

Learning to Teach at Inclusive Schools

*Student Special Educators' Perspectives at
Ilia State University in Georgia*

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Abstract

This qualitative study is about student special educators' perspectives on the learning outcomes from the SNE program at Ilia State University of Georgia. The research uses a semi-structured interviews and analyze the findings based upon the technique of thematic analyzes.

The aims of this study are to identify resources and difficulties in training special educators for teaching at inclusive schools, and to investigate possible gaps between demands of inclusive education and special teachers training program. In addition, making recommendations for further development of SNE bachelor program at Ilia State University of Georgia.

The research refers to critical theory and Habermas's concept of communicative action to discuss the link between the demands of inclusive education, intentions of SNE program and students learning outcomes. It implies Kolb's experiential learning theory to explain students' learning processes.

In the findings, the students express strengths and weaknesses of the learning outcomes, while they also emphasize teaching quality and program organizing. Their answers reflect a communication action gap between the policy of inclusive education, university intentions and the students' outcomes. The issues of making assessments and adaptations, development of IEP and collaborating with professionals and peers are underlined as weaknesses, while teaching without practice and inefficient structure of the program was highlighted as a need for improvement. These aspects are also reflected in the recommendations for the further enhancements of the SNE bachelor program at Ilia State University.

Dedication

The study is dedicated to my father from whom I got the passion for professional growth. Unfortunately he did not live to see my study career, but he is always in my heart and mind.

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Abbreviations

CEC	Council of Exceptional Child.
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.
IEP	Individual Education Plan.
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia.
SNE	Special Needs Education.
SRAC	Social Rehabilitation and Adaptation Center.
UN	United Nations.
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

1 Introduction

The International Union started to develop official documents about human rights for education in the middle of the 20th century. This movement was later followed up with the action plan of education for all children. Inclusive education became the core issue in the process of provision of education for children with special needs.

The right to education for every child is stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). The Convention on the Rights of the Child underlines the rights of children with special needs for education, health care services and preparation for employment to ensure maximum potential of the child's social integration and individual development (UN, 1989). The World Declaration on Education for All claims as well that all children, youth and adults should be provided with basic education. These steps should be taken within the education system, to ensure equal access to education to every person with special need (UN, 1990).

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education asserts the objectives to provide education for all, particularly for children with special needs. This document has inclusive orientation of schools as one of the important strategies for overcoming discriminatory attitudes, building the inclusive society and reaching the goals of education for all. Inclusive education is defined as the environment where integration of children with special needs and their peers is best achieved (UNESCO, 1994).

Inclusion is underlined as the process of addressing the variety of needs to all children (UNESCO, 2005). This approach indicates how to transform the education systems and settings in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It involves modifications in the environment, particularly in content, approaches, structure and strategies during provision of education.

It is evident that teaching is one of the strongest determinants of student achievements. The highest interest towards teacher education and concern about teacher quality is the worldwide evidence of it (Schwille & Dembélé, 2007).

The teachers are one of the key players in inclusive education setting. They have the biggest responsibility to provide a high quality of education to the diversity of learners (UNESCO, 2005).

One of the philosophical bases of inclusive schools lies on classroom teachers and special educators. The classroom teachers should take the responsibility to teach all students and the special educators should be the partners in order to adapt the curriculum and environment to the diverse needs of all students (Jenkins, Pious & Jewell, 1990).

The Salamanca Statement claims that knowledge and skills for responding to special education needs should be taken in educating teachers for inclusive settings. The training should enable special educators to work in different settings and to play the important role in special needs education. The universities have the major role to contribute to the development of inclusive education by preparing trained teachers; designing training programs, research and evaluations in the field of special needs education (UNESCO, 1994).

Today, special educators in inclusive schools have often experienced a gap between their teacher preparation programs and the demands of inclusive school settings (Fisher, Frey & Thousand, 2003).

To summarize, inclusive education brings challenges to programs designed to educate teachers working with children with special needs. The students graduating these programs are supposed to work at inclusive schools, and to contribute in the development of inclusive education. They should acquire learning outcomes from their training programs for work in inclusive settings. Therefore, the focus of the study is to investigate the perspectives of the students on their learning outcomes. The study is grounded in qualitative research traditions and has some basis in evaluation research. The rationale of the study and outline of the thesis is presented below.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

The rationale of this study underlines factors that justify the significance of the research. The topic covers two main questions: Why the study is significant for a Georgian context (1.1.1.)

and why it is important to study perspectives of student special educators (1.1.2.). In the end of the rationale, the personal motivation for this study is presented (1.1.3.).

1.1.1 Why is the Study Significant in Georgia?

The university program for preparing teachers for children with special needs has been developed from the Soviet Union in Georgia. The faculty of defectology was the main department at the pedagogical university of Georgia, which trained teachers for children with special needs. This was in the time in Georgia when the sphere of education was built on a principle that excluded any chance of equality, tolerance, individuality and inclusion. The general attitude toward persons with a disability as well as the main idea for understanding disability was reflected by the term defectology (Makhashvili & Javakhishvili, 2005).

The original theory and treatment methods of defectology were developed by the Russian scholar Vygotsky in Soviet Union in 1920. He highlighted the importance of educating children with special needs together with their peers. He argued that the children should not be excluded from the mainstream schools, and would develop better in a natural environment (Ainscow & Haile-Giorgis, 1998). Vygotsky's thoughts reflect the ideas of social cultural theories where the environment, society and culture play a significant role in the development of children with special needs. His theory was far from the medical paradigm, but in some countries of Soviet Union, defectology was based on the medical model (Ainscow & Haile-Giorgis, 1998).

Georgia was one of those countries where defectology, from medical perspectives, viewed disability as a disease. People with a disability were perceived as invalid, abnormal and defective. The environmental factors in understanding disability were ignored and the treatment mainly consisted of the diagnosis and correction of defects (Tobis, 2000).

Therefore, teachers trained from the defectology faculty in Georgia were oriented on treatment of defects within the children. The education of children with special needs was provided in special schools or institutions; the adults with physical or mental disability had their treatment at special clinics (The World Bank, 2007).

In 1990 the Soviet Union fell apart and Georgia gained independence. Even though, the independence was followed by the civil war, the country still strived towards the European values of society.

Georgia has signed many of the international declarations and conventions about integration and rights of persons with special needs: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1991); Convention on the Rights of Children (UN, 1994); European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Council of Europe, 1953); Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disability (UN, 1993); Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994).

After the Rose Revolution in 2003, the constructive reform period started in the country. The educational system became part of the reforms and especially inclusive education was emphasized during this transformation period.

In 2004, the Ministry of Education and Science, the National Curriculum and Assessment Center, and the Ministry of Education and Research of Norway developed the pilot project called “Introducing Inclusive Education in Ten Schools in Tbilisi”. Within the project, the physical environment in 10 schools were adapted to the children’s needs, the staff received training focusing on inclusive education and those schools began to take an inclusive direction in Georgia (MoES, 2004).

In 2009, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia continued the partnership with the Ministry of Science and Research of Norway, and the main project was developed. The aim of the project is to establish inclusive schools outside Tbilisi, in particular ten regions of Georgia (MoES, 2009).

The actions towards inclusive education development in Georgia brought up the issue of the qualifications of special teachers. It showed that inclusive education teachers with a defectology background were lacking the qualifications to support children with special needs in inclusive settings.

The reform period towards inclusive education was also relevant in regards to the program for preparing special educators. The pedagogical institute became part of Ilia State University, the former faculty of defectology was closed and the special needs education program was established. Despite some changes in teacher preparation, programs qualifying special teachers are still a problematic issue in Georgia. The difficulties of proper teaching of children with special needs still exist in the country. This is confirmed when “there are many barriers related to physical adjustment of school buildings to the needs of disabled persons, lack of specialized study materials, lack of adequate knowledge about teaching techniques for disabled children” (The World Bank, 2007, p. 14). The qualification of special teachers for inclusive education and quality of training special educators at the university level is still the discussion topic in Georgia in 2010. This is represented in the National Strategy and Action Plan for Education of Children with Special Needs and also reflected in the Project “Development of Inclusive Education in 10 Regions of Georgia” (MoES, 2010).

To summarize, Georgia is oriented on the development of inclusive education. The need of educated special teachers for inclusive settings is an essential matter for the country. This issue underlines the importance of this research, which is focused on evaluating learning outcomes of student special teachers, based on their perspectives.

1.1.2 Why is it Relevant to Study Student Special Educators’ Perspectives?

Evaluation of the teacher preparation programs is a well-established practice in education. Wilkins & Nietfield (as cited in Lambe, 2010) supported this idea. They stated that teacher training programs should be re-evaluated in order to improve teacher preparation for responding to the diverse needs of the children.

Student teachers can play an important role in evaluation and further improvement of the program. Due to the fact that the students have several years of experience from the study program, their views are uniquely helpful to explore the difficulties within the program.

Leckey & Neill (2001) claimed that studying the students’ feedbacks about the program is a well spread approach for evaluating teaching effectiveness at the Universities of North

America. They considered students experience as extremely important for enhancing the teaching quality at the university.

In addition, the studies that explore students' perspectives are considered as essential for future development of the programs (Spencer & Schmelkin, 2002).

It was investigated as well that the study of students' perspectives by surveys or interviews were common methods for evaluating the SNE programs (Brownell, Ross, Colon & McCallum, 2005).

Based on international experiences, it is evident that researching student teachers perspectives about their educational programs will contribute to the understanding of both weaknesses and strengths, which is an important basis for future development in this area.

As it was discussed above, the university training program of special teachers in Georgia has been modified during the reform period. The inclusive education is emphasized in the description of the bachelor program of special educators preparation. In this program, it is stated that students get the qualifications to work in inclusive settings (Ilia State University, 2010). At the same time, it is claimed that the qualifications for special teachers are not appropriate for inclusive teaching, and that their education program needs improvement (MoES, 2008). The student special teachers have four years experience of studying on SNE bachelor program. Their views will be beneficial to understand the limitations and the strength, which can be the basis of future improvement of the program.

1.1.3 Personal Motivation for the Study

The rationale of the study is also based upon direct experience and observation of special educators training. The personal experience is linked to special teacher students practice at the Social Rehabilitation and Adaptation Center.

The SRAC carried out programs for inclusion of children with special needs. The special teacher students from Ilia State University were doing their teaching practice in the SRAC. From personal observation, the students practice was chaotic. There was no protocol for their fieldwork. The supervision on the practice place was not organized. It was hard for the staff of

SRAC to plan where and how to involve the students. The students were just observers or care takers for the children with special needs during their practical period. They did not take part in planning lessons, teaching, evaluations and so forth. Students were confused, they were complaining about the management of their practice from the University.

One of the motivational factors for the study was, to have opportunity observing the practice of student special educators and talking with them as one of the staff at SRAC.

1.2 Research Aims and Research Questions

The rationale of the study shows the importance of the research from different perspectives. It leads to define the aims of the study and to clarify the research questions for investigating the research.

1.2.1 Aims for the Study

- To identify resources and difficulties in training special educators for teaching in inclusive schools at the bachelor program of Ilia State University
- To investigate possible gaps between demands of inclusive education and special teachers training program in Georgia
- To make recommendations for further development of SNE bachelor program at Ilia State University.

1.2.2 Research Questions

- How do student special educators from the bachelor Program of SNE evaluate their learning outcomes at Ilia State University?
- What are student special educators recommendations for future development of the program?

1.3 Research Methodology

The study is grounded in qualitative research design, which has evaluative characteristics. Qualitative methods are often used in evaluations. They are intended to collect information about the program activities or outcomes in order to improve program effectiveness or make recommendations for future programming (Patton, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews are used in this study. This approach is characterized as flexible, and at the same time focused on the specific topics that will be covered (Bryman, 2008). The participants in this study were chosen based on purposeful sampling. This type of sampling is focused to select the informants, which will give the rich information for the study (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). The analyses of the data was done with the thematic analyze techniques. This analyze method is common for qualitative study designs (Bryman, 2008).

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is divided in five chapters as outlined below:

Chapter 1- Introduction

This chapter introduces the study with the rationale of the thesis, research aims and research questions. It also presents the research methodology of this study.

Chapter 2- Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents aspects of critical theory, based on Habermas and the concept of communicative action. Furthermore, this chapter emphasizes experiential learning theory as an adult learning theory, mostly used at higher education.

Chapter 3- Methodology

This chapter focuses on the qualitative design and the evaluation characteristic of the research. It shows constructing and conducting processes of semi-structured interviews. This chapter describes the thematic analyze techniques used for analyzing the data. It shows the ethical considerations and validity threats of the research

Chapter 4- Results

This chapter underlines the findings emerged from the data. It shows main themes and sub themes developed from the thematic analyze techniques.

Chapter 5-Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter shows connections between the findings, research question and research aims. The results are discussed in relationship with the theoretical framework of the study and the recommendations are made for further development of SNE bachelor program at Ilia State University of Georgia. The chapter does also contain conclusion of the study.

2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework describes critical theory and Habermas in regard to higher education (2.1.). It shows the qualification demands of inclusive education policy towards special teachers from international perspectives (2.2.) and the national policy and university perspective (2.3.). The last section of this chapter explains the students learning process in higher education, based upon adult learning theory (2.4.). The last section is the summary of the chapter (2.5).

2.1 Critical Theory and Habermas

Critical theory comes from radical humanistic paradigm, which is concerned in development sociology of radical change from a subjective viewpoint. One main focus is the importance of exceeding limitations of existing social arrangements (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Critical theorists used the term ‘emancipation’ in their writings, but in terms of education, the modern world ‘transformation’ has been employed. Transformation in education is about changes of institutes and individuals. Habermas’s critical theory suggests transformation within the pedagogy and university (McLean, 2006). The critical theory is relevant for this particular study, as it is intended to find out the limitations in the educational program of special teachers and to make the recommendations for further transformation. Habermas emphasize the importance of subjective perspectives while making changes in the society. This idea is linked to this study as the research is seeking the subjective perspectives of the students, which will contribute for transformation of the program.

Habermas’s theory of knowledge concerns three central issues: the relation between theory and practice, the relation between subject and object and the criterion of emancipation (Morrow & Torres, 1995). Those issues are significant for this study in regard to its aims to investigate the subjective viewpoints of students. This is connected to the objective reality and how objective reality involves the issue of relation of theory and practice, and is relevant because this study is expected to develop the recommendations for transformation of the program based on the students’ subjective viewpoints. McLean (2006) claims that the university acts within the social historical context. It has always been connections between the states economic and political orientations, the adoptions of particular systems of the

universities and the experience of citizens, including university students. The university education is in dynamic relationship with the countries democratic ambitions. This is confirmed by McLean (2006) when he states that “this relationship is weekend, it still exists and can be strengthened” (p. 3). The figure bellow presents the relationships between the policy, university program and the students learning outcomes.

