

PRE-SCHOOL TEACHER'S PERCEPTION ON INCLUSION
OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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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

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Brac University
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that:

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing my master's degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where it is duly cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain any material that 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: Pre-School Teachers' Perception on Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Early Childhood Education

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1. Source of population: Preschool teachers from English Medium schools in Dhaka city.

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 - *yes*
 - 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*

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Executive Summary

Early childhood education is considered fundamental worldwide. Many developing countries struggle with implementing inclusive approaches in the early years, as preschool teachers lack knowledge on the philosophies and practices of inclusion. This study aimed to explore the perception of preschool teachers towards the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in early childhood education. For this qualitative study, a group of preschool teachers from English medium schools who also cater to children with learning disabilities were interviewed using semi-structured in-depth interviews and group discussions. The research findings indicate that teachers had mixed understanding of inclusion which is affected by their level of knowledge and experience. Results suggest that although a few teachers support inclusion, others believe that it is not considered the most effective education approach. The research further reveals teachers felt needs for proper training in this field. This study recommended that the school administration is required to provide an inclusive friendly environment to support preschool teachers in successfully implementing inclusion. Yet another recommendation suggested by this study is for policies to be reviewed to ensure implementation of inclusion in early childhood education system. Lastly, further research needs to be carried out on a larger scale to see a nationwide perspective.

Key Words: pre-school, perception, inclusion, learning disabilities, early childhood education.

Dedication

I am dedicating this to Neda, my sister, best friend, counselor, confidant – these are only few of the many, many roles you play in my life. None of my accomplishments would have been possible without your involvement. I am forever indebted to your kindness, encouragement, generosity, thoughtfulness and endless support.

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Chapter I

Introduction & Background

Introduction

Early Childhood is referred to as the phase between prenatal to eight years of age.

(Daniel L. G, 1997) explains that the experiences during this period will influence the outcome of an individual's life as this is considered an essential stage of growth and development. Early childhood presents a vital chance to lay the framework for continuous learning while preventing potential delays in development. These are vulnerable and impressionable years as they lay the foundation of development, which significantly depends on the environment the child is being exposed to. Schools are the first out-of-home setting that a child experiences. Consequently, teachers become primary educators as well as influencers of children in those formative years. Teachers can manipulate and mold the foundation, based on which the child's development will depend on, (The National Academies of Sciences, 2001).

Multiple challenges are interconnected with the social stigma attached to learning disabilities: insufficient training, assessment of children with learning disabilities, lack of knowledge, and inadequate resources (in terms of having a concrete curriculum that caters to an inclusive classroom). Preschool teachers are not considered to be sufficiently prepared to teach children with learning disabilities, says (Deborah Bruns, 2007). Literature further highlights that teachers are unprepared due to lack of knowledge and skills that is required for inclusive classroom practices (Batu, 2010) explains further.

The fundamental idea behind inclusive education is access to equal education for all. The goal is not just to include students from diverse backgrounds, as per (UNESCO, 1994), but to also embrace learners of different abilities in a uniform education system, says, (Ainscow, 2005). As per, (Avramidis, 2000), a successful outcome for inclusive education can be expected by obtaining insight into the teacher's perception on the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in the classroom. This study focuses on the teachers' perception of inclusion. This includes their attitudes towards whether or not the teachers agree that children with learning disabilities should be attending mainstream schools. This study will help determine the level of skill and knowledge each teacher has on dealing with children who have learning disabilities. The study will further speculate the challenges preschool teachers face and what accommodations need to be implemented for a successful inclusive classroom.

Definition of Key Terms

Preschool Teachers – The term “preschool teacher” can only be defined through the role they play in the education and development of children. A preschool teacher is someone who assists children between the ages 2- 8 years old, in developing language skills, vocabulary skills, social skills and basic concepts of math and science. A preschool teacher is someone who helps a child build the foundation on which all future learning depends, as claimed by (Miller, 2007).

Perception – Wikipedia defines perception as “the organization, identification, and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the presented information or environment.” This study will determine the perception of

preschool teachers on inclusive education of children with learning disabilities in classrooms.

Inclusion – Is where schools work to include each and every child in the learning process, celebrate differences and respond to individual needs, as claimed by (Tomlinson, 2014).

This study will reflect on the knowledge, practices and mainly the teachers' perception regarding inclusive classroom approaches.

Children with Learning Disabilities – The term “Learning Disabilities” is an umbrella term used to refer to students with special educational needs. A learning disability is considered reduced intellectual capacity and struggles faced with day-to-day activities such as socializing, performing day-to-day tasks and learning (Dumont, 2019).

Early Childhood Education - Early childhood education is the period of time from a birth to when a child is ready to enter kindergarten.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers' attitudes towards an inclusive classroom directly affects the learning and development of children, especially in the early years, says (Rakap, 2011). A positive and a growth mindset will help teachers make an effort to develop their skills and cater to the needs of individual children. This will in return help students learn better as their teachers become more skilled. Teachers play a crucial role in the quality and success of inclusion, as stated by (Worley 1994). (Sadler, 2005) commented that, teachers lack acceptance of inclusion which is recognized as a crucial barrier towards effective inclusive practices.

Teachers with a negative attitude towards inclusive settings, limit their capacity as a teacher in the classroom and this adversely affects student learning. These negative attitudes can be a result of lack of knowledge, insufficient resources, unexclusive education program and irregular classroom settings. The underpinning of such factors is crucial as teachers build the foundational skills of children. Given the current situation in Bangladesh, the lack of assessment has made it difficult for teachers to identify learning disabilities in children. Teachers in the classroom are not equipped with the knowledge, skills or resources required for inclusive classroom demands, as per (Hundert, 2007). Therefore, the result is inevitable, students with learning disabilities fall behind from the rest of the class and this creates more inconsistencies as teachers push to equalize the classroom. One curriculum does not fit all, and teachers need to learn to manipulate the curriculum to satisfy the requirements of individual students.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to understand the perception of English medium preschool teachers in Dhaka, on the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in early childhood education. Furthermore, the intention of this study is to reflect on teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in early childhood education. To sum up, this study will focus on the perception and knowledge of preschool teachers in inclusive classrooms where they would have to tend to the different abilities and needs of each student.

Inclusive education has been interpreted by Lere, (2002) and Okyere (2003) as a process of placing all categories of learners with learning disabilities in a full-time

regular classroom. Inclusive education can be perceived as a platform where children of different abilities have equal opportunities and a program that is set to fit their individual needs.

Another aspect of this study is to discern the knowledge and skill level of preschool teachers regarding an inclusive classroom. In-depth discussions (in both group setting as well as individually) regarding the experience's teachers have in an inclusive setting will be carried out to determine the existing knowledge teachers have about inclusive practices. The study will also bring to light the challenges and felt needs teachers have in an inclusive classroom.

Significance and Justifications

The concept of an inclusive classroom is one that is new to the education system of Bangladesh. Lack of resources, awareness, knowledge, experience and professional training are a few of the challenge's teachers face each day with respect to an inclusive classroom. Although many schools are yet to accommodate children with learning disabilities, a few English medium schools have acquired their own techniques to cater to such children. According to Grant, (2001), besides a teacher's knowledge, one of the most important influences that influence the success of inclusion is the teacher's attitude. This study is based on the teacher's perception of an inclusive classroom. Teacher's attitudes towards inclusion are generally contradictory and a few teachers are more favorable about inclusive practices whereas others seem to have negative attitudes towards teaching students with learning disabilities in regular classrooms, believed Diamond, (2009). The study emphasizes

on the insight, challenges and experiences of preschool teachers working in English medium schools in Dhaka.

Inclusive early childhood education programs are advocated as a successful practice from the experts who are involved with early childhood education and early childhood special education fields (NAEYC-DEC 2009). Literature has frequently emphasized that preschool and elementary teachers are not sufficiently equipped to teach children with learning disabilities, as determined by Fuchs, (2009-2010), and they do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to teach in inclusive classrooms, says Batu, (2010).

Research Questions

- 1) What is the understanding of preschool teachers about the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in early childhood education?
- 2) What are the preschool teachers' belief and attitude towards the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in early childhood education?
- 3) What are the classroom practices of preschool teachers to include children with learning disabilities?
- 4) What are the challenges preschool teachers face in teaching children who have learning disabilities in their classrooms? What are the felt needs of the teachers and their expectations from educational settings and from the government?

Chapter II

Literature Review

There is no doubt that inclusive learning is an integral part of education that is missing from the education system. Though there are policies that teachers need basic training and experience before teaching in a classroom, these policies are not implemented and there is very little demand that teachers follow through with such policies. With a growing demand for quality education, there should not be such inconsistencies. The literature proves the importance of early childhood development focusing on the need for teacher training, especially in the field of learning disabilities and the effects of such failings in the holistic development of a child.

