

## Using Thematic Analysis to Understand Teachers Perspectives about Inclusion in Early Childhood Education

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### Abstract

Teachers are an important part of society, and they played a vital role in the development of the country. As inclusive education is becoming a major concern for every country, either they are developed or developing. The study aimed to explore the teacher's perception of Inclusion in Early Childhood Education. In this study qualitative approach was used. Data was collected by using semi-structured interviews. The sample comprised ten teachers working in inclusive schools who teach early childhood education. A purposive sampling technique was used for data collection. The thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the data. Themes were generated from the literature review and also from the interview guide. The study revealed that the teachers working in the inclusive education schools have comprehensive knowledge about inclusive education. They believed that the early childhood education system is very beneficial and useful for special needs children at the inclusive system. Most of the participants agreed that the ECE system builds preschool skills, dressing, grooming, creativity, and social interaction skills in a child. Our study recommends that teachers training must be held in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, early childhood education, teacher's perspectives

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**Introduction**

Education is the biggest and most important fact of development. Every developed and developing country is focusing on the growing system of education not only for ordinary but also for children with disabilities. In the pursuit of a better nation, special children have been taken notice of, and early childhood education was offered to enhance their lifestyle or meet their needs, even though it would be an integral part of society. Early childhood education (ECE) is commonly viewed as training of little children right from birth until they are eight years old. In many Asian countries, ECE is viewed as a natural source of basic cognitive, intellectual, and language skills outside their homes. The Montessori Method of education, a renowned approach of ECE, provides a sustaining, steady learning environment for young ones and considers various learning styles (Losert, 2010). This incorporates kids with unique requirements, including those who are handicapped or have other learning disabilities or shortcomings like problems in spelling, composing, mathematics, etc. It also incorporates learning strategies for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); and gentle to-direct autism spectrum disorder (ASD) problems. In the Montessori setup, children learn in multi-age classes, with a similar instructor, for a very long time. This continued association makes a steady, unsurprising climate for grown-ups and kids the same. Children can learn conveniently with their learning style, instead of changing in accordance with new individuals and new schedules each year (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006). Montessori schooling is established on every Student's uniqueness, a key fixing that rouses child to be their own best educators and facilitators in the classroom. Montessori is a strategy for education that depends on self-coordinated action, active learning and collective play. In Montessori study halls, children settle on inventive decisions in their learning, while the classroom and the profoundly prepared teachers offer age-proper exercises to manage the cycle. Students work in gatherings and exclusively to find and investigate information on the world and to build up their greatest potential (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008). Montessori classrooms are delightfully made conditions intended to address the issues of kids in a

particular age range. Most Montessori study halls are mainstream in nature, despite the fact that the Montessori teacher's technique can be incorporated effectively into a religious program. Each material in a Montessori class underpins a part of children advancement, making a match between the kid's regular advantages and the accessible exercises. Students can learn through their own insight and at their own movement. They can react at any second to the common interests that exist in all people and fabricate a strong establishment forever long learning (Giardiello, 2013).

This style of education is particularly valid for our extraordinary requirements students, a significant number of whom don't hold fast to the prescriptive guidelines, standards, and codes that society has just characterized as "special". These students are regularly determined to have dyslexia, ADHD, or ASD on a scale from serious mental imbalance to Asperger's, and have depleted all different endeavors to "fit in" at school (McKenzie, Neiger, & Thackeray, 2012).

It is a complex task to define Inclusion with a single definition. Inclusion has been taken with different perspectives in the existing literature. It is expressed in diverse ways by many practitioners. According to them, writing, teaching or having a discussion regarding this subject is complex and are being argued. Therefore, it is important to recognize its value and trainings should be given to inclusive teachers to improve the current quality of inclusive education (Tan et al., 2011).

