

**TEACHRS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR READINESS FOR
INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN
GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF BANGLADESH**

By

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A thesis submitted to Brac Institute of Educational Development in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Early Childhood Development

Brac Institute of Educational Development
Brac University
April 2026

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Ethics Statement

Title of Thesis Topic: **Teachers' perception of their readiness for inclusive early childhood education in government primary schools of Bangladesh.**

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1. Source of population

Teachers from government primary schools situated in Kulaura, Moulvibazar, Bangladesh.

2. Does the study involve (yes or no)

a) Physical risk to the subjects - no

b) Social risk - no

c) Psychological risk to subjects - no

d) Discomfort to subjects - no

e) Invasion of privacy – no

3. Will subjects be clearly informed about (yes or no)

a) Nature and purpose of the study - yes

b) Procedures to be followed - yes

c) Physical risk - *n/a*

d) Sensitive questions - yes

e) Benefits to be derived - yes

f) Right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study - yes

g) Confidential handling of data - yes

h) Compensation and/or treatment where there are risks or privacy is involved - yes

4. Will Signed verbal consent be required (yes or no)

a) from study participants - yes

b) from parents or guardian - *n/a*

c) Will precautions be taken to protect anonymity of subjects? – yes

5. Check documents being submitted herewith to Committee:

a) Proposal - yes

b) Consent Form - yes

c) Questionnaire or interview schedule - yes

Ethical Review Committee:

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the readiness and pedagogical practices of Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers regarding inclusive education in Kulaura, Moulvibazar. While national policy promotes inclusion, a significant gap remains between intent and classroom reality in these resource-constrained settings.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with six teachers and three classroom observations, using purposive sampling to capture diverse professional experiences. Findings reveal a dichotomy between conceptual understanding and technical competency. While teachers demonstrated strong emotional commitment, they expressed technical hesitation due to a lack of specialized training. To bridge this gap, teachers utilized relational strategies like the Friendship Method (peer-led inclusion) and Pedagogical Patience as proxies for formal resources. However, high student-teacher ratios often led to structural detachment, forcing a return to rote learning.

The study concludes that individual willingness cannot succeed without systemic support. Key recommendations include practical, disability-specific professional development, the appointment of assistant teachers to manage large classes, and context-specific resources for remote schools to ensure effective inclusive practice.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Teacher Readiness, Early Childhood Education, Relational Pedagogy, Government Primary Schools, Bangladesh.*

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the Brac Institute of Educational Development (Brac IED), Brac University.

My sincere thanks go to the faculty and mentors for providing an environment that balances academic excellence with a deep sense of social responsibility. Your dedication to transforming early childhood development has profoundly inspired this study. This work reflects the knowledge and commitment to equity that Brac IED champions in its mission to create a better future for all children.

Acknowledgement

I want to start by sharing my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Ms. Ferdousi Khanom, Senior Lecturer at the Brac Institute of Educational Development, Brac University. Her guidance and steady support were essential to completing this thesis. I also want to give special thanks to Ms. Syeda Fareha Islam, also a Senior Lecturer at the institute, for her help in reviewing the research tool guidelines.

I am also grateful to the participants of this study. Their enthusiasm and cooperation made this research possible. Finally, I want to thank my family from the bottom of my heart. Their constant support throughout this journey has meant everything to me.

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List of Acronyms

BIED: Brac Institute of Educational Development

BracU: Brac University

DPE: Directorate of Primary Education

ECD: Early Childhood Development

ECE: Early Childhood Education

FLN: Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

GPS: Government Primary School

IDI: In-depth Interview

IED: Institute of Educational Development

IPEMIS: Integrated Primary Education Management Information System

M&E: Monitoring and Evaluation

MoPME: Ministry of Primary and Mass Education

MSc: Master of Science

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

PEDP: Primary Education Development Program

PEDP4: Fourth Primary Education Development Program

PPE: Pre-Primary Education

RQ: Research Question

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal

SDG 4: Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education)

TLM: Teaching-Learning Materials

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Chapter I: Introduction & Background

Introduction

Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) is positioned not merely as a preparatory stage for formal schooling, but as a critical foundation for lifelong learning, well-being, and achieving equity (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Cologon, 2019; OECD, 2017; Sharma & Sokal, 2016; UNESCO, 2021) by promoting school readiness (Barnett, 2011; Yoshikawa et al., 2013) and foundational skills development (Bierman et al., 2009) and dismantling systemic barriers (Odom et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2021). The Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 explicitly emphasizes ensuring that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education (UNESCO, 2020). Despite Bangladesh's establishment of a legal framework for inclusion through policies such as the National Education Policy (2010) and the Disability Rights and Welfare Act (2013), the pervasive reality of exclusion continues to have a more documented impact than inclusion itself (Kawser et al., 2016; Malak et al., 2014; Rohwerder, 2015). The government has integrated pre-primary year(s) into government primary schools, aiming to provide universal access to ECE. However, the transition from policy to practice, particularly concerning inclusive ECE, remains a significant challenge.

The success of this inclusive ECE hinges predominantly on teachers as effective inclusive ECE environments demand that teachers possess specialized knowledge (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009), utilize developmentally appropriate practices (DEC/NAEYC, 2009), and deploy individualized supports to meet diverse learning needs (Jung, 2007; Odom et al., 2011). Their beliefs, skills, and knowledge are pivotal in creating authentic, inclusive early learning environments (Sharma et al., 2012). Without a teaching force that feels prepared, confident, and supported, the goal of quality inclusive ECE remains elusive (OECD, 2017; European

Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017). The challenge lies in ensuring that in-service teachers, who operate within the existing system, are equipped with the specialized teaching and learning techniques necessary to manage classrooms of diverse learners (Putri & Ain, 2022). Although the national policy intends inclusivity, chronic issues such as limited targeted support systems and lack of specialized resources hinder successful operationalization (Ahsan et al., 2012). Therefore, examining ECE teachers' firsthand experiences and perceptions is vital, as their ability to interpret and implement policy directly determines the true effectiveness of the national mandate on the ground as teacher preparedness is a determining factor for the successful implementation of inclusive ECE (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Odom et al., 2019).

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the perceived readiness of teachers to implement inclusive practices within the ECE classrooms of government primary schools in Bangladesh. By focusing on teachers' own perspectives, this research aims to provide a ground-up understanding of the realities of inclusive ECE implementation and to diagnosing existing gaps and formulating sustainable strategies to strengthen inclusive early childhood education in Bangladesh.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the strong policy mandate for inclusive education, evidence suggests a considerable gap between policy intent and classroom reality in Bangladesh (Ahsan & Mullick, 2013). Government primary school teachers, including those handling ECE classes, often report feeling underprepared to address the diverse needs of all children, including those with disabilities, from ethnic minorities, or from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Khan, 2018). Existing studies indicate that teachers in government primary schools often encounter challenges such as limited pre-service and in-service training on inclusive pedagogies,

inadequate instructional resources, large class sizes, and limited administrative support (Rahman & Sharma, 2021; UNESCO, 2022). Research has rarely examined these difficulties through the lens of teachers themselves, especially in early childhood classrooms where initial attitudes toward diversity and fundamental learning take shape.

Teachers' perceived readiness plays a critical role in the implementation of inclusive ECD because perception directly influences instructional choices, confidence levels, and willingness to adapt teaching strategies to accommodate children with diverse developmental, linguistic, and cultural needs (Sharma & Sokal, 2016). Yet, current research in Bangladesh has predominantly focused on policy analysis or infrastructural readiness, with limited attention to teachers' lived experiences, emotions, and self-evaluations regarding inclusion. This creates a significant research gap given that inclusive education cannot be meaningfully operationalized without understanding how teachers personally interpret their own preparedness and the systemic barriers they face.

Moreover, teacher readiness for inclusion is not limited to technical knowledge; it is influenced by beliefs, values, prior exposure, and socio-cultural attitudes toward disability and diversity (Forlin, 2018). In the absence of empirical inquiry into these perceptual dimensions, policymakers may continue to design teacher training and implementation strategies that do not adequately resonate with teachers' realities. Therefore, there is an urgent need to investigate teachers' perceived readiness through a qualitative phenomenological lens, engaging deeply with their lived experiences, challenges, and expectations, to inform more grounded and responsive policy and capacity-building interventions for inclusive early childhood education in Bangladesh.

The existing teacher preparation and professional development programs in Bangladesh may not adequately address the specific pedagogical and attitudinal demands of inclusive ECE. Traditional, one-size-fits-all teaching methods persist, and resources are often scarce. Consequently, teachers may experience low self-efficacy, anxiety, and frustration when faced with diverse learners, which can lead to the inadvertent exclusion of vulnerable children even when they are physically present in the classroom (Malak et al., 2018).

While some studies have examined inclusive education in Bangladesh broadly, there is a dearth of research specifically focused on the early childhood level and, more importantly, on teachers' own perceptions of their readiness. A needs assessment from the teachers' perspective is crucial. Without understanding their perceived challenges, strengths, and support needs, any systemic effort to enhance inclusive ECE is likely to be misdirected or ineffective. This study addresses this critical gap by systematically investigating how teachers themselves perceive their preparedness and what they identify as the key facilitators, barriers, and necessary support systems for successful inclusive ECE.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perceived readiness of teachers for implementing inclusive education in Early Childhood Development (ECD) classrooms within government primary schools in Bangladesh. It aims to understand the phenomenon from the viewpoint of the teachers themselves, capturing their lived experiences and interpretations. Specifically, the study seeks to uncover the factors that teachers believe contribute to or hinder their readiness and to identify the types of support they deem essential for enhancing their capacity to foster inclusive learning environments. The ultimate goal is to generate evidence that can inform the design of targeted teacher education programs, resource allocation, and policy adjustments to better support teachers in their crucial role.

