constraints cannot explain implementation difficulties.

Zhuhai thus represents a theoretically strategic case (Yin, 2018) for understanding inclusive education implementation: a context where basic infrastructure exists but quality challenges may persist. Examining how policy intentions translate into practice within this relatively advantaged setting offers insights into barriers that transcend resource scarcity alone, illuminating what implementation challenges remain even when foundational conditions appear favourable.

2.7 Research Gaps and Study Rationale

The preceding review identifies three critical gaps in current research. First, while studies document policy-practice gaps systemically (Section 2.2), micro-level mechanisms through which policies translate into daily practice remain underexplored (Fullan, 2016; Qu, 2024). Second, research inadequately examines how disability complexity shapes family expectations and home-school partnerships (Li, Xue, and You, 2024). Third, limited research investigates inclusive education in well-resourced urban contexts, with most studies focusing on under-resourced areas (Wang and Feng, 2014; Pang, 2019).

Research Questions

Central Question: How do resource systems, home-school partnerships, and policy implementation mechanisms shape the educational experiences of visually impaired students in Zhuhai's special education context?

Sub-questions:

1. How do resource constraints affect teachers' instructional practices and the distribution of educational support responsibilities?
2. How does disability complexity influence family educational expectations and partnership dynamics?
3. What factors mediate the translation of inclusive education policies into classroom practice in relatively well-resourced urban contexts?

Importance of the Study

This study contributes theoretically by illuminating micro-level implementation mechanisms that complement existing macro-level policy analysis (Qu, 2024; Fullan, 2016). Empirically, it addresses the underexplored context of well-resourced urban settings, providing insights relevant to China's expanding mid-tier cities (Wei, 2012). Practically, findings inform policy refinement and responsive partnership approaches for educators and families navigating inclusive education implementation.

Chapter 3 Research Design and Methodology

Building on the research gaps identified in Chapter 2, particularly the need for micro-level investigation of implementation mechanisms (Section 2.7), this chapter outlines the research design and implementation procedures, following the "research onion" framework (Saunders et al., 2007) to ensure methodological rigour and ethical integrity. By peeling back the layers from philosophy to techniques, the study ensures that the chosen methods are logically consistent with its underlying worldviews.

3.1 Research Methodology

This study adopts a relativist ontology (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, pp. 105–117), asserting that social reality is not a singular, objective truth but is constructed through the subjective experiences and interpretations of individuals within the Zhuhai educational context. In the field of special education, the "success" or "challenge" of inclusive practices is not merely a set of quantitative metrics, but a socially constructed reality (Brekhus, 2015) perceived differently by teachers, parents, and administrators. Aligned with this ontology, the research employs an interpretivist epistemology, focusing on understanding the diverse meanings participants attach to their lived experiences (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used in this study to investigate the educational experiences of visually impaired students. Hermeneutic phenomenology was selected because it enables examination of how individuals interpret their lived experiences while acknowledging the researcher's role in meaning-making (Van Manen, 2016). This approach aligns with the study's aim to understand not only what visually impaired students experience but how teachers, administrators, and families make sense of these experiences within their specific institutional and cultural context.

A single-case cross-sectional design was employed, gathering data at a specific point in time (September 2025) rather than tracking changes longitudinally. This design was appropriate because the research questions focus on understanding current implementation dynamics and stakeholder perspectives within one institutional context, rather than measuring change over time (Sedgwick, 2014). The single-case approach enabled in-depth investigation of the complex interactions between policy frameworks, resource availability, and educational practices within a bounded system (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

3.1.1 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

In alignment with the hermeneutic approach, the researcher acknowledges that total objectivity is neither possible nor desired. As a researcher trained in international education and inclusive pedagogy, my perspective is shaped by a belief in the social model of disability, which views barriers as systemic rather than individual deficits.

Throughout the fieldwork, researcher of this study maintained a reflexive journal to document emotional responses and potential biases, particularly my initial assumption that resource inadequacy was the primary barrier. By consciously "bracketing" (Husserl, 1931) these preconceptions while simultaneously integrating my professional understanding (Gadamer, 2004), researcher of this study sought to move from a purely descriptive account to a deeper interpretive understanding of the Zhuhai context. This reflexivity ensures that the findings are a co-construction between the participants' voices and the researcher's analytical lens. This iterative process of reflection and interpretation proved particularly valuable when confronting contradictory evidence—for instance, discovering that resource-rich contexts still encountered quality challenges, which prompted deeper investigation into implementation mechanisms beyond material provision.

To operationalise this interpretivist framework, the study was structured into specific phases of participant selection, data gathering, and analytical interpretation. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with five formal participants (three teachers and two school administrators), supplemented by informal contextual conversations with three parents. Purposive sampling (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2016) was employed to identify individuals with the requisite expertise to address the research questions. Following audio-recording and verbatim transcription, the data underwent thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to identify patterns across resource challenges, home-school partnerships, and policy implementation.

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout, including approval from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David Research Ethics Committee, anonymisation of participants (T1-T3; A1-A2), and secure, encrypted data management to prioritise participant welfare. The following sections detail these procedures.

