

## How to Cite

Dzamukashvili, S. (2022). The importance of inclusive learning and teaching environment and teacher reflection. *International Journal of Humanities, Literature & Arts*, 5(1), 39-43. <https://doi.org/10.21744/ijhla.v5n1.1940>

# The Importance of Inclusive Learning and Teaching Environment and Teacher Reflection

**Shorena Dzamukashvili**

Associate Professor, Telavi State University named after Gogebashvili, Georgia

Corresponding author email: [sh.dzamukashvili@gmail.com](mailto:sh.dzamukashvili@gmail.com)

**Abstract**---The research aims to identify the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of the preschool teachers of the target group regarding the implementation/development of inclusive education. Structure/methodology /approach-10 teachers participated in this study, who were also involved in the research carried out within the framework of the project "teacher reflection for quality early inclusive education". An early inclusive education environment self-reflection method was used, developed within the framework of the early childhood inclusive education (I) project implemented by the European agency for special needs and inclusive education from 2015 to 2017 ([www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/inclusive-early-childhood-education](http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/inclusive-early-childhood-education)), our adapted version. Research is qualitative. The reflection method included four open questions: This article reflects educators on the "inclusive environment of teaching and learning". Conclusion: the survey participants' responses prove that educators and educators are aware of the desire and need to increase their knowledge about the inclusive environment of learning and teaching, but they find it difficult to reflect on these issues and analyze them based on their practice, which can again be considered as their low competence in this regards. Novelty/value: the study of teacher-educator reflection is not conducted on the example of our practice. Provides quite important, versatile information on a particular topic clearly demonstrates challenges, and also creates prerequisites for future research.

**Keywords**---child, inclusive learning, self-reflection, teacher-educator reflection, teaching environment

## Introduction

According to the convention on the rights of the child, every child has the right to education, taking into account its capabilities. In order for each child to be able to enjoy the services of early and pre-school education institutions, and not feel marginalized, isolated, and frustrated, it is essential to create an inclusive environment. (UN, 1989). Inclusive learning is the result of effective teaching practice, an adapted learning environment, and teaching approaches that ensure that all children are included, engaged, and supported. An inclusive environment that provides fair and equal opportunities creates a happy and healthy future. In this environment, each child has the opportunity to fully and equally engage and participate in early and pre-school education programs: "quality early education equally ensures the development of the maximum potential of each child involved in the educational process within the framework of protecting his / her true interests, ensures equal involvement of each of them taking into account his / her characteristics, needs, by identifying, respecting and providing educational needs based on the social situation". Quality education, in itself, implies the inclusiveness of education (Takano & Tanno, 2009; Smallwood et al., 2011; Hepsiba et al., 2017).

However, recent studies (a study of the quality of preschool education. 2018. A study by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which was conducted in Georgia and is based on an analysis of the quality of preschool education in the following areas: accessibility, staff, curriculum (educational program), monitoring, and management, showed not very good results. "Preschool institutions are facing a significant problem, because a large part of the staff does not have qualifications or have qualifications that are not related to early upbringing and education of children, and 50% of directors do not have education which related to early upbringing and education of children." As for the implementation and development of inclusive education, the report says that "in case of enrollment of children with disabilities in pre-school institutions, they face significant problems in terms of full

inclusion and participation in kindergarten". Knowledge and competences are low in relation to the issues of inclusion of children with disabilities and disadvantage"; The report also highlights the barriers to inclusion of children with disabilities: lack of adapted infrastructure, a large number of children in groups and low competences of teachers (Meijer et al., 2007; Epstein et al., 2020; Thomas, 2016; Nurfatuhayah, 2017).

Studies show that kindergartens do not meet the principles of early inclusive education, which causes children with disabilities to stay outside the educational processes. What are the requirements that nursery schools should meet in terms of early quality inclusive education? In order to answer this question, let's get acquainted with what we have about the education of children with disabilities defined in the legislative and regulatory documents and draw a parallel with reality.

The law on early and pre-school education (2016), inclusive early and pre-school education (Article 23 and Article 17), says that institutions should provide inclusive education to children regardless of their physical, cognitive, sensory, social, emotional, linguistic, ethnic, racial, religious, gender or other characteristics. The rights and obligations of the institution with regard to children and their parents/ legal representatives shall be determined by the law and the institution shall develop an inclusive education strategy in accordance with the standards; at the municipal level, it obliges the institution to provide equally accessible and inclusive pre-school education.

The retrospective vision of teachers on inclusive learning and teaching environment revealed in the framework of the study "reflection of teachers for quality early inclusive education" (iakob gogebashvili Telavi State University scientific research project of the Faculty of Educational Sciences, 2021-22), allowed us to identify the practice, knowledge, and attitudes of the teachers on this issue and make conclusions. The mean used in this study, which aims to improve the degree of inclusiveness, was developed within the framework of the early childhood inclusive education (I) project by the European agency for special needs and inclusive education in 2015-17. ([www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/inclusive-early-childhood-education](http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/inclusive-early-childhood-education)). It is based on the vision of an ecosystem in which the child's experience is seen as a function of proximal processes in the environment. In this sense, professionals and staff significantly influence the child's involvement, learning, and development (Zeichner, 2005; Murray & Male, 2005; Gallagher et al., 2011).