Teacher's Perception Towards Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Preschool

Besides a teacher's knowledge, one of the most important factors that influence the success of inclusion is the teacher's attitude, as per (Grant, 2001). Teachers who have a positive approach towards inclusion of children with learning disabilities in the classroom are able to execute more successful inclusive teaching practices than teachers with a negative approach. The negative approaches are caused by a few underlying factors. As stated by (Norwich, 2002) one of them is lack of teacher training and qualifications. Teachers with inadequate qualifications felt less confident about teaching in an inclusive setting compared to teachers who have sufficient training and qualifications. This insecurity also results in teachers doubting their skills as an effective educator and facing uncertainties as to whether the students are benefiting from the program, says, Čech.čkov, (2014). This can have a negative

impact on the learning and overall development of the student. The success of inclusive programs may be at risk if regular classroom teachers hold negative perceptions toward the inclusion of students with learning disabilities (Van Reusen, 2001).

Teachers are perceived to be an essential component for the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in mainstream classrooms (Haskell, 2000). Therefore, their ideas, beliefs and approaches need to be in high regard. Teachers' perception is a critical element to the success of inclusive programs, to include students with learning disabilities into regular classes. It is important to study the essential attitudes towards the inclusion of students with learning disabilities into traditional settings. Their perceptions may influence their approach toward and acceptance of such students (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003).

Importance of Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Preschool

Children with learning disabilities lack the support they need for informal education. Child development not only affects the child's well-being but also affects the child's capacity to function as an adult and contribute to the community, determined, Brimbring, (2007).

Children with learning disabilities face quite a lot of segregation in formal education. This not only affects their well-being but also their capacity to be a functioning adult in society. As per Osborne & Adic, (2005), there is a growing agreement among scholars that the experiences children have in their early years are significant in molding their long term cognitive, social, emotional, physical and intellectual growth.

This can only conclude that depriving children of the help they need is depriving them of a purposeful future.

It has been verified that children who experience good early childhood education gain advantage in math and literacy, and other such associated skills required for any child to start learning (Odom & Diamond, 1998). Children who receive sufficient intervention for learning disabilities at an earlier stage have more success in formal education and can carry on an academic career like the rest of the children.

Children with learning disabilities benefit from experiencing an inclusive setting, not just in literacy but this setting also helps them develop social and communication skills. An inclusive environment will also protect children with learning disabilities from segregation and being subjected to society's negative attitudes (Lindsay, 2007).

Education is a basic human right and needs to be treated as such. All children, despite their background or level of learning, should go to school and receive education as per their level. Children who are deprived of a formal school setting end up with further delays and inability to function in society as they are not taught the necessary skills required to do so.

An inclusive classroom also raises awareness and tolerance for students with learning disabilities and provides a safe platform where they can grow and gain equal respect and privileges as the rest of the society, says Soukakou, (2011). A tolerant society can help catalyze the development of children with learning disability to create equity in the classroom and provide equal opportunities for all students.

Challenges of Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Preschool

As stated by various studies based on inclusive approaches, the most challenging issue teachers are facing is the implementation of a successful inclusive strategy.

There has been a considerable transformation in the new roles' teachers play in the classroom as they are now expected to recognize the characteristics and learning methods of individual children and be able to devise and adapt a curriculum as per the needs of the child, as stated by Mogharreban, (2009). This limitation results from inadequate professional training and resources for teachers, difficulty in designing individual plans for development of children with learning disabilities as well as lack of support from school administration and policy makers. Teachers are under the obligation to know about the methods of development and implementation of individualized education programs (IEP) and acquire skills to cater to individual learners as per their needs (Richardson, 2001). Without sufficient support and training, teachers will lack the necessary skills to plan and implement a successful individualized education plan for children.

Early years teachers are not adequately prepared to teach children with learning disabilities, and they do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to teach in an inclusive setting (Hedge 2007).

Challenges are interconnected with the social stigma attached to learning disabilities, insufficient training, assessment of children with learning disabilities, lack of knowledge, and inadequate resources (in terms of having a concrete curriculum that caters to an inclusive classroom, (Burns & Mogharberrn, 2009). This issue presents

itself in all forms, as society suppresses the right of education for children with learning disabilities, which causes cognitive, physical, and emotional delays.

Such delays lead to further interruptions in carrying out day-to-day activities and hinder what constitutes a normal life.

Global Perspective on Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Preschool

Experts in early childhood education advocate that inclusion is the best and most effective program for the learning goals of individual children (Dana Hilbert, 2014).

However, most preschools do not offer special programs for children with learning disabilities (Sandall, 2000). Local education agencies are not compelled to intervene in preschools concerning children with learning disabilities. The above statement means that the preschool programs offered don't meet the needs of the individual child says, Bailey, 1998.

The first five years of a child's life are the most impressionable years for child development and lay the foundational skills for the individual's intellectual, emotional, social, and physical development, says Adeleke, (2015). In affiliation with the above statement, Trembey (2002), states that the significance of these early years influences the quality of a child's growth, education, and health. Eastman, (2002) noted that the more the brain is stimulated during these early years, the more it can do, claims Adeleke, (2015).

“An abundance of teachable moments occurs during infancy and preschool period that are best used in the inclusive settings with teachers who are trained to recognize such developmental opportunities” says Hornby, (2000). The above statement supports the

idea that a teacher has the ultimate power to change the course of a child's life during the preschool years. Learning disabilities, when identified and intervened, can potentially hinder the ability of the child to learn and develop throughout their life. In an inclusive classroom, all categories of learners with different learning abilities acquire an equal opportunity to education. This does not mean the same knowledge but teaching that is individualized to meet the needs of each child, as per Lere, (2002) & Okyere, (2003). An inclusive classroom can be perceived as an educational platform that caters to everyone. This is a setting in which children from all learning abilities are accepted (Manueal & Adeleke, 2015). It is needless to say that inclusive settings, a setting without segregation and discrimination, will help assist children with learning disabilities to attain their educational goals.

Policy and Practices of Inclusive Education in Preschools in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has joined the international declarations that promote inclusive education. Policies and legislations have been ratified over the past two decades to support inclusive education (Roshid, 2013). In Bangladeshi context, it has been noticed that inclusive education policies have primarily been sponged from numerous international policies which makes it difficult for teachers in Bangladesh to relate to and implement in classrooms (Malak, 2013). Inclusive education initiatives in Bangladesh fall under various policies and legislations, such as: Compulsory Primary Education Act- 1990, National Education Policy for the Disabled- 1995, Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act- 2001, and National Education Policy- 2010. Through early childhood education, a Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and

Development Policy was drafted in 2012, which suggested the implementation of an effective inclusive environment for all children. These mentioned policies are considered to be the fundamental policy initiatives of inclusive education in Bangladesh. In harmony with the mentioned policies, the government of Bangladesh recognizes the practice of inclusive classrooms through the Primary Education Development Program.

However, the guidelines these policies provide are unclear and not concrete. This creates numerous challenges for practitioners who are trying to implement successful inclusive classrooms.

Chapter III

Methodology

Research Approach

The qualitative study will provide concrete documentation of preschool teachers' perceptions, knowledge, and needs on catering to children with learning disabilities in the classroom.

This issue will arise a considerable number of contradictory beliefs and opinions based on different experiences of preschool teachers working in inclusive settings.

The study will further analyze the experiences preschool teachers have in an attempt to get a more in- depth understanding of their beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion.

Research Participants

The target group will be preschool teachers working in English Medium schools in Dhaka. 4 individual in-depth interviews and two groups of 3/4 participants each, for group discussion. The participants will be recruited purposefully until a thorough understanding of the anomaly is achieved. The participants would be able to provide an abundance of information and deep understanding of the topic.

Research Site

This study is based out of an English Medium school in Dhaka. This is because private schools in Bangladesh have more funding for professional development which

means, there is a higher chance that such teachers have experience and knowledge in working with children who have learning disabilities.

Sampling/Participant Selection Procedure

Considering the purpose of the study is to identify the perspective of preschool teachers in inclusive classrooms, it is important to take in as many interviews as possible. In order to do that, the teachers chosen for the interviews (both individual and group) will be selected through the techniques of “purposeful” and “convenience” sampling. Data can be collected from one-on-one interviews with 4 teachers and 2 groups of teachers with 3/4 teachers in each group. Through the technique of purposeful sampling, teachers would have the most in-depth knowledge regarding the topic and can provide a range of information, will be identified. Through the technique of convenience sampling, random teachers who are available and fit at least some of the criteria will be interviewed in groups for discussion.

Data Collection Methods

Some of the methods that will be applied are:

Group Discussions: This would be a great way to correlate each experience and idea and see how the teachers function as one entity.

In-depth interviews: A questionnaire designed to derive information regarding teacher’s perception on including children with learning disabilities in classrooms will be discussed with the teachers to share their thoughts and experiences.

