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Parents' perspectives about inclusive education for their children with autism

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ABSTRACT

PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR THEIR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

Rahma Abbasi, M.S. Ed.
Department of Special and Early Education
Northern Illinois University, 2017
Jeff Chan, Director

This study explored parents' perspectives about inclusive education for their children with autism in the state of Illinois, USA. A qualitative ethnographic research design was used to analyze data from Skype interviews with five parents of children with autism (Pre-K through fifth grade). Parents were recruited using a convenience sampling technique, and subjective data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Participants' responses were analyzed through developing descriptive and interpretative emerging themes and their given codes. Seven emerging themes arose from the parent interviews. These themes revealed that although parents believe that inclusive education is an effective and beneficial program for their autistic children, these children require additional resources from general education teachers and school districts to help them cope with their educational needs and behavioral issues. However, some parents expressed empathy for general education teachers in inclusive classrooms that outweighed other concerns they may have had and allowed them to place their children in these environments for their benefit. This study's findings will help improve services for children with autism and resolve parental concerns about placing their children in inclusive education.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

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PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR
THEIR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

BY

RAHMA ABBASI
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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Thesis Director:
Jeff Chan

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DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to my family, particularly my parents, my husband, and my brothers, for nurturing me with affection, love, and their higher expectations toward me for achieving success in my life. It would have been impossible for me to travel abroad alone without their endless encouragement, enormous efforts, and countless sacrifices they made for me. I also dedicate this thesis to my late father-in-law, who assisted me at every step and supported me in achieving my goals. I wish he could be with us to see my great academic achievement and feel proud of me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem and Background

Children have unique characteristics and benefit from supportive learning environments designed to fulfill their needs. This is especially true for children with disabilities who need special services to help them access the general education (GE) curriculum and become productive members of society (Zhu & Wang, 2010). According to Abosi and Koay (2008), “The ultimate aim of education of children with disabilities is to make them live independent lives in any given community” (p. 2). To facilitate this outcome, children with disabilities are often placed in inclusive classrooms designed to meet the needs of all children—those with and without disabilities (Abosi & Koay, 2008). Inclusive education is intended to provide a platform for meeting the needs of all students; however, research has documented that GE teachers may not have been trained enough to meet the required needs of children with autism (Jindal-Snape, Douglas, Topping, Kerr, & Smith, 2005).

Parents of children with autism are often hesitant to place their children in inclusive settings due to a lack of general education teachers’ training (Jindal-Snape et al., 2005). Along the same lines, Rafferty, Boettcher, and Griffin (2001) stated that “parents have concerns about the potential impact of integration on their children” (p. 268). For instance, parents may believe

that teachers do not have enough training to handle behavioral issues that arise in their children with autism (Estrada & Deris, 2014).

The challenge of convincing parents to utilize inclusive education has been documented in the United States (Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, Solomon, & Sirota, 2001) and developing countries such as Pakistan (Haider, 2008), Zimbabwe (Mapuranga, Dumba, & Musodza, 2015), and Guyana (Ajodhia-Andrews & Frankel, 2010). Understandably, parental concern regarding GE teacher preparation has been shown to affect parents' willingness to place their children in inclusive classrooms (Ryndak, Storch, & Hoppey, 2008).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding about the perspectives of parents of children with autism regarding inclusive education. I was particularly interested in how parents of autistic children feel about the quality of GE (general education) teachers' training with special-needs children and the factors that affect parents' decisions when placing their autistic child in an inclusive classroom.

Research Questions

The following research questions were investigated:

1. What feelings do parents of children with autism have regarding the quality of teachers' training in inclusive settings?
2. What factors affect parents' decisions for placing their children in an inclusive classroom setting?

Significance of the Study

This study extends earlier studies discussed in the literature review and contributes to developing a deeper understanding of individual parental perspectives regarding inclusive placements for their children. Previous literature did not address parental empathy for GE teachers or the safety concerns parents had about the classrooms themselves. This study uncovered these contributing factors that help parents make informed placement decisions.

The findings of this study can be used to make recommendations for improving teachers' professional growth. This study can provide effective recommendations for training teachers to deal with issues of diverse learners (especially children with autism) in inclusive classrooms. Further, this study will help to facilitate parents' decisions to place their children with autism in inclusive settings through considering the positive impacts of inclusive education on autistic children. Therefore, when parents place their children with autism in inclusive settings, it will help maximize their children's learning.

Definition of Key Terms

To develop a deeper understanding of the study, it is necessary to know some important terminology frequently used in this study, i.e., autism spectrum disorder (ASD), inclusive education, feelings of parents toward inclusive education, and factors affecting parents' placement decisions for their children with autism in inclusive settings.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Lauritsen (2013) provided a brief description of ASD based on the definition provided in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth edition (DSM-V), and the

International Classification of Diseases, tenth edition (ICD-10), in her study: “ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder with onset early in life” (p. 38). Clinicians are required to diagnose a child as having ASD if four specific (A, B, C, and D) criteria are met, mentioned in the DSM-V and ICD-10 (see Table 1). The significant symptoms of ASD that may be observed in three major areas include social communication, restricted behavioral issues or fixation, and repetitive behaviors. If the above-mentioned symptoms are observed in a child before the age of three, the child should be referred for screening and a later diagnostic assessment that ultimately helps identify specific services he or she needs.

Factors of Influence

In this study, *factors* can be defined as the aspects that influence parents to make decisions for their children with autism. This definition was created for this study but was influenced by previous studies. These factors often include the overall performance of GE teachers and other paraprofessionals, classroom size, parent-teacher communication, schedule time for additional services, student development resources, and government funding. For instance, parents are eager to seek better services for their autistic children in school settings, such as having experienced and trained teachers to handle behavioral issues and having enough appropriate learning resources. Furthermore, their level of satisfaction with the overall GE teachers’ performance to work with their autistic children is also another important factor parents often consider. The majority of parents also strive to have daily communication with GE teachers to know whether their children are increasing social communication and/or decreasing behavioral issues. This communication between parents and teachers ultimately can result in the positive development of their children with autism (Falkmer et al., 2015).

Table 1

Autism Spectrum Disorder Criteria

- A. Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across contexts, not accounted for by general developmental delays, and manifest by all three of the following:
1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity; ranging from abnormal social approach and failure of normal back and forth conversation through reduced sharing of interests, emotions, and affect and response to total lack of initiation of social interaction
 2. Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction; ranging from poorly integrated-verbal and nonverbal communication, through abnormalities in eye contact and body-language, or deficits in understanding and use of nonverbal communication, to total lack of facial expression or gestures
 3. Deficits in developing and maintaining relationships, appropriate to developmental level (beyond those with caregivers); ranging from difficulties adjusting behavior to suit different social contexts through difficulties in sharing imaginative play and in making friends to an apparent absence of interest in people
- B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities as manifested by at least two of the following:
1. Stereotyped or repetitive speech, motor movements, or use of objects; (such as simple motor stereotypies, echolalia, repetitive use of objects, or idiosyncratic phrases)
 2. Excessive adherence to routines, ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior, or excessive resistance to change; (such as motoric rituals, insistence on same route or food, repetitive questioning or extreme distress at small changes)
 3. Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus; (such as strong attachment to or preoccupation with unusual objects, excessively circumscribed or perseverative interests)
 4. Hyper or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment; (such as apparent indifference to pain/heat/ cold, adverse response to specific sounds or textures, excessive smelling or touching of objects, fascination with lights or spinning objects)
- C. Symptoms must be present in early childhood (but may not become fully manifest until social demands exceed limited capacities).
- D. Symptoms together limit and impair everyday functioning.
-

(Lauritsen, 2013, p. 38)

Feelings

For this study, *feelings* are defined as the beliefs that parents hold and share with others regarding their children's educational placements. These beliefs are tied to a need to share their opinions or perceptions regarding their children's social, emotional, and academic growth and comfort zone. Parents of children with autism often seek teachers and other school personnel who can be more involved and devoted to helping their children develop social, emotional, behavioral, and academic skills (Falkmer, Anderson, Joosten, & Falkmer, 2015).

Inclusive Education

The term *inclusive education* is derived from the previous concept of integration. In integrated schools, students with disabilities are placed with their typical peers to receive education (Abosi & Koay, 2008). Now the term has changed to *inclusion*, which emphasizes both the academic as well as social skills development of children with diverse learning needs within GE classrooms. As defined by Loreman, Earle, Sharma, and Forlin (2007), "inclusion is a philosophy based on a notion of social justice that advocates equal access to all educational opportunities for all students regardless of the presence of difference" (p. 150). Johnson et al. (2014) offer an empirical definition of the term: "The implementation of the principle of inclusive education depends primarily upon a fundamental change of the mainstream school system; inclusive education advocates that children with special needs have to be educated alongside their normal peers in the regular classrooms" (p. 143). Inclusive classrooms are varied in their designs and depend on the available resources within school districts. However, a typical inclusive classroom has 25 to 30 neurotypical students along with five to six of their peers who have ASD or other disabilities. Often, children with ASD are pulled out for specific passages of

time to receive additional services according to their needs to improve their overall academic and other developmental skills.

The above definitions of both factors of influence and feelings are frequently combined to establish how parents make decisions to place their children with autism in inclusive classrooms.

Chapter Summary

Parents are hesitant to place their children in inclusive settings due to a lack of GE teachers' preparation in those inclusive classrooms. Therefore, in this study I attempt to identify parents' perceptions regarding GE teachers' preparation and related challenges to recommend improvements in their inclusive classrooms that will ultimately help parents to develop more positive feelings towards inclusive education.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides background information pertaining to benefits of inclusive education, different perspectives of GE teachers, pre-service teachers, school personnel, and parents to identify how they perceive inclusive education, what factors and/or characteristics of inclusive education benefit children with autism, and what concerns parents and GE teachers have in such classrooms. This chapter also helps the reader understand the parents', teachers', and other school personnel's perspectives regarding inclusive education through an examination of studies from the United States and other countries, with particular focus on studies from Pakistan.

