

Inclusion in Georgian Kindergarten

How do preschool teachers face the process of implementation of inclusive education of children with intellectual disabilities?

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IV

Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to find out preschool teachers' perspectives: the way they face the process of implementation of inclusive education of children with intellectual disabilities. The study intended to reveal teachers' knowledge regarding the inclusive education; their understanding of the concept of inclusive education and the way of perceiving their role and responsibilities towards inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities. Research describes preschool teachers' practice in inclusive education; in particular, it explains teachers' skills and abilities of ensuring the involvement of child with intellectual disability in the group activity by means of interaction; finally, the study identifies challenges that teachers are facing in the process of inclusion. The research was conducted in the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi.

The research was grounded in qualitative design, which gave teachers an opportunity to express their viewpoint, knowledge and skills, based upon the semi-structured interview and observation with video recording in the group. Research participants were four teachers who had taken trainings in inclusive education and who had a child with intellectual disability as a pupil in the group. For the analysis of the collected data, an interpretational approach based on the principles of hermeneutics was used.

The data revealed that preschool teachers' understanding of the concept of inclusive education and their perception of their role and responsibility towards the children with intellectual disabilities mainly corresponds to the international and national documents. Teachers consider that the conditions which they have to work under are irrelevant to their responsibilities and the request made towards them. Informants revealed specific skills and abilities, by means of which they were able to ensure the participation of children with intellectual disabilities in the common group activity. However, study revealed that in practice, teachers face challenges as well, which, according to them, are preventive factors in the process of inclusion of children with Intellectual disabilities.

On the basis of the findings, the researcher formulated implications and recommendation. It was suggested to provide more support and further trainings for preschool teachers to promote greater self-knowledge and professional awareness among practitioners' about the positive interaction with children with special needs and about their role and responsibilities as teachers or caregivers.

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Abbreviations

AAIDD American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

EFA Education For All.

IEP Individual Education Plan.

MoES Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia.

NGO Non-governmental Organization.

SNE Special Needs Education.

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the 20th century, the educational system in many countries has been changed and the main reason for these changes was a human rights perspective and belief that inclusive education will lead to inclusive society and ultimately to cost-effectiveness (Befring, 2001).

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) states that the success of the inclusive school depends significantly on early involvement of children with special needs in the education system. Early identification, assessment and stimulation of young children with special needs can promote their physical, intellectual and social development and school readiness (UNESCO, 1994). The document emphasises that early childhood education programmes have a major economic value for the individual, the family, educational institutions and the whole of society in preventing the aggravation of disabling conditions.

Educational systems of many countries in the world pay increasing attention to the introduction of the principles of inclusive education into their educational institutions from an early age (Odom, 1996). The research conducted in the countries with considerable experience in inclusive education showed that if the atmosphere in the kindergarten is adjusted to the needs of the children with special needs, it will present unique opportunity to enhance their development (ibid).

According to UNESCO (2005), the role of teachers is critical in any reforms of improving the quality of education. They have a very large responsibility to provide a high quality education, therefore inclusive approach from teachers requires specialist professional knowledge and competences in order to effectively teach and respond to a diverse population of pupils in the classroom (UNESCO, 2005). Because of the fact that general teachers are an integral part of a successful educational experience for the children with special needs, the researcher considered that it would be interesting to explore preschool teachers' perspectives: the way they face the process of implementation of inclusive education of children with intellectual disabilities.

1.2 Background Information

Throughout the world children with disability and many others who experience difficulties in learning are marginalised within or even excluded from kindergarten or the school system (Ainscow & Haile-Giorgis, 1998).

As one of the post Soviet Union countries, Georgia followed and used the “medical model” or diagnostic-therapeutic approach toward people with disability. This approach was developed by the Moscow Institute of Defectology (Ainscow & Haile- Giorgis, 1998). The original theory of defectology was developed by the Russian scholar L. S. Vygotsky in 1920.

However, his approach was far from the medical paradigm. Vygotsky argued that children with disability should not be socially excluded from mainstream society and emphasised the importance of educating children with special needs together with their peers. His theory reflects the ideas of cultural-historical theories where parents, whole society and culture play a significant role in the children’s development (Ainscow & H aile-Giorgis, 1998). Thus, Vygotsky’s theory was not based on medical approach, but in some countries of the Soviet Union, Defectology was interpreted as a theory that was based on a medical model (Ainscow & Haile-Giorgis, 1998).

The main philosophy of the medical approach was that diagnoses can be formed on the basic of observation and treatment of the individual. The medical model has led to the focusing of attention on diagnosis with emphasising problems and weaknesses in the individual, rather than the possibilities of teaching and learning opportunities for them (Befring, 2001).

Consequently, from a medical perspective, disability was viewed as a disease. In order to “fix” and solve the problems of persons with disabilities specialists were segregating children with special needs from the kindergartens and ordinary schools and sending them to the special educational institutions: in the rehabilitation centers or boarding schools.

It is evident that most challenges in our society related to the inclusive education are rooted in negative attitude toward people with disability. The medical approach and isolation of persons with special needs created and formed stigmas and stereotypes in society (the World Bank, 2007).

1.2.1 Educational Reforms and Current Situation in Georgian Kindergarten

Since the independence of Georgia (1991) the government's pro-western orientation has raised the issue of public adaptation and social integration of people with special needs.

Georgia has recognized and signed many of the international declarations and conventions concerning the rights of the people with disabilities that at the same time form the basis for supporting inclusive education in our country. These includes: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (ratified in 1991), UN Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Person (1971), UNICEF Convention on the Rights of a Child (1994), Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975), European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1999), Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) and etc. Geneva Convention on employment policy (1964), International Labour Organization (1996); European Social Policy Charter (with amendments), and Salamanca Declaration and framework action (UNESCO, 1994).

Georgia does not have a long history of inclusive education. Education of the children with special needs was recognised by Georgia, as a priority, from the year 2004 when a reform of the education system began. Educators began reviewing curricula and methods of teaching for all children in the school level. In 2008 different local, non-governmental organisations, with the financial support of international organisations, began to work on changing the existing system of education for children with disability in the preschool setting. The primary objectives of the project at the initial stage were children with disability. It was focusing the attention of the Government and Civil Society on the needs and problems of children with disability. For inclusive education of children with special needs in the kindergartens or schools, project aimed to prepare administration and general teachers. Therefore NGO's provided general awareness raising workshops and theoretical and practical training courses for almost every kindergarten in Tbilisi.

The National Strategy Action Plan of Inclusive Learning Implementation (2009-2011) and the Nursery Schools' Management strategy (2011) claims that kindergartens must not refuse admission to special needs children.

Inclusion of preschool children with special needs was and still is one of the priority outcomes of the Child Protection Program of The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Georgia. It aims to supply challenged children with knowledge on life skills that reduces their vulnerability and enables their school readiness and social integration. During the years 2006-2011 Ministry of Education and Science partnership with UNICEF implemented projects that aimed to do:

- Nursery Schools' Management Strategy document which also include components of early inclusion aspects;
- Supporting inclusive education at preschool level;
- Assessing children with special educational needs and developing individual study plans for these children.

The document covers the rule of involving of a child with special needs in inclusive group, selection criteria, rights and obligations of the staff working in the kindergarten, and recommendations for managers.

Nowadays implementation processes of inclusive education mostly depend on kindergartens' administrative and managerial bodies. They are responsible accommodate educational provisions for children with disability and therefore provide ongoing teaching trainings and supportive programs for teacher. Directors have to hire support staff in order to help preschool teachers include children with special needs in the groups.

There is no exact statistics to how many children with intellectual disabilities were included in past years in the preschool setting, however more than 20 kindergartens in Tbilisi have status of inclusive in view the fact that since 2008 administration prioritized inclusive education and are trying to implement inclusive programs in the preschool settings.

1.3 Significance of the Study

As is mentioned above, Georgia does not have a long history of inclusive education, however new reforms and some projects raise some expectations. Therefore it should be interesting to find out how do general teachers face the process of implementation of inclusive education in

practice and what knowledge and experience do they possess towards inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in the kindergarten.

Knight (1999) states that in the current situation when teachers are expected to cope with large class sizes, learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, developmental variation of their skills or abilities and so on, teachers have to be very organised, perfectly skilled and adaptable to over-changing factors and conditions in the regular classroom or kindergarten group.

It is evident that inclusive education approach increases the teachers' role and responsibilities in educational settings. All teachers need to understand the forces that support and constrain the implementation of inclusive education (Mittler, 2000). Knight (1999) states that "whether teachers will accept and understand the philosophy of and implement inclusion very much depends on their individual starting points regarding their experiences and commitment to it" (p.3). The National Strategy Action Plan of Inclusive Learning Implementation 2009-2011 highlights the issue of preschool inclusion and states that the success of inclusive education in the secondary level partly depends on preschool inclusion. From this, the document considers the importance of preschool teachers' knowledge and experience as an important factor for successful implementation of inclusive education. Because teachers' knowledge and experience for inclusive settings is an essential matter for educational reforms in Georgia, this issue underlines practical values of this research, which is focused on the identification of preschool teachers' perspectives; knowledge and practical skills or abilities to ensure the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in the kindergarten group environment. Moreover, study also describes the challenges that teachers are facing in the process of implementation of inclusive education.

While the concept of inclusion is broad and applies to all children, especially for those who have been excluded and marginalized from the educational opportunities in the post-Soviet-era, this research focuses only on issues of children with intellectual disabilities. Drew, & Hardmen (2007) suggests that appropriately planned inclusive process can provide services and needed support for the children with ID in general education settings. For the past 25 years a significant body of literature has attested to the positive outcomes for children with intellectual disabilities who have been placed in educational setting with their typically developing peers (Brown, Hemmeter, & Pretti-Frontczak, 2005, in Drew, & Hardmen, 2007).

1.4 Research Aims and Research Questions

The main purpose of the study is to describe the current situation in Georgian kindergarten regarding to inclusive education. In particular, it shows interest in preschool teachers' perspectives; the way they face the process of implementation of inclusive education of children with intellectual disabilities. Teachers are the main participants in this study, as far as in inclusive education the most important role is played by the teacher who at the same time is the facilitator of children's interaction and participation in the group playing/learning activities.

Current project has several focuses. It aims to find out preschool teachers' knowledge and understanding of the concept of inclusive education; their opinions towards early inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities and the benefits from it.

Furthermore, the study aims to find out preschool teachers' knowledge about their own role and responsibilities towards inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities. Research describes preschool teachers' practice in inclusive education; in particular, it explains teachers' skills and abilities to ensure the involvement of child with ID in the group activity by means of interaction; finally, study identifies challenges that teachers facing in the process of inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities.

1.4.1 Research Questions

In order to investigate the research problem the main research questions is: How do preschool teachers face the process of implementation of inclusive education of children with intellectual disabilities?

To support the research question following **sub-questions** were raised:

- How do preschool teachers understand the concept of inclusive education?
- How do the preschool teachers perceive their role and responsibilities towards inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities?
- How do preschool teachers practicing inclusive education?

1.5 Definition of the Terms

The following terms was defined to give the meanings they are intended to be in this study:

Preschool teachers: Teachers who have had training to teach children in the kindergarten groups, that is, pupils without any kind of developmental disabilities.

Inclusion: Inclusion is the main key concept of this study. According to UNESCO (2005) inclusion is defined as the process of addressing the variety of needs to all children. This approach indicates how to transform the education systems and settings in order to respond to the diversity of learners in the preschool, school and higher education levels. It involves modifications of the environment, management of human resources and curriculum development. Another essential element to accommodate children with diverse needs in regular classes is for teachers to utilise a variety of innovative and flexible teaching strategies (Porter, 2001).

In the core of inclusive education are the principles of human rights to education. Its' philosophy is rooted in the principle that all humans have equal value and that every child should be cared for. The international document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states: "Everyone has the right to an education"... "Education has to be directed to the full development of human personality and to be the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Art. 26 – Universal Declaration of Human Rights, paragraphs 1 and 2).

The main principles of inclusion education are represented in the Salamanca Declaration (1994) and its' accompanying framework for action (UNESCO, 1994) which is a guiding document of the Ministry of Education in Georgia. It states that education of persons with special needs or disabilities have to be integral part of the education system. This document provides a clear conceptual and practical framework for inclusive education, setting in firmly in the context of Education for All and insisting on the inclusion of special needs children in planning to meet EFA targets.

The principle of inclusion has been interpreted and integrated in different ways in educational acts, policy papers and national frameworks for action in Georgia.

According to the National Strategy Action Plan (2009-2011) the following categories of marginalized pupils in Georgia include: students with disability, ethnic minority students in

special education institutions and children living in poverty and students from the conflict zones of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Georgian Law of on General Education (2007) states, “Everyone shall have the right to receive education and the right to a free choice of the form of education; the state shall provide basic education at its own expense. Citizens shall have the right to receive a free secondary education at state educational institutions in accordance with the procedure and within the framework established by law” (clause 7).

The law also defines inclusive education as a process of including children with special needs into mainstream education with other children and states that “Managerial bodies of the system of education shall create special and corrective curricula for pupils with limited abilities, as well as for pupils who need long-term medical treatment, according to which their teaching, education, treatment, social adaptation and integration in social life is carried out. The state shall provide funding for such pupils” (clause 13, points 3, 4).

Thus, inclusion is an effort to make sure that all pupils are involved in the education system as full-time participants and members of their schools and communities. Inclusion is a never-ending search to find better ways of responding to diversity. However, the speed of the process ultimately depend on various issues including political will, financial support or situation, access to resources, knowledge of inclusion education principles, and teachers’ knowledge and experience (Knight, 1999).

1.6 Thesis Outline

The thesis is organized in five chapters.

Chapter 1 represents the background information of the education in Georgia. It outlines the significance of study, research aims, research questions and clarifies the terms as they are used in this study.

Chapter 2 describes theoretical perspectives together with different programs and documents that emphasizes of preschool teachers’ roles and responsibilities in the child development and involvement in education setting.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the methodological part. It focuses on the qualitative design and shows constructing and conducting processes of semi-structured interviews and reactive

observations. Describes approach of data analyze and shows the ethical considerations, reliability and validity threats of the research.

Chapter 4 underlines findings emerged from the data. It implies the analysis and discussion of the data gained through the interview and observation and aims to give a systematic and clear representation of results.

Chapter 5 is the final part of the thesis the results are discussed in relation to theoretical and empirical knowledge. It represents conclusions, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research projects.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework that provides a conceptual perspective and a theoretical foundation as a basis for this study.