3.2 Sampling

This study used purposive sampling (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2016), a non-probability technique where researchers deliberately select participants with specific characteristics relevant to the research questions (Patton, 2015). Selection criteria required that teachers possess minimum three years' experience working with visually impaired students, and school leaders hold administrative positions with oversight of

educational or student affairs. The three-year threshold was established to ensure participants had experienced multiple policy cycles and student cohorts, as such knowledge and experiences developed through sustained engagement (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Consistent with the strategic case selection rationale outlined in Section 2.6, all participants were recruited from a single special education school in Zhuhai. The researcher employed a formal gatekeeper strategy (Creswell and Poth, 2018), initially contacting the school through its official website. Following approval from the principal and institutional ethics clearance, the school leadership acted as a facilitator in identifying candidates meeting the inclusion criteria. Given the research subjects were visually impaired minors and considering child safeguarding requirements (British Educational Research Association, 2018), direct student interviews were not conducted. Instead, the study gathered perspectives from adult stakeholders who serve as primary mediators of the students' educational and home environments. This strategy allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the students' lived realities while maintaining the highest ethical standards regarding vulnerable populations.

3.3 Participants

Participant inclusion criteria were: (1) affiliation with the partner school's educational system and (2) capacity to articulate the educational experiences, challenges, and support systems of visually impaired students from stakeholder perspectives (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Sample size was determined by information saturation (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006)—the point where subsequent interviews yield no new themes. During data collection, the researcher conducted initial coding alongside interviewing to monitor thematic emergence. By the fourth interview, core themes related to resource constraints, home-school expectation dynamics, and policy implementation gaps had stabilized. The fifth interview confirmed this pattern, introducing no new substantive themes. While acknowledging the study's single-researcher design and time constraints, the evidence of thematic recurrence across multiple participant types supported the decision that saturation had been reached with five formal participants.

Three parents were initially approached for formal interviews but declined audio recording due to privacy concerns. With verbal consent, the researcher documented key points from informal conversations in field notes, which serve as supplementary contextual information cited where relevant in the findings.

The five formal participants comprised three teachers and two administrators, whose demographic information is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Demographics and Roles

Pseudonym	Role	Years of Experience	Main Responsibilities and Areas of Expertise
T1	Teacher	3 years	Physical education teacher, also responsible for orientation and mobility training for visually impaired students in Class 1
T2	Teacher	9 years	Chinese teacher in Class 1, specializing in auditory learning and concrete teaching aids
T3	Teacher	18 years	Special education specialist in both class 1 and Class 2, teaching life skills and Chinese, with emphasis on behaviour management
A1	School leader	12 years	Served as a key school leader, familiar with the school's overall development strategy and policy context
A2	School leader	5 years	Currently Deputy Leader, responsible for instructional support and some administrative coordination

The diversity in teaching tenure (3 to 18 years) provides multi-generational perspectives on Zhuhai's special education evolution. T3's 18-year tenure offers longitudinal insights into the transition from pre-LRC policy era to current practices, while T1 and T2 provide contemporary classroom perspectives. The two administrators, selected following Palinkas et al.'s (2015) framework for purposeful

sampling, offer institutional-level insights into resource allocation and policy translation. Specifically, A1's senior leadership position provided macro-level perspectives on policy interpretation and resource allocation decisions, while A2's role as Deputy Leader offered insights into operational challenges of translating policy directives into classroom practice. This multi-level administrative representation ensured the study captured both strategic and operational dimensions of inclusive education implementation. All five participants completed their interviews without withdrawal.

3.4 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data collection method because they enable systematic exploration of pre-determined topics while allowing flexibility to pursue participants' unique perspectives and emerging themes (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2007). This balance was essential given the study's aim to address both common challenges across stakeholders and context-specific experiences. The interview protocol was informed by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), aligning with the literature structure in Chapter 2: microsystem questions addressed classroom interactions (Section 2.3), mesosystem questions examined home-school partnerships (Section 2.4), and macrosystem questions explored policy implementation (Section 2.2).

The interview protocol addressed four key domains: (1) participants' roles and interactions; (2) specific challenges in teaching and resource adaptation; (3) perspectives on current support systems; and (4) recommendations for improvement. Questions were designed to be open-ended, encouraging detailed responses (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). For example: "Can you describe a specific instance when you faced difficulties adapting teaching materials? How did you address this?" This question exemplifies the protocol's approach of grounding abstract policy discussions in concrete classroom experiences, enabling participants to articulate implementation challenges through specific examples rather than general statements. Such situated questioning proved particularly effective in eliciting rich, contextually grounded data.

3.4.1 Translation and Linguistic Rigour

To ensure conceptual equivalence, the researcher followed a rigorous translation protocol (Temple and Young, 2004). The protocol was developed in English and translated into Mandarin with cultural adaptations for the Chinese educational context. A back-translation method was employed to verify socio-cultural nuances remained intact, followed by a pilot interview to refine question wording and timing. For instance, the concept of "inclusive education" required careful translation consideration, as the Chinese term "融合教育" (róng hé jiào yù) carries specific policy connotations that might differ from Western inclusive education frameworks. Such cultural-linguistic nuances were addressed through iterative refinement.