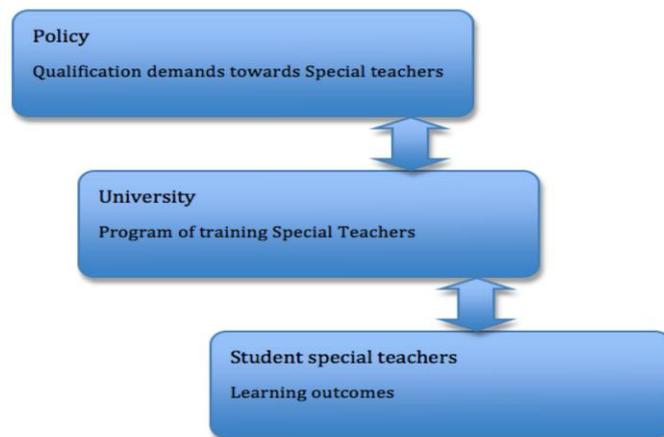


Figure 1. Connection between policy, university and students.

The policy of the education system has orientation of inclusive education in Georgia. This direction of the country puts some qualification demands for the special educators in order to be able to work at inclusive schools. The policy demands are transformed in the program of SNE at the university, and the transformation of the program should influence on the learning outcomes of the student special teachers. Habermas’s concept of communicative action reflects the connection between these three systems, and emphasizes the interaction and communication between people and institutions. Habermas explains that humans have universal capacity for creating and communicating meaning in speech acts. The pedagogy at the universities, which tries to reach the intended goals, is always communicatively structured. Teachers communicate with policy makers and visa versa, students communicate with teachers and visa versa (McLean, 2006).

The critical theory and Habermas’s consideration of communicative action strengthened the idea to explore the students’ perspectives, and to develop recommendations for strengthening communicative action between those different levels.

2.2 What are the Qualification Demands of Inclusive Education Policy Towards Special Educator: International Perspectives

The Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education request all the governmental sectors to provide systemic changes in teacher education programs in order to address the provision of SNE in inclusive schools. The statement emphasize some factors at inclusive school, such as adapting curriculum to the needs of the children, providing adaptive teaching with additional instructions within the context of existed curriculum, developing the assessment procedures in order to evaluate the progress of children, providing technical aids in the case of necessity and so forth. Furthermore, the Salamanca Statement claims that in order to respond to the factors of inclusive education, the teacher training programs during assessing teacher qualifications should take into considerations skills required to respond to the special educational needs (UNESCO, 1994).

Developing inclusive schools caused a dilemma for teacher educators. Inclusive schools brought a lot of changes in the environment, activities and expectations for pupils with disability. It is questioned how these changes influence the skills, knowledge and attitudes of special teachers. In other words, what knowledge will best serve special teachers while teaching inclusively (Fisher et al., 2003)?

SNE has developed as an essential field of study and research. Special educators bring their professional expertise to the schools. They are trained to believe that every person has individual characteristics and they require individual support during their learning process. Special teachers' educational training offers them different learning theories, use of different adaptive equipments, observation methods, developmental and cognitive psychology and teaching methodology (Befring, 2001).

Council of Exceptional Child (2000) in United States of America developed the standards and guidelines for preparation and certification of special educators. The guidelines include descriptions of skills and knowledge that should be required from all beginning special teacher. CEC (2000) presents eight categories of knowledge and skills for special educators:

1. *Philosophical, historical and legal foundations of special education.* The topic contains knowledge and skills about models, theories, beliefs, values and traditions in special needs education, definition and identification individuals with exceptional needs.

2. *Characteristics of learners.* This topic contains knowledge and skills about the similarities and differences between children with and without special needs, similarities and differences among children with individual learning needs, effects of special needs on individual life and so forth.

3. *Assessment, diagnosis and evaluation.* This category contains knowledge and skills about basic terminology used in assessments, screening, prereferral and referral procedures, use and limitations of assessment instruments.

4. *Instructional content and practice.* This category contains knowledge and skills about differing learning style of learners, demands of various learning environment, general and adapted curriculum.

5. *Planning and management the teaching and learning environment.* The theme is about knowledge and skills in basic classroom management theories, research based practice of effective management of teaching and learning, ways to use technology in planning and management of the class.

6. *Managing students' behavior and social interaction skills.* The theme includes knowledge and skills about politics, laws and ethics regarding behavioral management, teachers attitudes and behavior that influence on children's behavior, strategies for crises management and intervention.

7. *Communications and collaborative partnership.* The topic contains knowledge and skills about factors that promote effective communication with individuals, families, school personnel and the community members, family systems and their role in promotion of education, roles and responsibilities of the paraeducators involved in education.

8. *Professionalism and ethical practice*. The category includes knowledge and skills about personal, cultural biases that affect teaching and ways of behaving.

The knowledge and skills standard described in this document are validated by the profession. The Universities and colleges in USA use them to ensure that the special teachers training programs and the learning outcomes of the students reflect the standards of the profession. States and provinces use those standards to guarantee that licensed special teachers have the knowledge and skills based upon the profession (CEC, 2000).

Cross & Villa (1992) developed new innovations in the preparation of special teachers within the research in service training for inclusive education (as cited in Fisher et al., 2003). This study underlines five priority areas in training special educators.

Collaborative teaming and teaching is emphasized as one of the responsibilities of special educator. The special teachers are part of the setting where pupils are participating. The ability of communication with general teachers, family members, coaches, relates service professionals is essential for special teachers, because they are the instructional providers.

The knowledge of special educators in curriculum and instructional modification and accommodation is mentioned as one of the important qualification. The modification of the curriculum is necessary to be sure that students with special needs can assess the curriculum. “Decision when, why and how to make these adaptations are the responsibility of the special teacher” (Fisher et al., 2003, p. 46). The special educators should have the knowledge of understanding and developing individual education plans, special educators should be competent in providing the modifications and using specific adaptation with the pupils.

Assistive technologies for enhancement of communication, mobility and learning become common in special needs education. The special teachers should be competent in selecting the assistive technologies based on the needs of the pupils and the context. The special teachers should understand the needs of the students, demands from the class and how assistive technologies can be used to facilitate independent learning.

The special educators should have understanding of principles for positive behavioral support while teaching inclusively. Children with challenging behavioral problems often need positive behavioral support during participating in different environment. Special teachers should be able to develop the positive behavioral support plan and spread it in the social environment of the child, inform the team of the school and the family about it.

The knowledge of special educator should contain information about how and from whom to provide the personal support for children with special needs. The practice showed that the successful support comes from peers. Special educators should be able to use peers as natural support, to facilitator of friendship that emphasis another role of special educators. They should have skills to develop interaction with students without special needs.

One of the difficulties in inclusion of children with special needs is literacy and academic content of the curriculum. The special educators should have the understanding of literacy development for students with and without special needs. The special educators should be able to work on the content of the curriculum in order to modify to the needs of the pupils. The children with special needs are mostly relied on the knowledge of special educator in specific strategies of modifying the content of the academic subject.

Fisher et al. (2003) stated that the direction of inclusive education and the new work places for special educators in general classrooms, emerged the new competences mentioned above for special teachers. These new directions towards knowledge and skills of special teachers for teaching inclusively influence changes in the preparation programs of special teachers.

Brownell et al. (2005) reviewed the literature about general and special education teacher programs within their research. They looked through the manuscripts published the last 13 years about special educators' programs. 64 publications were reviewed within this research. They found some similarities and differences. In the following of this, they found several characteristics that occur frequently in the special needs education programs, which is relevant to discuss for this current study. The most of the programs underlined well-crafted, well-organized extensive field experience, that was carefully supervised, and combined to the theory from the coursework. The collaboration with other professionals and family members of the pupils were also emphasized in the programs. They showed the importance of

inclusion, cultural diversity and learners with special needs. They had their philosophical directions. Some were oriented in constructivist or constructionist epistemology of teachers learning and others were grounded in positivist epistemological stands. 81% of the programs contained evaluation systems about the impact of the teacher education programs. The evaluation methods varied from each other, but included direct assessment such as observation on the teaching process and indirect assessments as for example student satisfaction. In addition, faculty perception of the program and cooperative teachers and administrators' perception of the student teachers and the program were included. 31% of the programs used only interviews and surveys with current or former students to evaluate the program based on their perspectives.

To summarize, the SNE has developed as a separate field of study and research. Literature about education of special educators emphasizes some specific qualifications and knowledge that future special educators need to acquire to work at inclusive schools. The reviewed data is from international articles, so it is essential to describe what are the inclusive education policy demands in Georgian context and how this is transferred to the university programs for training special teachers?

2.3 What are the Qualification Demands towards Special Teachers from Georgian Policy and the University Perspectives?

The Georgian Law on Education defines inclusive education as a process of including children with special needs into mainstream education with other children, and states that:

Managerial bodies of the system of education shall create special and adaptive curricula for pupils with limited abilities, as well as for pupils who need long-term medical treatment, according to which their teaching, education, treatment, social adaptation, integration in social life is carried out. The state shall provide funding of such pupils (MoES, 2005, p. 18).

The policy of education for children with special needs in Georgia is formulated in the National Strategy and Action Plan for Children with Special needs¹ (MoES, 2008). The

¹ The information from National Strategy and Action Plan of Children with Special Needs is translated from Georgian.

Strategy is based on several principles such as provision of high quality standard education for all children, provision of equal possibilities for all children within education, and provision of opportunities for all children to study with their peers in general school. The document highlights importance of inclusive education development in the country. It defines inclusive education as “involvement of all children with special needs in the general education with their peers. In addition, inclusive education means teaching children with special needs with adapted curriculum” (MoES, 2008, p. 3). This policy paper defines special teacher, as a professionally educated in SNE by university. It does not contain the information about specific professional standards, but it claims the importance of developing the standards for this profession and emphasizes some general qualification demands for special teachers. “Special educator should have knowledge in the development, education and integration of children with special needs, the special educator should be able to use psycho-pedagogical techniques in practice, make pedagogical assessment of pupils with special educational needs and develop the individual education plan. The special educator should provide support for the general teacher at inclusive education setting” (MoES, 2008, p. 8).

The university program in SNE² reflects the National Strategy and Action plan based on the description of the program, it gives qualification to the graduates to work at inclusive school after four years education, including 240 ECTS. “The BA program graduate special educators are able to work at special or inclusive kindergartens, special or inclusive schools, day care centers for children with special needs, speech therapy clinics, medical and rehabilitation centers” (Ilia State University, 2010, p. 2).

The aim of the SNE program is to provide students with theoretical knowledge and practical skills about teaching, learning, development and social inclusion of children with special needs (Ilia State University, 2010).

The program’s focus is on the right of education of children with special needs. It underlines inclusive education and the responsibility of special teachers in this process. “The gradutors from this program gain knowledge of inclusive education theory and practice. They are trained in general communication and social skills in order to defend the rights of education of children with special needs” (Ilia State University, 2010, p. 2).

² The information about SNE program at the State Ilia University is the translation from Georgian.

The program has formulated the learning outcomes for the students. The learning outcomes approach to the curriculum development is considered the relatively new. The learning outcomes cover the broad range of students' attributes and abilities, which indicate how their learning experiences have facilitated students' development as individuals. "The learning outcome is an objective of the module or program being studied. An objective is a succinct statement of intent. It signifies either a desired outcomes to be achieved and/ or a process that should be undertaken or experienced" (Lorraine, 2009, p. 43).

The learning outcomes of special needs education bachelor program at Ilia state university is defined as intentions about what the students will acquire and be able to do at the end of the program. They are classified in three main categories: First, the basic knowledge of special needs education; second, transferring skills and third, general skills (Ilia State University, 2010).

The first category, *basic knowledge of special needs education*, describes the theoretical part of learning outcomes such as knowledge of terminologies, principles, theories and concepts. It does also include ethical norms and professional responsibility.

The second category, *transferring skills*, is about how to link and use the theoretical knowledge in practice, how to identify the issues in practice, how to deal with the professional challenges, based on the theoretical knowledge, practical skills and ethical norms.

The third category, *general skills*, is about the abilities of synthesis and analysis, problem solving, planning and organizing, self study management, research and the computer technology skills.

The teaching strategies in the program are presented as lectures, seminars and group work.

The courses in the program are divided in major and minor parts. The major courses are obligatory; the minor courses are up to the students to attend. The major courses consist of introductory courses such as Introduction of Special Needs Education, Basics in Special Needs Education, and Basics in Inclusive Education. There are some courses about teaching

children with different kind of disabilities such as Teaching Children with Learning Disability, Teaching Children with Hearing Impairment, Teaching Mathematic and Literacy for Children with Special Needs and Logopedy (Ilia State University, 2010).

To summarize, the program description of special teachers training at the university reflects the policy of the country in regard to special teachers qualification. It puts emphasis on inclusive education and provides students qualifications for working in inclusive school. In spite of this, the knowledge and qualification of special educators is questioned in the country.

2.4 How does Students Learn in Order to Reach the Learning Outcomes of the University? The Theory of Adult Learning

Many scholars in adult education have been dealing with the issues of adapting the child learning theories to adult learning (Knowles, 1973). There have been some propositions for adult learning theories, which have influenced mostly higher education systems (Fry et al., 2010). Knowles (1973) uses the term andragogy in referring to the adult learning:

For over two decades I have been trying to formulate a theory of adult learning that takes into account what we know from experience and research about the unique characteristics of adult learners. Originally I organized my ideas around the concept of informal adult education. In the mid-1960 s I became exposed to the term andragogy. Used by my adult education colleagues' in Yugoslavia, which seemed more adequate organizing concept (p. 35).

Furthermore, he describes how the meaning of andragogy comes from the Greece word “aner” and is used as “man” rather than boy. Andragogy was used in Germany from 1833 and then in Yugoslavia, France and Holland, while the University of Amsterdam established the department of pedagogical and andragogical science (Knowles, 1973).

Many learning theories in higher education settings are derived from the traditions and principles of adult education. Experiential learning is considered as one of the well-known adult learning theories.

The main emphasis of experiential learning theory is that people learn from their experience, the outcome of this experience can be assessed and certified by university credit systems. The

model of experiential learning theory strengthens the link between the personal development, work and education (Kolb, 1984). The figure below shows the model of experiential learning theory developed by David Kolb.

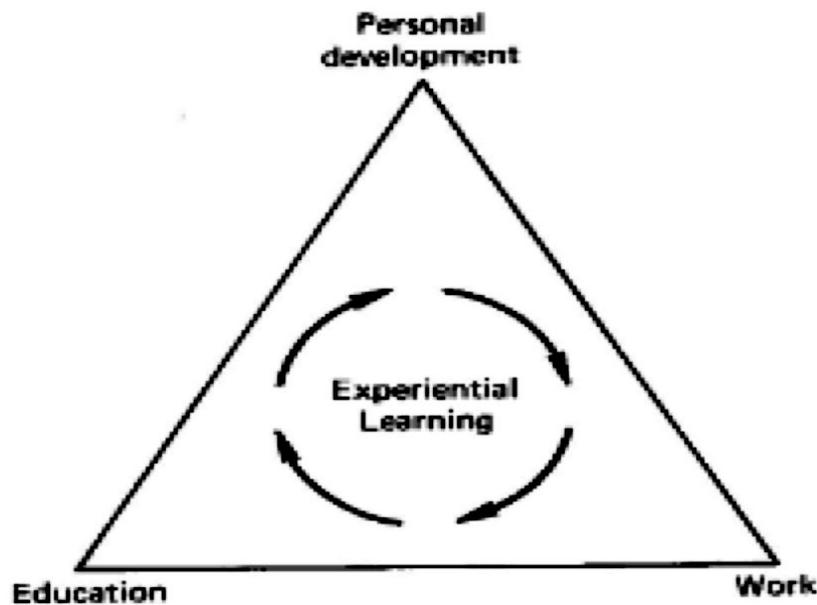


Figure 2. Experiential learning as the process that links education, work and personal development.