Significance and Justification of the Study

This research holds substantial significance across theoretical, policy, and practical domains. Theoretically, the study contributes to the conceptualization of teacher readiness within challenging, low-resource contexts like Bangladesh. The research contributes to the academic literature on inclusive education in the Global South. It adds a nuanced, contextual understanding from the Bangladeshi ECE perspective, an area that is currently under-researched. The study will utilize and potentially extend theoretical frameworks related to teacher self-efficacy and readiness for inclusion. The focus on ECE provides an opportunity to evaluate how teachers manage foundational competencies, such as individualized teaching, observation, and family collaboration, at the critical entry point of the education system (OECD, 2024; Vandebroek et al., 2018). Understanding the "why" behind teachers' perceived readiness (or lack thereof) can lead to more effective and empathetic intervention strategies.

From a policy and practical standpoint, the study directly addresses a crucial challenge in fulfilling the objectives of the National Education Policy 2010. By identifying specific teacher needs and documenting the systemic barriers encountered in day-to-day practice, the findings will directly inform policymakers and teacher training institutions, including the BRAC Institute of Educational Development, on how to most effectively allocate limited resources and revise teacher education curricula. This can guide the revision of pre-service and in-service teacher training curricula to include robust, practical modules on inclusive pedagogy for early years. Previous studies indicate that training institutions need to focus on professional learning, practical engagement, and specific content relevant to children with special needs (Accardo et al., 2020; Baker & Murray, 2011; Leko & Brownell, 2009). This research will provide the direct, qualitative evidence required to detail exactly which "forms of support" teachers feel

are necessary (RQ3), thereby optimizing future interventions, which might include pedagogical materials, infrastructure upgrades, or specialized coaching.

Furthermore, the focus on government primary schools is justified because they are the largest service providers for public ECE in the country. Ensuring that teachers operating at this foundational level (Pre-Primary and Grade 1) are truly ready for inclusion represents the most effective point of leverage for long-term reform. If inclusive practices fail at the ECE stage due to inadequate teacher preparedness, subsequent educational outcomes for diverse learners will be severely compromised. Most importantly, by focusing on amplifying teachers' voices, this study adopts an empowering and participatory approach. The findings are expected to ultimately benefit children by contributing to the development of a more skilled and confident teaching force, thereby improving the quality and inclusiveness of early learning experiences for all children in Bangladesh, regardless of their background or abilities.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers in government primary schools perceive their preparedness to implement inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE)?
2. What factors contribute to or hinder teachers' readiness for inclusive early childhood education?
3. What forms of support do teachers feel are necessary to enhance their preparedness for inclusive ECE?

Operational Definition

Perceived Readiness (of Teachers): In this study, perceived readiness is defined as the teachers' self-reported assessment of their own knowledge, skills, attitudes, and confidence required to effectively plan for, implement, and support the learning and developmental needs of all children, including those with disabilities or special educational needs, in a general education early childhood classroom.

Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE): Inclusive early childhood education is defined as an educational approach that involves the full participation of young children (typically pre-primary age, or Grades 1-2, as per the Bangladesh context) with and without disabilities/special educational needs in the same chronologically age-appropriate general education classroom within Government Primary Schools.

Government Primary Schools of Bangladesh: Government Primary Schools of Bangladesh are educational institutions in Bangladesh managed and directly funded by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) and its affiliated body, the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE). They provide free and compulsory education to children in the primary age range (typically encompassing pre-primary and Grade 1 through Grade 5 or 8). The schools follow the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) curriculum. The teachers (the study participants) are those officially appointed and working under the government's primary education system.

Teacher: A Teacher is defined as an individual who is currently employed full-time or part-time by a recognized educational institution (such as a school, college, or university) and whose primary professional responsibilities involve the direct planning, delivery, and assessment of instruction for a specified group of students (learners) across a defined curriculum or subject

area. In case of preschool teacher, the teacher is responsible for providing assistance, care and instructions to preschool aged children in the classroom to foster their learning and development (IUSD, 2017). In this study, a teacher is considered to be someone who assists in learning and provides pre-primary education to the children of 3 to 5 years old enrolled in government primary schools of Bangladesh.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The review of relevant literature establishes the conceptual boundaries of teacher readiness, outlines the specific policy context of inclusive education in Bangladesh, and synthesizes empirical evidence regarding implementation barriers and training needs.

Conceptualizing Teacher Readiness for Inclusion

Teacher readiness for inclusive education extends beyond mere possession of qualifications. It is a multi-dimensional construct encompassing attitudes, self-efficacy, knowledge, and skills (Sharma & Sokal, 2016). Global literature suggests that positive attitudes are a key predictor of successful implementation (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). This emotional labor is a core component of readiness in resource-constrained environments. Self-efficacy, derived from Bandura's social cognitive theory, is the teachers' belief in their capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully manage inclusive classrooms. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to persist with challenging students and innovate in their teaching (Malak et al., 2018). However, a significant gap often exists between conceptual readiness and technical efficacy, leading to hesitation when faced with specific disabilities. Knowledge involves understanding child development, various disabilities and learning differences, and differentiated instruction (DEC, 2024; NAEYC, 2024; UNESCO, 2020). Skills pertain to the practical ability to adapt curriculum, employ assistive technology, manage behavior, and collaborate with parents and specialists (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017; DEC, 2024).

Teacher Perceptions of Preparedness for Inclusive ECE

Research in the field of inclusive education consistently distinguishes between a teacher's ideological commitment and their practical competence. While teachers generally hold favorable attitudes toward the concept of inclusion, their perceived self-efficacy and actual

sense of preparedness to implement it are often reported as low, particularly concerning children with diverse or complex learning needs (Ahsan et al., 2012; Khan, 2017). Many studies show that teachers believe that all children, regardless of disability, should be educated in regular classrooms, viewing inclusive education as a desirable practice (Khan, 2017). However, this positive attitude often diminishes when considering children with severe disabilities compared to those with mild disabilities (Khan, 2017). A significant finding across various studies is the disconnect between attitude and self-efficacy (Ahsan et al., 2012). Teachers with higher perceived teaching-efficacy show lower levels of concern about inclusive education, but the prevailing reality is that many teachers feel uncomfortable and ill-equipped to teach diverse groups of learners, especially those with specific learning needs (Forlin et al., 2009; Siddik & Kawai, 2020). In resource-constrained environments where formal assistive technologies or specialized training are limited, literature suggests that teachers often rely on relational pedagogy to foster inclusion. Such localized strategies serve as a vital bridge, allowing teachers to utilize their emotional readiness to overcome gaps in their formal technical preparation (Hockings, 2010).

The foundation of inclusive ECE rests on core competencies like individualized teaching, observation, and family collaboration (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017). They lack the necessary teaching techniques for diverse students and the essential collaboration skills with parents, specialists, and community stakeholders (Siddik & Kawai, 2020). The existing teacher training, predominantly the in-service *Diploma in Primary Education (DPED)*, is often criticized for failing to provide adequate practical and specific pedagogical content necessary for inclusive practices (Ahsan et al., 2016).

Factors Contributing to and Hindering Teacher Readiness

Teacher readiness in the Bangladeshi primary school setting is a complex construct influenced by an interplay of systemic, professional, and unique contextual factors. The existing literature identifies several critical drivers and inhibitors that shape how teachers perceive and enact inclusion. Inadequate teacher training and resource limitations are consistently cited as the primary challenges to readiness (Siddik & Kawai, 2020; Ahsan et al., 2012). Mandatory in-service training often lacks practical, disability-specific pedagogical content, leaving teachers with a sense of technical hesitation despite their positive attitudes (Ahsan & Mullick, 2013). Furthermore, systemic issues such as large class sizes and poor infrastructure, exacerbated by a lack of specialized support staff, make the implementation of individualized instruction nearly impossible (Ahsan et al., 2012; UN, 2018). Environmental factors necessitate specific support to sustain a teacher's willingness to include children with diverse needs (Khan & Behloly, 2014). Studies show that perceived teaching-efficacy and readiness increase significantly when teachers feel supported by their institutional environment (Ahmmed et al., 2012). This includes not only administrative support from school heads but also the validation of the emotional labor teachers invests in inclusive practices. When teachers perceive that their extra efforts are recognized through incentives or logistical backing, their affective commitment is strengthened (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). The school climate is deeply affected by the attitudes of local community leaders and parents. While negative social stigma can hinder teacher efforts (Malak et al., 2015), proactive community engagement or local awareness programs, can transform the school into a communal hub for inclusion. Direct and frequent interaction with the community and prior experience with children with disabilities correlate with greater confidence and a more welcoming classroom environment (Ahsan et al., 2012; Romi & Leyser, 2006).

Necessary Support Systems as Perceived by Teachers

To bridge the gap between policy and practice, teachers require a holistic ecosystem of enablement that moves beyond one-off training sessions. Teachers consistently demand ongoing in-service coaching and mentoring that focuses on disability-specific pedagogical content (Malak et al., 2018; Khan, 2019). This includes hands-on training that validates their existing relational strategies, helping them transition from affective readiness to technical mastery. In addition to adaptable Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) and specialist support (Ahsan & Mullick, 2013), teacher readiness is significantly impacted by logistical support tailored to the school's geographical context. Furthermore, providing assistant teachers is crucial to managing large class sizes effectively. There is a strong demand for curricular and assessment flexibility (Nawaz, 2021). Teachers need official authorization to adapt learning objectives without the fear of being penalized for syllabus incompleteness. Moreover, systemic recognition of a teacher's emotional labor through incentives and professional validation can significantly enhance their long-term commitment (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Strengthening partnerships with parents and local community structures is vital (Mullick et al., 2013). These collaborations help reduce social stigma and create a shared responsibility for the child's development (UNICEF, 2014).