3.4.2 Interview Procedures and Data Management

Formal interviews were conducted in September 2025. Before each session, the researcher explained research aims and secured written informed consent. Interviews occurred in a designated quiet room and were fully audio-recorded. Following each interview, reflexive memos documented nonverbal cues and preliminary reflections (Birks, Chapman, and Francis, 2008).

All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and anonymized. Electronic data were stored on encrypted devices using a data tracking log (Nowell et al., 2017). In accordance with university ethics requirements, data will be retained for five years before being permanently destroyed.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Consistent with the hermeneutic phenomenological lens, the analysis moved through the "hermeneutic cycle"—a recursive process of understanding the "whole" educational experience through detailed comprehension of its "parts" (specific interview statements), then reassessing those parts in light of the emerging whole (Alsaigh and Coyne, 2021).

To ensure analytical rigour, the researcher utilized a data tracking log to document code evolution across all five datasets, ensuring final themes were transparently grounded in the raw data.

3.5.1 Preparation and Familiarization

All interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve participants' original expressions. Transcripts were anonymized using codes (T1–T3; A1–A2) and stored on encrypted devices. Before formal coding, the researcher immersed in the data by reading transcripts at least twice, documenting initial impressions in analytical memos (Birks et al., 2008).

3.5.2 Coding and Theme Development

A manual inductive coding process was employed, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases:

Initial Coding (Phase 2): Line-by-line coding generated descriptive labels. For example, "creating own Braille exercises nightly" was coded as *teacher-generated materials*; "absence of standardized workbooks" as *insufficient teaching resources*; and "prioritize children's happiness over grades" as *pragmatic expectation adjustment*. The coding process revealed patterns both within and across participant types. For instance, all three teachers independently described after-hours material creation, while both administrators referenced "implementation capacity" constraints—convergences that signalled systematic rather than idiosyncratic challenges.

Theme Construction (Phases 3-4): Similar codes were grouped into candidate themes. Codes relating to material creation and equipment shortages were clustered under "Resource Limitations and Teacher Workload." Divergent expectations and communication barriers formed "Home-School Expectation Gaps." This clustering process involved iterative refinement: initial themes were tested against the data set, with some codes reassigned as their relationships to broader patterns became clearer. For example, codes initially categorized under "teacher workload" were subsequently recognized as manifestations of the broader "implementation capacity gap" theme.

Theme Refinement (Phase 5): Themes were validated against raw data to ensure "internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity" (Patton, 2015)—data within themes hung together meaningfully while differences between themes remained clear.

3.5.3 Interpretive Synthesis

In the final phase, refined themes were synthesized to form the primary analytical framework. The hermeneutic cycle remained central: the researcher constantly moved between raw interview quotes and the broader socio-political context of Zhuhai's inclusive education policies, ensuring the analysis moved beyond descriptive categorization to interpretive engagement with how participants' accounts reflected systemic tensions between policy ideals and classroom realities.

3.6 Rigour

This study followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework to ensure trustworthiness, employing four strategies:

3.6.1 Member Checking

Member checking ensured data authenticity (Birt et al., 2016). Following transcription, the researcher provided participants with written summaries of key interview points and initial interpretations via WeChat. All participants confirmed these summaries faithfully represented their perspectives, with no modifications requested, thereby validating credibility.

3.6.2 Transferability

Transferability was enhanced through "thick description" of the research context, participant characteristics, and procedures (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). Detailed information about Zhuhai's educational environment and participants' backgrounds allows readers to assess findings' relevance to similar special education settings or other coastal cities in China.

3.6.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity addressed researcher bias (Creswell and Poth, 2018). As detailed in Section 3.1.1, the researcher kept reflective memos to document and challenge pre-existing assumptions—such as the initial belief that resource scarcity was the only significant barrier. By deliberately attending to contradictory evidence, the researcher ensured analysis remained grounded in actual data rather than personal preconceptions.

3.6.4 Audit Trail

A rigorous audit trail ensured transparency and dependability (Nowell et al., 2017). A detailed research log documented all procedural decisions from initial design through final thematic analysis, including a data tracking log recording code evolution. This provided a clear and traceable link between raw interview data and final findings.

These interconnected measures established the study's trustworthiness, ensuring findings are both academically rigorous and practically relevant.

Chapter 4 Findings and Data Analysis

4.1 Overview of Interview Data

Following the analytical procedures described in Chapter 3, this chapter presents findings from thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with three teachers and two school administrators at a special education institution in Zhuhai. The interviews explored the research questions outlined in Section 2.7: (1) how resource constraints shape instructional practices and support responsibilities, (2) how disability complexity influences home-school partnership dynamics, and (3) how policy intentions translate into classroom practice.

Initial examination revealed complex tensions between inclusive education principles and classroom realities. Teacher T1 captured this: *"The textbook support is exemplary; however, the follow-up exercises present significant challenges. We must use our leisure*

time to identify relevant exercises, print them on unadorned paper, and anticipate parental assistance." This exemplifies educators' dedication coupled with systemic resource constraints extending their professional responsibilities beyond standard working hours.