Data Analysis

The analysis will be carried out in the following ways:

First approach would be a Narrative Analysis - In this process, different stories and experiences gathered from responders (preschool teachers) with the context of the research, are analyzed and interpreted in a structured way.

Secondly, Discourse Analysis would be carried out. In this method, the analysis is derived from data collected from naturally happening conversations.

Lastly, Content Analysis will be done. This process includes a compilation of articles and literature which is contextual and is represented in an unambiguous way.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Tool

To ensure the reliability of the study, multiple sources of data collection will be classified systematically to represent a well-ordered flow of information.

BRAC Institute of Educational Development (*BRAC IED*), Brac University will be reviewing the prepared questionnaires for both in depth and group interviews. This ensures that all necessary protocols are followed.

The study will be a qualitative study about preschool teachers' perception of inclusion of children with learning disabilities in early childhood education, and therefore, in-depth interviews and group discussions with preschool teachers will be conducted.

To ensure that the interview questions adequately capture the unique perceptions and experiences of individual teachers who work with children with learning disabilities, it is essential to guarantee that the questions utilize appropriate language. Therefore, a field test consisting of three in-depth interviews will be carried out prior to the main

interview to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of the questionnaire. Experts from BRAC Institute of Educational Development (*BRAC IED*), Brac University, will review the findings from the field test and make recommendations for improvement to the final questionnaire. This will ensure credibility, dependability, validity, and risk level of the study.

Ethical Issues

The ethical issues which need to be considered would be to first ensure the confidentiality of personal information (name, address, etc). Teacher's names or the names of the case study (student), should they mention any will not be included.

Teachers need to feel as though they are in a safe place and be able to share the actuality of their situation and not feel that this is a test of their abilities or that this study will in any way hamper their position as a teacher at the school. Keeping that in mind, the questions will be designed in a way to limit the amount of personal information teachers have to share. Teachers will be briefed and ensured that at any point if they feel as though they are uncomfortable with a question, they have the option of not answering it.

Lastly, consent forms will be signed by the teachers which will give them a detailed explanation as to what they are volunteering for and what will happen with the information they share.

Limitations of the Study

Given the current circumstances, where we have to exclusively work virtually, this itself creates quite a few limitations. Classroom observations which is one of the

biggest resources for the study, will not be possible due to the pandemic and all the schools being shut. Therefore, the source of information will be limited to interviews only. This is a setback as there can be no observation on how the teachers accommodate individual students in the class. This situation puts a hold on the amount of accessible data. The study is mainly based on interviews, so it won't be possible to gather much statistical representation of the study.

Chapter IV

Results and Discussion

This chapter consists of the results from analyzing the data gathered from in-depth interviews and group discussions.

Subsequently, the chapter will include a discussion section, reflecting on the hypotheses from the data analysis. Finally, it will conclude with the study recommendations.

Results

The result section of this research aims to report the findings collected from in-depth interviews and group discussions of pre-school teachers' perception on inclusion of children with learning disabilities in early childhood education. The data collected was organized into different themes and sub-themes as per the research questions. The four central research questions circle around a) knowledge of pre-school teachers about the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in early childhood education, b) pre-school teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in early childhood education, c) classroom practices of pre-school teachers to include children with learning disabilities, and, d) challenges and felt needs of pre-school teachers and their expectations from educational settings, to accommodate children with learning disabilities in classrooms. The findings will cover these research questions. Research findings will be further supplemented by quoting the comments of the respondents directly.

Demographic Information of the Participants

A total of six pre-school teachers were interviewed, all of whom were women between the ages of 28 and 41. All 6 participants have a bachelor's degree, and one of them has a master's degree. Although none of the participants have any formal education in this field, they have all attended short training programs conducted by their schools. The teachers selected for this research currently work in two different English medium schools that cater to typically developing students and students with learning disabilities; therefore, all teachers have experience working in an inclusive classroom. On average, each teacher has three to six years of work experience in this field.

Knowledge of Pre-school Teachers on the Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Early Childhood Education

For the first theme, the research focuses on the teacher's knowledge and understanding of the topic. The questions were designed to recognize teachers' level of comprehension regarding the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in an inclusive setting.

Knowledge of Inclusion

As per the participant's responses collected from the interviews, a few things were evident. Firstly, it was evident that not all teachers had a clear understanding of what inclusion is. *Few teachers who had a vague understanding of inclusion referred to it as, "inclusion refers to acceptance of others, irrespective of who they are or what they believe in."* (In-depth Interview #1, 25.10.20). Another participant mentioned, *"To my*

understanding and from the training that I got, inclusive education is something to do with children with special educational needs." (In-depth Interview #2, 25.10.20). It was apparent that lack of knowledge was due to a lack of training and experience. During a group discussion, more than half the teachers were less interactive when asked to share their inclusion knowledge. Finally, a participant said, *"Inclusion refers to the process of one teacher teaching all subjects to students."* (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20). The data collected from this particular question concludes that more than half of the interviewed teachers have no basic knowledge of inclusion.

Furthermore, data analysis provided that half the teachers interviewed had in-depth knowledge of inclusion of children with learning disabilities in the classroom. Most of the teachers who had received some form of inclusive education training expressed what constitutes inclusive education. A teacher opined, *"I understand the term "inclusion" as referring to the conditions required to allow all students to participate in a particular learning environment, considering their individual learning requirements. This usually implies modifications of curriculum, either in content or delivery, to suit these individual needs."* (In-depth Interview #4, 27.10.20). As per another respondent, it was stated that *"inclusion means making learning accessible to all learners."* (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20).

The aforementioned quotes from the participants bring to light the fact that they have a clearer understanding of inclusion.

Knowledge of Learning Disabilities

Teachers were asked what they understand by learning disabilities in early childhood as it is an integral part of inclusive education. Half of the teachers had explicit

knowledge of the topic, which was reflected in their responses, as they discussed that learning disabilities refer to students with specific or multiple learning disabilities and have concerns with one or more of the following: reading fluency, reading comprehension, phonological awareness, math calculations, math problem-solving, and written expression. A teacher mentioned, "*Learning disabilities refers to the incident in which someone cannot learn in the stereo-normative way of education. Learning disabilities are a result of the way the brain is wired and the way the brain processes information*" (In-depth Interview #4, 27.10.20).

In the course of a group discussion, a teacher mentioned, "*I believe the term learning disability is extensive. I have worked with a variety of children with learning disabilities such as dysgraphia, ADHD, developmental delays*" (Group Discussion #1, 26.10.20). During the interview process, a teacher mentioned that they have experience working with many students with learning disabilities, such as ADD, ADHD, and few other diagnosed learning disabilities. These teachers claimed that the adjustments required were minimal in some of these situations, such as extended time to complete a task. In others, the whole curriculum had to be modified to allow for good learning outcomes.

Based on these shared experiences, it can be speculated that half of the teachers have adequate knowledge about learning disabilities and also are actively teaching and catering to children with different abilities.

For the remaining half of the teachers who were asked to share their knowledge of what constitutes learning disabilities, the results came out more negative. The negative approach was evident when a teacher referred to learning disability as "*a condition that causes developmental delay in a child causing the child to not be able*

to understand or learn properly" (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20). During this group discussion, it was apparent that the teachers in this particular group who had not received any formal training in this field showed signs of misconception regarding the difference between learning difficulty and disabilities.

Knowledge of Identifying Learning Disabilities

During interviews, teachers shared their processes of identifying learning disabilities in the classroom, assessing children using reliable assessment tools, and the necessary steps they take after the assessment. Few teachers mentioned that they do not have any in-depth knowledge on which assessment tools are used to identify learning disabilities in children, as a specialist does the assessments. Therefore, during the process of this interview, none of the participants were able to discuss in detail about the assessment tools but were able to mention the process of identifying learning disabilities in children and the intervention that follows.

A few teachers mentioned that they could identify red flags in children based on their experience. A teacher mentioned, *"I have worked as a preschool teacher for four years and I can easily recognize if a student is struggling in class. They face difficulty following instructions and are frequently distracted from the lesson. If a child is isolating themselves or acting out of character, I can tell that this particular child needs assistance"* (Group Discussion #1, 26.10.20). The teacher disclosed that after she has red-flagged a student, she then recommends that a specialist assess the student. *"The first step of identifying a child who has a learning disability would be to observe the child in the classroom to detect areas of struggle"* (Group Discussion # 2, 26.10.20), said a teacher during a group discussion. A few of the teachers who work in the same

school mentioned that they first observe students in the classroom who struggle to keep up with the class and then use a standardized assessment tool to evaluate the child's specific needs further. Data analysis established details regarding the assessment tool were not disclosed by any of the teachers. Furthermore, a teacher mentioned that the specialist uses a standardized achievement test, which includes reading, writing, and math, to determine the child's exact disability.

