Inclusion at a Crossroads: What do Trainee Educational Psychologists think? An exploration of TEPs' understanding of and attitudes towards Inclusive Education and how this influences their professional role.

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education, Mary Immaculate College, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology (DECPsy)

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Abstract

Inclusive Education (IE) is a highly contested and controversial concept, fraught with dilemmas and tensions around its true meaning. Contradictions and inconsistencies between legislation, policy and practice within the Irish context and internationally act as an impetus for urgent action around the meaning of IE and its implications going forward. Trainee educational psychologists (TEPs) have a unique role regarding IE, given their capacity to work with schools, families, children and young people to inform practice and empower others. In recent times, the NCSE (2024a) has asserted that the Irish Education system is working towards a 'progressive realisation of a system of inclusive education' (p.91) and that educational psychologists (EPs) play an essential role in the implementation of this. Despite this, there is a dearth of evidence exploring EPs' and particularly TEPs' attitudes towards this topic. As a result, the current research is timely in examining TEPs' underlying attitudes and beliefs around IE to generate understanding and inform future practice.

The current study comprises qualitative research with over 30 TEPs, using semi-structured interviews and online qualitative questionnaires, grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. The research uses Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to provide a comprehensive analysis of the data. Findings indicate that TEPs' understanding of IE is shaped through personal and professional experiences intertwined with values and reflective practice. Systemic challenges are highlighted, as well as how TEPs promote inclusion within their role such as collaborating with families and schools, celebrating diversity as the norm and acting as an advocate for children and young people.

Declaration

This research is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology (DECPsy) at Mary Immaculate College. The work has not previously been accepted for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted for any degree.

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. Where the use has been made of other people, it has been fully acknowledged and referenced. I hereby give my permission for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for reading and interlibrary loans, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Name: Emma Teahan

Signature: 

Date: 4th May 2025

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CAMHS	Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CDNTs	Children's Disability Network Teams
CPL	Continuous Professional Learning
CoP	Community of Practice
COS	Continuum of Support
DE	Department of Education
EASNIE	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
EP/s	Educational Psychologist/s
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
ETSS	Education Therapy Support Service
EU	European Union
GAM	General Allocation Model
GOI	Government of Ireland
HSE	Health Service Executive
IE	Inclusive Education
IEP	Individual Education Plan
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
ISE	Inclusive Special Education
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SET	Special Education Teacher/Teaching
SETAM	Special Education Teacher Allocation Model
SIM	School Inclusion Model
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SLCN	Speech, Language and Communication Needs
SNA/s	Special Needs Assistant/s
TEP/s	Trainee Educational Psychologist/s
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TPL	Teacher Professional Learning
UCD	University College Dublin
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

WoE	Weight of Evidence
PSI	Psychological Society of Ireland

1. Introduction

1.1. Thesis Overview and Aims

The current research centres on the influence of Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) understanding of and attitudes towards Inclusive Education (IE) in Ireland on their professional role as psychologists. IE has become a widely discussed topic within the field of educational policy and practice in Ireland. One of the main driving forces fuelling concerns, discussions and debates on the topic nationally is due to the assertion made by the United Nations, under Article 24 of United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) that the nature of the current Irish education system is not compatible with its view of inclusion (NCSE, 2019). The goal under Article 24 is the realisation of a system whereby students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are not excluded from the general education system based on their disability and that they should receive supports within the system to provide them with an effective education. Consequently, the NCSE (2024a) have devised a list of recommendations in response to this goal within the Irish context. Notably, it is deemed that the involvement of Educational Psychologists (EPs) as stakeholders is pivotal in achieving a truly inclusive education system in Ireland. It has been predicated that EPs are in a unique position to support inclusive practices in the education system, due to their professional relationships with schools and the values and principles which underpin their role (NCSE, 2024a; Zaniolo, 2021). While minimal studies have been conducted with qualified EPs, there is a paucity of research regarding TEPs' attitudes and perspectives around IE. Examining attitudes at the foundational stage is particularly valuable given that TEPs' stage of training is crucial in shaping their professional identities (Tan, 2014). Understanding their evolving and changing perspectives will allow for insights into how future EP practice may be best supported and influenced to promote inclusive attitudes from the outset, rather than assessing views post-qualification when beliefs may be more entrenched. The current study aims to address this gap in the literature through exploration of TEPs' attitudes and understanding of IE and how such attitudes influence their professional role.

1.2. Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a way of viewing the world, through certain philosophical assumptions that guide one's thinking (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Mertens, 2023). To decipher which paradigm the current research is situated in, the researcher explored three concepts. 1) Epistemology describes how we decide what constitutes knowledge and explores the relationship between the knower and the would-be known 2) Ontology studies the nature of reality and is concerned with the assumptions we make to believe that something is real 3) Methodology refers to process of the knower obtaining information in terms of research design, methods and procedures (Kivunja & Kuyini,2017; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Mertens, 2023). On considering this, the current study is situated in the interpretivist paradigm whereby the central objective is for researchers to step into their participants' world and attempt to understand it from their perspective, rather than their own.

1.2.1. Epistemology

Epistemology focuses on the nature of human knowledge, wherein the researcher considers how we know what we know. The interpretivist paradigm focuses on interpreting and deeply understanding the subjective human experience, underpinned by a subjectivist epistemology. Interpretivism assumes that reality is socially constructed, hence it is often referred to as the constructivist paradigm (Kivunja & Kuyini,2017; Mertens, 2023). The researcher utilises their interpersonal skills to attempt to truly and meaningfully understand their participants viewpoint (O'Donoghue, 2006). Furthermore, interpretivism assumes an inextricable link between the researcher and the research subject due to the assumption that humans cannot be separated from their knowledge. O'Donoghue (2006) describes the relationship between the researcher and the research subject as an 'interdependent one rather than a one-sided deterministic one' (p.16). Critique of the paradigm has identified that the focus on social phenomena at an individual level within interpretivism does not allow for understanding around the societal impact on the issue (Hay, 2002). The current researcher would argue that interpretivism does not ignore the societal influence; rather, it offers a nuanced and context-sensitive approach to understanding how individuals and groups interpret these influences.

1.2.2. Ontology

Ontology is concerned with the chosen phenomenon in terms of its 'nature of existence' (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020, p.40). The interpretivist ontology assumes a relativist view, wherein reality is examined through an inter-subjective lens, encompassing the variety of social factors that can shape an individual's understanding. From an ontological standpoint, interpretivism assumes that there are multiple, socially constructed versions of reality which can be explored through human interactions. Given the subjective nature of the relativist ontology, critique of interpretivism includes that the researcher's own values and interpretations will inevitably influence the results and bias may occur (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). The current researcher argues that, unlike positivist approaches, interpretivism acknowledges and embraces the influence of human perspective. To mitigate the possibility of bias, the current researcher employed rigorous reflexivity and transparency methods, as detailed in relevant sections.

1.3. Theoretical Underpinnings

1.3.1. Bioecological Systems Theory

The current research can also be considered in the context of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bioecological Systems Theory whereby an individual's development is shaped through proximal processes over time, which are progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between an active and evolving biopsychosocial human and the ever-changing environment. This theory represents a refined and expanded result of the previous foundational theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bioecological Systems Theory (2005) is influenced by the interplay between four elements: Process, Person, Context and Time (PPCT).

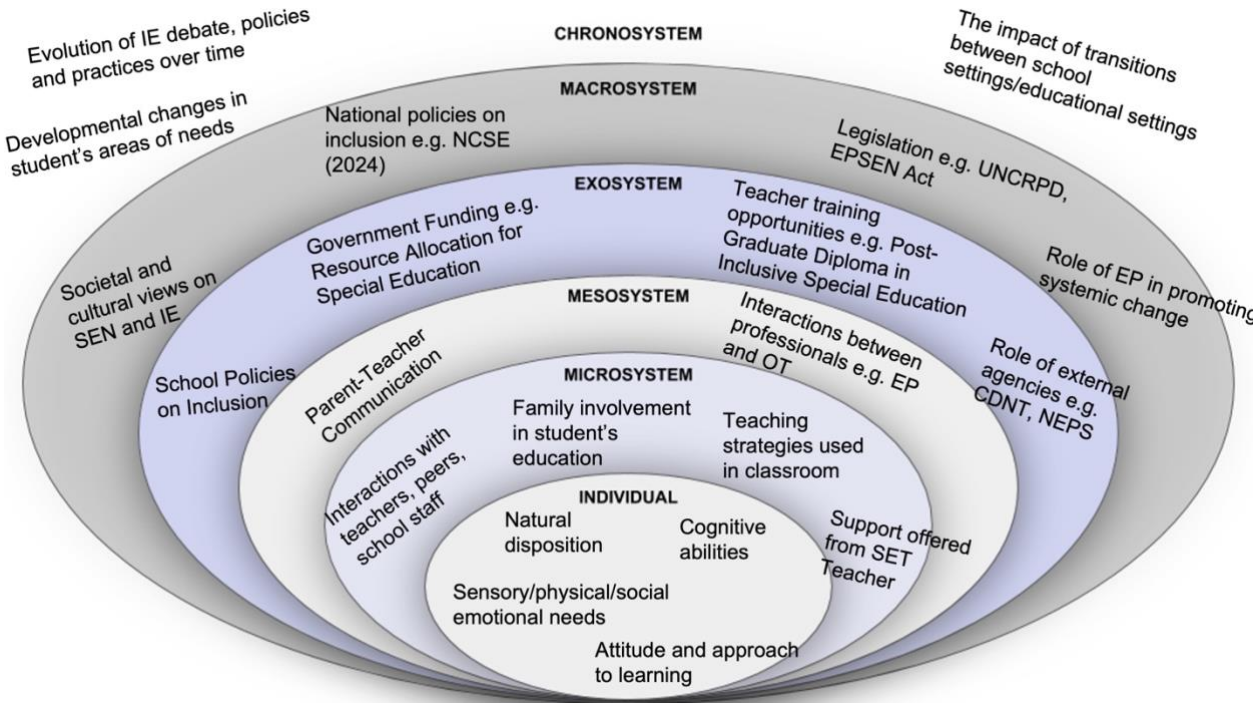
Process is a pivotal element of this theory, referring to the interactions between the individual and their environment. This element can be examined through three concepts: 1) The reciprocity between an individual and others who they interact with 2) The increasing complexity of these interactions over time and 3) The duration and frequency of these processes (Navarro et al., 2022). Person recognises that a person's characteristics, made up of their biological and genetic traits, as well as their experiences impact on how they engage with their environment.

A person's characteristics can be considered in three distinctive categories 1) Force characteristics are the traits that can either enable or impede on proximal processes 2) Resource characteristics are the sources of experiential, mental or biological resources that an individual draws on to implement proximal processes. 3) Demand characteristics are the tangible factors within the environment that either facilitate or hamper individuals engagement (Prendeville & Kinsella, 2025).

Context signifies that a child's development is nested within the following layers of the environment: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystem refers to the influence of the individual's interaction with their immediate settings e.g. interactions between teachers and school. Such interactions impact a child's social emotional development and their ability to function within the school setting. This is located within their mesosystem which is the interrelations between two or more microsystems e.g. interactions between professionals supporting the child. The exosystem is any environment in which the individual is not an active participant but still impacts their development such as school policies around inclusion. The overarching system, known as the macrosystem refers to the broader values, traditions and cultural components that influence a child's development e.g. legislation This framework elucidates that a child's engagement and interaction with an inclusive educational environment could be a pivotal factor in their development trajectory (Trang Thu et al., 2022). The concept of IE can be viewed within the context of the macrosystem, whereby EPs work to make a systemic change through their work with the stakeholders around the child (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023). Figure 1 illustrates the variety of factors nested within the context of a child's environment that can influence their experience of an inclusive system.

Time, also referred to as the chronosystem, captures the influence of passing time. This includes the experiences that occur during the proximal processes (macrotime) as well as over longer periods of time (mesotime) and across generations and historical contexts (macrotime) ((Prendeville & Kinsella, 2025).

Figure 1: Illustration of the influence of child's interaction with contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), relevant to IE



1.3.2. Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is a social psychological theory which provides 'an integrative group-based analysis of attitudes and attitude phenomena' (Smith & Hogg, 2008, p.353); whereby attitudes are linked to a person's social context, including their social identities and social group dynamics. According to SIT, individuals derive their self-conception and self-identity from groups they feel they belong to. Furthermore, it is thought that whoever the individual most strongly identifies with has the most powerful influence on their behaviour (Trepte, 2013). This theoretical framework is pertinent to the current study as it illuminates how TEPs are gradually becoming integrated members of the EP profession. SIT illustrates how TEPs' identification with certain groupings and dynamics can impact on their attitudes and behaviours regarding IE. As they navigate their training, TEPs are not only forming a new professional identity, they are also drawing from understanding derived from pre-existing

identities in their prior professional roles such as teachers and assistant psychologists. The experiences, beliefs and practical knowledge gained from these past roles provide TEPs with a pre-existing lens through which they interpret new understandings of IE, potentially shaping their developing identity and attitudes towards inclusion. SIT complements the abovementioned EST throughout the research, given that both frameworks emphasise the interplay between individuals and their surrounding environments. While SIT, highlights the influence of group identification on attitudes, EST offers a broader lens through illustrating how these social identities are shaped by interaction across contexts.

1.4. Positionality Statement

This research is deeply influenced by my time working as a primary school teacher, with experience of working in mainstream and special class settings. In this regard, I have practical knowledge and first-hand insights of the real-world strengths and challenges that are associated with all educational settings. As a teacher, I strive to give students a meaningful, participatory experience, where they feel a sense of belonging and connectedness. In the mainstream classroom, I collaborated with Special Class Teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to ensure students enrolled in specialist settings had enriching experiences when attending my mainstream class for part of the day alongside their peers. These moments, often marked by joy, friendship, and mutual learning, underscored the value of inclusion. I also witnessed the logistical challenges, social complexities and sensory demands that could oftentimes make mainstream settings overwhelming for students. Conversely, as a Special Class Teacher for autistic students, I worked closely with SNAs to create a structured yet flexible environment where children felt safe and supported. Inclusion was individualised-some students participated in mainstream classes, while others thrived best within our specialist setting. This varied on a day-to-day basis, dependent on a plethora of contextual, child-centred factors. For me, these experiences reinforced the importance of child-led practice over rigid frameworks.

Following three years working as a primary school teacher, I embarked on the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology course, where I began to learn about the complex history and legislative mandates, as well as the current positioning and future direction of the state regarding IE. During this time, I had placement experiences within Children's Disability

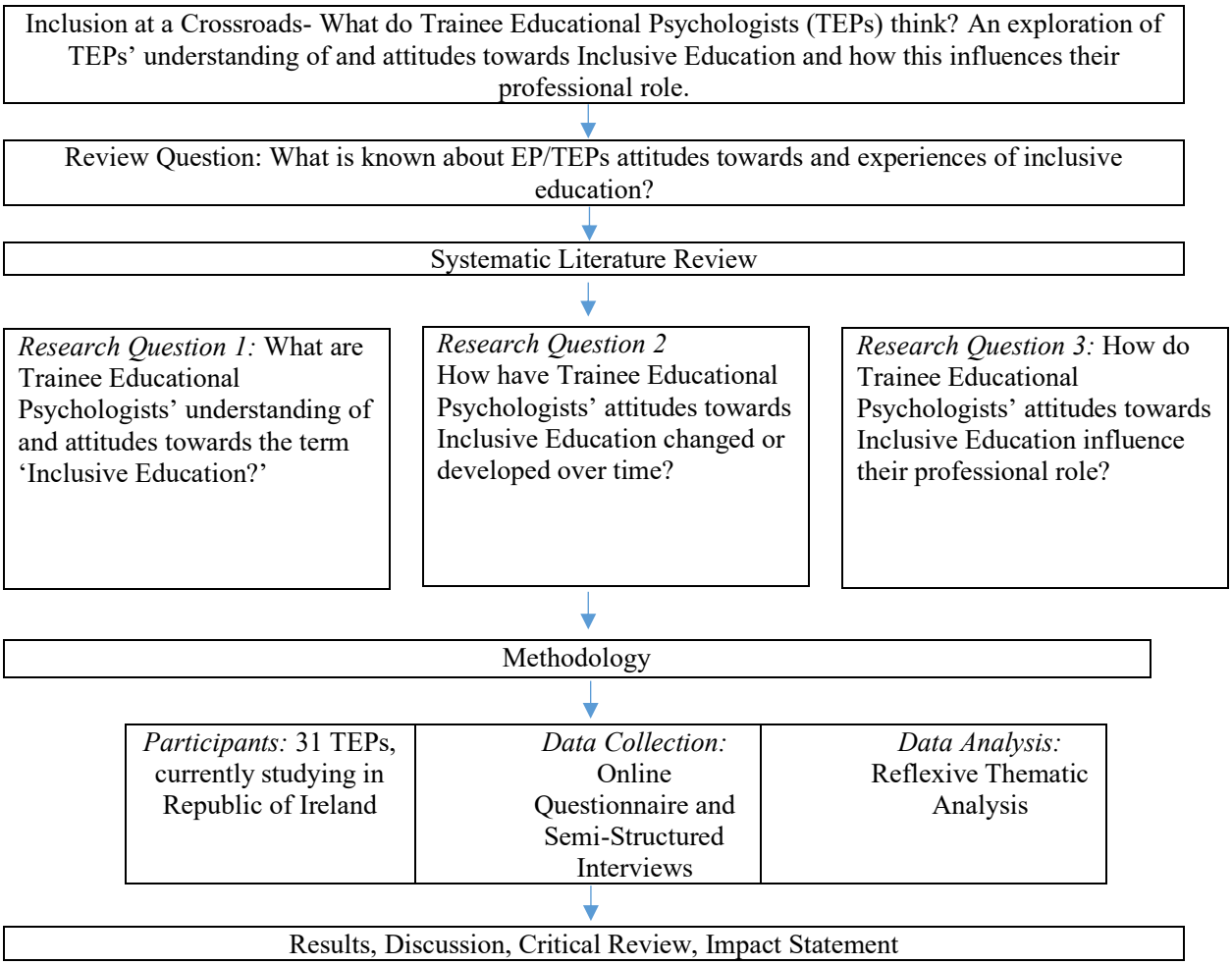
Network Teams (CDNTs), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) whereby I was continually exposed to the ethical debate around appropriate school placements in addition to the logistical difficulties around securing appropriate school places. Through these experiences as a TEP, I was confronted with the concept of what really constitutes an 'appropriate' school placement and who is to say what is appropriate or not. I also began to reflect on what IE means aside from the debate around placement. For example, the feeling you get as you walk through the door of a school or the child-centred, creative pedagogies used by school staff who strive for their students to reach their full potential. Through discussions and experiences with fellow trainees, supervisors and school staff, I began to reflect on the role of the trainee within the inclusion conversation, before deciding to deepen my interest through undertaking the current research. Undoubtedly, I approached this study as an inside researcher. While this gave me valuable insight into participants' experience, it also increased the risk of researcher bias (Unluer, 2012). To mitigate this, I undertook genuine and transparent measures to maximise objectivity and be as explicit about my position as possible.

Ultimately, I believe that an appropriate educational experience is unique to each child and should be guided by their strengths, preferences and areas of needs. Furthermore, I believe that student experience hinges on the relationship formed between child and teacher/SNA, regardless of the setting. I believe that whether students with SEN are attending a mainstream or special class or school, their experience of feeling safe and valued in that setting will have as much to do with the staff/pupil rapport as it will to do with the level of training in SEN that staff have received. Up-to-date training for staff is fundamental to creating an inclusive climate within a school. I believe that this is where the trainee role plays a part, particularly in the power of education, advocacy and empowerment.

Anecdotally, I believe that the lack of availability of appropriate school places is an issue which can leave families and educational professionals to act with a sense of urgency and desperation at the detriment of considering the bigger picture and the long-term implications of educational settings, whether this is in mainstream or specialist settings. Oftentimes, parents of children with SEN are left with limited choice around where their child will receive an

education. This is a regrettable and emotionally laden issue for parents supporting children with SEN and a current failing of the Irish system. Every child deserves a school placement that will support them to thrive in society. Throughout my time as a teacher and now as a TEP, I have observed meaningful and truly participatory inclusive work in many educational settings across the country. My professional experiences fuel my commitment to advancing research in this field and contributing a fresh perspective to the discourse on IE.

Figure 2: Thesis Structure



2. Systematic Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

2.1.1. Defining IE

IE is a multifaceted and contentious issue which educational professionals and policymakers must address annually. The term 'inclusion' has diverse meanings and definitions among researchers, such that the field is 'riddled with uncertainties, disputes and contradictions' (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010, p.402). Following the first legal statement addressing children's right to an IE in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), the lack of consensus around what actually constitutes IE must be addressed (Hyatt & Hornby, 2017). The nebulous nature of defining IE is evident across the literature whereby some academics and policy makers equate inclusion to all students being predominantly educated in a mainstream setting (Ainscow, 2020; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Florian, 2014; UNESCO, 2005) On the other hand, others define IE as pertaining to the creation of inclusive and accepting communities in schools (Hornby & Kauffman, 2024; Nilholm, 2021). Cited as a term which embodies principles of justice, compassion, solidarity and human rights (Pirrie & Head, 2007), IE is a fundamentally moral issue which carries strong ethical significance.

In recent times, policy in Ireland followed the footsteps of its global counterparts to shift provision for students from segregated to mainstream provision, otherwise known as full inclusion. The drive for full inclusion has been partially bolstered by the 'All Means All' agenda put forward in the UNESCO (2020) report which emphasises that no student should be excluded from a high-quality education due to their disability and advocates for systemic change in policy, practice and attitudes. However, there have been debates about the meaning of full inclusion and its implications; mainly centred around if inclusion means having all children 'under the same roof' (Warnock, 2005, p.36) or if it means everyone receiving the opportunity to feel accepted and valued, regardless of the specific educational setting that they are in. According to Nutbrown et al., (2013), successful IE means striving towards maximum participation and minimal exclusion for children with SEN. This promotes the education of neurotypical and neurodivergent pupils together within the mainstream setting. Ainscow (2020) asserted that educating all students together puts the onus on schools to develop innovative ways of teaching

to meet the needs of all students. He also identified a societal justification for educating all students together, wherein non-judgmental and non-discriminatory attitudes are fostered and embodied. Likewise, Sweeney & Fitzgerald (2023) noted that shared experiences with students with SEN can challenge reductive assumptions, allowing neurotypical peers to 'look beyond the label' and recognise their strengths, fostering acceptance and belonging (p.388). Similarly, other studies demonstrate that educating all students together has positive social and emotional outcomes for peers of students with SEN, thereby fostering compassion and an appreciation of diversity (Cologan, 2019; Hehir et al., 2016). Some research points to evidence that educating all students together may produce increased academic outcomes (Hehir et al., 2012; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009). On this note, Pinto et al. (2018) identified that when meaningful peer contact and collaborative group work occurs within the mainstream classroom, academic and social outcomes may be improved for students with SEN.

On the other hand, it is identified that framing the debate in this way may be overlooking the crux of the issue. Focusing in on where education is practiced, as opposed to what and how content is taught has been described as 'willful ignorance' towards the idea of teaching those with SEN (Kauffman et al., 2016, p.4). Fitzgerald et al. (2021) commented that the continued 'prioritisation of placement over progression...perpetuates duality and isolated, discrete approaches to provision for students with SEND' (p.17). Equally, Florian and Rouse (2001) contended that much of the discourse on inclusion within the field of special education has remained largely disconnected from wider discussions on pedagogy and the principles of teaching and learning. Hornby (2015) argues that full inclusion is difficult to achieve in practice as there will likely always be a cohort of children who's needs will not be successfully met in mainstream classrooms. In the same vein, Cooper and Jacobs (2011) have described that physical integration of students into a classroom does not necessarily represent a truly IE system. Instead, they argued that to equate the two is a form of deceitful exclusion. Moreover, Hornby and Kauffman (2024) proposed that while the concept of educating all students together can work successfully, the idea that it is always feasible is 'a fantasy not consistent with the realities of schools' (p.5). Anastasiou et al. (2024) further pinpointed that the promotion of full inclusion is often framed by deceptive claims that specialist provision is a 'dangerous way of thinking about disabilities, is fundamentally oppressive, and promotes segregation' (p.101). In this regard, the

necessity for clarity and distinction between the terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘education in mainstream’ was highlighted in findings from Merrigan and Senior (2021), whereby physical integration was described as oftentimes acting as ‘a phrase, a title, a token’ (p.9). To this end, the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) (2020) indicate that, in certain scenarios, placing students with SEN in mainstream settings that do not have appropriate resources or therapeutic services can appear inclusive on surface level, but in reality, can have the opposite effect. This illustrates the rights-debate around full inclusion, whereby, according to legislation, namely the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (Government of Ireland (GOI), 2004) , it is a child’s human right to be educated within a mainstream environment with their peers. However, it is argued that human-rights and moral rights are not interchangeable. In essence, although an individual has a human right to attend a certain educational setting, this is not necessarily the optimum or ethical setting to meet their needs (Hornby, 2015; Kauffman & Badar, 2014; Thomson, 1990). Hornby (as cited in Banks, 2021) argues that full inclusion is ‘a simple and powerful idea, but some simple and powerful ideas are not actually right’. On this subject, O’Brien (2020) queries whether it is really necessary for society to approach the IE debate in such a ‘binary and polarised way’ (p.301) when considering if specialist settings are either beneficial or segregative practices. He references the nuance attached to both arguments, willing individuals to embrace the entanglement and ambiguities associated with the IE discussion (O’ Brien, 2020).