Multiple recurring issues emerged across interviews. Resource limitations manifested not only in material shortages but also in time and expertise required to adapt materials for diverse student needs. Teacher T2 noted, *"For families with parents lacking an educational background, assisting their children in completing the practice poses a challenge,"* highlighting how resource gaps extend beyond school walls into home learning environments. Administrator A1 articulated the policy-practice gap: *"In converting macro-policy directives into specific, sustainable classroom resources, we encounter practical challenges, notably the time and expense associated with developing adaptive teaching materials."*

There are tensions between policy ideals and resource realities, between standardized curricula and individual student needs, and between professional aspirations and practical constraints. These tensions provide the analytical framework for the findings presented in the following sections.

4.2 Resource Constraints and Adaptive Practice Development

This section examines how teachers implement inclusive education practices within resource-constrained environments. Interview data revealed systematic tensions between policy frameworks emphasizing integration and the material conditions necessary for effective instruction. These findings expose what administrators termed the "implementation capacity gap"—the distance between inclusive education ideals and schools' organizational capacity to actualize them in daily practice.

4.2.1 The Core Curriculum-Practice Materials Gap

When asked about their daily teaching challenges, Teachers T1 and T2 immediately identified a tension between well-supported core textbooks and absent supplementary practice materials. While national curriculum frameworks provide Braille textbooks,

they fail to supply the practice materials necessary for skill consolidation—materials that sighted students access readily through commercially available workbooks.

Teachers described assuming responsibilities beyond curriculum delivery, becoming resource developers in their non-instructional time. T1 explained: *"The textbook support is exemplary; however, the follow-up exercises present significant challenges. We must use our leisure time to identify relevant exercises, print them on unadorned paper, and anticipate parental assistance."* T2 highlighted how this gap extends beyond teacher workload: *"For families with parents lacking an educational background, assisting their children in completing the practice poses a challenge."* For visually impaired students, this absence of practice materials creates fundamental barriers to learning, as repeated tactile engagement with Braille text is essential for literacy development.

4.2.2 Home Learning and Socioeconomic Stratification

The practice materials gap extends beyond school walls. T2 observed: *"For families with parents lacking an educational background, assisting their children in completing the practice poses a challenge. These students have a disadvantage."* This illuminates how resource constraints interact with family socioeconomic status to produce educational inequalities.

The teacher-created practice materials depend on parental mediation for their effectiveness—parents must guide students through exercises at home, explain tasks, and verify completion. Teachers reported that parents with higher educational levels could decode their handwritten notes and scaffold exercises effectively, while those without such resources could not. T1 and T2 both emphasized that families were "supportive," indicating the issue was not parental willingness but rather the structural conditions making effective support contingent on educational capital.

4.2.3 Administrative Perspectives and Classroom Challenges

School administrators contextualized these classroom-level challenges within broader policy implementation dynamics. Administrator A1 explained: *"In converting macro-policy directives into specific, sustainable classroom resources, we encounter practical challenges, notably the time and expense associated with developing adaptive teaching*

materials." This statement identifies an "implementation capacity gap"—the distance between policy intentions and the organizational resources required to actualize them.

Administrator A2 described the school's response: *"Our emphasis is on maximising the utilisation of current limited resources and investigating methods to offer optimal assistance to teachers within the existing framework."* This approach represents pragmatic adaptation to structural constraints. While administrators emphasized experience sharing among teachers, they acknowledged this could not fundamentally address the absence of professionally designed, quality-assured materials.

Teacher T3, whose class comprised students with visual impairments plus additional disabilities including intellectual disabilities and autism, identified challenges related to student heterogeneity: *"One of the foremost challenges is maintaining a consistent state among students throughout the lesson. The misbehaviour of a single student who lacks self-control adversely affects the learning experience of other students with visual impairments."* This observation highlights tensions in implementing inclusive education for students with complex, co-occurring disabilities, revealing that students with visual impairments who also experience other disabilities present qualitatively different support needs.

4.3 Home-School Partnerships and Expectation Dynamics

This section examines the nature and quality of home-school collaboration, focusing on how parental engagement patterns vary according to students' disability complexity and how differing expectations between families and educators shape educational experiences.

4.3.1 Patterns of Parental Engagement

When asked about parental involvement, Teachers T1 and T2, who primarily taught students with visual impairments and minimal co-occurring disabilities, described uniformly positive experiences. T1 stated: *"The parents are exceedingly supportive. Although they may lack extensive education, they strive to assist the children in completing their schoolwork and maintaining their progress."* Families demonstrated commitment to

supporting homework completion and cultivating study habits, working within their educational capacities.

However, teachers identified tensions where grandparents or other extended family caregivers, serving as primary guardians, sometimes prioritized protecting children from perceived stress over maintaining rigorous academic expectations. Teachers noted that these caregivers, who often assumed childcare responsibilities when parents worked, held different views about childhood, learning, and appropriate expectations for children with disabilities.