The next step was discussed by one of the more experienced teachers, explained how teachers and parents design and implement an individualized plan. During an interview, a teacher said, *"the individualized plan is designed to meet the specific needs of a child to ensure proper learning. The reason we get teachers and parents on board during this process is so that everyone is on the same page"* (In-depth Interview #2, 25.10.20). In a group discussion, most of the teachers mentioned that the individualized plan is meant to be a prescription to support every child in their weak areas and further develop their strengths.

During a group discussion about the importance of assessing children with learning disabilities, a teacher said, *"It would be very challenging to help children with learning disabilities without a proper diagnosis. If I don't know what the problem is, how will I be able to help"?* (Group Discussion #1, 26.10.20). The mentioned response brings about the area of discussions as teachers reveal the need for proper assessment. As per data collected, it is found that the need for proper assessment is one that all teachers have in common. Following the responses collected during a group discussion, it was verified that a proper assessment could make a notable difference in a child's learning outcome. Assessments can help identify and pinpoint the areas of weaknesses to design lessons for the child's learning needs. A teacher

mentioned that *"without a proper assessment, it is impossible to understand the severity of the disability, and without identifying the underlying issue, effective methods cannot be implemented"* (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20).

Research findings showed that half the teachers unanimously agreed that an integral part of designing an individualized plan for a student depends on reliable assessment results. As reported by a teacher, it is apparent that identifying learning disabilities will allow the learning process for the child to be more effective.

Overall, the data collected from the teachers' responses concluded that half of the teachers who were interviewed lacked knowledge on inclusive education, learning disabilities and also knowledge of assessment. The teachers who have more experience spoke confidently on the matter and shared sufficient information. As for the rest of the teachers, they could share a little from their previous experiences but not too many facts on the themes discussed on knowledge of inclusion, learning disabilities, and assessments. The findings show that, although most of the teachers have some level of knowledge about the aspects of inclusion, they mention the need for more experience and training.

Preschool Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Early Childhood Education

To meet the demands, pre-school teachers were faced with questions revolving around their attitude towards all children attending the same school setting in an inclusive classroom. Furthermore, the research aimed to reflect on teachers' beliefs towards the right of every child to education and inclusive education as a successful teaching approach to address the needs of learners of all abilities.

Preschool Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Inclusion

The data collected from the interviews and group discussions revealed that half of the interviewed teachers had a positive attitude towards inclusion. During a group discussion, a teacher responded, *"I believe that an inclusive setting is indeed essential in early childhood education because the students begin developing many abilities at this age, and an inclusive setting can allow for easier identification of how these skills and abilities are developing differentially among students"* (Group Discussion #1, 26.10.20). It was observed that most teachers were comfortable discussing their ideas about early childhood development and were aware of the importance of education during these crucial years. These teachers shared their opinions on including children with learning disabilities in their classroom, along with typically developing children. When asked if they felt that inclusion is a significant part of their teaching approach, a teacher said, *"Yes, inclusion in early childhood education is essential as this is when a child develops and grows the most. Teachers and caregivers must ensure proper growth. It is also during this time that any disabilities can be identified and catered to"* (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20).

The data analysis casts a new light on the importance of inclusion to cater to children with learning disabilities and the impact it will have on the community as all children learn equality. More than half of the teachers believed that equal opportunities did not mean the same opportunities. Teachers need to be able to provide for the child's needs as opposed to the needs of the class as a whole. During the interviews, these teachers talked about how they need to be trained and acquire the skills to implement a successful inclusive classroom instead of excluding children with learning disabilities due to their deficiency in skills. At the time of an interview, a teacher said, *"It would*

not be wise to segregate like that. It will not be good for the children and in general, for the society. The children will forever be labeled with social stigma that they may never achieve anything better and that is very discouraging" (Group Discussion #1, 25.10.20).

During an interview, a teacher mentioned how an inclusive setting helps raise awareness and tolerance within the community. A teacher stated, *"In an inclusive setting, we are providing an opportunity for children to practice tolerance and acceptance for everyone"* (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20). At the time of a group discussion, it was observed that a few of the teachers' talked about the importance of all students being a *"functional part of an integrated community"* (Group Discussion #1, 26.10.20). There was a clear focus on the thought that with proper guidance, all children will have a chance to live a worthwhile life as well as contribute to society and not be a burden.

Responses from a few of the in-depth interviews were parallel as the teachers validate the need and importance of inclusion of all children in their classroom no matter their abilities, *"Inclusion allows all children to develop at their own pace"* (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20). Teachers mention that each child needs to be allowed the time and space to grow at their own pace without feeling pressurized. It was evident that the teachers who had positive responses did so because they have an average of four years of experience working in pre-schools, which cater to children with learning disabilities and children who are considered typically developing.

Furthermore, minority of the teachers responded negatively towards the concept of inclusion, which became apparent when a teacher said, *"If all students should be treated equally, then why should instructions be modified? Why should teachers have*

different methods for different students?" (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20). Less than half of the teachers were on the same page as they agreed that children with learning disabilities should go to different schools and be treated elsewhere if they cannot keep up with the mainstream curriculum. Data collected revealed that these teachers had little experience and no training and did not consider inclusion to be apt.

The teachers who disagreed that all students should attend the same school mention that *"inclusion can disrupt the learning environment for other students"* (In-depth Interview #1, 25.10.20). They then elaborated that children with learning disabilities require individual attention, which is unrealistic as teachers work in large classrooms. During a group discussion, a teacher mentions, *"I need to divide my time, energy and resources equally among the students. It will not be fair for me to spend more time with one student and deprive another student."* (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20).

Teachers share that it is not in the teachers' best interest to implement inclusive classrooms due to a lack of resources and classroom assistance. A teacher mentioned that for inclusive settings to be successful, the classrooms need to comprise of more teachers to assist students with their individual needs.

On the other hand, the teachers who were indifferent were so because they did not possess adequate knowledge of inclusion on children with learning disabilities. A teacher said, *"I take each day as it comes and try to fill the gaps as I seem fit. All teachers implement inclusion in their classroom to some capacity even if they don't know it."* (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20). This particular teacher mentioned that she does not feel as though her teaching approaches are insufficient given that she is satisfied with the progress her students are making in the classroom. She continues to say that this depends on the severity of the learning disabilities of the child. If their

disability is too severe, then she would advise the child to be taken to a specialist.

This teacher elucidated that it is not about the "*right of the child to education*" (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20), but about the practicality of the fact that not all children will benefit from the same setting. She mentioned that her resources and skills are limited, and it would be more beneficial for children to go to specialized professionals for their needs and severity of their learning disabilities rather than stay in a common setting.

The data analysis indications revealed that teachers with more experience and training showed a positive attitude towards inclusion. Teachers with little experience and training were reluctant to include children with learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom.

Preschool Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Right of Every Child to Equal Education

The analysis made it evident that only a few of the teachers showed conflicting views on what constitutes the right of every child to equal education. This conflict arose from the unclear concept of differentiating between every child's right to education and inclusion. More than half of the teachers agreed to the right of all children to equal education. The participants agreed that all children should be provided with the same learning opportunities in the same setting, regardless of their abilities, whereas other teachers mentioned that children with learning disabilities should attend separate schools.

During a group discussion, a teacher mentioned, "*I absolutely support this inclusion. Children should not be segregated based on anything. All children should have the same opportunities and it is the duty of the teachers to ensure that every child gets the*

help they need" (Group Discussion #1, 25.10.20). This group of teachers were very keen on every child's right to have access to educational resources, which includes teachers and classrooms. In an in-depth interview, a teacher discussed that inclusive education benefits children with learning disabilities and all children. Likewise, the discussion leaned towards "*No child left behind*" (In-depth Interview #4, 27.10.20) ideologies. In another in-depth interview, a teacher claimed that "*it will be in the best interest of society to include children of all abilities in a classroom and ensure that they grow up to become functioning members of society*" (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20).

The few teachers who did agree to the right of all children attending the same school regardless of their abilities were asked how they practice supporting their beliefs for the right of equal education for all children. A teacher said, "*I support this by raising awareness, talking to parents who have children with learning disabilities to come to school and not drop out. It is important to raise awareness and bring some normalcy to this issue and break the negative social stigma that is attached to this*" (Group Discussion #1, 25.10.20). All teachers from this group discussion support the right of all children to have access to the same schooling regardless of their learning abilities, background, or race. More than half of the teachers agreed that the inclusive setting would help children develop physical, mental, social, and behavioral skills required for a successful future. These teachers felt as though it was their duty to ensure this development and provide students with the help and education they need.

On the other hand, during a group discussion, less than half of the teachers mentioned that they do not support inclusion and disclose that it has nothing to do with a child's right. A teacher said, "*Each child needs different support which cannot be met in one*

classroom. This has nothing to do with rights. The child who has learning disabilities can attend a school which will be more beneficial than a mainstream school". (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20). The data also suggested that a few teachers did not have sufficient knowledge about children's rights and inclusion. The same was evident in a few of the in-depth interviews conducted where a teacher said, *"children with disabilities should attend special schools as mainstream schools would be difficult for them to cope with. It is not the teacher's duty to look after all the children"* (In-depth Interview #1, 25.10.20). As per the data analysis from the interviews, the teachers who lacked experience and training were hesitant to include children with learning disabilities in their classroom, and they shared their struggles of having to cater to the needs of such students.