Benefits of Inclusive Education

McLaren (2013) observed that children with autism learn different skills, such as social and emotional development skills, more rapidly when they engage with typically performing peers. McLaren's study investigated the views of a parent of a 15-year-old adolescent with high and complex needs due to ASD. In this study, the researcher explored the parent's perspective toward issues in inclusive education for their child with ASD. Findings indicated that it was critical to meet the needs of students through an appropriate intervention plan, its implementation, and availability of resources in an inclusive classroom. Furthermore, these children learn to control their aggression and increase their prosocial behaviors, such as sharing

and cooperating, in inclusive settings with their typical peers (Ogelman & Secer, 2012). Making GE classrooms more inclusive not only increases the potential skills of children with autism, it also benefits typical peers by helping them develop a sense of acceptance toward their diverse peers (Rafferty et al., 2001). Social acceptance through inclusion can enhance the interaction of typical students with their peers who have special needs (Ochs et al., 2001).

General Education Teacher Perspective

It is important to elaborate on the GE teachers' perspectives regarding inclusive education to date. In an empirical study conducted by Johnson et al. (2014) on GE teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education, 90% of the teachers interviewed perceived inclusive education as unsuccessful. Most felt the greatest challenge was due to lack of teachers' preparation and availability of resources for teaching in inclusive settings. A few of the GE teachers believed that placing children with special needs in inclusive classrooms requires additional demands that ultimately compromise the academic success of typical children (Tam, Seevers, Gardener, & Heng, 2006). According to Moores-Abdool (2010), "Many general education teachers lament that they do not have enough training to support students with disabilities in the general education classrooms" (p. 162). While considering the GE teachers' perspectives, it can be concluded that GE teachers are also eager to seek additional training to help them work with children with autism in their inclusive classrooms.

Parent Perspective

Parents of children with disabilities have reported a variety of different feelings or perceptions regarding the academic achievement and related services provided to their children (Coogle, Guerette, & Hanlin, 2013). Some parents believe that the current trend of inclusive education has more advantages as compared to disadvantages (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012). However, others perceived that inclusive education does not benefit their children because it does not provide a welcoming environment for their children (Sweden, 2009). In addition, the findings of an empirical study conducted by Rafferty et al. (2001) indicated that parents are concerned that their children with disabilities may not receive sufficient benefits of inclusive settings due to less qualified teachers who might not be trained enough to assist their children. For instance, children with autism often exhibit speech problems and/or behavioral outbursts, but unfortunately, teachers in inclusive classrooms often do not have the skills to deal with these issues due to a lack of training in how to provide alternative instructional materials (Lampert, Graves & Ward, 2012). Another concern that parents often discussed is the large class sizes of GE classrooms, in which teachers are required to have all students on the same page at the same time, which results in difficulties balancing learning material for all students equally (Tam et al., 2006).

Studies from the United States

Leyser and Kirk (2004) conducted a study to examine parents' perceptions of inclusive education for their children who had a variety of disabilities, including ASD. There were 437 parent participants from a midwestern state in the United States, including 15 parents of children

with autism. The parents used the Opinions Related to Mainstreaming (ORM) Scale developed by Antonak and Larrivee to provide their responses to issues related to “social isolation, negative attitudes, the quality of instruction, teacher training and skills, and support from teachers and from other parents” (Leyser & Kirk, 2004, p. 271). Results from this study indicated a plethora of views/perceptions from the parents based on their personal and professional experiences. The parents discussed several benefits of inclusive education, including increased socialization skills and positive responses toward placements in mainstream classrooms with well-prepared teachers. On the other hand, parents shared concerns about big class sizes that prevented GE teachers from addressing individual students’ needs. Parents expressed their concern that sometimes they did not have adequate communication with teachers to ask about their children’s progress. Leyser and Kirk identified parents’ educational background as another factor that influences their decisions and their level of satisfaction regarding placement of their children in inclusive settings. Parents with a high school education had different opinions from parents with a college education, possibly due to discrepancies between parents’ perception of what inclusive education should be and the practical application as it exists in most classrooms. High-school-educated parents might not have as much information as college-educated parents have; therefore, high-school-educated parents were more supportive of inclusive education without knowing the actual implementation. In contrast, college-educated parents also supported inclusive education but were concerned and more vocal about the day-to-day activities within those settings.

Although the above study discussed parents’ perceptions in detail, knowing teachers’ perspectives is equally important and were investigated in the following studies. A study was

conducted by Robertson, Chamberlain, and Kasari (2003) to identify the relationship between GE teachers and students with autism and how their behaviors could affect their relationships in inclusive classrooms. The participant pool was based on second- and third-grade students with autism. Overall results indicate that positive relationships between teachers and children with autism depend on the severity of problematic behaviors and the amount of time children with autism spend in those inclusive classrooms. When the amount of time spent in inclusive classrooms increases, their development of socialization skills and social acceptance within those classrooms increases as well.

Park, Chitiyo, and Choi (2010) examined pre-service teachers' attitudes towards children with autism in the USA. In this study, participants were 131 pre-service teachers (i.e., special education, GE, early childhood, and physical education) at a midwestern university in the United States. The researchers gave the participants the Autism Attitude Scale for Teachers (AAST) "to measure the attitude of school teachers towards children with Autism" (p. 108). Score analysis of the participants revealed that special education major pre-service teachers demonstrated more positive attitudes than other non-special education/pre-service teachers. Further analysis of the results suggested that when teachers have more exposure to children with autism, their attitudes are more welcoming toward those children. This is because when they have exposure to children with autism, they develop awareness of how to manage challenging behaviors and foster socialization skills that ultimately decrease students' challenging behaviors in inclusive classrooms. Inclusive education helps to develop a communication bridge between children with autism and their typically developing peers. It is a two-fold beneficial program for both groups.

A study by Bauminger et al. (2008) also supports the above findings. In this study, researchers identified similar and different characteristics of friendship among high-functioning children with autism (HFASD) and their typically developing peers. The sample size of the study comprised 44 children with HFASD from Israel and the United States and 38 typically developing children. The researchers used a multidimensional assessment tool to determine the interaction of participants with their close friends in two different conditions: first was construction of an object and second was drawing the object. After completing their observations, the researchers sought to identify the children's perceptions of the quality of their friendships. Last, researchers also interviewed mothers of the participants to obtain data about the interactions. The overall findings of this study suggested that students learn socialization skills if they are provided with the opportunities to have their typically developing peers in the same environment. The study's findings also revealed that students with autism also have an ability to perceive relationships and develop interpersonal skills. However, they require help from teachers to arrange learning environments that are conducive to this type of social and interpersonal development.

Embse, Brown, and Fortain (2011) examined psychological, educational, and electronic databases of the previous 10 years (2000-2010) to identify pertinent findings obtained from seven empirical research studies. Before selecting these studies, the researchers initially began a literature review of 103 different studies and selected the seven most significant studies to identify different components of effective interventions, the feasibility of implementation, and the future research directions to facilitate inclusion and reduce problem behaviors. The researchers found that although teachers desired to make their inclusive classrooms more

beneficial in nature for children with autism, sometimes those children's excessive behavioral issues created difficulties in effectively educating all children in those classrooms. GE teachers are required to have additional training while working with children with multiple behavioral issues; however, unfortunately this is not always the case. The authors concluded, "When teaching students with ASD, it is important to select an effective intervention designed to reduce problem behavior and promote inclusion in an effort to best serve this unique student population" (p. 28).

The findings from the United States show that both parents and teachers perceive inclusive education as beneficial if appropriate instructional environments, resources, teacher training, and opportunities for socialization with typically developing peers are in place. Following this review of studies from the United States, it is also important to investigate literature from other countries to understand international perspectives.

Studies from Other Countries

Because this study will inform the researcher's future work as an educator in Pakistan, it is important to know parents' perceptions about inclusive education based on research studies from countries besides the United States. In this section I will present studies from Zimbabwe, Guyana, Israel, and England, as well as the meta-analysis of studies from Europe, Australia, and Hong Kong that examined parents' and teachers' perspectives of inclusive education.

A qualitative case study was conducted by Mapuranga et al. (2015) to examine the impact of inclusive education on the rights of children with disabilities in the different schools of Chegutu, Zimbabwe. There were 30 participants: ten teachers, ten parents, and ten children from

five different secondary schools. Overall findings of this study revealed that inclusive education programs know the rights of children with disabilities, but parents had some concerns regarding those settings. They believe that the structure in these settings are not helpful to provide for the individual needs of children with disabilities. Furthermore, parents also expressed bullying by typically developing peers as one of the major issues in such school settings. Moreover, a lack of teacher preparation and resources provided by the Zimbabwe government was also found as significant difficulties for children with disabilities in those inclusive education settings. This study also highlighted the need for modifying attitudes of typically developing peers toward their peers with disabilities and considering them as respectable members of society.

Another study from Guyana, by Ajodhia-Andrew & Frankel (2010), presented a similar set of information regarding attitudes and calls for changes in inclusive classrooms in Guyana. In their study, they examined the practices of inclusive education for children from birth to eight years old. The participant pool of this study was 22 policy makers, teachers, and parents of children with special needs. The four emerging themes that arose from the obtained data include attitudes and perceptions toward those with special needs, change agents, resources, and experiences with children with special needs. The overall findings of this study reveal that the central theme, i.e., attitudes and perceptions toward those with special needs and other associated themes and/or conditions, are interrelated with each other and this interrelation results in successful inclusion for children with special needs. When these thematic categories work collaboratively toward inclusion, it results in successful outcomes for children with special needs. According the researchers, “The attitudes influence the state of the conditions and the conditions help to improve the attitudes” (p. 141). This statement also reveals that the

interrelationship among teachers', parents', and policy makers' attitudes ultimately helps children with special needs in academic growth as well as promoting successful inclusive education for them.

A study from Israel (Bauminger, 2002) examined the effectiveness of a behavioral intervention program for children with autism to increase their socialization skills. The participant pool of this study was 15 high-functioning children with autism ages of 8 to 17. Two categories of data were collected that observed "change[s] in children's social and emotional understanding, and change[s] in children's observed social interactions and overall social skills" (p. 290). Bauminger gathered pre-intervention and post-intervention data to evaluate progress through intervention training. That training consisted of peer interactions scheduled and observed multiple times per week with a typical peer over the course of seven months. The overall findings of the study revealed that both categories of collected data showed significant improvements in their overall performance in terms of increasing social and emotional understanding and social interaction skills. While this study did not involve an inclusive education environment, it did demonstrate the positive effects of interactions between children with and without autism.