At the same time, peers in the environment, parents, and family are part of the ecosystem around the child. They, as well as the physical environment, influence the involvement, development, and learning of each child. The self-reflection tool focuses on the proximal processes that children experience in the environment, special attention pays to environmental factors that affect the participation of each child. The self-reflection method consisted of questions related to eight topics. In this case, we discuss the results of reflection on one topic, an inclusive environment for learning and teaching. For this purpose, 4 questions were selected:

- 1) How do they use diversity and the individual strengths of children, and resources in learning activities?
- 2) How do children's involvement, learning, and support are noticed and observed?
- 3) Do kindergarten staff have the opportunity for continuous professional development in inclusive education?
- 4) What would you improve in this direction?

The first three questions made the respondents think about the practice in kindergartens (present) and the fourth question - was about the future, and what they would like to change, thus clearly revealing their assessment of the present and their visions of the future in the ways of improvement. This reflection process meant the use of their experience and knowledge in a particular direction (Malazonia et al., 2021; Schön, 2017; Rolfe et al., 2001; Wain, 2017).

10 teachers participated in the research and also they were involved in the narrative research carried out within the framework of this project. As a result of reflection analysis, the survey conducted with kindergarten teachers revealed the practice of respondents towards inclusive learning and teaching environment and their views on specific issues. As a result of reflection analysis, it turned out that the majority of respondents refrained from feedback on the question - how diversity and individual strengths of children are used in learning activities and did not answer this question, while a very small part focused only on the availability of resources and generally spoke that the child's, strengths and interests are taken into

"We try to make resources available for children. They have complete independence with resources. The child always tries to do what he does well and improves more with each subsequent activity."

"I use the individual strengths and interests of the child discovered through observation when planning activities to increase his / her involvement in the group."

In addition, we tried to identify, through reflection research, how the participants of the study notice and observe the involvement, learning, and support of children, the majority of them noted that they observe systematically, but do not make notes, fill out questionnaires/control papers, what means they use (Kolb, 2014; Gibbs, 1988; Bolton, 2010; Johns, 2005; Reid, 2000). Their responses are general and inconsistent. Only a small part of respondents noted that they make records and also create portfolios for children.

"I monitor children's learning and involvement systematically, consistently, and during daily routine activities. At this time, the child's strengths, areas of interest, and skills appear. I observe not only a specific child but also a specific ability of the child, for example, how this or that child is involved in an activity, I observe another, how he/she can solve problems, etc. Sh. I focus on the child's newly acquired skills and already learned ones. What they learn, how they develop, and what the experience has given them."

"I make a daily observation of the child, his involvement with peers. For me, I had records in which direction the child needed development and support. I tried to work on his weaknesses" (respondent's comment).

"Daily observation of the child, his/her individual portfolio and evaluation form of the child" (respondent's comment).

As for the question of whether the kindergarten staff has the possibility of continuous professional development in inclusive education, the minority of respondents answered that their kindergarten staff has the opportunity to do so and non-governmental organizations ("WORLD VISION") care about it. However, the majority noted that they do not have such an opportunity, and if they receive mostly scarce theoretical knowledge, they would like to have the opportunity to develop in this regard, which demonstrates that teachers and educators in inclusive education do not have adequate knowledge.

"We do not have the opportunity for continuous professional development in inclusive education. However, we have little information"

"We do not have opportunities for this" (respondent's answer).

"Inclusive education of personnel is limited only by scarce theoretical knowledge (first of all, I think of myself). I would like to pay more attention to this issue" (respondent's answer).

"Any teacher-educator will be happy if we are given the opportunity of professional growth and development" (respondent's answer).

According to the respondents' answers, half of the survey participants did not answer the question, which means that they do not see their role and participation in the development of their practice in this regard, or they will do everything in the best way. However, we cannot accept this last opinion, because the results of the majority survey are a clear example of their incompetence in the field of inclusive education (Han & Lee, 2022; Conceição & Heitor, 2002; Gregg et al., 2012). Some respondents mainly note the increase of knowledge in the field of inclusive education and consider it important to have specialists in the garden. Also, they considered it necessary and wished to have a resource room and educational resources in the garden.

"Let us have the opportunity to prepare in this direction and if necessary get the help of the multidisciplinary team." (Respondent's answer)

"I would like to know more about inclusive teaching." (Respondent's answer).

"It would be desirable to have more employees, Methodists, special teachers, psychologists involved with us." (Respondent's answer)

"A special room for a child with special needs and toys for children to calm and entertain the child during a tantrum." (respondent's response) " (Respondent's answer).

