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Promoting Factors of Social Inclusion of Students With Special Educational Needs: Perspectives of Parents, Teachers, and Students

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The idea of inclusion in the sense of participatory access to educational opportunities is widely acknowledged and implemented within the pedagogical discourse. Nevertheless, ensuring social participation of students with and without special education needs in learning situations continues to be challenging. The present study examines promoting and hindering factors for social inclusion with a focus on students with special educational needs. Therefore, semi-structured interviews regarding students' ($n = 12$ students with SEN, 12 students without SEN), parents' ($n = 24$), and teachers' ($n = 6$ regular teachers, 6 special need teachers) perceptions of promoting educational characteristics that might influence students' inclusion in everyday school life are analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings provide a wide range of pedagogical interventions that have the potential to promote inclusive education processes on educational, intrapersonal, and interpersonal levels as well as regarding different actors who are involved.

Keywords: inclusive education, social inclusion, special educational needs, promoting factors, multiperspective approach

INTRODUCTION

Several researchers have pointed out that students labeled with special educational needs (SEN) experience a lack inclusion (Koster et al., 2009; Bossaert et al., 2013; Schwab, 2018b; Hassani et al., 2020). Additional studies have demonstrated that when compared to their peers, the wellbeing of students with SEN has reported being less (e.g., Skrzypiec et al., 2016; McCoy and Banks, 2017); whereas other studies could not find any evidence (e.g., Goldan et al., 2021). Nevertheless, there is a consensus that wellbeing is linked to self-esteem, happiness, and further social, emotional, and psychological outcomes (Allen et al., 2018), which are important indicators for inclusion (Gökmen, 2021). Transnational agreements (e.g., UNESCO, 1994; UN, 2006) have therefore urged policymakers to foster the inclusion of all students in mainstream schools. Yet, the concept of inclusion does not seem to be consistent or clearly defined in the literature (Nilholm and Göransson, 2017). Nilholm and Göransson (2017) conducted a review and classified different definitions of inclusion into four main types, namely, inclusion as (a) the placement of students

with SEN in mainstream classrooms; (b) meeting the social/academic needs of students with SEN; (c) meeting the social/academic needs of all students; (d) the creation of communities with specific characteristics (p. 441). For the proposes of the current paper, the concept of inclusion introduced by Felder (2018) is used, which emphasizes that inclusion consists of two interacting dimensions: the societal and the interpersonal. While the societal aspect refers to the larger social context, the interpersonal aspect refers to relationships built on interactions and emotions. Children and youth spend a considerable time of their life in school. Therefore, research and educational policy have by now acknowledged the necessity of school becoming a place where all students have the same chances (UNESCO, 2020) and feel included. Like the concept of inclusion also the concept of inclusive education, as a strategy to promote inclusion, is interpreted in various ways, thereby leading to different approaches in educational policy and practice. In the current study, inclusive education is understood as "(...) a systemic approach to education for all learners of any age; the goal is to provide all learners with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers" (Watkins, 2017, p. 1). Therefore, the importance that "Inclusive schools (...) adapt the school environment to meet the needs of an individual student, rather than making the student fit in the school system" (Erten and Savage, 2012, p. 222) needs to be emphasized at this point. In Austria, where the current study was conducted, students with SEN attend so-called inclusive classes in mainstream schools or self-contained special schools. Schwab (2018a) provides an overview and notes that around 36% of students with SEN in Austria still attend the latter schools, which is a high number given the need for an inclusive approach in the school system. That said, about 64% of students with special educational needs attend inclusive classes, which in turn means that a closer look at their specific situation is needed.