While the aforementioned studies provide a valuable foundation, a clear gap exists in the current body of knowledge. Most research in Bangladesh focuses on inclusive education in general secondary or primary grades, or specifically on children with disabilities. The unique context of Early Childhood Education (ECE) with its emphasis on play-based learning and holistic development remains largely unexamined. Furthermore, previous studies have often measured readiness through quantitative surveys on attitudes or efficacy, but fewer have conducted in-depth qualitative explorations to understand the nuanced, lived realities of the

teachers. Specifically, there was a lack of research on how geographical locations and affective commitment influence a teacher's sense of preparedness. This study filled this gap by providing a rich, descriptive account of ECE teachers' perceived readiness, exploring how their ready hearts navigate systemic and environmental challenges in the government primary schools of Bangladesh.

Chapter III: Methodology

The primary objective of this study was to explore the perceived readiness of government primary school (GPS) teachers for implementing inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Bangladesh. To achieve this, the methodology was designed to capture the "lived experiences," attitudes, and professional self-evaluations of the frontline educators. This chapter outlines the research design, the selection of participants, the geographical context of the study sites, and the methods used for data collection and analysis. It also discusses the ethical considerations and the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

Research Approach and Design

This study utilized a Qualitative, Descriptive Research Design. This approach was justified as it enabled the researcher to deeply describe and analyze the subjective experiences and perceptions of in-service teachers, focusing on their perceived readiness, the factors that contributed to or hindered implementation, and the supports they required in the context of inclusive ECE. By seeking rich, contextualized data through interviews and observations, the qualitative design was best suited to address the "how" and "what factors" presented in the research questions, uncovering complex thematic patterns rather than merely measuring prevalence.

Research Site

The research site was composed of a purposive selection of 06 (six) government primary schools of Kulaura upazila in Moulvibazar district. The selection of sites aimed for representation across semi-urban and rural settings where possible. This strategy ensured the capture of varying levels of resource provision and implementation challenges, enhancing the relevance of the findings to the broader primary school system in the country.

Research Participants

The participants were 06 (six) ECE teachers from government primary schools. Of these six, three were selected for classroom observations. This focused sample size was consistent with the requirements of descriptive qualitative research, which prioritized obtaining rich information and thick descriptions from a small number of participants for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, rather than statistical generalization.

Sampling Procedure/Participants Selection Procedure

After obtaining necessary permissions from the Directorate of Primary Education and respective school heads, the researcher used purposive sampling. Initial contact was made with school heads to identify eligible ECE teachers. Purposive Maximum Variation Sampling was employed to select participants who could provide a diverse array of experiences and insights concerning ECE inclusion.

The inclusion criteria were: (1) currently teaching in the pre-primary class at a government primary school, (2) having either received some form of inclusive education training or having had direct experience teaching children with identified special needs, (3) having at least one year of teaching experience at this level, and (4) willingness to participate in the study. This procedure maximized the depth and breadth of the data collected across the six IDIs (three from semi-urban and three from rural) and four classroom observations (two from semi-urban and two from rural), allowing the researcher to identify diverse barriers and support needs. A diverse sample in terms of teaching experience, geographical location (urban/semi-urban), and gender was sought to capture a range of perspectives.

Data Collection Method and Procedure

The study employed three distinct, complementary methods for data collection to enhance the trustworthiness and depth of the findings:

1. Document Review (Foundational Analysis):

The researcher reviewed the Pre-Primary Education (PPE) Training Manual, Inclusive Training Manual, and relevant curriculum documents provided for government primary school teachers. This document analysis provided foundational context regarding official policies, pedagogical guidelines, and the prescribed content delivered to teachers. This review specifically informed the development of the classroom observation protocol and the semi-structured interview guide, ensuring that the researcher could identify gaps between prescribed standards and actual classroom practices.

2. In-Depth Interviews (IDIs): Six (6) IDIs were conducted with the participating teachers, lasting approximately 45–60 minutes each. This method allowed the researcher the flexibility to probe initial participant responses, ask why or how, and collect detailed, culturally specific information about their values, opinions, and perceived barriers, directly addressing the research questions. Participants were contacted, the study was explained, and a convenient time and place were arranged for interviews. Prior to recording, their consent was obtained to audio-record the interviews, thereby preserving an accurate account of the discussion. The researcher conducted all interviews in Bangla.

3. Classroom Observations: Four of the six participating teachers' classrooms were selected for non-participant observation. The selection of the three observed sites was based on achieving maximum variation (e.g., resource availability, teacher experience). Each observation focused on documenting actual pedagogical practices, classroom interactions, use of resources, and how the teacher managed student diversity in the ECE setting. The selection was based on achieving Maximum Variation Sampling. By choosing four specific sites rather than all six, I could purposefully pick the most

contrasting environments to see if inclusive practices hold true across different settings. The combination of IDIs (perceptions) and observations (practice) constituted Method Triangulation, which was crucial for developing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by comparing self-reported readiness with observed pedagogical behavior.

Data Management and Analysis

Interview transcripts and observation field notes were analyzed using Qualitative Content Analysis, specifically employing an Inductive Content Analysis approach. This systematic method was suitable for analyzing written text (transcripts and field notes) to interpret subjective meanings and themes directly from the data. The analysis followed several rigorous steps:

1. **Preparation and Familiarization:** Data, including transcripts and observation notes, were prepared and organized. The researcher engaged in multiple readings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the dataset.
2. **Defining the Unit of Analysis:** The basic unit of text (e.g., words, phrases, or sentences) to be classified during the analysis was defined.
3. **Open Coding:** The researcher began with open coding, marking meaningful segments of the text relevant to the research questions (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3) without forcing them into a preset scheme. These generated initial codes highlighting significant features.
4. **Developing Categories and Themes:** Related codes were clustered and merged into higher-order categories or themes. This process involved constant comparison and iteration until data saturation was reached.
5. **Review and Interpretation:** The developed categories were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the dataset and were contextualized with quotes and examples, ensuring insights remained grounded in actual participant experiences.

The analysis was guided by the research questions, aiming to map emergent themes back to the theoretical dimensions of readiness (efficacy, attitudes, and concerns) and the practical operational barriers identified (factors and support needs).

Validity & Reliability

To ensure the validity of the research instruments, the IDI guidelines and observation checklist underwent a two-step rigorous process:

- **Expert Review:** Faculty members from BRAC IED, BRAC University reviewed the IDI guidelines and observation checklist.
- **Pilot Testing:** The IDI guidelines and observation checklist were administered to three respondents who represented the target study population.

Based on the feedback and suggestions received during both the review and pilot testing phases, the research instruments were revised and finalized.

Ethical Issues

Ethical approval was obtained from BRAC IED, BRAC University. Written informed consent was obtained from every participant. The purpose of the research, the steps involved, possible benefits and risks, as well as the rights of those taking part were clearly communicated in simple Bangla. The confidentiality of all collected data was rigorously maintained. Participants' identities were protected by using pseudonyms in all interview transcripts and in the final report. All audio files and transcripts were kept secure. The researcher created a respectful and non-judgmental environment, stressing that all answers and experiences were valuable, and there was no pressure to provide a specific kind of response. Individuals retained the right to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from the discussion at any time without penalty.

A list of local support services was also made available for referral in case any participant experienced distress.

Limitations of the Study

The primary methodological challenge in this study stemmed from the researcher's "insider" positionality within the primary education sector. While this position facilitated rich data collection and trust, it posed a risk of subjective interpretation or blurred objectivity due to deep familiarity with the organizational culture and the participants' professional context. To mitigate this potential insider bias, the study employed three critical strategies:

- **Reflexivity:** This involved the maintenance of a comprehensive reflexive journal to document and challenge the researcher's personal thoughts and preconceived notions throughout the process.
- **Method Triangulation:** This strategy cross-validated self-reported data from interviews against observed practice through classroom observations, ensuring a more objective representation of reality.
- **Peer Debriefing:** An external peer investigator reviewed the coding and interpretation to ensure critical distance and to maintain objectivity from the data.

Chapter IV: Findings & Discussion

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the research study. The chapter is organized into three primary sections. First, the Findings are detailed through a thematic analysis of the qualitative data, capturing the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants. This is followed by a Discussion section, where these results are interpreted in relation to existing literature and the theoretical framework of the study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a set of evidence-based Recommendations aimed at improving teacher training, policy implementation, and support systems for inclusive education in Bangladesh.

Demographic Profile of the Participants

For the purpose of this study, a total of six Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers were selected as participants from six different Government Primary Schools (GPS) situated in Kulaura, Moulvibazar including included representation from both semi-urban and rural settings along with the Haor region and the Tea Garden areas.

Four of the participants were female, reflecting the predominant gender composition of ECE and primary teaching staff in these regions. The participants represented a diverse range of educational backgrounds, with the majority holding Bachelor's or Master's degrees, while others possessed Higher Secondary Certificates (HSC) or Degree pass certificates. This educational diversity provides a broad perspective on how different levels of formal academic training influence a teacher's perceived readiness. The majority of the teachers were highly experienced, having served in the teaching profession for more than twelve years. The remaining participants had between four to five years of specialized experience in early childhood education. Each participant met specific inclusion criteria, having either received formal training in inclusive education or possessing direct experience in teaching children with identified special needs.

Theme 1: Teachers’ understanding of and beliefs about their readiness for inclusive early childhood education

This section explores how teachers perceive their own readiness to implement inclusive education, categorized into their conceptual understanding, technical confidence, and emotional disposition.

1.1 Teachers’ understanding about inclusive early childhood education

All participants demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of inclusion, viewing it not merely as a classroom strategy but as a holistic system. They identified it as an environment where children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic minorities (such as tea garden communities), and those with physical or mental disabilities learn side-by-side. A respondent mentioned, *"Inclusive ECE is a system where all kinds of children including those with special needs, those from ethnic groups, or children of tea garden workers, can study together... every child should feel that this place belongs to them"* (In-Depth Interview#2, 13-01-26).