Waddington and Reed (2006) conducted a study to identify professionals' and parents' perceptions regarding inclusive education for children with autism. They used a random sampling method to identify participants from three local educational authorities (LEA) in the southeast of England. The selected participants were local authority workers and parents of children with autism. The 48 participants were divided into eight groups: four groups made up of parents of children with autism and four other groups made up of local authority workers. A

content analysis obtained from the interviews identified both LEA workers' and parents' perceptions. Results pertaining to factors were divided into three major groups: (a) school factors, such as school commitment; (b) LEA factors, such as funding (both [a] and [b] must be accomplished for successful inclusion of children with autism in mainstream classrooms); (c) a child factor, such as behavioral issues, identified as a significant reason to exclude children from inclusive classrooms. Parents' and LEA's decisions to place children with autism were based on all three factors, and they mutually agreed that there is a need for school personnel as well as parents to get involved together to make inclusive education a successful academic outcome for their children with autism.

A meta-analysis of studies from Europe, Australia and Hong Kong by Falkmer et al. (2015) also supports this argument that active participation of parents and teachers increases the success of inclusive education for children with autism. Falkmer and her colleagues reviewed 28 different articles to understand parents' perceptions regarding placement of their children with autism in inclusive classrooms. In the pertinent findings from all previous research studies, they found that parents identify teachers in inclusive classrooms as a *dynamic* person who could help their children with autism in understanding their academic, social and emotional, and other individual needs and work on them accordingly. The researchers also found that government funding and legislative policies made inclusive environments more welcoming for parents of children with autism. Furthermore, school personnel factors highlighted development of socialization skills, prevention from bullying, and support from the school and/or staff members to make inclusive education as beneficial as possible.

Studies from other countries were consistent with the studies from the United States, as the majority of researchers came to the same conclusion that inclusive education can be beneficial for children with autism. For the purpose of this study, it is also important to understand the research on this topic from Pakistan.

Studies from Pakistan

The pertinent findings from previous Pakistani studies revealed that GE teachers have limited training to integrate children with disabilities in regular classrooms. A pilot study by Tabassum, Kiyani, Chaudhry, and Kiyani (2014) was conducted to determine the attitudes of key stakeholders, teachers, head teachers, and managers of inclusive education in Pakistan. Results indicated that although teachers and head teachers were aware of inclusive education, training of educators to integrate all students—both with and without disabilities—in a similar classroom setting is in its initial stages. Integrating all students together can only be possible if teachers are trained enough to teach all students about their students' abilities and required educational needs, which is parallel to the findings from other countries.

In another study conducted by Sharma, Forlin, Deppeler, and Guang-xue (2013), the researchers claimed that there are several Asian Pacific countries, including Pakistan, that are endorsed in the United Nations agreement for the rights of people with disabilities that were also determined eligible and/or qualified to be in crucial need of providing integrated settings for all children. To obtain data for this study, the authors reviewed studies conducted in the last five years in 13 Asian Pacific countries. Sharma et al.'s study was guided by two specific research questions. The first research question pertained to issues, challenges, and proposals that were

associated with inclusive education in those countries. The second research question was related to progress of each Asian Pacific country toward obtaining Millennium Development Goals, in which they focused on overall responses of teacher education toward those objectives. The pertinent findings of this study revealed a significant lack of well-written policies and required resources in some countries due to extreme poverty and because of culturally based exclusions. Furthermore, a lack of parental involvement in the educational process of their children, especially children with special needs, was identified as a challenge to inclusive education. The researchers also found that an understanding of the concept of inclusive education is also lacking in the Asian Pacific countries, including Pakistan. Thus, in such situations teachers struggle to support children with disabilities in their classrooms.

Haider (2008) investigated the attitudes of Pakistani teachers toward inclusive education for children with special needs. Her participants included 58 general education teachers and 50 special education teachers. According to Haider's statistical analysis, the majority of the participants (70.1%) believed that teachers have limited training to teach children in inclusive classrooms and that there is a significant need for training teachers to teach in integrated classrooms where all students with and without disabilities receive education. The researcher also found that even though GE teachers in those classrooms do not believe that they are well prepared, they have welcoming attitudes toward the inclusion of children with disabilities.

My review of the available literature from Pakistan on inclusive education revealed that there is a need to expand this field of research because parents and teachers have limited resources to identify best practices and, within those practices, to broaden their perspectives

regarding inclusive education. Additionally, because there are only a few inclusive classrooms in Pakistan, researchers have limited options to conduct further studies.

Chapter Summary

Parents show their willingness to place their children in inclusive settings because of the potential benefits of inclusive education. However, the lack of teacher training sometimes creates a barrier to make this happen globally. Many parents believe that GE teachers need training to decrease the behavioral issues that arise in their children with autism. Some of the teachers also believe that training could help them to ensure the benefits of inclusive education for students with autism. The significant gap that this researcher found upon reviewing the literature is that limited research has been conducted on how the lack of teacher training could minimize the learning environment for children with autism from the parents' perspectives.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Research Design and Questions

According to Creswell (2015), ethnography is referred to as “writing about groups of people” (p. 465). Ethnography often involves investigating how different perspectives and/or beliefs of different individuals impact the opinions of people within that community. With reference to this definition given by Creswell, it is rational to say that because I was eager to identify how different parents of children with autism individually perceive inclusive education for their children, I employed a qualitative ethnographic research design for this study because this design involves reflexive inquiry regarding beliefs, behaviors, and perceptions (Creswell, 2015). Therefore, an ethnographic research design was used to identify parental beliefs regarding inclusive education that ultimately facilitated the purpose of the study.

The following research questions were investigated.

1. What feelings do parents of children with autism have regarding the quality of teachers’ training in inclusive settings?
2. What factors affect parents’ decisions for placing their children in an inclusive classroom setting?

Information on Participants

Identification Process

The intended sampling method for this study was purposive convenience sampling selected by considering the potential difficulty to locate participants (Creswell, 2015).

Participants were recruited from communities local to Northern Illinois University where the study was being conducted. My mentor provided contact information for several of the parents, who subsequently provided further contacts to establish the research population. The located participants identified further parents. Once the parents were identified, I contacted them through phone calls and emails and asked for permission to have a Skype call or in-person meeting to explain the study (see Appendix A). If identified parents were willing to participate in the study, they were provided with a written informed consent to be read and signed to confirm their participation in the study (see Appendix B).

Details of Participants

The participant pool of this study consisted of five mothers of children with autism. All children currently attend inclusive classrooms with support from additional service providers. Participants were parents of preschoolers through fifth graders. The reason for choosing parents with children in multiple grade levels was to gain insight into parents' perspectives regarding teachers' training in inclusive settings for placement of their children in different grades. The following paragraphs provide specific demographic information about each participant.

Barbara, a Caucasian woman, is a housewife. She has been staying at home for almost eight years. She attended two years of college and used to design kitchens. She is a mother of

two sons: a sixteen-year-old son and an eight-year-old son who was adopted when he was a baby. The younger boy has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), obsessive compulsive disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), and speech disorder. He is in second grade and placed in an inclusive classroom.

Cathy, a Caucasian woman, is a student at a local university. She is a single parent and lives in an urban environment. She has a nine-year-old boy with ASD. He is in the fourth grade and placed in an inclusive classroom.

Diana, a Caucasian woman, is an education professor. She teaches at a local university where her area of research is autism treatment for infants and toddlers. She has two children: a five-year-old girl with ASD with moderate severity and a six-year old boy with a mild severity, or what professionals used to call high-functioning autism. Neither of her children has cognitive impairments. Her daughter is in a self-contained classroom but goes to the regular kindergarten classroom for a few special activities like art class or music. Her son is placed in a regular first-grade class.

Lisa, a Caucasian woman, is a nursing student. She is a mother of two sons, a six-year-old (Joseph) who has autism spectrum disorder and a three-year-old who is typically developing. Joseph is in a special education program; however, he spends part of his day in a special education room and part of his day in a general education classroom. He was diagnosed with ASD at the age of three.

Sarah, an Asian woman, is a housewife. She earned a bachelor's degree in business administration. She has four daughters, the oldest of whom has spastic quadriplegia cerebral

palsy, ADHD, and ASD. She is eight years old, and is currently studying in a third-grade regular classroom.

Data Collection Method

Participants were asked to select either of the given two choices: either face-to-face interview or Skype call interview. All participants agreed to participate via Skype call interviews due to the distance between the participants and me. Therefore, I conducted Skype call interviews with all participants. Once they all agreed upon Skype call interviews, I asked them to choose a feasible time and date for their interviews. Each interview lasted 40-50 minutes for each participant. To better understand parents' perceptions regarding inclusive education, they were asked the following seven open-ended and indirect questions:

1. What is your personal definition of "inclusive education settings"?
2. What are your overall opinions and perceptions regarding inclusive education for students with autism?
3. Do you feel comfortable placing your child in inclusive settings? If yes, why? If not, why not?
4. What are some of the factors that influenced your decision to place your child in an inclusive setting?
5. What are your experiences with teachers in inclusive settings? Are you satisfied? What are some of your concerns?
6. What types of trainings do you think that teachers should have regarding appropriate education of children with autism, including intervention for challenging behavior?

7. In your opinion, what are some recommendations for promoting best practices for inclusive education for children with autism, including intervention for challenging behavior?

Interview questions 2 and 3 served to gather initial information that pertained to Research Question One regarding the feelings of parents towards inclusive education, while interview questions 4 to 7 served to gather initial information that pertained to Research Question Two regarding factors affecting their decision to place their children in inclusive settings. The interview questions were designed based on the understanding that parents may have diverse perspectives. They were written with the intent to be used in future studies in Pakistan.

Each participant was individually interviewed to help me gather detailed information. The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim to analyze the data. I also took additional notes to clarify the information for the discussion section of the study. I obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Northern Illinois University (NIU) prior to conducting interviews with the parents.

Data Coding and Analysis

Transcription Process

After completing each interview, I listened to the audiotapes and also looked at my field notes to transcribe the data. Transcripts of the participants' responses were given to them so they could review their statements (Creswell, 2015). This helped me check the statements' accuracy. I created five separate electronic files to store the data obtained from each participant's interview.