The theory offers competences in job demands, corresponding educational objectives and emphasizes the link between the classroom and real life within the experiential learning method. It considers a work place as learning environment that can develop and supplement to the formal education (Kolb, 1984).

Experimental learning employs different types of teaching and learning activities. The work based learning, action learning, teaching laboratory work and reflective practice are teaching strategies used within experiential learning (Fry et al., 2009).

The continuously cycling model of learning is known as the 'Kolb Learning Cycle', which implies four types of abilities in order to successful learning. First is the concrete experience, which means that students are involved in new experience. Second is the reflective observation, which emphasis the idea that the students need satisfactory circumstances to reflect from their experiences from different perspectives. Third is the abstract

conceptualization, which means that students should be able to form, reform and process their ideas to integrate their own ideas into the logical theories. The fourth is the active experimentation, which is about using their understanding to make decisions and solve problems. The experiential cycle does not only focus on experience, but does also emphasize on reflecting, processing, thinking and problem solving. The teachers should be aware that this cycle does not go smoothly with the students, which can be stacked or failed in some points. (Fry et al., 2009).

To summarize, the experimental learning theory connects real work situations to the university teaching. It gives students opportunity to learn and develop within the practice by reflecting on actions, generalization theories and concepts, making decisions and solve problems.

2.5 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has presented the critical theory and Habermas's concept of communicative action. It highlights the communication between national policy towards inclusive education and special needs education program at the university, and student special educators learning outcomes. The figure about this relationship was presented as basic aspect for this chapter. Based upon the figure, connection between policy, university and students was described in relation to the qualification demands of special teachers from different perspectives, such as international and national, the university program of SNE and its intended learning outcomes. Based upon this, the intentions of SNE bachelor program of the university reflects the national policy, however it is evident that special teachers in practice does not have qualifications for inclusive teaching. Therefore, the process of student learning was emphasized in the last section to understand how do students learn in order to reach the intended outcomes.

3 Methodology

The methodology chapter describes design of the study (3.1.), sampling (3.2.) and the method used for this research (3.3.). It underlines the process of gaining access for the data (3.4.), the interview process (3.5.), the interview procedures (3.6.), ethical considerations (3.7.), analyzes (3.8.) and reliability and validity issues (3.9).

3.1 Research Design

Qualitative research design has been chosen in order to explore the research questions. Qualitative study presumes that the participants build social reality; it studies cases, creations of individual meaning and use analytic induction to analyze the data (Gall et al., 2007). This is a relevant approach for this particular study where the focus is on individual's perspectives and views, and where the research questions are oriented to find out the meanings that students create about their learning outcomes. The basis of understanding the phenomena of this research is to explore students' perspectives in depth, to investigate details from students' ideas about their learning outcomes in regard to inclusive education. "Qualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context and nuance" (Patton, 2002, p. 227). The study has evaluative characteristic and intends to evaluate learning outcomes from students' perspectives. Qualitative design is frequently used in evaluations, as it tells the program's story by communicating with the participants and capturing their viewpoints (Patton, 2002).

This study is focused on the ideas and perspectives of the students, which they express in speech and words. Bryman (2008) defined qualitative design as a research strategy that usually highlights words, rather than quantification during collections and analysis of the data.

3.2 Sampling

Participants for the study were selected based on purposeful sampling procedures. The main idea of this type of sampling is to select the cases, which will give the rich information considering the purpose of the study (Gall et al., 2007). Purposeful sampling includes different kind of strategies. One of them is criterion sampling, which requires selection of cases to satisfy important criteria (Gall, et al., 2007). The criterion was that students should be

on the fourth year of study in the bachelor program of special needs education. This means that they are graduating the program and experienced participation in all courses of the bachelor program. Their opinions about learning outcomes are based on 4 years experience, which gives richness for the data. Students are still in the study process, so their opinions are fresh in regard to the existed situation.

The special needs education program at State Ilia University has eight students on their last year of the bachelor degree. One of them participated in the pre piloting stage of the research, which helped to make some corrections in the interview guide. Another one was the participant of the piloting, but nothing has been changed in the guide after that, so the data from piloting was used as well in analyze. In total, seven students were informants of the study. There are no rules in the number of informants in qualitative studies. “The ideal sampling procedure is to keep selecting cases until one reaches the point of redundancy, that is, until no new information is forthcoming from new cases” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 186).

3.2.1 Introduction of the Participants

All the participants are female. The age range is from 20-22. In this study, the students are referred by the pseudonyms to insure their confidentiality. The informants have personal motivation towards special teacher profession. Ketii, Tekla and Nana have the same motivation to become special teachers. They see the importance of the profession in the country, consider the issue of employment in Georgia and they think that it will not be difficult to find a job as a special teacher and have a stable financial well being. Anna’s motivation is connected to the religious values. She thinks that the profession is oriented on providing help for the children with special needs, and underlines this as a very appreciated job from the orthodox religious perspective. Nona and Lali are motivated for the profession because they like to be with children. Nona has additional interest; she has experience interacting with her friend’s brother, who has special needs. This experience made her more motivated to study the development and inclusion of people with special needs. Tsira’s motivation is emerged from her interest towards psychology of people. Later she became motivated towards pedagogy. She found her two interests combined in special teacher’s profession and decided to become a special educator.

The participant's motivation towards profession is various, but they all have their own interest towards it. This is an essential characteristic of the students.

3.3 Method of the Study

Interview has been used as the study method to collect the data. Interview is often used in qualitative research design and it helps the researcher to find out the informants perspectives. Using qualitative interviews within this particular study emphasizes the importance of the participants' ideas, concerns and views. "Qualitative interviews begin with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowledgeable and able to be made explicitly" (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

Bryman (2008) highlights two kinds of interviews for qualitative research. Unstructured and semi structured interviews. The semi-structured interview was chosen in this study to investigate the students' perspectives. Bryman (2008) mentions that it is more expected to use semi-structured interview when the study has a precise focus. The semi structured interview on one hand gives opportunity to have a list of some questions that will help to investigate the research question, and on the other hand is flexible with following the predefined questions during interviewing. This research has the clear focus and the specific research question rather than the general idea about research topics, so semi structure interview corresponds to this research.

3.3.1 Developing the Interview Guide

The open questions were used in the interview guide in order to get the students' meanings and perspectives (appendix A). Gillham (2005) points out those open questions in the interview leads to the open answers from the interviewee. Therefore, open answers help to go in depth of participant's views on specific phenomena.

One of the critical point during developing the interview questions was to maintain the focus on the main research question and to be sure that the data derived from the interview questions will help further to understand the main research question. Maxwell (2005) claims that "your research questions identify the things that you want to understand; your interview questions generate the data that you need to understand these things" (p. 69). The main topics

of the interview guide was based on the meaning of inclusive education, special teachers responsibility at inclusive schools, gained learning outcomes from the program, lack of learning outcomes, teaching style and theory linked to practice. The questions were open, but the prompts or the supplementary questions were developed to some questions to ensure that the participant's answer will be focused on the topic of the study. Gillham (2005) states that interviewees are often prompted by supplementary questions if they have not touch spontaneously with one of the areas of study interest. The prompts differed from question to questions. Mostly they were based upon the theoretical considerations on special teachers learning outcomes such as development of IEP, assessment of child's abilities, collaboration with professionals and family, adapting teaching methods, materials and environment.

During construction of the interview guide, the beginning and ending part of the interview was taken into consideration. The first question of the interview was not planned to be directed to the topic, but to help the participants in opening up for the interview and easily express their ideas. The ending question of the interview guide was planned to give the participant the opportunity to express his/her opinion that was not brought up during the interview.

After constructing the draft interview guide, piloting was conducted. Gilham (2005) divides piloting into two stages: pre-piloting and piloting. During pre-piloting, the interviewer can ask the critical feedback from the participant about the interview questions and structure. The piloting is helpful while the researcher is making the trial run of the final interview guide (Gilham, 2005). Both stages were applied in the study. One student was the participant in pre piloting stage. It appeared that some words, for example the word "competence" and "strategy" used in the questions, were not understandable for the student. After pre-piloting, the interview guide was modified. The questions were structured with easier sentences and use of everyday words.

After pre piloting and modifying the interview guide, the piloting was done with one student. The same day the data was transcribed to assure that the interview questions were answering the research questions. The piloting phase showed that the questions of the interview guide were understandable for the participants, and the student's answers were significant for the study.

3.4 Gaining Access for the Data

After the topic for the study was chosen, the gaining access process has been started to avoid the problems during the research. According to Bogdan & Biklen (2003), the first problem that the research could face in the fieldwork is getting permission for the study. The information about the SNE bachelor program should be taken from Ilia State University. The general information about the program would be important to describe the situation in the faculty. Therefore, the permission for collaborating with the faculty staff and getting information about SNE program was taken from the head of the University (appendix B1; B2.).

Considering the approval from the Rector of Ilia University (appendix C), the quality control manager of the study programs provided with the supportive letter for the research. The letter contained request for SNE faculty staff and students to support during the research process (appendix D).

After getting access to the program, the meeting with the program coordinator of SNE bachelor program was organized. With support from the program coordinator, the student contact information was attained and information about the structure of the faculty was gained.

The meeting was organized with the students. The aim of the study, interview process and confidentiality issues were presented. All of them agreed to participate in the study. The study obtained informed consent from the organization where the study was carried out and from the students who were the main participants. Gall et al. (2007) emphasize that “Researches must inform each individual about what will occur during the research study the information to be disclosed to the researchers and the intended use of the research data that are to be collected” (p. 82).

3.5 The Interview Procedures

The interview procedures were based on five phases suggested by Gillham (2005). The stages are illustrated below:



Figure 3. Stages of interview procedures.

The first phase is *Preparation Phase*, which describes all the small details that are important during preparing to conduct the interview. On this stage, the place and time for the interview was negotiated with each participant. It was some problems to find the room at the university for interviewing. The interviews were carried out in the end of the semester and most of the rooms at that time were occupied at the university. For some interviews, the library rooms were used, while the reading place at the cafeteria was used for others.

Before starting the interview, the place was checked in order to be sure that it is organized and quiet. The recorder was checked including spare tapes and batteries.

The second stage is *Initial Contact*: It describes the first contacts with the interviewees with social and informational elements. The student was welcomed for the interview. Before starting with the questions, a short conversation was initiated to establish relationships with the participants.

The third phase is *Orientation*: It is about explaining and giving information about the content and procedures of the interview. The students were informed about the purpose of the interview and the procedures before the meeting. In the face-to-face meeting, more detailed information was provided about the research. It was also explained why the recording is important and the issue of confidentiality was confirmed.

The fourth stage is the *Closure Phase* which describes process of ending the interview. As the interview was semi structured and the investigator was following the questions, no difficulties took place in this phase. To guide closure of the interview, the investigator used questions like: Is there anything else you would like to add or bring up before we finish the interview? This helped participants to think about what they have already mentioned, while additional ideas and perspectives were also outlined.

While finishing the interviews, all participants were asked if they wanted the transcript of the interview. This supports the validity of the transcribed data. Two of the students showed interest for this, so the transcribed interviews were sent to them. They approved the content of the interviews. Each student was asked if she would like to get the research report or the final thesis. It was mentioned that the thesis will be in English, but the investigator can make the research report in Georgian for them. Three of them were interested in research report and others prefer the final thesis. It was negotiated to send them the material at the end of the June 2010. All the students were informed additional questions might come up, and that the investigator will contact them if necessary. The participants were also encouraged to contact the investigator on phone or mail if other questions or issues occurred.

The fifth stage is *Summary*. It highlights the strength and the weaknesses of the interview. One of the strength of the interview was that it facilitated students to talk and show their views with enthusiasm. They were answering questions with motivation and brought up interesting issues. The interview environment supported careful listening to the participants and when necessary, follow up questions were provided to get accuracy of the students' ideas. The attention was directed to voice, intonation, pauses and gestures of the interviewee. The notes were made about all those body language signs. This indicates some meanings that participants put into the sentences.

All interviews were recorded; the recorded material was of good quality and important for transcribing the data. The time for each interview varied from 35 to 45 minutes. All seven interviews were finished the 25th of December.

The weakness of the interview was that the investigator was not skilled in qualitative interviews, and used a lot of time for preparing the interview guide and to practice the skills of interviewing. The interviews were planned in October but were rescheduled because of some changes at the university. The university planned some additional courses for students and the investigator waited until the students got these experiences as well, but unfortunately those courses were cancelled. The information about withdrawal of these additional modules was announced in December.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) identify four main considerations while discussing of ethical issues in qualitative interviewing:

Inform consent. This is described above and was sent the university. For the participants the special meeting was arranged to inform them in details about the research. In this information, ethical issues were also provided.

Confidentiality. The students' names are not mentioned in the study. They are referred by pseudonyms. The concrete age of each name is not stated as well. However, the faculty, specialty and the year of the study are cited. The number of participants is also mentioned in the paper. All of these issues were discussed with the students before the interviewing took place.

Consequences. Initiatives to decrease the risk of harm for the participants and the larger group they represent were taken. The students during interviewing were often very open and telling stories about exact teachers or exact courses, so in presenting the data the investigator was very careful. It was considered not to harm the teachers in this program.

The role of the researcher. In some interviews, it was difficult to balance the relationship between the students and the investigator. The students were very friendly and during the talks it provoked sometimes to be involved in non-professional talk and express own ideas about teaching and learning in general. In spite of this, it was good to gain the trust and open up the conversation as far the researcher was controlling that thoughts and ideas did not influence on students' viewpoints.

3.7 Analyzing the Data

The data was transcribed after each interview. Gillham (2005) suggests transcribing the data as soon as possible in order to interpret information more easily. During listening to the tape, the intonations and emotional expressions that were coming from the students talk was written down to support the analysis process. The interviewer questions and the interviewee answers were typed in different typeface and in double spacing.

The data analysis was based on thematic analysis techniques. Bryman (2008) states that this method is one of the common approaches to qualitative data analysis. The focus of this technique is to search for the themes and sub themes within the data. The interview guide had already contained some themes based on the concepts from the literature. Those themes were used as starting points to open up the text and to investigate students' perceptions about specific themes. In reading the data, quotes from different interviews reflected the same idea about the theme were highlighted. Those sentences were re-read and compared for differences and similarities. The next stage was to look through those quotes and find out if some small themes derived from these quotes. It was obvious that sub themes were evident in the sentences, which also corresponded to the core themes. In this process, the framework approach to thematic analysis was used to help in organizing sub themes under main themes. This approach helps to build a matrix of themes, sub-themes and coded text (Bryman, 2008). The quotes from each interview were organized under the sub themes, which supported to justify each sub theme and their correspondence to the main theme (appendix E). When the data was organized according to the themes and sub themes, the transcribed material was safeguarded by a second investigation to check if other themes derived from it.