Teacher T3, whose students had complex disabilities, described a markedly different pattern. When asked about family expectations, she explained: *"Parents often express a desire for their children to develop social and academic adaptability rather than to focus solely on rigorous studying. They desire their children to mature contentedly."* T3 clarified that "academic adaptability" refers to students' capacity to participate appropriately in classroom routines and follow basic academic expectations rather than advanced academic achievement. Parents of Class 2 students emphasized social integration and fundamental self-care competencies over conventional academic success, prioritizing their children's happiness and quality of life.

This contrast illuminates how disability complexity shapes parental priorities. For students with visual impairments alone, parents maintained academic expectations comparable to sighted students. For students with complex disabilities, parents' expectations shifted toward functional life skills and social belonging—what parents in informal conversations termed "joyful development" rather than academic rigor.

4.3.2 Negotiating Expectation Gaps

The expectation gap identified by T3 represents a fundamental tension in special education: reconciling family priorities with institutional academic standards. Teachers described parents' emphasis on social skills and self-care as reflecting a different conception of what constitutes successful education for their children. These families prioritized competencies they believed would enable their children's long-term independence and social acceptance.

Administrator A2 articulated the school's approach to this challenge: *"We must comprehend the varying needs of families according to the specific circumstances of their children. Families of students with significant disabilities prioritise pragmatic objectives, specifically survival skills and quality of life. Our communication techniques must align with this, rather than only highlighting cohesive academic norms."* This statement reframes the expectation gap as a natural consequence of varying circumstances rather than a problem requiring resolution. A2 described this as recognizing that effective collaboration means different things for different families rather than applying uniform engagement models.

Teachers reported that while these expectation differences created challenges in planning individualized education goals, they did not prevent productive collaboration. Instead, educators and families found areas of mutual concern—such as student well-being, social skills development, and independence—around which to build working relationships despite divergent long-term educational priorities.

4.4 Policy Implementation and Social Inclusion

This section examines teachers' and administrators' perspectives on inclusive education policies, social attitudes toward visually impaired students, and environmental factors affecting implementation.

4.4.1 Teachers' Perspectives on LRC Policy

Participants expressed general support for China's Learning in Regular Classroom (LRC) policy but recognized that inclusive and specialized settings serve different functions. Teachers identified distinctive advantages of specialized special education environments. Teacher T1 stated: *"In our school, we can provide immediate Braille instruction, tactile learning materials, and mobility training integrated into daily routines. The entire environment is designed with visual impairment in mind—classroom layouts, tactile markers, accessible technology."*

Administrator A1 elaborated: *"Specialized settings offer peer communities where visual impairment is the norm rather than the exception. Students here don't experience constant comparison with sighted peers or questions about their capabilities."* These accounts

emphasize that specialized environments provide not only technical accommodations but also social contexts where disability does not mark students as exceptional or deficient.

However, teachers also recognized potential tensions between inclusive education ideals and mainstream school communities' concerns. Teacher T3 observed: *"Parents in regular schools prioritize academic achievement. They worry that including students with significant support needs might slow instruction or require teacher attention that reduces focus on other students."* T3 suggested these concerns reflected inadequate support systems rather than prejudice: *"If regular schools had adequate special education teachers, assistive technology, and modified curricula, these concerns might diminish."*

4.4.2 Social Attitudes and Infrastructure Gaps

When asked about social acceptance, participants described gradual improvement alongside persistent challenges. Administrator A1 stated: *"Compared to even ten years ago, public awareness has increased. People understand more about visual impairment; there's less overt discrimination."* Participants attributed this improvement to increased policy attention and public education efforts.

However, teachers identified continuing barriers. Teacher T2 recounted: *"Students sometimes report that when they're in public spaces, strangers approach them with intrusive questions—'Can you see anything at all?' The questions aren't hostile, but they treat visual impairment as spectacle rather than simply a characteristic. One student told me she feels constantly observed and questioned, which makes her self-conscious about being in public."* This illustrates how well-intentioned curiosity can inadvertently reinforce students' sense of being different.

Teachers emphasized that schools could actively shape social attitudes through structured activities. Teacher T1 described a joint music performance initiative: *"Our students demonstrated their musical abilities. Afterward, the sighted students' questions changed from 'How do you do things?' to 'How did you learn to play so well?' The focus shifted from disability to ability."* Administrator A1 articulated this principle: *"Schools are microsystems for altering social perceptions. When we create opportunities for visually*

impaired students to showcase strengths, we challenge assumptions about disability meaning inability."

Regarding infrastructure, Teacher T2 provided a concrete example: tactile paving exists but is *"routinely blocked by vendors' stalls, parked motorcycles, or construction materials."* Teachers described this as reflecting inadequate enforcement and public compliance mechanisms. Teacher T3 connected this infrastructure example to broader implementation challenges: *"The blocked pathways symbolize a larger pattern—we have policies supporting disability inclusion, resources allocated on paper, but the daily reality often doesn't match."*

4.5 Summary of Research Findings

This chapter presented findings from thematic analysis of interviews with three teachers and two school administrators at a special education institution in Zhuhai. Three primary themes emerged:

Resource Constraints and Adaptive Practices: Teachers identified significant gaps between available textbooks and necessary practice materials. The absence of standardized supplementary materials required teachers to create resources individually during non-instructional time. This burden extended to families, where effectiveness of home learning depended on parents' educational backgrounds. Administrators described challenges in translating policy mandates into sustainable classroom resources.