The survey participants' responses prove that teachers and educators are aware of the desire and need to increase their knowledge about the inclusive environment of learning and teaching, however, they find it difficult to reflect on these issues and analyze them based on their own practice, which can again be considered as their low competence in this regard. The teachers' reflection on inclusive learning and teaching environment has clearly demonstrated the challenges and achievements in the preschool education system.

To conclude, we can say that

- Working with a child requires specific knowledge and a trained educator is necessary in order to be able to provide an appropriate environment for teaching and development of children;
- Systematic retraining and professional development of teachers is necessary; practice-based training of teachers;
- Teaching self-reflection and creating a development plan based on them;
- Presence of a specialist in a preschool institution and coordination of educators with them.

## References

- Bolton, G. (2010). *Reflective practice: Writing and professional development*. Sage publications.
- Conceição, P., & Heitor, M. V. (2002). Knowledge interaction towards inclusive learning: Promoting systems of innovation and competence building. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 69(7), 641-651. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0040-1625\(02\)00286-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0040-1625(02)00286-X)
- Epstein, I., Stephens, L., Severino, S. M., Khanlou, N., Mack, T., Barker, D., & Dadashi, N. (2020). "Ask me what I need": A call for shifting responsibility upwards and creating inclusive learning environments in clinical placement. *Nurse education today*, 92, 104505. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2020.104505>
- Gallagher, T., Griffin, S., Parker, D. C., Kitchen, J., & Figg, C. (2011). Establishing and sustaining teacher educator professional development in a self-study community of practice: Pre-tenure teacher educators developing professionally. *Teaching and teacher education*, 27(5), 880-890. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.02.003>
- Gibbs, G. (1988). Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods. *Further Education Unit*.
- Gregg, N., Chang, Y., & Todd, R. (2012). Social media, avatars, and virtual worlds: re-imagine an inclusive learning environment for adolescents and adults with literacy barriers. *Procedia Computer Science*, 14, 336-342. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2012.10.038>
- Han, S., & Lee, M. K. (2022). FAQ chatbot and inclusive learning in massive open online courses. *Computers & Education*, 179, 104395. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2021.104395>
- Hepsiba, N., Burugapudi, E., & Rao, Y. P. (2017). Teacher education. *International Research Journal of Engineering, IT & Scientific Research*, 3(5), 12-18. Retrieved from <https://sloap.org/journals/index.php/irjeis/article/view/570>
- Johns\*, C. (2005). Balancing the winds. *Reflective practice*, 6(1), 67-84.
- Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. FT press.
- Malazonia, D., Macharashvili, T., Maglakelidze, S., & Chiabrishvili, N. (2021). Developing students' intercultural values and attitudes through history education in monocultural school environments (Georgian-language school case study). *Intercultural Education*, 32(5), 508-524.
- Meijer, C., Soriano, V., & Watkins, A. (2007). Inclusive education across Europe: Reflections upon 10 years of work from the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. *Childhood Education*, 83(6), 361-365.
- Murray, J., & Male, T. (2005). Becoming a teacher educator: Evidence from the field. *Teaching and teacher education*, 21(2), 125-142. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2004.12.006>
- Nurfatuhayah, -. (2017). Learning materials development on descriptive texts based on local culture as learning at junior high school. *International Research Journal of Engineering, IT & Scientific Research*, 3(6), 39-55. Retrieved from <https://sloap.org/journals/index.php/irjeis/article/view/9>
- Reid, B. (2000). The role of the mentor to aid reflective practice. *Reflective Practice in Nursing: The Growth of the Professional Practitioner. Second edition*. Oxford, Blackwell Science.
- Rolfe, G., Freshwater, D., & Jasper, M. (2001). Critical reflection for nursing and the helping professions a user's guide.
- Schön, D. A. (2017). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Routledge.
- Smallwood, J., Schooler, J. W., Turk, D. J., Cunningham, S. J., Burns, P., & Macrae, C. N. (2011). Self-reflection and the temporal focus of the wandering mind. *Consciousness and cognition*, 20(4), 1120-1126. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2010.12.017>
- Takano, K., & Tanno, Y. (2009). Self-rumination, self-reflection, and depression: Self-rumination counteracts the adaptive effect of self-reflection. *Behaviour research and therapy*, 47(3), 260-264. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2008.12.008>
- Thomas, L. (2016). Developing inclusive learning to improve the engagement, belonging, retention, and success of students from diverse groups. In *Widening higher education participation* (pp. 135-159). Chandos Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-100213-1.00009-3>

Wain, A. (2017). Learning through reflection. *British Journal of Midwifery*, 25(10), 662-666.

Zeichner, K. (2005). Becoming a teacher educator: A personal perspective. *Teaching and teacher education*, 21(2), 117-124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2004.12.001>