An inductive approach was used to analyze the data. According to Creswell (2015), an inductive approach theory is formulated based on the participants' responses. This approach is used to generate a new theory that emerges from the obtained data. Therefore, because the researcher desired to explore parents' perspectives toward inclusive education and to investigate their personal perceptions to establish her theory, the researcher used an inductive approach to facilitate this study based on her participants' responses.

The researcher completed manual analysis of audiotaped interviews by highlighting the participants' responses using different-colored markers on MS Word while reading the soft copies of the interview transcripts. I thoroughly read the interview transcripts many times to find, organize, and differentiate information from the transcripts. Next, separate electronic files were created and participants' responses pertaining to feelings were coded into one file and responses pertaining to factors were coded into another file.

After creating two separate files, I started to identify relevant information pertaining to feelings and highlighted the sections with specific phrases to represent different subcodes. A similar procedure was used to identify information pertaining to factors. After completion of the first interview, I created a coding manual and listed all specific phrases used to identify highlighted information from the interview pertaining to feelings and factors. A similar procedure was repeated for all interview transcripts to extend the coding manual and to identify agreement among responses presented across participants' interviews.

Excerpt Analysis Process

After listing all specific phrases in a coding manual, I developed a separate electronic file to transfer all obtained excerpts from the interview transcripts into one separate file for further analysis. There were 48 specific excerpts pertaining to interview questions 2-7 regarding parents' feelings and factors identified from the transcripts. Next, joint review of the excerpts obtained from the interview transcripts was completed with one of the committee members to identify main ideas and key terms from those excerpts. Afterwards, the organization of main ideas and excerpts into thematic categories was done independently at first and later with the committee member and then condensed into one separate electronic file to identify thematic categories. Thematic categories were given appropriate titles by both myself and a committee member. After I developed a file of thematic categories, she created a conceptual map to show the relationship between them. Last, I set up a detailed database that included the excerpt number, parent contributor, and main ideas and/or key terms for all 48 excerpts. These themes are explained in Chapter 4. The databases supporting each thematic category are included in Appendix C.

The overall coding process helped me identify patterns in each participant's responses and across participants' responses. Further, this coding process also helped me increase confidence in the accuracy of the findings and reliability of the study using triangulation by highlighting emerging themes (Creswell, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

I used pseudonyms for the participants and their children to protect their identities. All data were kept in a password-secured laptop belonging to me. Data were only shared with my

research mentor to establish the reliability of codes and subcodes. Data were only reported using the pseudonyms.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the research design and questions, process for identifying participants, interview questions, processes for collecting and analyzing data, and the ethical considerations used to maintain participants' confidentiality. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, and Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings and the study's conclusion.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Seven themes were identified from the interview data. Theme names, number of supporting excerpts, and names and prevalence of parent contributors are summarized in Table 2. The relationships among themes are summarized in Figure 1, which provides the organizational structure for this chapter. Parental contributions to themes are described below.

Table 2
Themes Mapped to Excerpts, Parents, and Prevalence

Themes	No. Of Excerpts	Parent Contributors	Prevalent Contributors
1. Desirable Characteristics of Instructional Environments	10	Barbara, Cathy, Diana, Lisa, Sarah	Diana, Lisa, and Barbara
2. Factors Affecting Willingness to Place Students in Inclusive Settings	14	Cathy, Diana Lisa, Sarah	Roughly Equal
3. Factors Affecting Comfort in Inclusive Placements	7	Barbara, Cathy, Lisa, Sarah	Roughly Equal
4. Desirable Characteristics of School Personnel	5	Barbara, Cathy, Lisa, Sarah	Roughly Equal
5. Desirable Instructional Abilities and Experiences of School Personnel	23	Barbara, Cathy, Diana, Lisa, Sarah	Diana and Lisa
6. Communication, Collaboration, and Consistency	13	Barbara, Cathy, Diana, Lisa, Sarah	Barbara, Lisa, and Sarah
7. Parental Empathy for GE Teachers	4	Cathy, Sarah	Cathy

Note. Prevalent refers to the most dominant voice(s) represented. Equal under the prevalent category means voices were equally represented. GE stands for general education.

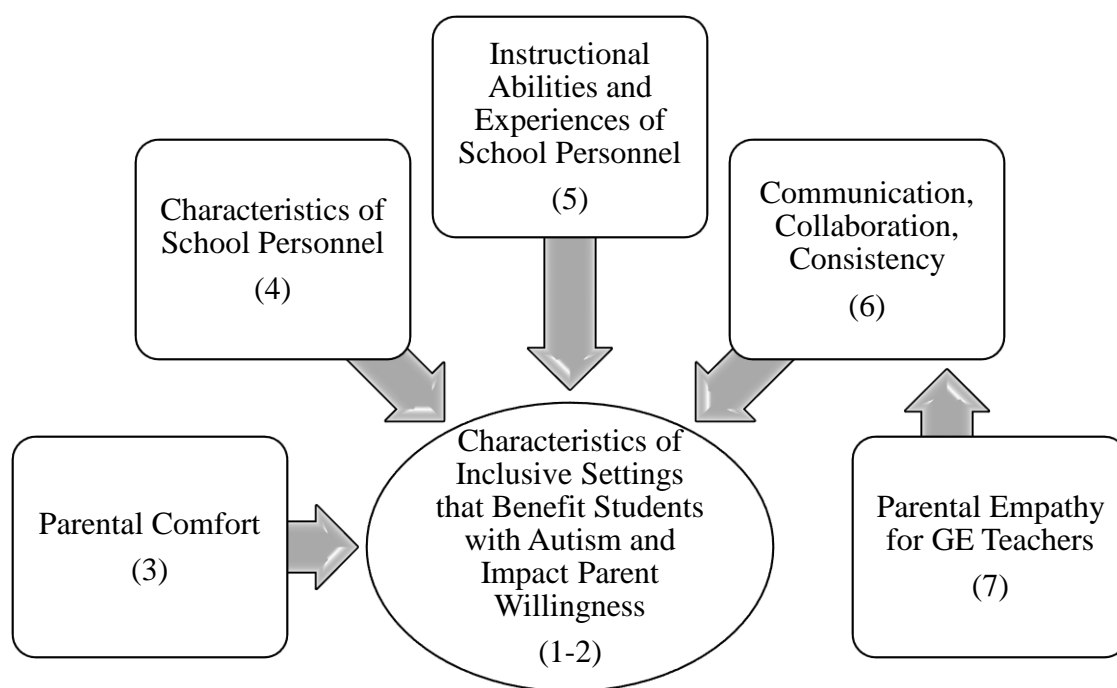


Figure 1. Conceptual map showing the relationship between themes.

Parent Contributions

The frequency of contributions made by each parent per theme and overall are summarized in Table 3. Except for Theme 7, all themes had at least four parent contributors. Themes 1, 5, and 6 had some contributions from all five parents, as parents only contributed moderately to those themes and not every parent commented on each theme. However, on Theme 5 (23 excerpts), parents contributed with more frequency than on the other themes, whereas on Theme 7 (only 4 excerpts), parents made the lowest number of contributions. The overall contributions of parents from highest to moderate to lowest contributions were identified as Lisa (highest) followed by Cathy, Diana, and Sarah (moderate) followed by Barbara (lowest).

Table 3

Frequency of Parent Contributions (Per Theme and Overall)

Theme	Frequency of Parent Contributions				
	Barbara	Cathy	Diana	Lisa	Sarah
1	2	1	3	3	1
2	--	3	4	4	3
3	1	2	--	2	2
4	1	2	--	1	1
5	2	3	7	7	4
6	4	2	1	3	3
7	--	3	--	--	1
Overall	10	16	15	20	15

As shown in Table 3, Barbara (10) made the lowest number of contributions overall and contributed most to the development of Theme 6. Cathy (16) is one of the two parents who contributed to the development of all seven themes. Diana (15) contributed greatly to the development of Theme 5. Lisa (20) made the highest number of contributions overall and like Diana contributed greatly to the development of Theme 5. Sarah (15), like Cathy, contributed to the development of all seven themes.

Beneficial and Inviting Characteristics of Inclusive Settings

Characteristics of inclusive settings that benefit students with autism and impact parent willingness is the central thematic category that emerged from my analysis of the data. It is based

on Themes 1 and 2, which are summarized below. As illustrated by the direction of the arrows in Figure 1, Themes 3-6 contribute to bringing about the outcomes communicated in the central thematic category. Theme 7 appears to facilitate outcomes associated with Theme 6.

Desirable Characteristics of Instructional Settings

Collectively, all parents described many desirable characteristics of instructional environments that they believed would produce beneficial outcomes for children with autism. For example, they felt that such environments should be challenging, stimulating, and motivating—characteristics that were perceived to be more likely in inclusive rather than self-contained settings. When parents observed these characteristics in their children’s instructional environments, they noticed important benefits. Collectively, they allowed their children to model typically developing peers, and such environments exposed them to higher standards of academic achievement to strive for.

Another desirable characteristic pertained to safety. Parents wanted classrooms that are organized in such a way as to allow their children to step aside into visible “safe spaces” when needed to deal with behavioral issues. They also desired potentially dangerous and distracting objects to be stored safely, away from easy access, to prevent injury and/or distraction from productive study.

Parents also desired environments that foster interactions between students with autism and typically developing peers. Parents value these interactions because they believe that interaction with typical peers helps their children develop socialization skills. For example, one class used a buddy system that pairs a student with autism with a typically developing student to help them practice or express their communication skills with each other. Parents appreciated this particular activity because they observed positive changes in their children’s behavior.

Environments with visual schedules posted and utilized also appealed to parents because they perceived their children's need for a structured and easily understood environment. Visual schedules are pictures arranged in some logical order to delineate a routine for the classroom that can be easily followed and removes sudden transitions from one activity to another. Parents believed that by creating a schedule that children can easily understand, the teacher prevents certain behavioral issues that come from abrupt changes that might irritate their child.

Of final note, parents expressed a desire for environments to be adjusted based on the sensory needs of their children. Adjustment of lighting and sound to accommodate children with autism are examples. Many children with autism experience sensory overload, and parents observed that positive experiences arose from classrooms where teachers dim their lights or reduce sound levels to accommodate their autistic students.