The theoretical framework represents definition, classification and main characteristics of intellectual disabilities (2.2.); Katz's preschool teachers development theory (2.3); it discusses benefits of preschool inclusion (2.4); preschool teachers' role and responsibilities in inclusive education (2.5); Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the role of the teacher (2.6); the penultimate section of this chapter explains ICDP – the eight principles to improve the interaction between adult and child (2.7) and finally, Summary of the chapter (2.8).

2.2. Definition, Classification and Main Characteristics of Intellectual Disabilities

Intellectual disability is a type of developmental disability. This term implies a reduced level of intellectual capacity, and the concept of intelligence has played a central but variable role in defining intellectual disability (Kittler, Krinsky-McHale, & Devenny, 2004, in Drew & Hardman, 2007). The American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) defined intellectual disabilities as a disability characterised by “significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills” (AAIDD, 2010: p.6).

For determining if a person has intellectual disability or not professionals must consider the following assumptions: first of all, specialists have to evaluate the limitations in present intellectual and adaptive behaviour functioning within the context of an individual's age (before the age of 18) peers and culture; such as an individual's linguistic differences, as well as differences in communication, sensory, motor and behavioral factors for defining person's adaptive skills in the environment (Kirk, 2012). Secondly, persons with intellectual disabilities are complex human beings who likely have certain capacities or gifts as well as limitation. Thus, specialists have to consider that within the individual, limitations often co-

exist with strengths which are the significant factors for developing an individualized plan of needed support for the person with intellectual disabilities, because, a person's level of life functioning will improve if appropriate personalised supports are provided over a sustained period (AAIDD, 2010).

Traditionally classification of children with intellectual disabilities indicates a level of delays. This has been done by using Intellectual Quotient (IQ) scores as ranking measures. According to AAIDD (2010) people who score 70-79 are considered to have a limitation in their intellectual ability. An IQ-score below 70 indicates a mild intellectual disability, below 50 moderate intellectual disabilities, below 35 severe, and below 20 profound intellectual disabilities. In addition to IQ-tests, there are also standard tests aimed at determining a person's adaptive behaviour, and possible limitations in it. Adaptive behaviour is defined by AAIDD (2010), as consisting of three types of skills: conceptual skills (using indicators such as communication and literacy skills); social skills (using indicators such as interpersonal skills, social responsibility and self-esteem); and practical skills (using indicators such as mastering of day-life activities, occupational skills and travel/transportation skills). Thus, according to the standards set by AAIDD (2010), a person must fulfill three criteria in order to be characterised as having intellectual disability. First, two or more of the skills outlined above must be significantly limited, second, the person must score under 70 on the IQ-test, and third, this condition must be onset before the age of 18.

The formal definition above gives much more attention to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities rather than on their deficits. In order to consider intrinsic functions and external support of person's with intellectual disabilities AAIDD (2010), revision specifies four levels of needs for support that may be required by a person with intellectual disabilities. These levels are *intermittent needs* that are episodic in nature and do not always required support; *limited needs* that are consistent over time but are limited in intensity; *extensive needs* that are long-term and serious, and *pervasive needs* that are constant and intense throughout life (Smith, 1998).

The four levels of intensity of support roughly match the four levels of delay: mild, moderate, severe and profound levels. In addition, a definition of levels of support helps specialists to understand how intense the supports need to be for individual children with intellectual disabilities (Kirk, 2012).

Willis (2009) gives some characteristics of children with intellectual disabilities. She states that children with intellectual disability are developing more slowly than their peers. It takes them longer to learn the new skills or they may forget a skill that was previously learned because of difficulty to remember new information. In addition, their attention span is much shorter than that of their peers. Also, language and communication skills are often very difficult for a child with cognitive challenges. In general, they learn fewer words than their peers and they speak in much shorter sentences (Willis, 2009).

In order to meet children with intellectual disabilities needs it is necessary to provide special education services. Special education services means specially designed instruction implemented in all settings such as kindergarten group, classroom, at home, and in hospitals or institutions (Drew & Hardman, 2007). In the educational settings inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities requires significant collaborative efforts among general and special educators as well as other team members, for instance such as psychologist and occupational therapist. These specialists are responsible to develop Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the children with special needs. Individual education plan is a written plan of action that specifies an individual's progress toward specific educational goals and objectives. It creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrations, related services personnel to work together to improve educational results for children with intellectual disabilities (Drew & Hardman, 2007).

2.3 Katz's Preschool Teachers Development Theory

According to Katz (1972), preschool teachers experience and practice can be the criteria of measuring their abilities, knowledge and skills. She claims that in the beginning teachers have to inform and interpret experience and knowledge that they are gaining from their job, while after some period and with intensive in-service training they are achieving maturity - professionalism that allow them to become specialists and even trainers for beginner and inexperienced teachers (Katz, 1972). Katz also mentions that individual teachers may vary greatly in the length of time spent in each of the four stages outlined in his theory.

In her theory Katz (1972) emphasizes four developmental stages for preschool teachers and states that these stages can show teachers developmental sequence in their developmental growth.

During the first stage, which may last throughout the first year of teaching the teachers main concern is whether she or he can *survive*. The teacher has to take responsibilities for each child of a group, teach and take care of them during the day. The discrepancy between anticipated successes and group realities intensifies feelings of inadequacy and unpreparedness. Therefore, in this stage the teacher needs support, encouragement, training, consultations and guidance.

At the second stage which Katz calls *consolidation*, teachers are more confident and are now ready to consolidate the gains made during the first year and to differentiate tasks and skills to be achieved next. According to Katz (1972), in this stage teacher's as a rule began to focus on children individually who pose problems or have some special needs. Thus, in the second stage the teacher is trying to identify individual children whose behaviour and skills depart from the pattern of most of the children she or he knows. The teacher may find that they need information about children with disabilities and collaboration with support staff such as: psychologists, special education teachers, health workers and other specialists who can strengthen their skills and knowledge at this time.

During the third stage: *Renewal*, the teacher find it rewarding to meet colleagues from various programs. Teachers profit from membership of professional associations and participation in their meetings. They welcome opportunities to visit other preschool settings, programs and demonstration projects.

Finally, at the last stage some teachers may reach maturity and readiness to help, teach or share their experience with the teachers who are at the first or second stage of development.

According to Katz (1972), teachers' pre-service education has only a minor influence on what they do day to day in the group and the timing of training should be shifted so that more training has to be available to the teacher during the job than before it. Also, she adds that it is not important to label teachers with a developmental stage but to use the information to understand the teacher and offer the best assistance possible.

2.4 Benefits of Preschool Inclusion

In a review of research of developmental outcomes in inclusive settings Lamorey & Bricker (1993) noted that generally, children made significantly better gains in the areas of social competence and social play, as well as in other developmental domains. Allen & Cowdery (2005) state that children with developmental disabilities are likely to benefit from quality inclusive preschool experience because usually programme is more stimulating, varied, and responsive experiences than special classrooms or groups composed. In addition, inclusive settings provide far more variety in activities, methods and instructions which benefits to all children in the group (Willis, 2009).

Comstock- Galagan (2008) gives several explanations and proofs of benefit of early inclusion of children with special needs. She states that with good planning and the right support, all children with a disability can have a positive kindergarten experience and opportunity to practice new skills. Comstock-Galagan (2008) claims that child who is included in the natural learning environment from the start is welcome in its' community and is not forced to depend largely on human support and different service systems for its lifelines, while inclusion in the beginning builds natural support that will prove critical to its success in community living.

A kindergarten environment gives a child an opportunity to interact with children of the same age, learn new things and have some fun. Children learn from each other - peers provide models as they react and interact with each other, teachers, materials and information, so children with special needs have many potential opportunities to observe peers engaging, with various degrees of success, in social or pre-academic learning (Comstock-Galagan, 2008). The child who is included early gets opportunities to make connections in society with families – peer parents who know and accepts her as a kindergartner. Comstock- Galagan (2008) assumes that families are perfect community educators and can influence more effectively on popularisation of inclusive education than any public service announcement.

Benefits for children without disabilities: Allen & Cowdery (2005) state that a well-documented benefit of inclusion for children without disabilities is peer-tutoring - when one child instructing another that both the child being tutored and the child doing tutoring receive significant benefits from the experience. The benefits of tutorial is shown in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory when he claims that more capable peers can provide significant

support for children in the learning processes, while teaching others peers can realize or analyze situation better and in this way internalize higher psychological functions (see 2.4).

Subsequently, study shows that among 224 parents almost all reported that inclusion helped children without disabilities to understand differences in others. In inclusive setting they developed sensitivity and become increasingly aware of their own strengths and weaknesses (Rafferty, Boettcher, & Griffin, 2001 in Allen & Cowdery 2005). In another word Comstock-Galagan (2008) also claims that children without disabilities experience growth in social cognition and gain a greater understanding and acceptance of students with disabilities and of diversity in general when they experience inclusive programing.

Finally, according to Comstock- Galagan (2008) in the inclusive education environment, teaching is no longer a matter of making something happen but more a matter of turning each ongoing activity into a learning opportunity by finding ways to involve children with special needs in the group. Teachers learn to orchestrate and facilitate, providing opportunities for learning and in this situation all participants can get benefits.

2.5 Preschool Teachers' Role and Responsibilities

The national Preschool Institution Management Guide (Meladze, 2011) states that preschool teachers have to accommodate and adapt the group environment to meet each child's needs and interests.

The Nursery School Statement (2009) claims that preschool specialists must stimulate and develop each child's physical, cognitive, moral and social-emotional skills and abilities. According to this document kindergarten's aims to promote children's knowledge that help them to achieve readiness for school.

Preschool teachers' main responsibilities are represented in different national documents. According to the Preschool Institution Management Guide (2011) preschool teachers have the following obligations and responsibilities: they are responsible to every child in the group and have to consider their individual needs and abilities during the day. Additionally, adapting teaching/playing activities and instructions to children's individual strength, needs and demands is also very important (Meladze, 2011).

According to the *Preschool Education Teachers' Methodological Manual* preschool teachers must know theories about child development and the implications of transferring this knowledge to children; it is important to know when and how to teach certain topics from the curriculum and how to access the knowledge children have received from it (Aptarashvili, & Labartkava, 2011). If in the group there is a child with special needs the teacher has to use an individual approach in order to include him or her in the group activities. The focus should be on removing barriers for children where these already exist and on preventing learning difficulties from development (Aptarashvili, & Labartkava, 2011). Effective inclusion requires specific planning and implementation by teachers whose responsibilities include also to structuring a playing/learning environment in which all children with and without disabilities are helped to participate together in a variety of activities related to all areas of development (ibid). Furthermore, for efficiency of inclusive education, the teacher has to collaborate with parents and special education teacher in order to participate in the processes of developing individualized programs based on long-term goals and objectives in a variety of settings (*Nursery Schools' Management Strategy*, 2011).

Subsequently, a preschool teacher has to facilitate active participation in a fair and respectful environment that reflects cultural, ethnical and linguistic diversity; demonstrate a positive attitude towards children, parents and colleagues; express knowledge of instructional adaptations including alternative assignments and supplemental instructions; use a wide range of teaching approaches and provide opportunities to increase independence and self-service skills in children (Aptarashvili, & Labartkava, 2011). Thus, preschool teacher has to perform a wide range of tasks ranging from basic care needs, addressing the well-being, hygiene, safety and needs of the child and the group, to education needs, addressing socialization, development and learning (ibid).

An overview of the preschool teachers roles and responsibilities makes clear that essential knowledge and skills for inclusive education are addressed in the professional preparation of general education teacher candidates (Dingle, 2004), while a teacher's inadequate professional preparation for inclusion may impede achieving effective teaching in inclusive classroom (Knight, 1999).

2.6 Sociocultural Theory and the Role of the Teacher

The developer of sociocultural theory, Lev Vygotsky, believed that human activity takes place in cultural setting and cannot be understood separately from these settings (Vygotsky, 1978). The core idea of sociocultural theory is that the history of human development is a complex interplay between the processes of natural development and the processes of cultural development brought about by the interaction of a growing individual with other people (Bodrova & Leong, 2011).

According to Vygotsky's theory the social interactions influence humans cognitive development and thinking processes. He states that the entire system of naturally determined mental functions becomes restructured to produce higher mental functions and assumes that:

"...when the child enters into culture, he not only takes something from culture, assimilates something, takes something from outside, but culture itself profoundly refines the natural state of behavior of the child and alters completely a new the whole course of his development."

(Vygotsky, 1997:p. 223)

The preschool age period is one during which this restructuring goes through its initial stages as children's use of cultural tools (language, signs and symbols) transforms perception and begins to develop other cognitive processes such as attention, memory and thinking (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, adults use these tools to teach these children during the day-to-day activities and as children engage in activities they internalise them, particularly dialogue become intramental. In this way individual mental functioning has sociocultural origins.

Hence, Vygotsky (1978) believed that a child's cognitive development occurs through the interactions with more capable members of the society - adults or more capable peers. A child's discoveries in the society are assessed or mediated by family members, teachers and peers. Therefore, Vygotsky saw teachers, parents and other adults as central to the child's learning and development.

Vygotsky in his theory emphasised that in teaching/learning interactions, development and learning proceeds best, when assistance is provided that permits a learner to perform at a level

higher than would be possible without the teacher's interaction (Wells & Claxton, 2002). Vygotsky described this condition as a Zone of Proximal Development, which is:

“the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978: p. 86).

The proximal zone then, is different from the child's developmental level at which individual, unassisted performance is possible (Wells & Claxton, 2002). Thus, teaching consists of assisting performance through the Zone of Proximal Development.

Vygotsky (1978) argues that there are at least three ways that cultural tools can be passed from the adult to the child: the first is *imitative learning* when for instance the child tries to imitate the teacher. The second way of learning is *structured learning* - the process when the child internalises the instructions given by an adult and uses these instructions to self-regulate, and the third is *collaborative learning* where a group of peers strive to understand each other and learning occurs in the process (Tomasello, Kruger & Rutner, 1993 in Woolfolk, 2008).

Another concept that comes out of Vygotsky's theory is *scaffolding*, however he never used this term himself. It refers to the guidance and inter-actional support given by a teacher in the zone of proximal development. Bruner (1976) and his colleagues were the first to use the term and explained scaffolding as permitting children to do as much as they can by themselves while what they cannot do is filled in by the parent's or other tutor's activities (Smith, 1993).