Alternative to viewing IE through the lens of the physical setting, it is a multi-dimensional concept which includes the celebration of differences, consideration of human rights and the application of the social model of disability (Hornby, 2014). A feeling of belonging is described as central to the inclusion process and is a prerequisite for successful learning and overall wellbeing (Warnock, 2005). The Irish government denotes that principles of inclusive practice include being responsive to the diverse needs of learners and that this is actively promoted by management within schools. Additionally, it is purported that effective staff collaboration, access to a broad curriculum relevant to students’ needs and allocation of appropriate teaching supports are all indicators of whole-school inclusive practices (GOI, 2022b).

Resource allocation, or its scarcity, often permeates discussions on IE. Lauchlan and Greig (2015) proposed that, rather than fixating on resources, one should consider critically evaluating personal beliefs and values surrounding the education of children with SEN. Similarly, it has been suggested that the concept of IE is about societal reform and requires stakeholders to 'critically examine one's own beliefs and attitudes and the impact these have on actions' (EADSNE, 2012, p.12). It is thought that in order for children with SEN to receive their right to education, we must all reimagine the education system and view IE as a process rather than a fixed destination (OCO, 2022). While the debate around IE can seem 'by its nature slow, and possibly, never ending' (Ainscow, 2020, p.9), it is an important catalyst to provoke thought and action in making school settings as inclusive as possible.

2.1.2. Inclusive Special Education

The concept of IE is divisive and emotive by nature, with Allan (2007) suggesting that the concept has created a division of two sides comprising 'inclusionists' and 'special educationalists' who both utilise ideology as a 'weapon' to advocate and promote their viewpoints (p.12). However, Hornby (2014) proposed the amalgamation of philosophies and practices from Special Education and IE to create a clearer vision for effective education for children with SEN. The theory of Inclusive Special Education (ISE) was developed by Hornby (2014) in response to his belief that the vision of IE is ultimately unclear and subsequently unachievable. This model synthesises the strategies of intensive and specialised instruction used in special education settings with the philosophy of acceptance and belonging of IE.

Proponents of ISE clarify that the goals of the education system are paramount to creating a successfully inclusive system. It is suggested that the main goal of the education system for all pupils is to support them in becoming happy, independent and fulfilled individuals who are included in their communities and possess the skills to meet the demands of everyday life. One of the main ideas comprising ISE is that students must receive an education appropriate to their needs, rather than slotting into a curriculum designed for a neurotypical population. Teacher education; both at Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) levels, are identified as key components to achieving ISE. This theory asserts that the focus should be on educating as many students as possible within the mainstream environment, while

also providing a continuum of educational placement options for students in order to meet the needs of the minority of the student population who benefit from being taught in specialist settings. There is a recognition that although many students can be educated in mainstream settings, there is a cohort of students who benefit from more specialist instruction (Kauffman et al., 2022). This is under the assumption that children have flexibility to transfer between placement options throughout the school day and their schooling career to ensure that they are facilitated to learn in the environment best suited to their strengths and needs. The theory of ISE advocates for ongoing communication and collaboration between the Mainstream Class Teacher, the Special Education Teacher (SET) and teachers in special classes and special schools (Hornby, 2015; Hornby & Greaves, 2022).

2.1.3. Symbolism of space in conceptualising IE

The idea that IE equates with physical presence in a particular space is continuously referred to. 'Space' can be defined as a medium through which people locate themselves; also referred to as a product of interrelations and power dynamics (Massey, 2005; Merrigan & Senior, 2021). Importantly, the strong association between social dynamics with the material components of space cannot be underestimated (Buchner & Köpfer, 2022). The literature around special education is permeated with mentions of physical spaces such as special classes, sensory rooms and therapeutic spaces. The word 'space' within a school environment denotes the places that children can retreat to and perhaps not be held to typical expectations and school norms as other places within the building (Nind et al., 2022). It has been proposed that physical spaces within the education system have potential to promote ableism and reinforce boundaries between ability and disability, whereby specialist classrooms are a physical representation of students who, for some reason, do not meet the criteria to occupy certain parts of the school spaces (Nind et al., 2022; Ypinazar & Pagliano, 2004).

2.2. Legislation pertaining to IE in Ireland

Ireland has a complex history regarding educating children with SEN and its' approach to inclusivity within the school environment. Undoubtedly, IE is deeply rooted within policy and legislation both nationally and internationally. Throughout the twentieth century, special education and general education were and currently still are provided through a somewhat siloed

approach; with Kenny et al. (2020) describing it as ‘multi-track’ approach to education (p.2) whereby some students with SEN are educated in separate special classes or schools and others within the mainstream setting.

2.2.1. O’ Donoghue v. Minister of Health (1993)

The case of O’ Donoghue v. Minister of Health had a monumental impact on Irish legislation regarding the education of children with SEN. This was the case of Paul O’ Donoghue, a young quadriplegic boy, who allegedly did not receive an adequate education. His parents made the case that as per Article 42 of the Constitution, their son had a right to an education the same as his peers. Resultantly, the ruling found that he had been discriminated against and that the State was obligated to modify the curriculum and their teaching methodologies to ensure students with SEN could reach their potential (Kenny et al., 2020; MacGiolla, 2007; O’ Donoghue v. Minister for Education, 1993).

2.2.2. Sinnott v. Minister for Education (2001)

In 2001, Kathy Sinnott sued the State due to allegations that her son, Jamie Sinnott, had been deprived of his right to a primary education appropriate to his needs. Jamie was a young autistic adult with a severe to profound general learning disability. The judgement made by Mr. Justice Barr in the High Court affirmed that the State was negligent in the treatment of Mr. Sinnott and found that he had received no more than two meaningful years of education in his 23 years. The State agreed to pay the damage awards and to provide for Jamie’s education. However, the Supreme Court adopted the view that, as per the Constitution, the family was the primary educator of the child and that Jamie was not eligible for primary schooling past the age of 18 (Ring, 2024; Sinnott v. Minister for Education, 2001).

2.2.3. Special Educational Review Committee (SERC) (GOI, 1993)

The publication of the SERC Report in Ireland was the first time the DE advocated for ‘as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as necessary’ (p.22). The SERC report serves as a foundational framework for SEN in Ireland which continues to inform policy and have influence to this day. This includes acknowledging the right of all children with

SEN to an appropriate education and attesting to the right of the parent to be actively involved in decision-making processes around their child's school placement (Ring, 2024).

2.2.4. Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994)

The publication of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) was a watershed moment for IE and has been described as the most significant piece of legislation within the field (Ainscow et al., 2019). 92 member countries and 25 international organisations signed this document to indicate their commitment to shift practice to reach the goal of a more inclusive system. This document deemed that segregated educational provision was to be avoided and promoted inclusive practices to the diverse learner in the mainstream setting (Nilholm, 2021). It has been contended that this policy agreement aimed to inspire 'a new era that involved the dismantling of segregated education systems internationally' (Graham et al., 2023, p.126). The Salamanca Statement promoted the education of all students together unless there were 'compelling reasons' not to do so (UNESCO, 1994, ix). Despite much of the literature citing otherwise, Hornby and Kauffman (2024) remain resolute that the Salamanca Statement did not support the idea of full inclusion in its' totality due to this recognition that a minority of students would require specialist educative support.

2.2.5. The Education Act (1998)

The Education Act (GOI, 1998) was a monumental piece of legislation in Ireland, which legally obliged schools to cater for all types of learners and recognised all individual's constitutional rights to an appropriate education. This evidenced the first national legal mandate for the education system to promote inclusion and equality of access to all learners in Irish schools, with reference to promotion of best practice in teaching, learning and professional development. This legislation outlined the right of all children to access the best possible quality of education as appropriate to their needs (Ring, 2024). The Education Act (GOI, 1998) set out that it is the right of the parent to send their child to a school of their choice and, furthermore, stipulated the requirement of the school to respect this right (MacGiolla, 2007). Additionally, this act outlined the importance of flexibility regarding the transition between mainstream and special education settings.

2.2.6. The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (GOI, 2004)

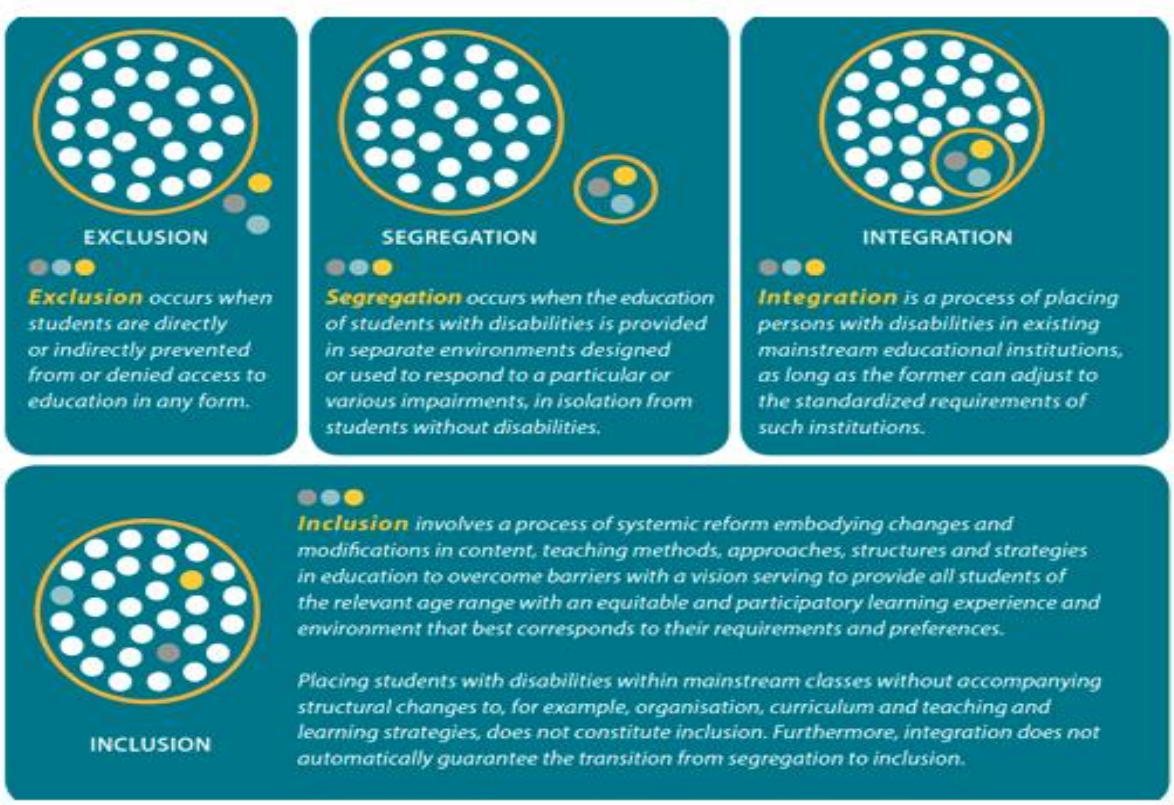
The EPSEN Act was published in 2004, enshrining into law that all children have a right to an IE in a mainstream setting alongside their peers in their local school, unless this would not be in the best interests of the child or their peers (GOI, 2004). Additionally, the EPSEN Act identified that if a mainstream school placement broke down, the child still has a right to an appropriate education; placing a decree on the provision of special classes within the education system. However, from a legal standpoint, it has been asserted that the EPSEN Act holds little weight in terms of realising rights and that many sections of the act have not yet been implemented (Travers, 2023). For example, sections of the ESPEN Act that have not yet commenced comprise statutory entitlement to an educational assessment and an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for all students with SEN as well as an independent appeals approach (GOI, 2018a). This legislation acknowledged the establishment of multidisciplinary teams as a cornerstone to collaboratively addressing the diverse needs of stunts. In 2022, the DE initiated a review of the EPSEN Act, with the intention to engage directly with stakeholders affected. In March 2023, a submission on the review of the EPSEN Act was published by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. This submission gave a plethora of recommendations, including that the review of the EPSEN Act should consider whether the state's understanding of the term IE complies with Article 24 of the UNCRPD (IHREC, 2023). The EPSEN Act is currently under review in order to seek the lived experiences of people with SEN and key stakeholders. This review is expected to be concluded in the first quarter of 2025, with a comprehensive report to follow.

2.2.7. United Nation Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006)

The UNCRPD is a United Nations (UN) Treaty, ratified by 186 states and the European Union (EU), which affirms and protects the rights of individuals with disabilities, recognising their right to make informed decisions about their own lives. The UNCRPD was adopted in 2006 and signed in 2007; with Ireland being the last EU member state to ratify the convention in 2018.

This was the first legally binding human rights treaty to discuss the right to IE. Article 24 of the UNCRPD is centred on educational rights and called upon all countries to implement a fully IE system, reporting that 'State Parties shall ensure an IE system at all levels...' (UNCRPD, art. 24, para. 1); instructing that state parties should realise this right through ensuring that 'persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability' and highlight their right to an IE system 'on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live' (UNCRPD, art. 24, para. 2). General Comment No. 4 of the UNCRPD (2016) provided distinctions among exclusion, segregation, integration and inclusion, as evidenced in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Definitions of Exclusion, Segregation, Integration and Inclusion from General Comment No. 4 UNCRPD (2016)



Note. From the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education 'Inclusion, Exclusion, Segregation and Integration: How are they different? (MCIE), 2017 (https://mcie.org/think-inclusive/inclusion-exclusion-segregation-and-integration-how-are-they-different/). Copyright 2017 by MCIE.

General Comment No. 4 of the UNCRPD (2016) asserted that students educated in specialist settings are receiving an 'inferior quality of provision' than their peers in a mainstream setting (para 3).This inferred that the current dual-track continuum of educational provision in Ireland is a form of segregation (Tiernan, 2022) and engendered controversy and concerns about the implications of moving towards a fully inclusive system (Cook & Cook, 2020). It has been described that Article 24 of the UNCRPD 'effectively proposed the end of special education' (Hornby & Kauffman, 2024, p. 4). Ireland's tardiness in ratifying this document was potentially demonstrative of the difficulties among stakeholders to implement the necessary changes to adequately meet the principles of the UNCRPD (Kenny et al., 2020). Clearly, if Ireland was to embrace the full inclusion model outlined in the UNCRPD, the alterations to the current structure of the Irish education system would require careful consideration (Tiernan, 2022). Ireland is required to submit regular reports to the UNCRPD to provide updates on measures taken to implement the provisions outlined. Of note, the GOI approved the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UNRPD in October 2024, enacting a complaints procedure for individuals or groups to bring issues directly to the UNCRPD if they believe their rights have been violated (NDA, 2024).

2.2.8. Education (Admission to Schools) Act (2018)

The Education (Admission to Schools) Act (GOI, 2018b) was enacted to provide more equity and transparency regarding school's enrolment policies. This law outlined that schools cannot discriminate admissions based on SEN except if an admission is made to a special school or special class and the child does not have a diagnosis of the specific category of need required for that setting (Shevlin & Banks, 2021).

2.2.9. The Education (Provision in Respect of Children with Special Educational Needs) Act (2022)

The Education Act (GOI, 2022a) marked a significant governmental commitment to the provision of special classes. This legislation enabled the Minister for Education to direct Boards of Management in school settings to provide and operate a special class for children with SEN, under the streamlined section 37A Process. Circular 0075/2022 alerted Boards of Managements within primary and secondary school settings to this legislation, stating their obligation to

cooperate and comply with the NCSE and the relevant minister to make provisions if requested to do so (DE, 2022).

2.3. Governmental Programmes

2.3.1. NCSE School Inclusion Model (SIM)

It is well-documented that teachers striving to achieve an inclusive system require ongoing support from other therapeutic disciplines to address the needs of all students (As I Am, 2025; INTO, 2020; NCSE, 2020). In response to the ratification of the UNCRPD, the School Inclusion Model (SIM) was piloted by the NCSE in the 2019/2020 school year; with the overarching aim to assess whether in-school therapeutic provisions of Speech and Language and Occupational Therapists would be useful in order to achieve a fully inclusive education system. The SIM pilot involved collaboration between the DE, Health, and Children and Youth Affairs, as well as the NCSE and the Health Service Executive (HSE). As part of the SIM, the In-School and Early Years Therapy Demonstration Project was established to build capacity for inclusive practice in 75 schools and 75 early years' settings (NCSE, 2020). One of the aims of the SIM was to move away from a diagnosis-led approach and instead provide a system whereby children are offered the right supports at the right times, delivered by suitably-qualified personnel (Gardiner, 2023). While the pilot has generated positive feedback, there is yet to be an official review of the programme (Madigan, 2022).

2.3.2. Educational Therapy Support Services (ETSS)

In response to advice that the SIM should be expanded nationally (NCSE, 2024a), the then Ministers for Education and Special Education and Inclusion announced the establishment of the Educational Therapy Support Services (ETSS) in June 2024. This is a therapy service within the NCSE, described as a 'key support for IE' (INTO, 2020). It is expected to build on the supports offered by the SIM. Under the ETSS, there is an appointment of 39 Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists, in addition to 5 Behaviour Practitioners on a permanent basis (DE, 2024d). The permanency of the roles is a positive development in terms of staff recruitment and retention of professionals whom are in huge demand within the public services. It is hoped that the ETSS will build capacity among teachers to work with therapists to provide appropriate

supports to students. It is advised that staff on the ETSS programme may collaborate with EPs within the NEPS to reach optimum outcomes for students. 22 schools in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow have been prioritised for 2024-2026 and this number is expected to increase as the recruitment campaign gets underway (DE, 2024l).

2.3.3. Towards Inclusion Pilot Programme

'Towards Inclusion' is a DE pilot programme rolled out across twelve locations nationally with the aim of providing collaboration between mainstream and special school settings regarding teaching, learning and assessment. The then Minister of State for Special Education contended that this programme can be 'viewed as a foundation block in work being undertaken to develop an IE system' (Naughton 2024, para. 23.). Similar to the SIM as abovementioned, there is no available data on the outcomes of this programme at the time of writing.

2.3.4. Teacher Professional Learning Opportunities

The government currently funds six colleges nationwide to offer a post-graduate diploma programme of TPL with the objective of supporting schools to meet needs of the diverse student population. These courses are available to SET, Special Class and Special School teachers. The aim of the programme is to 'provide substantial theoretical and practical TPL for teachers working with students with SEN and thereby to contribute to the school's overall capacity in this area' (DE, 2024b). In addition, the government provides funding for a Graduate Certificate in Autism Education in Dublin College University Institute of Education designed for teachers working specifically with autistic students (DE, 2024c).

2.4. Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM)

The General Allocation Model (GAM) for organising support teaching in schools was introduced in 2005, with the aim of realising 'truly inclusive schools' in line with global aspirations for IE (DES, 2005, p.3). Under this model, teaching resources were allocated based on categories of 'high incidence' disabilities such as mild learning difficulties and 'low incidence' disabilities whereby schools could apply for resource teaching hours based on diagnostic assessments. For example, a student with an autism diagnosis could receive five hours

resource teaching hours per week (Curtin, 2021; DES, 2005). Described as a 'deeply flawed and inequitable system' (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2020, p.3), the GAM was found to place significant pressure on EPs within the NEPs to provide diagnoses to schools in order for students to receive additional teaching hours (Griffin & Shevlin, 2011).

In 2017, the DE introduced a new teacher allocation model known as the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM (DES, 2017) in replacement of the GAM, to allocate teaching resources equitably among children with SEN. The SETAM is a needs-based model, whereby there is no longer criteria for a student to have a diagnosis to receive special education teaching hours. Instead, special education teaching (SET) hours are allocated based on the educational profile of the school as evidenced by standardised testing scores and the socio-economic status of the school (DES, 2017; Raftery & Brennan, 2021). Positive feedback around the SETAM was the increased levels of autonomy and flexibility for schools to provide for children with the highest level of need within the school. Equally, the SETAM has posited challenges for schools whereby principals report feeling added responsibility and pressure from parents advocating for support hours to be allocated for their child (Curtin, 2021; Raftery & Brennan, 2021).

In a circular published in December 2024, the GOI emphasised the importance of schools using their SET allocation appropriately to support the needs identified within the school. Examples of incorrect deployment of SETs were advised, such as utilising the SET teacher to reduce pupil teacher ratio (DE, 2024n). In February 2024, a circular was published to all schools detailing the SET Allocation Model for the 24/25 academic school year. This document advised that amendments were being made to the SETAM, specifically around how the DE will use the available data to review the model for identifying the educational profile and calculating SET hours for schools. Prior to this circular, CDNT data was utilised to identify students with complex needs. However, under Circular 0002/2024, the category of complex needs will no longer be used to inform SET allocation due to concerns around inconsistencies in the reliability of CDNT data as well as variances in different parts of the country (DE, 2024e). This has been described as a 'deeply concerning move' by Ireland's Autism Charity As I Am, referencing that this circular may be indicative that the students with the highest level of need may receive more

support and resources in specialist settings rather than in a mainstream class, despite the parental and student preference or the identified appropriate setting which is most suited to their learning needs (As I Am, 2024).

2.5. Continuum of Support

The Continuum of Support (COS) is a needs-led, three-tiered framework which enables school staff to identify and respond to students' needs in a flexible way, adhering to the principle that students with the most significant level of need receive the most support (DE, 2024h). Introduced in 2007, this framework is used to guide the identification of students' strengths and difficulties, and their response to targeted intervention. The COS outlines that students needs can be considered on a continuum, whereby they can be placed on a Classroom Support Plan (known as Support for All), a School Support Plan (Support for Some) or a School Support Plus Plan (Support for Few). Classroom Support is the most common response to students with SEN whereby the class teacher adapts their approaches to meet the student's needs. School Support generally involves the SET and may mean the pupil is receiving interventions in a small-group or individually. A student placed on School Support Plus means they are likely to be receiving intensive teaching support and are likely to be supported by external agencies (DES, 2010). All approaches used with students on the COS are ought to be evidence-informed and 'underpinned by the principles of an IE system and an inclusive culture (DE, 2024h, p.43).

2.6. Social Class

While the SETAM and the COS eliminate the barrier of needing a diagnostic report to receive extra support within mainstream school settings, this does not extend to those requiring a specialist placement; wherein a professional diagnostic report with suitable recommendations is a prerequisite to enrolment. It is regrettable that socio-economic factors still play a significant role in accessing required supports, with middle-class families being better positioned to afford private assessments and, ultimately, gain access to specialist settings for their children (Banks et al., 2012; Hartas, 2011). Unsurprisingly, this class issue has been found to 'exacerbate inequality' across the country and internationally (Carroll et al., 2022, p.2). Furthermore, while schools have access to a limited number of state-sponsored assessments per year from the NEPS;

school staff often have the ‘unenviable task’ of deciding which students they will put forward for assessments (Shevlin & Banks, 2021, p.3), which could act as a gateway to a specialist setting.

2.7. Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

UDL is based on the three principles of multiple means of representation, engagement and expression which are designed to enhance learner agency (CAST, 2024). This approach has been described as ‘holding much promise as a framework to promote IE for all students’ (O’Brien & Fitzgerald, 2023, p.42). UDL involves proactively planning lessons with a vision to remove potential barriers to learning and provide the flexibility and autonomy required for students to decide how they learn and how they share what they have learned (Flood & Banks, 2021). This approach builds social emotional skills, values communicative differences and offers environments which are sensitive to students physical and sensory needs (DE, 2025a). UDL acknowledges difference, embraces human variability and promotes teaching to the diverse student as the rule rather than the exception (CAST, 2024; NCSE, 2025). This framework is underpinned by the sentiment that ‘What is essential for some, may be beneficial for all’ (NCSE, 2025, p41).