Preschool Teachers' Beliefs/Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education as a Successful System to Address the Needs of Learners of all Abilities

As per the teachers who believe in and practice the right of each child to education, there were still a few controversies as to whether or not they thought inclusion is an all-rounded and successful education system that can benefit all children. All participants were asked to share their opinion on whether they considered inclusion to be a successful and productive teaching approach.

During an interview, a teacher said, *"Mostly. It depends on the severity of needs of the child."* (In-depth Interview #4, 27.10.20). This teacher believed that inclusion could only be effective if the learning disability is not severe. She mentioned that due to a lack of adequate training and experience in this field, teachers would not be able to cater to the child's more severe needs, so inclusion will not be effective. During a group discussion about inclusion being a successful system, a teacher mentioned,

"Yes, I believe there is a type and level of inclusive education that may address the needs of learners of all abilities. However, in practice it is very difficult to find a single setting that can provide adequate support for a wide variety of learning needs" (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20).

Analysis from an in-depth interview revealed that a teacher believes it is best if an educational setting is specialized in providing a specific type of support as it will be more successful. A teacher discussed how trying to cater to too many different needs might make resources too thinly spread and thus reduce the effectiveness on inclusion.

During a group discussion teacher mentioned *"Children should be placed in the least restrictive learning environment during a group discussion. With proper support and training, paraprofessionals provide necessary support to the child in being successful. If a system can only educate some children, then the system itself is not successful"* (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20).

During the interview process, it was observed that despite the teachers supporting inclusion, all the teachers agreed that inclusion is not considered the most effective education method due to lack of training, lack of experience, lack of classroom resources, and lack of assistance in the classroom.

Classroom Practices of Preschool Teachers to Include Children with Learning Disabilities

This theme circles around preschool teachers' level of comfort in working with children with learning disabilities, their access to adequate resources for

implementing a successful inclusive classroom, their practices in designing and implementing individualized plans.

Teachers' Level of Comfort in Working with Children with Learning Disabilities

Data processed from interviews and group discussions indicate that teachers' comfort level in working with children who have learning disabilities depend on their confidence in their teaching skills. This confidence stems from knowledge on the topic and experience in working with children of all abilities. Teachers were asked how comfortable they felt in working in an inclusive classroom, and a teacher answered, *"Yes, within several limitations. I am only confident in teaching students with conditions that I have received training to deal with and support. For example, I would not be comfortable teaching a student with a severe learning disability, as I have not been trained. If I were offered the relevant training to help in that situation, then I would be more comfortable doing it"* (Group Discussion #1, 26.10.20). This point of view was true for most of the teachers as they revealed their insecurities in their teaching methods, resulting from lack of training. In addition to that, the classrooms are overcrowded, and teachers have to tend to multiple students with minimal resources. During an interview, a teacher expressed, *"I do not feel that I have the right training or time needed to attend to children with learning disabilities. This can cause discomfort as I try to maintain all students, and even though, ideally, I would like to spend equal time with all the students and cater to each of their needs, it is not practical. It won't be fair for me to spend more time with one child as I deprive another of my attention"* (In-Depth Interview #1, 25.10.20).

Data analysis shed light on teachers' need for proper training to teach at their full potential. Throughout the survey, none of the teachers talked about salary, but all of them mentioned teacher training as a necessity. Data suggests that the lack of teacher training is causing teachers' efforts to be inadequate for the children's needs. *"In my opinion only teachers with proper training and certifications should be allowed to teach students with learning disabilities. Children who need special attention should be placed under certified supervision in order to ensure positive impact in the long run. An untrained teacher would be unable to use effective techniques to make the differently abled children learn"* (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20).

On a positive note, more than half of the teachers revealed that they feel comfortable as they have been working with children of all abilities for more than four years. A teacher shared how working in an inclusive classroom setting makes her creative and uses the resources to help meet the classroom demands. Even without training, she can provide enough support for the students to progress. She said, *"Yes I am very comfortable working with children who have learning disabilities. Working here challenges my creativity that makes me improve my skills as a teacher"* (In-depth Interview #4, 27.10.20).

Furthermore, during a group discussion, a few teachers claim they have to do extensive research to find ways to use the available resources to help every child. The teachers went on to mention that they gained knowledge from this practice, which helps them develop the skills required to work with children with learning disabilities. A few teachers discussed that they could express their creativity in the classroom and explore different ways to accommodate all students. One of the teachers said, *"I can also see the difference it makes in the learning of every student. When I see their*

progress, I feel proud and that gives me job satisfaction. I enjoy working in this field and since I enjoy what I do, I am very comfortable" (Group Discussion #1, 25.10.20). She mentioned that although it is challenging at times, she feels comfortable working with children with learning disabilities. She further mentions, *"My abilities are challenged and put to test each day as every child is different and surprises me with a new need which needs to be fulfilled. I can be creative with my lesson plans to ensure that the children are getting the sufficient learning they need, and I feel glad when I see them progress. Working with children who have learning disabilities brings out the best in me"* (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20). In the course of the interviews, it was observed that the teachers' comfort level was directly correlated with their level of knowledge and skills.

Teachers' Access to Adequate Teaching Resources for Implementing a Successful Inclusive Classroom

At the beginning of the interview for this theme, teachers were first asked to discuss what they understood by teaching resources and why they are essential. A teacher said, *"teaching materials are resources teachers use to deliver instruction. Learning materials are important because they can significantly increase student achievement by supporting student learning."* (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20). Collected data reveal that most teachers believed that teaching materials could help student learning and increase student success. Teachers further mention that ideally, the teaching materials are tailored to the content in which they are being used to cater to the child's needs. As per a teacher, *"Teaching materials come in many shapes and sizes, but they all have in common the ability to support student learning"* (In-depth Interview #4, 27.10.20). A few teachers viewed only material objects as classroom resources. While

discussing what they considered teaching material, a teacher mentioned, "*Visual displays, different types of chairs, standing and sitting options, enlarged print, audio versions, peer buddies*" (Group Discussion #1, 26.10.20).

As per data analysis, it was revealed that the need for adequate resources in the classroom is one that is felt more severely. Almost all the teachers expressed that the ability to use the available resources is also a challenge and one that needs to be addressed. Teachers were asked how they use available resources to complement their teaching method. The data collected from this particular query determined that each teacher uses the materials differently as most of the teachers interviewed do not have the training required to use the materials. Teachers further mentioned that the lack of resources had compelled them to provide for the materials themselves. "*I have nothing. Sometimes I have to buy things with my own money and that isn't really sustainable*" (In-depth Interview #1, 25.10.20).

On the other hand, half of the teachers felt as though they had enough resources, the skills to use them effectively, and the creativity to manipulate and modify the available resources to cater to the child's particular needs. A teacher mentioned, "*Yes, I have a well-supplied classroom of manipulatives and assistive technology*" (Group Discussion #1, 26.10.20). Another teacher claimed that they do have enough resources to fulfill the needs of the teachers and students. She said, "*I can also be creative with the resources provided to modify them to the need of the child. Every corner in the classroom is a learning opportunity*" (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20).

Teachers discuss how children learn through play and should not be deprived of that opportunity. Teachers collaborate and share ideas on the different ways they can increase student exposure to diverse materials to promote learning. It is also vital to

have an array of resources as every child has a different interest, and unless they are provided with the opportunity to explore, they will never be able to identify their interests. *"We have much sensory play in the classroom. We teach math using marbles or any toys the child is interested in. We have picture books and flashcards for the visual students, and they can also sit on sensory mats, which helps build stimulation, and makes learning sustainable"* (Group Discussion #1, 25.10.20).

Although a few teachers feel as though they lack adequate materials and training to carry out a successful inclusive classroom, others felt that they are creative enough to modify their available resources and feel they have enough resources to execute a successful inclusive classroom.

Teachers' Practices in Designing and Implementing the Individualized Plan

Teachers were asked to discuss some of their regular classroom practices that promote an inclusive classroom setting where they referred to designing and implementing individualized plans for the students as a part of their inclusive classroom practices. Further into the details of discussion, a few teachers revealed the struggles of having to prepare such elaborate plans for each student. They mentioned that they need to put in extra effort into observing each child to identify their learning methods and areas of struggles and then designing an individualized plan to cater to the child's specific needs. A teacher answered, *"Yes and no. It is not as difficult if you have a good assessment about the student, or if you have previously worked with this student the previous year. I would say it is difficult as every lesson you have to ensure plans are ready for the teaching assistant, and it does become a bit of extra work. Unless the*

student is a part of the learning advancement center, usually this extra work falls upon the teacher" (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20).