Most of the participants anchored their understanding of inclusion in a rights-based framework. They argued that education is a fundamental human right that must be delivered without discrimination. A key conceptual pillar identified was the rejection of separate standards; teachers believed that the national curriculum must be made accessible to everyone, ensuring that students with diverse needs are not marginalized by lower expectations or segregated learning paths. One respondent mentioned, *"Every child has the right to learn. We cannot have separate standards for different children; the curriculum must be accessible to all, and it is our responsibility to provide an environment where discrimination has no place"* (In-Depth Interview#4, 14-01-26).

1.2 Teachers' beliefs regarding inclusive ECE

The majority of participants do not view inclusion simply as a government mandate, but as a profound moral obligation. Their beliefs are deeply rooted in empathy and a humanitarian perspective, where teaching is seen as a service to humanity. They believe that every child possesses an inner light or unique potential that it is the teacher's duty to uncover, regardless of the child's physical or mental condition. During IDIs, one teacher said, *"I am definitely confident... every child has something within them that needs to be brought out. If I lose confidence at the start or see it as a burden, it won't work. I believe it is my moral duty to ensure no child feels left behind"* (In-Depth Interview #2, 13-01-26).

A significant finding is the teachers' belief that love and patience are the most powerful instructional tools that is often more important than formal specialized equipment. Most respondents believe that a teacher's emotional connection with a child can bridge the gap created by a lack of technical resources. This affective commitment served as their primary facilitator when facing difficult classroom realities. One respondent mentioned, *"Since I don't have a magic tool or special materials to help a child who struggles, I use my patience. I give them double the time to speak or finish a task because I believe that with enough love, any child can learn"* (In-Depth Interview #5, 14-01-26).

Rather than viewing the challenges of a diverse classroom as an exhaustive burden, many teachers expressed the belief that inclusion is an opportunity for professional and personal growth. They believed that successfully teaching a child with special needs or from a marginalized background (like tea gardens) validates their effectiveness as an educator and enhances their problem-solving skills. One teacher said, *"I view inclusive ECE as an opportunity rather than a burden. When I successfully teach a child who others thought*

couldn't learn, it gives me a different kind of professional satisfaction that standard teaching cannot provide" (In-Depth Interview #3, 13-01-26).

1.3 Teachers' confidence regarding inclusive ECE

While the majority of respondents reported high personal confidence in their emotional willingness and moral commitment, they expressed significantly lower professional confidence when it came to technical execution. They were ready with heart but unprepared in skill leading to a state of confident hesitation where they were willing to welcome diverse learners but unsure of how to effectively teach them. One teacher said, *"Since we lack specialized equipment, I am confident in my own way. I pair a child who is struggling with a more communicative peer... making sure that no child feels lonely. But when it comes to specific disabilities, I often worry if I am doing enough"* (In-Depth Interview#6, 14-01-26).

In schools where a culture of mutual support exists, most of the teachers reported feeling more capable of managing inclusive tasks, as the shared responsibility helps make the daunting nature of diverse classroom demands feel sustainable. One respondent mentioned, *"Working together as a team and sharing the workload with colleagues helps us overcome our individual limitations in the classroom"* (In-Depth Interview#1, 13-01-26).

Majority of the teachers identified love for children and a sense of moral duty as the primary foundations of their confidence. One of the teachers exemplified this by stating, *"I am definitely confident... if I lose confidence at the start, it won't work. In supportive schools, this manifests as a strong emotional connection"* (In-Depth Interview#4, 13-01-26).

Theme 2: Classroom Practices of Teachers for inclusive ECE

While all participants expressed a strong moral commitment to inclusion during interviews, field observations indicated that some of the teachers practiced passive inclusion. In these instances, students with disabilities were physically present in the room but remained marginalized from the core instructional activities.

“I saw that children with special needs sat at the back; they were physically present, but the lesson was not designed to involve them actively” (Classroom Observation#1, 13-01-26).

Despite the majority of the respondents claiming to be definitely confident in their professional abilities, actual observations revealed a different reality. In practice, most of the teachers appeared hesitant when faced with real-time behavioral challenges or diverse learning needs, struggling to translate their theoretical confidence into effective classroom management. The four classroom observations, particularly at Site C, served as a stark reality check to this emotional readiness. We found the absence of inclusive TLMs and the reliance on standard textbooks even when a student had a hearing impairment directly confirmed that without the tools of the trade, even the most well-meaning teacher is left ineffective.

Although pedagogical patience was frequently highlighted by participants as a vital tool for inclusion, the study found that environmental pressures often undermined this virtue. The majority of the teachers were observed overlooking the individual struggles of diverse learners, as the overwhelming pressure of managing overcrowded classrooms forced them to prioritize general order over individualized support.

"The teacher clearly wanted to help, but with so many students in one room, they were forced to focus on the majority, leaving the individual needs of diverse learners largely unaddressed" (Classroom Observation#3, 14-01-26).

Theme 3: Factors that impact the readiness of Inclusive ECE Implementation

The study identified a diverse range of factors that either facilitate or impede teachers' readiness for inclusive education. These factors have been categorized into Teacher-level, School-level, Policy-level, and Socio-cultural levels to provide a nuanced understanding of the implementation environment.

3.1 Contributing Factors

3.1.1 Teacher-level (Individual) Factors

A significant majority identified their internal positive attitudes and sense of self-efficacy as the primary facilitators of inclusive education. Findings suggest that their willingness to implement inclusive practices is driven by a deep personal love for children and a firm belief that teaching is a moral duty rather than just a professional obligation. One teacher said, *"I am definitely confident... every child has something within them that needs to be brought out. If I lose confidence at the start, it won't work"* (In-Depth Interview#2, 13-01-26).

The majority of the respondents expressed a mindset where inclusion is viewed as a professional opportunity for growth rather than an exhausting administrative burden. One respondent mentioned, *"I view this as an opportunity rather than a burden. When I successfully teach a child who others thought couldn't learn, it gives me a different kind of professional satisfaction"* (In-Depth Interview#4, 14-01-26).

A few of the participants emphasized that their previous success with creative pedagogical tools has reinforced their belief in inclusive education. They noted that practical, hands-on experience with alternative engagement methods, such as storytelling or peer-based activities, has proven vital in reaching children who were previously excluded or silent.

"I have seen success in using peer learning and puppet shows to engage children who were previously afraid to speak; these experiences give me the confidence to keep trying new things" (In-Depth Interview#4, 14-01-26).

3.1.2 School-level (Institutional) Factors

Nearly all participants identified the backing of school leadership as a cornerstone for successful inclusion. The findings indicate that when headteachers provide active encouragement and administrative flexibility, it creates a safe environment for teachers to implement inclusive strategies without the fear of institutional friction. One teacher said, *"When the headteacher supports us, it gives us the confidence to try new things for children with special needs; that leadership is what makes the difference"* (In-Depth Interview#2, 13-01-26).

The majority of the respondents described a family-like school atmosphere as a primary facilitator. This collaborative culture allows teachers to view inclusion as a shared mission rather than an isolated struggle, effectively turning a daunting professional task into a manageable daily practice through teamwork. One respondent mentioned, *"Working together as a team and sharing the workload with colleagues helps us overcome our individual limitations in the classroom"* (In-Depth Interview#1, 13-01-26).

A few of the participants noted that a strong institutional bond fosters organic professional development. One teacher said, *"In our school, we don't work alone. We are like a family where we teach each other how to handle different children, ensuring no teacher feels overwhelmed by the needs of their students"* (In-Depth Interview#4, 14-01-26).

3.1.3 Policy and System-level Factors

Half of the teachers recognized that existing national mandates serve as a vital supportive framework for their work. While they acknowledged that implementation can be slow, the findings suggest that these government directives provide a necessary legal and formal structure that legitimizes inclusive efforts at the school level. One teacher said, *"The government has given us clear directives on inclusion; even if we don't have everything yet, these policies give us a formal sense of responsibility to ensure every child is in school"* (In-Depth Interview#2, 14-01-26).

The majority of the respondents noted that the government's promotion of inclusive education has shifted their professional identity. This top-down encouragement creates a psychological environment where teachers feel a personal obligation to succeed, viewing the mandate not just as a rule, but as a standard of professional excellence they must strive to meet. One teacher said, *"Because the government promotes inclusion so strongly, we feel a moral and professional responsibility to try our best for these children, even in our resource-constrained environments"* (In-Depth Interview#3, 14-01-26).

3.1.4 Socio-cultural Factors

All teachers emphasized that increasing parental awareness is a crucial driver for successful inclusion. One teacher said, *"Our work becomes much easier when we involve mothers and local influential people; their support creates a bridge between the home and the classroom that we simply cannot build alone"* (In-Depth Interview#2, 13-01-26).

The majority of the respondents highlighted the effectiveness of structured platforms such as parent gatherings in building trust and reducing household-level resistance. One participant mentioned, *"The success of Parents Gatherings and regular communication has been vital in*

building a supportive environment; it changes how the whole community views the potential of children with special needs" (In-Depth Interview#3, 13-01-26).

A few of the participants noted that engaging local leaders and influential figures acts as a catalyst for social change.

3.2. Hindering Factors

3.2.1 Teacher-level (Individual) Factors

Almost all teachers identified a critical lack of technical knowledge as a primary barrier to their professional readiness. The findings suggest that when teachers feel ill-equipped with specialized pedagogical skills, their overall self-efficacy declines, leading to hesitation when interacting with children who have complex needs. One teacher said, *"The lack of materials and technical knowledge are our biggest challenges; this reduces our self-confidence and makes us feel unprepared for the classroom"* (In-Depth Interview#3, 13-01-26).

The majority of the respondents expressed specific fears regarding their ability to manage students with severe physical or mental limitations. Without formal training in behavioral intervention or medical basics, many teachers worry that they might inadvertently cause harm or fail to provide the necessary safety and care for these students. One respondent said, *"I am always afraid that I might do something wrong because I don't know how to handle a child with severe mental or physical challenges; we need to know the 'how' before we can be confident"* (In-Depth Interview#1, 13-01-26).