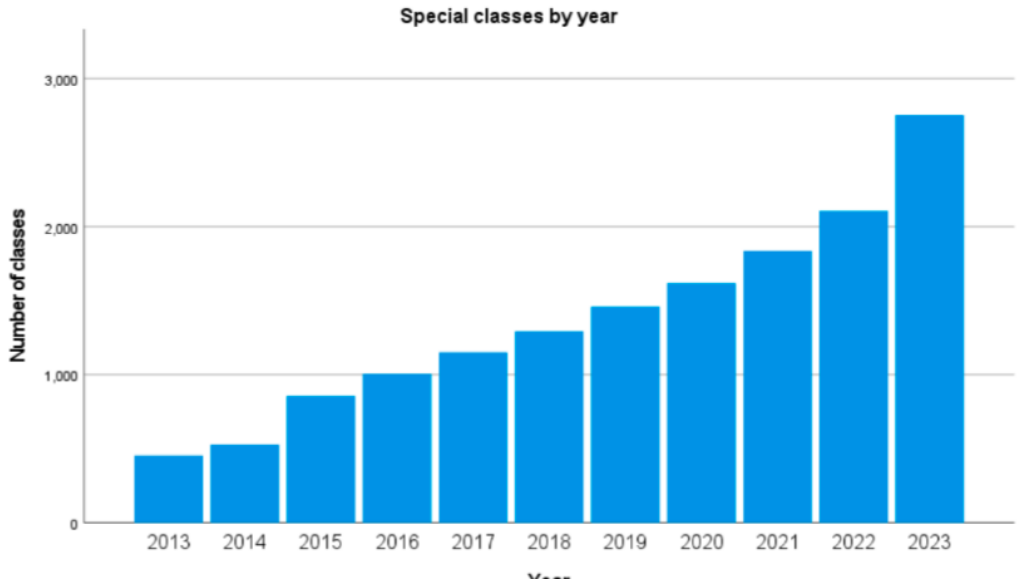
2.8. Specialist Educational Provision in Ireland

2.8.1. Special Class Provision in Ireland

Following the ratification of the UNCRPD, it has been described that special classes and special schools have become the central tenet of the IE debate (Shevlin & Banks, 2021). Special classes are small group classes attached to mainstream schools with between six and eleven students, depending on the category of need. For example, a special class for autistic students comprises six students, two SNAs and one teacher whereas a special class for students with a Mild General Learning Disability comprises eleven students, one teacher and four SNAs. According to the NCSE (2024b), special classes are suitable options for students who are ‘unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class, even with support, for most or all of their school day’ (p.2). Enrolment of students in a special class occurs following an application form from parents, supported by a professional report stating the diagnosis and containing a recommendation for the type of educational setting that they require (NCSE, 2024b). Current

data illustrates that there is a total of 3,335 special classes nationally, 2,338 at primary level and 997 at post-primary level (DE, 2024m). Furthermore, recent figures show that the 2024 Governmental Budget will augment the number of special classes in Ireland in 2025 to over 3,700 (DE, 2024i). In October 2024, Circular 0080/0024 illustrated a significant governmental commitment to the increased establishment of special classes nationally (DE, 2024f). This included the advice that medium-large sized schools should be prepared to open at least one special class in the foreseeable future. Additionally, the government announced increased funding of €30,000 in the form of a grant to schools who commit to the establishment of a new special class for the 2025/26 school year (DE, 2024f). In April 2025, the current Minister for Education, Helen McEntee, announced her commitment to opening 400 new special classes for the upcoming school year 2025/2026 (DE, 2025b). Ultimately, there has been an exponential rise in the provision of special classes in Ireland, particularly at a time when there is ongoing debate and speculation around the future of IE. Between 2013 to 2023, data illustrates a 600% increase in special classes as shown in Figure 4; with autism classes comprising 89% of current special class provision in Ireland. Classes for students with specific speech and language difficulties and students with a Mild or Moderate General Learning Disability comprise the remaining percentage of special classes (Travers, 2023).

Figure 4: Growth in Special Classes in Ireland based on NCSE figures 2013-2023



Note. From 'Special Class Provision in Ireland: Where We Have Come From and Where We Might Go' (p.7) by Joseph Travers (2023) (https://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/13/9/859) Copyright 2023 by Travers.

One of the main reasons for this exponential growth is the significant rise in diagnoses of SEN, particularly autism, with a reported a prevalence rate of 3.38% in 2022 which is a significant change from the previous reported rate of 1.55% in 2018.(NCSE, 2024a). Other possible contributing factors include parental and professional preference for specialist provision and increased funding for teacher training. Additionally, more rural or developing schools with teaching principals are incentivised to open two special classes as this will result in the appointment of an administrative principal (Travers, 2023). Another potential reason could be attributed to the significant media coverage of parents and advocacy groups campaigning for local schools to create these settings (Shevlin & Banks, 2021). The rise in the number of specialist classes, coupled with the significant governmental support, appears to be at odds with the ongoing debate about IE. Specifically, the UNCRPD, through Article 24, advocates for a fully inclusive education system where children with disabilities are not excluded from mainstream settings and receive support within general education. Despite this, there is a clear increase in specialist provision outside of mainstream education, creating a divergence between international policy aspirations and practical implementation.

2.8.2. Special School Provision in Ireland

While there is no formal definition of a special school in policy or legislation, it can be deduced that a special school is one which caters exclusively for children and young people with one or more specific category of SEN (NCSE, 2009). Most special schools cater for pupils between 4-18 years old. At the end of the 2024/2025 school year, there was a total of 130 special schools in Ireland (DE, 2024k). In April 2025, the current Minister for Education, Helen McEntee, committed to opening 300 new places in specials schools for the upcoming school year 2025/2026 (DE, 2025b).

In 1992, the government published a document called the Green Paper, allowing relevant stakeholders to comment on issues within the Irish education system. This document identified that special schools were originally set up as they were the only viable option to give students with SEN the individualised support required. However, this paper acknowledged that pupils and parents alike found it difficult to accept that this specialist, separated environment was the only answer (GOI, 1992). The Green Paper demonstrated a move towards establishing a continuum of provision for students with SEN in addition to acknowledging the need for a balance between appropriate placement of students within mainstream and special school settings (Ring, 2024). This document is demonstrative of the long-standing nature of the debate around IE, particularly the contested arguments for and against the role of specialist provision. The Programme for Government 2025 shows commitment to increasing numbers of specialist provisions in local communities, introducing a more appropriate application system and ensuring therapies are provided in schools (GOI, 2025).

2.8.3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Specialist Provision

Inevitably, the choice of where to send a neurodiverse student to school is entangled with complexities and influenced by a variety of factors such as parental preference, geographical location and professional advice (McNerney et al., 2015). The tensions related to the issue of specialist provision are generally centred on values of meeting the needs of the student through tailored supports while simultaneously instilling a sense of belonging, connectedness and acceptance for all students. The provision of specialist settings is a contentious topic; often highlighting the dichotomous tension between meeting the needs of the child and aiming to be inclusive (Norwich, 2008; Travers, 2023). It has been described that enrolment in a mainstream school setting 'is not a barometer to measure inclusion' and instead we should be looking at the extent at which the child's needs are being met and supported (INTO, 2020, p.3). Furthering the complex nature of the inclusion debate, there is currently little evidence to show the efficacy of special classes (Shevlin & Banks, 2021). Moreover, there is no centralised data to illustrate the amount of time children enrolled in special classes are spending in mainstream education, which makes it difficult to decipher the level of meaningful inclusion occurring in Irish mainstream classrooms (Sweeney & Fitzgerald, 2023). When looking at the longer-term picture, findings show that many students enrolled in a special class remain in this setting for the duration of their

schooling life (Banks et al., 2016). This is despite the governmental advice that a student's enrolment should be kept 'under continual review' (NCSE, 2024a, p.4), noting that there should be a minimum of a yearly review of the students' progress and targets.

According to the latest NCSE report, there is a 'strong belief' (2024a, p.8) among parents and school staff that special classes for autism are the optimum setting, where children are offered a safe space, additional resources and an appropriate education that meets their needs. It is upheld that special classes give students the opportunity to access the curriculum in a way that is not possible for them in the mainstream classroom, even with the required supports in place. It is thought that the smaller pupil to teacher/SNA ratio can be helpful in meeting these students needs as well as facilitating their inclusion into the mainstream class (NCSE, 2024a). As previously outlined, students hold a legal entitlement to receive an education that is appropriate to their needs. It is contended that special classes are frequently a means by which this right is realised (Travers, 2023). In 2023, the DE Inspectorate conducted inspections in 17 primary schools and 12 post-primary schools to investigate the quality of educational provision for students with SEN. This report outlined that effective teaching in special classes at primary level was evident, with clear progression demonstrated across the curriculum. It was reported that there were examples of successful inclusion of children enrolled in the special class, into the mainstream setting for a diverse range of curriculum areas (DE, 2024a). However, in some cases, the Inspectorate perceived that activities prioritised for inclusion were not best suited to students' interests, strengths or needs. Within special classes at post-primary level, the use of autism-specific approaches and active learning methodologies were commended, while it was also acknowledged that tasks were not always sufficiently challenging for students within special classes (DE, 2024a). In a recently published 'Same Chance' report completed by over 1400 autistic individuals and their families, 70% reported that the Irish education system is not inclusive of autistic people. Perceived barriers to inclusion included a lack of school places, lack of inclusive school cultures, inappropriate Codes of Behaviour and unwillingness of schools to accommodate students (As I Am, 2025).

It is recognised that special schools can be the optimum setting for some students with SEN; whereby stakeholders advise that certain students currently enrolled in special schools

would not thrive in mainstream settings due to inadequate resourcing and an absence of staff expertise (NCSE, 2024a). The majority of stakeholders identified that in an ideal world, the most appropriate option is to educate all children in the same setting, with the recognition that this is most reflective of the reality of the world we live in (NCSE, 2024a). In an Irish study, principals described that they view special schools as the 'essence of inclusive practice' (Merrigan & Senior, 2021, p. 13); whereby children are offered an individually tailored educational programme to meet their needs. When considering the concept of IE, one principal described that inclusion equates to 'participating fully in the life of the school', irrespective of what educational setting that is in (Merrigan & Senior, 2021, p.9). Furthermore, this study found that special schools can meet the individual needs of the students while building their self-confidence and self-esteem. Nevertheless, a consensus was expressed that there can be a negative public perception, stigma and misunderstanding attached to special schools, whereby this setting can be perceived as the final expedient. In the face of this challenge, participants deemed it essential that special school settings receive an equal status on the continuum of educational provision, in line with mainstream and special classes (Merrigan & Senior, 2021). Regarding potential limitations of special schools, it is acknowledged that such an enrolment is a crucial decision for families to make, whereby there is possibility of limiting student's opportunities once their schooling ends. Furthermore, the same issue as with special classes presented wherein stakeholders identified that many students remain indefinitely in special schools once they are enrolled and are, therefore, denied their right to experience an education alongside their neurotypical peers (NCSE, 2024a).

2.8.4. Insufficient School Places available for children with SEN

It would be misleading to examine specialist educational provision in Ireland without acknowledging the difficulties parents face every year in securing timely, appropriate school placements within their child's locality. At the time of writing, there have been two sleep-outs this year in March and April 2025 outside Irish government buildings from parents of children with SEN that do not currently have school places, in an effort to draw attention to this crisis (O' Kelly, 2025). The Ombudsman for Children, Dr. Niall Muldoon, described this as a 'clear failure on the part of the State' (OCO, 2022, p.6) in protecting the rights of the child to an appropriate

education. The recently published Autism Innovation Strategy (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2023) and the As I Am (2025) 'Same Chance' report referenced barriers to students achieving their educational potential included insufficient numbers of autism classes and lack of teacher training, as well as the use of seclusion, restrictive practice and children being placed on reduced school timetables. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that shortfalls in the current system to provide appropriate school placements results in a reactive response when parents bring such issues to the fore. Resultantly, many students are forced to travel long distances to school each day resulting in adverse effects for the child's participation in school life, as well as home-school links (Inclusion Ireland, 2023). School principals have highlighted the importance of planning with regard to the opening of specialist classes. In a recent Irish documentary, a school principal identified that 'A special class needs to be more than just a box-ticking exercise, it needs to be functional and effective and that can only happen with proper planning' (Virgin Media Play, 2024). As abovementioned, Circular 0080/0024 was announced to future-proof and plan for the number of students that require specialist setting placements (DE, 2024f). It stated that parents who are seeking a special class or school for their child are now required to notify the NCSE by February of the preceding school year. The objective of this recent requirement is to 'facilitate NCSE planning and to ensure the NCSE and the DE is provided with sufficient time to plan and provide for additional special class and special school capacity' (DE 2024f, p.6). The level of success of this approach remains to be seen in the coming months and years.

2.9. Role of EP concerning IE

EPs working within school psychology settings in Ireland are typically employed by the NEPS, a service funded by the DE which specialises in providing a psychological service to schools across the Republic of Ireland. EPs working within child disability services generally work in CDNTs, as part of a multidisciplinary team, providing psychological support to young people with complex needs. Alternatively, EPs working within child psychology services are typically employed by Primary Care Psychology or CAMHS, which support young people with mild or moderate-severe mental health difficulties respectively.

According to the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), guidelines for doctoral training in Educational Psychology should be devised based on the role of the EP as a 'consultant, advisor, assessor, counsellor, educator, researcher, policy advisor, team participant and advocator' (PSI, 2022, p.6). The changing role of the EP has been posited as a shift from a diagnostician and gatekeeper of resources to collaborator and provider of a reflective space (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023). Many EPs use a consultation model which involves a problem-solving collaboration between the psychologist, teachers and parents working together to solve problems and overcome challenges. This involves the application of appropriate psychological theory and perspective with teachers and parents (Dinkmeyer et al., 2016; Nolan & Moreland, 2014). NEPS Psychologists' casework includes supporting students on an individual basis as well as providing support to school staff with a goal of facilitating a common understanding of a student's strengths and needs (NCSE, 2024a). NEPS psychologists promote systemic level change within schools and create connections 'at a deep, nucleus-like level within the school, and between schools and other agencies' (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023, p.13). This interpretation of the role is similar to the work of O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018) in which NEPS psychologists noted that they view their main role as building capacity, while they may also be more directive in offering advice and recommendations. One teacher noted that the EP can give a more informed viewpoint about potential harm or benefits associated with a certain approach. Working with an EP was viewed as allowing stakeholders to 'gain a more objective' meta-like view of the problem (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018, p.323). The NCSE (2024a) have recently proposed that a significant increase in the number of NEPS psychologists employed is central to the promotion and realisation of a progressive IE system, illustrating the pivotal role the profession has within the realm of IE. Furthermore, in the Programme for Government 2025, the government committed to doubling the places available for training in Educational Psychology courses to support plans to introduce therapeutic services into schools (GOI, 2025).

As a result of all of the above, the following review question was identified for the current systematic review: What is known about EP/TEPs attitudes towards and experiences of IE?

2.10. Search Strategy

Three searches were carried out between May 2023 and October 2024 to identify relevant studies for the current review. The researcher utilised the search engine EBSCO, using the following databases: ERIC, Australian Education Database, British Education Index, PsycInfo and PsycArticles. The databases were chosen based on their relevance to the fields of Education and Psychology. A Boolean search was used to access full-text, relevant, peer-reviewed articles. The search terms used can be seen in Table 1, along with a rationale for choice of search terms. The search terms were deciphered through the researcher developing familiarity with the research field, scoping titles and abstracts in addition to reviewing the subjects and key words within retrieved articles.

Table 1: Search Terms

Subject Mapping Terms	Key Word Search Terms	Rationale
"educational psychologists" AND	OR "school psychologists" OR "trainee educational psychologists" OR "educational psycholog*" OR "child psychologists" OR "EPs"	The search intended to review data from population of Educational Psychologists. The researcher used varying synonymous terms, specific to different cultures.
"inclusive education" AND	OR "inclusion" OR "full inclusion" OR "inclusi*"	The review's aim was to find research on inclusive education. Similar terms were found during scoping of titles and abstracts.
"attitudes"	OR "beliefs" OR "views" OR "perspectives"	The review intended to find articles related to psychologists' attitudes towards inclusive

		education. It was deemed necessary to expand this search term to garner all relevant articles.

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) was utilised to illustrate the systematic search process, shown in Figure 5. Articles were screened using the Inclusion and Exclusion criteria, presented in Table 2. Following a full-text review, excluded studies are presented in Appendix A, alongside a rationale for their exclusion. Following a rigorous screening process, 7 articles were selected for the systematic review, presented in Table 3. The researcher created a visual representation summary of all included studies, known as ‘mapping the field’, which can be seen in Appendix B.

Figure 5: PRISMA Flow Chart

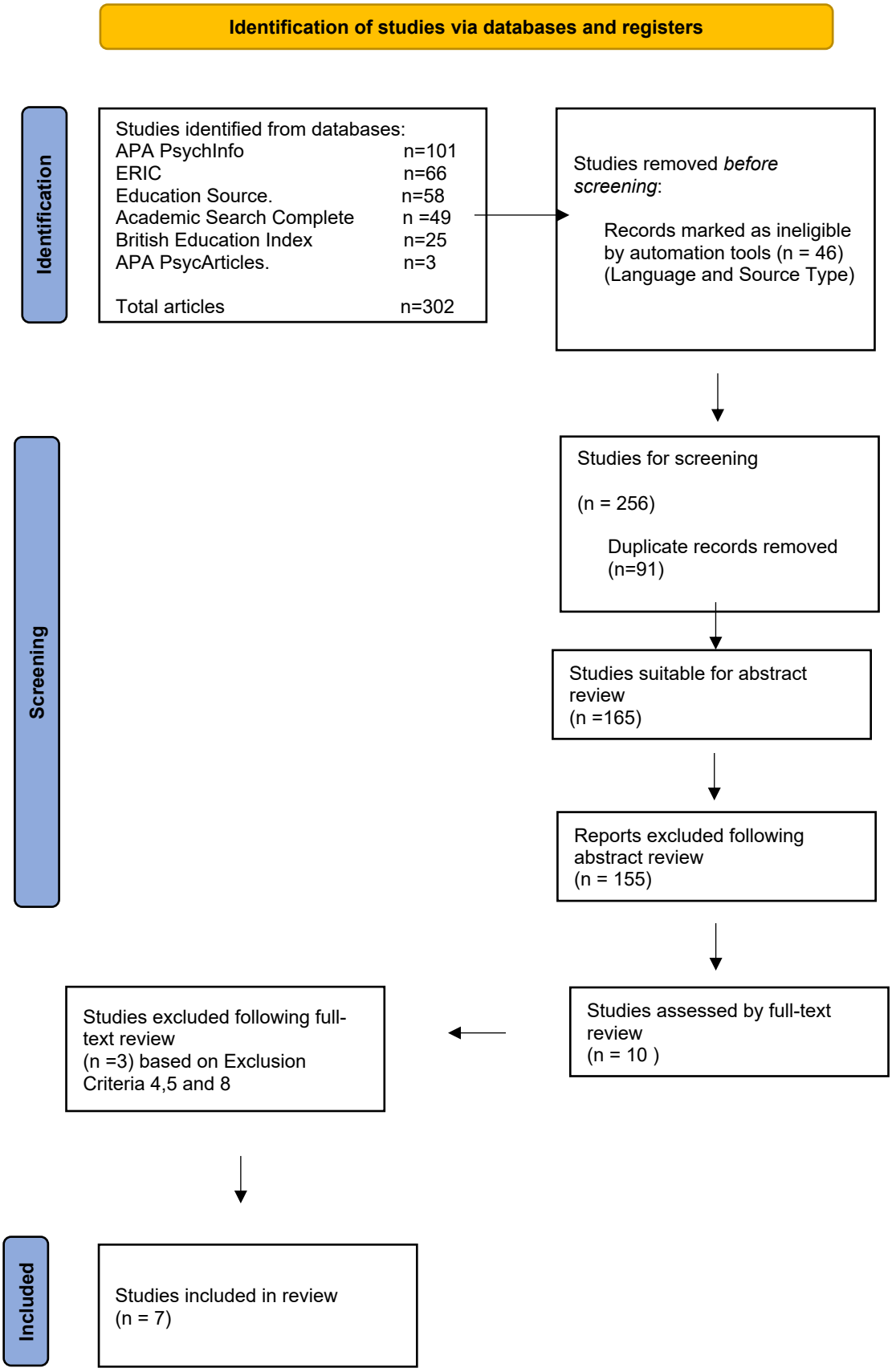


Table 2: Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
1. Source of publication	Primary research from peer-reviewed journals	Studies which are secondary research and not peer-reviewed	Increase the overall quality and rigour of the study
2. Language of publication	Studies published in the English language	Studies published in any language other than English	No translation facilities are available for current research
3. Dates of publication	Studies published in and after 2014	Studies published before 2014	Ensure the current review is up-to-date with research from last ten years
4. Source Types	Studies published in peer-reviewed journal articles	Studies not present in peer-reviewed journal articles such as unpublished theses	Increase the overall quality and rigour of the study.
5. Participants	Data collected from Educational Psychologists or Trainee Educational Psychologists, suitably qualified according to the relevant country's regulations	Data collected from trainee/ qualified psychologists from another discipline e.g. Clinical or Counselling. Data collected from a group of professionals including EPs/TEPs where the voice of the EP/TEP discipline alone is not clear or distinct	Trainee Educational Psychologists are the participants and focus of current research
6. Outcome	Study explores the attitudes of EPs towards Inclusive Education with regard to children with SEN as the main/one of the main outcome measures	The study does not explore attitudes of EPs towards Inclusive Education with regard to children with SEN	The current research focuses on the attitudes of TEPs towards Inclusive Education with regard to children with SEN
7. Journal accessibility	The journal is available through Mary Immaculate College database subscription	The journal is not available through Mary Immaculate College database subscription	Author of the current review is a student of Mary Immaculate College

Table 3: List of Included Studies

Nkoma, E. (2018). Perceptions of Zimbabwean trainee/educational psychologists regarding the training on their support roles and responsibilities in inclusive education. *Psychology in the Schools*, *55*(5), 555–572. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22128
Nkoma, E., & Hay, J. (2018). Educational psychologists' support roles regarding the implementation of inclusive education in Zimbabwe. *Psychology in the Schools*, *55*(7), 850–866. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22147
Palomo, R., Simón, C., & Echeita, G. (2024). The role of educational psychologists in the framework of the right to inclusive education: Between reality and desire. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *39*(4), 550–566. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2023.2242031
Szulevicz, T., & Tanggaard, L. (2014). Inclusion and budget cuts – The contours of educational psychology in the marketplace. *Nordic Psychology*, *66*(1), 36–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/19012276.2014.885762
Toye, M. K., Wilson, C., & Wardle, G. A. (2019). Education professionals' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with ADHD: The role of knowledge and stigma. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, *19*(3), 184–196. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12441
Vivash, J., Dockrell, J., & Lee, F. (2018). The re-alignment of educational psychologists in supporting primary schools to enhance provision for children with speech, language and communication needs. *Educational and Child Psychology*, *35*(2), 43–59. https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsecp.2018.35.2.43
Winter, S., & Bunn, H. (2019). Work to be done? A survey of educational psychologists' contribution to special schools for profound and multiple learning difficulties. *British Journal of Special Education*, *46*(1), 53–75. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12252

2.11. Synthesis of Findings

2.11.1. Critical Appraisal of Included Studies

As a process, research synthesis requires critical appraisal around the quality and relevance of the evidenced literature. In critiquing the included studies, the author is making the plurality of the available research transparent (Gough, 2007). Following the screening process, selected studies underwent a critical appraisal to consider how well executed and how fit-for-purpose the study was in answering the current review question. Gough's Weight of Evidence Framework (2007) (WoE) was used to make judgements on review-specific criteria, namely methodological quality (WoE A), the relevance of methods employed (WoE B) and the relevance of the included study to the focus of the current review question (WoE C). All three scores were then combined to assign an overall judgement (WoE D) to each study. While the WoE provides a structure for

making judgements, it does not dictate how judgements are made. In this regard, the researcher utilised the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) (2008) and The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018) to assess the coherence and integrity of the studies (WoE A). (Appendix C, Tables C1-C3). In addition, the appropriateness of the research design and methodologies employed in answering the review question was critiqued (WoE B) using Petticrew and Roberts' (2003) typology of evidence (Appendix C, Tables C5-C6). Furthermore, the appropriateness of the study's focus and an appraisal of the extent to which the study addresses the review question (WoE C) was examined using elements of the PICO Framework (Richardson et al., 1995) (Appendix C, Tables C7-C9). Each study received a score based on the abovementioned categories, which was then converted to a mean score indicating the overall quality of each study, referred to as WoE D (Appendix C, Table C10).