Home-School Expectation Dynamics: Parental engagement patterns varied substantially according to students' disability complexity. For students with visual impairments alone, families maintained academic expectations comparable to sighted students. For students with complex disabilities, families prioritized social integration, functional independence, and what they termed "joyful development" over conventional academic achievement. Administrators emphasized the need to recognize these varying priorities rather than expecting uniform expectations.

Policy Implementation and Social Inclusion: Participants described both progress and persistent challenges in inclusive education implementation. While social awareness

had improved over time, barriers remained in daily experiences (e.g., intrusive public curiosity) and infrastructure maintenance (e.g., blocked tactile paving). Teachers emphasized specialized settings' advantages in providing not only technical accommodations but also peer communities where visual impairment was normalized.

These three themes interconnected in complex ways. Resource gaps at school level shifted support burdens to families, with effectiveness contingent on family educational capital. Family expectation patterns reflected both disability complexity and perceived school system capacity. Policy mandates existed alongside implementation challenges in translating intentions into sustainable practice. The following chapter will discuss these findings in relation to existing literature, explore their theoretical significance, and examine implications for policy and practice.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Overview of Key Findings

This study investigated visually impaired students' educational experiences in Zhuhai through interviews with three teachers and two school administrators, revealing systematic tensions between inclusive education policy frameworks and implementation realities across three interconnected domains: (1) resource constraints and implementation capacity gaps, (2) home-school expectation divergences, and (3) policy implementation mechanisms and social inclusion dynamics.

5.1.1 Resource constraints and implementation capacity gaps

Teachers identified resource scarcity as a fundamental barrier. Teacher T1 explained: *"The textbook support is exemplary; however, the follow-up exercises present significant challenges. We must utilise our leisure time to identify pertinent exercises, print them on unadorned paper, and anticipate parental assistance."* This captures what Administrator A1 termed an "implementation capacity gap"—the distance between policy mandates and practical delivery mechanisms. When schools cannot provide standardized materials, support burdens transfer to families, with effectiveness contingent on

parents' educational backgrounds. Teacher T2 articulated this: *"For families with parents lacking an educational background, assisting their children in completing the practice poses a challenge. These students have a disadvantage."* The finding reveals what might be termed a "resource-transfer mechanism": institutional deficits cascade into home-based inequality dynamics, transforming a school-level technical problem into a socioeconomic issue. This finding extends Wang and Feng's (2014) documentation of resource challenges by revealing how institutional deficits cascade into home-based inequality mechanisms.

5.1.2 Home-school expectation divergences

For students with visual impairments alone, teachers described positive family engagement, with Teacher T1 stating parents "strive to assist the children in completing their schoolwork and maintaining their progress." However, for students with complex disabilities, Teacher T3 found parents "express a desire for their children to develop social and academic adaptability rather than to focus solely on rigorous studying," prioritizing what parents in informal conversations termed "joyful development" and independent living skills. Administrator A2 contextualized this: "We must comprehend the varying needs of families according to the specific circumstances of their children. Families of students with significant disabilities prioritise pragmatic objectives, specifically survival skills and quality of life." This pattern suggests what might be called "differentiated partnership needs": effective collaboration takes fundamentally different forms depending on disability complexity and family priorities. This challenges Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) assumption that communication can resolve expectation conflicts, suggesting some gaps persist when families and schools hold legitimately different priorities shaped by lived experiences with disability.

5.1.3 Social inclusion paradox

Administrator A1 noted macro-level progress: *"Compared to even ten years ago, public awareness has increased. People understand more about visual impairment; there's less overt discrimination."* However, teachers identified "micro-level stagnation" in implementation fidelity. Teacher T2's example of tactile paving "routinely blocked by vendors' stalls, parked motorcycles, or construction materials" exemplifies "declarative

implementation"—policies formally adopted but not operationally sustained. Teacher T3 connected this to education: *"The blocked pathways symbolize a larger pattern—we have policies supporting disability inclusion, resources allocated on paper, but the daily reality often doesn't match."* This extends Qu's (2022) "presence without participation" framework by documenting mechanisms: inadequate enforcement, maintenance, and accountability systems allowing policy erosion in practice.

5.2 Situating Findings Within Existing Literature

5.2.1 Confirming and Extending Established Patterns

This study confirms Wang and Feng's (2014) documentation of resource shortages while revealing cascading mechanisms. Administrator A1's identification of "implementation capacity constraints" illuminates how schools possess mandates but lack organizational infrastructure to translate them into practice. When implementation systems cannot deliver resources at scale, burdens transfer to teachers, then to families—creating reliance on "informal" rather than institutionalized support (A2). This demonstrates how resource constraints operate as systemic implementation failures with consequences across multiple domains.