Five of the 10 excerpts used to develop this theme are provided below. Italics were added to highlight connections between the excerpts and theme.

1. We have seen with [Naina] that putting her in environments that *challenge* her and *stimulate* her, *motivate* her, or other ones, she does best. (Sarah, Excerpt 11)
2. They [teachers] have a big open area at side of the classroom with tons of things he can come through where they have things like [the] trampoline where he can jump on, computers. So, things need to be reset and adjusted. They should have equipment *closed* and *safe*. It's a big thing. I just recommend to adjust them to teachers. (Barbara, Excerpt 30)
3. I think it's also important for kids to be able to really *integrate* more with the other population. So, I think like maybe to really implement like buddy systems to where the autistic child could *pair up with the different kids* every day and be a buddy. So, the kids get to know them as well as autistic child *gets exposure* and has somebody kind of working with them up here. (Cathy, Excerpt 32)
4. I have been in my son's classroom and all the kids seems to have the *visual schedules* and I think it gives them more structure. I think it makes communicating with the kids much easier because verbally, like a typical classroom, verbally a lot of kids do not respond to that. So, I have seen a lot of the *visual schedules* and I think it's very effective. (Lisa, Excerpt 37)

5. My son's kindergarten classroom, not his first-grade classroom, is *pretty dim*, and the teacher has it dim because they use a projector a lot and she has Christmas lights up, but it's really *kind of calm*. That's nice for kids who are *sensitive to a lot of light*. Keeping a classroom *quiet*, managing a classroom for kids who are *sensitive to noise*, hypersensitive to noise. (Diana, Excerpt 45)

Factors Impacting Willingness to Place Students in Inclusive Settings

Collectively, four of the five parents discussed many factors that influenced their willingness to place their children in inclusive settings. Several can be discussed in terms of opportunities, including opportunities to (a) meet other parents with children in inclusive settings, (b) meet inclusive classroom teachers, and (c) visit school settings.

The first opportunity parents discussed was to meet with parents who had children in inclusive settings. By talking to other parents, particularly parents who had children with autism, they developed a sense of what to expect from inclusive education and a viewpoint that they could relate to as opposed to a teacher's or school's opinions that may be more biased. Also, by talking to parents with experience, they were reassured about their decisions to place their children in inclusive education.

The next opportunity parents discussed was meeting with classroom teachers. These meetings gave parents more information about the teachers' training and personality to help them make an informed decision about placing their children. By understanding the teachers' training in handling aggression and behavioral issues, parents considered their concerns to be alleviated. They also appreciated teachers who were interested in parents' opinions and open to collaborating with them and others in the educational community.

The last opportunity parents discussed was the opportunity to visit the schools and learn about the environment and the school district. By visiting the school district, parents were given

the opportunity to observe class sizes, facilities, and how children interacted with each other. By seeing these things firsthand, parents began favoring inclusive education as an option for their children with autism.

Parents preferred inclusive classrooms overall because they believe them to be more beneficial than self-contained classrooms. Some parents wanted their children to graduate out of a self-contained classroom because they felt that making friends with typically developing peers is important and they wanted their children with autism to be able to function in a diverse environment with a wide spectrum of other classmates. They also preferred working with the GE teachers because they had more communication with them than with the teachers in a self-contained classroom.

Seven of the 14 excerpts used to develop this theme are provided below.

1. The first one is I have a *good friend* whose son is autistic and went through this inclusive program out here. I heard from her about the program out here that they do work for autistic children. She has her son in that. Her son is probably grown so having her son is the teenage factor for us to see changes in his needs. (Cathy, Excerpt 5)
2. I *meet with the teachers* for the first time who were trained and they know how to handle aggression and behavioral issues. (Cathy, Excerpt 5)
3. Once we had his IEP meeting and I *met with the team* and his classroom, I *saw everything*. They assured me all the safeguards they had for the place to keep him safe. Of course, I was more comfortable. I feel like his school and the specific program that he is in is really well equipped for kids like him and they are very aware and very interested in my opinions and wanting to know what my concerns were so they could address them and keep him safe. Also, that was really the only thing that made me uncomfortable with safety. As far as other concerns, I really didn't have any at all. (Lisa, Excerpt 7)
4. I think because kids with autism struggle so much *socially* so that the inclusive environment really helps. Helps with their *sensory integration*, just being around with more kids, it helps with their *social skills*. I think it's really important and I think that it should continue. I think it's very beneficial to the students themselves. Not just the students you know, with autism, but the general classroom, because in the general

- population, they also have more exposure to people who process differently. (Lisa, Excerpt 1)
5. I think the fact that everyone is very open to learn, *open to working with us*, open to working with each other, and just have that experience from the other. I think it's a kind of a whole philosophy of the school and district that they are really working towards inclusiveness. (Sarah, Excerpt 10)
 6. Whereas with my daughter, it's a *special ed. teacher*, speech pathologist, school psychologist and they all do the class. They are with the kids all day. So, yeah, I guess *I don't feel that I interact with them*—with the typical teacher there. (Diana, Excerpt 18)
 7. I worked in public schools and we did pull-out therapy for the most part and the self-contained classrooms in their variety of different disorders in those classrooms. And I don't think that *once a child gets in special ed.* that goes for all children. *It's very difficult for them to get out.* Even if they are doing better. Even if they could probably do well in a regular mainstream classroom. So, that is my only concern is that she doesn't stay in a self-contained classroom all the time just because I want her to make friends with typically developing kids as well. It will be great if she makes friends with kids on the spectrum too. That will be great. (Diana, Excerpt 20)

Factors Affecting Comfort in Inclusive Placements

Collectively, four of the five parents expressed conditional comfort in placing their children in inclusive settings. The first condition parents had was the need for appropriate supervision, such as an adult who can step in to help manage behavioral issues. Parents expressed belief that their children have triggers for behavioral issues that are easier to manage if a trained adult is present in those settings. The second condition was that the classroom contain appropriate safeguards for the child's protection. Parents were more comfortable placing their children in settings that contain locks, door alarms, and other safety procedures that protect their children throughout the school day. The third condition that parents expressed was evidence that their children are making progress academically, socially, and emotionally. Parents indicated that their children observe and mimic their peers' actions (both good and bad). They feel comfortable

placing their children in inclusive settings because in such settings more opportunities are available for them to copy and practice higher level communication skills exhibited by their typically developing peers.

All the parents who expressed conditional comfort felt that these conditions were being met in their child's current classroom. Two parents expressed discomfort with specific features of inclusive classrooms, such as separation within inclusive settings and a previous school not being equipped to handle their child's needs. Even though parents believed their children were benefiting from the inclusive classrooms, in some cases they still saw that their children were receiving separate instruction and were still segregated from typically developing peers.

Six of the seven excerpts used to develop this theme can be seen below.

1. I do feel comfortable. If I didn't, I would never put my son in inclusive settings. He succeeded. The program he is in, they are whole special ed. in their classes. They are all there for doing that *surrounded by typically developing students* unless they push into a classroom with them for a certain amount of time. And they have an understanding with the teachers that I am talking about the situations when they take them back to the classrooms. (Barbara, Excerpt 4)
2. I do feel comfortable, but with the appropriate, you know, *supervision*. So, with an adult to kind of step in when needed. (Cathy, Excerpt 6)
3. I met with the team and his classroom, I *saw everything*. They assured me all the *safeguards* they had for the place to keep him *safe*. Of course, I was more comfortable. I feel like his school and the specific program that he is in is really well equipped for kids like him and they are very aware and very interested in my opinions and wanting to know what my concerns were so they could address them and keep him safe. (Lisa, Excerpt 7)
4. I do feel comfortable with her being in an inclusive setting because we have seen her *make great progress* in a classroom environment with kids who are typically social and typically behaving. (Sarah, Excerpt 9)
5. When [Naina] was in kindergarten and we had to switch over her IEP, she was going to a private school before and then we choose in a public school for three months of kindergarten and it was mainstream class, but they were not, that school was not

equipped to really understand and be *sensitive to [Naina's] needs*. So, that experience was unsuccessful, that was pretty negative. (Sarah, Excerpt, 8)

6. The one thing I don't like is that they are still *segregated and still separated*. It's like mini self-contained within the general so that is not very inclusive and they still have been out to the general students. He is just separated within the general classroom. He is still separated and they are still giving separate instructions in there. (Cathy, Excerpt 3)

Desirable Characteristics of School Personnel

Four of the five parents collectively expressed many desirable characteristics of school personnel that they believed would benefit their children with autism and influence their willingness to place their children in inclusive settings. For example, parents desired that school personnel should be accommodating, receptive, and welcoming. When such characteristics are evident in teachers, parents are more likely to develop a strong relationship with them. Being able to have a positive relationship with school personnel is important to parents because to them it means that communication and collaboration can exist to facilitate the education of the child overall, both in the classroom and other environments.

Parents also highlighted the experience of teachers and the use of one-on-one time with students as another desirable characteristic. It was important to them that their child has individual time with the teacher because then the teacher can assess and address his or her specific needs. Of final note, parents also indicated that they would prefer school personnel to be calm, adaptive, well organized, teamoriented, and willing to work with parents. When parents see these characteristics in school personnel, they are reassured that their children are in competent hands. To parents, these characteristics are representative of a professional educator who is well equipped to handle children with autism.

All five excerpts used to develop this theme can be seen below.

1. They [have] always been very *receptive*, very *welcoming*, *accommodating*, which is great. The special ed. teachers as well. The only thing is the aides. I would say the aides sometimes, they are very nice loving ladies, they are kind of little bit like a grandmother type, which is again very nice and I love them all, but sometimes they are too affectionate or sometimes a little not as formally consistent as the teachers are. (Cathy, Excerpt 12)
2. They kind of understand what makes sense to it, which is awesome. It's really surpassed my expectations, but it seems like it [the teachers] really spends a lot of *one-on-one time* with the kids, the kids with special needs. So, that is one of the really positive experiences. (Lisa, Excerpt 15)
3. They need to be a *calm* person, they need to be *adaptive* because things change all the time. I would say *well organized* and each of these kids are different so they gonna have a different schedule, they gonna have different work to be done, certain triggers to set them off. I think they need to be *willing to work with the parents* as well. (Barbara, Excerpt 21)
4. I think the teachers that we have kind of meet us, they have been very *teamoriented* and they were great together. (Sarah, Excerpt 25)
5. I think they try to do their best as they can and that's simple. I mean they just do, at least the parents communicate that they are trying to do the best they can. And that's the only thing we all can do so they could have been training on being *receptive to working with the parents*. (Cathy, Excerpt 32)

Desirable Instructional Abilities and Experiences of School Personnel

All parents were collectively involved in establishing the theme of desirable instructional abilities and experiences of school personnel. The significance of explaining this theme is to showcase how parents quantify the abilities of teachers and school personnel and how it makes inclusive education a more viable option for their children with autism.