2.11.2. Participants

The number of participants across the 7 studies varied from 5 EPs (Vivash et al., 2018) up to 177 EPs (Palomo et al., 2024). The total number of participants across all studies was 567; with 454 of those participants comprising EPs/TEPs. Three studies (Nkoma, 2018; Nkoma & Hay, 2018; Winter & Bunn, 2019) included TEPs in their participant cohort; with years of professional experience across all of the studies ranging from currently in training up to a maximum average of 15 years of experience (Vivash et al., 2018). Descriptive statistics around the age of participants was not reported in four out of the seven studies (Nkoma, 2018; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014; Vivash et al., 2018; Winter & Bunn, 2019), while the mean age of participants within the other studies was 39.2 years (Nkoma & Hay, 2018; Palomo et al., 2024; Toye et al., 2019). In general, studies with higher numbers of participants received higher scores within the WoE B appraisal due to their likely superior generalisability to the wider population. However, in studies where EPs/TEPs were one professional discipline among others (Toye et al., 2019; Vivash et al., 2018), e.g. Speech and Language Therapists, a lower score was assigned on the WoE B. This was due to the focus of the current study, in addition to the voice of the EP becoming overshadowed at times amongst other professional perspectives. Palomo et al. (2024) offered details around gender diversity within the sample size, noting that there were 22 male and 155 female participants. Similarly, Toye et al. (2019) noted that 83% of participants were female, while Vivash et al. (2018) comprised all female participants. While this constituted a

significant gender imbalance in all three studies, this did not negatively affect the WoE B given that the profession of educational psychology is pervasively female dominated, with statistics showing that 80% of EPs are females (Johnson et al., 2020). While two studies (Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014; Winter & Bunn, 2019) did not give details about gender of participants, it is presumed that there were likely a higher number of female participants in this study for the aforementioned reasons. Nkoma (2018) and Nkoma and Hay (2018) were the only studies to have a higher rate of male than female participants, with Nkoma (2018) comprising 10 males and 3 females and Nkoma and Hay (2018) comprising 13 males and 3 females. Despite both studies referring to participants as TEPs/EPs in Zimbabwe; only one participant in each study acquired a Master's Degree in Educational Psychology and one of the 'expert' participants possessed a PhD in Educational Psychology (Nkoma & Hay, 2018, p.850). Nkoma (2018) detailed that while the requirement to become an EP in Zimbabwe is an Honours Degree in Psychology and a Master's Degree in Educational Psychology; the required Master's programme had not been running since 2012 due to a lack of suitably qualified lecturers. Nkoma (2018) acknowledged that this shortcoming in training is driven by poor socioeconomic conditions and has negatively impacted the quality of training. This leaves many students with no choice but to complete varying psychology degrees and complete internships with a focus on child assessment, parent consultation and school psychology in their pursuit to become EPs. The current researcher decided that both studies were still eligible for inclusion given that the participants were suitably qualified within their context. However, the reduced quality of training was reflected in a lower WoE C score. In a similar vein, studies which did not provide any details on participants' qualifications received a lower WoE C score (Szulevicz &Tanggaard, 2014; Toye et al., 2019; Vivash et al., 2019; Winter& Bunn, 2019), while Palomo et al. (2024) received a higher score for identifying that all participants obtained a Master's Degree. While Nkoma et al. (2018) and Nkoma and Hay (2018) are the only studies to explicitly state that recruitment was conducted using purposive sampling, it can be inferred that this method was utilised for all studies, given the participants were chosen based on their professional characteristics.

2.11.3. Location

There was variance among studies in terms of the country that participants worked in. Three studies were located in the United Kingdom (Toye et al., 2019; Vivash et al., 2018;

Winter & Bunn, 2019), one study took place in Madrid, Spain (Palomo et al., 2018) and Denmark (Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014) respectively, while two studies took place in Zimbabwe, South East Africa (Nkoma, 2018; Nkoma & Hay, 2018). In terms of generalisability of cultural and societal norms for the current review, the researcher categorised the studies into a hierarchy within the WoE C scores. As the current review took place in Ireland, studies located in the United Kingdom received the highest scores (Toye et al., 2019; Vivash et al., 2018; Winter & Bunn, 2019), proceeded by studies located within the European Union (Palomo et al., 2024; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014) and lastly, studies taken place outside the European Union (Nkoma, 2018; Nkoma & Hay, 2018).

2.11.4. Design and Measures

There were mixed approaches to study design and methodology used across the included research, with four studies opting for a qualitative design (Nkoma, 2018; Nkoma & Hay, 2018; Palomo et al., 2024; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014); one quantitative study (Toye et al., 2019) and two mixed-methods studies (Vivash et al., 2018; Winter & Bunn, 2019). Two studies that utilised a qualitative design both collected data through focus groups (Nkoma, 2018; Palomo et al., 2024). The latter study held 21 focus groups with an average of 8 participants per group; while Nkoma (2018) held 3 focus groups with an average of 4 participants per group. The function of a focus group is to bring people together to explore how they feel about an issue through sharing perceptions and perspectives (Krueger, 2014). The intended aim of the work of Nkoma (2018) was to understand TEP/EPs' experiences of learning about their roles regarding IE. Similarly, Palomo et al. (2024) aimed to examine the role of EPs within IE, in addition to the barriers to IE. As both studies were assessing TEP/EPs' perspectives around a phenomenon, the researcher deemed their design and data collection method as appropriate to their study aims, which was reflected in the WoE A. The other two qualitative studies (Nkoma & Hay, 2018; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014) utilised interview methods for data collection. Nkoma and Hay (2018) conducted phenomenological, face-to-face interviews lasting between 25-50 minutes, while Szulevicz and Tanggaard (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews, lasting an hour each. Interviews allow for exploration of participants' attitudes towards a phenomenon in a way that does not limit the depth and breadth of responses. Moreover, interviews allow the interviewer to probe for clarification and, where appropriate, seek more detail around the

rationale behind attitudes (Bryman, 2016; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Patton, 2015). Resultantly, the design and data collection methods in both studies were deemed appropriate and this was illustrated in scores within the WoE A (Nkoma & Hay, 2018; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014).

Interestingly, Szulevicz and Tanggaard (2014) also used an observational technique, comprising the researchers directly observing two EPs in their role for two days a week over a three-month duration. As stated by Ciesielska et al. (2018), when using observational techniques as a scientific method of data collection, it is important to have a focus on research aims. In line with this, Szulevicz and Tanggaard (2014) had two clear research foci while completing observations: (1) Does the economy dictate the consultative practice of EPs? (2) Are the budget cutbacks an invitation to rethink inclusive practices? Additionally, it is thought that naturalistic observations can provide real-time insights into behaviours which may not present when relying on participants' self-report. It is thought that observational techniques can provide nuanced descriptions of events, interactions, and behaviours, consequently enhancing qualitative analysis (Emerson et al., 2011). Nevertheless, critical information around subjectivity of interpretation during observation sessions, in addition to the potential for reactivity whereby EPs may have altered their behaviour in the presence of others, was not addressed (Charmaz, 2014; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015).

Only one study within the current review used a quantitative research design (Toye et al., 2019). While all other studies within this review sought to explore perspectives around IE at a broad level, Toye et al. (2019) aimed to specifically explore the effect of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) knowledge on attitudes towards mainstream inclusion. Data collection comprised three self-report surveys, presenting a possible limitation as participants may have attempted to present themselves in a favourable light, known as social desirability bias (Van de Mortel, 2008). The measures used were The Multidimensional Attitudes towards Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES) (Mahat, 2008), The ADHD Stigma Questionnaire (ASQ) (Kellison et al., 2010) and Knowledge about Attention Deficit Disorders Scale (KADDS) (West et al., 2005). Importantly, authors referenced the psychometric properties of reliability and validity of all three measures, however specific details were not given. Nonetheless, the

measures were deemed appropriate to assess for the study's aims which was highlighted in the methodological quality ranking (WoE A). The current research is seeking perceptions on the phenomenon of IE and therefore qualitative research is deemed more appropriate to answer the research question. With this in mind, the quantitative nature of this study contributed to a lower score in the WoE B.

Winter and Bunn (2019) explored the views of EPs regarding their contribution to special schools for young people with profound difficulties using a mixed-methods online survey seeking responses to both quantitative and qualitative questionnaires. In contrast, Vivash et al. (2018) used a two-phase sequential design, encompassing focus groups, classroom observations and questionnaires to explore EPs perceptions around effective provision for supporting students with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) within the school setting. Notably, EPs were only involved in the focus groups methods within this study. Winter and Bunn (2019) described their commitment to rigorous reliability and validity testing of tools, detailing that the survey was designed in collaboration with EPs and university tutors; further enhanced by a participant validation group. While Vivash et al. (2018) detailed psychometric properties for the school staff questionnaire, it is not clear if a process was in place to test reliability and validity of the focus group schedule; a limitation which negatively impacted the WoE A.

2.11.5. Outcomes

This review was primarily focused on assessing research around EPs' perceptions of IE regarding students with SEN. With this in mind, the researcher devised a hierarchy in terms of the relevance of the outcomes being measured in each study comparative to the current review. Three studies explored the attitudes of participants regarding the role of the EP within IE as either the main or one of the main foci within the study, which impacted positively on scores within the WoE C (Palomo et al., 2024; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014; Nkoma & Hay, 2018). One study explored the experiences of EPS/TEPs learning about their role within the domain of IE. This was deemed of lesser relevance to the current review which was reflected in the WoE C (Nkoma, 2018). Lastly, three studies explored attitudes towards the EPs role regarding a specific domain within IE (Toye et al., 2019; Vivash et al., 2018; Winter & Bunn, 2019). For example, Vivash et al. (2018) investigated the role of the EP in supporting children with SLCN in school

settings. While this topic is pertinent to the topic of IE, it is perhaps not as generalisable as looking at viewpoints regarding IE at a broader level. As a result, these studies received a lower WoE C score.

2.12. Findings and Discussion

The current review sought to explore the research base around TEP/EPs' attitudes towards IE, while also critiquing the quality of available literature on the topic. Thematic synthesis was utilised to identify and analyse themes across studies. This involved a transparent three-step process of coding findings and developing both descriptive and analytical themes to provide a cohesive integration of findings. The researcher applied an inductive line-by-line open-coding process, followed by grouping initial codes into broader categories which reflected patterns across studies. Finally, analytical themes were generated through interpretation and identification of underlying beliefs, systemic influences and tensions not explicitly stated (Thomas & Harden, 2008). From this review, a plethora of themes emerged, with a significant emphasis placed on systemic barriers to IE.

2.12.1. EPs perspectives on Inclusion Debate

Where participants were provided with opportunities to define IE, explanations were based on systemic and role-based factors; concerned with the identification and removal of barriers to meaningful participation of students, rather than ideal placement settings. This is illustrative of the shift towards viewing IE more broadly as a principle that celebrates diversity among all learners. For example, in the work of Szulevicz and Tanggaard (2014), the concept of IE was raised during the observation component of the study, whereby one EP identified that 'inclusion is not the same as simply containing. When we talk about inclusion, we have to think about the quality of the learning environments' (p.46). A similar sentiment arose in Nkoma and Hay (2018), with one participant noting that 'We do not need to just include people with disabilities...they need to be included but meaningful learning has to take place' (p.857). Both perspectives drew parallels with the belief that inclusion without meaningful participation and learning defeats the purpose and is insufficient (Hornby, 2014).

Across studies, there appeared to be varying perceptions on the optimal model of educational provision for students with SEN. In general, participants in Nkoma and Hay (2018) viewed full inclusion as idealistic but currently more theoretical than practical. In this study, it was described that placing students in mainstream education was the EPs' priority, but that students ought to be placed in alternate settings if that equated to meaningful participation. This study also referenced the importance of students in alternative specialist settings socialising with their peers within the mainstream environment at various times throughout the day. In Vivash et al. (2018), the EP focus group perceived that students with SLCN benefitted from participation in the mainstream classroom, provided that there were plentiful language opportunities for students to engage in as opposed to withdrawal for intervention. Additionally, participants emphasised the importance of EPs supporting teachers to increase their own capacity, rather than educators relying on external agencies to provide positive outcomes (Vivash et al., 2018). Similarly, Toye et al. (2019) found that EPs held significantly stronger attitudes in favour of inclusion of children with ADHD in mainstream settings when compared with teachers, school managers and support staff. Conversely, psychologists' in Palomo et al. (2024) perceived that if allocation of resources within mainstream settings continued to be distributed based on diagnostic labels, certain students' needs are best met in parallel settings outside of the mainstream environment. While EPs across studies expressed a desire for students to be educated in the mainstream setting, it is evident that systemic measures, most notably implications for funding, are crucial to ensure that their aspirations for students with SEN are not merely idealistic but are grounded in practical reality.

2.12.2. Personal Values and Belief Systems

Across certain studies, findings showed that a strong sense of inclusion is innate within EPs, inadvertently shaping their practice. Namely, quantitative findings in Toye et al. (2019) identified that psychologists reported less stigmatised beliefs towards children with ADHD than teachers and other school staff. To this point, a participant in Szulevicz and Tanggaard's work (2014) reported 'I think we all became EPs, because we want more inclusion in society. I consider helping vulnerable children my calling' (p. 46). While this is a self-reported statement from one participant, it highlights the possible influence of personal motivations and values on EPs' attitudes towards IE. In line with this, the role of self-motivation in striving towards further

academic pursuits is noted in Nkoma and Hay (2018), whereby one participant noted that undertaking Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) was a commitment to provision of a more meaningful support to students.

2.12.3. Inconsistent perceptions about role of EP- 'I feel there is, or has been, a difference of opinion between what we offer and what the school think or hope we offer!' (Winter & Bunn, 2019, p.67).

Some studies recognised that systemic weaknesses such as top-down leadership and an absence of governmental strategies impact their work promoting inclusive practice (Nkoma, 2018; Palomo et al., 2024). Findings from Nkoma (2018) highlighted that while there are policies and circulars in relation to educational placement procedures, there is a dearth of specific governmental guidance clarifying the role of the EP regarding IE. Instead, Nkoma (2018) illustrated that EPs learned about their role regarding inclusion through college courses, workshops, reading and informal collaborative discussion with colleagues. Similarly, EPs in the Spanish study (Palomo et al., 2024) identified that insufficient leadership, planning and coordination from local authorities make it difficult '..for these professionals to step out of their comfort zone and dare to undertake other functions aligned with the right to IE' (p.558). One EP noted that in the past, they would have had discretion to implement initiatives such as the promotion of diversity within schools. However, due to guidance from the local authorities, this is no longer possible as EPs are obliged to focus on justification of diagnostic labels and recommendations around school placement.

Some studies highlighted that EPs' perceptions of their role regarding IE can be different to that of school staff and other professional disciplines (Palomo et al., 2024; Vivash et al., 2018; Winter & Bunn, 2019). Participants described that some school staff could be more narrow-minded in terms of what the role of the EP is, with their attitudes insinuating they were more resistant to change and less open to new, creative ways of working with the EP (Palomo et al., 2024; Winter & Bunn, 2019). Another clash of perspectives was noted in Vivash et al. (2018) whereby EPs generally did not consider supporting students with SLCN to be an appropriate referral for them. However, based on findings from participants in other professional disciplines, Vivash et al. (2018) advocated that EPs are uniquely suited to support schools in offering this

type of provision and, furthermore, they suggested that EPs would be prudent to reconsider their focus with this population.

2.12.4. Financial cutbacks and resource allocation- 'The challenge is not to let money overshadow the child's interests' (Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014, p.45)

Throughout the studies, it emerged that the economic landscape and subsequent resource allocation seems to dictate the work of EPs in supporting inclusive practice within school settings. EPs working in Madrid detailed that the pressures associated with the governmental allocation of support hours to students with SEN, can influence their work towards a more traditional diagnostic and assessment-led model. One EP encapsulated this; 'At times, I question my ability to foster an IE mindset because urgent matters tend to distract me, and I end up resorting to labelling instead of focusing on what truly matters..' (Palomo et al., 2024, p.559). This is a powerful sentiment depicting that EPs can feel a pressure to work in line with the Medical Model of Disability, at the cost of promoting inclusion. It was described that if this systemic barrier was removed, EPs' work could be more focused on transforming schools through supporting environmental modifications and preventative measures, as well as improving educational practices to allow for enhanced diversity. In parallel, EPs who partook in the observational component of Szulevicz and Tanggaard (2014) study, worked in a psychological service which shifted from a primarily-assessment focus to a consultation-only model. Consultation can be defined as an ongoing, indirect problem-solving approach whereby the psychologist works with the key adults in the child's life to enhance understanding through application of psychological theory. The aim of consultation is to reach a better understanding of the child, leading to more effective outcomes in the school and home settings than can be provided by more traditional models of assessment (Guiney et al., 2014; Nolan & Moreland, 2014). However, Szulevicz and Tanggaard's study (2014) found that budget cuts from a governmental level significantly impacted EPs' ability to support IE through this collaborative model. For example, it was delineated that when there is a budget cut in Denmark, students with SEN' access to supports are also cut. Speaking to this, one psychologist cited '..sometimes I get the impression that the teachers just want me to test him, because they want him removed from the class' (Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014, p.45). Again, this underscores the conflict EPs face as they aim to align their work with the Social Model of Disability, while being restricted by

governmental regulations that steer their practice toward the Medical Model. To the contrary, Szulevicz and Tanggaard (2014) evidenced that, at times, budget cuts can obligate schools to cater for students with SEN in the mainstream classroom when they are left with no other choice. This point raises concerns about the ethicality of placing students in mainstream classrooms as a direct byproduct of financial constraints. While it is indeed relevant that budget constraints may prompt schools to take inclusive action, this should not be fuelled solely by financial cuts as this risks undermining the importance of thoughtful planning and sufficient collaboration between systems that are required for meaningful inclusion. Comparably, Winter and Bunn (2019) described the process of private trading procurement in the UK to access an educational psychology service. One EP recalled that, historically, their special school bought a two-days-a week package from the service, but now that this package has ended, the school only receive 'core' time, rather than additional time (p.59).

Other barriers to a truly inclusive system were noted by Nkoma and Hay (2018) as large class sizes, inefficient physical infrastructure such as ramps and a strong focus on completing curricula syllabus. In addition, Nkoma (2018) identified that that inadequate training to become an EP, lack of available Master's programmes and the extemporaneous nature of professional development options all serve as obstacles in the face of furthering inclusive practice. While this is in the Zimbabwean context and perhaps not entirely generalisable to the Irish context, it points to the usefulness of seeking undergraduate psychology students' or TEPs' perceptions around the availability, accessibility and/or impact of their academic training programmes on their attitudes and beliefs around IE. Overall, these findings underscore the profound influence of financial considerations on the role of the EP, as well as the concomitant pressures imposed on EPs to adopt alternative approaches that may diverge from their perceived ideals and optimal practices.

2.12.5. Influence of rapport with school staff

Three studies referenced that EPs building rapport with school staff can influence their work around inclusion, both positively and negatively (Palomo et al., 2024; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014; Winter & Bunn, 2019). Over half of participants in Winter and Bunn's work (2019) reported having a 'good' or 'excellent' relationship with their assigned special school, noting that this is largely due to a grounding of mutual respect and understanding. One

participant referenced the impact of a strong rapport on the EP's working style, noting 'the school are generally well-engaged and prepared for working with me, and seem to value our work together' (p.60). Palomo et al. (2024) also highlighted how building collaborative relationships with teaching staff is crucial to developing practices that deviate from psychoeducational assessments, leading to a more thorough analysis of the teaching methodologies and thus, more tailored guidance around inclusive strategies. In contrast with this, a newly-qualified psychologist in Szulevicz and Tanggaard's study (2014) reported that maintaining rapport with clients sometimes resulted in her compromising professional judgement and complying with teachers' request for a cognitive assessment for a student instead of consultation. This suggests that early-career EPs may be more likely to prioritise the satisfaction of others, which could result in a deviation from their working style and potentially compromise best practice. While it is evident across studies that building rapport is crucial; it is discernible that this should not come at the expense of ethical considerations and professional boundaries.

2.12.6. Insufficient capacity and time

Unsurprisingly, four studies identified that there is insufficient time and scope to undertake work which would help advance the progression of inclusion within their respective settings (Nkoma Hay, 2018; Palomo et al., 2024; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014; Winter & Bunn, 2019). 'Time restrictions' were cited as a consistent barrier in 142 out of 207 responses in Winter and Bunn (2019). This was regarding both EP time being restricted in addition to EP time not being invested in by schools. Illustrative of the same issue, teachers in Szulevicz and Tanggaard's work (2014), felt that meeting with the EP to discuss supportive strategies was too time-consuming as it necessitated the organisation of substitute cover for their class. This sentiment was described by the EP as 'extremely frustrating' (p.44), given that it had a negative impact on the preferred consultative working style of the organisation. Palomo et al. (2024) identified the importance of having dedicated time for reflective practice among EPs and school staff, with a view to the promotion of inclusive practice through sharing experiences and addressing common issues. Compounding the above matters, Winter and Bunn (2019), Nkoma (2018) and Nkoma and Hay (2018) all drew attention to the vast workload far exceeding the number of qualified EPs available, noting that 'When we could assess the impact of what we

have done we would discover that at the end of the day, we have covered so little and yet there are so many people who want the services' (Nkoma & Hay, 2018, p.860). Overall, findings across studies paint a bleak picture in terms of inefficient time and resources acting as key barriers to EPs promotion of IE.

2.12.7. Lack of confidence

In three studies, a theme of decreased EP confidence around catering to the needs of complex children and young people emerged. More specifically, two studies referenced EPs' perceptions of school staff being more knowledgeable than them due to their practical experience on the ground, leading to deflated EP confidence (Nkoma & Hay, 2018; Winter & Bunn, 2019). As discussed previously, EPs in Vivash et al. (2018) reported that they did not feel best placed to cater for students with SLCN and perceived this to be a Speech and Language Therapist's role. This is further suggestive of diminished EP confidence to appropriately cater for this cohort of young people. In this regard, Winter and Bunn (2019) explored the possibility of EPs developing specialisms in specific areas to deepen their knowledge and enhance their confidence in the promotion of IE. CPL is also advised in findings from Nkoma (2018), denoting that this should focus on diverse areas to facilitate high-quality service provision.

2.12.8. A preferred future- 'EPs are a crucial piece in the machinery that must be transformed for greater progress to occur' (Palomo et al., 2024, p.563)

Across three studies, participants shared their aspirations for the practical embodiment of their roles in championing IE going forward (Nkoma, 2018; Palomo et al., 2024; Winter & Bunn, 2019). In general, EPs noted that their ideal contribution towards inclusion in schools would be to work at more of a systemic level to augment school-wide inclusive practice, in addition to increased consultation work with the systems around the child. Both Palomo et al. (2024) and Winter and Bunn (2019) acknowledged that they would endeavour to use EP time to offer teachers emotional support through development of counselling frameworks. Furthermore, EPs would like to hone in on their psychological skills and knowledge base in areas such as attachment and bring this to their work in school settings to promote meaningful understanding of the student. In this regard, it was also proposed that EPs have a unique skillset in capturing the voice of the child, a useful technique to promote inclusive practice (Palomo et al. 2024). Specific

to the Zimbabwean study (Nkoma, 2018), participants noted that CPL workshops must be decentralized to improve accessibility to them. Furthermore, it was proposed that improved communication between the Allied Health Practitioners Council and EP employers would be helpful for practical reasons such as gaining study leave to complete CPL. Overall, these findings underscore EPs' desires for a more multi-faceted role in the quest for IE, encompassing specialised skill development and acting as agents of change.

2.12.9. Conclusions of the Research Studies

This review aimed to clarify the existing understanding of TEP/EPs' experiences in their role of promoting IE. Initially, seven studies were identified that met the inclusion criteria, and these studies were then rigorously analysed to present the key findings that led to their conclusions. The search process revealed a prevalence of studies investigating the experiences of educators regarding IE, suggesting that the EPs' perspectives in this field remains relatively understudied. Most notably, to the researcher's knowledge, there is no peer-reviewed, published studies related to this topic within the Irish context.

Overall, this review illustrated that EPs pay due consideration and show varying levels of responsibility toward the promotion of IE. On a positive note, participants noted that an important part of their role was to provide consultation to parents, offer support to staff and advocate for appropriate school placements. However, it was clear across studies that systemic issues such as financial constraints, an over-emphasis on the medical model, issues with training and misunderstanding of the role of the EP all act as significant barriers to EPs' promotion of IE. These findings may be a helpful starting point for EPs to engage in reflective practice and consider how they can work in collaboration with school staff, parents and relevant stakeholders to address the systemic barriers to inclusive practice. Furthermore, it is hoped that these findings may act as a catalyst for EPs to advocate strongly for increased funding, policy development and CPL options. On a more individual level, these results might encourage EPs to engage in a deeper introspection of their own values, beliefs and overall positionality of how they align with the principles of IE.

2.13. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

As highlighted in the critical evaluation and the preceding results, the studies included in this review are not without flaws. Gaps in the research are discussed and suggestions for future research are presented below.

2.13.1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

It is important to note that doctoral theses were not included in the current study. Despite their internal rigour and valuable insights, challenges arose in relation to their systemic identification, uniformity and accessibility. For example, many theses are not available online and when they are accessible through institutional repositories, more varied search strategies are required. The exclusion of doctoral theses within the current systematic review was primarily driven by practical and methodological reasons. Nonetheless, this represents a limitation whereby relevant studies may not be captured in the current work (Higgins et al., 2022). Therefore, future research could consider methods to systematically access and appraise relevant doctoral theses within systematic reviews to yield a more relevant body of evidence.

2.13.2. Methodical Rigour

As evidenced in the WoE, some studies failed to provide critical information around sampling strategies used (Palomo et al., 2024; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014; Toye et al., 2019; Winter & Bunn, 2019) as well as insufficient information around the validity of testing measures (Toye et al., 2019) and focus group schedules (Vivash et al., 2018). Moreover, key ethicality issues, such as the possibility of subjectivity in the observational techniques used in Szulevicz and Tanggaard (2014) were not explored. Of note, only two studies received a rating of ‘High’ in the WoE D (Palomo et al., 2024; Vivash et al., 2018). Considering the above issues, future research should have a focus on a rigorous research design, including explicit information on sampling strategy and ethical considerations in addition to clear reporting on the validity of measurement tools.