As per the data analysis, a few of the challenges that the teachers are faced with are a direct result of improper and sometimes lack of diagnosis. Subsequently the teachers are not fully aware of the disability as such it becomes more difficult for them to design individualized plans. Teachers share their consternations regarding insufficient resources. *"As every child is unique, it can be challenging to create an individualized plan for each child. Also, if the teachers had adequate resources and supported planning, an individualized plan would be less challenging"* (In-depth Interview #2, 25.10.20), stated a teacher. Teachers share their struggles with the limitations that come with the number of students in the classroom that need these individualized plans. Every child has different needs and different learning methods, and the plan has to accommodate that. Teachers need to be creative and flexible with their plans to ensure not to be too difficult or too lenient on the child. In order to make learning more palatable to children it should be designed to be captivating for that particular child.

Although a few teachers faced challenges with the process, others seemed to have a different view. The noticeable differences in the teacher's opinions were based on the level of experience they have, their training, and the framework provided by the school. The data analysis establishes that the teachers who were provided with appropriate resources, including a framework for curriculum and appropriate teaching resources, found it less challenging to design and implement individualized plans. A teacher declared, *"I don't find it difficult to design individualized plans as we have a functioning system in place, which we follow. The student is first assessed and*

diagnosed" (Group Discussion #1, 25.10.20). As per the discussion in this group, the teachers mentioned that with the help of early childhood specialists, they design individualized plans for the child to cater to their specific needs. Additionally, teachers claim that they also get the parents on board with the plan so that they are able to follow through at home and are updated on the current progress of their child. The teachers and the specialists have a good working relationship, which makes for an effective inclusive classroom.

A commonality in the responses focused on designing the individualized plan, which involves teacher, parent, and collaboration with other specialists. As per the responses, it became evident that the success of implementing the individualized plans depends on the diagnosis which comes from proper assessment.

Challenges and Felt Needs of Preschool Teachers to Accommodate Children with Learning Disabilities in the Classroom

The discussion for this theme began with teachers being asked what their significant challenges are working in an inclusive setting. Teachers mentioned how an inclusive classroom gives rise to specific challenges, especially if there are not enough resources and assistance in the classroom. There was an emphasis on how teachers struggle to meet the students' demands since they are not sufficiently equipped with the skills and resources required to carry out a successful inclusive approach. The challenges lie in the lack of teacher training, lack of proper assessment, lack of resources, and teachers' dire need for all these challenges to be met immediately. The questionnaire results deduced that one of the chief challenges teachers face is the lack of proper assessment. The assessment to identify whether or not a child is suffering from learning disabilities. The outcome of the results will determine which direction

the teachers will take to design and implement an individualized plan to meet the child's needs.

Lack of Proper Assessment

Teachers were asked if they faced any disruptions in their teaching methods without proper assessment of the child. A teacher responded, "*Yes. The main challenge is that without the proper assessment, you do not know the specific need that student has; therefore, you might be providing the support that is redundant or inadequate, and this will lead to a sense of failure, both for the student and the teacher*" (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20). In a group discussion all the teachers expressed the challenges of helping children with learning disabilities without a proper diagnosis. "*If I do not know what the problem is, how will I be able to help? In our institution, we have a specialist who assesses through observations. The diagnosis from this assessment can help users determine the best intervention plan for the student*" (Group Discussion #1, 25.10.20), a teacher mentioned. Teachers unanimously agreed that proper assessment could make a patent difference in a child's learning outcome. A teacher mentioned that "*Assessments can help identify and pinpoint the areas of weaknesses so that teachers can design lessons for the child's learning*" (In-depth Interview #1). Another participant claimed that a general assessment tool, which is internationally recognized, is being implemented at the institution where she works. However, she was unable to disclose any further information regarding the assessment tools. The teacher mentioned that a specialist assesses the students and that they are unaware of the process. The study reflects that all teachers agree on the importance of proper assessment to help them create individualized plans for children, without which a proper management would not be

possible. During the interview process, teachers shared their experiences working in other schools that do not have an assessment method, which leaves the students unattended. In conclusion, teachers agree that a proper assessment can significantly impact the learning experience of an individual child. As per data collected from the teachers' responses, it became evident that without proper assessments, a mild case can also become more severe later in life and affect the child's overall development.

Challenges Related to Increased Workload

As per data collected from teachers' responses, it was determined that, in addition to teachers struggling with lack of proper assessments to make individualized plans, there is also the distress teachers face each day as all of this adds to their already overwhelming workload. Teachers mentioned that creating an individualized plan for each child is time-consuming and adds to their workload. When asked if they felt as though an inclusive setting intensified their workload, they all concurred. *"Yes. It requires a lot more planning time for class. This affects teaching each day because there is an increased need to reflect on every day's work and modify the following day's plan accordingly, but not just for the group but the different individual needs"* (In-depth Interview #4, 27.10.20). Furthermore, teachers mentioned that it is not just a matter of execution but also the planning process that is strenuous. Teachers talk about the struggles of having to design individualized plans and modify them as per the need of the child.

On the other hand, a teacher claimed that *"inclusive teaching can increase workload, but if certain practices are part of the classroom environment, then the amount reduces over time"* (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20). The teacher further discussed

that if teachers consistently make inclusion a part of their planning process, then the workload will decrease as teachers practice designing and implementing individualized plans. Although some teachers mentioned that this process had increased their workload, the general consensus was that this was not a complaint. These teachers have a favorable view towards inclusion and feel that it is a part of every teachers' job to modify instructions and plan for each child in the classroom to ensure proper learning.

A teacher mentioned how she learns and grows professionally as she has to develop her skills and add to her knowledge before executing an inclusive lesson. She says, "*I learn something new every day and so I do not feel as though it is work but rather a learning opportunity. I share experiences with my peers and that helps me review my own approaches and be able to work on my limitations*" (In-depth Interview #1, 25.10.20). Teachers discussed that it is productive when they get together to design each child's individualized plan, and that is a learning prospect for them as they share experiences and give each other feedback. They further discuss how they can work on their weaknesses but also get appreciated for their strengths. A teacher mentioned, "*That is a great motivation for me to continue to work in this field and not feel as though it is an added workload*" (Group Discussion #1, 25.10.20).

Need for Teacher Training

The need for teacher training has been brought up in every theme of this research paper. The lack of teacher training is considered a challenge and a significant setback for the education scene. A teacher mentioned, "*Usually the biggest challenge is to receive proper training*" (In-depth Interview #2, 25.10.20). At the beginning of her

teaching career, this teacher mentioned how she would consider individual students to be "lazy" when they had a learning disability that prevented them from reaching desired outcomes.

She revealed that after attending specialized training programs and keeping up to date on academic research on certain topics, she learned more about learning disabilities and how to help children with learning disabilities. Teachers agreed that they would benefit from more training. A teacher mentioned, "*Especially when it comes to an inclusive setting, it would be very beneficial if teachers had more training in this particular field. The concept of inclusion has been a common practice but without proper guidance and structure*" (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20). Teachers revealed that they have modified instructions to help children for many years but did not know what they were doing, so it was not fully effective. They claim that now there is plenty of research and proven techniques that teachers worldwide have implemented and been successful in. Teachers opined that they would surely benefit from being trained in those areas and bringing in a more concrete structure to their planning and teaching approaches. As per a teacher, "*I would like to learn new methods of teachings, ways to differentiate instructions and gain more in-depth knowledge on the different kinds of learning disabilities and how to cater to those children*" (Group Discussion #1, 25.10.20). Teachers responded that they feel as though if they could pick one need that would drastically change their skills as a teacher, it would be teacher training.

Teachers are in dire need of training. Throughout this study, teachers talked about how it would be great to have international exposure to explore broader avenues of learning how to teach children with learning disabilities. It would be great to attend

training programs that involve other teachers, as well. This statement was evident when a teacher said, *"This will help me as I can share other teachers experience and learn from them. Teachers discuss their approaches, their challenges and how they overcome their challenges. This is a great learning opportunity. I would also like to get feedback on my current teaching methods and find areas of improvement"* (Group Discussion #1, 25.10.20).

Teachers were asked to share their personal opinions on what element would help their teaching strategies and how they could reach their full potential as educators. A teacher mentions that as Bangladesh is considered a developing country, teachers need exposure and training from more developed countries to succeed. A teacher mentions, *"Also, as inclusive classrooms and overcoming learning disabilities is an important agenda for our government, we would need more funding and focus to be successful"* (Group Discussion #2, 26.10.20).

For children to keep developing, teachers too must continue to develop. Teachers need to be updated on the most current research and approach towards learning. Sufficient training and exposure will help gain knowledge and develop skills and change the conventional mindset and traditional approaches towards learning and teaching.