The main themes were mainly developed according to the interview guide, while some sub themes were clearly data-driven.

The notes about emotional reactions and body language were not analyzed in depth. However during reading the text, this information was helpful to grasp the meanings of some sentences.

3.8 Reliability and Validity

The issue of reliability and validity is considered as essential for the quality of the research (Gall et al., 2007). The study will discuss this topic based on five criteria developed by Maxwell (1992). Those are descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalizability and evaluative validity. Regard to reliability, Maxwell (1992) reviews it as a particular threat in validity issues, which will be discussed later in this section.

Descriptive Validity

One of the concerns of qualitative research is considered as factual accuracy of the things, which the researcher saw or heard. Descriptive validity is dealing with the accuracy of the descriptions made in the study. Descriptive validity can refer to the issues of omission and absence of some words or features. Maxwell (1992) states that interview transcripts can be descriptively invalid if it will omit features in the participants' speech. To insure the descriptive validity, the recorder was used to capture all the sentences said by the participants. During interviewing, notes were made about the features of body language from the participants. While transcribing the data, the emotional reactions and the intonations of voice were transcribed to give more accuracy for the speeches.

Interpretive Validity

The qualitative research is not only concerned about the accuracy description of the events, objects and behaviors, but also concerned with what those objects, events and behaviors mean to the people. In the term of 'meaning', Maxwell (1992) includes intentions, belief, cognition, evaluation and everything that can be considered as 'participants' perspectives'. Furthermore, he states different perspectives can construct the physical or behavioral phenomena, and further how the accounts of meanings must be based on the participants' own language and terms. As this study is focused on the students' perspectives, the interpretive validity is essential for it. The analysis was based upon the accurately transcribed data with its emotional reactions within the speech tone or the body language of the participants. Even though, the notes about the body language and emotional reactions were not analyzed in depth, but helped to put the meaning to the sentences from participants' perspectives. It is also important for the interpretive validity that several students, who initiated to look through the transcribed data, agreed on the meaning of their sentences in the written material.

Theoretical Validity

The theoretical validity goes beyond the concrete description and interpretation, and explicitly addresses the theoretical constructions that the researcher brings to or develops in the study. The theoretical account refers to the explanation of the phenomena based upon the theory. The theory has concepts or categories and the relationships between those concepts. This study employs the theories such as critical theory and Habermas's concept of communicative

action. Based upon this theory, the relationships between the students' perspectives and the political and academic demands towards special teachers are discussed. This study applies another theory in Kolb's experiential theory, which discusses the relationship between students learning processes and their learning outcomes.

Generalizability

Generalizability refers to the degree one can extend the account of a studied particular situation or population to other persons or settings. Maxwell (1992) states that the issue of generalizability plays a different role in quantitative and qualitative research. Generalization in qualitative research usually employs development of the theory, which makes sense not only for the particular situation, but also for similar cases. This study does not intend to develop a theory, but aims to develop recommendations for improvement of a special teachers preparation program. However, those recommendations can be helpful for similar programs, but this study is focused on a specific bachelor program at Ilia state university in Georgia.

Qualitative research include two aspects of generalizability: First, internal which is concerned about generalizing within the community or institution studied to persons, events and settings which were not directly observed or interviewed, Second, external which includes generalizing to other communities and settings. As internal generalization is more important in qualitative research than external, the internal generalizability will be discussed for this particular study.

Considering the internal generalizability, the qualitative researcher cannot observe or interview every situation or settings of the phenomena studied. It is usual to make purposeful sampling and get as rich information as possible from the studied participants. This research applied a purposeful sampling and criterion is defined for choosing the students. In advantage for internal generalizability, all students on their last year of the bachelor program in special needs education were interviewed. As it was mentioned in sampling section, eight students in total, while one of them took part in pre-piloting of the interview and the seven others were defined as participants.

Evaluative Validity

The evaluative validity refers to the evaluative framework to the objects of the study. Based upon Maxwell's (1992) ideas, evaluative validity as external generalizability is not essential for qualitative research. The researchers in qualitative studies make no claims to evaluate the things they study. This kind of validity is not much relevant for this particular study.

Considering the issue of reliability, as it was mentioned above Maxwell (1992) defines it as validity threats. In his book "*Qualitative research design. An interactive approach*" (2005), he emphasizes two specific validity threats: bias and reactivity.

The concept of bias reflects on subjectivity of the researcher. As it was mentioned in the background of the study, the researcher has some personal interest and motivation towards the study topic. Based upon the personal experience of interacting with student teachers, the researcher has developed some ideas about the program. Considering this issue, the researcher tried to decrease the influence of her ideas and predispositions on the data by developing an open ended questions in the interview guide, and giving possibility for the students to express their ideas in depth, analyzing the data in an accurate way and being dependent on the students views.

Reactivity is considered as influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied. The interview is a social situation and the researchers personality, talking style and body language might to some degree influenced on the participants, but the investigator was aware about this fact and tried to influence as less as possible on the participants. This does not insure that the participants in another situation can react the same. This is a critical part of reliability in qualitative research.

4 Results

This chapter starts with the themes based on the thematic analysis: Gained learning outcomes (4.1.), lack of learning outcomes (4.2.) and impact of program management and teaching on learning outcomes (4.3.). The last section is the summary of the chapter (4.4.).

4.1 Gained Learning Outcomes

The students described the learning outcomes as what they learn from their university education and they consider those outcomes important for inclusive schooling. Four sub themes were developed, based on students' ideas; Definition of different disability and terminology, meaning of inclusive school, role of special educator at inclusive school and attitudes toward children with special needs.

Definition of Different Disability and Terminology

Qeti and Tekla stated that they learned about definitions of different disabilities. They clarified the specific impairments that they mean in different disabilities. "I have learned definitions of different disabilities, such as mental disability, visual disability, hearing impairment and speech impairment" (Qeti). Lali mentioned that she learned how to differentiate disabilities, and she knows that the children with different disabilities need different approaches. "Now I know specific disabilities, what is the difference between the mental disability and autism, between visual impairment and hearing impairment. I know that child with mental disability needs probably different approach than child with visual impairment". Nona stated that she got learning outcomes about syndromes and the symptoms. She thinks that this is an important knowledge for the future special educator and she will use this information in schools. " We were taught syndromes and the symptoms of each syndromes. I think this is important knowledge for future special educator. I will use this information about characteristics of specific disability while working with children at school". Tsira had the same idea as Nona; she talked about syndromes and symptoms. Anna emphasized the learning outcomes connected to the terminology used about people with special needs. She underlined that she now knows how to refer to persons with special needs:

I learned that it is very important not to use discriminative words while referring to people with special needs. For example to say 'children with special educational needs' or 'children with

disability' instead of saying 'invalid child', 'disable' or abnormal' while refer to children with special needs. This is very important to our future career.

Meaning of Inclusive School

The participants talked about their learning outcomes connected to the meaning of inclusive school. Lali mentioned that before she started her study, she had no knowledge about inclusive schooling, but now she knows that it is connected to education of all children without segregating them: "Before I entered the program, I had no idea what was inclusive school, now I know what inclusive education in school means. This is education for all. Nobody should be segregated because of social statues, economical situation or lack of abilities". Furthermore, the students claimed that inclusive schools should provide education without segregating students with different abilities, religious values or ethnical background. Inclusive education at schools should insure that education is for all. "Inclusive education at schools means providing education for every child without segregating them based on religious, ethnicity or disability" (Nana). Nona underlined the issue of environment and stated that environment in inclusive schools should be adapted to the needs of the children: "The environment of schools should be adapted to the needs of the children in order that they feel comfortable". Tsira emphasized the issue of involvement in the activities at inclusive school: "Children with different abilities should be together in the same class. However, not only being together is important, the children should be involved in the class activities". Qeti mentioned the importance of resource rooms in inclusive school, but did also claim that children should not always be in resource rooms, and they should be integrated in general classes: "The resource rooms are important for inclusive schools, but the child with special needs should have much more time in a general class with other kids and not sitting alone at this resource room". Another participant stated that inclusive schools should consider each pupils' interests, and that physical and the social environments should be ready for children with special needs:

In inclusive schools, the teachers should consider each pupils interests and try the best to make lessons that interest all children. Another point is that the environment at school should be adopted in order that the child enters the school and learn there. The parents, teachers and directors of schools should be prepared (Tekla).

Nona did also talk about the adapted environment at school. She mentions that physically adapted schools should be accessible for children with physical and visual disabilities. She concerns about the teachers flexibility:

The environment and the staff should be prepared. The school should be physically adapted so children with physical impairments can enter the school and move inside. Lights should be very good for children with visual impairments and the teachers should be flexible”.

Special Teachers’ Responsibility in Inclusive Schools

The students did also claim that the special need program helped them to understand the role of special teachers in inclusive schools, their tasks and responsibilities. Tekla explained:

I did not know before what special teacher should do in inclusive school, but from my study program, I learned that me as a special educator should assess the child, should make short and long term educational goals and develop the individual education plan.

Most of the participants talked about the individual education plan. They mentioned that it is the main responsibility of special teachers to develop and take part in implementation of individual education plans for children with special needs. They identified some steps during developing the IEP: observing, finding out strengths and weaknesses, developing short and long term goals and evaluating the goals. “The special teachers’ role is to develop the individual education plan which contains several activities as observe and assess the child, identify the strength and weaknesses, develop short and long term goals and evaluate the goals periodically (Lali). Tsira has another approach when she claims that the special teachers first role is to introduce and to explain inclusive education and provide for help to the school staff, children and parents to implement inclusive education: “Our first task is to explain inclusive education to the staff of the school and the parents, and then provide help for them and for children to implement inclusive education”. Nona emphasizes the role of special teachers in providing teaching for children. She thinks that none of other specialists are skilled in teaching children with special needs as special educators:

Comparing to the other specialists involved in multidisciplinary team the special educators have the knowledge of teaching children with special needs. After developing the IEP the huge responsibility is on the special teacher to teach child based upon the IEP.

Qeti mentioned the collaboration with parents of children with special needs and the parents of children without special needs as the responsibility for the special educator. She also

stated that special educators role is to collaborate with other specialists and especially the general teachers. Furthermore, she stated that the general teachers should have some information about children with special needs and should try to avoid much involvement of special educators. Nana thinks that one of the important responsibilities, in addition to IEP development, is to collaborate with the teachers and to give the recommendations: “Developing IEP and giving recommendations for the teachers how to work with the child with special needs is the most important responsibility of special educator on my opinion.”

Anna stated that special teachers role at inclusive school is providing help. Special teachers should help the children with special needs, the parents and the staff: “I think that we special teachers are helpers for the children, for the parents and for everybody who is involved in inclusive education”.

Attitudes Toward Children with Special Needs

Three of the students emphasize the fact that the study program influenced on their attitudes toward children with special needs. Tsira felt pity for people with special needs some years ago, and she told how she used to see only weaknesses of people with special needs, but her attitude now has been changed. She doesn't feel pity for them anymore and can interact and make friends with them: “My attitude have been changed towards children with special needs. From the beginning I was pity of them, but now it is absolutely different, I can see the strength of those people, can establish contacts and make friends with them”.

Anna mentioned that she sometimes was scared to interact with people with special needs. During studies at the program of special needs education, she realizes that there is nothing to be afraid of. These children have strengths and good characteristics:

From the beginning, I had fear towards children with special needs. Now, I can communicate with them. They can express warm attitudes towards you and they demand the same from you, and they can easily hug and kiss. This is very important characteristic for the human beings. The study was a good experience for me; my attitude has been changed towards people with special needs.

Tekla mentioned that she, in the past, would never imagine making friend with a person with special needs, but after being a student of special needs education, she realized that those

people have very good characteristics and personalities. Now she can very easily make friends with them:

My attitudes have been changed towards people with special needs. From the beginning, I thought those people are special and I can never become friend with a person with special needs. But now, I can very well communicate with them, have very good relationship with some of them and even have some good friends.

4.2 Lack of Specific Learning Outcomes

Students mentioned the lack of learning outcomes. They emphasize the importance of those outcomes for working at inclusive setting. In the talking about this topic, they were very enthusiastic and expressed their ideas in depth. Four sub themes were developed within this category; Assessment, Development of IEP, Adapting teaching methods, strategies and environment, collaboration with peers and professionals.

Assessment

Five participants talked about the lack of assessment skills. They express their feelings of incompetence in assessing the child's abilities. Qeti hardly remembered if she learned anything about assessment of child's abilities. She said that she learned very briefly about observation, and that she did not know what and how to observe and how to make the reports of observations. Students mentioned that they were taught some key points of observation; for example observing the child's behavior in the natural environment, but they did not know what to observe, how to structure the observation and how to make the report. "I am not sure if we learned anything about assessment, it was very briefly about observation. But what to observe, how to observe and how to make the report of my observation, I do not know. I do not get this information from my study program" (Qeti).

Tsira has a similar perspective. She does not look at herself as competent in the assessment of child's abilities, and underlined that the teaching only included the surface of this topic. She also claimed that the teaching does not give her the knowledge in methods of assessments:

I do not think that I am competent in making observation and assessment of the child's abilities. We only learned that observation should be in a natural environment. The teaching was so surface that we do not learned the methods of observation or structuring techniques of observation.

Tekla mentioned that she only knows that assessment is her responsibility, but she does not have knowledge how to make assessment in practice: “I am not sure how to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the children, but I learned that this is my responsibility to do in school”. Nona mentioned the lack of assessment skills connected to the evaluation of the goals together with assessments of child’s abilities: “We learned that we should assess the goals that we planned, but I do not get the knowledge or skills of how we should do this or how we should assess the child’s ability in our program”. Anna emphasized that she does not get the knowledge of assessing the reading or writing skills of the children: “ We were taught that assessing the abilities of the child with special needs is our responsibility, but I do not know for example how to assess the reading or writing skills of the child”.

Developing Individual Education Plan

The majority of the students mentioned that their learning outcomes about developing individual education plan are weak. They feel incompetent and consider it as a scary task in the future working life.

“Making individual education plan is one of the scary task for me, because I lack knowledge in this” (Qeti). “I feel totally incompetent in developing IEP (Lali). I am not sure that I will develop IEP at school if I start job there. I feel that I am a bit afraid of this task, because I have lack of knowledge about it” (Anna.) Nana stated that she does not feel competent to make IEP in practice, because she only knows the theory about IEP and has no experience of it:

I can say about making IEP in practice, we do not know. We only know the theory as for example; what are the components of IEP, the long and short-term goals, teaching strategies and so forth. But we have never practiced in our study program.

Tsira linked special teachers responsibility in regard to IEP and did also question how she will develop IEP in the job place, when she has none experience from it:

I think we should be competent in developing IEP when we graduate, because this is our main responsibility. I do not feel that I am competent in this. During four years study period, I have never done it and how can I make it when I go for a work at school?