2.13.3. Defining IE

As per the inclusion criteria, all studies included in this review were examining attitudes towards IE as a main outcome or one of the main outcomes of the research. Despite this, only two studies explicitly investigated how EPs defined the concept of IE (Nkoma & Hay, 2018; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2014) and even then, the exploration was limited in depth. While the research clearly showcases that EPs have a valuable role to play in the quest for IE, their meaning-making and construction of the concept is still unclear and inadequately explored. In this domain, the research was limited in its' interrogation of participants underlying beliefs, values and attitudes. Going forward, it would be beneficial for researchers to engage in thoughtful discussions with participants to establish their understanding of the concept. To this point, Toye et al. (2019) suggested that future researchers consider the knowledge, stigma and attitudes of EPs who work in different political and educational contexts. Stigma surrounding the inclusion of children with SEN can affect how EPs and other professionals approach inclusion (Leifler et al., 2024). By examining these attitudes, future research can help identify underlying biases or misconceptions that might hinder the effective implementation of inclusive practices, enabling EPs to engage in reflection and thus work more effectively.

2.14. EP Professional Experience

Although years of professional experience differed across studies, each paper included participants working in similar, if not the same service environments. For instance, in Winter and Bunn (2019), all participants were employed in special school settings, while in other studies, participants were consistently working in comparable educational contexts. Conducting research with professionals who have experience across a wider array of settings may offer a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of practice and perspective. Winter and Bunn (2019) advised that this recommendation may also capture richer data, thereby providing a more in-depth contribution to the field. As discussed above, it was denoted in one study that the rise in popularity of Social and Education courses poses a query over the extent to which the psychological perspective is relevant in the inclusion discussion. Herein, Szulevicz and Tanggaard (2014) advised that further research would be appropriate to 'legitimize' the role of the EP in the promotion of inclusive practice (p.49).

Finally, three studies included TEPs within their participant cohort (Winter & Bunn, 2019; Nkoma, 2018; Nkoma & Hay, 2018) yet the TEP perspective was relatively indistinct from the voice of the EP, effectively merging the two. As outlined by Zaniolo (2021), research with TEPs could offer a fresh and contemporary perspective on this topic, shaped by recent academic research and training. Furthermore, it is obvious that TEPs are the future of the Educational Psychology profession, therefore including their voice and providing opportunities for them to reflect on this subject may equip them to navigate the ever-evolving IE landscape.

2.15. Research Questions

Based on the abovementioned findings of the systemic review and indeed the gaps in the literature, the following research questions were devised for exploration within the current thesis:

1) What are Trainee Educational Psychologists' understanding of and attitudes towards the term 'Inclusive Education?'
2) How have Trainee Educational Psychologists' attitudes towards Inclusive Education changed or developed over time?
3) How do Trainee Educational Psychologists' attitudes towards Inclusive Education influence their professional role?

3. Empirical Paper

3.1. Introduction

This chapter documents the empirical study undertaken by the researcher, beginning with a brief introduction to the research field. A detailed outline of the study's design, methodology, and data collection process will be presented. Additionally, the interpretivist paradigm that grounds this research will be discussed. Following this, data analysis and results will be examined in relation to each research question, concluding with the implications of these findings for policy and practice.

3.2. Inclusive Education

As explored in Chapter 2, IE is a nebulous term whereby there is no universal definition agreed upon, as well as much complexity entangled in the variety of definitions within research and practice. The concept of IE has been described as 'ontologically fragile' (O' Brien, 2020, p. 307) wherein many questions are left unanswered regarding the meaning of IE in its truest form. Table 4 indicates the varying definitions of IE, according to governmental bodies and legislation.

Table 4: Definitions of IE

Author	Definition
NCSE (2011)	'Addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through enabling participation in learning, cultures, and communities and removing barriers within and from education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school'(p.13) 'This concept of inclusion promotes the active participation of the learner as the primary aim rather than simple placement or

	accommodation. It also emphasises the need for changes within the education system and the school to accommodate the learner'(p.14)
NCSE (2024a)	'Inclusion can be viewed as part of a dynamic process of change to restructure school systems to enable them to increase their capacity to respond to, and accommodate, the diversity of needs of all learners. Inclusion in education is also seen as making an important contribution to the creation of an inclusive society' (p.10)
DE (2021) DE (2024h)	'Schools with strong inclusive cultures are characterised by: A positive ethos and learning environment whereby all pupils, including those with special educational needs, feel welcome and experience a sense of community and belonging. An emphasis on promoting pupils' participation and active engagement in their learning and in the life of the school...A commitment to developing pupils' academic, social, emotional and independent living skills...A focus on high aspirations and on improving outcomes for all pupils' (p.21) 'An inclusive education system is one that recognises and celebrates diversity, and this includes neurodiversity. Neurodiversity means that not all children experience the world in the same way. It emphasises the importance of respecting, valuing and celebrating such differences' (p.6)
Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994)	'Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all, moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system' (Section 2)
United Nations International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)	Article 24 identified that states should ensure an 'inclusive education system at all levels' through the following means: 'Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability...Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality, free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live...Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided...Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system to facilitate their effective education...Effective individualised support measures are provided in environments that maximise academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion' (Article 24)
EPSEN Act (2004)	'A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs is such that to do so would be inconsistent with the best interests of the child or the effective

	provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated' (Part 1, Section 2) '..the education of people with special educational needs shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs' (Part 1, Section 1)
European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE)	'An inclusive setting refers to education where the child/learner with an official decision of SEN follows education in mainstream classes alongside their peers for the largest part – 80% or more – of the school week' (2024, p.8) 'Those children/learners who are not in inclusive settings are in separate classes in mainstream schools, fully separate special schools, other recognised forms of education maintained by health or social services, etc., or are out-of-education children/learners' (2024, p.25) 'Inclusive education supposes a real change at both policy and practice levels regarding education. Learners are placed at the centre of a system that needs to be able to recognise, accept and respond to learner diversity. Inclusive education aims to respond to the principles of efficiency, equality and equity, where diversity is perceived as an asset' (2022, p. 21).

3.3. TEPs Attitudes towards IE

TEPs have a strong role in empowering school staff towards building a more inclusive school culture. As evidenced by Howe and Griffin (2020), 'Educational psychologists must be recognised as key personnel within a capacity-building model whereby they can serve to empower schools within a process of mutual reflection and learning, aligning with a bottom-up approach to SEN' (p.51). It is deemed that EPs' positive attitudes towards students with SEN is paramount, given their far-reaching potential to influence mindsets and perspectives among school staff (Polat, 2001). Despite their important role in decision-making processes around inclusive practices for students with SEN, very little research has been undertaken on the beliefs and attitudes of TEPs towards inclusion, with most of the research focusing on educators' perspectives. According to the PSI (2022), following doctoral training, EPs should show commitment to promoting social justice and inclusion for young people, families and schools. It

is stated that Educational Psychology training programmes should provide experiences for students to develop their skills in adopting inclusive practice into their role. Training guidelines state that Educational Psychology programmes should facilitate trainees to 'develop insight into their personal attitudes and beliefs and how these can impact on the provision of an equal and inclusive service' (PSI, 2022, p.6). Such requirements illustrate the expectation for TEPs to demonstrate high levels of inclusivity within their own practice, as well as consider their own perspectives and values in relation to IE through a critical lens.

Attitudes towards inclusion are frequently cited as a significant predictor of successfully implemented IE systems (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Sharma et al., 2006). An attitude can be defined as an 'individual's propensity to evaluate a particular entity with some degree of favourability or unfavorability' (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007, p.583). For many individuals, it is possible that their existing beliefs and values may clash with the underpinning philosophy of IE (Wilson et al., 2020). Research has indicated that effective inclusive practices could be dependent on beliefs around the nature of disability and practitioners' perceived responsibilities when working with students with SEN (Jordan et al., 2009). Knowing about individuals' attitudes gives insight into the psychological processes that drive action. It is thought that research examining practitioners' concerns around implementation of IE, as well as their sentiments towards students with SEN may garner the contribution of a variety of context-specific factors (Sharma et al., 2006).

3.4. Methodology

3.4.1. Research Design

This research adopted a qualitative design, whereby data were collected through online semi-structured interviews and an anonymous online questionnaire. The online questionnaire data was collected through the online platform Qualtrics. This software allowed for the efficient design of the qualitative questionnaire (Cushman et al., 2021). For example, the software enabled the researcher to include information about the study and participant consent agreement at the beginning of the webpage. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 12 participants, via the online platform Microsoft Teams which is evidenced to elicit rich data and insights (Gordon et al., 2021). Most notably, the online component of the study meant the researcher was not

restricted by location when recruiting participants, therefore accessing a larger pool of potential TEPs and increasing the power of the sample size (Carpenter et al., 2019). The use of online interviews allowed for flexibility in scheduling as well as augmented cost and time efficiency. Nevertheless, there are disadvantages to online interviews, such as the researchers limited ability to pick up on nuances such as non-verbal cues and technical difficulties such as unstable internet connection (Tomás & Bidet, 2024).

3.4.2. Research Paradigm

The research paradigm or philosophical stance that the current study is grounded in is interpretivism. This philosophy is based on the belief that the level of meaning derived from research is dependent on the interpretation of the researcher. Interpretivism assumes that a person's reality is 'shaped by way of human experience and social backdrop' (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022, p.421). For the current study, interpretivism was deemed the most appropriate paradigm, given that the central tenet is to 'get inside the head of the subjects being studied' (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p.33). Therefore, the interpretivist researcher aims to understand the participant's context and setting, wherein their viewpoints are grounded through a subjective lens. Unlike positivism which searches for objective facts and assumes that context is unimportant, the aim of interpretivism is to access an individual's reality and reach an understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Ontology is concerned with the nature of being, existence and reality (Mertens, 2023). The interpretivist paradigm adopts a relativist ontology, whereby it is thought that there can be more than one interpretation of an event and that reality is not objective. Interpretivism assumes that reality is socially constructed and that there can be multiple realities and perspectives, dependent on context. It is therefore the researcher's role to understand the nature of human experience, situated within cultural and social contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Ontologically, interpretivist researchers aim to understand how members of a social group attach meaning to their realities and how this meaning influences their actions (Goldkuhl, 2012). Epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowledge and how best to research and investigate it. It can be seen as 'how we know what we know' (Creswell, 2009, p.37). Interpretivism assumes that knowledge is seen as 'fluid and provisional' (Kroeze, 2011, p.4) and entwined with the values of the researcher (Mertens, 2023). In light of this, the

interpretivist paradigm is deemed wholly suitable; given that the researcher herself is both a teacher and TEP and her personal experiences have acted as a catalyst for the current study from the initial research-design stage. More information around the researcher's personal stance can be found in the researcher positionality statement.

3.5. Participants

12 TEPs participated in the semi-structured interviews conducted as part of this study, while a further 21 TEPs took part in the online qualitative questionnaire component. In total, 33 TEPs took part in the study. At the time of data collection, all participants were enrolled in either an Educational Psychology or Educational and Child Psychology Doctoral Programme within the Republic of Ireland, namely either in University College Dublin (UCD) or Mary Immaculate College (MIC) respectively. Of the 12 TEPs who partook in the semi-structured interviews, 11 of these participants were female and 1 participant was male. Further descriptive demographic information can be found in Table 5 below. Given that the researcher herself is a TEP, the ethical constraints of engaging her classmates as participants were considered, with particular regard to possible social desirability effects. For this reason, an anonymous qualitative online questionnaire (Appendix F) was devised, whereby the researcher's peer group could only complete this component of the study. Other cohorts of TEP students were free to complete either method of data collection, but not both. For the purpose of protecting anonymity, demographic information was not garnered from participants within the questionnaire component of the survey.

Table 5: Demographic Participant Information

	Gender	**Professional background prior to enrolling on EP programme**	**Year of Study**
Participant 1	F	Assistant Psychologist	1
Participant 2	F	Primary School Teacher	1
Participant 3	F	Behaviour Analyst	1
Participant 4	F	Behaviour Analyst	3
Participant 5	F	Assistant Psychologist	3
Participant 6	M	Researcher	1
Participant 7	F	Primary School Teacher/Assistant Psychologist	1

Participant 8	F	Primary School Teacher	2
Participant 9	F	Primary School Teacher	2
Participant 10	F	Primary School Teacher	2
Participant 11	F	Assistant Psychologist	3
Participant 12	F	Primary School Teacher	2

3.6. Recruitment

Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgement sampling, was utilised in the current study. This is a non-randomised strategy whereby the researcher chose participants based on a specific quality that they possessed. 'Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience' (Etikan et al., 2016, p.2). Findings from studies conducted using purposive sampling can be generalised to the particular sub-group of TEPs, as well as generate understanding relevant to the fields of education and psychology more broadly.

The researcher sought participants through sending a recruitment email to the Acting Course Coordinator of the MIC Doctoral in Educational and Child Psychology course at that time, requesting her to send the email to any current TEPs (Appendix G). As this approach was accounted for in the researcher's MIC Ethics application, the request was approved. For the recruitment of UCD TEPs, convenience sampling was used whereby the selection of participants was primarily driven by convenience and the researcher's accessibility to them (Hossan et al., 2023). The researcher used her professional and personal contacts to disseminate information about the research and recruitment process to the relevant population.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

All participants received a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix J). Participants who completed the semi-structured interviews signed a Participant Consent Form and returned to the researcher before commencing (Appendix K). This study gained ethical approval from Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) on the 22nd February 2024 (Appendix H). Additionally, this research adhered to the PSI (2019) Code of Professional Ethics and the Data Protection Act (EU, 2018).

3.8. Theoretical Frameworks

3.8.1. Bioecological Systems Theory

For the purpose of the current research, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) was applied through a dual lens: first, placing the child at the centre to understand the systems that shape their experience of IE; and second, placing the TEP at the centre to explore the systems influencing their attitudes and practice around IE. Within this framework, the developing person can be considered as the centre point interacting within different levels i.e. microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, exosystem and chronosystem across varying contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). For the purpose of the current research, this framework will be considered both using the child as the focal point, as well as the TEP. Figure 1 (as per Section 1.3.1) illustrates the influence of a student's interaction with the varying levels of Bioecological Systems Theory (2005) in relation to IE. The child's microsystem comprises their interaction with their immediate environment, such as school. This is located within the mesosystem which accounts for the interrelations and connections between the micro-systems in a child's life such as home-school communication. From a microsystem level, it is deemed that school leadership teams have an important duty to foster a school environment conducive to meeting the needs of students with SEN. Similarly, nested within the mesosystem, research indicates that using family-centred approaches and clear, consistent communication between families and school staff can culminate to the provision of a more inclusive system (Semeniva & Dmytrovych, 2024; Trang Thu et al., 2022). The macrosystem can be defined as the outermost layer of a child's environment; encompassing values, beliefs, laws, resources, opportunities and cultural customs (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Darling, 2007). The effects of decisions made as a by-product of the macrosystem can have far-reaching consequences for students' education. For example, the level of government funding available for TPL can have a significant impact on schools' ability to meet the needs of students and encourage their meaningful participation in school life (Trang Thu et al., 2022). Attitudes towards IE can be understood within the macrosystem level of a child's development. It is believed that individuals' beliefs and perceptions regarding the best educational approaches for students with SEN can greatly impact students' future interactions with the world (Zaniolo, 2021). Bronfenbrenner (2005) proposed that the exosystem is the social system whereby, similar to the mesosystem, the child's microsystems are interacting with one another. However, within this structure, the individual

child may not have an active and direct role, yet the influence of the interaction is still reciprocal (Crawford, 2020). The exosystem is particularly relevant to the current study, whereby many TEPs work under a Consultation Model which emphasises the practitioner working with the systems around the child such as their family or school staff with the aim of best meeting the needs of the pupil (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2018; O' Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). Through this lens, the student will be impacted by the interaction of the TEP and school staff, while not always being directly involved themselves. Finally, the chronosystem is concerned with the construct of time within the sphere of human development. This accounts for both the passage of time, as well as the era that an individual lives and develops in (Crawford, 2020). Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) influenced the current research from conception of the study's topic and research questions up to the methodology and data analysis phases. The researcher remained cognisant of placing the child at the centre of the ecosystem throughout this research process, particularly during the early phases when conceptualising IE. This was crucial in order to keep the importance of IE at the forefront of this research.

Additionally, throughout the research process, this underpinning placed the TEP at the centre of the bioecological system and enabled the researcher to interrogate the myriad of factors that influence practitioners' attitudes, both at an immediate and a systemic level. Table 6 indicates possible contributors towards attitudes around IE within each concentric layer of the environment, with the TEP at the centre.

Table 6: Possible factors influencing TEP attitudes towards IE, structured within Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory(2005)

Microsystem	• TEP's prior professional experiences • TEP's prior personal experiences • TEP's level of engagement with reflective practice • TEP's level of engagement with supervision processes • Level and quality of lecture input around IE received by the TEP • Level and quality of supervision received on placement • Level and quality of insights on IE that the TEP is exposed to on placement/during academic input • Experiences and opportunities arisen and provided to the TEP on placement
Mesosystem	• Link between the TEP Placement Supervisor/Organisation and University Supervisor • Link between the TEP Placement Supervisor/Organisation and External Agencies e.g. Links between NEPs and CAMHS/Primary Care leading to opportunities for continual professional learning for the TEP • Links between the TEP Placement Team and other teams within the organisation e.g. Regional Team Meetings providing further opportunities for learning for the TEP
Macrosystem	• Societal and cultural attitudes towards IE • International Policy Documents e.g. Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) • National Policy Documents e.g. An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society (NCSE, 2024a) • Governmentality around IE e.g. funding provided to schools for establishment of specialist settings, increased SNA allocation etc.
Exosystem	• Models of working within the TEP's placement service e.g. Assessment/ Consultation/Therapeutic focus
Chronosystem	• Any changes that occur on a national or local level while the TEP is in training e.g. Funding of the DECPsy course, introduction of new circulars, new government priorities, review of EPSEN Act etc.

3.8.2. Social Identity Theory

SIT is a psychological framework that elucidates the complex interactions between individual identity and group membership and how this relationship influences behaviour, perceptions and social dynamics. This theory explores the interplay between personal and social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Central to SIT is the idea that individuals derive part of their self-concept from the group to which they belong, attributing emotional and value significance of the groups they feel they belong to (Abrams, 2001). In the context of professional identity, Lewis and Crisp (2004) postulate that professionals may conceptualise their profession as part of their 'group identity label' (p. 405), whereby they are likely to seek out diverse ways to sustain their professional identity in the face of the IE debate. The extent to which an individual identifies with and is dedicated to their social group is termed social identification. When one's social identity is threatened, a commonly used 'maintenance' strategy (Lewis & Crisp, 2004, p.407) is known as out-group derogation, where negative comments can be directed towards an individual's 'out-group'. Positive in-group bias can take place as individuals can define themselves based on their group, leading to emotionally charged group comparison (Islam, 2014).

Turkish research found that school psychologists with past experiences of working with individuals with SEN had more positive attitudes towards students with SEN than those without such experience (Polat, 2001). Through the lens of SIT, this may be explained by their increased identification with individuals with SEN through shared experiences, leading to greater empathy and alignment with inclusive values. Additionally, such psychologists are likely to possess deeper knowledge of students with SEN, which may further contribute to their more favourable attitudes (Polat, 2001; Smith & Hogg, 2008). Moreover, in light of the role conflict highlighted in the systematic review above, where EPs disagreed with other professionals about their role in IE, SIT emerges as a particularly fitting framework through which to underpin the current study.

Both EST and SIT were selected to serve as complementary theoretical frameworks for this research to enable a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping TEPs' attitudes. Integrating both perspectives enabled the researcher to capture the interaction of

both the systemic factors e.g. policies, and psychosocial influences e.g. professional values, that underpin TEPs' positioning within the IE landscape.

3.9. Data Collection

This qualitative research design comprised two separate data collection methods: 1) Semi-structured interviews and 2) Online qualitative surveys. The methodologies used are situated within the interpretivist paradigm, whereby the research questions are grounded in human experience and shaped by the participants' social world. Therefore, such phenomena cannot be measured quantitatively, but rather 'through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings' (Gichuru, 2017, p.1). Furthermore, qualitative methods typify the interpretivist approach, yielding rich data and strengthening the understanding of participant's realities (Nind & Todd, 2011; Willis, 2007).

3.9.1. Interview Schedule Development

Within the qualitative research process, it is evidenced that rigourous data collection procedures are the driving influence of the quality of findings as well as the reliability of the study overall. Considering this, the researcher utilised Kallio's Framework (2016), a five-phase practice-based tool, to enhance the rigour of data collection and develop the interview and survey questions. The final interview schedule can be found in Appendix D in addition to an example of an interview transcription, found in Appendix E.

The aim of the first phase of the interview schedule development was to identify re-requisites for using semi-structured interviews i.e.to determine the appropriateness of using a semi-structured interview method to answer the intended research question. Given that semi-structured interviews are described as a suitable means of exploring an individual's perceptions, attitudes and experiences towards a certain phenomenon (Paradis et al., 2016), the researcher deemed this an appropriate mode of data collection.

Phase 2 involved retrieving and using previous knowledge. This phase recognises the importance of having a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. In light of this, the researcher familiarised herself with the relevant policy and research papers within the field, prior to beginning the study. The researcher engaged with university lectures, including a lecture entitled 'Inclusion and the Organisation of SEN Provision', delivered by an experienced Senior

Educational Psychologist. The researcher attended relevant professional learning opportunities within the field, such as the NCSE Conference 2024, the PSI Conference and the NEPS Conference 2025. In addition, the researcher's prior knowledge, training and understanding of the school system considering her experience as a primary school teacher contributed towards this phase of the interview schedule.

Phase 3 comprised formulating the semi-structured interview guide. The aim of this phase is to use previous knowledge to devise an interview guide as a tool for interview data collection, in the form of a list of questions which directs conversation towards the research field and topic. This phase emphasised the importance of generating non-leading, clearly worded questions to generate spontaneous, in-depth answers from participants. The researcher devised two types of questions: main theme and follow-up questions, sequenced in a progressive, logical way (Kallio et al., 2016; Naz et al., 2022). The researcher utilised her previous knowledge, in addition to the gaps evidenced in the Systematic Review to guide her questioning.

Phase 4 involved pilot testing the interview guide and making any necessary adjustments. This phase 'assures the content covered, relevancy of the content communicated and identification of the need to reframe questions and test its implementation' (Naz et al., 2022, p.48). Based on the Kallio et al., (2016) Framework, piloting can be completed across three stages. 1) Internal Testing: The researcher shared the schedule with her researcher supervisors and received support to address any possible interviewer bias (Chenail, 2011). 2) Expert Assessment: This stage involved sharing the preliminary interview schedule to be critiqued by relevant practitioners, outside of the core research team. This stage allowed the researcher to gain helpful feedback around the wording and sequence of the questions. The researcher shared the interview schedule with an Expert Assessment Team, comprising two TEPs from each year group in training, one qualified EP and a researcher and lecturer who had specific expertise in qualitative studies. At this stage of piloting, a question was added about how TEPs promote inclusive practice within their own day-to-day work. Furthermore, the sequencing of the questions was slightly altered, whereby the researcher asked the TEP about defining IE at the beginning of the interview, rather than in the middle. Finally, a question was added to seek participants sense-making around challenges associated with the topic of inclusion. 3) Field Testing: This is a technique whereby the researcher tests out the interview guide with prospective participants to simulate a real-interview situation and provides practical information around the

implementation of the interview (Chenail, 2011; Kallio et al., 2016). The researcher completed this stage of the pilot interview with a TEP and subsequently re-formulated and refined a number of questions.

Finally, based on the findings of the previous four phases, the researcher finalised and utilised the interview guide for data collection

3.9.2. Online Survey Design

As discussed previously, the researcher was attentive to the possible ethical constraints of using her own classmates as participants within the semi-structured interviews, given that she is a current TEP and her peers would meet the participant criteria. For this reason, an anonymous online qualitative survey was designed and administered via Qualtrics to capture a wider pool of participants and counteract social desirability bias. Qualitative surveys 'consist of a series of open-ended questions about a topic, and participants type or hand-write their responses to each question' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.135). For the online survey, the Kallio et al. (2016) Framework was used to pilot the survey. The final version of the survey can be seen in Appendix F.