Assistive learning as a major aspect of teaching for Vygotsky requires scaffolding that was described above as giving information, reminders, prompts and encouragement at the right time and then gradually allowing children to solve the task independently. Teachers can assist learning by adapting materials to children's current level of mastery; demonstrate skills or thought processes, do part of the task; give detailed feedback and allow revisions; or ask questions that refocus learners' attention (Woolfolk, 2008).

The teachers' have a significant role in the Vygotskian framework. In order to provide the right level of guidance, a teacher needs to know individually each child in the group very well. They also need to have time for interaction and conversation with children in a one-to-

one situation and the opportunity to observe children for defining how to adjust their support to the child's current level of understanding (Woolfolk, 2008). Therefore, teachers have to be able to see things from the child's point of view and understand the meanings which come from the background of family and culture.

2.7 ICDP- Eight Themes for Positive Interaction

Henning Rye (2001) offers universal intervention program - International Child Development Program (ICDP) - based on resource-based communication and mediation that aims to improve and enrich interaction between adult and child in order to optimize children's socio-emotional well-being and psychosocial development. Rye (2005) claimed that for development of social-emotional abilities in children, certain basic psychological needs have to be met for instance: being noticed, understood, accepted and loved by others. The ICDP approach is built on the idea that the best way to help vulnerable child is helping their caregivers/teachers – by increasing their awareness about children's psychosocial needs, sensitivity, enabling them employ their own empathic competency and practical experience to interpret and adapt to the children's expressed feelings (Christie & Doehlie, 2011). Thus, programme focuses on the way caregiver perceives his or her interaction with the child and how the adult experiences own abilities as a caregiver.

Subsequently, ICDP helps to develop meaningful dialogues with children and it promotes their active participation and initiatives that is equally important in parent-child, as well as teacher-pupil interactions. Rye (2005) underlined the power of caring support, the roots for interaction that gradually increases confidence in children, particularly in children with special needs that form all important aspects of sustaining lifelong learning.

Furthermore, as is mentioned above these eight themes for positive interaction are universal, because they refer to different social and cultural contexts. Rye (2005) states that in adult-child interaction there usually occurs a natural and often unconscious transformation of the eight principles of interaction, as the child develops and is able to take part in increasingly complex shared activities. Thus, ICDP programme's eight principles can be adapted to kindergarten context.

The ICDP eight themes of positive interaction are designed to encourage self-observation, recognition, exploration and further development (Rye, 2001). These eight themes are divided into three major types of dialogue: *the Emotional-Expressive Dialogue*, *the Meaning Dialogue* and *the Self-Regulative Dialogue* (Hundeide, 2007, in Christie & Doehlie, 2011).

a. The Emotional-Expressive Dialogue

1. **Showing love and care**; a demonstration of positive feelings enhances the emotional bond between child and adult. It will help them to both enjoy and learn something. Even if a child cannot yet understand regular speech she or he is capable of perceiving positive and negative emotional expressions of love and rejection. A child needs to feel that an adult is emotionally positive/accessible toward them: it is important for a child's sense of security. Also, emotional contact often begins with eye contact, which is the starting point to share attention and interaction (Rye, 2001).
2. **Following your child's lead**; adapt to the child's needs. during the interaction when a child takes the initiative on the basis of their attention adult have to be aware of a child's wishes, actions, feelings and needs in order to make certain degree attempt to follow the child's cues and interests (Rye, 2001).
3. **Initiate dialogue**; emotionally expressive dialogue addresses the emotional development and creates a basis for comforting relationship. Infants can feel dialogue through eye contact, smiles and exchange gestures and expressions of pleasure. Both verbal and non-verbal communication became connected with the interaction when the caregiver makes positive comments towards the child. These imitative exchanges or as Rye states "feeling dialogue" is important for the child's future attachment with caregiver and his or her social and language development (Rye, 2001).
4. **Giving praise and recognition**; children need feedback for their own behaviour and to maintain their sense of security about their caregiver's acceptance and love. For children it is important to feel that someone makes them feel worthy and competent, that someone explains to them why something was good. Expression of acceptance and recognition or praise provide an important foundation for the development of the child's self-confidence

and social adjustment because acceptance and recognition are connected to positive emotional relationships and are the basic premise for a child's socialization (Rye, 2001).

b. The Meaning Creating and Expansive Dialogue

5. **Joint focus of attention;** this principle of the ICDP programme addresses the cognitive development and creates the child's understanding about the world – the things in the surrounding environment. Young children often need help to focus their attention, while adults can attract and direct their attention to things in their environment by communicating with them. Such directed attention gives a certain experience to a child who gets more prepared and receptive to what the caregiver wants to communicate (Rye, 2001).
6. **Give meaning to a child's experience;** children remember people, objects, symbols and situations by sharing adults experiences and by showing them feelings, emotions and enthusiasm. Rye states that caregiver have to make their instruction meaningful- not just with respect to what they talk about, demonstrate, but also by showing personal involvement in the subject (Rye, 2001).
7. **Expanding and explaining;** children need help in order to understand and realise the world around them. To help and stimulate a child's interest adults can use different strategies; they can tell stories, ask questions, compare a shared event that a child has experienced earlier, point out similarities and differences of things, counting and so on. In this, the adult can gradually help a child to gain some knowledge and develop their cognitive skills (Rye, 2001).

c. The Self-Regulative Dialogue

8. **Self-regulation;** children have to learn self-discipline, adjust to the daily routine and plan it. Therefore an adult makes arrangements, clearly plans activities and explains why certain things are not permitted. Discipline develops a child's expectations of what will happen and allows him or her adapt to what is expected. As Rye (2001) states expectations are based on experience, ability to understand cause-and-effect relationships.

Self-regulation ability is very important for children's social and cultural adjustment (ibid).

2.8 Summary

Every theory, perspective, or programme represented in this chapter emphasises of preschool teachers' roles and responsibilities in the child development and involvement in education setting. Katz's theory presented the perspective that teachers learn best from the experience and therefore in-service training is very important for teachers in order to achieve a high qualification in their work place. It has to be noted also that all the discussed theories state that, preschool years are a crucial period for a child's psychosocial development and therefore and preschool teachers as a caregivers have to consider the characteristics of the child's development features in order to make appropriate conditions for stimulating and developing children's potential – different kind of skills and abilities. If we sum up all the given theories it will become obvious how this theoretical framework helps to analyze the data.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter represents the research methodology and procedures used in the study. The second subchapter (3.2) deals with the main characteristics of qualitative research and reasons for choosing this design. The following subchapter (3.3) describes the sampling process and data collection. Subsequently, the research method (3.4) as well as the preparation and procedures of the data collection (3.5) are explained. After an introduction to the analytical approach used in this study (3.6), this Chapter is completed by presenting reflections on the ethical considerations (3.7) as well as on issues of reliability and validity (3.8).

3.2 Qualitative Research Design

The study of preschool teachers' perspectives to include children with intellectual disabilities in the kindergarten determined the choice of the qualitative approach. The qualitative study is an in-depth study of a phenomenon. This approach gives possibilities to the researcher to enter the participants' world and through different methods seek and identify meanings of particular fields of interest. Also, qualitative research characteristics allow the researcher to literally work on and personally be involved in the field work (Creswell, 2009). Gall et al. (2007) states that: "qualitative research typically deals with complex social phenomena as they occur in a real-life context" (p. 118). According to Creswell (2009) "data analysis intuitively builds from particulars to general themes and to the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data" (p. 4). During the study period analytic induction was used. Analytic induction means that the enquirer searches through the data little by little and then infers that certain events or statements are instances of the same underlined theme or patterns (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007).

The aim of the study is to search how do preschool teachers face the process of implementation of inclusive education. As is mentioned above, new reforms in the education system in Georgia significantly increased the demands and responsibilities of the teachers who have to teach each child in the group according to their individual characteristics, abilities and needs. The basis of understanding the phenomena of this research is to explore

preschool teachers' perspectives in depth. It includes investigating teacher's knowledge about the concept of inclusive education, their perception of roles and responsibilities towards the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities, as well as their way of practicing involvement of the children with ID in the common group activities.

In addition to this, the main reasons for choosing qualitative research design for this study are as follows: first of all, in the natural setting the enquirer has face-to-face interaction time and sees individuals in their context without artificial modifications. Secondly, a qualitative researcher rarely uses other enquirers' work. In the qualitative study enquirers collect data themselves through examining documents, interviewing participants or observing participants' behaviour, so the role of the qualitative researcher is very active. Also, qualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the problem of study that involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation and finally gives holistic accounts - larger picture that emerges from the inquiry (Creswell, 2009).

3.3 Process of Data Collection

The collection process of the data for the study started from October 2012 and lasted till the end of November of the same year. The preparation period for data collection involved sampling procedures and efforts to obtain permission for the study.

3.3.1 Purposeful Sampling

The participants for this study were selected through a purposeful sampling technique. The main idea of this type of sampling is to select cases that are likely to be information-rich with respect to the purposes of the study. Such sampling includes different kind of strategies. One of them is criterion sampling that requires selection of cases to satisfy important criteria (Gall et al., 2007). Thus, purposeful sampling strategy allows a researcher to select only those participants who had had relevant experience for a particular study.

Purposeful sampling was used to select kindergarten, groups and preschool teachers for this study. The kindergarten which was chosen for the study has the status of inclusive in view of the fact that in 2009-2011 years this kindergarten participated in the UNICEF project that, as

is mentioned above, aimed to implement and promote early inclusive education in the preschool setting. There are 12 groups and more than 30 children in each group, also 18 children with special needs in the whole kindergarten among them 12 children with intellectual disabilities. In per group there are one preschool teacher and one assistant. Other specific criteria for choosing this kindergarten was that it has special education teacher, speech therapist and inclusive education coordinator. They are employed as the supportive staff members for inclusive education which makes higher probabilities of finding an experienced teacher.

For choosing the teacher in the kindergarten, special criteria were identified: (1) a teacher who was reputed to be one of the most qualified and effective in innovation projects in the kindergarten; (2) a teacher who has taken trainings in inclusive education and has more than 2 year work experience with children with intellectual disabilities in the preschool setting; (3) a teacher who currently has a child or children with intellectual disabilities in the group and (4) those who were willing to take part in the study. All these criteria were based on the main goal to select participants that were considered as experienced in inclusive education by the kindergarten administration.

3.3.2 Introduction of the Participants

The participants of the study are four preschool teachers who have taken special training courses in inclusive education philosophy provided by NGO's with financial support from UNICEF and four preschool children with intellectual disabilities.

All selected preschool teachers were females and ranged in age from the mid-25s to mid-45s. Two of the teachers had master's degrees and other two bachelor's degrees, whereas only one of them had preschool teacher's diploma, although all participants had taken pre-service coursework in general education. The teachers had an average of 4 years of direct group experience with preschool-age children, and their overall individual teaching experience ranged from 6 to 22 years. The participants' opinion about early inclusion and their 3 years or more of working experience gives values and richness to the data. Also, selected preschool teachers still are in the working process, so their opinions, presented skills, knowledge and challenges in inclusive processes are fresh and actual in existed situations.

The children with intellectual disabilities were diagnosed by the multidisciplinary team in Scientific and Practical Center for Epilepsy Control and Prevention. The age of the children ranged from 4 to 6 years.

3.4 Research Methods

For collecting the data two methods were used in the present study - interview and observation. "Interviews consist of oral questions asked by the interviewer and oral responses by the research participants" (Gall et al., 2007, p.228). During the interviewing, respondent are answering in their own words and "the researcher is recording their speech, while in the process of observation the researcher takes field notes on the behaviour and activities of the participants of the individuals at the site" (Creswell, 2009, p.181). It is common to use both methods in educational research to collect data about phenomena that are not directly observable such as, for instance, participants inner experience, opinions, interests, concerns, views and so on (Gall et al., 2007). Interview is the primary method, while data collection gaining through observation supports and verifies the information obtained by the interview method.

3.4.1 Interview Guide

According to Gall (2007) the interview guide specifies the questions and its' sequence in which they are to be asked in order to get information from the participants. In the provided interview guide (Appendix 1) open-questions were used because they allow the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it also allows the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up. Therefore for collecting the data a semi-structured interview was utilised, which involves "asking a series of structured questions and then probing more deeply with open-form questions to obtain additional information" (Gall et al., 2007, p.246). Semi-structured interview gives an opportunity to have a list of the main research questions and topics that need to be covered during the conversation, usually in a particular order, however it is flexible with following the predefined questions during the interviewing.

The interview guide was divided in three parts. The first part is starting with ice-melting demographical questions about participants' age, profession, years of working in the kindergarten and experience to teach children with intellectual disabilities, attending training course(s) and the content of it; modules and duration of the training.

The second part dealt with the concept of inclusive education; participants were asked to explain the term inclusive education in their own words and discuss the benefits of early inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities and their values for the group and the whole of society. Also, this part was focused on the understanding of the preschool teacher's role and responsibilities in order to include children with intellectual disabilities in the group.

The following questions in the third part were aimed to found out how preschool teachers practice inclusive education. Also, this part of the interview guide dealt with the identification of challenges that teachers are facing in the process of inclusion.

3.4.2 Interview Procedure

The day of the interview was agreed in advance with the teachers. One interview was carried out in the cafe and three in the teachers' resource room.

Before individual interviews with the participants, they all were informed about the purpose of the study and procedures (see 3.5). However, in the face-to-face meeting, more detailed information was provided about the research and its' purposes. In order to gain their trust and to establish a relationship with the participant, informal discussion were initiated about our professional interests and experiences in the field of inclusive education. Also, before the interview it was explained to the participants why recording the interview was necessary and the issue of the confidentiality was confirmed verbally as well.

During the interview some specific terminologies in the last question were explained explicitly to the participants. Respondents seemed quite motivated to answer the questions concerning their roles and responsibilities in the processes of inclusion. The interview ended by giving the informants the opportunity to give some additional information about the issues of inclusion education in the kindergarten and by asking for permission to contact them again in case of follow-up questions.

All interviews were recorded; the record material was of good quality and convenient for transcribing the data. The time for each interview varied from 40 to 50 minutes.

3.4.3 Observation

Gall (2007, p. 276) state that: “observation allows researchers to formulate their own version of what is occurring and then check it with the participants”. Information gained from the observation method in a researcher’s report provides a more complete description of phenomena than would be possible by just referring to interview statements. Consequently, observation provides an additional source of data that verifies the information obtained by other methods (Gall et al., 2007).