An inclusive system is the main focus of the worldwide population as it became the norm of the educational field. In Inclusion, there is an active participation from the professionals. Specifically, academic professionals can cater to the needs of students with disabilities because they have profound knowledge of various pedagogical techniques and concepts of early childhood education. Institutions are the foremost source that is supposed to be the most prominent set up for disabled or special students and normal students (Deng, Qi, Deng, Zhang, & Zhao, 2008). Inclusion provides a chance to reshape the conventional educational system and bequeathed more chances to normal and special students for education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

It is the ambitious target to enhance the quality and reach of inclusion education. A study has reported that at some universities, there is a zealous effort to embrace the teaching style of Inclusion and provide a supportive environment to the teachers as well as for the students in the class (Torriti, Hassan, & Leach, 2010). Ganimian (2009) discussed that Student's achievement is based on the acquisition of education. Achievement can be defined as an "accomplishment of something" and achieving its learning goals. Teachers help their students in achieving their learning goals during the class. Teachers developed the interactive environment in the class and this creates an instructional environment in the class which gave them explicit skills.

Studies have also reported that classroom arrangements that are feasible for students contribute to learning as well as the development of the special students. They can approach easily in their class and this made them active and gave the feelings of independence. The easy approach of all the equipment's provides an opportunity to trust on their selves. Universal design is designed for all the students so that they could adjust themselves in the class adequately (Subban & Sharma, 2005).

However, ECE has not been formally recognized by the public sector in Pakistan. The traditional 'katchi' (pre-primary) class in some public-sector schools has predominantly remained a familiarization stage towards formal schooling for non-admitted, younger siblings of students. A limited part of the Class 1 national curriculum is taught to this group. ECE was officially organized in Pakistan in the 1970s. Katchi classes for children between the ages of three and six were regularly organized in government primary schools, although this practice was officially suspended during the 1980s. However, these classes were very formal and didactic in their original sense, and were not recognized as early childhood settings (Aad et al., 2011)

General education teachers play a major role in the education of students with disabilities. Teacher's help to develop and implement inclusive models of education that address the social and academic needs of all students served in general education classrooms. The attitude of teachers towards students with special needs is a key factor in determining the success or failure of inclusive education.

As indicated by Odom, Love, Wolfe, Paul, and Whitesides (2002) early childhood education see incorporation as both helpful and concerning. In the usage of early consideration, both youth and specialized curriculum teachers assume significant jobs. Subsequently, both their discernments and understandings of inclusive schooling are urgent to enhancing inclusive practices. To know which kind of obstacles and challenges faced by inclusive education teacher while dealing with disability students in Montessori early childhood education classes. Influential and prominent decision-makers of universities are required to understand and facilitate to the general education teachers and give them understanding that how they can teach with disability students. The researcher has chosen the teachers as the key respondents to research so that they can know the hurdles, issues, concern and needs of teachers in inclusive classroom at Montessori early childhood education.

Plethora of research has reported positive results of Inclusion of special needs children. For instance, Van den Berg (2001) looked at the consideration of kids with mental problems in youth classrooms. They found that incorporation gives a steady climate where little students can develop and teach one next to the other with their peers. Although in Pakistan, scope of inclusive education is increasing day by day but parents have no enough knowledge about inclusive education and Montessori early childhood education for their special children. Parents have only enough knowledge about special institutes, therapies for their children.

This study will be beneficial for the preschool and early childhood education teachers and parents of special children to know about the scope of inclusive education at early childhood education and its benefits for their children. It will be productive to enhance considerate thought about the teacher's perspectives about Inclusion at early childhood education. The study will help to understand the institutional settings with disabled and on the basis of the study further recommendation and practices will be incurred in administrations view so that the improvements should be cooperated in inclusive settings especially with teachers. It is observed in Pakistan, that in government special schools, inclusive system of education is not introduced yet. Only private special

institutes working on inclusive setup and few institutes run early childhood education for special needs children. This study will explore the teacher's perspectives about Inclusion at early childhood education.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Objectives of the study are:

- 1- Explore the perspectives of teachers about Inclusion at early childhood education.
- 2- Identify the challenges of the teachers which they faced while teaching in early childhood education at inclusive setup.
- 3- Explore which abilities and skills are mostly developed in a child during early childhood education at inclusive setup.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The research depends on phenomenological approach. So, for satisfying the reason for the purpose of the study qualitative research design was utilized. As qualitative research design is utilized to investigate the person's views about Montessori early childhood education in inclusive setup. The nature of the research was basic qualitative research.

#### **Inclusion Criteria**

Inclusion criteria of the study were:

1. Teachers teaching in inclusive system
2. Dealing with normal and special needs children in a same class.
3. The willingness of participation in the study.