3.10. Researcher Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity is known as the process of 'continual dialogue and critical self-evaluation' (Berger, 2015, p.220), whereby the researcher shows a genuine awareness of their presuppositions within the research field. This lends itself to an authenticity wherein the reader can gain a full understanding of how the researcher's background moulded the study from conception right up until the interpretation of the research findings (Walsh & Downe, 2006). In the current study, researcher reflexivity was seminal to the process, given that I shared a significant commonality with participants i.e. my role as a fellow TEP. I was acutely aware that this shared experience held potential to see myself reflected in interviewees which could then affect interactions, follow-up questions and data analysis (Peterson, 2019). To mitigate potential biases, I created a Researcher Identity Memo at the outset of this study (Maxwell, 2005). This document allowed me to acknowledge how my personal experiences might shape my research approach and to develop strategies for addressing these influences throughout the investigation

(Cox, 2012) (Appendix I). For this reason, a reflexive journal was kept throughout the research process to identify any of the personal biases or potential conflicts of interest arising (Berger, 2015) (Appendix L). While I was asking participants to reflect on their own biases towards the concept of IE, I recognised that it was crucial for me to do the same. For instance, when participants shared experiences that resonated with my own beliefs about IE, I was naturally curious and sought further clarification. Following use of the reflexive journal, my heightened self-awareness enabled me to show an equal level of interest to experiences that diverged from my own viewpoints. Clearly, there are factors which may be negatively associated with being an inside researcher, however, within the interpretivist grounding it is also encouraged to celebrate the researcher's subjectivity through recognition that the researcher's positionality can add value and true meaning to the study (Moore, 2007).

3.11. Approach to Data Analysis

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was used to analyse findings in the current research. RTA is a qualitative analysis technique used to identify patterns, themes and meanings within a data set. RTA approaches 'embrace researcher subjectivity as a resource for research' (Braun & Clarke, 2023, p.2). Inductive Thematic Analysis, also referred to as a 'bottom-up' approach, was used in the current study, whereby the codes and themes emerged naturally from the researcher's analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.6). A six-stage process was followed to uncover themes relating to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). To begin, automatic transcription of the interviews was generated through Microsoft Teams in-built transcription service. Directly after each interview, the researcher re-played the interview and cross-checked the transcriptions, correcting any errors or inaccuracies. She then read and re-read the transcripts to familiarise herself with the data. Following this, NVivo software was used to store, organise and code the data offering a variety of tools to aid the author in developing 'new understandings and theories' around the information collected (Azeem et al., 2012, p.262). NVivo was used to support the generation of succinct codes to capture participants' sentiments. Notably, the online software was used as an aid to assist the researcher in the hermeneutics analysis of the task, rather than assuming the role of the exclusive analyst. These were then exported to a 'structured codebook' using a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet (Appendix N) whereby codes were clustered together into relevant domains (Byrne, 2022, p.1392) (Appendix L). The coding process required

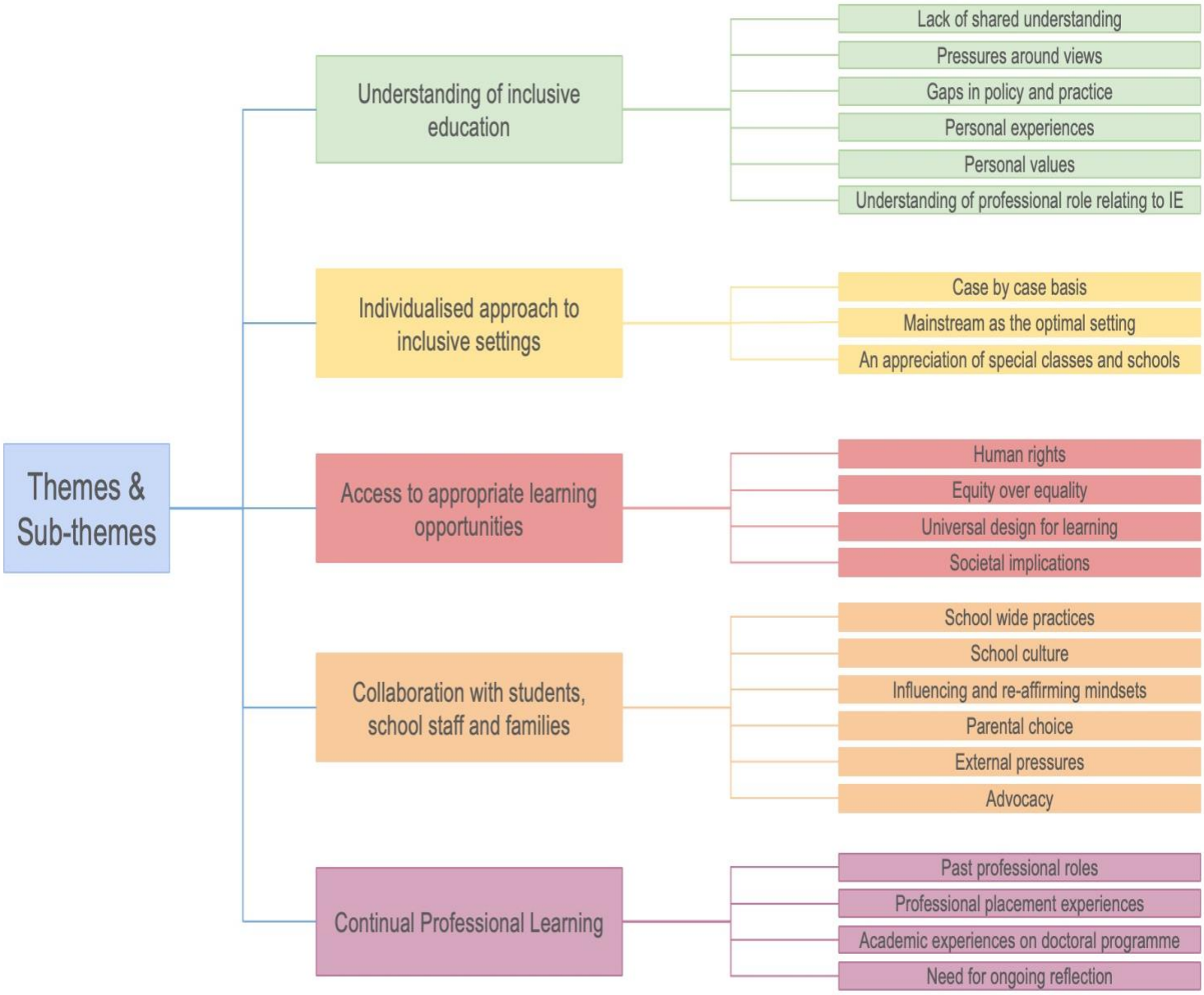
a level of transparency and flexibility on the researcher's part, continually 'bending back on oneself' to query any assumptions and interpretations made during the coding and interpreting process (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.594). These clusters formed the basis for generating initial themes, which the researcher thoughtfully engaged with before defining and naming, striving to view themes as 'interpretive stories' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.594). Examples from initial clusters of codes can be found in Appendix O. Following this rigorous analytic process, the researcher engaged in the write-up of results (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The researcher utilised intercoder reliability to enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of the analysis process, specifically aimed to measure the degree of agreement between the researcher and an independent second coder, thereby validating the coding. (Cheung & Tai, 2023). This involved both the researcher and the second coder independently applying codes to units of text from four semi-structured and two online qualitative questionnaires. Following this, codes were compared, as well as a critical discussion undertaken to prompt the researcher to examine any biases or assumptions influencing her interpretation.

3.12. Results

Following the coding process, the data was clustered among other relevant codes to create 5 themes and 23 sub-themes, as seen in Figure 6 below. The number of codes cited per theme was derived to assess for a theme hierarchy. As a result, the themes 'Understanding of IE' and 'Collaboration with students, school staff and families' were the most highly cited. To note, findings from participants 1-12 were generated from semi-structured interviews and findings from participant 13-32 stem from the online questionnaire. Excerpts from the researcher's reflexive research diary, known as reflective boxes, illustrate the researcher's insights throughout the following write-up (Wagstaff et al., 2014).

Figure 6: Themes and Sub-Themes



3.12.1. Theme 1: Understanding of IE

It is important to address from the outset that, perhaps unsurprisingly, many TEPs expressed challenges in defining IE. This will be addressed through the following sub-themes: A lack of shared understanding, the perceived pressure to take a firm stance around beliefs and the gaps between policy, research and practice. Furthermore, the influence of personal experiences and personal values in shaping TEPs' understanding of IE will be discussed. Lastly, TEPs understanding of IE in relation to their role will be explored.

Participants expressed their difficulties in providing a comprehensive definition of IE, given the nebulosity of the term, as well as the wide-ranging interpretations of its true meaning. Participant 9 described that *'it's so interpretivist, it can be construed in any way, shape or form that somebody wants it to be'*. Participants described that there is a lack of shared understanding of IE, leading to a subjective approach regarding its true meaning. Participant 2's rhetoric encapsulated this point aptly; *'It [IE] can sometimes be a buzzword that's thrown around, but is it really fully understood and is everyone on the same page? I don't think so'.*

Some TEP's indicated that they felt a sense of pressure to take a resolute stance on the topic. Participant 12 noted that *'Sometimes there's like a bit of pressure around it..pressure to have a certain view'*, while Participant 1 identified that '*because I'm not fully one way or the other, I find that maybe a little bit challenging'.* In this sentiment, the TEP was referencing that she was not fully in favour of or opposed to mainstream or specialist settings and that this stance presented a challenge for her at times.

Reflective Box 1
This reminds me of Allan's (2007) reference to 'inclusionists' vs. 'special educationalists'. I wonder where this pressure stems from for TEPs to feel like they have to choose a side. I recall this initial feeling of pressure when I began to learn about the IE debate. However, as I read up further on the literature within the field, I learned more about the nuance attached to the debate.

Several TEPs spoke about the perceived need to remain steadfast in their beliefs and attitudes towards IE, particularly when faced with resistance or opposition from others. This was described as *'trying to hold your ground'* by Participant 1, and *'...you have to be very firm in your opinion on this'* (Participant 11). Putting these descriptions into context, one TEP reflected that

> *It's interesting how other's views can rub off on you because that teacher was so strong in her views. I remember her making me doubt if you could include this child in this school, so I think it's really important to have strong views on it yourself (Participant 12)*

TEPs identified a disconnect between research, policy and practice as an obstacle in reaching a thorough understanding of IE. There was a sense among participants that inconsistency between documents can lead to confliction and incertitude in developing a collective stance towards IE. Participant 2 expressed that there are conflicting messages around IE, denoting that *'You might come across something that says we're striving towards full inclusion, but then you're coming across something else that stipulates that, you know, this child should be in a special school'*. Likewise, Participant 4 referenced an element of *'policy proliferation'* within the system, whereby *'if you were to align yourself with the most recent idea or the most recent policy, you'd be changing your mind every few minutes'.* Moreover, some participants denoted that policy does not always reflect the preferences of families and students whereby Participant 13 stated *'the 'idealistic view' advocated for in policy is not always what is wanted by the key stakeholders, who often take a more realistic stance as to what is needed for their child to be safe and fulfilled in education'.*

The majority of participants referenced at least one personal experience that has shaped and evolved their understanding of and attitudes towards IE. These included reference to family experiences and memories from TEPs' own schooling experiences. One participant attributed seeing her mother in her professional role as a school principal and hearing her views on IE as influencing factors to her own attitudes, noting '*So I grew up seeing that [IE]...My mom was a big factor and a big influence for me because she kind of always valued IE' (Participant 2).* Furthermore, other participants posited that witnessing family members with SEN navigate

the education system had a profound impact on their own attitudes. Participant 4 conveyed this point wherein she described

> *I have a number of family members who are autistic, and I suppose even just seeing them go through school and seeing how hard it was for them at times and some of them had really fantastic experiences in school and some didn't. And I think even just like seeing that and hearing that, you know, not only in college, but also then in my personal life like that really does influence you.*

Reflective Box 2
I was very grateful to Participant 4 for sharing such a personal insight and experience. It was clear that her opinions on IE are deeply rooted in lived experience and empathy. This stood out as a clear example of how personal narratives can be a powerful force in driving attitudes. It also left me reflecting on how many other professionals, myself included, carry similar, often unspoken, personal stories that influence their daily practice.

TEPs described varying experiences from their own schooling years, regarding the inclusion of individuals with SEN. Those who had positive experiences in this regard noted the lasting impact it can have on an individuals' neurotypical peers in enhancing understanding and promoting positive attitudes. Participant 12 identified that these early experiences in interacting with students with SEN served as a catalyst for personal development.

> *There was a girl with Down Syndrome in my class and I have fond memories of being in the class with her ..we'd like protect her and mind her so I feel like from that point of view, it brought out parts of my personality like it helped me to flourish as an individual because I learned how to care for others who might need more help.*

Another TEP detailed the distinctive differences between her primary and secondary schools, regarding the calibre of meaningful inclusive practice. She described that in her primary school, it was evident that there was an overarching goal of '*including everyone and kind of removing those barriers, whatever needed to be done was done'*, whereas her secondary school experience differed, with a perceived over-emphasis on academics *'..if you weren't getting above 500 points in your Leaving Cert like you may as well leave the school. It was just really, really wrong, if you weren't fitting the mould, you weren't going there'*. When reflecting on the differences between the two schools, this TEP identified this as *'a defining experience, it just*

really stuck with me, and I suppose it definitely influenced me in going for this course too' (Participant 2).

Other TEPs referred to more negative experiences of IE within their own schools; Participant 9 noted that *'I suppose when I was in primary school, there wasn't any IE. It didn't happen because kids with those needs weren't there'.* Participant 6 alluded to exclusion within his own experience of school. It was expressed that schools have diversified in recent years, asserting that *'I'd kind of wish I was more in school now for that. Do you know what I mean? Whereas I couldn't wait to get out of school for that reason'.*

Several TEPs deciphered that their own personal values are interlinked with their views towards IE, thereby playing a role in their attitudes and overall practice. Participant 9 noted '*I think I'd be very conscious of IE, and I was before I started the course. I always really enjoyed working with the kids with SEN'.* Similarly, there was evidence that some TEPs actively set aside time to learn about and expand their views on IE, suggesting that this was an ideal that TEPs feel passionately about. *'I feel I've worked very hard to develop my own perspective on IE, it's something that just probably was an interest to me' (Participant 4).* In addition, Participant 12 discussed following her intuition regarding IE, reflective of a strong moral compass and internal value system towards this concept. '*Looking at this from a trainee psychologist perspective, you're trying to follow your gut, and your gut is to try and include this child as much as you can in this school'.* Another participant also referenced feeling *'a real kind of inner moral conflict' (Participant 2)* during a case where there were contrasting viewpoints about an appropriate school placement of an autistic young person. Both quotations reflect an overall profound conscience about this issue.

Participants explored that their understanding of the overarching purpose of their role was to promote inclusion within schools at both an individual and systemic level. There was a clear sense among participants that the promotion of inclusivity within school settings and more broadly at a wider societal level underscores the entire role. This was referred to in a myriad of different ways; such as *'It's [IE] like an underlying drive in everything we do' (Participant 2), '..I realise now how much of the role of the EP is underpinned by our attitudes towards IE'*

(Participant 12) and *'I think the ultimate aim is just inclusion...I don't see any other purpose of it, to be honest' (Participant 7)*. Seven participants acknowledged that TEPs are bound by the PSI Guidelines and have a duty to promote IE, for example, Participant 15 stated *'The PSI Code of Ethics promotes inclusion...so in order to follow our ethical guidelines, it is vital for us to promote IE'.* Half of TEPs interviewed identified that writing recommendations in a report with the ultimate aim of promoting inclusivity is significant proportion of the job role. It was outlined that recommendations in a report are *'really there to put in additional supports to allow for meaningful inclusive practice' (Participant 5).* Participants encapsulated that the panoptic purpose of the TEP is to remove barriers for students to learn and enhance their participation in the classroom, school and society. This is reflected in Participant 9's statement *'When I think of why we are there at all, well really, it's to try and actively seek out what's stopping this student from succeeding and try to remove that, and what's working well? Okay let's build on that'.*

3.12.2. Theme 2: Individualised Approach to Inclusive Settings

There was a common thread amongst participants that cases pertaining specifically to educational placements must be viewed on an individualised basis, with a perceived sense that a 'one-size-fits-all' stance is inappropriate. This theme will be categorised into the following sub-themes: Case by case basis, viewing mainstream as the optimal setting and an appreciation for specialist classes and schools.

There was a strong sense among participants that each student is unique in their pursuit of an inclusive experience within the school setting. Illustrating this point, Participant 4 asserted that *'what may look like IE for one young person and their family may look entirely different for the other, and I think we need to be sensitive to the needs in that regard'.* Similarly, Participant 8 added that it is crucial for TEPs to realise that '*all children aren't starting at the same point, and we need to support kids at different levels',* highlighting the individualised nature of the topic as well as the importance of support offered on a continuum. Some participants discussed the problematic nature of equating inclusion in schools to a binary choice between either mainstream schooling or specialist schooling. Illustrating this point, Participant 27 identified that

> *What I think people get stuck on is that they think it is black and white, either you have special classes or you don't, but I think that once it is in the best interest of the child.. that's the most important part.*

Reflective Box 3
I felt that Participant 27 challenged the 'binary and polarised' view of IE that O'Brien (2020) discusses. I find the word 'stuck' interesting here, as it again insinuates some degree of pressure to conform to one 'side' of the debate or another. The choice of language subtly highlights how pressures, whether systemic, policy-driven or otherwise, can limit individual's decision-making and attitudes around this topic.

Overall, TEPs described having a level of flexibility of perspective regarding the topic. Participant 7 identified that she is *'less inclined to take that Puritan stance now…I'm more informed of the nuances of it [IE]'*. Similarly, Participant 10 expressed that she is not as *'stuck in on one idea'* regarding IE as she would have been in the past. Half of participants referred to frustration with elements of report-writing, particularly regarding the necessity for specific wording pertaining to school placement recommendations, given their beliefs around the nuance attached to school placements. Participants described a chasm between the psychologist's assertion that a certain placement was essential for a student versus the legislative right of parents to choose where their children go to school.

> *..we have requirements from the likes of the NCSE, for psychologists to state this child 'requires' this placement. You know, I would query how much in line that is with the Education Act or the EPSEN Act.. We have in our legislation that this is the parents decision at the end of the day and I don't know where we stand in terms of writing, you know, very specific recommendations around this is the school placement for this child (Participant 4)*

On this subject, a profound level of discomfort was described by some participants; with Participant 7 sharing *'I have mixed feelings with the EPs role in assessing or recommending specialist placements. I don't know how I'm going to work with that going forward'*. Possible solutions for this issue were offered such as *'I think the word 'eligibility' for example might be useful rather than saying it's necessary or it's essential for a child to attend a certain setting' (Participant 6).*

Many participants referenced their proclivity towards viewing mainstream schooling as their preferential setting for students with SEN. Several participants described the importance of school staff providing individualised supports to pupils with SEN in the mainstream class setting. In certain cases, TEPs identified the importance of this approach as the first step in providing an inclusive school experience, before exploring other specialist educational placements for pupils. Participant 2 described a situation whereby she and her supervisor were explaining to school staff that

> *you can't just jump to wanting the child to go to another placement when things aren't working well...that you do need to try your very best and put everything in place firstly in mainstream to ensure that you're trying to give this child an IE first.*

Similarly, Participant 1 emphasised her preference *to 'keep the child in mainstream as much you can…just trying to work on everything to keep them in place there and that all avenues have been tried before you think about maybe moving them'.*

Nonetheless, there was a clear sense amongst participants that, within the current system, there is a valued space for specialist educational provision. One TEP identified that special classes can provide a *'safety net'* (Participant 12) for students who move between the special class and mainstream class. On this note, there was a clear condemnation across participants pertaining to physical integration, whereby a student is placed in a mainstream setting without meaningful opportunities to participate. Participant 9 described that *'If they're sitting there and they're not accessing whatever is going on, that's not inclusion, that's exclusion, that's not good enough'.* Correspondingly, some participants rejected the idea that students with SEN participation is in some way more laudable than their peers *'I think sometimes there's this attitude of ahh aren't they great to be here at all... and there is less big picture thinking. They deserve to be here the exact same way that everyone else does' (Participant 2).*

Some participants asserted that special schools were exemplars of IE. For example, Participant 8 suggested that *'maybe special schools actually should be looked at as centres of excellence for supporting inclusion and then we kind of learn from them rather than seeing the mainstream as like the gold standard'.* Similarly, Participant 11 described her positionality

following observations and placements in special schools*; '...having visited those and felt the culture and being part of that and realising how specialist and how much knowledge they have.. I actually really think that there's a place for those schools*'. Nonetheless, practices within special classes and special schools in meeting students' needs were cited by participants as varied dependent on the school. Some TEPs referenced the inappropriate placement of students in specialist settings thereby limiting their progress and growth. For example, Participant 5 described that

> *Special schools and autism classes are great, like I've gone into them and they're so supportive and they meet the child's needs and some schools know how to do them and then others you're kind of like oh gosh, you know, this child would probably will be better in mainstream.*

In a similar sentiment, Participant 3 reflected that

> *There's just been too many times now in the last few months where I found myself in a special class or special school and thought 'that child should be in a mainstream class' and that 'their potential is just falling apart here'.*

On this note, the need for flexibility in reviewing the appropriateness of educational placement settings was addressed; *'I think there's almost an element of kind of finality about school placement and it's just saying, you know, it can be reviewed' (Participant 4).*

3.12.3. Theme 3: Access to appropriate learning opportunities

In conceptualising IE, participants explored the provision of appropriate learning opportunities for students with SEN. This will be analysed through the following sub-themes: Human rights, equity over equality, universal design for learning and societal implications.

A common theme that characterised TEPs' understanding of IE was the assertion that students with SEN have a human right to an appropriate education. Some participants referenced that students have the right to learn in the same setting as their neurotypical peers, while one participant likened this sentiment to *'the old model of inclusion that I hope and kind of feel is gone' (Participant 9),* highlighting differences in opinion among TEPs on this subject. Other

participants referenced the student and parental right to choice in deciding what setting would best meet their needs. Participant 11 illustrated this by voicing that *'Every child should have the right to learn in the environment that their parents see fit'.* Four participants cited the UNCRPD; with one TEP commenting that *'We've been told that our policies aren't in line with the UNCRPD view of inclusion' (Participant 4)* and another participant describing that the assertion from the UN that specialist settings are of inferior quality to mainstream settings *'makes so much sense' (Participant 7).* She elaborated on this point by offering her perspective that IE is a *'human rights issue and to be honest, I think we'll look back in like 100 years time...and say, oh my God, they were segregating disabled children into different schools under the guise of specialist provision'.* This viewpoint contrasted with others who described specialist provision as *'a lifeline for our students with complex needs' (Participant 5),* serving as *'to be honest, probably one of the only aspects of our public services that isn't currently failing the most complex young people we have in the country' (Participant 22).*

Over half of TEPs pointed to the provision of equitable opportunities for students with SEN as a hallmark of an inclusive system. The difference between equity and equality was highlighted whereby Participant 8 noted that '*Equality doesn't mean you know, everybody gets the same, it's that we're all at different starting points. So, it's that kind of discrimination based on need'.* Participant 9 agreed that *'It's really kind of making sure there is a level playing field for people'*. In the same vein, child-centred approaches were perceived as central to achieving equity. It was noted that school-based activities should map onto the child's current progress and priorities, rather than generic tasks. Participant 14 expressed that '*I don't think each child should have to do the same thing. I think it should be very much dependent on where they're at and what they need, it should be child centred'.* In this realm, participants discussed that the goals of students with more complex needs should have a focus on independent living and functional skills, rather than an over emphasis on academics. *'I think learning their ABCs is probably down the list for me, I would be more concerned about this child being able to cross the road safely, make themselves a snack and take care of their hygiene' (Participant 5).* Notably, three TEPs explored that these goals can get lost when there is an over-emphasis on academics, wherein Participant 12 noted *'Schools can often be striving for top marks and I would wonder when that is the sole priority, where do these children fit in?'*

Adaptation of the environment to suit students' needs was cited as a defining factor of IE across participants. In this vein, TEPs referenced the importance of using a UDL approach consistent with the goal of promoting student engagement. Participant 15 defined IE as *'synonymous'* with UDL, relaying that truly inclusive schools allow students to *'engage fully in learning in a way that is respectful of multiple ways of being, knowing and learning'*. Similarly, another participant expressed that IE *'is about making sure that the size of the classroom and the layout, the physical classroom itself is adaptable and it can be user friendly based on the children's needs' (Participant 11).* In the same realm, other TEPs recognised differentiation as an important indicator of an inclusive school system, wherein Participant 9 defined IE as *'...how the teacher is differentiating or approaching the curriculum in a different way to provide opportunities to thrive'.*

There was a perception among TEPs that the promotion of appropriate learning opportunities had farther-reaching implications than just the immediate, day-to-day outcomes. Such sentiments were discussed within the frame of students with needs' attendance in their local community school. This was described by one participant as *'social networking for the future'* (Participant 12). This perspective was mirrored by others, with Participant 2 reflecting that

> *I think it's so worthwhile when a child with additional needs is in their own community school because you know, the children really get to know them and if in years to come they're walking to the shop or whatever, there's a lot of people that would recognise and know them and say hello and it really builds that kind of inclusivity in a community.*

Reflective Box 4
This quote from Participant 2 struck me as it captures the deeper, longer-term value of inclusion, beyond the school gates. For her, IE is about more than access to education, but about belonging and visibility that lasts right into adulthood. This prompted me to reflect on the many personal and professional conversations I have had, discussing students travelling lengthy distances to school and the impact this has on their and their family's well-being.