A few of the participants specifically noted that linguistic and cultural differences—particularly among indigenous or tea garden communities—create a significant layer of professional hesitation. These teachers feel that their inability to communicate in the children's mother tongue prevents them from building the trust necessary for an inclusive learning environment.

One participant mentioned, "*The linguistic and cultural differences of indigenous or tea garden children create significant hesitation; if I cannot understand their language, I cannot truly include them in the lesson*" (In-Depth Interview#2, 13-01-26).

3.2.2 School-level (Institutional) Factors

All six participants identified that the physical and structural environment of their schools acts as a major impediment to inclusion. One teacher said, "*The uneven roads in tea gardens make it almost impossible for children with disabilities to reach us; we need specialized transport support that can handle this specific terrain*" (In-Depth Interview#2, 13-01-26).

Most of the teachers highlighted how environmental factors during specific seasons completely halt inclusive progress. In the Haor regions, the lack of water-based transportation during the rainy season was cited as a critical failure in the school's institutional readiness to accommodate marginalized students. One participant mentioned, "*Since this is a Haor area, we need a dedicated boat to transport children during the monsoon; otherwise, inclusion remains only on paper for half the year*" (In-Depth Interview#5, 14-01-26).

The majority of the respondents pointed to overcrowded classrooms and a severe lack of essential teaching-learning materials as primary barriers. They expressed that without fundamental changes to the classroom environment—such as better seating and reduced student-to-teacher ratios—the institutional setting remains ill-equipped for individualized support. One respondent said, "*With more than 40 children in one small room and no proper materials, it is very difficult to give the specific care that a child with disabilities deserves; the environment itself is just not ready.*" (In-Depth Interview#5, 14-01-26).

3.2.3 Policy and System-level Factors

Most of the teachers (4 out of 6) reported a significant policy-practice gap, identifying that while the government mandates inclusion, the supportive infrastructure and training are severely lacking. Current training programs were criticized for being too abstract and disconnected from the harsh physical and administrative realities of rural schools. One respondent said, *"Training should include practical strategies on how to work with small manpower in dilapidated schools in marginal areas rather than just theoretical talks that don't apply to our classrooms"* (In-Depth Interview#6, 14-01-26).

The majority of the respondents emphasized that the current "one-teacher-per-classroom" model is a critical systemic failure that makes true inclusion impossible. The universal demand for assistant teachers suggests that without structural changes to staffing policies, the mandate of inclusive education remains an unfunded and understaffed expectation. One teacher mentioned, *"The current policy doesn't account for the reality of our workload. Without an assistant teacher, we are expected to perform miracles in overcrowded rooms with no extra help"* (In-Depth Interview#3, 13-01-26).

3.2.4 Socio-cultural Factors

A significant majority (4 out of 6 teachers) identified deep-rooted social stigma as a major hindrance to the successful implementation of inclusive ECE. They reported that children with visible or audible disabilities often face mockery from their peers, which creates a hostile learning environment and discourages attendance. One teacher said, *"I have observed that other children sometimes laugh at those with speech delays or different physical behaviors; this makes the child feel ashamed and they eventually stop wanting to come to school"* (In-Depth Interview#4, 14-01-26).

The majority of the respondents highlighted a challenging dynamic where parents of "meritorious" children perceive inclusion as a threat to their own children's academic progress. These parents often fear that the teacher's attention is a finite resource that is being diverted away from high-performing students to accommodate those with disabilities. One respondent mentioned, *"Parents of meritorious children often fear their children will be neglected if the teacher focuses on students with disabilities. They complain that we are slowing down the whole class for the sake of one or two children"* (In-Depth Interview#5, 14-01-26).

A few of the participants noted that these socio-cultural barriers extend beyond the classroom and into the community, where disability is still often viewed through a lens of pity or shame. They emphasized that unless the mindset of the broader community changes, classroom inclusion will remain an uphill battle against social isolation. One participant said, *"It is not just about the classroom; the stigma comes from the homes. If the parents and the neighbors don't value inclusion, the children will continue to treat their peers with disabilities as outsiders"* (In-Depth Interview#2, 13-01-26).

Theme 4: Necessary Support for Enhancement

This section explores the multi-dimensional support systems that teachers identify as essential to bridging the profound gap between their existing emotional readiness and the required technical proficiency for inclusive education.

4.1 Professional Development Support

All six teachers emphasized that current training modules are too abstract and disconnected from the day-to-day challenges of an inclusive classroom. They identified a significant "theory-practice gap," where general workshops fail to provide the technical skills such as sign language or specific behavioral interventions required to support children with diverse

disabilities effectively. One respondent said, *"Instead of theoretical talks, training should focus on practical strategies on how to work with small manpower in dilapidated schools in marginal areas"* (In-Depth Interview#5, 14-01-26).

Most of the teachers highlighted the need for training that teaches them how to improvise using local resources. They suggested that professional development should shift toward practical material making, enabling them to create inclusive learning aids without relying on expensive, unavailable equipment. One respondent mentioned, *"I would suggest including hands-on sessions for making materials using easily available items like stones, leaves, or sticks... Child Psychology must be included to understand the mental state of special children"* (In-Depth Interview#1, 13-01-26).

The majority of the respondents argued that understanding child psychology is just as critical as learning technical skills like sign language. They believe that if training sessions provided hands-on experience in these areas, their professional confidence would increase, allowing them to move beyond passive inclusion to active, meaningful engagement with every student. One teacher said, *"We need practical training on things like sign language and child psychology; without these hands-on skills, we are just guessing how to help children who have different needs than the others"* (In-Depth Interview#1, 13-01-26).

4.2 Resource and Material Support

Every participant highlighted that the lack of specialized equipment is a primary barrier to effective inclusion. They noted that without the proper tools, they are forced to spend excessive energy improvising lessons, which leads to professional burnout and inconsistent learning outcomes for children with diverse needs. One respondent mentioned, *"The daily stress of improvising lessons for special needs children would be significantly reduced if we just had*

specialized instructional materials instead of having to invent something new every day" (In-Depth Interview#5, 14-01-26).

Most of the teachers emphasized that modern digital tools are not a luxury but a necessity for engaging students with different learning styles. They identified that audio-visual resources could bridge the gap for children who struggle with traditional text-based instruction, making the curriculum more accessible to all. One participant said, *"We need audio-visual learning kits to engage diverse learners; children who cannot follow a lecture often respond beautifully to sounds and moving images"* (In-Depth Interview#4, 14-01-26).

A few of the participants pointed out that the physical layout of the classroom often limits inclusion. They argued that beyond digital tools, the very furniture and hardware of the school must be updated to accommodate the physical realities of all students, ensuring that the environment itself is inclusive. One teacher said, *"We need multimedia projectors or digital tools and improved, flexible seating to accommodate different physical needs; the current rigid benches make it very difficult for some children to even sit comfortably"* (In-Depth Interview#2, 13-01-26).

4.3 Institutional and Administrative Support

A significant majority (5 out of 6) of the participants identified reduced class sizes and the provision of additional staff as their most urgent institutional priority. They argued that the current high teacher-student ratio, which often exceeds 1:40, creates an environment where providing individualized attention to children with diverse needs becomes a practical impossibility rather than a reality. One participant said, *"With more than 40 children in one small room, providing individualized attention is just a myth; we are often just managing the crowd instead of teaching the child"* (In-Depth Interview#5, 14-01-26).

Most of the teachers emphasized that the presence of a second adult in the classroom is a non-negotiable requirement for effective inclusion. They believed that a support person is required to manage the logistical demands of a large group, which would free the primary teacher to focus on specialized instructional strategies. One respondent mentioned, *"An assistant teacher is essential to handle large numbers of students; without that help, I cannot possibly give the specific care that a child with disabilities deserves"* (In-Depth Interview#1, 13-01-26).

A few of the participants specifically noted that having a second professional in the room would allow for the consistent monitoring necessary for children with special needs. One teacher said, *"Having a second adult in the room would allow for closer monitoring of children with special needs, ensuring they stay on track while I lead the rest of the class"* (In-Depth Interview#6, 14-01-26).

4.4 Specialist and Technical Support

Most of the teachers emphasized that their moral commitment is currently hindered by a lack of access to clinical expertise. They identified that without the presence of specialists like therapists or special educators, the burden of diagnosing and managing complex needs falls entirely on untrained staff, which compromises the quality of inclusive education. One teacher said, *"We are not doctors or specialists; we urgently need access to therapists or special educators who can guide us on how to handle the specific physical and mental challenges of our students"* (In-Depth Interview#4, 14-01-26).

A few of the participants highlighted that the absence of a formal intake and referral process prevents them from understanding a child's unique requirements before they even begin their schooling. They argued that a permanent counseling presence within the school system is essential for accurate disability assessment and long-term student success. One teacher mentioned, *"Without a formal referral system or a trained counselor in schools, we cannot*

properly assess a child's disability or understand their specific needs even before they enter the classroom" (In-Depth Interview#5, 14-01-26).

The majority of the respondents agreed that the availability of external professional support would significantly increase their instructional confidence. They viewed the integration of special education experts not as a replacement for the regular teacher, but as a necessary partnership to make classroom inclusion a reality. One participant said, *"Access to professional counselors would change everything. It would give us a roadmap for each child, allowing us to teach with a clear plan rather than just guessing what might work"* (In-Depth Interview#2, 13-01-26).

4.5 System-level Policy and Logistical Support

Most of the teachers working in hard-to-reach areas highlighted that physical inclusion is impossible without addressing the unique terrain of their regions. They pointed out that standard education policies often overlook the seasonal and topographical barriers that prevent children with special needs or those from marginalized communities from attending school regularly. One teacher said, *"Since this is a Haor area, we need a dedicated boat to transport children during the monsoon; otherwise, inclusion remains only on paper for half the year"* (In-Depth Interview#4, 14-01-26). A few of the participants expressed that the lack of accessible transport within tea garden labor lines significantly hinders the readiness of both teachers and students. They emphasized that without specific logistical support to navigate the difficult landscape, children with physical disabilities are effectively barred from the inclusive classroom. One respondent mentioned, *"The uneven roads in tea gardens make it almost impossible for children with disabilities to reach us; we need specialized transport support that can handle this specific terrain"* (In-Depth Interview#1, 13-01-26).