Hands-on experience, not just book learning, was an important quality to parents because they believe teachers who have experience working with children with autism are more equipped

for managing disruptive classroom behaviors. Parents believe that their children will therefore learn more productive skills because they will not be disrupted during instructional delivery. Specifically, parents highlighted behaviors that would make an inclusive setting more hostile; those included bullying, teasing, temper tantrums, overreacting, not getting their own way, and difficulty expressing emotions. Parents chose these behaviors as examples because of their own experiences with their children. However, parents also commended inclusive programs for teaching emotional support behaviors, such as self-soothing and self-calming.

Understandably, parents also believed that teachers' standards and educational background should be rigorous and tailored to the individual needs of their children with autism. Throughout the interviews, parents made it clear that teachers' education and training was important to them. They contended that the training of teachers directly impacts the quality of education their children receive in their classrooms. Parents suggested that teachers receive certification in special education and attend seminars alongside parents, professionals, and caretakers. In the parents' perspectives, these training options were considered supportive and helpful.

Parents also focused on practical applications of teachers' training, noting the use of positive reinforcement and routines as being helpful to make inclusive settings more productive. This is because parents believe that utilizing appropriate schedules with their children helps them transition smoothly from one activity to another. Of final note, parents desire teachers to be sensitive to the safety needs of their children. Consequently, they believe that there should be measures in place to monitor their children's activities in inclusive classrooms.

Ten of the 23 excerpts used to develop this theme are provided below.

1. I think the best training probably is just by experiences, just by *hands-on experience* working one-on-one with kids. I am not sure what they exactly have to do schooling-wise, but I think just working with kids with autism gives you a better understanding. I mean, read about it as much as possible, but can't understand until you are physically working back and forth with that person. (Lisa, Excerpt 24)
2. I think that the teachers should get more education, the general classroom teacher. Because they usually don't have enough. It seems like understanding of that and that's why they, like, have the special ed. teacher who kind of just deal with those students. So, the general classroom teacher doesn't really know how to *handle aggressive behaviors*. (Cathy, Excerpt 22)
3. They should also probably have training about *bullying*, how to recognize that because at least we know in speech pathology, kids with speech and language disorders and disabilities in general are more susceptible to bullying and just them being proactive and consciously trying to build a culture in their classrooms among pre-developing kids that's inclusive of others. (Diana, Excerpt 27)
4. The intervention programs where they talk about *emotions* and self-soothing, self-calming behaviors. I think if regular teachers knew how to get these children out of these tantrums more quickly that would be helpful and they can do that by teaching children how to calm themselves down. There are *sensory adjustment techniques* teachers can make in a classroom. (Diana, Excerpt 44)
5. I think there should be a *standard of knowledge* and *standards of behaviors* that are followed. The teacher aides or paraprofessionals, they are trained and have experience of working with one-on-one with the kids with special needs. (Sarah, Excerpt 26)
6. General ed. teachers can *get certified* in special education. I think just providing training, providing support to their staff, something that schools can do and just giving them options for training inside or outside. (Sarah, Excerpt 39)
7. Maybe *working with the therapists* who are in the school already or going to be. Different non-profits or other places that might be nearby that work with kids with special needs and I know that they are in the neighborhood where there are a lot of non-profits for kids with autism and they have *seminars for parents* and *for professionals and caretakers*. (Sarah, Excerpt 40)
8. *Positive reinforcement* I think is really helpful for kids with autism and I also think having a routine and that probably varies from child to child, but my kid really needs a *good routine*. So, as long as he knows about something in advance and he is being

reinforced for the good behavior, things go much more smoothly for him. (Lisa, Excerpt 36)

9. I was very concerned putting him in the early childhood setting, putting in the inclusive education setting, but once we had his IEP meeting and I met with the team and his classroom, I saw everything. They assured me all the *safeguards* they had for the place to keep him *safe*. (Lisa, Excerpt 7)
10. There was a time when he was in a classroom setting where there were no planned things for watching what they are doing with his behavioral issues and they did not have a good place to take him and to keep people *safe*. In fact, there was a closet and then they had heavy handle at the bottom and then there was [a] little square hole where they would come in and watch him—like that kind of issues. I did not like that at all. So, they haven't changed into different classrooms where they had just, like, glass partition and back behind that there was a storage area. I don't think that was [a] calming place for him. (Barbara, Excerpt 29)

Communication, Collaboration, and Consistency

All the parents discussed the need for communication, collaboration, and consistency of service provision in inclusive settings. They believed there is a gap between what they would like to happen and what they are receiving for communication, but it has not kept them from placing their children in an inclusive environment because they understand the benefits their child receives outweighs the lack of substantial communication. In explaining this aspect, they identified several characteristics: frequency and quality of communication and collaboration among parents and school personnel, use of visual schedules, and consistency of in-class and school/home interactions. Regarding frequent and meaningful communication, parents felt it should contain feedback on students' performance (including completeness and correctness of work, and whether progress is occurring) and recommendations for home-based actions to facilitate the progress of their children at home as well as in school. According to parents, this type of collaboration between parents and teachers would foster their child's academic growth to

the maximum extent. Some parents were unsatisfied with simple communication strategies that teachers utilized in daily communication, such as smiley faces or check marks. This type of communication was perceived as insufficient for parents to help their children at home.

In addition, parents perceived use of visual schedules as a beneficial component to facilitate communication between teachers and students. Parents believe that visual schedules establish a mechanism for students to understand what is expected and help teachers to understand how well students are able to meet those expectations and how to address necessary changes. Within the classroom, parents also expressed a need for consistency in how parents, teachers, aides, and paraprofessionals interact with children with autism. Parents asserted that having consistency aligns implementation of required services in all areas of the student's life.

Five of the 12 excerpts used to develop this theme can be seen below.

1. Of all the teachers he has had, I would, even the one right now is my favorite. It is because I go with the *daily communication* that I need to and I ask for. We use [a] reward system at home based on his day at school, how he did things ... at school and if we *don't get feedback* from the teacher we have a hard time knowing if he is working or not. So, that is one of my concerns, if we haven't had feedback. I thought teachers needed to tell me *almost daily how he is doing*, how was his day, what things [have] been great today, what are some areas to figure out where he still needs something to work with him? I love to have the same things between the teacher and me. *The problem is the communication. I am not getting daily good communication* coming home. I have no activities for doing at home. That's the concern for me. (Barbara, Excerpt 13)
2. There is *no paperwork coming home* to show us whether he is learning or not. What is he doing in math and in reading? We are *not seeing any completed work coming home*. We have a folder that comes home every day. So, how do I understand communication like smiley face, straight line or other face? *Maybe twice a week*, she circles one of these faces and that's how we communicate with her and school. There is *no completed, not corrected work*. These faces show how he behaves throughout the day like smiley face means he behaved well today, how he participated. (Barbara, Excerpt 14)

3. I have been in my son's classroom and all the kids seem ... to have the *visual schedules* and I think it gives them more structure. I think it makes communicating with the kids much easier because verbally, like a typical classroom, verbally a lot of kids do not respond to that. So, I have seen a lot of the visual schedules and I think it's very effective. (Lisa, Excerpt 37)
4. The classroom teachers have been always really wonderful and well-done. Very accommodating, very *well to work with*, very receptive. I usually have, like, his Barbara goal assessment, his OT goal assessment, assessing him in the classroom like to *get feedback* from his therapist and then apply that. I am always working to make sure myself [of] his outside private therapy and then the classroom [we] *all are at the same page*. (Cathy, Excerpt 12)
5. I think the fact that everyone is very open to learn, *open to working with us, open to working with each other*, and just have that experience from the other. I think it's a kind of a whole philosophy of the school and district that they are really *working towards inclusiveness*. (Sarah, Excerpt 10)

Parental Empathy for GE Teachers

Although based on the lowest number of excerpts and lowest number of contributors, Theme 7 was included because it may facilitate outcomes associated with Theme 6. In particular, if teachers knew parents were empathetic, they might be more willing to communicate and collaborate with them. Parents who contributed to the development of this theme understand the difficulties teachers experience when working with large class sizes, students with and without special needs, and limited resources. As seen in Theme 2, parents understand funding to be a major issue that hinders their GE teachers' resources. This theme is also important because, despite these challenges, parents are still willing to work with teachers.

All four excerpts used to develop this theme are provided below.

1. I do think that sometimes the classroom teachers, the mainstream classroom teachers, I feel are probably overwhelmed with generally *big class sizes* and on top of that they are working with kids who have lots of *different types of disabilities*. (Sarah, Excerpt 26)

2. I think for the challenging behaviors it's *very difficult to handle* because I am thinking what the therapists do. But I understand that their *teachers aren't their behavior therapist*. It's *not really their things* to have to be these kids', like, behavior therapist and teach them. (Cathy, Excerpt 31)
3. I think that general ed. teachers might be put in an *unfair situation* because they don't have the knowledge or the skills to *work with special needs kids* like special education teachers do. (Cathy, Excerpt 42)
4. The special education teachers are the ones who are working with the children in a self-contained classroom. So, they know exactly how to deal with the kids and what to do and what they need to know. But, it's [a] little *tricky for teachers* who go to school to become certified as general ed. teachers and they have, like, *thirty kids* in the classroom. And then they have a very disruptive child with ADHD; how are they *supposed to handle that* if they don't have the skills or the support? (Cathy, Excerpt 43)

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the themes uncovered include: Theme 1, which relates to desirable characteristics of instructional environment. Theme 2 explains the factors affecting willingness to place students in inclusive settings, whereas Theme 3 relates to factors affecting comfort in inclusive placements. Theme 4 relates to desirable characteristics of school personnel, and Theme 5 explains desirable instructional abilities and experiences of school personnel. Theme 6 relates to communication, collaboration, and consistency, and Theme 7 explains the parental empathy for GE teachers.