Likewise, participants drew attention to viewing the school system as a representation of the wider society that students will mould into, with participants equating school to *'a*

microcosm of society' (Participant 15) and *'a stepping stone into our greater life' (Participant 4).* The long-term implications of neurotypical students' understanding and acceptance of SEN in light of their schooling experience was also considered. *'So, if students are not being educated alongside their disabled peers, what kind of adult population is that going to create, you know, like, it's really when you look at the bigger picture, it [IE] is so important' (Participant 7).* Participant 17 referenced the multitude of skills that students learn when they are educated with their neurodiverse peers *'By learning alongside peers with different abilities, students develop essential life skills such as empathy, communication, problem-solving, and teamwork, which are invaluable for success in their future'.*

3.12.4. Theme 4: Collaboration with students, school staff and families

Under this theme, participants explored their understanding of IE through collaborating with the student and the systems around the student. Succinctly put *'The TEP is a cog in a system of people, networks, and resources that are in place to strive to make IE a reality for all children' (Participant 20).* This theme will be examined under the following sub-themes: Building school-wide practices, school culture, influencing and reaffirming mindsets, respecting parental choice, systemic pressures and advocacy.

TEPs emphasised the advantage of promoting IE at a whole-school level to create an embedded culture of meaningful participation. One third of participants identified that building an IE system is an ongoing undertaking without a fixed end point. In this vein, school-wide practices were viewed as a catalyst to the development of an inclusive vision. Participant 31 defined the concept as *'IE doesn't stop, it's like a continuous process'.* Similarly, Participant 12 denoted *that 'inclusion is like a process that you need to constantly respond to…it's not like okay we are inclusive now so we can stop working at it'.* TEPs referred to promoting inclusive practice at policy level, including supporting schools to develop their mission statement, code of behaviour and anti-bullying policies. Participant 4 captured the powerful nature of systemic work, likening it to a '*grassroots initiative',* which can act as an impetus for long-standing change. Illustrating this, Participant 11 described that the systemic work she undertook on placement involved *'looking at what patterns were kind of emerging across the school and what*

could be implemented, we were looking at that Continuum of Support and how could we make school more inclusive for some, for few and for all'.

Some participants outlined that a truly inclusive school and education system stems from the culture within a school, with reference to the implications of *'top-down approach' (Participant 1),* wherein the quality of inclusive practice *'depends on the leadership team, the board of management and the overall culture of the school' (Participant 9).* It was identified that true inclusion trickles into classroom practice as a by-product of a broader school culture of openness and flexibility. Participant 11 conveyed that

> *..if you have a school with a culture behind it that's very much open to change and looking at things from a new perspective or a different way of doing things, I think that culture feeds into the whole school.*

Creating a culture of acceptance, belonging and understanding were other important factors for many TEPs in characterising IE. Promoting IE within schools was succinctly described as *'Bring all students in and embrace them' (Participant 6),* echoed by Participant 4's description of IE as *'an appreciation and a celebration of difference'*. Participant 5 described her work with schools to create *'an accepting environment for everyone really, so that they don't feel discriminated against or looked down upon on or wrong'.*

Many TEPS recounted their unique position in influencing and reaffirming the perspectives and attitudes of the individuals they work with. Participant 11 described this as the most significant part of the role in relation to IE, noting *'the biggest part for me with IE is being able to flip that narrative'.* Other TEPs echoed this statement, with Participant 1 describing this part of the job *as 'trying to shift the lens a little bit'*. Participant 12 highlighted the gravity of influence that enhancing others' attitudes can have, above all else. She contested that

> *I think sometimes we might underestimate the power of simple things like attitudes, you can throw resources at things and throw money at things, but until you actually change people's attitudes, I think that's probably the most important thing.*

Reflective Box 5
Participant 12's insight here resonated with me as it felt like a powerful validation of my chosen research topic. Her observation that attitudes are often underestimated in their impact captured the crux of what my research aims to explore. This comment reminded me of the 'why' behind my study i.e. that internal perspectives shape the lived reality of educational experiences for so many learners.

Validating pre-existing inclusive practices within schools was mentioned as an important aspect of the work of TEPs in collaboration with schools. Participant 9 described that *'teachers can be really knowledgeable and it's nearly sometimes they just need that permission to deviate a bit from the curriculum'.* In tandem, Participant 4 referenced that the positive aspects of a school's practice can *'maybe get lost a little bit'*, wherein the role of the TEP can be to *'reaffirm that and say, you know, I think you're doing that really well and keep doing that'.*

More than half of participants stressed the importance of empowering parents in the decision-making process about where their child will go to school. TEPs discussed that their role is in the exchange of information rather than dictating a family's decision to take a certain course of action. Participant 5 expressed that *'I do think as trainees we have important conversations about this, but I think sometimes your own professional opinions might be kind of left to one side and you are really just respecting the parental choice'*. Similarly, Participant 15 discussed the importance of TEPs' awareness of their own views in order to provide objective, non-biased information to parents, reflecting that *'I have my own personal and professional views which align with a full inclusion model. However, I reflect on these views when working with families, so I do not bias their views'.* A few participants noted that it is within their remit to ensure that parents are comfortable with recommendations around school placement. Participant 7 highlighted the genuine collaborative nature of this in sharing *'My supervisor always says that they're not recommendations, they're like agreed actions. So, you need to make sure that everyone's on board'.*

Within this collaboration process, TEPs noted that one of the challenges they encountered, particularly in relation to school placement decisions, was the pressure they

sometimes felt from school staff and families. Participants explained how this pressure can lead to difficult conversations. One such example was described as

> *I've seen cases where at the forefront of the conversation is the school wanting the child to leave their school and go to a special school and the EP saying well you know I disagree and that's not my professional opinion (Participant 1).*

Another participant recognised that oftentimes, outside pressures can sway the TEP to take a certain course of action, summarising that

> *There's a lot of outside pressures as well that kind of affect your decisions as a trainee psychologist, you may have one opinion about IE but then you can't always stick to that because you have the pressure from schools and from parents' (Participant 2).*

TEPs also highlighted systemic pressures, such as large class sizes, high pupil-teacher ratios, inadequate infrastructure, and limited availability of SETs, SNAs and appropriate school placements, as barriers to effective collaboration and, ultimately, the promotion of IE. Participants recognised that their idealistic visions for IE are perhaps at odds with the real-world systemic practicalities. For example, Participant 11 postulated that

> *Ideally we'd be able to cater for all these kids in the mainstream classroom, but with resource limitations, including the numbers of the kids in the classrooms and the physical space like I've been in so many classrooms that are so squished there's no room for children to move.*

Reflecting the impact of these constraints, several participants shared that they often presented recommendations in draft form to schools. The purpose of this was to assess the viability of recommendations through asking *'Does this seem feasible to you? Because you know you can go off and make all these recommendations for IE and strategies and they're saying 'we have no staff to do this' (Participant 4).* It was also identified that TEPs could take more of a hands-on role in supporting schools if systemic issues were not a barrier, with Participant 23 noting *'Ideally, the TEP would be more involved in supporting IE within a school, however time pressure and caseload often prevents this from happening'.*

The advocacy role of the TEP was consistent throughout responses. This was described as the TEP acting as *'a bit of a voice for the child and the difficulties they are having' (Participant 9).* It was noted among some participants that the advocacy role can involve onerous conversations, for example *'...sharing your professional opinion like, you know this child deserves to be here. Sometimes they don't feel like they're deserved, and it's up to us to voice that' (Participant 5).* Gaining the voice of the child or young person was considered a salient part of the role. Participant 10 described the purpose of this as

> *Seeking out what they feel they need because that could be very different to what their teachers or parents think so in that sense it's important to consider and to bring those findings into your formulation and to put in the reports as well to get a snapshot of their perspectives at that moment in time.*

Similarly, Participant 12 recounted a scenario on placement whereby a young person was experiencing confusion around enrolling into a specialist setting. The TEP shared how gaining his perspectives enabled meaning-making and provided the TEP with actionable tasks for them to work on together. She posited that she

> *gave him a space to kind of articulate his feelings on it...It also opened up that he had like a lot of questions about well what is an autism class or how would it work in secondary school so we explored those options in further sessions.*

3.12.5. Theme 5: Continuous Professional Learning

This theme will delineate the influence of CPL in shaping TEPs' attitudes. This will be explored through the sub-themes of past professional roles, professional placement and academic experiences on the Doctorate in Educational Psychology and the ongoing need for reflective practice.

Several participants identified that their past professional roles in settings catering to students with complex needs perhaps inhibited them in imagining a system whereby all students could be educated together. For example, Participant 1 referenced how her professional experience working as an assistant psychologist in a CDNT shaped her viewpoints:

> *..so that would have been a lot of complex disabilities and a lot of those children would have been in special schools. So, I think I had an opinion before starting the course, I thought that in Ireland that full inclusion probably wouldn't work.*

Another participant identified that in her previous job role, she would have been more in favour of specialist settings than she is now, reflecting that *'prior to my experience as a trainee, I would have been more aligned with the need for segregated and special settings mainly only for those kids with really quite complex needs' (Participant 5).* Participant 4 identified this same prior viewpoint and the accompanying attitudinal change as *'Now I believe more so in the idea of space and that we have shared learning spaces where children are safe'.*

TEPs who had worked as teachers noted how this part of their professional identity had informed their attitudes towards IE. *'Coming from teaching, I would have very much kind of valued IE and I suppose strived towards it' (Participant 2).* Another participant noted how her practical experience in the classroom illuminated the IE debate, fraught with dilemmas.

> *I felt guilty that the other children in the class were losing out and that was another point where I might have questioned inclusion being like, is it fair if by including this child are we letting down the rest of the children, are they not getting the same standard of education? (Participant 12)*

One TEP recognised that her experience as a teacher has equipped her with experiential knowledge which has now grounded her attitudes in realism and practicality.

> *Just having that insight from being a teacher to kind of go, OK, actually, let's look at practical things in the classroom rather than just dishing down recommendations by the book, kind of taking a deeper look at things based on my own experience as a teacher (Participant 8).*

Reflective Box 6
Participant 8's sentiment strongly echoed my own journey from teaching to training as a TEP. As a former teacher, I can relate to this sense of responsibility to 'step into their shoes' and offer recommendations grounded in practicality, and rooted in the realities of school life. This quote is demonstrative of the power of practitioner insight into shaping inclusive practice.

Similarly, Participant 16, recognised that her prior experience as a teacher influenced her current professional interactions, stating that *'I am very glad that I have the teacher perspective to be honest as I can genuinely empathise with the challenges of creating an inclusive classroom in Ireland'.*

Exposure to new settings during professional placement experiences was cited by participants as a driving factor in changing and developing attitudes towards IE. For example, Participant 1 noted that '*In the past I would have been like, oh no, I can't see it working but that's because of that one setting I was in, whereas now on placement in NEPS, I'm like oh yeah it's a bit easier to imagine here'.* Similarly, Participant 3 identified that, prior to enrolling on the course she *'would have viewed a need for special schools more than I do now. Since placement I just feel my views have changed to, actually, we need to equip mainstream schools better to cope'.* Many participants noted that placement experiences have broadened the lens through which they view IE, due to an increased understanding of the wider systemic issues. Participant 2 identified that since beginning the course, she is more informed about the co-ordination of various external agencies and the role they play in creating meaningful inclusion in schools, as well as the difficulties in accessing such services.

> *I'm kind of seeing it from a different lens.. I was just seeing it from a teaching point of view. But now I'm seeing how the other services all kind of come together as well and like obviously all of the issues at the moment with wait lists and accessing like disability teams and primary care and that obviously impacts on IE as well.*

Within the sub-theme of professional placement experiences, the influence of supervision emerged as a factor in shaping how TEPs navigate their role and apply their developing professional judgement. TEPs highlighted that they are working within the bounds of their supervisors which can present challenges in terms of difference in attitudes. This was described as having *'to slot in with the agenda of your supervisor. I think you'd have to be a little brave then to break the mould and say okay let's try it this way instead' (Participant 11).* There was a clear sentiment that TEPs strived to work in a way that was acceptable and appropriate to their level of training, whereby Participant 12 acknowledged *'I wouldn't like to overstep the mark and go outside the boundaries'* and Participant 6 advised that *'Especially for a first year trainee, you kind of have to crawl before you can walk'.*

The influence of course content from the respective doctoral programmes was referenced by nearly all participants, both organically and in direct response to researcher questioning. Intensive taught input explicitly on the topic of IE was noted by many participants as a factor in

shaping their viewpoints. TEPs described that these lectures broadened their understanding of the complexities regarding inclusion in schools. Participant 1 expressed that such lectures *'got us thinking a lot more critically around it'*, while Participant 8 described that lecture content was instrumental in *'provoking those thoughts about what does inclusion mean...which I've been kind of thinking about and reflecting on for the past three years'.* Similarly, several TEPs identified the importance of hearing the lived experiences of individuals in elucidating the long-term, real-world implications of having a truly inclusive experience in the education system. Participant 12 identified that this input *'just gave me a whole new perspective that I'd never really thought about before',* while Participant 4 asserted *'I will never forget it...the lived experience really did guide my thinking'.*

Participants emphasised the need for continual reflection, particularly to develop an awareness of the power and influence they hold within the system. Central to this was the importance of giving explicit, intentioned time and space to reflect on their own attitudes towards this topic. This was explored in the context of being a student enrolled in a full-time doctoral course. Participant 4 considered that *'I suppose you're so busy with coursework and placement and thesis and everything you actually do kind of need to prioritise the time to think about what inclusion is because it's in every aspect of your work'.* Another TEP remarked that the interview with the researcher had sparked subconscious beliefs, *'your questions kind of generated more thought than anything I was like, oh yeah, I didn't realise I thought that' (Participant 9)*; perhaps highlighting the aforementioned importance of TEPs dedicating space to this topic. Participants recognised the necessity to consider *'their power and the difference it can make to children's lives' (Participant 10).* Underscoring the profundity of this position, one TEP described that *'the perspectives that TEPs might have in relation to IE can determine the trajectory of a child's education and subsequently their life' (Participant 12).* Many participants viewed ongoing learning and a sustained commitment to the student and family as central to achieving true inclusion in schools, emphasising the importance of keeping the child's best interests at the heart of practice *'Once everyone keeps trying their best, and once everyone remembers to keep the best interests of the child at the centre. I don't think there's a right and wrong after that once people's hearts are in the right place' (Participant 29).*

3.13. Discussion

This section will address the above findings in relation to the wider context, relevance to literature, strengths and limitations and implications for policy and practice.

3.13.1. Research Question 1: What are TEPs' understanding of and attitudes towards IE?

This section addresses the first research question by exploring TEPs' understandings of and attitudes towards IE, as illuminated by the study's findings and situated within the broader literature.

Most TEPs addressed the ill-defined and indeterminate nature of IE, commenting that this makes it difficult to proceed with a sense of uniformity among all stakeholders. This aligns with much of the relevant literature in the field that the term IE is indistinct and thereby renders IE an elusive goal (Ainscow 2020; Hornby, 2014; Rose & Shevlin, 2020; Travers 2023). Participants consistently advocated for an individualised approach to inclusion. Rather than endorsing a rigid stance for or against certain settings or approaches, they emphasized the importance of tailoring provision to the unique needs of the student. In this regard, TEPs identified the importance of nuance within the IE discussion, recognising that inclusion 'is about more than headcount: it must maximise both presence and participation' (O' Brien, 2020, p.300). From both a SIT and EST perspective, this rejection of rigid binaries around IE may reflect TEPs' evolving professional identities whereby they are seeking to distinguish their values while navigating systemic constraints. Banks (2025) described that the argument for the provision of specialist settings versus a fully inclusive system has been become less dichotomous in recent times. This viewpoint is upheld by current findings that TEPs did not dogmatically argue in favour of either mainstream or specialist provision. Furthermore, this bears relevance to the argument that 'there is too much emphasis on the placement of students in special classes or special school and not enough emphasis on the quality of instruction and educational outcomes' (NCSE, 2014, p. 20). Findings of the current research illuminated that TEPs paid considerable attention to weighing up the benefits of a specific setting to a specific child, giving genuine thought to contextual factors and remaining sensitive to individual situations. Participants depicted that children with SEN

should be educated in a mainstream school with supports if their needs could be met within that environment. Failing this, specialist settings were portrayed as not just appropriate, but often an optimum option for students with more complex needs. This aligns with Hornby's (2014) Theory of Inclusive Special Education, which recognizes that 'although the majority of students with SEND can be effectively educated in mainstream classes, others with more severe SEND will benefit more from being educated in resource rooms, special classes, or special schools' (Kauffman & Hornby, 2025, p.8). Overall, findings are commensurate with the work of Merrigan and Senior (2021) which found that 'it is the right of the child to education, rather than the location of a child's educational placement, that is more significant in the inclusion debate' (p.14).

Within the current study, a consensus around the importance of meeting children where they are at was ubiquitous. Findings indicate that TEPs may be opposed to the EASNIE (2024) definition which equates IE to a student spending 80% of time in a mainstream setting. Current findings reflect concerns that a quantitative benchmark of IE risks oversimplifying the individualised nature of the concept. It is proposed that EASNIE's (2024) placement-focused metric may inadvertently shift emphasis away from other important factors such as student voice and school culture. Similarly, findings suggest that TEPs would also be opposed to the EASNIE (2024) and UNCRPD (2016) assertions that a setting is not inclusive if it is not a mainstream classroom. Findings illustrate that specialist settings are not a perfect solution and not the ideal for many TEPs' vision for IE. Notwithstanding this, the value of specialist settings was clearly depicted. In some cases, TEPs perceived specialist settings to provide a meaningful education for students with SEN wherein, if the setting is appropriate, a student can flourish. To a greater extent, several participants acknowledged that successful inclusion occurs within these settings to a degree that would not be possible in a mainstream school. Nonetheless, findings show that there is a degree of misplacement of students in specialist settings where, in the view of some participants, particular students would be better supported in a mainstream setting. This is congruous with recent findings from a DE (2024g) Inspectorate report which noted that current guidelines may be 'leading to children availing of a special class placement from an early age when it may be more appropriate for them to be in an inclusive environment with their same-aged, neuro-typical peers' (p.25). Similarly, the NCSE (2024a) described some of the

shortcomings in the education of students with SEN as inappropriate placements and infrequent reviews of placements. This was described as a denial of the students' right to experience mainstream schooling with their peers, as well as denying students with more complex SEN the right to enrol in the setting most appropriate to their needs. This finding elicits the question around regulations and reviews of the placement of students in special classes and special schools and if further support is needed for school management teams in this area.

Findings suggest that TEPs view an inclusive schooling experience as one that includes differentiation of teaching approaches and an understanding of principles of UDL. This attitude draws parallels with the principles of inclusivity such as adapting the education system to the diversity of learners in a way that benefits all pupils (Ainscow, 2020; Norwich, 2013). Some TEPs acknowledged that an over-emphasis on academic goals can, at times, hamper student's learning of life skills. This aligns with the work of Hornby (2014), who noted that the governmental focus on literacy and numeracy has 'deflected attention away from the broader goals of education, such as those concerned with the development of life skills, social skills, communication skills and independent living skills' (p. 46). Of note, in a recent Inspectorate report (DE, 2024), it was identified that evidence of effective teaching in special classes promoted a broad curriculum including life skills. Given that such skills are of utmost importance for students' development (NCSE, 2013), the adoption of a holistic curriculum which balances academic work with life skills would be an appropriate step in achieving IE in practice. This should be in line with the UNESCO Education 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2015) which emphasises the need to equip students with life skills to thrive in society.

A clear finding of the current research is that TEPs conveyed an inclusive system to be one which moves beyond a deficit-based school of thinking and instead celebrates diversity and difference as the norm. TEPs recognised that for a student to feel truly included in a school environment, there is an onus to cultivate a sense of belonging and connection on both a whole-school and individual level. This is consistent with findings from Vandenbussche & De Schauwer (2018) who propose that full participation, as necessitated for in an IE system, is characterised by 'being connected in complex assemblages that stimulate growth and flourishing' (p.979). Similarly, most recent governmental guidelines for SET outlined that the

creation of an inclusive school is the responsibility of the whole-school community. The DE (2024h) purported that a truly inclusive school allows students to experience 'belonging, connectedness and success' (p. 10).

Nonetheless, TEPs recognised that IE goes far-beyond students' feeling that sense of acceptance. Participants emphasized that IE must be seen as a human right, not an optional luxury, echoing Cologan's (2019) assertion that IE is not 'an added extra…born out of kindness or charity' (p.21). The sentiment that students with SEN are commended for their engagement with schooling was condemned by one participant. It is concerning that this same point was conveyed nearly 30 years ago by the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996) where it was described that 'public attitudes towards people with disabilities are based on charity rather than rights' (p.5). Participants emphasised that IE is a human right bestowed onto every child to receive equal opportunities to participate in their education. This is in tandem with PSI Guidelines (2022) stating that trainees must demonstrate an 'understanding of professional, ethical and legal issues, with due consideration of the rights of the client' (p.8). Notwithstanding this, notably only four participants named specific relevant legislation such as the UNCRPD, pointing to a potential gap in TEPs knowledge of the most up-to-date developments within the realm of IE. In line with the PSI (2022) accreditation standards for trainees to demonstrate 'understanding of key legislation, policies, structures and accountability systems, central to supporting Educational Psychology services' (p.8), this could be a further area of development for training providers.

3.13.2. Research Question 2: How have TEPs' attitudes towards IE changed or developed over time?

A defining feature of IE is engagement with critical reflection on one's attitudes towards the concept (Cologan, 2019; Subban & Mahlo, 2017). The second research question of the current study aimed to explore how TEPs' attitudes have changed or developed over time.

Findings showed that CPL opportunities emerged as central to the evolution of TEP's attitudes towards IE. This is similar to research conducted with teachers which found a positive effect size for the influence of professional development opportunities on attitudinal change regarding IE (Donath et al., 2023). Reflective practice was also noted as a driver of attitudinal change, with a particular focus on the necessity to reflect explicitly on views around IE due to its ever-present nature in the role of the TEP.

Professional experiences were found to shape participants' attitudes; with many who previously worked as teachers recalling defining experiences which solidified their views and helped to build their professional identity. The Profile of Inclusive Teachers (EADSNE, 2012) purports that four core values are required by teachers to work towards IE. These are: 1) Valuing learner diversity 2) Supporting all learners 3) Working with others 4) Continuing Personal/Professional Development. These values closely align with the professional experiences described by participants, suggesting that such experiences not only influence attitudes but also play a pivotal role in cultivating inclusive dispositions and professional identities that underpin IE. Lecture content on the Educational Psychology programme that was led by individuals with lived experience was cited as a powerful catalyst for attitudinal change. This aligns with research by Connor et al. (2008), wherein personal narratives were emphasised as helpful tools to foster deeper understanding of models of disability as well as shift mindsets away from more traditional, deficit-based schools of thinking. Varied placement experiences, particularly those differing from prior roles, were noted as key drivers of attitudinal change. This aligns with SIT as it highlights that exposure to new settings broadens TEPs understanding; potentially reducing 'in-group bias', challenging 'out-group' bias and offering an opportunity to see beyond TEPs' own professional norms and facilitate identity integration.

Personal experiences and TEPs' value systems were found to have a powerful role in shaping their attitudes. As quoted in Albarracin and Shavitt (2018), 'moral values can legitimize attitudes and make it subjectively appropriate to act on those attitudes' (p.305). This sentiment was evidenced in findings whereby participants' moral values to remove barriers for students with SEN was cited as a motivator by many to progress in their pursuit of IE. This aligns with a recent governmental publication (DE, 2024j), which acknowledged the power of values-based

leadership and contests that leaders must prioritise IE as a value to build a truly inclusive system. Similarly, personal experiences relating to TEPs' understanding of their own family members experiences and perspectives on IE held a key role in influencing their attitudes. This can be understood through Bioecological Systems Theory (2005), wherein the TEP is clearly influenced by individuals in their immediate environment as well as their interactions with external environments. For example, one participant described how her observation of her family's difficult experience in accessing resources for a sibling with SEN sparked her interest in becoming a TEP and striving for more inclusive, accessible practice and resources.

3.13.3. Research Question 3: How do TEPs' attitudes towards IE influence their professional role?

As described by Slee (2011) 'IE invites us to think about the nature of the world we live in, a world that we prefer and our role in shaping both of those roles' (p.14). The final aim of the study was to understand how TEPs' attitudes inform their professional role regarding IE.