A Framework for Inclusive Education

Even though past research has made considerable efforts to foster the inclusion of students with SEN, the measures to overcome these difficulties remain to be a challenge. Over the last decades, several studies have been undertaken to identify the components needed to build a framework for inclusive education to foster social inclusion. Little (2017) argues that in educational settings, it is important to offer opportunities that foster involvement and particularly encourage those students who have difficulties engaging with their peers in socially anticipated ways. These educational opportunities comprise different aspects such as social participation, students' sense of belonging to the school, and wellbeing (Hascher, 2017; Juvonen et al., 2019). Koster et al. (2009) reviewed past research and name *friendships/relationships, interactions/contacts, perception of the student with SEN,* and *acceptance by classmates* to be considered when speaking of social inclusion (see also Bossaert et al. (2013)). Previous research conducted by Janice et al. (2017) further highlights that in schools, "(a) goal setting and planning learning opportunities; (b) incorporating all young children in the classroom; (c) utilizing tiered models of support; (d) measuring and assessing inclusion;

and (e) training competent classroom teams and staff" (p. 59) play a crucial role in providing high-quality inclusion.

It is essential to note that inclusion still poses a challenge for all stakeholders in the educational system, and additional evidence is needed for the requirements for an inclusive school. These components promising a successful inclusion need to be defined by all people involved in the school system. For example, Schwab et al. (2019) conclude in their study that multiple perspectives are necessary when assessing and analyzing social participation since different actors have varying experiences and diverse views of the same situation. Hence, apart from teachers, students and their parents need to be involved in order to provide a comprehensive perspective that will allow designing a school that responds to all needs. With this understanding, the current paper takes these voices into account and asks students with and without SEN, their parents, and teachers about promoting factors of successful inclusion of students with SEN.

Conditions for Successful Inclusion: Role of Students, Parents, and Teachers

Lower social inclusion of students with SEN could take place owing to reasons ranging from educational factors such as class composition, inclusive didactics, and classroom practices to parents', teachers', and classmates' attitudes as well as individual factors such as students' wellbeing, school belonging and so forth. Allen et al. (2018), in their meta-analysis consisting of 51 studies, found evidence that individual factors such as teacher support (e.g., in learning processes), student characteristic (e.g., emotional stability and self-esteem), and micro-level factors such as peer and parent support strongly correlated with school belonging. School belonging, in turn, has an impact on psychological wellbeing (Jose et al., 2012).

Several studies have indicated that the relationships to teachers as well as classmates correlate strongly with the wellbeing domains (e.g., Moore et al., 2017). The importance of the student-teacher relationship for wellbeing was also confirmed by Littlecott et al. (2018) who conducted interviews with the teaching and support staff as well as with students and parents. In a mixed-method survey, Anderson and Graham (2016) showed that students reported that being respected, being listened to as well as having a say were linked to school wellbeing.

Peers' Role

In a systematic review Woodgate et al. (2020) state that peers named the presence of teacher assistants who spend time with students with SEN as well as dependence on parents (e.g., the necessity to accompany to e.g., leisure activities) as a barrier of inclusion. Furthermore, physical disabilities and emotional challenges of students with SEN were named as hindering factors for them to include their peers. However, also the peers' lack of knowledge in alternative communication skills and their friends influence toward students with SEN were discussed as additional barriers in building relationships with students with SEN. Following this, also the attitude of peers has to be named as an important factor. Several studies have shown its significant impact on the social inclusion of students with SEN (Vignes et al., 2009; De Boer and Pijl, 2016; Schwab, 2017). Therefore,

it is important to consider this aspect of peer relationships in inclusive classrooms, as negative attitudes displayed toward students with SEN can lead to poor social inclusion of the latter (Nowicki and Sandieson, 2002; Bossaert et al., 2011). Hellmich and Loeper (2019) also found empirical evidence that apart from contact, students' self-efficacy beliefs also predicted their attitudes. Positive attitudes can be fostered by actions such as promoting high-quality contact among students with and without SEN by engaging students in cooperative group activities (Keith et al., 2015; Schwab, 2017). This need was further highlighted in a systematic review by Garrote et al. (2017) who found empirical evidence that besides peer tutoring, interventions aiming to foster social interaction and cooperative learning, promote the social acceptance of students with SEN. Rademaker et al. (2020) further point out that in addition to contact, information on the topic of SEN is crucial to change students' attitudes.