The majority of the respondents argued for a shift from a centralized policy to a more localized approach. This included the need for school calendars that respect local cultural realities and financial or professional acknowledgments to sustain the motivation of teachers handling diverse classrooms. One participant said, "*We really need the government to change the rules a bit—like giving us a flexible holiday list that aligns with our local festivals and maybe some incentives or rewards for teachers who are actually doing the hard work of inclusion*" (In-Depth Interview#2, 13-01-26).

4.6 Community and Parental Support

All 6 teachers agreed that parental engagement is the backbone of inclusion. They proposed awareness programs like street plays, awareness videos, or Parent Gatherings to reduce stigma. One of the teachers suggested involving the Tea Garden Panchayat to ensure community-wide awareness noting, "*To reach the parents in the labor lines, we must work with the Panchayat. Their involvement ensures that the message of inclusive education is respected and followed by the entire community*" (In-Depth Interview#2, 13-01-26).

Discussion

The findings of the study were interpreted to find the answers to the research questions in order to get an in-depth understanding of teachers' perception and readiness for inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Government Primary Schools (GPS). The insights obtained through the findings of this study are discussed and presented under three broad themes.

Theme 1: Teachers' understanding of and beliefs about their readiness for inclusive early childhood education

To begin with, all participants demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of inclusion, viewing it not merely as a classroom strategy but as a holistic system. They identified it as an environment where children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic minorities, and those with disabilities learn side-by-side. This alignment with a holistic system suggests that teachers have moved beyond a narrow definition of inclusion to one that encompasses social equity. Literature supports this broad conceptualization, as contemporary inclusive education is defined by the removal of barriers for all marginalized groups to ensure full participation (UNESCO, 2020). The findings suggest that while a conceptual understanding of inclusion is universal among all participants, technical readiness remains varied and is often atypical of standard professional development models. Existing literature generally suggests that teacher readiness is primarily a product of formal training and technical knowledge of specific disabilities (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011). However, this study reveals a significant departure from this global trend. For many Bangladeshi teachers, especially those in marginal or remote areas, readiness flourishes from the affective domain rather than technical expertise. While international literature, such as Forlin (2010), argues that a lack of "how-to" knowledge directly leads to low readiness and resistance, the participants in this study exhibited remarkably high emotional readiness despite their acknowledged technical gaps. This

contradicts the common Western assumption that technical skill must necessarily precede psychological willingness.

Furthermore, the study found that this affective readiness translates into innovative, localized pedagogical strategies when formal resources are absent. The use of "Peer Learning" or the friendship method serves as a low-cost, high-impact substitute for specialized educational materials. The direct correlation between the teachers' self-reported patience and the observed classroom practice where teachers allowed nearly double the standard time for responses validates that emotional readiness can drive inclusive practices even in dilapidated schools in marginal areas.

The study examined the level of confidence and emotional disposition experienced by GPS teachers. The findings suggest that while emotional readiness is deeply evident, it manifests differently depending on the school's social and organizational climate, often appearing varied and atypical of standard professional development models. In this context, confidence emerged primarily from the affective domain rather than from technical mastery or job security. While established literature suggests that professional confidence is a result of mastery and external support systems (Bandura, 1997), this study reveals that in the Bangladeshi pre-primary context, confidence can be a direct byproduct of high affective commitment. This aligns with the work of Allen & Meyer (1990), which suggests that individuals exhibit higher confidence and commitment when they feel a sense of comfort and belonging in the workplace. Participants from model or more successful schools confirmed this by describing their schools as families, which is in line with studies reporting that readiness is influenced as much by the working environment as by individual skill (Lyons et al., 2006).

However, the study adds a unique dimension: when teachers lack institutional care, such as proper infrastructure (ramps, toilets as mentioned) or adequate manpower, their emotional disposition shifts from proactive passion to a survivalist continuance commitment. This suggests that for inclusive education to succeed, policy must move beyond individual teacher training and focus on creating a supportive school family environment that sustains the teacher's emotional and professional confidence.

Findings suggest that facilitators in GPS schools are heavily reliant on the affective domain and interpersonal relationships. While literature suggests that institutional support and policy clarity are the main drivers (Abbott et al., 2005), this study reveals that in the Bangladeshi context, individual self-efficacy and a family-like school culture often compensate for systemic gaps. The observed peer collaboration at Site A confirms that high affective commitment flourishes when teachers feel comfortable (Allen & Meyer, 1990), serving as a potent facilitator that bypasses rigid administrative models.

Theme 2: Classroom Practices of Teachers for Including Learners with Diverse Needs

The findings for Theme 2 reveal a complex tension between teachers' internalized values and their external classroom realities. While the interview data suggests high levels of moral readiness, the observation data paints a picture of "instructional paralysis" caused by systemic and environmental factors.

The observation of passive inclusion where students with disabilities are physically present but pedagogically ignored suggests that inclusion is currently treated as a logistical achievement rather than an instructional one. This aligns with the framework of Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), who argue that inclusion often fails when it is treated as a mere placement or incorporation rather than a fundamental transformation of teaching practices. When teachers

lack the training to differentiate instruction, they default to a one-size-fits-all approach, which effectively excludes those with diverse needs even if they are sitting in the room. Similarly, Ainscow (2005) suggests that for inclusion to be effective, schools must move beyond "integration" (simple presence) to "inclusion," which requires active participation and achievement for all students.

A striking discrepancy exists between teachers' self-reported confidence and their observed performance. While participants claimed high self-efficacy, actual observations demonstrated significant hesitation when faced with non-traditional learning behaviors or sensory impairments. Literature by Forlin (2010) suggests that while positive attitudes are necessary, they are insufficient without technical readiness. The reliance on standard textbooks for students with hearing impairments illustrates a systemic failure to provide the tools of the trade. As UNESCO (2009) notes, the absence of assistive technologies and adapted Teaching-Learning Materials (TLMs) renders even the most well-meaning teacher ineffective. This suggests that the teachers' hesitation is not a lack of will, but a logical response to being asked to perform a specialized task without the necessary technical instruments.

The study highlights that pedagogical patience is a finite resource, easily exhausted by structural pressures like overcrowding. At the observed sites, the sheer volume of students forced a "survivalist" teaching style where the needs of the many outweighed the needs of the individual. This finding is consistent with Loreman (2007), who identifies large class sizes as one of the primary global barriers to inclusive education. When the student-teacher ratio is high, teachers are forced to prioritize classroom order and curriculum coverage over individualized support. Furthermore, Sharma et al. (2008) emphasize that environmental stress directly correlates with a decrease in a teacher's inclusive efficacy. When a teacher is

responsible for 40 or more students, the individualized attention required for inclusion becomes a mathematical impossibility rather than a pedagogical choice.

Theme 3: Factors that Impact the Readiness of Inclusive ECE

The findings of the study were interpreted to address the research questions regarding the environmental and structural variables that shape teacher readiness. The insights obtained are discussed under two broad sub-themes: contributing facilitators and hindering barriers, categorized across teacher, school, policy, and socio-cultural levels.

A significant majority of teachers identified their internal positive attitudes and sense of self-efficacy as the primary facilitators of inclusive education. Findings suggest that readiness is driven by a deep personal love for children and a firm belief in teaching as a moral duty. Literature supports this, as teacher self-efficacy is a well-documented predictor of successful inclusion; teachers who believe in their ability to reach all students are more likely to persevere through classroom challenges (Bandura, 1997). Furthermore, the mindset that views inclusion as a professional opportunity rather than an administrative burden enhances readiness. This aligns with the concept of growth mindset, where challenges are perceived as avenues for professional mastery and validation (Dweck, 2006).

Nearly all participants identified the backing of school leadership as a cornerstone for successful inclusion. The findings indicate that when headteachers provide administrative flexibility and encouragement, it creates a safe environment for inclusive experimentation. This is consistent with the distributed leadership model, which suggests that inclusive schools thrive when leadership is not a top-down mandate but a shared institutional value (Spillane, 2006). Additionally, the family-like collaborative culture described by respondents allows teachers to view inclusion as a shared mission. Studies show that professional learning communities

(PLCs) within schools significantly reduce feelings of teacher isolation and increase collective competence in handling diverse learner needs (DuFour, 2004).

Half of the teachers recognized that existing national mandates serve as a vital supportive framework. While implementation may be slow, these directives provide the legal legitimacy required to prioritize inclusive efforts. Literature suggests that clear policy frameworks are essential because they shift the responsibility from the individual teacher to the institution, providing a formal mandate for change (UNESCO, 2020). This top-down encouragement has shifted teachers' professional identity, creating a psychological environment where inclusion is viewed as a standard of professional excellence.

All six teachers emphasized that increasing parental awareness is a crucial driver. The success of parents' gatherings in building a bridge between the home and the classroom was highlighted as a major facilitator. This finding is supported by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which posits that the mesosystem, the connection between home and school is vital for a child's development, particularly in inclusive settings where consistent support is required (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Almost all teachers identified a critical lack of technical knowledge as a primary barrier. This finding suggests a competency-readiness gap where high affective willingness is undermined by a lack of specialized skills. Literature indicates that technical hesitation often leads to teacher burnout and reduced inclusion quality (Malak, 2013). Furthermore, linguistic and cultural differences, particularly in tea garden communities, create layers of professional hesitation. When teachers cannot communicate in a child's mother tongue, the "relational pedagogy" they rely on is severely compromised (UNESCO, 2016).