Gall (2007) describes two types of observation: reactive and nonreactive. In the process of reactive observation, which usually occurs in real-life contexts, participants know that they are being observed by researchers whereas in the nonreactive observation participants do not know that they are being observed (Gall et al., 2007). For this study reactive observation was used, so preschool teachers know that they were observed during the activities in the group. One of the advantages of reactive observation is that the researcher can see whether the subject in the observation act as they say they do. However, the disadvantage of such observation type is that observer may affect participant or whole situation. While, nonreactive observation arises ethical issues more than reactive observation, because informants do not know that they are being observed.

In the nonparticipant observation conducted in this study, the enquirer had the role of “observer- participant” which means that the observer did not communicate with the teacher and children. She did not take part in the group activities. For observation, the enquirer was sitting in a place which has good view of the actions of whole group.

According to Gall (2007) the focus of observation in qualitative research usually shifts during the study. The shifting process typically includes three stages. The first stage is the *descriptive stage* that is general and unfocused in scope that creates a basis from which the researcher can branch out in several directions. In this study the descriptive stage of observation involved one general observations process in each selected group. From this stage the researcher found out that according to the kindergartens’ curricula and routine, teachers’ have to follow an

everyday plan of scheduled activities which includes formal and informal activities. Formal activities are for instance, teachers-initiated activities; group meetings with children and discussion about the particular teaching theme, story-telling time, art activities, toileting/diapering and nutrition. While informal activities include mainly child-initiated activities – in the free play time in the group or outside.

The second is the *focused stage* when the observer identifies features of the phenomenon under study that are of greatest interest and directs her or his attention to gathering narrower and deeper information about this range of features. The focused stage of observation in this study involved selecting one formal activity in each group which provided richer information about the teacher's abilities to support the involvement of a child with intellectual disability in it. In the last selective stage, the observer shifted her focus "to referring and deepening their understanding of the specific elements that have emerged as theoretically or empirically most essential" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 269) when the research questions had been defined. In this stage the observer's efforts were directed toward specific, selected activities and the focus was narrowed on them in order to find out the teacher-child positive interaction patterns based on the ICDP eight theme that helped to identify teachers' abilities to ensure the involvement of child with ID in the common group activity.

3.4.4 Recording the Observation

The observation with video recording was conducted after the interview with the participants. The period between the interview and observation enabled the observer to have enough time for transcription and analysis of the data in order to prepare for the observation. Information gained from the interview and observation of selected groups helped the observer to focus on some particular events and facts in the group. The purpose of including observation in this study was to attempt to understand the phenomenon from the researcher's point of view (etic perspective). The observations were structured by using a pre-prepared guide form (Appendix 2) and video recordings. The observation guide form created for this study includes descriptive and reflective notes. The former section is for a description of observed activities. The following schemes include descriptions of teacher-child interaction during the activity and the last section is for comments and reflections. Video recording was used

simultaneously to keep observers’ reflections and all valuable information that was not possible to write down during the observation time.

Observations were conducted for one time in each group. Observed groups were different by age. Two were 4- 5 aged groups, one 3-4 aged and last group was 3-6 aged (so called mixed) group. The observation process was: listening, watching and recording, the video lasted around 15 minutes in each group. Data was originally recorded in Georgian and then translated into English.

3.5 Procedures

The first step in gaining access to informants was to seek permission from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services and the local education authority in Georgia. Also, permission for the study was gained from the preschool teachers and from the parents of the children with intellectual disabilities. The consent form has been taken from the director of the kindergarten which confirms that the administration has acquired the consent from the children’s parents to video the group either for research or educational purposes. All permissions were obtained according to the procedures presented in Figure 1 below.

Norwegian Data Service	Administration	Preschool Teacher	Parents of the Children with ID
Application letter (Appendix 3)	-Meeting with the administration of the kindergarten; - Presentation of the study aims and purposes; -confirmation letter from the administration (Appendix 4)	- Meeting with the preschool teacher; -Presentation of study aims and purposes; -Information letter and Consent Form (Appendix 5).	-Information letter and Consent Form (Appendix 5)

Figure 1 - Steps for gaining entry into the field work

3.5.1 Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted in the beginning of September in the same kindergarten where the main study was carried out. The aim of the pilot study was to test and exercise the research methods. According to Gall (2007) testing out the interview guide can help the researcher to see weaknesses like missing questions, an inadequate question order, problematic formulations and terminologies that are not understandable for the respondent. After a pilot interview with preschool teacher it was necessary to revise the interview guide. Researcher reformulated two main questions and added one new question to the guide, for instance the question: *what barriers do you expect in the process of involvement of a child with special needs in the group?* Reformulated in this way; *what difficulties do you face in the process of inclusion of a child with intellectual disabilities in the group?* The structure of the interview guide also was modified.

Regarding observation, one pilot study was conducted only in one group. The pilot study helped the researcher to get some practice in using the video recorder during the observation and in making some notes in the paper as well. After the pilot study it was easy for me as researcher to create an observation form and define its' structure.

3.6 Analysis of the Data

The collected data gained from interview and observation methods have been analyzed qualitatively. In particular, for this study the researcher applied an interpretational form of analysis based on the principles of hermeneutics.

Interpretational analysis is a process examining the gathered data closely in order to find constructs, themes and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon (Gal et al., 2007). While, hermeneutics is a philosophical discipline which has its main focus on the interpretation of meaning. It assumes that all human beings are constantly engaged in processes of interpretation and that an objective reality does not exist. The *hermeneutic circle* is a principle that describes how we interpret texts: It can be understood as a “continuous process of alternating between interpreting the meaning of each part of the text and the text as a whole” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 521). Therefore the researcher's role is crucial in the process of

collecting and analysing the data. Creswell (2009) states that: “the goal of the researcher is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (p.8).

As it mentioned above, in this study the *inductive* approach of *data analysis* was used, where the researcher builds his categories and themes from the principle of “bottom-up” which means that they are not determined beforehand, but emergent from the data. In this way, the data can be organised in “more abstract units of information” (Creswell, 2009, p.173). This approach gave the researcher possibilities to go back and forth in the study.

In order to analyze the data of this study, the following steps were taken: all the results gathered from the interview and observation were printed; In the interview materials the key words for questions that were asked and the main themes that appeared in the responses of each teacher were underlined; The categories were not determined beforehand but they emerged from the data where possible. After identifying categories it was feasible to compare them and find connections between themes both within categories and across them.

After the interview data the observation material was analysed; there were links made between observed and spoken data. As a result some observed data were added to the categories driven from the interview for instance: subcategory 5.4.4 that explains challenges that teachers face in the process of inclusion. After organising the data, given material was interpreted in terms of the discussion, theoretical framework and official documents.

3.7 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are always presented in research, especially in a qualitative study which has a close focus on individuals, on their characteristics and unique experiences. It is therefore important to protect the privacy of the participants (Gall et al., 2007). Brinkmann & Kvale (2007) emphasise four main demands that are placed upon the researcher: role of the researcher, informed consent, confidentiality and the consequences.

The role of the researcher: Researchers have to consider ethical issues before, during and after the conduct of a research study. Their responsibility is to protect participants from avoidable harm and honor their contributions to research knowledge (Gall et al., 2007). Furthermore, Brinkmann & Kvale (2007, p.268) state that: “morally responsible research behaviour is more than abstract ethical knowledge” that involves researcher’s moral integrity,

his or her sensitivity and commitment to moral issues and action. During the research the enquirer tried to distinguish between private and confidential information and information that can give an answer to the research question. In this way the researcher protected the participants' privacy by retaining information that can put preschool teachers at risk. Furthermore, interview transcriptions, field notes and the observation provide a descriptive account of the study, however they do not provide explanations. It is the researcher who has to make sense of the explored data which he or she is interpreting (Creswell, 2009). In this study, when the researcher had to analyze the data received simultaneously by two methods, her aim was to make correct links between them and combine these two courses of data with each other in a way that would not reinterpret and disfigure the findings. This process was a difficult part for the researcher.

Informed Consent: Informed consent entails informing the research participants about the overall purpose of the study and the main features of the design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation in the research project.

As mentioned above, for the participants the special meeting was arranged to inform them in detail about the research purpose and main procedures. Also, for starting the field work informed consent forms and information letters were distributed which involve different information about the researcher, guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity, assurance that the participant can refuse or withdraw at any time and without any justification, contact information if questions arise (Creswell, 2009). Such consent forms were developed for preschool teachers and parents of children with intellectual disabilities which provide details and space for signing as an agreement to participate (Appendix 5).

Confidentiality: According to Brinkmann & Kvale (2007), "confidentiality in research implies that private data identifying the participants will not be reported" (p. 266). Therefore all the data obtained during data collection were treated with confidentiality. In order to secure the kindergarten's, the teachers' and the children's privacy and anonymity, their names and their actual age have not been used in this study (only pseudo names). Though, there is still a risk because the teacher and her group may be recognized by colleagues and administrators in the participating kindergarten. However, participants' beforehand were informed about this risk factor. In addition to this, by stating the terms of Norwegian Social Science Data Service (Appendix 3) the study also guarantees that the data will be deleted after

completion of the project to make sure it does not fall into somebody's hands and ruin the promised anonymity.

Consequences: In order to decrease the risk factors the consequences of a qualitative study need to be addressed with respect to possible harm to the participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2007). During the interviewing, preschool teachers were very open, they telling some private facts as well, so in presenting the data the I was very careful.

3.8 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are the two central concepts in order to prove whether the results of a study are of value or not. According to Creswell (2009) for the qualitative reliability the main focus is made on the consistency of a researcher's approach across different researchers and projects, while qualitative validity means that researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings through different procedures during the study (Gibbs, 2007, in Creswell, 2009).

Reliability deals with assuring that if another researcher conducts the same study and follows the same procedures as the first researcher than his study has to reflect similar results (Yin, 2009, in Gall et al., 2007). In this study, the researcher was aware about the fact that during the data collection procedure her talking style, speech intonation and body language might, to some degree influence the participants, but this does not ensure that the participants in another social situation can react, give exactly the same answers and behave in the group in the same way.

Maxwell (1992) identifies the kinds of validity in qualitative study as *descriptive validity*, *interpretive validity*, *theoretical validity* and *generalisability*.

Descriptive validity is described as factual accuracy of account (Maxwell, 1992). This means that the researcher does not have to distort what he or she saw and heard in connection with the data. The use of multiple sources of data for this study aims to increase the quality of this study and ensure validity (Creswell, 2009). According to Maxwell (1992) interview transcripts might be descriptively invalid if they omit features in the participants' speech such as stress or pitch that are important for understanding of the interview. However, to ensure descriptive validity the recorder was used during the interviewing of the participants and

while transcribing the data the emotional reactions and the intonations were considered to give more accuracy for the speeches. Also, descriptive validity was ensured through video tapes as well, that contained visual and verbatim data from the observations.

Interpretive validity concerns the meaning of behaviors, physical objects and events to the people engaged in them (Maxwell, 1992). In terms of “meaning” Maxwell includes intentions, belief, cognition, evaluation and everything that can be considered as “participants’ perspectives”. He claims that in interpretive validity, an attempt is made to ensure that participant viewpoints, thoughts, intentions, and experiences were accurately understood and reported. For interpretive validity researcher have to explicitly identify and reflect his or her biases, values and personal background that may have an effect on the study (Creswell, 2009). For this research, interpretive validity is important to consider because data collection was based on interview study processes. Therefore the analysis was mainly based upon the accuracy of transcribed data with its emotional reactions within the speech tone of the participants. During the interview in order to make sure that participants were understood, the question correctly periphrasis was used. Also, special observation forms (Appendix 2) were used as the structure of observation and identification of visual and verbal situations that were revealed from teacher-child interaction during the formal playing/learning activities in the group.

Theoretical validity “refers to an account’s validity as a theory of some phenomenon” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 291). It goes beyond specific description and interpretation and explicitly addresses the theoretical constructions that the researcher brings to, or develops during, the study (Maxwell, 1992). The question that is asked here is: has the researcher provided an accurate explanation of the phenomena? The second chapter of this thesis employs the theories that provide a conceptual perspective and a theoretical foundation as a basis for this study.

Generalizability is the extent to which one can extend the account of a particular situation or population to other persons or settings than those directly studied (Maxwell, 1992). Maxwell claims that qualitative study does not allow systematic generalization to the wider population. Generalization in a qualitative research usually employs development of the theory, which makes sense not only for the particular situation but also for similar cases, however this research does not aims to develop a theory. Thus, the current study of preschool teachers’

perspectives to include children with ID in the kindergarten cannot be generalized because of the small sample of the participants. However, as a description of particular teachers' knowledge, abilities and challenges, in practice the data still shows a valuable variety and interesting links that might be taken into consideration in further examination of this topic.

4 Presentation of the Data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter represents findings and discussion of interview and observation data. The answers of the research question and sub-questions are presented in themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interview transcriptions, field notes and observation. The first theme refers to presenting teachers background in general and inclusive education (4.2); it describes preschool teachers' understanding and knowledge of inclusive education (4.3); teachers' perception of their role and responsibilities (4.4); teachers practice in inclusive education (4.5); and summary of the findings (4.6).

4.2. Presenting Preschool Teachers' Background in General and Inclusive Education

As described in the methodology chapter (see 3.3.2), all the teachers have received a university education and have taken pre-service coursework in general education. Their overall individual teaching experience ranged from 6 to 22 years. In 2009 and 2011 they attended a two-week training course in the philosophy and theory of inclusive education and enjoyed a year-long practical assistance together with consultation from an expert of inclusive education.

As was mentioned by the research informants, the trainings concentrated on the rights of children with special needs, the importance of inclusive education and on the role of the preschool teacher. Teachers did not remember exact themes, however all of them emphasized that trainings gave basis information about child with special needs in psycho-physical development and learning characteristics.

With Regard to the rights of Children with Special Needs Lia stated that she had learned through the training that children with special needs have a guaranteed right to get an education together with their peers without disability. She claimed: *“I have been teaching in the kindergarten and until 2008 I do not remember even a single case when the administration asked us to include a child with intellectual disability into a group... I thought such children were taken to special kindergartens and rehabilitation centres, but nowadays*

according to the law they have a right to be there, among normal peers”. Now, Lia has had children with ID for three years and almost every day, she is assisted by the special education teacher or parent in group.