However, this study specifies Wang and Feng's framework in an important way. While their research examined resource shortages primarily as material deficits; this study reveals that in special education contexts, resource gaps encompass not only physical materials but also the organizational time and pedagogical expertise required to adapt them for diverse student needs—creating. This creates what might be termed a "constraint ecology"—where barriers in one domain reinforce those in others, transforming institutional technical problems into socioeconomic issues that amplify educational inequalities.

The expectation divergences between families and schools align with established literature (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011) while providing empirical specificity. For students with visual impairments alone, families actively engage within capacity constraints (Xia, 2024). However, for complex disabilities, parents' emphasis on "joyful development"—drawn from parents' own characterizations as documented in researcher field notes—reveals reconceptualization of educational success. Li, Xue, and You's (2024)

"pragmatic expectation adjustment" helps explain this, yet this study extends their framework by documenting how such adjustments create structural tensions with systems structured around academic mandates.

Teacher T2's blocked tactile paving example reveals "declarative implementation"—a pattern where initial adoption demonstrates commitment, yet inadequate maintenance mechanisms allow fidelity erosion. This extends Qu (2022) by showing implementation requires not merely adoption but sustained organizational attention through enforcement, maintenance, and accountability systems.

5.2.2 Novel Findings and Divergences

Unlike Ma et al.'s (2023) findings suggesting diminished expectations, this study reveals variation by disability complexity and regional context. Teachers T1 and T2 reported strong parental engagement for students with visual impairments, contradicting assumptions about uniformly lowered expectations. The divergence may reflect Zhuhai's strong infrastructure, suggesting parental expectations are shaped by perceived opportunity structures, not solely disability characteristics.

Additionally, the research identifies administrators as "implementation intermediaries" navigating macro-policy directives and micro-operational realities. Administrator A2's articulation of adapting "communication techniques" to "varying family needs" and A1's identification of *"practical challenges in converting macro-policy directives into specific, sustainable classroom resources"* reveals dual positioning: accountable upward while managing downward constraints. This contributes understanding of how administrators function as organizational translators interpreting abstract policy requirements into concrete operational decisions while mediating between competing stakeholder expectations. The Zhuhai case is particularly instructive for understanding this intermediary role. As a mid-tier coastal city with relatively strong infrastructure yet persistent quality challenges, Zhuhai exemplifies contexts where administrators must navigate the paradox of possessing resources on paper while lacking implementation systems to operationalize them effectively. This suggests that administrative capacity-building represents a critical yet underinvested dimension of inclusive education reform.

5.2.3 Theoretical Contributions

This study explored "implementation translation mechanisms"—organizational processes through which policy commitments become (or fail to become) operational realities. While this concept builds on general policy implementation literature (Fullan, 2016), it has not been systematically documented in Chinese inclusive education research. The contribution shows policy-practice gaps reflect not merely inadequate resources but missing organizational systems—production mechanisms, distribution networks, maintenance protocols—shifting focus from resource provision to system-building.

The concept of "differentiated partnership"—recognizing effective collaboration means different things for different families—offers alternatives to alignment-focused approaches (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Rather than treating expectation divergences as problems requiring resolution, differentiated frameworks accept families and schools may legitimately prioritize different outcomes while identifying mutual concern areas for "coalition collaboration."

Documentation of specialized settings' benefits—providing "*peer communities where visual impairment is the norm rather than the exception*" (A1)—challenges integration-segregation binaries (Slee, 2018). This "normative belonging" concept suggests different settings provide different benefits, requiring nuanced placement decisions rather than categorical integration preferences.

5.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings reveal several critical implications for inclusive education policy and practice.

5.3.1 Policy Implications

The identification of "implementation capacity gaps" suggests that advancing inclusive education requires systemic infrastructure development beyond policy mandates. Policymakers should establish regional production and distribution platforms for specialized materials, shift teacher professional development toward practice-based learning (Wang and Mu, 2014; Huang et al., 2024), and fund sustained collaborative

activities between special and mainstream schools (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). District education bureaus could coordinate centralized production of high-demand materials through specialized publisher partnerships, providing baseline materials teachers customize. Rather than one-off workshops, professional development should follow cycle models: initial instruction, classroom implementation with peer observation, and ongoing coaching.

5.3.2 Practice Implications

The documentation of "differentiated partnership needs" indicates educators must recognize that effective collaboration takes fundamentally different forms depending on disability complexity and family priorities (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Li, Xue, and You, 2024). Schools should co-create individualized goals with families rather than expecting uniform engagement and establish formalized resource-sharing systems to reduce teacher workload duplication (Beltman, Mansfield, and Price, 2011). For families prioritizing academic achievement, collaboration should focus on instructional continuity; for families emphasizing functional independence, collaboration should demonstrate connections between academic content and life skills applications.

5.3.3 Family Implications

Parents should actively articulate educational priorities to schools, and schools should facilitate peer support networks recognizing family isolation as a barrier to effective advocacy (Song et al., 2014; Xia, 2024).