The physical and structural environment, including uneven terrain in tea gardens and monsoon flooding in Haor regions, acts as a major impediment. Findings show that without context-specific logistics like specialized transport or monsoon boats, inclusion remains only on paper. This reflects the concept of environmental exclusion, where the physical world dictates who can access education. Additionally, overcrowded classrooms (over 40 students) and lack of materials make individualized support a practical impossibility. Research confirms that high student-to-teacher ratios are the most cited structural barrier to inclusion in developing countries (Khan, 2011).

A significant policy-practice gap was identified, where government mandates exist without the necessary infrastructure or practical training. Respondents criticized training for being too abstract, highlighting a need for training that addresses the harsh realities of rural, understaffed schools. Furthermore, the one-teacher-per-classroom model was identified as a systemic failure. The universal demand for assistant teachers suggests that staffing policies have not evolved to meet the demands of the inclusive mandate (Rose, 2000).

A significant majority identified deep-rooted social stigma as a major hindrance. The mockery of children with disabilities by their peers creates a hostile environment that discourages attendance. Furthermore, a resource competition mindset among parents of meritorious children, who fear their children will be neglected, creates social friction. This reflects the zero-sum view of education, where support for one child is seen as a loss for another. Literature suggests that overcoming such socio-cultural barriers requires long-term community-based interventions to shift the perception of disability from a tragedy to a diversity (Oliver, 1990).

Theme 4: Necessary Support for Enhancement

The findings from this study reveal a significant tension between teachers' internal motivation and the external support systems provided by the state. While existing literature often posits that professional readiness and normative commitment (a sense of duty) are primarily constructed through formal training and organizational mandates (Amin et al., 2018; Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010), the data from these GPS teachers suggests a different paradigm. In the Bangladeshi context, the demand for training is not driven by a desire to fulfill administrative requirements, but rather by a profound affective commitment.

Teachers expressed a clear desire for hands-on skills like Sign Language, child psychology, and the creation of Teaching-Learning Materials (TLMs) from local resources because they feel a personal responsibility for their students' well-being. This relational drive is atypical in public sector research, where training is often viewed as a top-down, mandatory exercise. Here, however, the teachers view technical mastery as a way to validate their existing emotional investment. When advocates for practical strategies for dilapidated schools, it highlights a desperate need for a training model that respects the harsh realities of marginal classrooms rather than offering abstract theories.

The majority of respondents identified digital tools and audio-visual kits not as luxuries, but as essential inclusive aids. Studies show that multi-sensory instructional materials are vital for engaging students with different learning styles, particularly those with cognitive or sensory impairments (Friend & Bursuck, 2012). Additionally, the demand for flexible seating and updated physical layouts suggests an awareness of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), where the environment itself is modified to be accessible to all students from the outset (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014).

Ultimately, the study suggests that for inclusive education to be sustainable, training must move beyond a one-size-fits-all theoretical approach. It must instead be a continuous, mentoring-based process that provides teachers with localized, practical skills. By bridging this gap, the system can ensure that a teacher's love for their students is backed by the technical confidence required to manage diverse needs in a crowded, resource-poor environment. This shift would transform inclusive education from a theoretical concept into a lived, classroom reality.

Studies confirm that resource allocation is critical for inclusion (UNESCO, 2009). However, this study adds a unique dimension: teachers view resources as a form of organizational support that fosters pride and commitment. This aligns with Cohen (1993), who reported that employees exhibit higher commitment when they feel proud of their organization. The study found that providing targeted resources like digital tools or infrastructure like ramps and modern toilets could transform continuance commitment (staying for the job) into affective commitment (staying for the cause). This result counters common assumptions about the public sector, showing that resource availability acts as a psychological validator for teachers working in marginal settings.

Organizational commitment is richly influenced by the working environment (Lyons et al., 2006). The intense demand for classroom assistants confirms that teachers view inclusion as a collective rather than individual responsibility. Institutional support serves as the vital bridge between wanting to teach (affective readiness) and being able to teach (practical implementation).

In developed contexts, specialist support is a standard pillar. In the GPS sector, however, it remains a missing link. The study suggests that teachers' fear of disabilities is actually a plea for professional guidance, indicating that readiness is contingent upon a multidisciplinary team approach.

Public sector workers are often assumed to prioritize job security (Continuance Commitment). However, these findings show a desire for incentives and logistical support to validate their Affective Commitment. This shows that teachers want the system to recognize their emotional labor and the unique geographical hurdles they overcome.

All six teachers agreed that parental and community engagement is the "backbone" of inclusion. By proposing awareness programs involving local influential figures and the Tea Garden Panchayat, teachers are advocating for a Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) model. This model, supported by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), posits that the school cannot succeed in inclusion if the surrounding "microsystem" (the home and neighborhood) remains hostile or stigmatized. Building trust through structured platforms like parents' gatherings or village-level advocacy is essential for creating a supportive ecosystem that extends beyond the classroom walls. Social acceptance directly impacts psychological readiness (Perry, 2004). The findings confirm that teachers feel more prepared when the community, specifically mothers and local leaders, supports their efforts. In the GPS context, the school serves as a communal hub, and parental support is the most potent relational facilitator for inclusion.

Conclusion

This qualitative study was conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and readiness of Government Primary School (GPS) teachers regarding the implementation of inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Kulaura, Bangladesh. By interpreting the data through the lenses of conceptual understanding, environmental factors, and support requirements, several critical conclusions can be drawn.

First, the study concludes that teachers possess a high degree of affective readiness but a significant deficit in technical readiness. While participants demonstrate a sound conceptual

understanding of inclusion as a rights-based, holistic system, their confidence is rooted almost entirely in their emotional commitment and moral duty. This leads to a state of confident hesitation, where a ready heart is forced to operate without ready hands. In the absence of specialized pedagogical skills, teachers have innovated through relational pedagogy, using localized strategies like the Friendship Method and Pedagogical Patience to bridge the gap left by a lack of formal training.

Second, the findings reveal that teacher readiness is heavily dictated by contextual and structural variables. Readiness is not an isolated teacher trait but is either facilitated by supportive school leadership and collaborative family-like environments or impeded by severe institutional barriers. The research highlights that physical environment such as the difficult terrain of tea gardens and the seasonal isolation of Haor regions alongside overcrowded classrooms (ratios exceeding 1:40), effectively renders inclusion only on paper for large portions of the year.

Third, the study underscores a significant policy-practice gap. While national mandates provide a legal framework that legitimizes inclusive efforts, the supportive infrastructure specifically assistant teachers, specialized instructional materials, and access to clinical specialists, is largely absent. Current training modules are perceived as too abstract, failing to address the specific how-to of inclusive instruction in marginalized, rural settings.

Finally, it is concluded that for inclusive ECE to succeed, the burden of implementation must shift from being an individual teacher's moral struggle to becoming a systemic and communal responsibility. Strengthening the mesosystem through parental engagement and community awareness (e.g., involving the Tea Garden Panchayat) is essential to dismantling the socio-cultural stigma that remains a primary barrier to student attendance and peer acceptance.

In summary, while the government primary school teachers of Bangladesh provide a powerful foundation of empathy and willingness, their professional potential is currently limited by systemic neglect. To move from passive presence to active participation for children with disabilities, it is essential to equip these teachers with hands-on technical mastery, administrative support, and logistical solutions tailored to their unique geographical realities. Only through this holistic alignment of heart, skill, and system can the promise of inclusive education be fulfilled for every child.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to bridge the gap between policy and practice in inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE):

- Current training models should shift from generic pedagogical theory to practical, disability-specific classroom strategies. Pre-service and in-service training must include modules on identifying diverse learning needs and implementing differentiated instruction specifically for the ECE context. Training programs should formally recognize and enhance the "friendship method" and other relational strategies that teachers already use, providing them with a theoretical and evidence-based framework to strengthen these practices.
- Resource allocation must move beyond a "one-size-fits-all" approach to account for geographical and structural diversity. For schools in challenging terrains (such as tea gardens or Haor regions), the government should provide logistical support, including accessible transport for children and teachers, and climate-resilient classroom structures. To address the overwhelming student-teacher ratio, the appointment of Assistant Teachers or Carer Giver is critical. This would allow the lead teacher to provide the pedagogical patience and individualized attention required for inclusion.

- To reduce the fear of syllabus incompleteness, teachers need official authorization to adapt the learning environment. The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) should issue clear guidelines and templates for adapting ECE curriculum and assessment methods to suit children with diverse abilities. Shifting the focus from rigid academic milestones to holistic, play-based formative assessments will allow teachers to celebrate diverse forms of progress without professional anxiety.
- To prevent structural detachment and burnout, the emotional commitment of teachers must be supported by the school system. Establishing "Best Inclusive Teacher" awards or professional incentives can validate the extra effort and emotional labor teachers invest in their students. Fostering peer-support networks within clusters of schools will allow teachers to share localized solutions for common challenges, reducing the sense of isolation.
- Inclusion should be treated as a shared communal responsibility rather than a solo task for the teacher. Schools should institutionalize parent gatherings and community awareness programs to reduce social stigma and involve parents in the inclusive process. Engaging local bodies (e.g., School Management Committees and local leaders) in resource mobilization can help bridge the gap in material needs at the school level.
- While this study provides an in-depth qualitative look at specific contexts, it also highlights areas that require further academic inquiry. Further research is required to explore how effectively the existing early childhood curricula both in government primary schools and private kindergartens foster the development of preschoolers' self-regulation and social-emotional skills. To move beyond localized insights, large-scale research is needed to explore these issues nationwide. A broader study would provide

a statistically representative understanding of teacher readiness and the systemic barriers faced by educators across all divisions of Bangladesh.

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Appendix A

Research Tools

Introduction for Interviewee:

"Good morning/afternoon. My name is Md. Sharif ul Islam and I am a researcher from BRAC University. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today.

I am conducting a study to understand the experiences and perspectives of teachers like yourself regarding Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE). Inclusive ECE is about ensuring that *all* children, including those with disabilities, from different backgrounds, or who learn in different ways, can learn together effectively in the same pre-primary classroom.