Unlike Lia, Maia before taking a special training course had heard about the inclusive education from their colleagues and the media. They also knew that implementation of this project was necessary due to the law. Maia mentioned: *“I know from my friend at school and from TV that inclusive teaching has been implemented in schools for a long time and it is now obligatory for the schools kindergartens to include children with special needs...”* Nana explained: *“I heard about inclusive education through TV and from my colleagues”*. Both Nana and Maia have four year work experience with children with intellectual disabilities.

Maggie mentioned that in spite of the fact that she studied graduated Pedagogical University, she had not attended a course in inclusive education. *“I have not done a course in inclusive education at the University and I did not have any idea that such children would be in the kindergarten. I did not ever know that there existed a term “inclusion”*. However, Maggie considered herself to be a better qualified than teachers working in other kindergartens. Maggie underlined: *There are several kindergartens which are implementing inclusive education in Georgia. One of them is this kindergarten that makes me to feel more qualified than other preschool teachers are nowadays”*. She has dealt with the children with intellectual disability for five years.

Table 2, given below sum ups information, which has been collected with interview. It describes preschool teachers’ background in general and inclusive education.

Preschool Teachers	Education	Pre-service coursework in general education	In-service trainings in inclusive education	Work experience in the kindergarten	Experience of work with children with ID
Lia	Bachelor degree	√	√	22 years	3 years
Maia	Bachelor degree	√	√	7 years	4 years
Nana	Master degree	√	√	9 years	4 years
Maggie	Master degree (Preschool Educator)	√	√	6 years	5 years

Figure 2 - preschool teachers’ background in general and inclusive education. √ = has taken.

To sum up, all four teachers have almost similar background in general and inclusive education. However the main differences among them are seen in Maggie's case who has more experience of working with children with Intellectual disabilities and has preschool educator's diploma and in Lia's case, who has more experience of working in the kindergarten than others. As revealed, the preschool teachers did not take part in the trainings organised by NGOs. However, as teachers say they constantly are receiving recommendations and practical assistance in the group from special education teacher, speech therapist and inclusive education coordinator in order to include children with intellectual disabilities in group playing /learning activities.

4.3 Preschool Teachers' Understanding and Knowledge of Inclusive Education

The preschool teachers defined the term *inclusive education* with their own words and expressed different attitudes towards the early inclusion of children with intellectual disability in the kindergarten. All four participants considered that the term "inclusion" only refers to the disabled children like children with physical impairments, learning difficulties and cognitive challenges.

Maggie and Maia stated that inclusion, in the case of children with disabilities, means participation of these children in kindergarten playing/learning activities. In addition to this, they mentioned that inclusive education is a new method in the kindergarten: "*Inclusive education is a new method which involves teaching children with physical and mental challenges in the kindergarten or school*" (Maggie). "*Inclusive teaching means keeping children with disabilities with their peers without disabilities. This method was first introduced into schools and later into the kindergarten*" (Maia).

Nana, like Maia and Maggie, defined inclusive education as the active involvement of children with disabilities in the activities held at schools or kindergartens. When asked to define inclusive education, Nana looked nervous: "*Mm...to tell the truth, I am not quite sure how to define it precisely. If I am not mistaken, inclusion means involvement of the children who have learning problems into the group, does not it?*".

Like others, Lia defined the inclusive education as participation in kindergarten activities together with other children. Although, unlike others, she underlined that in the process of inclusive education it is inevitable to follow the team work principle, when every specialist takes his/her own responsibility in serving a child with special needs in kindergarten environment. She mentioned: *“inclusion means participation of all of the specialists in the group in order to taking into consideration the interests and difficulties of the children who have cognitive and physical problems”*.

Thus, the respondents defined the essence of inclusive education more or less similarly. All four teachers defined the term “inclusion” as participation of children with disabilities in the educational system. While Lia also added that inclusive education approach requires significant collaborative effort among general and support staff members in the educational settings.

4.3.1 Preschool Teachers’ Opinions towards the Early Inclusion of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

As far as the researcher saw, all four teachers expressing a positive attitude towards early inclusion of children with ID. However, their responses were not homogenous. For instance Maggie considers that together with program news, the implementation of inclusive education is important in kindergarten, as far as the new program sees child as an individual and it does not consider only age differences, unlike the soviet program. Because of her religious beliefs, Maia thinks that from standpoint of moral and ethics, inclusion of a child with ID in kindergarten is very kind. Nana, according to her experience, thinks that an early inclusion causes positive outcomes. While Lia considers that inclusive education brings positive results only for children who have not severe problems related to studying and self-help skills.

Regarding to this topic Maggie mentioned the following: *“I hold a very positive attitude towards inclusion. I agree and fully support inclusion of these children into the kindergarten at an early age - as early as possible”*. Maia looked at the issue from the religious point of view, and added that if a family has a child with disabilities, they must be taken care by the kindergarten. She claimed: *“Nobody can be sure that they would not have a child with a disability in the family, can they?! As well as this, it is not good enough from a religious point*

of view. As Christians, we should help such children and not deny them assistance or abandon them completely”.

Nana stated that from her own experience, it became obvious to her that children with intellectual disabilities have to be included early in the kindergarten: *“I can say from my own experience that children with intellectual disabilities make progress in the kindergarten. I consider that this programme should have been introduced earlier than recently”.*

In spite of the fact that Lia supports the idea of inclusive education, she still thinks that all the children with intellectual disability should not be involved in the kindergarten groups, as according to her, preschool teacher cannot give these children any relevant knowledge. She mentioned: *“children with severe problems have specific needs. For instance, they cannot eat independently, cannot use the toilet. What we teach others is not clear to them and that is why both, us and the children with severe problems suffer from this... I believe that these children would feel happier in a special kindergarten or a center.”*

When asked whether Georgia is ready to implement inclusive education or not, Maia expressed her opinion based on her own experience and personal observation: *“I do think that people are ready, because the parents themselves are well aware of the issues”.* She considers that the parents know more about their own children’s conditions and rights and do not deny them the right to education. Maia underlined: *“In 2009 when we first started to accept children with special needs into kindergarten groups, the parents tried to conceal their children’s problems and we felt we would not dare talk to them about it.... Now, the situation is completely different, more children come to the kindergartens, and parents do not hide their children’s problems anymore.”*

Maggie considers that the country is ready for inclusive education and explains this by the fact that there have been quite a few changes in the kindergartens regarding the programmes of learning and teaching there. She mentioned: *“We do not use the old Soviet programmes any more, the methodological textbook for the teachers of kindergartens have already been published so, inclusion should be implemented as well.”*

Nana stated that inclusion process have to be start in order to get readiness for it: *“the society will not be ready unless the inclusive process starts and is implemented. If it does not start, the society will never know about it”.* However, she does not feel qualified or really informed

enough yet to give the support children with intellectual disabilities: *But the problem is how ready we are the teachers?!*”

Lia also explained her opinion that Georgia is not yet ready for inclusive education by the fact that teachers are not ready for the challenge: *”From the teachers working in our kindergarten only few have attended the trainings on inclusive education. In other kindergartens the teachers have not yet done any training at all. Because of this, I consider that first, the teachers should go through the process of re-qualification.* Thus, Lia considers that for implementation of early inclusion it is important that first teachers undergo special trainings, to ensure a proper service for a child with ID in kindergarten environment.

4.3.2 Benefits of the Preschool Inclusion

While talking about inclusive education, all four participants stated that it has positive features like stimulating children to learning from each other, to get ready for school, as well as the benefits for children without disabilities which they experience in practice while working in inclusive group.

They also mentioned that the results achieved in the process of inclusion gives them additional stimulus to overcome the challenges which they face while working with the children with intellectual disabilities. Researcher will deal with these issues and necessities in the following chapter (see 4.6). This sub-chapter describes the benefits of the preschool inclusive education which, as claimed by the teachers, it can bring to the group they are included into, to such children themselves and to the whole of society.

Maggie stated that they did talk about the advantages of inclusion at the staff meetings. She considers that inclusion can have a positive influence not only on the children with intellectual disabilities, but on all the children in the group: *”While interacting, the children learn a lot from each other. For example, children with intellectual disabilities learn how to be a team member, how to eat, dress, they imitate their peers, make friends with them and reveal the desire to communicate with them.... On the other hand, children without disabilities learn how to take care of the others... ”.* Maia also considered that children without disability learn how to care about and support the children with disabilities. She also stated: *”They understand each other well...sometimes, even better than me“.*

Nana mentioned that all children among them children with intellectual disabilities can benefit from the kindergarten: *“The kindergarten helps every child to adapt to the school regulations, listen to the teacher speech or reading... and to make friends”*. She also claimed that the main reason she works with these children is that she is sure that inclusive education brings a lot of positive influence to the group and the to the school society: *“Children know from an early age that there are people who are different from them and later they will not be surprised to see them at school.”* - mentioned Nana.

4.4 Teachers’ Perception of Their Role and Responsibilities in Inclusion of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

All the participants in the group talked much about their own role and responsibilities. They thought that in the process of inclusive education the most important role is played by the preschool teacher of the group, who spends all day with the children. The respondents also mentioned that, according to the preschool curriculum, they are responsible not only for looking after the children but also for teaching them. Subsequently, teachers consider that inclusive education significantly increases their responsibilities in the group.

While talking about their own responsibility and role, Nana and Maia first of all mentioned that their main duty is to take care of each child, especially in case of child with disabilities, who are more vulnerable than other children. When Nana was asked to comment on her (as a teacher’s) role and responsibilities in the process of inclusive education, her answer was the next: *“My assistant and I are to be with the child all day long. We have to take care of him, make sure that he participates in learning and playing activities... In order to tackle these problems, we follow an individual plan”*. While talking about her own role and responsibilities, Maia emphasised that, first of all, the teacher has to make sure that all the children are safe in the group, especially child with ID. She claimed: *“I have to pay attention to the fact that children do not hit one another and do not injure others or get injured. This child needs more care because he is more vulnerable than other kids are”*. Maggie, like Nana and Maia thinks that in order to ensure the safety of children, all of them should be paid equal attention when they are participating in playing/learning activities. However, to make the children with intellectual disability interested in such activities and ensure their participation, it is important that the teacher spends more time and puts more effort in working with them.

This was described by her in following way: *“In order to make sure that the children with intellectual disability also take part in the activities and do not feel shut out, I always try to be with them and help them individually... For instance, when we are sitting in a circle, I always sit next to them and manage them easily.”* Subsequently, Maggie believes that the teacher should carry out activities around the topic of discussion according to the children’s interests and needs; therefore teacher should know their individual personal features. She stated: *“It is crucial that the teacher knows the abilities of each and every child, their needs, interests and take these into consideration while carrying out activities”*.

Maia also added that it is her duty to simplify the activities so that the children would be able to perform them, however she mentioned that she is not qualified enough in it. She said: *“It is the teacher’s duty to simplify the programme so that all the children could be able to take part in activities, but I think I am not qualified enough for this”*.

Furthermore, Nana is sure that it is the teacher’s responsibility to cooperate with children’s parents as well and if necessary, she should talk to them about the rights of a child with special needs. Nana sees her role as an informer of parents, as far as she had a case when a parent of a child with intellectual disabilities had protested the presence of her child in this group. She claimed: *“The teacher should cooperate with parents to get to know such children better.... If the parents of the children without disabilities are unhappy that children with intellectual disabilities are part of the group, then we explain to them that such children also have the right of studying and education with their peers”*.

Corporation with parents was mentioned by Maggie as well, however, it was mentioned with the reason that in the implementation of educational goals, the parent is also responsible. She felt that it is the teacher’s duty to talk to the parents about their children at least once a week. She mentioned: *“The parent should know what their children have done during a week or during a day. What topics were discussed or activities have been done and what the children learnt from them”*.

Nana, Maia and Maggie considered that inclusive education increases their responsibility as children with intellectual disabilities require much more time and effort from them. Lia did not speak much about her role and responsibilities in inclusive education, although she noticed that a child with intellectual disabilities significantly differs from other children because of this, his involvement in common group activities requires an additional effort from

her. She stated: *“I understand that all children are different, but the child with intellectual disabilities who I have in my group, cannot learn and understand what I say.... So, I have to go up to him, show him how to paint, how to hold the scissors and so on...”*

To sum up, the teachers first of all underlined that their main duties, roles and responsibilities include: a) Taking care: looking after and support children during the day; b) Adapting activities/instructions to the children’s needs; Additionally c) Nana and Maggie explained the meaning of collaboration with the parents with an additional motive.

4.5 Preschool Teachers Practice in Inclusive Education

In this chapter I will describe the preschool teachers’ practice in inclusive education. In particular, it identifies preschool teachers’ skills and abilities to ensure the involvement of child with intellectual disabilities in group activity by means of an interaction. The meaning of each theme and its’ sub-themes, discussed here, are based on Rye’s general descriptions of some of the principles that are adapted to preschool context. Hence, it discusses the positive interaction patterns from the ICDP resource-based communication and mediation approach between teacher and child with ID in the playing/learning activities. The findings represented here, are two sources of data - interview and observation. Thus, following description is based on combined data from two methods that gives an interesting outcome.

During the play activity organized by the teacher, they interacted with whole group and were mainly giving general directions and game rules for children. Although, they, as the facilitators, had to also give individual instructions and tasks to children, including the child with ID, which, as it was mentioned by teachers in interviews, requires a special care and adaption of the activities to his or her needs and interests.

As a result of observation on interaction between teacher and a child with ID in group, the teachers’ skills to ensure the children involvement in activity initiated by them was made clear. This kind of involvement was made by means of demonstrating all ICDP eight themes of positive interaction that are intertwined with each other, however for the analysis I interpreted and determined those positive interaction patterns, which were expressed by the teachers in group most of all, and which clearly reflected their interaction in order to involve a child with ID within the group activity. These selected ICDP themes are: showing care-

demonstrating positive feelings towards children, adapt to the child's needs, praising and encouraging children's activities and helping them to focus their attention on current activity.

4.5.1 Showing Care - demonstrating positive feelings

On basis of observation on each teacher, it was shown that Maia, Nana and Maggie were expressing care and affection towards the children with intellectual disabilities by means of physical contact and smile. Teachers verbally expressed caring words like "*lovely*" and "*dear*".

In the group activity, Nana often encouraged a child with ID by touching his back, as far as this child was sitting near her. "*No, my dear*" – said she to child when he tried to change his place. During 15 minutes, she looked at his face for two times and shared a smile. Just like Nana, Maia and Maggie looked into the eyes of a child with ID during the interaction with him. Maggie kneeled down when she was physically helping the child to color the outlines on a sheet of paper.