#### **Sampling and Participants**

General and special education teachers currently working in inclusive schools and provide early childhood education were selected for this research. Five inclusive schools from Lahore and Islamabad were selected for sampling through purposive sampling.

The sample was consisted of 10 in-service teachers who are working in inclusive schools. Behavior and Special Education Services (BASES) was selected as a major part for teachers interview because at present, BASES work remarkably and open inclusive education setup on a large scale. They promote Montessori early child hood education system and adapt the method of US and implement in Pakistan inclusive schools.

### **Data Collection Method**

First, we find out the inclusive schools in Lahore by searching from GOOGLE. We contacted the concerned person/administrator of the schools. When we got the consent, a meeting was arranged the with the head of the school. In the meeting, we discussed all the aspects of the research and also visited the Montessori classrooms. After this, meet up with teachers (sample) was scheduled. Before interview, we developed the interview guide. The interview questions were developed after extensive review of the literature regarding inclusive education. For this research, the semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data from the participants. The interview guide was developed in English language as it is the official academic language in Pakistan. Interview guide was divided into two parts. First part consisted of demographic information and the second part consisted of three these including questions. Demographic information include age, gender, education, professional qualification, training services, designation in institution and experience.

The inform consent was taken from the participants when they showed their willingness and fulfill the criteria of the Inclusion. After taking appointment from the teachers' data was collected through semi-structured interview guide. Firstly, data was collected only from 3 teachers (BASES, Lahore State Life Branch) for pilot testing of the interview guide. After the validity of interview guide, data was collected from the all ten selected participants. The participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and were asked that they could question if they do not understand a question. They were asked that they could leave interview if they felt inconvenient. Complete instructions regarding research work was given to the participants. The interview taking

is a time-consuming work and it took long time. The participants were debriefed about the research purpose and were thanked for their time and interest.

### **Validity of the Interview Guide**

The interview guide developed for the study was given to three experts of the field for their invaluable evaluation. The experts belonged to the Department of Special Education of Allama Iqbal Open University. The experts were requested to validate the interview guide for the following criteria: All the questions in the interview guide are relevant to the research topic and all questions are clear and in calculated meaning and are commonly absolute. After the evaluation of the interview guide, the experts gave their opinions as; the content of the guide was good and they didn't feel any difficulty in understanding it. The whole questions were relevant to the research topic. Some modifications were recommended in words of the question. It was incorporated in the guide.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analyses of the collected data are the most important part of the research. Thematic analysis was used to analyze interview data. All these steps were taken in consideration while identifying themes in the data. A theme of the information could be "catches something significant about the information corresponding to the research question. The data was coded according to the conceptual and literature of the study and interview guide (Clark & Braun, 2013). Themes were predominantly recognized on semantic or unambiguous level. During coding, some semantic content of the data and its underlying assumptions need to go beyond the ideas which are conceptualized with the teacher's perception about Inclusion at early childhood education. Microsoft Excel was used to process thematic process systematically as it arranges the tables and facilitate in comparing the data collected from various participants.

### **Ethical Considerations**

During the research, we ensured full compliance with research ethics. The whole procedure was completed by following ethical rules and consideration. Before taking data from the institutions, the consent letter was taken from the department and then that letter was given to the institutions where researcher had to collect the data. The head of the institution gave permission for data collection and then the researcher went to the departments where researcher could find the inclusive teachers. The informed consent of the teachers was also taken and they were ensured about the confidentiality of the data. They were also told that the data will be used for academic purpose and will never be used against any propaganda. All the ethics were followed by the researcher.

### **Results of the Study**

Table below highlights the themes and sub-themes that were extracted from thematic analysis of the data.