The seven themes described in this chapter provide insight into parent feelings about the quality of teachers' training in inclusive settings (Research Question 1). They also uncover factors impacting parent willingness to place their children in inclusive settings (Research Question 2). How these findings relate to previous research on these topics, as well as their practical implications, is discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of parents' perspectives about inclusive education for their children with autism. Research Question 1 was plotted to identify parents' feelings regarding the quality of teachers' training in inclusive classrooms, and Research Question 2 was designed to examine factors that impact parents' decisions to place their children with autism in those inclusive classrooms. I interviewed five parents of children with autism, their ages ranging from pre-K through fifth grade. Seven different open-ended interview questions were asked, and seven themes emerged from the obtained data. Themes 4 and 5 were mapped as answers to Research Question 1. On the other hand, Themes 1, 2, 3, and 6 were mapped in response to Research Question 2. Last was Theme 7. Although it was not directly related to Research Questions 1 and 2, it was interpreted as an attempt to facilitate Theme 6.

Parents' Desires for GE Teachers

Based on the information obtained from the emerging themes, it was revealed that although parents perceive inclusive education as a beneficial program for their children with autism, they want to see some specific characteristics as well as experiences and instructional abilities in GE teachers and other school personnel that allow both school personnel and GE teachers to perform better in their educational practices. Furthermore, parents also expressed

some concerns that they believed should be addressed and recognized by the GE teachers to help children in inclusive classrooms. Parents' decisions to place their children in inclusive classrooms are influenced by observing such organized and dedicated instructional environments for their children. The two significant focuses of this study, i.e., feelings and factors, and the themes emerging from them coincided with the literature on the topic and revealed similar results; however, findings pertaining to empathetic feelings were a surprising outcome for the researcher.

While reviewing each emerging theme, I found that parents' responses were generally consistent with each other. However, some statements, such as performance of individual school districts, varied across participants' responses and were further explained based on their personal experiences. For instance, some parents believed that their children with autism require minimum support in inclusive settings and that GE teachers utilizing useful resources could help students perform comparatively better than they do in self-contained classrooms. However, a few parents claimed that their children require extensive support in inclusive settings due to their children's behavioral issues, such as aggressive behaviors, outbursts, and safety issues.

Such contradictory explanations given by parents revealed that parents' placement decisions are varied and often based on their children's needs in inclusive settings. Although some parents wanted minimum additional support and another group of parents demanded maximum support from GE teachers, their opinions pertaining to placement decisions were consistent in relation to GE teachers' preparation in inclusive classrooms. All parents wanted teachers to have a certain level of training and experience working with children with autism. A study mentioned in Chapter 1 by Jindal-Snape et al. (2005) also supports this finding that

parents' hesitation for placing children in inclusive education is generally due to GE teachers' training in inclusive settings.

New information uncovered by this study pertained to empathetic feelings from parents toward teachers who work in inclusive classrooms. Even though parents expressed concerns about placing their children in inclusive settings, they acknowledged the difficulties that teachers experience by teaching in those inclusive classrooms. They understand that teachers must address a full spectrum of students' needs. This affects their decisions to place their children by positively swaying parents in favor of inclusive environments because they understand that the benefits outweigh the difficulties and empathize with the teachers.

Benefits of Inclusive Education

Parents believed that if GE teachers are adequately trained to handle behavioral issues, there is no significant reason that parents would hesitate to place their children in inclusive education because they understand that it helps their children learn appropriate socialization skills that ultimately result in decreasing their behavioral issues. Such beliefs are supported by Leyser and Kirk (2004), who found that inclusive education helps to increase socialization skills. Parents in the current study further illustrated their positive feelings by saying, "I do feel comfortable. If didn't, I would never put my son in inclusive settings" (Barbara, Excerpt 4). A similar set of responses was found from all participants.

Another strong sentiment that emerged from the participants' interviews was that placing children with autism in inclusive settings increases social acceptance from their peers and themselves, which ultimately helps them learn how to engage appropriately with their typical peers. Murray, Handyside, Straka, and Arton-Titus (2013) stated in their study that parents

understood the values of building relationships in an inclusive classroom as opposed to isolating children with autism in self-contained classrooms. Regarding this point, it could be argued that when children with autism are placed only in self-contained classrooms, they cannot learn social skills and appropriate behaviors to communicate with others in other environments as well. Similarly, typically developing children will also never understand how to interact with their peers.

During interviews about children who partially spend time in inclusive classrooms with their typical peers, parents explained that although their children with autism do not stay for the whole day in integrated classrooms, changes in their behaviors due to placements in inclusive settings are obvious at home. Notably, remarkable changes in behaviors depend on the environment, and learning certain behaviors could only be possible when children with autism spend their time with typical peers. Mereoiu, Bland, Dobbins, and Niemeyer (2015) found that, in order to develop social and emotional skills in autistic children, teachers must provide inclusive environments that help them feel emotionally secure, which ultimately increases their social skills. For this purpose, providing integrated environments helps children with autism increase their social skills and decrease their behavioral problems through learning from peers how to behave adequately in certain situations by modeling appropriate behaviors. This is consistent with Bauminger's (2002) study that explored one-on-one interactions between children with and without autism and demonstrated how peer modeling increases social and emotional competency.

Parental Concerns

As far as overall concerns that parents in this study expressed, it was revealed that parents' hesitation for placing their children in inclusive classrooms is typically due to large class sizes, lack of daily communication with teachers, lack of resources, lack of government funding, and lack of confidence in modified instructional materials that are necessary in inclusive settings for children with autism to maximize their learning potential. All these concerns presented by the respondents were consistent with previous literature. Tam et al. (2006) identified the same concerns and explained that teachers are required to have students on the same page at the same time, which can be difficult with large classes of integrated students. Findings from Jindal-Snape et al. (2005) were consistent; these authors suggested that there be a balanced ratio between GE teachers and children with autism in inclusive classrooms.

A finding that does not appear in previous research was parents' concern about their children's safety in inclusive classrooms. They believe that teachers should be trained to prevent bullying and that classrooms should be structured so that all students can be observed at all times to prevent safety hazards. Parents were also concerned about potential distractions because of the nature of autism and hyper-focusing that their children exhibit.

Recommendations

Parents provided recommendations based on their practical and personal experiences with GE teachers and the performance of their children with autism in inclusive settings. For instance, daily communication with parents to let them know about their children's progress could help parents understand what they can do at home. An empirical study by Lindsay and Dockrell (2004) also supports this recommendation given by parents that if parents would be actively

involved with their children's activities at schools, they could better understand and further prompt their children at home and in other environments.

Another recommendation stems from the parents' concerns about safety issues. Teachers should address this concern when communicating with parents and assure them of the security measures they have in their classrooms. Teachers should also receive training based on the needs of the students in their classrooms. Parents emphasized this as one of the most important recommendations they had. Some types of training they recommended were related to positive reinforcement, a buddy system, and bullying prevention.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was the small sample size; therefore, generalizing the overall findings to all states of the United States is not possible. Additionally, this study was only conducted in the communities that were local to NIU due to limited time and access to other communities. Furthermore, this study examined only mothers' perspectives and does not include fathers at all.

Future Studies

In future studies, a larger sample size including parents of more varied attitudes toward inclusive education and different perspectives on the needs of their children is necessary to expand on these findings. This is because a larger pool of participants can express more significant data across a larger spectrum. Also, parents who prefer a self-contained classroom or are not comfortable in inclusive classrooms may provide new data that may change the results. Additionally, another question would be added to the interview process to determine if parents understand and relate to the difficulties teachers experience. Based on this study's findings,

parents' empathy for teachers is a notable factor and needs to be explored more thoroughly. Future research would include interviewing both mothers and fathers to obtain perceptions from parents of both genders. Throughout the literature, there was a heavy focus on mothers' perspectives and very little involvement of fathers. The societal role of fathers in raising children differs from that of mothers and therefore could lead to fathers having a different perspective that would alter the results. A question about the involvement of sensory integration in the classroom will be added to the interviews because several of the students from this study had severe sensory issues within inclusive classrooms. Finally, I will expand the study in Pakistan, where there may be cultural, educational, and societal differences that could affect the results of the interviews. This change in geographic location is due to expanding the research into a location where inclusive education is a newly developing educational strategy.

Conclusion

This study has allowed for a deeper understanding of the conditions parents consider when placing their children with autism in an inclusive environment. Despite the small sample size, the interviews were comprehensive and potentially indicative of a broader overview of parents' opinions. By interviewing *parents* specifically, this study presented a new perspective and uncovered parental empathy toward educators.

If teachers are aware of what parents want from them and from inclusive environments, it will influence their decisions about how to manage their inclusive classrooms. Further, accounting for the factors that parents believe are beneficial for children with autism (e.g., parent-teacher interaction, increased social interaction among children, teachers' training, safety measures, and appropriate instructional environments) can result in teachers and parents

considering one another's needs and working together to create the most beneficial environments for children with autism.

This study has the potential to impact parents' placement decisions in Pakistan, as it would help them realize what things could benefit their children with autism in inclusive classrooms. As far as GE teachers are concerned, considering the potential changes in their instructional delivery and environment could help them adapt their inclusive classrooms to be more conducive to the educational and social needs of all children.

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APPENDIX A

PARENT'S RECRUITMENT LETTER

June 2, 2016

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Rahma Abbasi, and I am an international graduate student at Northern Illinois University seeking my Master's degree in early childhood special education. I am writing to request your participation in my research project titled Parents' Perspectives about Inclusive Education for their Children with Autism. I will be conducting this research in August and September 2016.

Through this study, I hope to learn parents' perspectives regarding inclusive education and the role of teachers' training in addressing behavioral challenges of children with autism. Although inclusive education is widely practiced, more research needs to be conducted regarding parents' experiences and opinions regarding the educational system.

I hope to recruit parents of young children with autism (preschool through fifth grade) in different counties, located in Illinois State. If you agree to participate in the study, I will conduct interviews in person or via Skype. These interviews should last 40-50 minutes. The interview will include questions about your perspectives about inclusive education for your child with autism. After completing an interview, I will also provide a Walmart gift card as a reward that worth \$20. This study will not interrupt any family activities or schedules. With your permission, I will audio record the interview and maintain all confidentiality. I will not include any information that makes it possible to determine your identity in my reports or presentations of the data.