Parents' Role

The role of parents, both those having children with or without SEN, regarding inclusive education and social inclusion must also be given attention. Past research showed that parents of students with SEN expressed ambivalent attitudes regarding inclusive education. Although they highlighted the advantages of inclusive education risks (e.g., students with SEN being excluded) were also articulated (De Boer et al., 2010; Gasteiger-Klicpera et al., 2013; Mann et al., 2016). Results of studies regarding the attitudes of parents of students without SEN were mixed. De Boer et al. (2010) conduced a review and showed that overall parents' attitudes were positive regarding the inclusion of students with SEN. Contrary, Schmidt et al. (2020) found in their study that parents of children with SEN were more inclined to inclusion and supposed more positive social effects and advantages for all students than parents of children without SEN. Albuquerque et al. (2019) showed that the latter parents indicated neutral attitudes toward inclusion. Beside these findings, also, the type of disability seems to play a role when it comes to inclusion. Studies have found that parents are more open to the inclusion of students with physical or learning disabilities than to the inclusion of those students with behavioral disorders and intellectual disabilities (see e.g., Paseka (2017), Waxmann Paseka and Schwab (2020)). These results are important since Hellmich et al. (2019) also showed that perceived parental behavior toward students with SEN also predicted peers' attitudes. Therefore the importance of parents' attitudes and behavior in the context of social inclusion has to be given attention.

Teachers' Role

In addition to peers and parents, teachers also play a crucial role in the social participation of students with SEN. In this sense, the role of classroom management also needs to be taken into consideration when aiming to include all students (Vollet et al., 2017). Farmer et al. (2019) point out that teachers need awareness and knowledge regarding classroom dynamics in order to create a classroom climate where all students help and cooperate with each other. Moreover, teacher-student relationships have been shown to impact peer relationships and students' feelings of belonging (Hendrickx et al., 2016; Henke et al., 2017; Van den Berg and Stoltz, 2018). Past research also found evidence that teachers' attitudes toward students with SEN and inclusive teaching practices also play an important role (Avramidis et al., 2019). Subsequently, teachers holding more positive attitudes are open to implement inclusive teaching practices (Hellmich et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2019) and modify their teaching practices to ensure the inclusion of all learners (Monsen et al., 2014). Another outcome of past research is the role of feedback in social acceptance. For instance, it could be shown that positive and negative teacher feedback on both, behavior and academic performance, had an impact on peer acceptance (Bacete et al., 2017; Hendrickx et al., 2017; Wullschleger et al., 2020; Schwab et al., 2022). Teachers themselves emphasize the importance of early integration of students with SEN into kindergarten and preschool in order to foster contact and highlight that cooperation between parents and social workers is crucial. Concerning teachers, Schwab et al. (2019) state that pointing out not only similarities but also the uniqueness of students is crucial to avoid stigmatization and support participation.

Study

Given the assumption that inclusive educational processes are multifaceted and influenced by various stakeholders involved, the present study aims to highlight different perspectives related to students' inclusion in school. The main research question is as follows:

What promotes the inclusion of students with SEN into educational situations from teachers', students', and parents' perspectives who have an active relationship with inclusive educational settings (teaching in inclusive classes, attending inclusive classes, or being a parent of a student that attends an inclusive class)?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample and Procedure

We conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with students, teachers, and parents of students in inclusive classes. The inclusion criteria for the sample were that there had to be at least two students with an official diagnosis of having SEN in class and the existing cooperation of a regular as well as a special needs teacher. Overall, six parents (mother or father) of students with SEN, six parents (mother or father) of students without special educational needs, six regular teachers, six special needs teachers, twelve students with SEN, and twelve students without SEN took part in the study. Out of the twelve students with SEN, seven students had learning disabilities (LD), three had hearing impairments (HI), and two students were diagnosed with autism (see **Table 1**).