Need for Community and School Administrative Involvement

As per results collected from the interviews and group discussions, it was evident that another felt need of teachers is the need for support from communities and school administrations. Parents, school administration, and the community as a whole should be held accountable for all children's safety and well-being. A teacher mentions, *"In*

order to implement a successful inclusive classroom, all counterparts have a role to play" (In-depth Interview #1, 25.10.20). Teachers felt as though the school administration should take steps to help implement a successful inclusive classroom. Teachers revealed that they need the school administration to invest more in in-house resources and equipment to help with their current method and curriculum. In addition, the school administration should be more open to accepting admission of students with learning disabilities. As per the teachers' point of view, the school administration should find a balance between typically developing students and students with special needs. A teacher mentions, *"Schools can appoint more certified special needs teachers in their school to help the differently abled students to excel"* (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20). Moreover, teachers also share their opinions and ideas about how the school should budget and consult with teachers to find out their needs before purchasing resources.

"Most schools are run by people who do business and don't have experience in the classroom and therefore don't understand the needs of the teachers or students" (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20), said a teacher.

Teachers consult how it becomes difficult for them to do their jobs with limited resources, tight budgets, and lack of training. On a side note, a teacher mentioned that the school administration should have more faith in the teachers and give them the freedom to choose where they want to spend the allocated budget. A teacher responded, *"This is always a big issue. I would rather spend money to get resources than buy chairs and tables. But for the administration, chairs and tables are considered fixed assets so they would rather spend on that. The materials needed are considered as toys which children will ruin and therefore that money spent is deemed*

as a waste of money. The first step the school authority needs to do is give teachers the freedom to choose where they wish to spend the money" (In-depth Interview #3, 26.10.20).

Teachers unanimously agreed that the school authority needs to play a more active role in the school. It is their responsibility to ensure that there is enough budget for resources and materials.

Discussion

Knowledge of Preschool Teachers about the Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Early Childhood Education

The first research question sought to find out from all the preschool teachers their understanding of children with learning disabilities in early childhood education.

Most teachers had sufficient knowledge but lacked an in-depth understanding of what constitutes a learning disability and inclusion concepts. This study's findings suggest that teachers need to have access to teacher training programs in this field to carry out an effective inclusive classroom. To support each student and ensure sufficient learning, teachers must possess the ability to detect any form of interruptions in the student's learning style. Teachers need to be able to cater to any learning difficulties by assessing and identifying the difficulty, designing an individualized plan that caters to the difficulty, and implementing the plan to complement the student's learning style and ensure an all-rounded learning environment. To do this, teachers must have sufficient knowledge of learning disabilities and their management techniques.

According to the study's first finding, the preschool teachers' lack of knowledge regarding children with disabilities were discovered to be inadequate. Teachers lacked

knowledge concerning adjustments of existing curriculum, inclusive classroom management, assessments and teaching approaches. This is in view of previous findings which indicate that preschool teachers lack the necessary skills to execute a successful inclusive plan (Bruns & Mogharreban, 2009; Crane-Mitchel & Hedge, 2007; DeSimone & Parmar, 2006; Gök & Erbaş, 2011; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). The preceding finding was forceable as preschool teachers in Bangladesh are provided with a single general training course in education. Additionally, majority of the teachers do not have enough facilities to pursue professional development programs that focus on inclusive practices due to heavy workload. In order to further prepare preschool teachers for an inclusive setting, Buell et Al (1999), stated that, it would be more constructive to offer special education courses during pre-service education. Although, general information on learning disabilities is introduced in a few educational courses (Praisner, 2003), it would be more beneficial to offer more intensive courses to address exclusive topics on learning disabilities and inclusion (Leysner & Toppendorf, 2001).

Preschool Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Early Childhood Education

Analysis of the second theme reveals the preschool teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in early childhood education. Teachers disclosed their perception of children's rights of all abilities to attend the same classroom and have access to the same resources. Teachers understand their vital roles in this scene and unanimously feel that all children, regardless of their learning abilities, race, religion, or caste, should have the privilege of equal education. Although all teachers agree and support inclusion in the

classrooms, there are still residing factors that contribute to the reservation's teachers might feel in an inclusive setting. Such factors depend on the social stigma attached to learning disabilities, lack of teacher experience, and teacher training. As per the study results, it is evident that teachers who felt as though they acquire sufficient knowledge and training are more confident about supporting inclusion with positivity than teachers who lacked enough experience and knowledge. Literature reveals the association between a teacher's knowledge and attitude. As per (Buell et al, 1999), it was testified that teachers who had attended more courses on special education or in-service training had a more positive attitude toward inclusion. Conversely, negative attitudes can result from a lack of knowledge (Crane-Mitchell & Hedge, 2007). Sufficient training would undeniably have an impact on teachers attitudes towards inclusion (Crane-Mitchel & Hedge, 2007). Consequently, there should be emphasis on conceiving a more positive approach towards facilitating inclusive practices to foster children with learning disabilities. By offering practical and functional pre-service and in-service programs a positive mindset can be achieved as teachers will be armed with the skills, they require to execute an effective inclusive classroom. These results indicate that teachers' effectiveness of teaching depends on their positive/negative attitude towards inclusion, which is influenced by their skill and experience in this field.

Classroom Practices of Preschool Teachers to Include Children with Learning Disabilities

The third theme aimed to reveal the preschool teacher's practices to incorporate an inclusive setting to accommodate children of all abilities in their classrooms. Under this topic, the findings circled teachers' level of comfort in working with children with

learning disabilities, their access to adequate teaching resources for implementing a successful inclusive classroom, and their practices in designing and implementing the individualized plan.

While discussing their comfort level, half of the teachers mentioned that they are not comfortable working in an inclusive setting due to a lack of proper training and resources. The other half of the teachers mentioned that they have experience working with children with learning disabilities and therefore feel comfortable in an inclusive classroom. All teachers discussed their concerns regarding the lack of classroom resources they require to be more equipped to cater to children with learning disabilities. They reveal that they are required to create and modify the limited available resources to complement their teaching.

Challenges and Felt Needs of Preschool Teachers to Accommodate Children with Learning Disabilities in the Classroom

The last theme discussed in this study are the challenges preschool teachers face in teaching children who have learning disabilities in their classrooms and the felt needs and expectations from school administration. Teachers revealed that there is a multitude of factors that can ensure successful inclusion. One teacher stated that she feels unprepared and does not know about students with learning disabilities to teach them effectively. The majority of the literature reviewed during this study reported that teacher training in this field is of high significance as stated by McLeskey and Waldron (2002, D'Alonzo, Giordano, and Vanleeuwen (1997), and Shade and Stewart (2001). A further study by Leyser and Tappendorf (2001) affirmed that teachers require in-service and pre-service on practical, inclusive settings and knowledge on learning disabilities and how to cater to children with learning

disabilities. As per Simpson, Myles, and Simpson (1997), teachers must be more knowledgeable about assessing children with learning disabilities, designing an individualized plan, and implementing it effectively. For teachers to be effective educators, the school administration needs to support them with their increased workload. Data collected from this study revealed that all teachers complained about workload and lack of resources. They suggest that the school administration allocate more funding towards classroom resources and teacher training and hire support staff to help teachers with the workload. Teachers discussed the importance for schools to restructure their current restrictions on admitting children with learning disabilities and restructuring policies to cater to students' diversity. Smith (2000) documents that it is essential to reduce barriers to learning for all students, not only those with impairments or those identified with learning disabilities.

Data suggests that, although all the teachers value all students equally, there is still a considerable lack of classroom practices. However, it was expected that due to the lack of training, teachers do not have theoretical knowledge of inclusion as a teaching approach. Overall, it is evident that there have been distinctive differences in preschool teacher's attitudes towards inclusion. It appears as though the similarity in mindset held by teachers is that partial inclusion is beneficial for students of all abilities. However, there is a need to continue to provide teachers with resources that include less restrictive settings for students. It is also apparent that schools must practice inclusion at different levels, but what will lead to a more successful inclusion setting is appropriate training, adequate resources, and school administration support. Lastly, the benefits of inclusion of children with learning disabilities are apparent.

Conclusion

This study examined the perception of teachers in urban English medium schools in Dhaka. As per findings from the data analysis, it was determined that although there are struggles, all teachers believe that inclusive education can be successful under the right conditions. Research also showed the optimism and negative perceptions of preschool teachers on children of all abilities attending an inclusive setting. The study concluded that trained and untrained teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education depend on their level of knowledge and experience of working in this field.

The study implicates that successful inclusive education needs to meet various conditions, starting from teacher training programs, available resources, school administration support, and current curriculum and policy development.

Despite all difficulties teachers face while implementing inclusive practices, the study concludes that inclusion is the preferred placement for children of all abilities.

Therefore, teachers who work in early childhood education should have the appropriate knowledge and skills to meet all the needs of children. Research findings have also highlighted many challenges of implementing inclusive education related to providing the conditions mentioned above.