#### **Themes Sub-themes**

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Teachers perspectives about Inclusion	Knowledge about Inclusive education, benefits of Inclusion, Role of a teacher, way to teach with normal and special needs children
Challenges faced by teachers during managing class	teachers' experiences, problems in educational program, students' behaviors, change teaching strategies
Skills build in early childhood education	Motor skills, emotional skills, preschool activities, communication improvement

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### **Teachers perspectives about Inclusion**

Most of the teachers said that Inclusive education is the point at which all students, paying little mind to any difficulties they may have, are put in age-suitable general schooling classes that are in their own local schools to get great guidance, mediations, and supports that empower them to meet accomplishment in the central subjects. The school and classroom work on the reason that students with disabilities are as on a very basic level able as normal

students. Subsequently, everything students can be full members in their classroom and in the nearby school. A large part of the development is identified with enactment that students get their schooling at all least restrictive environment (LRE). This implies they are with their friends without disability to the most extreme degree conceivable, with general education the arrangement of best option for all students. Few participants stated that inclusive education is primarily about accepting, understanding, and engaging students' differences and diversity, which can include physical, academic, cognitive, social, and emotional. This does not mean that students never have to spend time in formal education classes, because sometimes they do it for a specific purpose. But the point is, this should be an exception. The principle of driving is to make all students feel welcome, appropriate challenge and support in their endeavors. It is also important to help adults. This includes all staff and teachers other than the Permanent Education Teacher and Special Education Teacher who are key stakeholders - including parents. Most, of the participants purposed that in inclusive setup students with and without disabilities learn more. Early childhood education helps in a special needs child to build social and emotional improvement. Early childhood education for children with disabilities can have a positive effect on a child's cognitive and social development. Participation in early childhood programs supports the rights of all children, regardless of their abilities, even if they participate more in natural settings in their communities. Natural settings include, but are not limited to: home, preschool, nursery school, head start program, kindergarten, neighborhood / community, school classroom, childcare center, synagogue, recreation area and more. Settings that small children and families enjoy. Few participants stated that teachers' role is very important for the development and improvement in a child. If teachers' behavior is always positive and appreciate the child, the child learns quickly as compare to other children. For earlychildhood education special needs children already have a command on pre-academic skills. They train into special schools or give some therapies. In inclusive setup, earlychildhood education system helps to build hidden skills with the help of normal children. Special needs children feel they are normal and are an important part of a society. They use different curriculum

strategies and techniques for children. No specific method is adopted. Different tasks, games, out-door and in-door activities are held for children. Field-trips are held for better understanding of a children. Tracing lines sheets, coloring, matching concept, shapes, size, adjectives, receptive identifications, visually identification techniques are used in early childhood program for children. With the help of early childhood education program services and curriculum can be modified according to the age level of a child.

### **Challenges faced by teachers during Managing Class**

Most of the teachers told that they were experienced in teaching special students as it was the part of their education. But still it was a difficult task for them to in co-operate the special students in the class. The teachers who had 5 to 7 years' pre-experience of teaching special children felt little bit difficulty in inclusive class but the teachers who were from general class and never taught any special student felt tired and difficult task. They stated that focused on the special Student as well as normal Student needs teacher to be vigilant in the class and need to be expertise in the particular area. So inclusive class teaching needs experience for effective teaching. Some participants discussed that proper early childhood education system design according to the age level of a normal and special child is too difficult. They also discussed that preschool education programs can be specifically designed for three-, four- or five-year-olds, and they include childcare and daycare or nursery school settings, as well as traditional preschool or preschool. Also available in kindergarten classrooms. As, another teacher reported that special students were asked that when they need help for their curriculum or any issue related to their studies or personal life they can asked for help. But they did not bother teachers and did their whole work by themselves. The, participant stated about the tough time which they felt while teaching inclusive class and for this, teachers had to prepare themselves. A few teachers told that they don't have enough knowledge to use different approaches to teach them as they were not skilled to teach the inclusive class but as it is stated that the skillful knowledge is required to teach the special need students. Few participants stated that students aggressive behavior in a class create disturbance if shadow teacher or trained teacher is not present. Sometime special needs children regress and

their all previous behavior occur which create too much disturbance in a class. In behaviors include hitting, throwing, shouting, spitting and zero interest in class activities and with peers. To tackle these types of behaviors is very difficult for teachers. Teaching was used by the teacher as they gave freedom to the special need students that they can come across and asked for extra class from the teacher. The teacher used multiple strategies to communicate them the course work and help them to understand their work. Teacher shared that inclusive education experience as they had worked with other special students and it helps them in understanding the students need. So, the teachers encourage them to move on and helped them throughout the session. Two participants stated that they feel fatigue and burden because they belong to general education setup and they don't have a stamina to work like a special need children teacher.