The recruitment took place within a broader research project, ATIS STEP project (e.g., Schwab, 2018b). This project was supported by the Styrian Government [grant number: ABT08-247083/2015-34]. Ethical approval was given by the local school authority of Styria (Landesschulrat Steiermark). The interviewees have been chosen from six schools in Styria (a federal state of

TABLE 1 | Sample description.

Participant	Gender	Students' SEN (if applicable)	Participant	Gender	Students' SEN (if applicable)
Parent SEN 1	Female	autism	Student SEN 1	Male	LD
Parent SEN 2	Female	LD	Student SEN 2	Male	LD
Parent SEN 3	Male	LD	Student SEN 3	Male	LD
Parent SEN 4	Female	LD	Student SEN 4	Male	LD
Parent SEN 5	Female	HI	Student SEN 5	Male	LD
Parent SEN 6	Male	LD	Student SEN 6	Female	LD
Parent no SEN 1	Male	-	Student SEN 7	Female	LD
Parent no SEN 2	Female	-	Student SEN 8	Male	HI
Parent no SEN 3	Female	-	Student SEN 9	Male	HI
Parent no SEN 4	Male	-	Student SEN 10	Male	HI
Parent no SEN 5	Female	-	Student SEN 11	Male	autism
Parent no SEN 6	Female	-	Student SEN 12	Male	autism
Teacher special 1	Male	-	Student no SEN 1	Female	-
Teacher special 2	Male	-	Student no SEN 2	Female	-
Teacher special 3	Female	-	Student no SEN 3	Female	-
Teacher special 4	Male	-	Student no SEN 4	Male	-
Teacher special 5	Female	-	Student no SEN 5	Male	-
Teacher special 6	Female	-	Student no SEN 6	Male	-
Teacher regular 1	Female	-	Student no SEN 7	Male	-
Teacher regular 2	Female	-	Student no SEN 8	Female	-
Teacher regular 3	Female	-	Student no SEN 9	Male	-
Teacher regular 4	Female	-	Student no SEN 10	Male	-
Teacher regular 5	Female	-	Student no SEN 11	Male	-
Teacher regular 6	Female	-	Student no SEN 12	Female	-

Austria). To guarantee consent from the school board members and participants, the following procedure was performed: First, school leaders were asked for permission to choose six inclusive classes of the 4th grade from the respective schools. Subsequently, both teachers (regular and special needs teachers) of all of the six classes took part in the interviews. Second, two students with SEN as well as two students without SEN had been selected (by the research team and the teachers) to be interviewed. Additionally, for all students, one caretaker was asked to participate in the interview study. The interviews lasted for 15–90 min and had been conducted at school or other places convenient for the interviewees.

Material

Semi-structured interviews were conducted following a guideline-based approach. Interviewees were asked about their perception of conditions required for the successful inclusion of students. In addition to that, the participants were asked about educational aspects that might promote or hinder successful inclusive learning situations for students with SEN. Another focus was given to the participants' perceptions of possible opportunities for inclusive action and intervention with a particular focus on inclusion in their area of responsibility as well as considering other stakeholders involved (depending on the role students, teachers, parents). The interviews had been audio-recorded and transcribed in the course of which, personal data have been kept confidential.

Analytical Approach

Methodologically, the current study follows a multiple-case study approach, which provides the opportunity to shed light to different perspectives by carefully choosing cases that are predicted to contain similar as well as contrasting results depending on the participants role in inclusive education of students with SEN (Yin, 2013). For an analytical approach, the thematic analysis with regards to Froschauer and Lueger (2020) was chosen. In the course of this method of analysis, five steps were to be taken into account when investigating the data material: (1) identifying thematic clusters, (2) explicating the characteristics of the themes, (3) investigating differences and similarities regarding the extracted phrases within one theme, (4) elaborating a hierarchical relevance of topics if possible, and (5) integrating the themes in the context of the research question (Froschauer and Lueger, 2020). By combining the methodological approach of a multiple-case study and the analytical method of thematic analysis, the summarizing discussion can deal with the perspective related results within a cross-case synthesis after coding and analyzing each case individually.