During the interview Maggie mentioned that she has especially warm relationship with the child with ID, because of the fact that the child is also favorable towards her: "*he always wants a caress and he hugs me all the time*". By the end of activity, Maggie took a child with ID into her hands to help him hang the picture on wall and she kissed his cheek, after it she tried to put him down and she pointed "*go and sit down, dear!*", but the child went against the command, so Maggie had to hold him in her hands approximately for two minutes. In the observer's opinion, this was a form of expressing positive feelings and care from teacher's side, which enhanced the emotional bond between children and her. Besides this, as far as Maggie considered the child's interest of being with her, she did not put him down, which proves that she adapted to the child's needs as well.

In the process of activity called "*clean the dishes*", Maia was singing songs and in this way expressed a positive emotion towards children. Her voice and intonation was soft and she spoke with a slow tempo and cheerfully. In this way, the teacher's singing was perceived as a demonstration of positive feelings towards children.

During the observation on group activity Lia's interaction with a child with ID was mediated by his parent – mother, who was supporting her child individually (if this was needed). Lia

was explaining the parents what the child had to do during the common group activity, so in Lia's case, this concrete pattern units of positive interaction were not displayed.

4.5.2 Adapting to the Children

Teacher practiced different ways of adapting to children's needs and interests while interacting with them during the group activity. In the interview Nana mentioned that she has the same manner of relation with a child with ID as with other children, however the difference is that during the interaction with a child with ID, she is trying to act with more compromise: *"though he has problems with speech, he can understand almost everything and he is trying to do his best. I never force him to do things I know he does not like or cannot do"* – mentioned Nana.

During the group activity, when the children with the teacher's request had to sort the vegetables or fruits with one or two characteristics (according to color, shape and taste) in turn, the teacher followed the child's initiatives. For example, the researcher saw that the child tried for several times to stand up and take participation in activity when it was not his turn yet. When noticing that the child with ID was impatient in waiting for his turn, Nana asked exactly him to stand up and to take tomato from the vegetables lying on a bowl, and he performed it very easily. Also, approximately eight minutes after the activity, when a child with ID stood up, Nana did not stop him and she let him to start playing ball considering his own interests.

During the interview, when Maggie described her own responsibilities in inclusion she mentioned that teacher should plan and carry out the activities according to the children's interests and needs (see 4.4). While playing activity, Maggie asked children to choose one coloring sheet with their favorite cartoon from a box. After detecting his favorite fairy-tale character from sheets of paper, the child with ID screamed: "me" then the teacher turned the box towards him and enabled him to take a sheet of his choice, on which she made a comment: *"of course your favorite!"*. According to the observer, the fact that child with ID chose his favorite painting, was as an additional stimulus for him to paint it.

As mentioned above, Maia was singing for children during the activities. While giving instructions to children, she would temporarily stop singing, but she resumed singing again with children's initiative.

The examples given above showed that teachers were aware of child's wishes, actions and needs in order to make a certain degree attempt to follow the child's cues and interests (Rye, 2001).

4.5.3 Giving Praise and Recognition

Teacher practiced different ways of praising and encouraging children's activities while interacting with them and motivating kids this way to keep attention to the activity.

Besides the verbal praise, "*good for you!*" which Nana used addressing the child with ID, every child within the group which fulfilled teacher's request (instructions) in proper order (choosing a fruit or vegetable according to the named sign) was praised with applause by other children with the teacher's initiative, after finishing the quest. Thus, Nana verbally and nonverbally used praise and expressed recognition towards children, as well as towards the child with ID.

During the interview Maia has mentioned that to get a child with ID interested in general group activities, she praises their work often. "*He is very shy and if I praise him, and tell him, for instance, "good job! Or what a good boy you are!" He has more motivation to continue an activity like painting, playing with Lego and so on*" – noticed she. Maia was praising the child for performed task. For example in the end of the activity when child dried up the bowl and put it in to the box she said to him: "*Well done!*"

Just like Maia, Maggie and Lia praised the child with ID verbally for performed task:

"*Excellent work!*" said Maggie to the child when he put up the colored picture on the string.

After carrying out the task Lia praised the child: "*Good for you! You have done this so well!*"

4.5.4. Helping Children to Focus Their Attention

Focusing children's attention was commonly used by the teacher when interacting with

children.

Nana tried to focus children's attention mainly by using statements like: "*Quiet please!*"- when the noise made by children exceeded the voice of participant who had to do the task given by teacher, according to color, shape and taste sort the vegetables and fruits. Also hence there were many children in group, in order to keep them in line, she pointed: "*Listen, it is his turn now!*" and with this she was trying to help them focus their attention on the child who performed the task in given moment.

Maggie tried to concentrate the attention of child with ID during the group activity by giving directions verbally: "*I am watching you*" which according to the researcher meant that she was encouraging the child by being close to him and was not leaving him alone. Also, while giving him a short-time physical help during painting, she told the child: "*Do it yourself*" by what, as researcher noticed, she appreciated his independent work and once again she drew his attention towards the painting.

In Maia's group it seemed that singing encouraged children to stay involved in the activity. Song thematically was connected with the activity, as far as the lyrics of the song were linked with water, washing hands and taking bath. Such directed attention gives a certain experience to a child who gets more prepared and receptive to what the teacher wants to communicate (Rye, 2001).

Lia's case the selected pattern units of positive interaction were not displayed, because as is mentioned above her interaction with child with intellectual disability was mediated by his mother.

4.5.5 The Challenges Teachers Face in the Process of Inclusion

From the survey it became clear that one of the main disturbing factors for teachers in the process of inclusion is a large number of children in group. Although, every teacher noticed that their qualification for inclusive education is still low and they require intense trainings and a practical help from the support staff specialists.

Maia mentioned the fact that the process of inclusion should be accompanied by suitable conditions in the kindergarten which means a small number of children, involvement and help

from various specialists: “... *it is one thing that I do like and support the inclusion of children with disabilities, but we should also have suitable conditions! What can an assistant and I do with 40 children?*” - mentioned she.

Lia and Nana emphasised that, despite the fact that a special education teacher and inclusive education coordinator co-operate and develop Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) for children with ID, the process of the inclusion of a child in playing/learning activities and the amount of the knowledge and skills they get in kindergarten still seem problematic. Regarding to this, Nana mentioned: “*A special education teacher assesses the skills and problems of the child with intellectual disabilities and makes an individualised programme, in which I participate. However, it is mostly my assistant and me who have to carry out the programme.*” During the interview Lia also claimed that inclusive education requires additional time and effort from her and because of this she needs a help from assistant specialists to give an appropriate service to children with ID within a group. She mentioned: “*I always need a person in group who will stay only with this child and take care of him, because in so many children it is very difficult for me to do that*”.

Lia and Maggie also emphasised the low salaries, which, as they said, is inadequate to their work and the effort. Lia thinks that the teachers’ motivation should be boosted up by increased salaries: “*the salary is so low that it is imposable for me to take any additional duties*” - mentioned she. Maggie emphasised that because of the low salary she’s not able to pay for trainings she needs for improving her qualification: “*There are many interesting trainings for me, but I am unable to attend them because of the fees*” – mentioned she.

The observation on teachers in group made clear that they have trouble in distributing their attention between all of the thirty children. For example, observation showed that in Maggie’s and Maia’s case, each child was not receiving an appropriate attention, appraisal and verbal instructions from the teacher. They had to ignore comments or questions made by some children, while individually interacting with children, including the interaction with children with ID. Although they had an assistant who helped them in organizing and conducting the activity, it was very difficult for them to consider the requests of all children. In order to keep them properly in line, Nana often had to make loud comments to keep the children quiet and direct their attention onto the activity. This lengthened the time of the process and made the children loose interest of waiting for their turn and getting involved in the process.

To sum up, teachers feel poorly prepared to meet the educational needs of children with intellectual disabilities. However, they also mentioned that no matter how well they are prepared for inclusive education program, they still have several preventing factors. The first one is a large quantity of children within group, second - the lack of kindergarten support staff, which does not enable them to actively receive a practical support from them in serving a child with ID. In the end it has to be noticed that low salaries were named as one of the important preventing factors for implementing and promoting inclusive education. As teachers have mentioned current salary is not able to create an appropriate motivation to implement new methods and approaches within a group.

4.6 Summary of Findings

The preschool teachers defined the term *inclusive education* with their own words and expressed different attitudes towards the early inclusion of children with intellectual disability. Informants underlined the preschool inclusion's positive features like stimulating children to learning from each other, to get ready for school and discussed about benefits for children without disabilities which they experience in practice while working in inclusive group. When talking about their role and responsibilities teachers underlined that according to the preschool curriculum, they are responsible not only for looking after the children but also for teaching them. Subsequently, participants consider that inclusive education significantly increases their responsibilities in the group. As a result of observation on interaction between teacher and a child with ID in group, the teachers' skills and abilities to ensure the children involvement in activity initiated by them was made clear. However, as is motioned in the last subchapter teachers feel poorly prepared to meet the educational needs of children with intellectual disabilities. In addition, informants underlined external preventing factors that they face in the process of inclusion of children with ID in the group activities.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter consists of two main parts, which include several sub-chapters each. In the following sub-chapters the findings of the study will be discussed and interpreted in relation to the theoretical perspectives that were pointed out in chapter 2, and the conclusions will be drawn. Afterwards, the limitations of the study will be stated followed by the implications for future research projects. Thus, the first part is a discussion of the findings (5.2), whereas the second part provides concluding remarks (5.3).

5.2 Discussion

The main focus of the study was to find out preschool teachers' perspectives: the way they face the process of implementation of inclusive education of children with intellectual disabilities. To describe the phenomenon of interest and pursue the aim of the study, the answers were generated from the following sub-questions:

- How do preschool teachers understand the concept of inclusive education?
- How do the preschool teachers perceive their role and responsibilities towards inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities?
- How do preschool teachers practice inclusive education?

Findings emerged from the study helped to investigate the questions and contributed to the purpose of this research. In particular, the current study found out preschool teachers' knowledge of the concept of inclusive education: their opinions about early inclusion and benefits of it, as well as their perception about their own role and responsibilities towards inclusion of children with ID. Furthermore, after getting information about the teachers' knowledge, the researcher went through their practice in order to find out teacher-child positive interaction patterns based on the ICDP themes that identifies teachers' practical skills and abilities to promote child involvements in the common group activity. Finally, current

study identified challenges that teachers facing in the process of inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities.

5.2.1 Preschool Teachers Background in Inclusive Education

As mentioned in the chapter 4, teachers have attended in-service training course in the philosophy and theory of inclusive education and enjoyed one year-long practical assistance together with consultations from an expert of inclusive education. All four teachers have almost similar background in inclusive education. However the main differences among them are seen in Maggie's case who has more experience of working with children with Intellectual disabilities (see figure 2). Referring the Katz's (1972) Preschool Teachers' Development Theory preschool teachers' experience and practice can be seen as the criteria for measuring their abilities, knowledge and skills. In the beginning as teachers mentioned they have to inform and interpret the experience and knowledge that they are gaining from their job, while after some period and with intensive in-service training they are achieving qualification that allows them to begin implementing inclusive education in their groups. Teachers emphasize the significance of the in-service trainings because pre-service education that concerns to the general education has only a minor influence on what they do day-to-day in the group (Katz, 1972). In the beginning of the inclusive education process in their way of development as professionals, teachers found out that they needed information about children with disabilities and collaboration with support staff such as: psychologists, special education teachers, health workers and other specialists who can strengthen their skills and knowledge at this time. Therefore they stated that more training has to be available for the teachers during the job than it has been before.

5.2.2 Teachers' Understanding and Knowledge of the Concept of Inclusive Education

According to the findings preschool teachers' responses regarding inclusive education are not exactly the same. However, they defined the essence of inclusive education more or less similarly. Teachers considered the term "inclusion" as participation of children with disabilities in the educational system. As teachers emphasized inclusion, in the case of children with disabilities, means participation of these children in kindergarten or school

activities. All four teachers know that according to the law children with disabilities have a right to get education. Regarding to this Lia mentioned: “... *according to the law they have to be there*”. The international document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states: “*Everyone has the right to an education.*” This document claims that in the core of inclusive education are the principles of human rights to education. (Art. 26 – Universal Declaration of Human Rights, paragraphs 1). Besides, the Law of Georgia on General Education (2007) states: “*Everyone shall have the right to receive education and the right to a free choice of the form of education*” (clause 7). In this way, teachers recognize that inclusion implies the right of a child with disabilities to be a full member of group who can participate in playing/learning and entertaining activities next to others.

Teachers Lia and Maggie also emphasized that inclusive education requires collaborative work with support staff in order to develop and implement individual development plans and it requires an additional knowledge and effort from them. Their understanding of the inclusive education partly corresponds to the definition of inclusion stated by the UNESCO (2005) which claims that inclusive education is the process of addressing the variety of needs to all children that arises the issue to transform education system and setting in order to respond to the diversity of learners in all educational level. Subsequently, according to the teachers inclusion is an effort to make sure that children’s are involved in the education system as full-time participants and members of their group and kindergarten. Additionally, the Law of Georgia on General Education (2007) defines inclusive education as a process of including children with special needs into mainstream education with other children. However it has to be mentioned that teachers considered that the term “inclusion” only refers to the disabled children - children with physical impairments, learning difficulties and cognitive challenges. As is presented in chapter 4 Maggie stated that inclusive education means involvement of “*children with physical and mental challenges*”, Lia emphasized that inclusion refers to the *children who have cognitive and physical problem*, while Nana used term “*learning problems*”. According to the National Strategy Action Plan (2007-2011) marginalized groups or children with special needs in Georgia include: students with disability, ethnic minority students in special education institutions; children living in poverty and students from the conflict zones of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Therefore teachers understanding and knowledge about the term *inclusive education* can be considered as narrowed defined because inclusive education were described by the teacher as an issue relating to only children with physical impairment, learning difficulties and cognitive challenges.

Furthermore, as is mentioned above teachers stated that inclusive education requires participation of all of the specialists in the group in order to consider interests and difficulties of the children with disabilities. Their understanding and knowledge about the inclusive education makes obvious that they know that inclusive education approach requires significant collaborative efforts among general and support staff members (Drew & Hardman, 2007).