Tekla had the similar ideas as Tsira. She talked about development of IEP in relationship with the demands from the inclusive school. She mentioned that general teachers and other specialist at school are expecting special teachers to be competent in this:

The knowledge that I have about making IEP is not enough for a bachelor graduate student. When I finish my studies, I should be able to work in inclusive schools and one of the tasks that the teachers and directors are expecting from us is development of IEP.

Nona stated that she should be dependent on her creativity and fantasy in practice. When she start job at schools, she should try to develop IEP based on her creativity. She was taught that it is impossible to get knowledge of developing individual education plans at the study program. It basically depends on the students' creativity.

Everything depends on my creativity at the job place. For example how to develop individual education plan? I should do that according to my fantasy and not the learning outcomes that I am taking from the University. It is not only my personal ideas, but teachers often say that. It means that when I start work, I should be dependent, 80% on my creativity and 20% on the knowledge I get from the program.

Adapting the Curriculum, Environment and the Teaching Methods.

Participants mentioned the importance of adapted curriculum for children with special needs, and highlighted the special teachers responsibility in developing adapted curriculum, but stated that they lack knowledge and skills in curriculum adaptation. This can be exemplified through Qeti:

I just know that I should adapt the curriculum and after that I should teach the child with adapted techniques, but I do not know how to do that, I have never experienced it and have never observed special educators doing it.

Lali supported these experiences: "I do not know how to adapt the curriculum, we have not been taught about curriculum adaptations. I know that this is special teachers responsibility but I am not sure if I can do it."

Nana mentioned that curriculums of different subject should be adapted to child's ability and special teachers should play a key role in this, but does not feel competent in this:

Teaching mathematic or literacy, History or Geography is very typical at schools and I think that special teacher should be able to adapt the content of those subjects.

I do not get any learning outcomes related to adapting the curriculum of any subject to the abilities of children with special needs, even though we had the course about teaching math and literacy for children with special needs.

Nona mentioned that she lacks knowledge in adapting teaching strategies. She knows that there are some adapted teaching techniques, but she does not know when and how to use them: “I can say that I know some teaching techniques theoretically, such as a visual or audio material, but I am not sure if I can plan when and how to use them”.

Anna talked about the lack of learning outcomes related to environmental adaptations. She mentioned that they were taught only how to adapt the sitting place for children with special needs, but they do not have knowledge in adapting the teaching materials for pupils, such as pen, pencil and notebook:

Considering environmental adaptations, I only know where the child with specific disability should sit in the class. A child with ADHD should for example sit far from the window to keep concentration on the lesson; the child with hearing impairment should sit near to the teacher; the child with visual impairment should sit in front. But I do not know how to adapt the teaching materials for the children with specific disability. For example, if I will have a child with writing problems in class, I do not know how to adapt the pen or pencil or notebook to his or her abilities.

Tsira believed that she has to do all adaptations based on her creativity and fantasy, because she does not have knowledge about the topic: “We have never done curriculum or environmental adaptation during our study period. I do not have knowledge of this, but I hope that I will manage this based upon my creativity and fantasy at the job place.”

Collaboration with the Peers and Professionals.

Some students talked about the issue of collaboration with the peers and the professionals at school. Nana emphasized that special teachers are not only working with the children with special needs, but also with their peers. She stated that she does not get any learning outcomes in collaborating with peers: “I think that special teachers responsibility is not only the child with special needs, but also other pupils in the class. But I don't learn how to deal with the classmates of children with special needs in class.”

Lali has the similar ideas about collaboration with peers of the child with special needs. She was in doubt about spreading the information of child with special needs and about facilitating kids to become friends: “I do not know what should I say about the child with

special needs to other pupils, how to introduce him, what information I can say to the whole class and what information I should not, how can I support them to become friends with him”.

Anna did not only mention collaboration with peers, but also with general teachers and other school staff. She said that the general teachers are expecting recommendations and help, but she does not know how to provide this support:

I do not get any learning outcome about collaborating with children in the class and the general teachers or directors of school. They are all expecting help and support from us to deal with children with special needs, but I do not even know myself. How can I give recommendations to the general teacher about IEP?

4.3 Impact of Program Organizing and Teaching on the Learning Outcomes.

Students connected the program organizing and teaching with the learning outcomes. They discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the program that facilitated to gain some important learning outcomes. They talked about the limitations of the teaching process, which influenced on lack of learning outcomes and make some recommendations for further development of the program. Four sub themes were derived from the data about this topic; inefficient four years of the study, mismatch between the course intentions and content, courses about the four specific impairments, teaching without practice.

Inefficient four years of the study

Students expressed their opinion about the study period. They were not satisfied with the first two years. They explained how the first two years are mainly for the introductory courses and that the subjects do not give them any learning outcomes as a special teacher. Qeti criticizes the program duration of four years. She explains that the first two years were poor in terms of learning outcomes:

Actually, I think that the study program is not for four years. The two first years are very broad and general courses in different disciplines and gives you no outcomes for your concrete specialty. So, only two years are left to get knowledge in your profession and this is very short time to acquire skills and knowledge for a good professional. I think the introductory courses can be done in one semester.

In addition, Nana is not satisfied with the last two years of study. She claims that it is not planned in an efficient way. She was expecting more than she got from this program, because the subjects are very general and they do not give her the knowledge in depth. She explained:

The study program is for four years but we study our speciality during last two years. First two years are only introductory courses in different profession but the last two years are not planned efficiently as well. The teachers used to say that they do not know what to teach in this short period, the subjects are very general and while the student becomes interested in depth of some specific subject at this time the course ends.

Lali claimed that teachers use the limited time as an excuse not to go in depth in their subjects and the teaching becomes very surface: “Teachers often say that the course is only for half a semester, so we cannot go in depth with this subject. The consequence is that the teaching only touches the surface and we do not acquire the learning outcomes that we are expected.”

Nona did also mention the inefficiency of the program planning. She said that the first two years courses are intended to give information about profession, and also to increase the motivation towards the specialty. However, she still considers that this is wasted time: “The courses are not planned in an efficient way. First, the two years of introductory course are wasted time, even though it is intended to give information about the profession and to increase the students’ motivation.” Tsira thinks that the first two years motivated her for the profession, but the last two years for getting professional knowledge was not enough: “First, two years was only for raising motivation towards the profession. This actually increased my motivation, but the time for our main courses are not enough to get professional knowledge.”

Anna expressed that the first years of her study increased her motivation, because the teachers were emphasizing the religious values and the helping role of this profession, but still she is not satisfied with the duration of other courses:

During first years of my study, I became more motivated for this profession. The teachers emphasized the religious values in this profession. They often mentioned that special teachers have a valued job by God. He gives us strength to do this charity profession. However, the last years of study is not enough to get the necessary learning outcomes for work as a professional special teacher.

They all recommended to address this issue for further development of the program and to start the professional courses earlier in their study period. Anna specified that it would be better to finish these introductory courses in the first semester of the study.

Mismatch Between the Course Intentions and its Content

Three students stated that some courses do not correspond to their intentions. This is exemplified when they claimed that it is a mismatch between the syllabus in teaching mathematics and literacy for children with special needs. They have only two courses in the program called teaching math and literacy for children with special needs. They express expectations of specific learning outcomes in these courses, but the content of the courses is not about these topics. They expressed high disappointments about this. Qeti mentioned that the teachers on these courses are confused as well with the title:

We have two courses called teaching mathematics and literacy for children with special needs. Those courses are totally different from their title. In the content of the courses, it is nothing mentioned about teaching techniques or adapting methods for teaching math and literacy for children with special needs. That's why I do not feel competent in teaching children with special needs. Even the teacher said that she does not know why the subject has this title.

Nona mentioned that she was waiting for these courses with big interest, but it appeared that the courses contain nothing about children with special needs. She also states that teachers of those courses do not take responsibility to provide information about teaching children with special needs:

I was waiting so much for the courses called teaching math and literacy for children with special needs, but it was totally different modules. They contained nothing about teaching math or literacy for children with special needs. The teachers used to say that special needs children is not her specialty, she can only lecture about teaching children without special needs.

Lali was also very disappointed in concerning of these courses. She stated that the learning outcomes, as stated in the program, were not evident in the teaching and she emphasizes that if the program will improve these is the main that should be changed.

I was so disappointed from the courses called teaching math and literacy for children with special needs. Those were the courses, which were supposed to give us very important learning outcomes how to teach math and literacy for children with special needs. These outcomes are stated in our program but the courses do not correspond to this at all. For future improvement of the program it is essential that the content of these modules be changed.

Courses About the Four Specific Impairment

Tsira mentioned that teaching about the four specific impairments is one of the strengths in the program. The theoretical knowledge that she has about visual, hearing, speech and mental impairments, is a result of the program. She thinks that it is very important to keep those course for the future, because it is important for special teachers to know specific impairments: “The theoretical information that I got about four impairments; visual, hearing, speech and mental disability is the positive outcome in our program. I think this information will be useful in the job.” Anna thinks that it is a good characteristic of the program to contain courses about different disability, but she also states that the knowledge they get is very general and not practical:

It is good that our study program contains courses about four main disabilities. We get a general knowledge about visual, speech, hearing and mental disability, but this knowledge is very general. It is not practical, such as how to teach the children with those impairments.

Tekla did also mention these courses, but she emphasized the fact that the literature is not updated and they are based on old defectology principles:

The courses about different impairment are nice to have in the program, but I should say that some books from syllabus are really old. I remember the book of defectology with horrible photos of children with special needs emphasizing “defects” and medical, correctional treatment strategies.

Teaching Without Practicing

Students expressed lack of practice during the teaching process, which influenced negatively on their learning outcomes.

Qeti stated that she has not experienced case discussions or practical assignments about developing IEP; it was only theoretically teaching in this topic, but nothing in how to implement this. One of the results is lack in knowledge. She wishes for the future that SNE program would be linked to practice:

We had no case discussions and no practical assignments about developing IEP. It was only teaching theoretically about the IEP, but no practical assignments of how to do it. I think that this kind of teaching style result in low learning outcomes for me in developing IEP. I wish that for the future the program would integrate practice in teaching

Nana mentioned that she is in doubt of how to use the knowledge that she has in practice, because the teaching was provided without practice. She thinks that she has knowledge about different disabilities, but she does not know how to plan goals or teach for children with disabilities. She thinks that this is one of the important issues that should be addressed

The teaching is out of practice. I have no idea how to use the knowledge I have about different disabilities in practice. For example: how to plan educational goal or to teach those children. This is most of the important problem that should be solved for the future.

Tsira said that the students are visiting a lot of institutions, schools and kindergartens, but this is more voluntary and not obligatory form the university. She claimed that the practice there is not planned; there are only observers, they are not participating in the teaching process. She thinks that this practice is beneficial when she can communicate with children, but she does not learn how to use her theoretical knowledge in practice:

The practical places that we visit are not organized for us. We are only observers there and do not participate in teaching process. It has some advantage that I can communicate with children with special needs, but it does not mean that I practice my knowledge there.

Tsira continues this idea and express her wish for the future development of the program: “if the program is going to be developed one of the most important is that at practical place students train their professional skills”.

Tekla mentioned that one of their motivations for this program is that inclusive education became popular in the country; there are more possibilities for employment. She explained how she planed to start job immediately after graduating the university. She thinks that good organized practice during the study period is crucial. She recommends the planned fieldwork and the tutor at the practical settings.

Inclusive education became very popular in Georgia the last 3-4 years. It will not be difficult to find a job after graduating. I think we need to get jobs related to practical skills from our study period. The well-organized practice with a good tutor should support achieving these skills. This profession and the knowledge that I get here should facilitate my financial wellbeing in the future.

Nona stated that they do not have planned practice at school, and they do not have practical assignment. She compared the learning outcomes described in the syllabuses and the real

outcomes they achieve. She questioned how she could develop IEP if she never practice it in her study period: “If you look in the syllabuses, it is well written what we should achieve after each course, but it is not like this in reality. How can I be able to develop IEP if I never practice it in my study program?”

Anna made the example of a good combination of theoretical and practical lectures. She said that she adored this course because she can learn the theory and see this theory into practice in the next lecture. She can even practice treatment with the children. This gives her competence in treatment of children with language impairments and makes her feel ready to work with children with special needs. She recommends this strategy of teaching for other courses.

On logopedy, the course teacher has one theoretical lecture and one practical. She explains specific speech impairment in the first lecture. In the next lecture, we can see how she is working with the child with this specific impairment and we can even practice on treatment. I adore this course. It contributes to a lot in our learning outcomes. About this subject, I can say that I feel competent to go to school and to work with child with specific language impairment. This kind of teaching should be the example for other courses.

4.4 Summary of the Findings

The students expressed their satisfaction towards the learning the definitions of specific disabilities and terminologies used towards children with special needs, the meaning of inclusive education and the role of special teachers at inclusive schools. Informants underlined that they developed positive attitudes towards children with special needs after studying at SNE program. Students underlined as well the lack of skills in assessment of child's abilities, development of IEP, adapting curriculum, environment and teaching methods, collaborating with professionals and peers. Students connected their learning outcome to teaching at the SNE program. They showed their frustration towards some issues such as inefficient planning of four years study, mismatch between some course content and the intended learning outcomes, teaching being without practice. They mentioned partly positively the courses about specific impairments, which helped them to learn some specific disabilities. However they stated that the literature is very old in some syllabus and in addition, the courses only teach what are specific disabilities and not how to teach children with the special needs.

For the further development of the program students emphasized that the intentions of the courses should be transferred into course contents, the teaching should be connected the practice and job environment, on the fieldwork the students' tasks should be planned and they should have tutor in their practice setting.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The discussion chapter begins with describing how the findings contribute to the research and outlines links between research aims, research questions and findings (5.1.). These topics are followed by the discussion of main themes and recommendations for further improvement in the special teachers training program at Ilia State University (5.2.). The last section contains summaries and conclusions for the study (5.3.).

5.1 Contribution of Findings to the Research

The introduction chapter emphasized the significance of this study, which was the starting point for developing the following aims for the research:

- Identify resources and difficulties in training special educators for teaching at inclusive schools at the bachelor program of Ilia State University
- Investigate possible gaps between inclusive education requirements and special teachers training program at Ilia State University in Georgia
- To develop recommendations for further improvement of special teachers training program at Ilia State University of Georgia

The main focus of this study is students' perspectives on their learning outcomes in special needs education. Considering the aims and the focus of the study, two research questions have been developed.

1. How do student special educators from the bachelor program of special needs education evaluate their learning outcomes at Ilia State University?
2. What are student special teachers recommendations for future development of the program?

Findings emerged from the study helped to investigate the questions and contributed to the aims of this research. The figure below shows the connection between research aims, research question and the findings.