RESULTS

Given a multi-perspective approach by including the perceptions of teachers, students and parents, the results are displayed by highlighting the promoting and hindering factors including the

respective samples in terms of self-perception and perception by the other sample groups. Therefore, the thematic clusters are firstly identified, and their general characteristics are explained and in the consequent steps. Following that, self-attributions, as well as external attributions of conducive and obstructive interventions considering students' social participation, are presented.

Regarding the results of the analyzed multi-perspective data, the inclusion of students with SEN in school can be summarized on three levels: educational, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels. Throughout all samples, the aspects considering every level were examined.

Inclusion and Its Educational Requirements

When it comes to beneficial conditions for the promotion of inclusion on the educational level, students with SEN themselves mention that everyone involved can play a supportive role in creating inclusive learning activities. Mutual support has been formulated as particularly important, which can be provided in the context of a supportive network of educational professionals and students (see **Table 2**).

Regular teachers mention that they should focus on adjusting the difficulty of the learning material according to every student's educational needs. They also mention that special needs teachers should also be able to work alone with students when necessary. From a special needs teacher's point of view, teachers should encourage and motivate students, build a trustful relationship between teachers and students, and avoid giving strong negative ratings of school performance that might discourage students from engaging with the teaching and learning processes. They should further create a pleasant class climate in which students feel free to participate. In doing so, the goal is to communicate that, regardless of having SEN or not having SEN, students feel accepted as equals in the class.

The sample of regular teachers and special needs teachers both highlight the important role of parents in creating inclusive educational situations. Regular teachers and special needs teachers believe that parents should support their children at home. They should help their child with the learning process at home, practice with them, and convey enthusiasm for learning activities. Teachers also wish that parents take over their consultation.

The parents' perspective goes in line with that of teachers. They believe that teachers should support students with SEN individually and, in connection therewith, use an adequate speed of introduction when explaining new learning content. In addition, parents of students with SEN point out that teachers should not exclusively focus on the weaknesses of students, but rather focus on their (potential) strengths. They highlight the importance of teachers' patience, kindness, and equal treatment toward diverse students. Parents of students with SEN also highlight that the competence of the special needs teacher is crucial to the successful educational development of their child. They should individually support students and give them precise feedback on what was good and what was not good regarding schoolwork. It is important to not put students under pressure and instead focus on building motivation and a good work attitude. Their peers who have and don't have SEN should support a climate of comfort and self-confidence. In line with this, students with and without SEN mentioned that learning seems possible if they feel comfortable and self-confident.

Students without SEN highlight that parents should support their children with their learning activities. Interestingly, they mention that it is important to also promote non-performance-related activities, i.e., sports and social engagement. They argue that activities in between teaching and learning sessions, which are free from the pressure of performing, act as recovery phases that promote concentration and performance.

Inclusion and Its Intrapersonal Requirements

According to students, parents, and teachers, students' positive wellbeing, on an intrapersonal level, is considered to be a criterion when it comes to the provision of inclusive schooling situations and processes (see **Table 3**).

TABLE 3 | Inclusion and its intrapersonal requirements regarding specific stakeholders.

Students	– Invite all students to social events (e.g., birthday parties).
	– Respectful interactions among each other.
Teachers	– Providing fewer and easier tasks.
	– Solving conflicts; meditating in conflict situations.
	– Promote mutual understanding between students.
	– Support social interaction among students.
	– Support/establish an understanding of the impairment.
	– Behavior: Be fair and treat children equally; support interpersonal acceptance.
	– Creating a nice/pleasurable atmosphere, nice physical environment.
Parents	– Mediate when there are conflicts, teaching conflict resolution.
	– Teaching a change of perspective.
	– Invite students with SEN to their homes.
	– Proactively talk about SEN students; teach mutual acceptance.
	– Should take over an active role in the education of their SEN students.
	– Convey the basic value that all diverse people should be accepted.
	– Promote self-confidence.