If you are interested in serving as a participant or have any questions about the study, please contact me via email or phone [REDACTED] so we can discuss the details of the study. If you have any additional questions concerning this study, you may also contact my research advisor Dr. Jeff Chan at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Rahma Abbasi

Graduate student
Department of Special and Early Education
Northern Illinois University
Phone: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

Participant Consent Form (Please initial by each item and sign at the bottom).

_____ I agree to participate in the research project titled Parents' Perspectives about Inclusive Education for their Children with Autism, being conducted by Rahma Abbasi, a graduate student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of this study is to gain insight about parents' perceptions regarding inclusive education and how this study will contribute to address effective recommendations for teachers to address behavior challenges of children with autism. The findings of the study may be helpful in introducing such recommendations to inclusive education systems to strengthen the academic success of children with autism.

_____ I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I will be asked to share my perceptions about teachers' training to handle behavioral issues of children with autism in inclusive education, in response to interview questions. I have been informed that my interview will last from 40-50 minutes and the researcher will audio record my interview for transcription and future analysis. Also, I have been informed for receiving a \$ 20 Walmart gift card as a reward at the end of my interview.

_____ I have been informed that there are no potential risks or discomforts I could experience during this study. I understand that all information gathered through this interview will be kept confidential by storing the obtained data in a password protected computer, using a pseudonym in manuscripts, and by not sharing my identity with anybody except the researcher and her mentor.

_____ I understand that Northern Illinois University does not provide compensation for, nor does the university carry insurance to cover, injury incurred as a result of participation in a university sponsored research project.

_____ I understand that my consent to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or redress I might have as a result of my participation, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent.

_____ I am aware that my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice, and that if I have any questions concerning this study, I may contact Rahma Abbasi, Graduate Student at Northern Illinois University, [REDACTED]

For additional questions, contact Dr. Jeff Chan, Associate Professor, Northern Illinois University, Department of Special and Early Education, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL [REDACTED]

Please contact the office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at 815-753-8588 if you have questions about your rights as a research participant.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

I understand that my interview will be audiotaped for transcription and future analysis.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C
THEMATIC CATEGORIES

Theme 1: Desirable Characteristics of Instructional Environments

Excerpt	Contributor	Main Ideas and Key Terms
11	Sarah	Characteristics of environments that produce beneficial outcomes for her child (challenging, stimulating, motivating) – more likely in inclusive than self-contained placements
29	Barbara	Characteristics of environments that produce beneficial outcomes for her child (having <i>safe</i> and visible spaces for students to go when dealing with behavioral issue)
30	Barbara	Characteristics of environments that produce beneficial outcomes for children (keep in a <i>safe</i> place potentially dangerous and distractible objects or equipment such as computers, trampolines)
32	Cathy	Characteristics of environments that produce beneficial outcomes for children (making sure students with autism are interacting with typically developing peers – for example through use of a buddy system)
37	Lisa	Characteristics of environments that produce beneficial outcomes for children (use of <i>visual schedules</i>)
45	Diana	Characteristics of environments that produce beneficial outcomes for children (lighting is appropriate for students with sensory needs)
46	Diana	Characteristics of environments that produce beneficial outcomes for children (sound level is appropriate for students who are hypersensitive to noise)
37, 44*	Lisa	Perception that students with autism need more structured environments and use of <i>visual schedules</i> (and visual materials) facilitated that outcome
48*	Diana	Parental awareness of early intervention services and evidence-based practices

Theme 2: Factors Affecting Willingness to Place Students in Inclusive Settings

Excerpt	Contributor	Main Ideas and Key Terms
5	Cathy	Conversations with friends who have children who have gone through inclusive programs
5	Cathy	Meeting with trained teachers who know how to handle aggression and behavioral issues
7	Lisa	Opportunities to meet/interact with teachers and visit the placement setting
7	Lisa	Teacher interest in parent opinions and concerns
10	Sarah	“Openness” of school personnel (to learn, work with parents, collaborate with each other)
10	Sarah	Reputation of schools (what parents have heard)
19*	Diana	Preference for inclusive rather than self-contained setting
20*	Diana	Desire for her child to make friends with typically performing peers (as well as the entire continuum of students)
20*	Diana	Difficulty of getting out of self-contained settings (and parent desire that students not have to remain in them)
23*	Cathy	Parental concerns about class size and funding
1, 2	Lisa	Perception that inclusive settings are beneficial (due to social benefits of inclusion for students with and without autism)
9	Sarah	Perception that inclusive settings are beneficial (due to peer modeling benefits of inclusive settings – i.e., child with autism sees peers behaving appropriately and imitates)
18	Diana	Perception that inclusive settings are beneficial (based on experience in self-contained classrooms of there being less “interaction” with school personnel – special education teacher, school psychologist, speech pathologist)

Theme 3: Factors Affecting Comfort in Inclusive Placements

Excerpt	Contributor	Main Ideas and Key Terms
4	Barbara	Feels comfortable placing child in inclusive settings
6	Cathy	Feels comfortable placing child in inclusive settings if there is appropriate supervision
7	Lisa	Feels comfortable placing child in inclusive settings when assured that appropriate safeguards are in place
9	Sarah	Feels comfortable placing child in inclusive settings when there is evidence that the child is making progress
8*	Sarah	Discomfort stemming from school not being equipped to understand and be sensitive to child's needs
3*	Cathy	Separation within inclusive settings
15*	Lisa	Has had positive experiences with her child's general education teacher

Theme 4: Desirable Characteristics of School Personnel

Excerpt	Contributor	Main Ideas and Key Terms
12	Cathy	Desirable characteristics of school personnel (accommodating, receptive, welcoming)
15	Lisa	Desirable characteristics of school personnel (perception that they understand children with special needs; spends a lot of one-on-one time with students)
21	Barbara	Characteristics of school personnel (calm, adaptive, well organized, willing to work with parents)
25	Sarah	Characteristics of school personnel (team oriented)
33	Cathy	Desirable characteristics of school personnel (receptive)

Theme 5: Desirable Instructional Abilities and Experiences of School Personnel

Excerpt	Contributor	Main Ideas and Key Terms
10	Sarah	School personnel have “experience” working with children with autism (including itinerant aides, therapists)
22	Cathy	Desirable qualification of GE teachers (know how to handle aggressive behavior)
24	Lisa	Desirable qualification of GE teachers (experience working with children with autism, not just book learning)
26	Sarah	Desired qualifications of school personnel (“standards” for working with students with autism)
27, 28	Diana	Desired qualifications of school personnel (training on the topic of bullying, in particular how to prevent)
28	Diana	Desired qualifications of school personnel (be sensitive and cautious regarding making fun of students – because it could inadvertently cause peer bullying; be a good role model)
34, 36	Lisa	Desired qualifications of school personnel (how to implement <i>positive reinforcement</i>)
35	Lisa	Desired qualifications of school personnel (dealing with challenging behaviors such as temper tantrums, aggressive behaviors, over reacting, being very upset, not getting one’s own way)
36	Lisa	Desired qualifications of school personnel (establishing <i>routines</i> for students on an individual basis) – she has found such helpful for her own child
44	Diana	Desired qualifications of school personnel (establishing smooth <i>transitions</i> from one activity to another, for example through the use of auditory cues)
44	Diana	Desired qualifications of school personnel (expertise in helping students develop <i>healthy emotional responses</i> by teaching them about emotions, how to express their emotions, and using different strategies for bringing emotions under control)
7*	Lisa	Safety awareness problems of children with autism
22, 23*	Cathy	Parent perception that GE teachers need more education (regarding how to work with students with autism)
29, 30*	Barbara	Safety awareness
35*	Lisa	Perception that <i>positive reinforcement</i> is more beneficial than negative reinforcement (at least for her child)
39, 40*	Sarah	Perception that GE teachers and support staff would benefit from having multiple options for learning how to work with students with autism (examples: obtaining special education endorsement, attending workshops, working with therapists, attending seminars for mixed audiences, utilizing non-profit and community based resources)

47	Diana	Perception that GE teachers should receive some training on working with students with autism during their teacher training program (e.g., practical things to do when children with autism are in their classroom)
49*	Diana	Importance of realizing that students differ and need individualized supports/service

Theme 6: Communication, Collaboration, and Consistency

Excerpt	Contributor	Main Ideas and Key Terms
7	Lisa	Opportunities to meet/interact with teachers and visit the placement setting
7	Lisa	Teacher interest in parent opinions and concerns
13	Barbara	Importance of daily communication with teachers
13	Barbara	Necessity of teacher feedback on student performance to facilitate home-based actions
14	Barbara	Desire for ongoing teacher feedback on academics (if progress is occurring, specifics on instructional focus, completeness and correctness of the work)
14	Barbara	Dissatisfaction with simple communication strategies (smiley face, straight face, etc.) that focus on behavior only
16	Diana	Teacher feedback on how things are going
37	Lisa	Perception that <i>visual schedules</i> facilitate communication between teacher and students
12	Cathy	Consistency/alignment in implementation of services (school, private, home)
12	Cathy	Concern about the characteristics and consistency of school aides (although very nice, tend not to be as consistent)
38, 41*	Sarah	Importance of parents, teachers, and aides working together to meet the needs of children with autism (within schools and school districts)
10	Sarah	“Openness” of school personnel (to learn, work with parents, collaborate with each other)

Theme 7: Parental Empathy for GE Teachers

Excerpt	Contributor	Main Ideas and Key Terms
26	Sarah	Perception that GE teachers’ effectiveness is limited by large class sizes, and their need to address the full <i>continuum of student needs</i> (from no disability, to moderate, to severe etc.)
31	Cathy	Parental <i>understanding</i> of the difficulty teachers experience when working with students with challenging behaviors (an

		understanding that they do not have the same level of skills/training as behavior therapist)
42, 43	Cathy	Parental <i>understanding</i> of the difficulty teachers experience when working with students with special needs (an understanding that they do not have the same level of skills/training as special education teachers) – especially when class size is large and some students are very disruptive (e.g., those with ADHD)