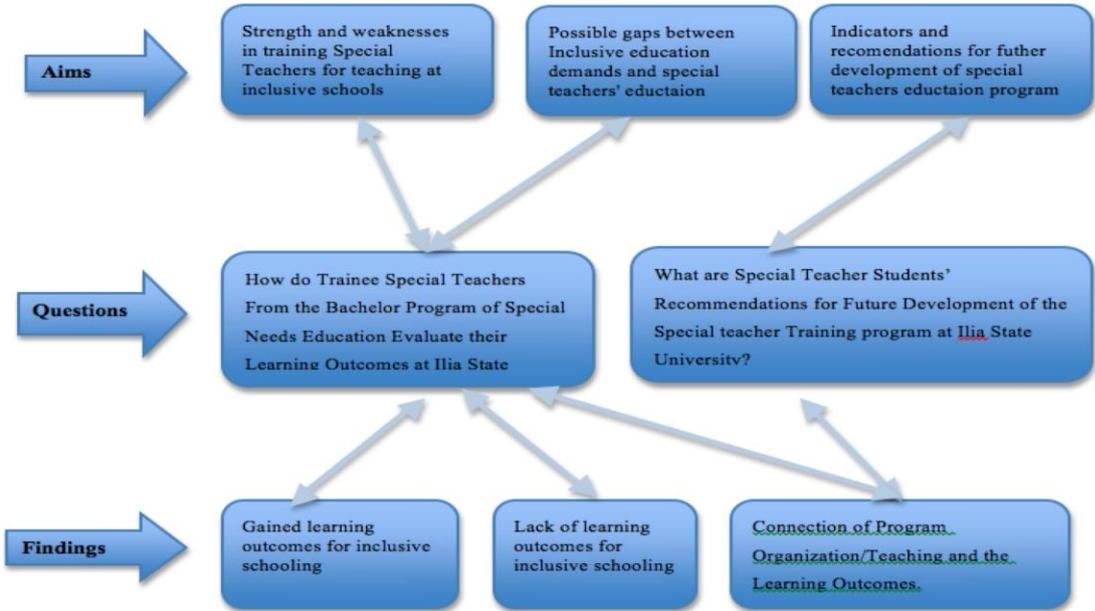


Figure 4. Findings, research questions and research aims

The first finding, ‘gained learning outcomes’, shows students opinion about what they achieved in the program. They also underlined that these outcomes are useful for future work in inclusive education. In the second finding, ‘lack of learning outcomes’, students expressed their ideas about essential learning outcomes for work at inclusive schools, which they lack. They discussed in depth the importance of these learning outcomes in relation to special teachers role in inclusive schools. The third finding, ‘impact of program organization and teaching on learning outcomes’, underlines how students link the organizing of the program, teaching and their learning outcomes. The informants mentioned what kind teaching or organizing program will be best for their learning. All three themes answer the first research question, while the third finding corresponds to the second research question as well. The research questions contribute to the research aims. The first research question contributes especially to the following aims: to identify strengths and weaknesses in training special teachers at Ilia State University, and to find out the possible gaps between the inclusive education requirements and special teachers training program. The second research question

contributes to the following aim: to make recommendations for further development of the program.

As a concluding remark, the findings of the study helped to explore the students' perspectives about their learning outcomes and their suggestions for the program enhancement. The findings facilitated development of recommendation for improving the SNE program. Discussion of the findings and the recommendations are presented below.

5.2 Discussion and Recommendation

This section discusses the main themes and sub themes from the results in relation to critical theory, Habermas's concept of communicative action and experiential learning theory. The link between these theories and the results is emphasized in three main ways:

- 1) Showing how the learning outcomes of the students reflect the policy and university requirements for special educators qualification, which is explained through Habermas's communicative actions between the several levels of the society.
- 2) Explaining the impact of teaching on the learning outcomes, in regard to the Kolb's experiential learning theory.
- 3) Based upon the defined critical parts and the strength of the program, making recommendations for further enhancement of the special teachers preparation program at Ilia State University. Facilitating transformation of the education program is the core of critical theory in higher education.

5.2.1 Gained Learning Outcomes

The students emphasized the outcomes that they got from the bachelor program of special needs education. They underlined the importance of this information for their future work in inclusive schools. Informants pointed out that they gained knowledge about definition and terminology for different disabilities; they learned some characteristics and symptoms of various syndromes, which they can use for identifying similarities and differences between

different disabilities. One of the students, Anna, mentioned that she learned how to refer to people with special needs and what kind of terminology to use.

According to the CEC (2000), the qualification of special teachers should contain the definition and characteristics of children with special needs. This type of knowledge is emphasized in the description of special teachers preparation program at Ilia State University in Georgia as well. It is the part of the learning outcomes categorized in basic knowledge in special needs education (Ilia State University, 2010). The proper terminology used towards children with special needs is underlined in Georgian National Strategy and Action Plan of Children with Special Needs (MoES, 2008). This document shows that the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia considers terminology used towards children with special needs, as an important issue. In this case, the Ministry suggests the term ‘children with specific education needs’ to be used in practice. The learning outcome of definition and terminology reflects the qualification demands from policy level and university program of special teachers. Considering the Habermas’s concept of communicative action between policy makers’ intentions, university program aims and the students learning outcomes, the different levels are harmonized.

Students talked about their progress in understanding the meaning of inclusive schools. They underlined that they did not know what inclusive education and inclusive school meant before they entered the special needs education program. In defining the meaning of inclusive education, the students emphasized three main points; First, education for all children without segregation of learners with different abilities, religious or ethnical background; Second, participation of learners with special needs in class activities with their peers; Third, adaptation of social and physical environment to the needs of the children. The Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) and Georgian National Strategy and Action Plan for Children with Special Needs (MoES, 2008) underlines all those positions mentioned by the students about inclusive education and inclusive schooling. The students pointed out the main principles of inclusive education by showing their understanding of inclusive schools. The university education program does also underline that students should acquire the knowledge about principles of inclusive education (Ilia State University, 2010). The students’ knowledge about meaning of inclusive school reflects the policy demands towards special teachers and the university program aims.

Informants showed their satisfaction about the learning outcome on special teachers' responsibility in inclusive schools. They underlined that the university program gave them information about the role and responsibility of special educators' in inclusive education. The students mentioned that they have a significant responsibility in inclusive schooling, such as assessing the abilities of the children, making educational goals, developing of individual education plan, teaching the students, collaborating with other specialists and the family. Fisher et al. (2003) defined the role of special educator in inclusive education. Based upon their ideas, assessment of children with special educational needs, development of individual education plan, communication with families and professionals are part of the tasks that special teachers are supposed to handle in inclusive schools. One of the students, Anna, stated that the role of special teachers is a helper for children, families and general teachers. Her ideas reflect Egan's (2005) definition of teachers' profession as helpers. "Teachers are, therefore, in a position to help their students' in direct and indirect ways, explore, understand, and deal with the problems of growing up" (p. 3). The Salamanca Statement and framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) and National Strategy and Action Plan for Children with special Needs of Georgia (MoES, 2008) highlight the idea that special educators play a key role in SNE.

The students pointed on the positive attitudes towards people with special needs, as the essential outcome gained from the program. They talked about how their attitudes have been changed during the study period. They compared their thoughts about people with special needs when they started the education and after four years of studying. Before the studies, Tsira's felt pity for children with special needs and focused only on weakness of those children. Anna was even scared of children with special needs. Tekla never imagined that she could make friends with people with special needs. In contrast, after entering the SNE program, their attitudes started to change. They began to see strengths and positive characteristics of children with special needs; Tekla even made some friends with people with disability. The Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action (UNESCO, 1994) and National Strategy and Action Plan for Children with Special Needs of Georgia (MoES, 2008) emphasize the importance of teachers' positive attitudes during inclusive education processes. Positive attitudes are considered as a significant factor for the success of inclusive education (Cook, Semmel & Gerber, 1999). Elhoweris & Alsheikh (2006) claim that special teachers

attitudes towards inclusive education are highly positive. In other words, the special teachers training programs play a significant role in supporting development of positive attitudes for students towards children with special needs and inclusive education. However, making impact on the students' beliefs and attitudes are considered as one of the challenges for special teacher education programs (Novak, Murray & Scheuermann, 2009). Students' viewpoints illustrate that their attitudes has been changed into positive perspectives towards children with special needs during their study years. This can be considered as one of strength of special teachers' preparation program at Ilia State University. This also reflects good communicative action between the policy, the university program and the students' learning outcomes.

To summarize this section, the student perspectives about gained learning outcomes reflect the international perspective on special teachers qualifications (UNESCO, 1994), National strategy and Action plan for Children with Special Needs in Georgia (MoES, 2008) and the university program of special teachers preparation (Ilia State University, 2010). The critical theory in higher education emphasizes the standpoint of dynamic relationship between the university education in the country and the national ambitions. Considering Habermas's theory of communicative action between different levels of the society, the mentioned learning outcomes are the consequence of good communication between policy makers, university program managers and the students.

5.2.2 Lack of Learning Outcomes

The students underlined the learning outcomes that they lack of. Five students mentioned the need of skills in assessing the child's abilities. The students discussed this topic in relationship with special teachers responsibility at school. They considered assessment of pupils' abilities a core responsibility of a special educator in schools. However, students do not feel prepared to fulfill this task at school. Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the child is considered as one of the major task in special needs education service (Kirk, Gallagher, Anastasiow & Coleman, 2006). Knowledge and skills in assessment is included in one of eight categories in the qualification requirements to license special educators through the CEC (2000). The National Strategy and Action Plan of Children with Special Needs (2008) in Georgia does also underline this; special educators should be able to make pedagogical assessments. The intended learning outcomes from the Special Needs Education

bachelor program is that “students graduated from special needs education bachelor program are able to identify the needs and issues of children with special needs” (Ilia State University, 2010. p. 3). This discussion leads to question the communication between the policy, university program and students learning outcomes. The same limitation connected to the communication between those three levels is represented by students’ lack of information in; 1) developing IEP; 2) making adaptations; 3) collaborating with peers and professionals.

Almost every student underlined the lack of learning outcome in developing IEP.

They were aware of their future professional responsibility for this, but did not feel competent to do it. Qeti was even afraid of this task in her future job place. Tekla linked the knowledge of developing IEP to the demands of inclusive school towards special teachers. One of the main innovations, brought by the policy for inclusion of children with special needs, is the requirement of IEP for every child with special needs. It is a clearly documented and carefully monitored plan, which is about modifying the curriculum in order to meet the needs of children with special needs (Kirk, et al., 2006). Different professionals could be involved in development of individual education plan. However, at least one special educator should be the part of this team (Peterson & Hittie, 2010). These ideas about IEP and special teachers responsibility are also part of national Strategy and Action Plan for Children with Special Needs of Georgia (MoES, 2008). This document defines individual education plan as an essential document for inclusive education. The multidisciplinary team of professionals, parents of the child and sometimes the child, take part in development of the IEP. Special educators are considered as the member of multidisciplinary team. This strengthens Teklas’ perspectives about expectations from the inclusive school towards special teachers qualifications about IEP. On the other hand, Nona’s viewpoint is that she will be more dependent on her creativity and fantasy than on her knowledge to fulfill the expectations about development of IEP. Tsira thinks the same about adapting the curriculum or the environment for children with special needs. She underlined that she does not have knowledge of this topic, so she will be based on her creativity to adapt things for children with special needs. The lack of knowledge in providing adaptation is a concern for five other students.

Adapting the environment, curriculum and teaching strategies is often considered as necessary to meet the educational needs of children with special needs and to support their learning

process (Kirk et al., 2006). These adaptations are mentioned as important in Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action (UNESCO, 1994) and in the National Strategy and Action Plan for Children with Special Needs in Georgia (MoES, 2008). One of the main qualifications of special educators is about the knowledge in modifying the curriculum, teaching materials and teaching strategies. The special teachers are responsible to make decisions, and evaluate when and how to make this adaptations (Fisher et al., 2003). The professional university educated special teachers should have learned the theories and strategies to explain the development of IEP, and not only be dependent on personal creative skills. “Professional education, on the other hand, is intended to create a basis for an exploring, reflective and knowledgeable teacher, a teacher who has learned strategies for constructing new knowledge, for observing, describing and evaluating learning processes” (Wormnæs, 2001, p. 312).

Anna questioned her limited knowledge in collaborating with general teachers. She was interested in how she can give recommendations for teachers and other professionals when she does not know some teaching methods or adaptation techniques herself. Lali and Nana worried that they did not get information about collaboration with peers of children with special needs. Providing support from professionals, and especially from peers, is considered as essential for successful inclusion in schools. The special educators should have knowledge and understanding of development of typical peers (Fisher et al., 2003). The competence of special educators in collaboration with professionals and peers is emphasized in the National strategy and Action Plan of Children with Special Needs in Georgia (MoES, 2008) and in the special teachers preparation program at the university (Ilia State University, 2010). However, the students do not feel that they get these learning outcomes.

Habermas underlines the universities role in forming the societies and preparing the students for work. He talks about harmonization of universities programs into socialization processes and emphasize ideal communication between state's, universities, teachers and students (McLean, 2006). His thoughts reflect the situation at special needs education program at Ilia State University. The university program corresponds to the national aims of the country towards inclusive education, but the students' perspectives about outcome do not match the intentions. They do not feel prepared for work. All the learning outcomes that students are missing, are essential for special teachers to be employed in inclusive school.

5.2.3 Impact of Program Organizing and Teaching on the Learning Outcomes

The students evaluated the organizing and planning of the program as inefficient for gaining the learning outcomes required to be a professional special teachers. Based upon five informants, the first two years of study was mainly introduction of the profession. The students entered the university, chose the educational faculty, attended courses in general education, pre school education, and special needs education for two years before they decided specialty. In one way, it is the strength of the program to give opportunity to the student to listen introduction courses of different specialty, to get information of each profession, become motivated towards one of them and then make decision. In the example of Anna, she emphasized the fact that her motivation increased during the first two years, but she still questioned the last two years of the study.

Motivation for the profession is important for the students learning process. The research in higher education found out that most of the incidents of students cheating and drop out from the studying programs were related to their motivation (Hoskins & Newstead, 2009). To put afford for motivating students is important from the university, but at the same time it is essential that students get the qualifications that the profession requires. A further issue can be how the teachers work on motivation of students. As Anna stated, the teachers emphasize religious values in special needs education and consider it as a “valued job by God” and a “charity profession”. This type of approach can be questioned in 21st century. Several centuries ago, it was common to underline religious values in special needs education. Considering the example of Norway, in 1739 the school for “all and everybody” was announced and aimed to facilitate each persons’ responsibility to the Christian God (Johnsen, 2001). In the 21st century, when Georgia is striving for European values of society, it could be an issue to emphasize religious values in order to motivate students for their professions. The other strategies can be used to raise the motivation of students, such as providing deep teaching strategies within the subjects and offer students more professional knowledge. Tsira and Nona explained that two years for motivation and introduction is too much, while two years for acquiring knowledge for the profession is too less. Lali stated that teachers create the excuse of not having enough time to teach in depth of the subjects. The teaching only taps the surface, and influence to students’

lack of learning outcomes. It is essential from the university to pay attention for those factors in future planning of the courses. The attentively planning of the program and the curriculum, results in provision for transparency for students regarding the intended learning outcomes (Lorraine, 2009). The students recommended as well solving this issue for the further enhancement of the program. Anna suggested finishing the introductory courses in the first semester of the study.