TABLE 2 | Inclusion and its educational requirements regarding specific stakeholders.

Students	– Mutual support.
	– Support feelings of being comfortable and self-confident.
Teachers	– Individual support.
	– Relationship: trusting, motivating, kind, equal treatment.
	– Creating a pleasant climate.
Parents	– Practice at home.
	– Convey enthusiasm for learning.
	– Promote strengths of children.
	– Support non-learning activities.

When asking students with SEN about who they think can help them in building or strengthening their positive wellbeing in school they mention various actors, they mentioned friends and classmates as the most central persons, but also teachers, parents, and additional caretakers. In addition to social contact and interaction in school, spending free time together when invited to social events (i.e., birthday parties) of peers was also considered important. Students without SEN highlight that the togetherness within the class and friendships are significant when it comes to wellbeing. Students "shouldn't be mean to each other, help each other, play with each other, do not insult each other, and stand up for each other when something bad happens" (An interview with a student without SEN).

Students also highlight the role of parents. They can support the wellbeing of special education needs students: "they for example, if there is a problem with another student go to the teachers and tell them and then the teachers do something."

Parents of students with SEN mention that it is important to address problems and support children in learning to deal with conflicts. Thus, parents should discuss experiences with their children. They should also encourage their children to change their perspective in order to understand others involved in social situations. Therefore, it is necessary to be patient with the children. Teachers, on the other hand, should be willing to find solutions for problems and conflicts and promote mutual understanding between students. Teachers should be just in their behavior and treat children equally. They should also engage in creating a suitable environment for students, including creating a enjoyable classroom environment. In general, the culture or climate at school as well as a positive discussion culture is considered to be beneficial for students' wellbeing.

Parents of students without SEN highlight that parents of students with SEN should assume an active role and participate in the education of the children and also work with teachers (and not against them) to support their children. In addition, parents of students without SEN should get their children to invite both students with and without special education needs and guide their children with mutual acceptance. However, from their point of view, teachers are responsible for creating structures and rules for learning together, which is important from the beginning of the school year on. In addition, teachers should convey the basic value that people's ability to be diverse should be accepted and appreciated. In doing so they should accept children as they are and promote self-confidence. In the case of students' behavior, parents think that mutual acceptance and their interaction within the class is decisive for the positive wellbeing of students with SEN.

Special needs teachers highlight that the attitudes of students are strongly based on the attitudes of their parents. Thus, parents should support the integration process and talk with their children regarding their peers with SEN, answer their questions, and discuss difficulties. Parents should also proactively invite students with SEN to their homes. In addition, good cooperation between parents and teachers is important to support the wellbeing of students with SEN.

Regular teachers highlight that all teachers should act as a team and work together. They should create an appropriate classroom setting, set up class rules, adhere to them, demand them, and make sure that all students feel welcome within this behavioral frame. In other words, they should create conditions that are suitable for all children. Teachers should also support interaction among students by promoting collaboration and mediating their interactions. Social learning will be enabled through such interactions. Further, teachers can increase the acceptance of students among each other and that they are aware and accept that there are differences. In particular, they should explain to all children that everyone has weaknesses and strengths, and that some students learn differently than others, which is acceptable. In addition, they should establish an understanding of the students' disabilities. Teachers should invest efforts in strengthening the class community. Within their behavior to the individual students, teachers should be sensitive, take children as they are, consider all their needs, and act fair without favoring anyone or emphasizing the special feature of the student with SEN.

From the perspective of regular teachers, students with SEN should have a caregiver and friend to establish positive wellbeing. Therefore, students must play together to enable building friendships.

Inclusion and Its Interpersonal Requirements

Students with SEN often see themselves as responsible for having friends regarding the expectations of others toward them. However, when talking to parents and teachers the multi-causality is getting clearer (see **Table 4**).