### **Skills build in early childhood education**

Almost all participants said that in inclusive education preschool teachers can use a variety of strategies to teach these skills while encouraging their students to have a natural curiosity and learning. Preschool teachers can meet their teaching goals through it. Build children's background knowledge and thinking skills, children's development is being monitored, Communicate with parents and care takers, creating a learning environment for young children, Helping children develop listening and speaking skills, Reading aloud to children, Teaching children about books, Teaching children about letters, Teach children about numbers and counting, Teaching children about print and Teaching children about the sounds of the spoken language. Some participants stated that early math skills are being used by children in their activities, experiments and daily routines, whether at school or at home. For example, getting acquainted with their routines, such as brushing their teeth, dressing, blinking, and learning to shop with their parents, when approached in a particular way, can be an opportunity to learn math. They said that children between the ages of one and five are beginning to discover patterns and shapes, compare sizes, and count objects. When it comes to preschool children, they use different methods to solve the problem and talk

about finding them. Math game is evident in pretense games, block play, literacy play, outdoor play and science play.

Most of the participants purposed that they build different skills with the help of different activities like shapes, pattern use for make the same, sorting, matching object to object, puzzles, numbers, play dough, cards, peg boards, rhymes and books, initial sounds of alphabets, fine motor skills, pencil holding, griping, coloring, jumping, racing all these skills build in a child with the help of early child hood educational plan. Some participants stated that painting, drawing, reading images, play with sand and water use with the help of naturalistic teaching and structured environment.

### **Discussion**

Teachers play a key role in developing students' careers. Inclusive education teachers follow the early childhood education program who help students with their special needs. The study found that general teachers showed fatigue but special education teachers showed a positive attitude towards inclusive education and considered their experiences as part of their career development. They, reported that the inclusive setting is beneficial for the students with disabilities (Avramidis, 2007). Most of the researches were conducted on school level so it is need of the hour to conduct more focused researches on higher education (Blackman, 2012). These, results indicated that teachers showed uncertainty in its implementation, lack of involvement and trust associated with the definition of participation. Teachers are still praised. It was broad and ideological. The definition of joining the ECE field has only recently become clear publicly available through position and national level statements to support teachers understand the implementation of successful status and participation.

According to the result of the study, teachers face many challenges in inclusive classroom like lack to teachers training, students' aggressive behaviors, designed curriculum, strength of a student's create challenges for teachers. Lack of support of parents

also create problems for teachers. They don't have enough knowledge to use different approaches to teach them as they were not skilled to teach the inclusive class but as it is stated that the skillful knowledge is required to teach the special need students. There are limited studies which analyze urban educators and the experiences of inclusive practice.

The findings of the study show that early childhood education program is very beneficial for normal and special needs children in inclusive setup. With the help of ECE teachers build different skills in a child, such as eye contact, attention span, writing, coloring, painting, drawing, non-academic activities, interest in studies. Teachers plan activities according to the age level of a children. Academic skills, self-care skills like dressing, grooming, toileting, leisure play time with friends, group activities done in ECE. Teachers follow the ECE program and able to child move in a society independently. Teachers need programs that helps them to teach students with disabilities that had positive impact on special students with normal students.

### **Conclusion**

It is concluded that inclusive education is very important for special needs children. It helps to build confidence, self-esteem and social interaction. Teachers implement early childhood education system in inclusive setup which is proving very helpful for them. It is also concluded that teachers have clear concept about inclusive education. Teachers experiences work with both normal and special child is very good. Children at the age of 3 to 8 build different skills and help to increase attention span and eye contact. ECE helps to build different skills in a child and all preschools habits build in a child. In inclusive setup they groom and polish the child. Newly hired teachers have a lack to teaching experience in a inclusive setup that why they face hurdles in starting.

### **Recommendations**

According to the finding of the study it is recommended that ECE must be implement in all public and private school. General and special schools must follow the methods and techniques used

in ECE program. Teachers must be train before hiring in a inclusive schools. General education classroom teacher must be trained how to handle special child in a classroom. Teachers of the inclusive education did not receive such awards for their hard working and managing the inclusive class so it is highly recommended that some rewards should be given to them that is in the form of increasing their pay roll, bonus or acknowledging them through giving certificates and shields in the ceremony. It encourages them and increased their extrinsic motivation to work whole heartedly with special students as well.

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