The teachers' understanding and knowledge of the inclusive education, as a term and its essence, was particularly clearly manifested when they mentioned the benefits of inclusive education. The teachers mostly relied on their own experience and underlined the fact that while interacting in group, the children with intellectual disabilities imitate their peers' behavior and in this way learn self-help and communication skills. Children with special needs have many potential opportunities to observe peers engaging, with various degrees of success, in social or pre-academic learning (Comstock-Galagan, 2008). Kids learn from each other - peers provide models as they react and interact with each other (ibid). Additionally, *Imitative learning* is one-of the ways to teach something, thus more capable peers can provide significant support for children in the learning processes (Vygotsky, 1978).

Furthermore, as findings have revealed, teachers consider that not only children with intellectual disabilities benefit from the inclusion, but it has a positive influence on all children in the group where they learn how to support or to take care of them. It is well documented that in inclusive group child without disability can get valuable experience in tutoring (Allen & Cowdery 2005). Thus, outcomes given from the participants also proves that they generally understand the meaning and benefits of inclusive education correctly, which they explain in an intuitive way, as well as with their own knowledge gained from their experiences.

5.2.3 Teachers' Role and Responsibilities in Inclusion of Children with Intellectual disabilities

As from the finding results revealed teachers think that in inclusive education their main responsibilities are: a) to take care of each child, especially in case of child with disabilities, who are more vulnerable than other children; b) to adapt the curricula - its' activities to the child with intellectual disability's needs; and c) collaborate with parents of children with

intellectual disabilities. Subsequently, teachers consider that inclusive education significantly increases their responsibilities in the group.

The informants emphasize that in the process of inclusive education the most important role is played by the preschool teacher who spends all day with the children. Teachers highlight that the most significant for them is to be sure that all children are safe in the group and especially child with intellectual disability. They also mentioned that teaching and caregiving were intertwined, and some expressed the view that caregiving should come first because if the children were not feeling well in preschool they would not learn anything. Consequently, for guarantee of the safety and well-being of the children teachers consider that they have to spend more time and put more effort during working with children with intellectual disability. According the Preschool Education Teachers' Methodological Manual teachers are responsible to every child in the group, however if in the group there is child with special needs adults have to provide special care and support by considering their individual characteristics or special needs (Aptarashvili, & Labartkava, 2011).

As the results have shown in order to develop individual programs for children with intellectual disabilities teachers have to collaborate with support staff members who are adapting or modifying (simplifying) the preschool playing/learning activities to the child's with ID needs and interests. According to the national document preschool teacher has to collaborate with special education teacher in order to participate in the processes of developing individualized programs based on long-term goals and objectives in a variety of settings (Agency for Managing Tbilisi Nursery School, 2011). However, because in the kindergarten there are only one special education teacher, speech therapist and inclusive education coordinator teachers have to implement individual education program which mean that they are responsible not only looking after but also to teaching them. Maggie thinks that the teachers have to carry out activities around the topic of discussion according to the children's interests and needs; therefore teacher should know their individual personal features. Maia also added that it is her duty to simplify the activities so that the children with ID would be able to perform them. Teachers' perception about their responsibilities in inclusion corresponds to the Preschool Education Teachers' Methodological Manual (Aptarashvili, & Labartkava, 2011) which states that if in the group there is a child with special needs the teacher has to use an individual approach in order to include him or her in the group activities. Effective inclusion requires specific planning and implementation by

teachers whose responsibilities include also to structuring a playing/learning environment in which all children with and without disabilities are helped to participate together in a variety of activities related to all areas of development (ibid).

Subsequently, one of the participants, Lia, thinks that when child with intellectual disabilities cannot perform the activity teachers have to physically assist or give individual verbal instructions to the children with disabilities in order to ensure his or her involvement in the group. However, she thinks that she is not qualified enough for it. Also, as is mentioned above Maggie states that in order to include child in the activity teacher should know their individual personal features. Vygotsky (1978) in his sociocultural theory emphasized that in teaching/learning interactions, development and learning proceeds best, when assistance is provided that permits a learner to perform at a level higher than would be possible without the teacher's interaction (Wells & Claxton, 2002). He described this condition as a Zone of Proximal Development. The proximal zone is different from the child's developmental level at which individual, unassisted performance is possible (Wells & Claxton, 2002). As researcher assumes, when Maggie mentioned that a teacher should know child's individual personal features, she implied a child's actual development level as determined by independent problem solving zone (Vygotsky, 1978), on the basis of which, a teacher has to determine child's zone or proximal development and her own role for efficiency of the learning.

Furthermore, corporation with parents as teachers' responsibility was mentioned by Maggie as well, however, it was claimed with the reason that in the implementation of educational goals, the parent is also responsible. For efficiency of inclusive education, the teacher has to collaborate with parents in order to participate in the processes of developing individualized programs based on long-term goals and objectives in a variety of settings (Agency for Managing Tbilisi Nursery School, 2011).

Finally, all participants considered that inclusive education increases their responsibility as children with intellectual disabilities require much more time and effort from them. This refers to the Mittler (2002) statement who claims that Inclusive education approach increases the teachers' role and responsibilities in the educational setting. Inclusive approach from teachers requires special knowledge and competences in order to effectively teach and respond to a diverse population of children's in the group (UNESCO, 2005).

5.2.4 Teachers' Practice in Inclusive Education

Results showed preschool teachers skills and abilities to ensure participation of children with ID in activity by means of interaction. As the findings revealed during the play activity organized by the preschool teacher, they interacted with whole group and were mainly giving general directions and game rules for children. However, as the facilitators, they had to also individually interact with children. As a result of observation on interaction between teacher and a child with ID in group, the teachers' skills to ensure the children involvement in activity initiated by them was made clear. This kind of involvement was made by means of demonstrating following ICDP themes of positive interaction: showing care-demonstrating positive feelings towards children, adapt to the child's needs, praising and encouraging children's activities and helping them to focus their attention on current activity.

Maia, Nana and Maggie were expressing care and affection towards the children with intellectual disabilities by means of physical contact and smile. Teachers verbally expressed caring words to them, willing to cooperate and establishing eye-contact. The main thing was that the children adequately perceived and responded to the positive emotions of teacher. Especially in Maggie's case it was obvious that teachers' positive feelings and care enhanced the emotional bond between children and her. As it seemed for the researcher, demonstration of positive feelings towards the children created a safe environment for them that helped to enjoy and to be involved in the common activities. Demonstration of positive feelings creates basis for constructing further dialogs among participants in activity (Rye, 2001).

Teachers practiced different ways of adapting to children's needs and interests while interacting with them during the group activity. Participants were aware of child's wishes, actions and needs in order to make a certain degree attempt to follow the child's cues and interests (Rye, 2001). Expressing initiative by a child with intellectual disabilities and a response reaction of the teacher encouraged his or her participation in activity. Vygotsky (1978) believed that teachers have a central role in children's development and learning, because in an educational setting child's discoveries in the group are assessed or mediated by teachers who make influence on children's cognitive development and thinking processes.

Teachers gave positive feedback to children's behaviour that according to Rye (2001) can maintain children's sense of security about their caregiver's acceptance and love. On the basis

of this study, it is impossible to make conclusions on the level of teachers' awareness of the fact that expression of acceptance and recognition is an important foundation for the development of a child's self-confidence and social adjustment. However, on the basis of observation, it was made clear that they were trying to encourage children and support their participation and socialization within the group. As Rye (2001) states, acceptance and recognition are connected to positive emotional relationship and are the basic premise for a child's socialization.

Focusing children's attention was commonly used by the teacher in process of interaction with children with intellectual disabilities. With aim of including kids in activity, teachers gave verbal instructions in order to direct or focus their attention to the things in particular activity. Directed attention gives a certain experience to a child who gets more prepared and receptive to what the teacher wants to communicate (Rye, 2001).

As is mentioned in the chapter 4, in Lia's case positive interaction behaviour were not displayed, because interaction with a child with ID was mediated by the parent. Despite the fact that Lia understood the essence of inclusive education and her responsibility almost like other participants did, as she stated, it's very difficult for her to practically ensure the involvement of a child with intellectual disability within the activities. Hence, the results have shown that the most experienced teacher, who has 22 years of work experience in the preschool settings, has the lowest abilities to implement inclusive education in the participated kindergarten. However, it must be considered as well that unlike others, she has only three years of work experience with children with intellectual disabilities.

Subsequently, besides the teacher's skills and abilities to ensure involvement of children with ID in the activity, study also identified challenges that teachers facing in the process of inclusive education. Teachers consider that conditions that they have to work under, which imply: quantity of children within group, the lack of kindergarten support staff and low salaries, are irrelevant to the requests made towards them.

According to the Preschool Education Teachers' Methodological Manual, effective inclusion requires specific planning and implementation by teachers whose responsibilities include structuring a playing/learning environment in which all children with and without disabilities are helped to participate together in a variety of activities related to all areas of development (Aptarashvili, & Labartkava, 2011). As the teachers stated, fulfilling the duties mentioned

above in a group of 30 or more children is very difficult for them to realize. This preventing factor does not enable teachers to actively receive a practical support from them in serving a child with ID. While Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlights that in order to provide the right level of guidance, a teacher needs to know individually each child in the group very well. They also need to have time for interaction and conversation with children in a one-to-one situation and the opportunity to observe children for defining how to adjust their support to the child's current level of understanding (Woolfolk, 2008). Hence it follows that the quantity of children within group is one of the preventing factor for the teachers in inclusive education process.

Furthermore, teachers feel poorly prepared to meet the educational needs of children with intellectual disabilities. Every teacher noticed that their qualification for inclusive education is still low and they require intense trainings and a practical help from the support staff specialists. As Knight (1999) states, teacher's inadequate professional preparation for inclusion may impede achieving effective teaching in inclusive group. According to the Agency for Managing Tbilisi Nursery School (2011) teachers are not the only ones who have to take responsibilities over the children with developmental disabilities, but they have to implement inclusive education with collaboration with support staff that have their own part of responsibilities. Thus, in the end it has to be mentioned that despite the knowledge and skills of inclusive education expressed by the teachers during the study, for effective implementation of the inclusion they need to take part in continuous trainings and to get practical assistance from the support staff members in the group.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

This final subchapter of the thesis consists of two parts. The first one (5.3.1) provides the conclusion of the findings. In the next subchapter (5.3.2) the limitations of the study and the recommendations for further research are presented.

5.3.1 Conclusion

The main purpose of the study was to find out preschool teachers' perspectives; *the way they face the process of implementation of inclusive education of children with intellectual*

disabilities. The research was grounded in qualitative design, which gave teachers the opportunity to express their viewpoint, knowledge and skills, based upon the semi-structured interview and observation with video recording. The findings from the data responded to the research sub-questions: 1) How do preschool teachers understand the concept of inclusive education? 2) How do the preschool teachers perceive their role and responsibilities towards inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities? 3) How do preschool teachers practice inclusive education? Based on the findings of the research, following assumptions were concluded:

1. Teachers' understanding of the concept of inclusive education is clear. As participants emphasized inclusion, in the case of children with disabilities, means participation of these children in kindergarten or school activities. As mentioned above teachers' explanation of the concept of inclusive education corresponds to the international and national documents. First of all, informants recognize that inclusion implies the right of a child with disabilities to be a full member of group who can participate in playing/learning and entertaining activities next to others. Second, informants emphasized that inclusive education requires collaborative work with support staff in order to develop and implement individual development plans and it requires an additional knowledge and effort from them. Finally, outcomes received from the participants also prove that teachers generally understand the meaning and benefits of inclusive education correctly, which they explain in an intuitive way, as well as with their own knowledge gained from their experiences. However it has to be mentioned that teachers considered that the term "inclusion" only refers to disabled children which does not correspond to the Georgian National Strategy Action Plan (2007-2011).
2. The study revealed that teachers' consideration and perception of their role and responsibilities towards the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities mainly corresponds to the national documents such as the Preschool Institution Management Guide (Meladze, 2011) and Preschool Education Teachers' Methodological Manual (Aptarashvili, & Labartkava, 2011). The informants emphasize that in the process of inclusive education the most important role is played by the preschool teacher who spends all day with children. Teachers think that in inclusive education their main responsibilities are: a) taking care of children with intellectual disabilities who have been considered as more vulnerable than other children; b) Adapting the curricula and its activities to the

child with intellectual disabilities; c) Collaborate with parents of children with intellectual disabilities. Consequently, all four teachers considered that inclusive education increases their responsibility as children with intellectual disabilities require much more time and effort from them. Moreover, teachers consider that conditions that they have to work under are irrelevant to the responsibilities and requests defined towards them.

3. Teachers Maggie, Nana and Maia revealed specific skills and abilities by means of which they were able to ensure the participation children with intellectual disabilities in the common group activity. This kind of involvement was made by means of demonstrating following ICDP themes of positive interaction: showing care-demonstrating positive feelings towards children, adapting to the child's needs, praising and encouraging children's activities and helping them to focus their attention on current activity. Furthermore, as the study revealed, in practice teachers facing some challenges, which, according to them, are preventive factors in the process of inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities. These preventive factors are: number of children within group being higher than thirty (pupils per group); lack of support staff members' participation in inclusion process; low salaries and insufficient qualification.

Thus, despite the fact that teachers' average work experience of working with children with intellectual disabilities is only four years, according to their theoretical knowledge and understanding of inclusive education and practice in it still allows concluding that the participants have a potential to contribute in the inclusive educational programs in kindergarten in future perspective. Regarding this, the preventive factors have to be foreseen, which are considered as the biggest challenges by teachers in their practice. Also, for a successful implementation of inclusive education, an important thing is that the teachers underlined that they still have a big desire to attend additional in-service trainings from the experts of inclusive education and to get practical assistance from the support staff members within the kindergarten.

5.3.2 Limitations and Further Research

A limitation is some aspect of the study that the researcher cannot control but, believes that it may negatively affect the findings of the study (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011). This study has

several limitations that could affect the results. First of all, the research as a qualitative study lacks the possibility to generalize findings (Maxwell, 1992). Second, research informants were only teachers. However, there are many other possible respondents who could contribute to a better understanding of the process of inclusion in the kindergarten, for example principals and support staff members who might own some valuable information to add. Third, the informants in this study were limited to a number of four and attention was focused on only one type of children with special needs. Furthermore, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, one of the research methods for this study was reactive observation in the group. The main disadvantage of such method is that observer may affect participant and the whole situation. Researcher considers that this factor could have affected interaction flow and content between teacher and children she was interested in. Also, the original data was recorded in Georgian and then translated into English. The translation might influence the meaning of the sentences, even though it was done in a structured and maximally accurate way. Finally, one of the limitations of this study was the time. As the thesis has deadline, this factor has made some restrictions, such as: adding other informants who can contribute to a better understanding of the process of inclusive education in the kindergarten and searching and referring more literature for the study. However, the outcomes in this study can lead other study within the field of inclusive education in the preschool settings.