The parents' perspectives of students with and without SEN highlight the perception that they feel responsible to show interest in their children's friendships and that they feel the need to support these interactions. They feel that they are expected to seek interactions with other parents. An upright interaction between parents is understood as a bridge for friendships among children. For instance, they can directly invite other children to their homes without getting their children involved in the process of rapprochement. Parents also highlight the importance of teachers regarding their children's social inclusion as an important aspect of inclusion at school. Parents of students with SEN believe that teachers should support the collaboration among students and, if necessary, mediate between students with and without SEN. Both samples of parents indicate the importance for teachers to treat all students equally. Parents of students without SEN

TABLE 4 | Inclusion and its interpersonal requirements regarding specific stakeholders.

Students	– To be open to each other.
Teachers	– Promote experiences and interactions among children.
	– Enable collaboration.
	– Mediate between children.
	– Strengthen the togetherness in the class (e.g., organize events or trips).
	– Set up rules and structures about mutual interaction.
Parents	– Show interest in friendships between students.
	– Create opportunities to meet.

elaborate on this issue and suggest that teachers should initiate and enable experiences and interactions among students with and without SEN and support the class community by organizing events and trips with their students. Further, to enable conflict-free situations, teachers should establish rules and structures that define how students should interact with each other. In the event of conflicts, teachers should be able to guide students in dealing with these situations. The parents of students without SEN also point out that parents should strengthen their children's self-esteem and teach them tolerance.

Regular teachers have similar opinions. They mention that they indirectly create the social foundation that allows interactions and friendships between students to develop. They enable interactions by implementing social grouping strategies or by changing the seating arrangement. Special needs teachers mention that games can also enable a feeling of togetherness. However, within these games, teachers should also be present and help when conflicting situations emerge. They should then address and discuss conflicts. In general, they point out that teachers must talk about the children in a positive way. Both teachers point out that parents are important when it comes to friendships. Parents should not work against inclusion. Instead, parents should create opportunities for children to privately meet after school and in general be open. They also point out that parents should pass on basic values and behaviors to their children that can be beneficial for building friendships. Regular teachers further highlight that parents should support their children in accepting others. This will further contribute to a good class climate. Teachers can also strengthen the class community. For instance, they can establish and enable contact among children. They should also support the interaction between students by providing them their help (e.g., during conflicts) and support interpersonal acceptance.

Summary of Results

Figure 1 presents opportunities for intervention at different personal levels that can contribute to the design and promotion of an inclusive classroom climate.

DISCUSSION

The present study describes aspects that can facilitate inclusive education for and inclusion of students with SEN. Regarding promoting factors, different perspectives of people who are somewhat involved in educational processes of students with SEN (i.e., teachers, parents, peers without SEN), as well as the perspective of students with diverse special needs (i.e., learning disabilities, hearing impairments, and autism), have been highlighted. The findings yield conditions that support inclusive educational opportunities on the following three levels of inclusion: educational, intrapersonal, and interpersonal levels. Tracing back the findings to these three levels of inclusion complements the literature presented earlier in the introduction, thereby emphasizing the need to allow interactions of students with and without SEN considering diverse pedagogical dimensions, for example, within social,

educational, but also individual contexts (Felder, 2018; UNESCO, 2020).

The outcomes resulted in a collection of desired measures and behaviors from the perspective of different stakeholders involved in the education of students with SEN to support their inclusion. The results hold practical implications for teachers and parents, but also students with and without SEN when it comes to fostering the inclusion of students with special education needs.

Regarding students' inclusion and consequent educational requirements that are needed, the prerequisites to promote adequate teaching and learning processes and to provide equal and adapted access to education for all students have been examined (Monsen et al., 2014; Vollet et al., 2017; Farmer et al., 2019; Hellmich et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2019). The requirements for fostering intrapersonal factors of inclusion encompass prerequisites of the feeling of belonging and wellbeing regarding school and classroom processes (Hendrickx et al., 2016; Henke et al., 2017; Van den Berg and Stoltz, 2018). On the interpersonal level, basic conditions for interactions and building friendships in order to promote inclusive education are highlighted in various studies (Bossaert et al., 2009; Koster et al., 2009; Little, 2017).