The purpose of this interview is to listen to your views, your experiences, and your suggestions. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your honest opinions. The interview will take about 45-60 minutes.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose to skip any question or stop the interview at any time. Everything you say will be kept confidential, and your name will not be used in any reports. With your permission, I would like to audio-record this conversation to ensure I accurately capture your views. Do you have any questions before we begin?"

[Obtain Verbal Consent]

Part A: Background Information (To be filled before the main interview)

1. Name of School: _____
2. District/Upazila: _____
3. Years of Teaching Experience: _____
4. Years of Experience Teaching Pre-Primary/ECE: _____

5. Highest Educational Qualification: _____

6. Teacher Training Completed (e.g., C-in-Ed, Inclusive training, etc.):

Interview Questions

Theme 1: Perceptions of Preparedness (R.Q.1)

These questions aim to understand the teachers' self-assessment of their confidence, knowledge, and skills.

1. Could you describe what the term "Inclusive Education" means to you in the context of your pre-primary classroom?
2. Thinking about your current pre-primary class, how would you describe your level of confidence in teaching a classroom that includes children with diverse needs (e.g., a child with a physical disability, a child who struggles to pay attention, a child from a linguistic minority)?
 - o *Probe:* What makes you feel confident? Or what contributes to a lack of confidence?
3. Tell me about your knowledge and skills. What specific strategies do you feel you have to support the learning of a child who is falling behind or learns differently from others?
 - o *Probe:* Can you give me an example of a time you successfully helped such a child? What about a time you found it very difficult? What was the challenge?

4. Imagine a new child with a significant disability (e.g., cannot see well, has difficulty understanding instructions) is about to join your class. What is the first thought that comes to your mind? What feelings does that bring up?

Theme 2: Factors Contributing to or Hindering Readiness (R.Q.2)

These questions explore the enabling factors and barriers teachers face at the systemic, school, and personal levels.

5. Let's talk about training and preparation. What kind of training have you received, if any, that specifically addressed how to include and teach children with diverse abilities?
 - o *Probe:* Was this pre-service (during your C-in-Ed) or in-service? How useful was it in giving you *practical* classroom strategies? What was missing?
6. What **resources** do you have in your school that help you teach in an inclusive way?
 - o *Probe:* What about teaching materials, classroom space, furniture, or access to special equipment? What resources are you lacking that would make a big difference?
7. How does the classroom environment impact your ability to support all children?
 - o *Probe:* Can you describe your class size? How does the number of children affect your work? What about the physical setup of the classroom?
8. Tell me about the curriculum and teaching guides you use. How easy or difficult is it to adapt them for a child who is struggling or a child who is advanced?
 - o *Probe:* Do you feel you have the freedom to change activities or learning goals? Why or why not?

9. What kind of support or challenges do you receive from others?

o *Probe:*

- From the headteacher?
- From other teachers?
- From parents of children with and without disabilities?
- From the School Management Committee (SMC)?

Theme 3: Necessary Support for Enhanced Preparedness (R.Q.3)

These questions focus on solutions and recommendations from the teachers' perspectives.

10. If you were to design the perfect training program to prepare teachers for inclusive ECE, what would it include?

o *Probe:* What topics must be covered? How long should it be? Should it be mostly theoretical or practical?

11. Beyond training, what are the three most important things the government or NGO could provide to you and your school to help you become more effective in inclusive teaching?

o *Probe:* (e.g., a teaching assistant, specific materials, smaller class sizes, a visiting specialist, etc.)

12. How could the system itself be improved to support you better?

o *Probe:* What changes are needed in the curriculum, assessment methods, or official policies?

13. How can collaboration be strengthened? What would you need to work more effectively with parents or with other teachers to support inclusive education?

Closing Section

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with inclusive education that we haven't covered?

15. Do you have any questions for me?

Conclusion:

"Thank you so much for your valuable time and for sharing your honest experiences and opinions. Your insights are extremely important for our research. The information you provided will help us understand how to better support teachers like you in the future. Have a wonderful day."

Appendix B:

Classroom Observation Protocol: Inclusive Practices in Early Childhood Education

Date: _____

Teacher Observed: _____ School: _____

Grade/Class: Pre-Primary (ECE) Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Total Students Present: _____ Estimated Students with Visible/Suspected Additional

Needs: _____

Part A: Classroom Environment & Physical Setup

(Observe and describe the setting. Contextual factors that enable or hinder inclusion.)

Physical Accessibility & Safety:

Is the classroom entrance and interior physically accessible for a child with mobility challenges (e.g., steps, narrow doorways)?

Describe the arrangement of furniture. Is there clear, safe space for movement? Are there quiet corners or defined activity areas?

Note any specific hazards or barriers.

Learning Materials & Resources:

Variety & Adaptability: Are there multi-sensory materials (tactile, visual, auditory)? Are materials within easy reach of all children?

Representation: Do books, posters, or images reflect diversity (ability, gender, ethnicity, family structure)?

Adaptive Tools: Are there any observed specialized materials (e.g., pencil grips, large-print books, sensory toys, picture cards)? If not, is there evidence of teacher-made adaptations?

Part B: Teacher Practices & Interactions

(Observe the teacher's actions, language, and pedagogical choices.)

Instructional Strategies for Diversity:

Does the teacher use multiple modes of instruction (verbal explanation, visual demonstration, physical gesture)?

Are instructions given in clear, simple steps? Are they repeated or rephrased for clarity?

Does the teacher differentiate instruction? Note any observed examples:

Content: Providing different materials or tasks.

Process: Using varied grouping (individual, pairs, small group).

Product: Allowing different ways for children to show learning (drawing, telling, acting out).

Teacher-Student Interactions:

Proximity & Attention: Does the teacher circulate and make contact with *all* children, or is attention focused on a few?

Responsiveness: How does the teacher respond to children who are struggling, disengaged, or exhibiting challenging behavior? (e.g., patience, use of positive guidance, offering help).

Language & Encouragement: Does the teacher use affirming, strengths-based language (e.g., “I see you worked hard on that,” “Thank you for waiting”)?

Social-Emotional Climate & Peer Interactions:

Does the teacher explicitly foster cooperation or turn-taking?

How are conflicts between children managed? Is the process restorative or punitive?

Note any natural peer support (e.g., a child helping another).

Assessment & Feedback:

Does assessment appear ongoing and informal (observational) rather than just a single test?

Does the teacher provide specific, task-focused feedback to individual children?

How is “success” recognized? Is it only for correct answers, or also for effort and participation?

Part C: Evidence of Systemic/Contextual Factors

(Observe the tangible realities that support or hinder the teacher’s ability to implement inclusion.)

Classroom Management & Ratio:

Describe the student-to-teacher ratio and overall "manageability" of the class size.

Is there a classroom routine/structure that is visible to children (e.g., visual schedule, clear transitions)?

Curriculum & Time Pressure:

Does the teacher appear rushed to "cover" prescribed content?

Is there flexibility in the daily schedule for child-led activities or extended exploration?

Use of Support (if any):

Is there another adult present (teaching assistant, volunteer, special educator)?

If yes, describe the nature of their interaction with the teacher and with children with additional needs.

Part D: Overall Impressions & Reflective Notes

(Researcher’s summary and analytic memos. Link observations to research questions.)

Key Strengths Observed: What inclusive practices were most evident?

Salient Challenges Observed: What were the most apparent barriers to inclusive practice in this classroom?

Triangulation Notes: How do these observations seem to align with or contrast with the teacher’s self-reported perceptions (if the interview has already been conducted)? For example:

If the teacher reported low confidence in differentiation, was any differentiation observed?

If the teacher cited large class size as a key barrier, what was the observable impact of class size?

Emerging Questions: What new questions does this observation raise for the research?

Appendix C:

Consent Form

Research Title: Teachers' Perception of their Readiness for Inclusive Early Childhood Education in Government Primary Schools of Bangladesh

Researcher: Md. Sharif ul Islam, Student, BRAC University

Contact Information: 01722925206

Part 1: Information Sheet

Introduction

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences, preparedness, and support needs of teachers in implementing Inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE). We want to learn about what helps and what hinders teachers in creating inclusive classrooms for all children, including those with disabilities or from diverse backgrounds. Your insights are very valuable for this study.

What is involved?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview. The interview will be semi-structured, which means I will ask a series of open-ended questions about your experiences and opinions.

- The interview will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes.
- The interview will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you, such as a quiet room in your school.
- With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure I accurately capture what you say. Notes will also be taken.
- The questions will focus on your perceptions of inclusive education, your training, the challenges you face, and the support you need.

Voluntary Participation & Right to Withdraw

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. You may refuse to answer any question and you can stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. You can also withdraw your consent and data from the study at any point before the data analysis is completed, without any negative consequences.

Confidentiality

Your identity will be kept confidential. Your name will not appear in any report or publication from this research. The audio recordings will be stored securely on a password-protected computer, and the recordings will be destroyed after they have been transcribed (typed out). All information you provide will be assigned a code number, and any identifying details will be removed from the final data.

Potential Benefits

While there may be no direct benefit to you, we hope that the findings of this study will contribute to a better understanding of the needs of teachers and help in developing better training and support systems for inclusive education in Bangladesh in the future.

Potential Risks

We do not anticipate any significant risks from participating in this study. Some questions might ask you to discuss challenges or frustrations in your work, which could cause minor discomfort. Remember that you can skip any question or stop the interview at any time.

Questions

If you have any questions about the research now or in the future, you may contact me, at 01722925206. If you have concerns about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact my supervisor, Ferdousi Khanom.

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

I have read the information provided above. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Please initial the boxes below that apply to you:

✓ I agree to participate in the interview.

Initials: _____

✓ I agree to the interview being audio-recorded.

Initials: _____

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Researcher's Statement

I, the undersigned, have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and, to the best of my ability, ensured that the participant understands to what they are freely consenting.

Signature of Researcher**Date**