Recommendations

This study indicates that preschool teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the inclusion of children with learning disabilities has a direct impact on the effectiveness of teacher's practices and, subsequently, student.

- It was evident that a major obstacle to effective inclusive education is lack of proper training in this field. The teacher training needs to focus on: knowledge

on inclusion and learning disabilities, how to incorporate a successful inclusive classroom setting, assessing students with learning disabilities and designing and implementing individualized plans which cater to students' particular needs. The training will make teachers more confident regarding their approaches as they gain knowledge and experience which will result in a successful inclusive approach.

- Another recommendation would be to include inclusion in early childhood education. Early years are when the most development happens, so an inclusive setting will cultivate wholistic set of personal strengths and skills that prepare a child for adult life.
- An important element that factors into a teacher's success in implementing inclusive approach, would be for school authorities to provide an inclusive, friendly environment. School authorities should take the initiative to provide an inclusive friendly environment. This includes the authorities to allocate budget for teacher training programs and assign budget for teaching resources. The support of school authority is one of high importance and can have a significant impact on the education of a child.
- Another recommendation that needs to be taken under consideration would be, that the existing curriculum be reviewed to accommodate inclusive early childhood education. It would greatly help all teachers to have a framework that caters to all children of all abilities rather than just one.
- Policies need to be reviewed to ensure the implementation of the early childhood education system's inclusion. This study was based on two Medium English schools in Dhaka and therefore lacks a comprehensive overview of the

current education scene in Bangladesh regarding the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in preschools.

- Therefore, I would recommend further research to be carried out on a larger scale to see a nationwide perspective.

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Appendix – A

In-depth Interview Questionnaire

Topic: Pre-School Teachers' Perception on Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Early Childhood Education

Section A

Interview Date:	Start Time:	End Time:
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Demographic Information

Name of Interviewee:	Age:	Sex:
Education Qualification:	Teaching Experience:	
Special training in Learning Disabilities:	Training in the relevant field (Please specify if any):	
Name of School:	Address:	

Section B

Knowledge of Preschool Teachers About the Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Early Childhood Education

- 1) Have you heard the term “inclusion”? If so, can you tell me a little about what you understand from it?
- 2) What do you understand by “inclusive classroom”?
- 3) What do you understand by early childhood education?
- 4) According to you, why is inclusive early childhood education important?
- 5) What do you understand by the term learning disability?
- 6) Have you worked with children with learning disabilities before? If yes, please specify.
- 7) Is the inclusion of children with learning disabilities necessary? If yes, please explain.

- 8) Do you think it is necessary to identify the learning disability in a child? How would you assess learning disability in a child?

Section C

Preschool Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Early Childhood Education

- 1) Do you support the right of children with learning disabilities to attend classes with other children? Please elaborate if yes.
- 2) Should students with learning disabilities be sent to a different school setting?
- 3) In your opinion, will children with learning disabilities be affected in an inclusive setting? How will early intervention help such children to build a purposeful future?
- 4) Do you view inclusive education as a successful education system to address the needs of learners of all abilities?
- 5) Are you comfortable teaching students with learning disabilities? Why or why not?
- 6) What are the opportunities available to cater to children with learning disabilities in your classroom?
- 7) How will teaching in an inclusive classroom help you grow as an educator?
- 8) In your opinion as a preschool teacher, do you think children without learning disabilities get affected by an inclusive classroom setting? How would they be affected or not affected?

Section D:

Challenges Preschool Teachers Face in Teaching Children with Learning Disabilities in their Classrooms

- 1) In your opinion, what are the pros and cons of teaching in an inclusive classroom?
- 2) What are some of the challenges you have faced in an inclusive classroom?
- 3) Have you ever implemented differentiated strategies or modified instructions in your classroom to cater to students with learning disabilities? If so, please specify the limitations in the process of implementing the strategies.

- 4) Do you find it challenging to teach students with learning disabilities without proper assessment?
- 5) Do you find it difficult to plan an individualized plan for children with learning disabilities?
- 6) Do you feel as though your approaches towards an inclusive classroom are sufficient? If yes, please explain
- 7) Does inclusive teaching increase your workload? Please explain
- 8) Do you feel as though you have adequate training, skills, and experience in teaching children with learning disabilities?
- 9) Other than teachers whose involvement should be there to implement an inclusive classroom effectively?
- 10) What are the opportunities available to cater to children with learning disabilities in your classroom?

Section E

Felt Needs of the Teachers and their Expectations from Educational Settings

- 1) Has your educational background prepared you to cater to children with learning disabilities? Please explain
- 2) Do you feel you require more training to develop skills and strategies?
- 3) Do you have adequate resources in the classroom to implement an inclusive lesson?
- 4) What role can the school management play to help with this setting?
- 5) What are your felt needs from your peers to help you in your inclusive classroom?
- 6) Do you feel as though the school administration should take further steps to help with implementing a successful inclusive classroom? What are those steps?
- 7) What are your personal needs that can help you as a teacher to carry out a successful inclusive classroom?
- 8) Do you need more support teachers in the classroom to help students with learning disabilities so you can spend more time with the other students?

- 9) Do you feel as though you have enough support from school administration/peers/ parents, to implement a successful inclusive classroom?
- 10) If yes, then how and if no then how can that issue be addressed?

Appendix – B

Group Discussion Questionnaire

Topic: Pre-School Teachers' Perception on Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Early Childhood Education

Section A:

Interview Date:	Start Time:	End Time:
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Demographic Information

Name of Interviewee:	Age:	Sex:
Education Qualification:	Teaching Experience:	
Special training in Learning Disabilities:	Training in the relevant field (Please specify if any):	
Name of School:	Address:	

Section B

1. Have you heard the term “inclusion”? If so, can you tell me a little about what you understand from it? What do you understand by “inclusive classroom”?
2. According to you, why is inclusion important in early childhood education?
3. What do you understand by the term learning disability? Is the inclusion of children with learning disabilities necessary? If yes, please explain.
4. Do you support the right of children with learning disabilities to attend classes with others? How?
5. Are you comfortable teaching students with learning disabilities? Why or why not?
6. Should students with learning disabilities be sent to a different school setting? Please discuss why or why not?

7. Do you find it challenging to teach students with learning disabilities without proper assessment?
8. Do you find it difficult to plan an individualized plan for children with learning disabilities? What are those challenges and how do you accommodate them?
9. Do you feel as though your approaches towards an inclusive classroom are sufficient? If yes, please explain.
10. Does inclusive teaching increase your workload? Please explain.
11. Do you feel as though you have adequate training, skills, and experience in teaching children with learning disabilities? Do you feel you require more training to develop skills and strategies? If yes, what kind of skills and strategies would help?
12. Do you have adequate resources in the classroom to implement an inclusive lesson? What are those resources if you have any and how do you use them?
13. Do you feel as though the school administration should take further steps to help with implementing a successful inclusive classroom? What are those steps?
14. What are your personal needs that can help you as a teacher to carry out a successful inclusive classroom?

Appendix – C

Consent Form for Teachers

Title of the Research: Pre-School Teachers' Perception on Inclusion of Children with Learning Disabilities in Early Childhood Education

Researcher: Naghme Shakiba

Purpose of the research

I am conducting this research as a part of my Master's Degree requirement from the Institute of Educational Development (IED) - BRAC University. The aim of this study is to identify the perception, attitude, and knowledge of English medium pre-school teachers in Dhaka, on the inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood education,

Expectation from you

You will be interviewed as part of the above research project. This consent form is necessary for me to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read the accompanying information and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- The interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced.
- The transcript of the interview will be analyzed by Naghme Shakiba.
- Access to the interview transcript will be limited to Naghme Shakiba, Ms. Ferdousi Khanom, and academic colleagues and researchers with whom there is collaborate as part of the research process.

- Any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are used

will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed.

- The actual recording will be deleted after the being analyzed and transcribed.

Risks

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter during a regular faculty meeting. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss problems that you experienced in worry to be judged. You do not have to answer any questions or share anything you do not want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. You might feel concerned that things you say might get back to your supervisor. Your information will be kept confidential.

Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

All information collected from you will remain strictly confidential. I would be happy to answer any of your queries about the study and you are welcome to contact me.

Consent for audio recording

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in this research study.

Future use of information

Some of the information collected from this study may be kept for future use. However, in such cases information and data supplied to other researchers, will not

conflict with or violate the maintenance of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of information identifying participants in any way.

Right not to participate and withdraw

Your and your child's participation in the study is voluntary, and you are the sole authority to decide for and against your participation in this study. Refusal to take part in the study will involve no penalty.

If you agree to my proposal of participating in my study, please indicate that by putting your signature in the specified space below.

Name of the Teacher

Name of the Researcher

Signature of the Teacher

Signature of the Researcher

Thank you very much for your cooperation. For any further query, you may contact me. My contact no is, 01617036131, or you can email at naghmeshakiba@gmail.com.