Considering the findings and limitations of the given study, following implications are introduced for future researchers and possible actions:

There is a lack of researches focusing on preschool inclusion in Georgia. Hopefully this study can stimulate further research in the preschool settings which will contribute in a better understanding of the process of inclusive education. Therefore, I think that based on this research, it would be interesting to focus on other participants such as kindergarten principals, as well as kindergartens' support staff members who together with teachers are responsible to promote inclusive education on the preschool level.

Besides, as mentioned in discussion, the study revealed that in the process of inclusive education teachers face the challenges as considered by them - preventive factors for inclusive education, such as for instance their insufficient qualification for inclusive education and lack of support staff members' participation in the group. I suppose that if further quantitative or qualitative research will be oriented on finding out these issues in practice, then the results

will support educators to create in-service training modules, especially since preschool teachers have expressed their readiness and need to participate in in-service trainings.

Finally, I suppose that conducting another research design, such as an action research, gives opportunity to improve of education professionals' own practice. This research project can be used as a foundation for action research for teachers to promote greater self-knowledge and professional awareness among practitioners' (Gall, 2007) about the positive interaction with children with special needs and about their role and responsibilities as teachers and caregivers.

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Appendix 1

Interview Guide

1. Background:

Sex:

Age:

Speciality:

How long have you been teaching at the kindergarten?

How long is it since you have had a child or children with intellectual disabilities in the group?

What kind of training have you taken in the field of inclusive education?

- What modules/themes were involved?
- What was the duration of the training?

2. Inclusive Education

What do you understand by inclusive education?

What is your opinion about early inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities?

What benefit can preschool inclusion for children with intellectual disabilities bring into the kindergarten?

In your opinion, is Georgia ready to implement inclusive education for children with intellectual disability?

Why?

According to your opinion are the kindergartens in Tbilisi facilitated to support inclusive education for children with intellectual disability?

3. Teachers' Practice in Inclusive Education

What do you think your role is, as a teacher, to promote inclusive education in the kindergarten?

What do you think your responsibilities are, as a teacher, to promote inclusive education in the kindergarten?

What kind of help does a child with intellectual disabilities need to participate in the group activity? How do you support/help him or her?

What difficulties do you face in the process of inclusion of a child with intellectual disabilities in the group?

In your opinion, what are the main challenges that the kindergarten faces in the process of implementation of inclusive education?

Appendix 2

Observation form

Activities	Teacher – Child Interaction	Comments

Appendix 3

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



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Vår dato: 03.07.2012

Vår ref:30869 / 3 / HIT

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 18.06.2012. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

30869	<i>Preschool teachers experience in the process of including children with intellectual disabilities in the kindergarten</i>
<i>Behandlingsansvarlig</i>	<i>Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
<i>Daglig ansvarlig</i>	<i>Tamara Tabakhmelashvili</i>
<i>Student</i>	<i>Natia Niauri</i>

Etter gjennomgang av opplysninger gitt i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon, finner vi at prosjektet ikke medfører meldeplikt eller konsesjonsplikt etter personopplysningslovens §§ 31 og 33.

Dersom prosjektopplegget endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for vår vurdering, skal prosjektet meldes på nytt. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html.

Vedlagt følger vår begrunnelse for hvorfor prosjektet ikke er meldepliktig.

Vennlig hilsen

Vigdís Namtvedt Kvalheim

Hildur Thorarensen

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Based on the information we have received about the project, the Data Protection Official for Research can not see that the project will include personal data being processed with electronic means, or that there will be created a manual register that contains sensitive personal information. The project will therefore not be subject to notification according to the Personal Data Act.

The Data Protection Official presupposes that in transcribing interviews, or other transfer of data to a computer, information that makes it possible to identify individuals, either directly or indirectly, will not be registered. All electronic processing of data in connection with the project must be made anonymously.

Anonymous information is defined as information that in no way identifies individuals in the data material, neither directly by name or social security numbers, indirectly through background variables, through a name list referring to a reference number, or encryption formula and code.

Appendix 4

Confirmation Letter from the Administration

I, _____ Director of the Kindergarten # _____ confirm that the student of Oslo University Natia Niauri is authorised to make a 15-minute video of groups of children of different ages for the purpose of her research. In order to carry out the educational activities envisaged by the kindergarten, the administration has already acquired written consents from the kindergarten children's parents to video group activities for search or educational purposes. This arises from the child's individual questionnaire form, which allows the video taken in the kindergarten to be used for research interests or to be uploaded on the internet, specifically, on YouTube or Facebook.

As I have been assured, the videos made by Natia Niauri will be used only for her Master's programme of search and, in order to protect the participants' confidentiality and anonymity, the video will not be given to any other person.

Signature:

Seal:

Appendix 5

Information sheet for the principal or teacher

Information and request for consent to use the kindergarten resources

I am a Masters student at the Institute for Special Education at the University of Oslo and I am going to conduct my Master's project in the Autumn of 2012. The aim of my research is to examine how preschool teachers are facilitating the promotion of inclusive education in the kindergarten. What is a preschool teacher's attitude towards children with intellectual disabilities and how they are helping the children to become involved in the kindergarten's activity?

In my research I will use four groups as examples and interview every teacher in each group. Teachers will be asked for their opinions about this issue, their practice and experience. I plan to use audio recordings during the interviews. Furthermore, I will make observations during the group activities to have more knowledge about the teacher's experience.

During the interview I will make notes so that no important details get lost, however no one except me will have access to the data. Nobody will be able to recognise a particular teacher in the report. The participants' privacy, confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed, and consent forms will be provided before starting. When the thesis is finished in June 2013, all recording and personal data will be erased.

The study has been reported to The Data Protection Official for Research, at the Norwegian Social Science Data Service.

If you agree to participate and contribute to this study, please sign the consent form and send it back in the enclosed envelope. Your participation in this project is absolutely voluntary. You have the right to refuse or withdraw from participation at any time and without giving any reason. It will not have any consequences for your relationship with the headmaster or your employer if you choose not to participate, or, if you later choose to withdraw from the study. You can also contact my supervisor at the University of Oslo, Tamar Tabakhmelashvili, on e-mail: tamar.tabakhmelashvili@isp.uio.no or by telephone: +47 93 60

60 87 or myself, Masters student: Natia Niauri on e-mail: natianiauri@gmail.com or by telephone +995 597 00 30 79.

Information sheet for parents

Request to participate in an interview study

Information and request for consent to observe your child's group during playing/learning activities and to interview teacher in order to find out his/her abilities and needs – experience and knowledge about inclusive education of children with intellectual disabilities.

I am a master student at the institute for Special Education at the University of Oslo and I am going to conducting my master's project in Autumn 2012. My aim of research is to examine what preschool teachers are facilitating in order to promote inclusive education in the kindergarten. What are their attitude towards children with intellectual disabilities and how are helping them to involve in the kindergarten's activity.

For collecting the data material I will use information giving by preschool teachers who have taken special training courses in inclusive education aspects and have more than two years work experience with children of intellectual disabilities.

I am going to collect the data through personal interviews with the teachers and through observation in the group. During the interview audio recorder will be used with the teacher. I will observe whole group, but will be oriented on the interaction and relationship between teacher and children with special need in order to find out how the inclusion process is going in the group.

I therefore ask for your consent for these activities. You have the right to see the interview- and observation guide I plan to use for collecting data, so that you can see what kind of information will be registered regarding you son/daughter.

All data will be kept confidentially. The study has been reported to the Data Protection Official for Research, at the Norwegian Social Science Data Service.

It is voluntary to participate in the research project, and you have possibilities to withdraw without having to state a reason. However, I would appreciate your participation very much. It is my interest that all children get equal opportunity and access to an adequate support and education.

If you do not mind to participate and contribute this study, please sign the consent form and give it back. In case of question please do not hesitate to ask me for more clarification. You can also contact my supervisor at the University of Oslo, Tamar Tabakhmelashvili, on e-mail: tamar.tabakhmelashvili@isp.uio.no or telephone: +47 93 60 60 87

Master student: Natia Niauri

+995 597 00 30 79

natianiauri@gmail.com

Letter of Consent

I have received oral and written information about the study of preschool teachers experience and knowledge in the process of including children with intellectual disabilities and

Would like to participate.

Principal's /Teacher's / Parent's Name: -----

Signature, date: -----

Phone number: -----

Do not want to participate.

Name: -----

Signature, date: -----

Appendix 6

Table of Thematic Analyzes

Theme 1: Inclusive Education				
Sub-themes	Understanding and Knowledge of Inclusive Education	Opinions towards the Early Inclusion of Children with ID	Readiness for Implementing Inclusive Education	Benefits of Early Inclusion
Interview 1 Maggie	<i>“Inclusive education is a new method which involves teaching children with physical and mental challenges in the kindergarten or school”</i>	<i>“I hold a very positive attitude towards inclusion. I agree and fully support inclusion of these children into the kindergarten at an early age - as early as possible”.</i>	<i>“We do not use the old Soviet programmes any more, the methodological textbook for the teachers of kindergartens have already been published so, inclusion should be implemented as well.”</i>	<i>“While interacting, the children learn a lot from each other. For example, children with intellectual disabilities learn how to be a team member, how to eat, dress, they imitate their peers, make friends with them and reveal the desire to communicate with them.... On the other hand, children without disabilities learn how to take care of the others...”.</i>
Interview 2 Maia	<i>“Inclusive teaching means keeping children with disabilities with their peers without disabilities. This method was first introduced into schools and later into the kindergarten”</i>	<i>“Nobody can be sure that they would not have a child with a disability in the family, can they?! As well as this, it is not good enough from a religious point of view. As Christians, we should help such children and not deny them assistance or abandon them</i>	<i>“I do think that people are ready, because the parents themselves are well aware of the issues”. “In 2009 when we first started to accept children with special needs into kindergarten groups, the parents tried to conceal their children’s problems and we</i>	<i>“They understand each other well...sometimes, even better than me“.</i>

		<i>completely”.</i>	<i>felt we would not dare talk to them about it.... Now, the situation is completely different, more children come to the kindergartens, and parents do not hide their children’s problems anymore.</i>	
Interview 3 Nana	<i>“Mm...to tell the truth, I am not quite sure how to define it precisely. If I am not mistaken, inclusion means involvement of the children who have learning problems into the group, does not it?”.</i>	<i>“I can say from my own experience that children with intellectual disabilities make progress in the kindergarten. I consider that this programme should have been introduced earlier than recently”.</i>	<i>“the society will not be ready unless the inclusive process starts and is implemented. If it does not start, the society will never know about it”</i>	<i>“The kindergarten helps every child to adapt to the school regulations, listen to the teacher speech or reading... and to make friends”.</i> <i>“Children know from an early age that there are people who are different from them and later they will not be surprised to see them at school.”</i>
Interview 4 Lia	<i>“according to the law they have a right to be there”.</i> <i>“Inclusion means participation of all of the specialists in the group in order to taking into consideration the interests and difficulties of the children who have cognitive and physical problems”.</i>		<i>：“From the teachers working in our kindergarten only few have attended the trainings on inclusive education. In other kindergartens the teachers have not yet done any training at all. Because of this, I consider that first, the teachers should go through the process of re-qualification.</i>	

Theme 2: Teachers' Perception of their Role and Responsibilities

Sub-theme:	Understanding of Teachers Role and Responsibilities in Inclusion
Interview 1 Maggie	<p><i>"It is crucial that the teacher knows the abilities of each and every child, their needs, interests and take these into consideration while carrying out activities".</i></p> <p><i>"The parent should know what their children have done during a week or during a day. What topics were discussed or activities have been done and what the children learnt from them".</i></p>
Interview 2 Maia	<p><i>"I have to pay attention to the fact that children do not hit one another and do not injure others or get injured. This child needs more care because he is more vulnerable than other kids are".</i></p> <p><i>"It is the teacher's duty to simplify the programme so that all the children could be able to take part in activities, but I think I am not qualified enough for this".</i></p>
Interview 3 Nana	<p><i>"My assistant and I are to be with the child all day long. We have to take care of him, make sure that he participates in learning and playing activities... In order to tackle these problems, we follow an individual plan".</i></p> <p><i>"The teacher should cooperate with parents to get to know such children better.... If the parents of the children without disabilities are unhappy that children with intellectual disabilities are part of the group, then we explain to them that such children also have the right of studying and education with their peers".</i></p>
Interview 4 Lia	<p><i>"I understand that all children are different, but the child with intellectual disabilities who I have in my group, cannot learn and understand what I say.... So, I have to go up to him, show him how to paint, how to hold the scissors and so on...".</i></p>

Theme 3: Inclusive Education Practice

Sub-themes:	Support Provided for Involvement	The Challenges Teachers Face in the Process of Inclusion
Interview 1 Maggie	<p><i>“he always wants a caress and he hugs me all the time”.</i></p> <p><i>“In order to make sure that the children with intellectual disability also take part in the activities and do not feel shut out, I always try to be with them and help them individually... For instance, when we are sitting in a circle, I always sit next to them and manage them easily.”</i></p>	<p><i>“There are many interesting trainings for me, but I am unable to attend them because of the fees”.</i></p>
Interview 2 Maia	<p><i>“He is very shy and if I praise him, and tell him, for instance, “good job! Or what a good boy you are!” He has more motivation to continue an activity like painting, playing with Lego and so on”</i></p>	<p><i>“... it is one thing that I do like and support the inclusion of children with disabilities, but we should also have suitable conditions! What can an assistant and I do with 40 children?”</i></p>
Interview 3 Nana	<p><i>“though he has problems with speech, he can understand almost everything and he is trying to do his best. I never force him to do things I know he does not like or cannot do”</i></p>	<p><i>“A special education teacher assesses the skills and problems of the child with intellectual disabilities and makes an individualised programme, in which I participate. However, it is mostly my assistant and me who have to carry out the programme.”</i></p>
Interview 4 Lia		<p><i>“I always need a person in group who will stay only with this child and take care of him, because in so many children it is very difficult for me to do that”.</i></p> <p><i>“the salary is so low that it is imposible for me to take any additional duties”.</i></p>