Qeti, Nona and Lali touched upon the same issue about mismatch of two specific course titles, aims and content. They mentioned the course titles: teaching math for children with special needs and teaching literacy for children with special needs. Lali was very disappointed with these courses; she expected to achieve the learning outcomes of teaching math and literacy to children with special needs. In contrast, she mentioned that these courses do not contain information about adapting mathematical or literacy curriculum for children with special needs, teaching strategies or adapting materials for those subjects. Nona mentioned that even teachers of those courses are confused with the course title, because they only provide information about teaching children without special needs. The general teaching techniques for math and literacy are also important to know for the special teachers, because these methods are basic for all children. In addition, they should also get knowledge about adapting teaching. These limitations correspond again to Habermas' communicative action concept. From this discussion it is obvious that there is a communication gap between the organizers of the courses, teachers and students. The planners of the courses and curriculum suppose that the courses provide the students the intended learning outcomes, but the teachers do not teach about it and the students experience lack of the learning outcomes.

Tsira and Anna mentioned that the courses about four impairments; visual, hearing, speech and learning disabilities brought them the essential learning outcomes. They understood what these impairments meant. Tekla underlined that the syllabuses contain very old books. The literature represents discriminative approaches and terminology towards people with special needs. She said that "idiots" are used to refer for people with learning disabilities, and the educational approach is based on defectology principles, as for example correcting the defects inside the children.

It should be emphasized that, when the inclusive education is the core for the program, the syllabuses should be updated in order to correspond the inclusive education principles. The literature should support students to understand different kind of disability from inclusive education perspectives. Anna raised one more important issue; the courses mostly provided information on what is specific disability and not *how* to teach students with those disabilities. Of course it is basic to know what the specific disability means, but it is not enough to adapt the curriculum, to plan the goals and to modify the teaching methods in order to reach the planned educational goals. It could also be questioned why the courses cover only specific disabilities? Why courses about other disabilities, for example physical disability, are not included in the program?

Another important topic, raised by the most of the participants was the issue of practice. They mentioned two types of issues connected to practical tasks. The first issue was about lack of practical assignments and case discussion on the lectures. This kind of teaching influenced much on lack of learning outcomes, such as skills of assessment or development of IEP. Their recommendations for the program development addressed this issue.

Case based pedagogy is considered as an effective teaching strategy for preparing teachers for inclusive education. Case discussions help students to understand the needs of the children at schools (Wade, 2000). The case studies are defined as key devices in teaching in higher education (Northedge, 2002). In contrast, students do not experience this kind of teaching in their study program.

Another issue is on the practical fieldwork, which appears as not organized and students do not feel that they develop and learn through practice. However, the university program defines that students should get the learning outcomes about transferring theoretical knowledge into practice (Ilia State University, 2010). Nana experiences that they did not see the theoretical knowledge about specific impairment in practice. In addition, Tsira feels disappointed and frustrated about being only observers and not participators in teaching. Furthermore, this observation was not planned, they did not know what to observe and why. They have no reflections or feedback on that. Tekla is motivated to start jobs after graduating the program and think that a well-organized practice with a fieldwork mentor is crucial for achieving this. Most of the students mentioned that it is recommended to linked teaching to practice, to plan

the fieldwork place and tasks for the students, to arrange tutors at the practical settings. Kolb's experiential learning theory emphasizes the link between job demands and educational objectives. It is focused on giving the students experience a real job place. Considering 'Kolb's learning Cycle', the students only get concrete experience at the fieldwork when they are in a practical place, but the informants do not have tutors to facilitate their reflections on their experience. Reflective teaching is considered as an active process of learning from experience, which supports evaluation actions, decision and behaviors (Ashcroft & Foreman-Peck, 1994). The students are not integrated in the practice, where they can form, reform and process their ideas and where they can experience feedback from others. They also experience lack of active experimentation processes, when they can use their understanding to make decisions and to solve some problems. Having no reflections, getting no feedback and no experience of problem solving situations, students cannot develop and learn much from this practice.

Students were critical, but one of them, Anna, showed the good examples of practice as well. The course about speech impairment contained organized practice. She mentioned that she saw the theory into practice and that students can practice treatment, reflect and get feedback.

In concluding, the section above highlighted the critical points of teaching and program organizing, which influenced students learning outcomes. The informants wish this issue to be addressed for the future development of the program.

It is evident that the university program emphasizes some important learning outcomes for the students, but the teaching and organizing of the program does not supports students to reach these outcomes. This directs us to the critical theory and Habermas's concept of communicative action. The communicative action gap between the program organizers, teachers and students are obvious. It is also critical that teaching is not connected to practice and that students do not experience Kolb's learning cycle, which would facilitate learning from their experience.

5.3 Recommendations

Critical Theory in higher education is focused on transformation and changes for the better education for the individuals. Habermas' thoughts reflect resources for both critics and alternative changes to develop university pedagogy in the 21st century (McLean, 2006). In regard to Habermas' theory, the study identified problems in special teachers training at the University level and underlined possible ways for improvements. The recommendations show the main topics that should be addressed for future changes. This section is based upon the discussion of the findings and students suggestions to enhance the program.

Recommendations for the Management of the Program

It is recommended to improve communication between the program planners, teachers and students. To review all courses in regard to the aims of the program and intended learning outcomes, especially to evaluate the modules called “teaching math for children with special needs” and “teaching literacy to children with special needs”. To review the time and hours spend for the introductory courses and for the main courses.

Recommendations for the Teaching Process

It is recommended to ensure that the literature in the syllabuses is updated and corresponds to inclusive education principles. To integrate practical assignments, case discussion, reflections and problem solving tasks in the lectures, to ensure that students not only achieve knowledge of specific disabilities, but also how to teach children with special needs in schools.

One of the most important issues is to properly plan the practice of the students; to make description of the practical fieldwork with the aims and learning outcomes; to locate responsible persons for the practice, such as supervisors from practical place and from the university; to make tasks for students at the practical place; to give them time for reflections; to involve them in teaching under supervision and to facilitate their practical tasks based on their theoretical knowledge.

5.4 Conclusion

The study has investigated the students' perspectives on special needs education bachelor program in Ilia State University of Georgia. The research was grounded in qualitative design, which gave students the opportunity to express their viewpoints, based upon the semi structured qualitative interview guide. The findings from the data responded to the research questions:

- 1) How do student special teachers from the Bachelor Program of Special Needs Education evaluate their learning outcomes at Ilia State University?
- 2) What are student special teachers recommendations for future development of the program?

The students defined the essential learning outcomes, which they evaluated positively. Those results showed the university programs' integrity in the societal and national values in Georgia. The students' perspectives about lack of learning outcomes reflected on communicative action gap between the policy of inclusive education, university program and students' learning outcomes. The students did also emphasize the issue of program management and teaching. Their main suggestions for the program enhancement, which became source for developing recommendations for improvement of SNE bachelor program at Ilia State University of Georgia.

The critical theory and Habermas's concept of communicative action were helpful to explain the correspondence of country policy, university program and students learning outcomes. Kolb's experiential learning theory helped to discuss the students' perspectives about impact of teaching on learning experiences. The theoretical considerations facilitated discussions of findings and lead to development of the recommendations.

The recommendations can be useful for making the first steps in transformation of SNE bachelor program at Ilia State University. The proposed changes can link the study to the real practice and the demands of inclusive schools. This will give new experience to students to learn how to teach in inclusive schools.

5.5 Limitations and Further Research

This section describes language and time factors as limitations for this study. It suggests the ideas for further research, considering special teachers training program at Ilia State University.

Language

The research proposal and the interview guide were planned in English, because the study is arranged as an international Master degree program in SNE at the University of Oslo. The interview guide has been translated to Georgian language and the interviews were conducted in Georgian. Some terms needed additional explanation in Georgian language to clarify the intended meaning for the participants. The transcripts have partly been translated in English, especially the essential sentences of the informants, which contributed in main themes and sub themes during the analysis. All the information about SNE bachelor program of Ilia State University is translated from Georgian materials. The translations might influence on the meaning of the sentences, even though it was done structured and accurate way. The translations were also time demanding.

Time

The time was limited for this study. As the thesis has a deadline, the allocated time was divided for all the parts of the research. This made some restrictions, such as giving wider perspective for the study, searching more literature and making in depth recommendations. However, the results in this research can lead to other studies within the field of higher education and special needs.

Recommendations for Further Research

- Focusing on the perspectives of other participants in the special needs education bachelor program of Ilia State University would be beneficial. Investigating the lecturers and program managers' perspective would contribute in understanding their ideas about planning, management and teaching within the program.

- In depth investigations of the teaching process in this program. Using another research methods, such as observations on the lectures and practical fieldwork places will contribute in understanding the limitations during teaching.
- Conducting another research design, such as action research. Implementing developed recommendations in practice and investigating participants' perspectives.

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7 Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Guide.

Question	Key points	Aim
1. Could you please tell why did you decide to enter the program of special needs education and inclusion?		Opening for the interview, to see students motivation
2. As you already know developing inclusive education is one of the priorities in the country. Could you please tell what inclusive education means for you?		To get students opinion about inclusive education, inclusive schools
3. In you opinion what is the special needs educators responsibility at inclusive schools?		To get students opinion about their role and responsibility at inclusive schools
4. If we look back to your study program, what do you think that you gained from it that you will use as a special teacher at inclusive school?	What did he/she learned about assessment, about curriculum adaptation, about adapting teaching methods, about assistive technologies, documentation-IEP, collaboration with teachers, parents, class management	To get the students ideas about the learning outcomes connected to inclusive education
5. You mentioned that you learned “. . . .”, Could you please tell how the teaching is provided?	Lectures, case study, group discussion, practice	To get the information about teaching structure

<p>6. In your opinion what are the strength of this teaching style? What are the weaknesses?</p>	<p>Connection to practice,</p>	<p>To get students opinion about teaching structure</p>
<p>7. Could you please tell how do you see the gained theoretical knowledge in practical work?</p>	<p>Examples from practice. The feeling of success or fail . Could be Case: imagine you should plane an individual education plan what kind of knowledge you will use.</p>	<p>Connection of theoretical knowledge to practice</p>
<p>8. If you start working at inclusive school tomorrow what do you think that you are competent in? What kind of lack do you have regarding to your knowledge? Follow up question: Why? Connection to teaching</p>	<p>Assessment, curriculum adaptation, adapting teaching methods, assistive technologies, documentation- IEP, collaboration with teachers, parents, class management</p>	<p>To get the idea of students needs</p>
<p>9. If some changes will be made in the program what will you maintain that you think is important for special needs teachers in regard to inclusive education?</p>	<p>Structure Content Courses</p>	<p>To get the idea of students opinions about strength in the program in regard to inclusive education</p>
<p>11. If some changes will be made in the program what will you improve?</p>	<p>Structure Content Courses</p>	<p>To get the idea of students opinions about weaknesses in the program in regard to inclusive education</p>

Appendix B1. Letter of Request.



UNIVERSITY
OF OSLO

Department of Special Needs Education

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Your ref:
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FACULTY OF EDUCATION

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This is to certify that **LORIA, Tamar**, date of birth 31.07.1983, is a full-time student pursuing a course of study at the Department of Special Needs Education at the University of Oslo, Norway, leading to the degree of Master of Philosophy in Special Needs Education (M. Phil. SNE).

This is a continuous two-year programme run on the "sandwich" principle, which involves periods of study and field work/research in both Norway and the home country. The student is currently in the second semester of the initial study period in Norway and will be working on the collection of data and the writing of a thesis during the autumn semester 2009. This involves a period of field work in Georgia from 1 July to 31 December 2009. The student will then return to Norway for the final part of the degree. The period of study will be completed at the end of May 2010.

The main responsibility for supervising the research, developmental work and thesis remains with the Department of Special Needs Education, University of Oslo, Norway. However, we would kindly request that the relevant authorities give the student the access required to the schools and educational establishments necessary in order to undertake field work and research. We would also be most grateful for any assistance that is afforded to the student which enables her to carry out this work, particularly the use of facilities such as access to telephone, fax, e-mail, computer services and libraries at the various educational establishments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steinar Theie', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Ass. Professor Steinar Theie
Academic Head of International Master's Programme
Department of Special Needs Education

Department of Special Needs Education
Faculty of Education
University of Oslo, Norway

Institutt for spesialpedagogikk
Det utdanningsvitenskapelige fakultet
Universitetet i Oslo
Norge

Appendix B2. Letter of Request

Date: 23rd of January 2009

Subject: Conducting master thesis research at Ilia Chavchavadze State University

Letter to the rector of Ilia Chavchavadze State University

Mr. Gigi Tevzadze

I am the Master student of Philosophy of Special Needs Education at the University of Oslo from August 2008. I have started the planning of the research topic for my Master thesis. I contact you in this matter and asking you for getting an approval to conduct the research at Ilia Chavchavadze State University.

As you know inclusion of special needs children is a core issue in Georgia. The Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia started a project about facilitating establishment of inclusive schools from 2004 with the support from the Norwegian Ministry of Education. The Educational Strategy Plan of Children with Special Needs (2009-2011) is approved by the Ministry of education and science of Georgia.

During implementation of inclusive education a significant factor is the professionals working on this field. Because the issue of inclusive education is new in our society the professionals need extra trainings to deal with inclusion of children with special needs in ordinary educational settings. The special teachers are working in interdisciplinary team with responsibility of inclusion of children with special needs in schools. The specialty of special needs education is situated at Ilia Chavchavadze State University. Ilia Chavchavadze State University represents of this reason, an important in implementing the strategies for inclusive schools.

My research will explore to what extent the curriculum of special needs education reflects the national strategy for inclusive schooling. In addition to this the research will focus on the main goals for higher education of special teachers at Ilia Chavchavadze State University, what could be strengthen and what kind of student competence is emphasized. If Georgia

shall reach the goal of “Education for All” we need to facilitate capacity building of the special teacher’s specialty and may be change some of the curriculum so it corresponds to the needs in the schools.

The research will be supervised by the professors of the University of Oslo, Department of Special Needs Education.

Thank you in advance and with hope for further collaboration

If you have any additional questions I will be happy to answer you. You can also contact the academic coordinator of the masters program – Ass. Professor Steinar Theie – if something seems unclear or if you have questions.

Yours sincerely,

Tamar Loria

The contact information

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Appendix C. Support Letter From the Rector of Ilia State University

**Date: Saturday,
February 21, 2009,
7:27 AM**

Dear Tamar,

Sorry not to respond earlier. Sure, special education is important issue in our country. To develop contemporary academic approach to this part of Educational science is on the top of our agenda. I think it will be good if you will contact Assist. Prof. Simon Janashia – responsible on quality issues on the Faculty of Education of our university. At the same time he holds the Position of Director of National Curriculum and Assessment Center. Concerning your field work in Georgia in the second half of this year – I do not think, that it will be any organizational or logistical constrain for your research here, but anyway, I'm ready to help you to conduct your research smoothly.

Sincerely,

With the hope that our collaboration will be fruitful.