5.4 Research Limitations

This study recruited five formal interview participants and three informal parent conversations. While enabling theme identification through information saturation (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006), limited sample constrains depth and precludes exploration of potential perspective variations. The three parents' significance lies in corroborating teacher accounts and providing family voices on priorities—particularly emphases on "joyful development" and functional skills—albeit informally without systematic analysis or member checking. Geographic specificity presents constraints. Zhuhai's financial supporting resource may not represent less-resourced inland or rural regions. Findings regarding parental engagement and resource challenges, while

revealing implementation gaps even in relatively well-resourced contexts, may underestimate difficulties facing schools with weaker infrastructure. Single school focus, while enabling depth, limits understanding of mainstream schools implementing Learning in Regular Classroom policies.

Methodologically, semi-structured interviews introduce researcher interpretation at multiple stages. Despite rigour measures, the researcher's preconception that resource inadequacy constituted the primary barrier to quality inclusive education—documented in reflexivity memos—potentially influenced initial coding attention toward resource-related themes. This preconception, common among researchers familiar with special education literature emphasizing resource constraints (Wang and Feng, 2014), was addressed through deliberate attention to contradictory evidence, yet single-researcher design meant no independent verification. Cross-sectional design captured perspectives at one time point (September 2025), limiting understanding of how phenomena develop over time. Ethically appropriate focus on adult stakeholders means findings represent adults' perspectives on students' experiences rather than students' own voices. Special education school focus means findings may not directly address mainstream school challenges where integration dynamics differ.

5.5 Conclusion

This discussion has situated the study's findings within existing literature, revealing both confirmations and extensions of established patterns. The documentation of "implementation capacity gaps," "resource-transfer mechanisms," and "declarative implementation" illuminates specific processes through which policy intentions fail to translate into effective practice—even in relatively well-resourced urban contexts like Zhuhai.

Three theoretical contributions emerge from this analysis. First, the concept of "differentiated partnership" challenges alignment-focused collaboration models, recognizing that effective home-school partnerships take fundamentally different forms depending on disability complexity and family priorities. Second, the identification of administrators as "implementation intermediaries" highlights a previously underexplored role in navigating macro-policy directives and micro-operational realities. Third, the "normative belonging" concept suggests specialized

settings provide unique benefits beyond technical accommodations—peer communities where disability does not mark students as exceptional.

These findings demonstrate that advancing inclusive education requires more than policy mandates or resource allocation. Even in Zhuhai—a context approaching resource "saturation" with 100% enrolment rates and substantial fiscal investment—the systemic nature of implementation challenges persists. The systemic nature of implementation challenges—spanning resource systems, professional capacity, family engagement, and social attitudes—indicates that sustainable improvement demands coordinated attention across multiple domains. While educators demonstrate remarkable dedication under constrained conditions, individual resilience cannot substitute for systemic support. The transition from "declarative implementation" to sustained operational commitment requires coordinated transformation across policy frameworks, organizational systems, professional practice, and family engagement. Cities investing in special education infrastructure must simultaneously develop implementation systems: not merely purchasing equipment or constructing facilities but building organizational capacity for sustained, effective utilization.

Chapter 6 Recommendations and Future Suggestions

6.1 Recommendations for School-Level Practice

To bridge the policy-practice gap, schools should transition from individual teacher resilience to systemic support structures. First, establishing a School-Based Resource Repository is essential to centralise teacher-created materials, reducing redundant workload and ensuring instructional consistency for visually impaired students. Second, schools must adopt Differentiated Home-School Communication Strategies. Instead of uniform expectations, teachers should co-create individualized goals with families, acknowledging varied socioeconomic backgrounds and disability complexities—particularly for students with co-occurring disabilities where functional life skills may precede academic targets. Finally, Specialised Professional Development should shift from theoretical workshops to practice-based coaching focused on tactile material production and assistive technology application.

6.2 Recommendations for District-Level Administration

District authorities must institutionalise support to ensure regional equity. It is recommended to establish a Regional Special Education Resource Hub in Zhuhai to facilitate the sharing of high-cost equipment (e.g., Braille printers) and standardized supplementary materials. Furthermore, to combat "presence without participation," education bureaus should Mandate Inclusive Interaction Initiatives. Moving beyond physical integration, schools should implement structured, equal-status collaborative activities (e.g., joint arts or sports projects) between special and mainstream schools to foster genuine social belonging and challenge deficit-based perceptions of disability.

6.3 Directions for Future Research

Future scholarship should expand beyond adult perspectives to incorporate the direct voices of visually impaired students through child-centered methodologies. Additionally, Longitudinal Policy Tracking is required to examine how macro-level directives are "translated" across different administrative layers. Comparative studies between high-resource coastal cities like Zhuhai and under-resourced inland regions would further illuminate the contextual dependence of inclusive education effectiveness.

6.4 Conclusion

This study has identified that educational equity for visually impaired students in Zhuhai relies not on sweeping overhauls, but on focused, systemic interventions. By institutionalising resource sharing, differentiating family partnerships, and fostering structured social inclusion, the "implementation capacity gap" can be narrowed. Ultimately, moving from "declarative implementation" to sustained operational commitment is essential for ensuring that inclusive education ideals become meaningful lived realities for every student.

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