Interestingly, various explicit and implicit implications for desired behaviors of specific stakeholders were mentioned in the context of external perspectives. This signifies that the interviewees addressed the need for inclusive action not (only) in themselves, but, above all, in other groups of people involved. This primary finding goes in line with previous research and theory on inclusive education that highlights the importance of taking the whole educational network and people involved into account. Therefore, an inclusive school culture needs to be considered when fostering students' inclusion.

When it comes to requirements for inclusion on an intrapersonal level, friends and classmates are considered to be the most central and important persons involved in developing a sense of belonging and wellbeing (Vignes et al., 2009; De Boer and Pijl, 2016; Schwab, 2017). Parents are deemed indirectly relevant, as attitudes of students are strongly based on the attitudes of their parents (Hellmich and Loeper, 2019). Interestingly, the factors that seem to be especially relevant for creating friendships are teachers that set the ground for friendships in the classroom (Keith et al., 2015; Garrote et al., 2017; Schwab, 2017), and parents that enable opportunities to meet other students.

For educational requirements of inclusion, the role of teachers appears to be important for all the interviewed samples. They are expected to promote individual learning opportunities and just treatment of all students (Janice et al., 2017; Watkins, 2017). The previously mentioned areas of responsibility, which the sample groups attribute to each other rather than to themselves, become particularly clear. Meanwhile, students and parents highlight the central role of teachers in the context of providing adequate educational opportunities. In light of inclusion, teachers also assign increased responsibility to another group of stakeholders involved, namely, the parents. According to the interviewed teachers, parents take over an important role regarding the educational dimension of their children's inclusion by practicing with them at home. In this context, a specific question arises: Why

FIGURE 1 | Interventions for inclusive educational practice.

are parents expected to do the pre-work or follow-up work on teachers' pedagogical decisions regarding the didactic measures in class? A possible explanation for this is that they know that their children with SEN would not be capable of keeping up with the teachers' instructions otherwise. In line with this assumption, inadequate teaching that is not adapted to the needs of individual students could create the need for at-home support by external stakeholders, namely, their parents/caregivers. Furthermore, the extent of measures promoting inclusion that can be supported by all parents or different possibilities and degrees of supporting children in learning due to individual family characteristics and situations should be discussed.

Regarding this issue, the data highlights additional factors that predict whether inclusion is successful for creating a stimulating and promoting learning environment for every student regardless of an SEN diagnosis: resources (time and staff–and their skills and competencies) and the quality of teamwork between students, teacher (special needs teachers and regular teachers) and parents (Moore et al., 2017; Allen et al., 2018; Littlecott et al., 2018; Goldan et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

While policies for inclusive education ensure the spatial inclusion of students with and without SEN within the same classes, efforts have to be made to ensure real inclusion. Within the current study, it became evident that a sustainable inclusive development

needs support of preventive actions and interventions at the level of all involved stakeholders. Teachers need to ensure high quality learning conditions (e.g., creating a fruitful emotional and social learning environment). Moreover, parents can create opportunities for exchange (e.g., of students with and without SEN and parents of children with and without SEN). However, peers play a significant role in promoting successful inclusion, for example, through formal interactions such as cooperative learning processes or informal interactions (e.g., playing together). The study indicated clear evidence that current practices need to be improved in order to overcome inequality and exclusion and to become more inclusive for students with SEN.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by local school authority of Styria (Landesschulrat Steiermark). Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardian/next of kin.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

K-TL contributed to conception and design of the study, analyzed data, revised the first draft, wrote the second draft of the manuscript, wrote sections of the manuscript, and participated in theoretical framework. SH wrote sections of the manuscript and participated in theoretical framework. SS contributed to conception and design of the study and wrote sections of the manuscript. CG contributed to conception and design of the study, analyzed data, wrote the first draft of the manuscript, and wrote sections of the manuscript. SK-S and AH contributed to conception and design of the study, analyzed data, and wrote sections of the first draft of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the article, read, and approved the submitted version.

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