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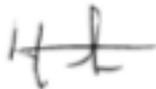
Appendix D. Support Letter From the Quality Control Manager of Ilia State University

თბილისი 07.10.2009

ილია ჭავჭავაძის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის განათლების ფაკულტეტზე მოღვაწე პროფესორებსა და სტუდენტებს

ქალბატონი თამარ ღორია თავისი სამაგისტრო ნაშრომის ფარგლებში, რომელსაც იგი ოსლოს უნივერსიტეტში აკეთებს, საქართველოში სპეციალური პედაგოგიკის შესახებ უმაღლეს განათლებას იკვლევს. ვთხოვთ თქვენი შესაძლებლობების ფარგლებში გაუწიოთ მას დახმარება ამ კვლევის დროს.

სიმონ ჯანაშია



განათლების ფაკულტეტის ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის სამსახურის უფროსის მოვალეობის შემსრულებელი

Appendix E. Framework of Thematic Analyzes.

Theme 1: Gained Learning Outcomes

Sub-theme:	Definition of different Disability and terminology	Meaning of Inclusive School	Special Teachers Responsibility at Inclusive School	Attitudes towards Children with Special Needs.
Interview 1 Qeti	“I have learnt the definitions of different disability such as mental disability, visual disability, hearing impairment and speech impairment ”	“ Children with special needs should be included in the general classes. The resource rooms are important for inclusive schools but the child with special needs should have much more time at a general class with other kids and not sitting alone at this resource room”.	“We should make individual education plans, we should observe the child, we should take information from parents and other specialist and then develop the individual education plans” “Developing good relationship with the parents of special needs children and parents of children without special needs, establishing report with the staff of the school-teachers and director” “The general teachers should have information about children with special needs, they should be able to plan the lesson so that don’t involve too much the special educators. The general teacher should observe the child during the lesson and if she cant deal with some issues then she should refer to	

			the special teacher”	
Interview 2 nana	“I have an overview of different disabilities”	“Providing education for every child without segregating them based on religious values, ethnicity or disabilities” “The environment of school should be adapted for sure. The furniture, lights and everything should be adapted to the needs of the child in order that they feel comfortable”	“Developing IEP and giving recommendations for the teachers how to work with the child with special needs is the most important responsibility of special educator on my opinion ”.	
Interview 3 Tsira	“I learned the syndromes, how they are developed, what are the symptoms of each syndrome”	“Children with different abilities should be together in the same class. However not only being together is important, the children should be involved in the class activities”	“Our first task is to explain inclusive education to the staff of the school and the parents and then provide help for them and for children to implement inclusive education”	“My attitudes have been changed towards children with special needs. From the beginning I was pity of them, but now it is absolutely deferent, I can see strong points of them can establish contacts with them and make friends as well”.
Interview 4 Lali	“Now I know specific disabilities, what is the difference between the mental disability and autism, between visual impairments and hearing impairment. I know that mental disabled child need probably different approach than the visual impairment child”	“Before I enter that program I have no idea what was inclusive school, now I know what does inclusive education at school means, that this is education for all, nobody should be segregated because of social statuses, economical situation or abilities»	“The special teachers role is to develop the individual education plan which contains several activities as observe and assess the child, identify the strength and weaknesses, develop short and long term goals and evaluate the goals periodically”.	
Interview 5 Tekla	“I have some general overview of each disability for example what is hearing impairment, visual impairment, mental impairment and	“In previous time, like in my childhood, the pupils getting bed marks, were mostly sitting in back and the teachers used to say: you still	“ I did not now what special teacher should do at inclusive school but from my study program I learnt that me as a special teacher should	My attitudes have been changed towards people with special needs. From the beginning I thought those people are special and I can never become friend with

	speech impairment.”	wont learn anything. It was common that teachers based their lessons on the interests of the pupils with good grades. Inclusive education gives rights all children to be the full member of the school. In inclusive school the teacher should consider each pupils interest and try her best to make the lesson interested to all children. Another point is that the environment at school should be adapted in order that each child should enter the school and learn there. The parents, teachers and directors should be prepared. Then I think the school can provide inclusive education”.	assess the child, should make short and long term educational goals and develop the individual education plan”	a person with special needs. But now I can very well communicate with them, have very good relationship with some of them and even have some good friends
Interview 6 Nona	“We were taught syndromes and the symptoms of each syndromes. I think this is important knowledge for future special educator. I will use this information about characteristics of specific disability while working with children at school”	“The environment and the staff should be prepared. The school should be physically adapted that children with physical impairment can enter the school and move inside, light should be very good for children with visual impairments. The teachers should be flexible”.	“My responsibility is to observe the child, to take information from parents, to find out his abilities and based on that to develop individual education plan. The most important role is then to teach this child. Just the special teacher has the knowledge how to teach the child with special needs, not the other specialists who are in the multidisciplinary team. So after developing the individual education plan the hug responsibility is on special teachers, how to implement it how to teach the child. “	

Interview 7 Anna	“I learned that it is very important not to use discriminative words while referring to people with special needs. For example to say ‘children with special educational needs’ or ‘children with disability’ instead of saying ‘invalid child’, ‘disable’ or ‘abnormal’ while refer to children with special needs. This is very important to our future career”	“Inclusive education for me means that children with special needs and without special needs are in the same class. This is good for children with special needs that society won’t look at them that they are disabled and they can not do anything”.	“I think that we -special teachers are just for help, we should help children with special needs to learn and we should help the teachers to teach”	“From the beginning I have fear towards children with special needs, now I can communicate with them, they are very cute and sweet. They can express warm attitudes towards you and they demand the same from you, they come close, hug and kiss. That is very important characteristic for the human beings. It was good experience for me, my attitudes has been changed towards people with special needs”
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Theme 2: Lack of Specific Learning Outcomes for Inclusive Schooling

Sub-theme:	Assessment	Developing Individual Education Plan	Adapting the Curriculum, Environment and Teaching Methods	Collaboration with the Peers and the Professionals.
Interview 1 Qeti	“I am not sure if we learned something about assessment. It was just very briefly about observation. But how to observe and what to observe when I will be at school I don’t know”	“Making individual education plan is one of the scary thing because I lack knowledge of it”	“I just know that I should adapt the curriculum and after that I should teach with adapted techniques but I don’t know how to do that, have never make this myself or never observe the special teacher making this”	
Interview 2 Nana		“I can say that making IEP in practice we do not know, we only know the theory for example what are the components of IEP, the long and short term goals, teaching strategies and so forth. But have never practiced it in our	“Teaching mathematic or literacy, History or Geography is very typical at schools and I think that special teacher should be able to adapt the content of those subjects. I do not get any learning outcomes related to adapting the curriculum of any subject to the abilities of children with special needs, even	“ I think that special teachers responsibility is not only the child with special needs but other pupils in his class as well. But I don’t learn anything how to deal with children when they have a child with special needs in class”

		study program”	thought we had the course about teaching math and literacy for children with special needs”.	
Interview 3 Tsira	“I do not think that I am competent in making observation and assessment of the child’s abilities. We only learned that observation should be in a natural environment. The teaching was so surface that we do not learned the methods of observation or structuring techniques of observation”	“I think that we should be competent in developing individual education plan when we graduate, because it is one of the main responsibility of special teacher. I do not feel that I am competent in this. In my four years study period have never done it and how can I make it when I go to work at the school?”	We have never done curriculum or environmental adaptation during our study period. I do not have knowledge of this but I hope that I will manage this based upon my creativity and fantasy at the job place”	
Interview 4 Lali		I feel totally incompetent making the IEP.	“I don’t know how to adapt the curriculum, we have not been taught about the curriculum adaptations, I know that it is our responsibility to do but I am not sure if I will do this”	“I do not know what should I say about the child with special needs to other pupils, how to introduce him, what information I can say to the whole class and what information I should not, how can I support them to become friends with him”
Interview 5 Tekla	“I am not sure how to assess the strength and weaknesses of the children, but I learned that this is my responsibility to do at school”.	“The knowledge that I have about developing individual education plan is not enough I think for Bachelor student, because when I graduate I should be able to go to the school and make this plans, but I don’t think so that I can do this”		
Interview 6 Nona	“We learned that we should assess the goals that we planned, but how we should do this or how we should assess the child’s ability I do not get this knowledge or skills from our program”	“Everything depends on my creativity at the job place. For example How to develop individual education plan? That I should do	“I can say that I know some teaching techniques theoretically such a visual or audio material but I am not sure if I can plan when and how to use them. I also lack knowledge in adapted teaching	

		based on my fantasy and not the learning outcomes that I am taking from the University. It is not only my personal ideas, but teachers often say that. It means that when I start work, I should be dependent 80% on my creativity and 20% to the knowledge I get from the program”	materials. I know in general that there are some adapted pans but how to use them and when to use I have no idea.”	
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Theme 3: Impact of Program Organizing and Teaching on the Learning outcomes

Sub-theme:	Inefficient four years of the study	Teaching without Practice	Courses about Four Impairments	Mismatch between course intentions and its content
Interview 1 Qeti	“Actually it is not 4 years study, because first two years are very broad general courses in deferent disciplines and that gives nothing for your concrete speciality. Then just two years are left to get some knowledge in your profession and it is very short time to become a good professional. I think this	“We had no case discussions and no practical assignments about developing IEP. It was only teaching theoretically about the IEP, but no practical assignments of how to do it. I		“We have two subjects that are called teaching mathematic and literacy for children with special needs. Those courses are totally different from their title. It is juts about how to teach math and literacy in general. There is nothing mentioned about children with special needs. Even the teacher has said that she does not know why this subject is called like that. During

	introductory courses in deferent speciality could be done in one semester”	think that this kind of teaching style result in low learning outcomes for me in developing IEP. I wish that for the future the program would integrate practice in teaching”		teaching us nothing is mentioned about adapting math tasks for children with special needs or adapting the pen while writing for example. That’s why I don’t feel competent about teaching techniques for children with special needs.
Interview 2 Nana	“Our study program is for four years but we study our specialty for last two years. Even in this two years I was expected more then was taught. First two years are juts introductory courses in different profession but the last two years are not planned efficiently as well. The teachers are saying that they do not know what to teach in this short period of time, the subjects are very general and while you become interested in depth of some specific subject at this time the course ends”.	The teaching is out of practice. I have no idea how to use the knowledge that I have about different disabilities in practice. For example: How to plan educational goals or to teach those children		
Interview 3 Tsira	First two years was only for raising motivation towards profession, which increase my motivation but then the time for main courses are not enough to get professional knowledge”	“We are visiting a lot of institutions schools, kindergartens, rehabilitation centers but it is kind of voluntary and not obligatory from the University. This practice is not planed, so we are just there, sometimes helping the	The theoretical information that I got about four impairments- visual, hearing, speech and mental disability is the positive outcome that our program contains those courses. Think this information will	

	(Tsira).	children, but we are not participating in planning the goals for children or teaching them. Of course it gives some benefit for example I can communicate with the children, but it does not mean that I learn there how to use my theoretical knowledge in practice.”	be useful at the job	
Interview 4 Lali	“ Teachers often say that the course is only for half a semester, so we can not go in depth with this subject. The consequence of it is that the teaching becomes very surface and we do not acquire the learning outcomes that we are expected”.	“I can say that I have visited a lot schools and kindergartens but just visit is not enough. We should have some structure there. For example I can say just about one subject logopedy that is really good teaching. Because she has one theoretical lecture and then one practical, That helps a lot. She explains one specific speech problem and next lecture we can see how she is working with the child with specific impairment, and even we can practice treatment as well. On this subject I can say that I feel a bit competent to go to school and to work with child with specific speech impairment”.		“I was so disappointed from the courses called teaching math and literacy for children with special needs. Those were the courses, which were supposed to give us very important learning outcomes how to teach math and literacy for children with special needs. These outcomes are stated in our program but the courses does not correspond this at all. For future improvement of the program it is essential that the content of these modules changed.
Interview 5 Tekla	“I just want to say that study in real is not for four years, O.K. we have program for four years but special needs education and inclusion subject starts from	Inclusive education became very popular in Georgia last 3-4 years. It will be not difficult to find a job after graduating. I think we need to get job related practical skills from our study	The courses about different impairment are nice to have in the program but I should say that some books from syllabuses are really old. I remember the book of	

	second semester of the second year. I think it is just wasting time from the beginning”.	period. The well-organized practice with a good tutor should support to get these skills. This profession and the knowledge that I get here should facilitate my financial wellbeing in the future	defectology with horrible photos of children with special needs emphasizing “defects” and medical, correctional treatment strategies (Tekla).	
Interview 6 Nona	“The courses are not planed in an efficient way. First two years for the introductory courses are wasting time, even though it is intended to give information about profession and to increase the students motivation”.	“I don’t know what I will do when I go to school, We don’t have practice at school, even we don’t have some practical assignments, I can say that I don’t achieved practical learning outcomes from the program. If you look in some syllabuses, it is very well written what we should reach after each course but it is not like that. How I can reach the learning outcome about making individual education plan if I will never make it during my study”.		I was waiting so much for the courses called teaching math and literacy for children with special needs, but it was totally different modules. They contained nothing about teaching math or literacy for children with special needs. The teachers used to say that special needs children is not her specialty, she can only lecture about teaching children without special needs
Interview 7 Anna	“During first years of my study, I became more motivated for this profession. The teachers emphasized the religious values in this profession. They mentioned often that special teachers specialty is valued job by the god. He gives us strength to do this charity profession. However the last years of study is not enough to get the necessary learning outcomes for work as a professional special teachers”	“On logopedy course teacher has one theoretical lecture and one practical. She explains specific speech impairment on the first lecture. On the next lecture we can see how she is working with the child with this specific impairment and even we can practice treatment as well. I adore this course. That contributes a lot to our learning outcomes. About this subject I can say that I feel competent to go to school and to work with child with specific language	“It is very good that our study program contains this four main subjects: mental disability, visual impairments, hearing impairment and speech impairment. That gives some general knowledge about those disabilities.	

	“I will recommend to finish these introductory courses in the first semester of the study”.	impairment		
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Motivation towards Profession.

(This theme was used for introducing the informants)

Sub-themes:	Future Financial Well being	Religious Values (Emphasized by the teachers)	Providing Help for Children	Interest toward Life of Person with Special Needs
Interview 1 Qeti	“It was obvious from the mess media that the inclusion of special needs children became very actual topic in the country, many job vacancies appear in last years, so I thought it will be a bit easier as well to get the job and it will help in the future financially”			
Interview 2 nana	Financial			
Interview 3 tsira				“My priority professions always were pedagogy and psychology because I was interested in children with psychological or mental problems and wanted to find out how this children develop and live in

				general, so I found a profession that was combination of pedagogy and psychology”
Interview 4 Lali			“I was interested in this profession because it was something different from every teacher, everybody become math or literacy teachers and its different from this and it gives you chance to help children”	
Interview 5 Tekla	“I can say that one of my interest was financial, the teacher emphasized in the introductory courses of this program that this profession is very popular and country is developing towards inclusive society. The schools, institutions etc need specialists in this field.”			
Interview 6 Nona			«I think that i feel some kind of responsibility towards these children that I should help them. I decided that this is really what I want because I enjoy while helping children. When we are talking about inclusive education then it means that the education of those children depends on us»	“My friends brother had some disability and he was always at home, I was always interesting how he was living”
Interview 7 Anna		“The first lectures made me more motivated when teacher emphasized that we have the strength from god to help this children, this is charity that we can do by becoming the special teachers”		