TEPs described that working in partnership with school staff and parents to facilitate change and empowerment was key to realising an IE system. These findings are corroborated by researchers Ní Bhroin and King (2020) who postulate that collaborative practices are 'orthodoxy for supporting IE' (p. 38). The TEP advocacy role was a strong finding in this study, with participants highlighting a keen drive to include the voices of students in decisions made about their education. This aligns with Article 12 and 13 of the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989), which states that children can form their own views and have the right to express those views freely in decisions made about them, including their education. In essence, students have the right to be 'active agents in the shaping of their school experience' (Lynam et al., 2024, p. 2). Current findings show that TEPs play a crucial role in supporting students to realise this right and further progress towards the implementation of an IE system. Participants expressed that offering parents impartial, yet supportive advice and information around educational options was another important part of their role. This reflects the parental right to school choice; protected under both the Education Act 1998 (GOI, 1998) and under Article 42 of the Irish Constitution (GOI, 1937). Current findings evidence that TEPs are upholding their competencies and ethical standards, as it is stated in the PSI (2022) accreditation standards that trainees should demonstrate

‘acknowledgment of the voice of children, adolescents, parents and carers as core stakeholders in decision-making process’ (p.11).

Findings show that TEPs value the transformative power of shifting mindsets regarding IE and allowing individuals to think in a different way. From the SIT perspective, this can be viewed as TEPs challenging norms within school systems through introduction of alternative discourses that broaden perceptions. The ability to dismantle stereotypes and biases around disability is seen as a key concept towards building an IE system (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Peters, 2003) thus, proving to be a critical finding of the current work. The role of reimagination in creating a vision for IE reform has been discussed in the literature. It is postulated that to reform the current system, it is necessary for stakeholders to imagine how things could be different if society was to deviate from the status quo in relation to IE (Kauffman et al., 2022). Based on findings from the current study, it is evidenced that dedicating specific time to reflective practice supports TEPs with the role of reimagination in striving towards a more inclusive system.

While TEPs expressed a strong commitment to inclusive practices, they acknowledged that their ability to act in line with their attitudes can be limited by systems-level issues. These included time constraints, limited school placement options, class sizes, report writing guidelines and under-resourcing of school staff. This can be understood through EST, where macro and exosystemic influences are interacting with the TEP’s microsystem i.e. their immediate environment, to create conditions that may conflict with their values. In this way, findings highlight that significant governmental commitment is a necessity for TEPs to work in a way this is aligned with their attitudes towards IE. This relates to recent research which determined that while positive attitudes and necessary skills are a key component towards the implementation of IE, simultaneous support at a government and policy level is critical to produce positive outcomes (Shanjuvigasini et al., 2023). This finding calls for an exploration of the most appropriate funding models to be used at policy level in Ireland. Goldan (2021) identified a key question which has ‘financially transformed’ many countries provision for an inclusive system: ‘How can limited resources be allocated, independent of diagnoses, so that they are still assigned to students in need, in order to achieve effective support for them?’ (p. 706). While this

question has clearly been applied to the Irish context regarding the Continuum of Support, perhaps it needs to be explored and answered regarding broader level systemic issues.

4. Critical Review and Impact Statement

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will detail a critical review and reflection of the research process. Firstly, the author will reflect on the epistemological and theoretical perspectives underpinning the study. Then, reflections on the research design, analysis and ethical considerations will be undertaken. The author will offer a personal reflection on learnings from the research process, as well as consider the strengths and limitations of the empirical study. Finally, an impact statement will be given, considering the contributions of the findings to the field of educational psychology.

4.2. Reflections on the Epistemological Position

4.2.1. Strengths of the Epistemological Position

This study employed an interpretivist paradigm in order to explore the attitudes of TEPs towards IE. This is sometimes referred to as a constructivist paradigm given the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed (Hollinshead, 2006; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The subjectivist epistemology underpinning the current study was selected for its appropriateness in addressing the aims of the research. Interpretivism aligned well with this study as it is often used with a qualitative research design and naturalist data collection methods of interviews and open-ended questionnaires (Fodouop, 2024). Crucially, interpretivism is underscored by contextual sensitivity, emphasising that the acquisition of knowledge is dependent on the context in which it is acquired (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This perspective aligned with the current empirical study wherein attitudes towards inclusion are clearly moulded by unique experiences in varying settings and according to individuals' personal values and belief systems. The subjectivist epistemology promotes the 'interpretation of subjective meanings and perspectives' (Fodouop, 2024, p.3). This underpinning coincided with the data analysis method of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) which seeks to 'develop a richer more nuanced reading of data' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.594). The latter was crucial for the current study, given the complexity of the subject matter.

4.2.2. Critique of the Epistemological Position

A subjectivist epistemology assumes that the researcher constructs meaning from the data resulting from interactions with the participants. Herein, subjectivist research is inextricably linked to the researcher's values which presents both opportunities and challenges (Mertens, 2023). It is possible that the reliance on subjective interpretations of the data may lead to bias in the analysis process. Nonetheless, the researcher made clear efforts to alleviate this challenge through transparency in the analysis process with a clear outline of how themes and sub-themes were reached through use of a six-step data analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and online software NVivo. The researcher was also explicit about her positionality throughout the research process.

4.2.3. Alternative Epistemological Position

During the initial stages of the research process, the critical paradigm was considered for use. This theory is concerned with the issue of power in relation to education, class and other societal institutions as well as challenging structural and societal norms to bring about a more equitable society (Asghar, 2013). The critical paradigm can be utilised when there is an explanation about what the societal issue is and the action to change it can be identified. Critical discourse analysis, often used within this paradigm, can be defined as a dialogue centred on the misuse of cultural, political and social power and the subsequent inequality that may result (Asghar, 2013; Pham, 2018). Following consideration, it was decided that the critical paradigm would not fully meet the research aims as it may have risked framing attitudes solely as the product of systemic issues and perhaps underrepresent personal beliefs and value systems which were of key importance to the current study.

4.3. Theoretical Perspective

This research was underpinned by two theoretical frameworks: Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

4.3.1. Strengths of the theoretical frameworks

The efficacy of Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) in underpinning the current study was two-pronged. Firstly, this framework supported the researcher to focus on

the crucial inter-relations between a student and the wider environment to achieve an inclusive schooling experience (Kamenopoulou, 2016). Secondly, this theory placed the TEP at the centre of the IE conversation, allowing the researcher to explore the myriad of influencing factors impacting participants' attitudes on both a direct basis e.g. interactions with supervisors and school staff and a broader cultural and societal level e.g. influence of relevant policies. By adopting a bioecological systems perspective, the researcher contextualised inclusion within the macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1977) proposed that the level of prioritisation that young people and their families receive within the macrosystem, in this case the educational setting, is vital 'in determining how a child and his or her caretaker are treated and interact with each other in different types of settings' (p. 515). Separately, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) framework shaped the research aims and underscored the value of investigating TEP attitudes toward IE, given their cascading influence on students' educational trajectories. Similarly, the underpinning of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) offered a comprehensive approach to examine group dynamics as well as the influence of individuals' sense of their own identity on their attitudes towards IE. Utilising SIT as a foundation for the study illuminated possible biases that arose from participants' prior work experiences, more specifically the influence of their in-group and out-group dynamics.

4.3.2. Critique of the theoretical frameworks

Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) has been critiqued for an over-emphasis on contextual factors; whereby Darling (2007) describes the well-known illustration as akin to 'a busy and complex world with a passive (and isolated) child at the centre' (p.204). It is described that the central tenet of development is the active person, rather than solely a product of external systems and agencies. In this vein, the influence of personal agency, motivations and cognitive processes may not receive as much attention as contextual factors (Tudge & Carter, 2008). A further critique of the framework used is that it was originally devised to investigate human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The current study was not necessarily examining human development, but rather it was examining a product of the individual's development through the inter-connected systems i.e. attitudes. Nonetheless, Tong and An (2024) decipher that, while the theory originated in the field of developmental psychology, it has an appropriate place in research wherein it influences the 'practical applications for the construction of better educational environments…emphasising the dynamic relationship between learners and their

environments' (p. 2). Additionally, SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is critiqued for a heavy reliance on inter-group dynamics and the impact of group identification on attitude formation, perhaps at the cost of more systemic issues such as policy frameworks (Haslam & Ellemers, 2005). Additionally, the language within SIT of 'in-group' and 'out-group' presents a somewhat rigid and binary dichotomy when applied to the complex and evolving landscape of IE. This concept may be at odds with the nuanced findings in the current study, given that attitudes are clearly not determined by a static association with one group or the other e.g. past role of teacher versus current role as TEP, but rather dynamically constructed through the interplay of past and present diverse identities. Equally, this language may oversimplify the collaborative nature of the role of TEPs with stakeholders such as teachers, parents and students where each brings their own perspective. Findings of the current study illustrate the importance of navigating these relationships sensitively to build shared understanding, which may not be fully captured in the language used within SIT and is therefore a limitation of this theoretical underpinning.

4.3.3. Alternative theoretical framework

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Azjen, 1991) was considered as a framework to underpin the current research. TPB recognises the impact of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control on individuals' intentions and actions within specific contexts (Azjen, 1991). This underpinning may have been helpful in predicting how TEPs' attitudes translate into intentional behaviours and implementation of inclusive practices. While TPB may have provided valuable insight, it was decided that the abovementioned frameworks were more appropriate in addressing both the identity-based and systems level influences on attitudes. More specifically, Bioecological Systems Theory and SIT incorporate the multi-layered complexities which can influence IE, whereas TPB may have been more restrictive as it is limited to individual-level determinants of behaviours (Azjen, 1991).

4.4. Reflection on Research Design

At initial stages of the research design, a mixed-methods study was considered. The researcher intended to measure participants beliefs around teaching and learning using a quantitative questionnaire outlining if viewpoints aligned predominantly with the social

constructivist or transmissive view of learning. The possibility of using an explanatory sequential design was explored wherein the impact of views of teaching and learning on individuals' attitudes towards IE would be measured. However, upon further examination, it became clear that many relevant measurement tools were designed for use with educators e.g. Teacher's Beliefs Survey (Woolley et al., 2004) and the Beliefs about Learning and Teaching Questionnaire (Glenn, 2018). This meant that the researcher would be necessitated to devise her own quantitative measure, based on a fusion of existing measures, adapt for use with TEPs and test using a think-aloud protocol (Beatty & Willis, 2007), in addition to completing qualitative semi-structured interviews. Following a review of thesis, academic and professional placement requirements, it was decided that the workload required would exceed the relatively limited time available for research on the doctoral programme.

4.5. Reflections on Measure and Sample

4.5.1. Semi-Strucutred Interviews and Online Questionnaires

The use of the Kallio et al. (2016) Interview Framework can be considered a strength of the current research. This provided a structured approach to the development of questions aligning with the overarching research aims. It supported the researcher to ensure that questions progressed logically and smoothly. Simultaneously, the framework permitted the researcher to use professional judgement and modify questions in accordance with responses. This coincided with the use of semi-structured interviews rather than structured interview; given that the former allows for more flexibility and for new questions to be sought due to interviewee dialogue (Ruslin et al., 2022). Moreover, the use of pilot testing, completed across three phases, increased the reliability of the interview guide and allowed the researcher to refine interview questions accordingly.

As discussed throughout, the positioning of the researcher as an insider presented potential for bias during the interview process. An alternative approach to mitigate this could have involved enlisting another researcher to conduct semi-structured interviews. This may have elicited different responses and complemented the researcher's reflexive efforts. However, for the current project, this was not feasible due to specific course requirements and the scope of the research project.

4.5.2. Recruitment Obstacles

An unforeseen obstacle arose in disseminating the recruitment leaflet, as permission had not been obtained through the UCD Ethics application to contact university students. This meant that the researcher could not disseminate recruitment information to UCD students through the course co-ordinator as originally planned. Instead, she relied on convenience sampling whereby she used her own personal and professional contacts to circulate the recruitment information. While convenience sampling is effective and time-efficient, it is contested to be limited in its generalisability. However, the researcher intentionally chose a homogenous convenience sample limited to the specific sociodemographic sub-group of professional training role. While this narrowed the generalisability, it provided clearer applicability than heterogenous sampling where the research is open to all subgroups (Jager et al., 2017). Furthermore, the purposive sampling utilised in this study was deemed crucial in addressing the gap in the literature and can therefore be considered a strength of the current research. A limitation of the recruitment method was the potential for self-selection bias where there is a possibility that participants have a specific and motivated interest in the topic of IE or perceive themselves as positively engaged with the field of IE, potentially swaying the results. Accordingly, the study represents a cohort of participants who were willing and forthcoming in sharing their viewpoints on the topic of inclusion. In particular, the online recruitment component of the study may have rendered the process susceptible to self-selection or equally to non-response biases from potential participants of whom IE was not of specific interest to them (Zahl-Thanem et al., 2021). Nevertheless, a certain level of interest from participants was to be expected, given the nature of their role within the schooling system.

4.5.3. Demographics of the participant pool

The skewed demographics of the participant pool was a further limitation for this study, wherein only one participant in the semi-structured interviews was male. Given the anonymity of the online component of the study, the number of male participants in total that took place in the study is unknown. There is a clear gender imbalance and underrepresentation of the male voice in the semi-structured component of the study at the very least. Nevertheless, this was inevitable

as the field of educational psychology is largely female dominated (Griffin et al., 2023; Prinz et al., 2021).

The researcher aimed for an equal number of trainees across year groupings. However, despite best efforts on the part of the researcher, voluntary participation was highest from Year 1 trainees and lowest from Year 3 trainees, possibly reflecting the increasingly higher workload and demands placed on students as they progress through the course. Another rationale for this may be due to the exclusion of the researcher's own year grouping from partaking in the semi-structured interviews. This resulted in a final participant cohort of five Year 1 trainees, four Year 2 trainees and three Year 3 trainees. This is a regrettable imbalance given that Year 3 trainees have an increased level of placement and academic experiences which may have impacted their attitudes. However, by the time of the semi-structured interviews, all trainees, including from Year 1, had completed their professional placement with the NEPS-an experience that offered valuable insight and relevance to the discussions held.

4.5.4. Social Desirability

In any research study, power dynamics between the researcher and participant can influence and potentially compromise the authenticity of data collected. In the current study, the researcher was conscious of her collegial relationships with fellow TEPs in other year groups in addition to her personal friendships with peers in her own year grouping. The possibility of social desirability bias was considered, wherein participants provide responses they perceive as more socially acceptable than their true reflections (Bergen & Labonté, 2019). For this reason, the anonymous qualitative survey was devised to mitigate against this difficulty to some degree.

4.6. Reflections on Data Analysis

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was used to analyse the qualitative data from both interviews and questionnaires. RTA was a suitable approach for data analysis given that it goes beyond the surface level meaning of the content and uncovers hidden meaning through identifying 'the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations and ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006,

p.84). Specifically, Inductive Thematic Analysis was used, which involved the identification of themes and sub-themes within the data set, without being constrained by pre-existing hypotheses. The iterative and reflexive process meant that the researcher could continually refine themes throughout the process, allowing for a flexible and interactive analysis of the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). In contrast, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was considered due to its suitability in exploring the rich lived experiences of participants in depth (Tuffour, 2017). Ultimately, it was deemed less suitable for use in the current study due to its idiographic focus on detailed individual accounts, which did not align with the broader aim of identifying commonalities and variations in experiences across a larger sample size. Similarly, Narrative Analysis was considered due to its' focus on the construction of narratives and the important role they play in the construction of one's identity (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). However, it was decided that the primary objective of the current study was to identify patterns and themes, rather than to analyse each participant's interview as a distinct story and therefore, RTA's capacity to achieve this rendered it the most appropriate method for answering the research questions.

There are notable benefits associated with being an 'inside' researcher, in that the researcher can often have enriched insight into participants' psychological, emotional and social processes (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Nevertheless, the accompanying challenges of being an 'insider researcher' must be acknowledged. One such disadvantage is that 'greater familiarity can lead to a loss of objectivity' (Unluer, 2012, p. 1). It is possible that the researcher may have unconsciously misinterpreted the data during the analysis phase, based on prior knowledge, interest and bias surrounding the topic (Berger, 2015). This limitation is compounded by the relativist ontology of the current paradigm, where it is purported that the research outcomes are 'unquestionably affected by the researcher's own interpretation, own belief systems, ways of thinking or cultural preference' (Pham, 2018, p. 4). Importantly, the researcher made active and explicit efforts to mitigate against this, as detailed in the researcher reflexivity section, including the use of a reflexive journal and a research identity memorandum (Maxwell, 2005). Additionally, intercoder reliability was utilised to measure the degree of agreement between the researcher and a second independent coder, who subsequently applied codes to the interview transcripts to validate coding (Cheung & Tai, 2023). To avoid further bias, the independent coder was not a fellow TEP and held the role of a Senior Clinical Psychologist with experience in

analysing qualitative data. This involved the researcher and second coder coding units of text independently (Miles et al., 2014). No significant inconsistencies were found between the research and coder. Consistent with Yardley's (2008) recommendations for establishing validity in qualitative research through transparency and reflexivity, the iterative dialogue between the researcher and second coder facilitated a more nuanced understanding of the data and led to minor refinements within the coding process. For example, following a discussion with the independent coder and research supervisors, the sub-themes 'Creating a Sense of Belonging' and 'Importance of Leadership' were collapsed into the theme 'School Culture'. While this proved helpful in refining codes, it is acknowledged that these discussions may have been more beneficial at an earlier stage of the analytical process such as during the first iteration stages of coding. Earlier engagement with intercoder reliability may have led to a more robust coding process and embedded a deeper reflexive stance throughout the study. Some academics critique the use of intercoder reliability for interpretivist research as it contradicts the principle of the existence of multiple realities (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Cheung & Tai, 2023). Nonetheless, it was deemed important for the current research to alleviate the abovementioned limitations of the research.

4.7. Reflection on Ethical Considerations

The study went through a rigorous process to ensure ethical soundness, under the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). Throughout the study, the researcher followed the PSI Code of Ethics (2019) and remained cognisant of the four overall principles of respect for the dignity and rights of the person, competence, responsibility and integrity. The researcher ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of participants throughout, particularly with relation to the specific university they attended. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and each trainee was reminded of his/her right to withdraw at any stage during the interview and up to the point of submission of the online questionnaire.

4.8. Implications for Practice, Policy and Future Research

The implications of the current research, as well as recommendations for future research, will be delineated below.

4.8.1. Implications for Government Policy

As iterated in the literature, current findings highlight that the lack of consensus around the definition of IE leads to confusion and misinterpretation by stakeholders (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Dyson, 2005; Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021; Slee, 2011; Travers, 2023). To begin with, it is advised that a governmental body, likely the NCSE, indicate an agreed upon definition that Ireland is adhering to and referring to when discussing IE. The researcher has formed the following definition, which may be useful in further exploration of the definition of IE.

> *An inclusive education system is one which acknowledges and enacts the right of every student to participate in their learning in a way which uniquely suits them, underpinned by respect for the family and students' interests, priorities and preferences regarding their educational experiences.*
>
> *An inclusive school is one which views inclusion as a continuous process and works to ensure every child feels a sense of belonging, acceptance and understanding. This is achieved through flexibility and open-mindedness by school management and staff, strong home-school links and opportunities to engage with professionals such as EPs, to share their work and feel validated and affirmed in their commitment to IE.*

Another finding of the current research is the discomfort and frustration many TEPs experience regarding the requirement from the NCSE for specific wording in psychological reports pertaining to students' eligibility for certain educational settings. It is advised that such a requirement does not align with the current view of IE and should be reviewed. Therefore, it is recommended that a protocol is devised by the DE, in tandem with EPs and other relevant stakeholders e.g. Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) to clarify appropriate wording in psychological reports, that balances meeting the requirements of the NCSE and school admission policies while also accurately reflecting the professional views of the EP.

Findings highlight that generally TEPs view a fully inclusive education system as an ideal which will only become a realistic vision when systemic issues are overcome. Current findings

highlight that, in the present reality, TEPs are more concerned with the school system appropriately meeting the needs of the student in whatever format is suitable for the individual young person. Considering this, it is advised that special schools and classes should continue to be offered as part of the continuum of educational provision for students with more complex SEN. Notwithstanding this, findings also highlight that, in some cases, students are inappropriately placed in specialist settings that do not meet their needs and would be better suited to a mainstream class placement. This is a concerning finding as it undermines the student's right to be educated in a mainstream setting as per the EPSEN Act (2004). Moreover, it denies students with more complex needs their right to be educated in an environment appropriate to their needs as per the Education Act (1998), which in some cases may equate to a specialist setting. To this end, the NCSE (2024a) has advised that 'student placements in special schools and classes should be kept under regular review, and formally reviewed at least once per year' (p.12). Similarly, recent Circular 0023/2025 (DE, 2025c) advises that 'regular review of enrolment in a special class is good practice' (p.2). It is deemed that the inappropriate placement of a student in a specialist setting is a gross breach of their rights. While the current study is small-scale and based on a population of TEPs, future research including more robust and larger-scale studies with other relevant stakeholders could inform whether a legally mandated annual formal review should be enacted.

In terms of supporting schools, the implementation of termly support in reviewing and advancing their vision of what IE looks like in practice is recommended. The recently published 'Indicators of Effective Practice for Primary/Secondary School: Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools' (DE, 2025c) provides a useful framework to guide this process. Prioritising this area within the NEPS National Support and Development work could enable schools' assigned NEPS psychologists to collaborate with school leadership teams on progressing their IE goals, ensuring all students have meaningful and equitable learning experiences.

Participants of the current study identified the benefits of typically developing peers engaging with their neurodiverse peers, such as development of communication skills, problem-solving skills and fostering empathy. Considering this, the current research would support the governmental move towards the promotion of the co-location of special schools and mainstream schools and the exploration of opportunity for mainstream and special schools to work together

to provide opportunities for students to collaborate meaningfully, as per the Programme for Government 2025 (GOI, 2025). Within this realm, it is advised that the DE provide an updated evaluation on the 'Towards Inclusion' pilot and guidelines for the future trajectory of this pilot.

4.8.2. Implications for the Professional Training Providers and Psychological Society of Ireland Accreditation Standards for EPs

Findings highlight the importance of TEPs dedicating explicit time to reflective practice around their views of IE, given that the concept permeates the role. Current standards delineate that 'Programmes should provide sufficient reflective learning experiences for students to develop their awareness, knowledge and skills in order to adopt inclusive practice in their role as an EP' (PSI, 2022, p.5). In light of this, as part of a Personal and Professional Development module or equivalent, TEPs could submit a reflective piece each semester about their changing views on IE. Additionally, a Community of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) can be defined as a group of people who have common goals come together to explore a 'shared repertoire of experiences, stories, tools and ways of addressing recurring problems that members of a community share, negotiate and contribute to' (Cantillon et al., 2016, p. 993). Findings from Gallagher & Fitzgerald (2025) outline the importance of access to professional learning communities as a means to develop competencies relating to IE. It is recommended that the possibility of a monthly CoP for TEPs is explored with the overall objective for trainees to develop their identities and attitudes explicitly regarding IE in a safe, nonjudgemental environment. The researcher has devised an example of what this may entail in Appendix P.

Findings also illustrate that trainees' past experiences, both personal and professional, have a clear influence on their attitudes towards IE. While some colleges may be implementing therapy requirements informally, current PSI Accreditation Standards for Educational Psychology (PSI, 2022) do not stipulate any requirement for TEPs to undergo personal therapy to explore this influence. This is in juxtaposition to Clinical Psychology Accreditation Standards which state that 'Trainees must engage in processes, either in personal therapy, group therapy/process, or a combination of these that focus on personal and professional development throughout the course' (PSI, 2021, p.9). It is advised that a similar requirement is included for TEPs in updated PSI accreditation standards to provide the necessary opportunities for TEPs to

reflect on their past experiences and the influence they have on their professional role. Similarly, this study highlights the seminal influence of past experiences in forming TEPs' attitudes towards IE. At present, guidelines state that EP programmes 'should facilitate trainees to develop insight into their own personal attitudes and beliefs and how these can impact on the provision of an equal and inclusive service' (PSI, 2022, p.6). Considering the present findings, it is advised that this accreditation standard is amended to include the impact of past experiences.

The provision of placement experiences deviatiating from trainees' past professional roles was found to support attitudinal change regarding IE. Resultantly, it is advised that, where possible, placement co-ordinators and providers make efforts to place students in settings where they have limited experience. For example, if a student has previously held the post of Assistant Psychologist in Primary Care, it should be endeavoured that they will be placed in a CAMHS setting during their professional training programme.

Regarding lecture content, the provision of lectures from those with lived experience within the IE field was found to be impactful and meaningful e.g. input from parents of young people with SEN. Findings evidence that the nature of this input is instrumental in bringing about attitudinal change among TEPs. Resultantly, it is recommended that course providers remain committed to seeking guest lectures or otherwise from individuals who have a personal narrative within the realm of IE. Findings also highlighted that while trainees clearly recognise IE as a human right, there was limited references to specific legislation. Given that this aspect of the profession is stated as an accreditation standard (PSI, 2022), it is advised that TEPs ought to receive increased input on relevant legislation associated with IE such as The Education Act 1998, the EPSEN Act 2004, The Education (Admission to Schools) Act (GOI, 2018).

Table 7: Potential Directions for Future Study

1. Future research could build upon the current study by examining attitudes towards IE with a cohort of trainee EPs and later qualified EPs at different time points to explore the attitudinal change towards IE, if any. This would identify the lasting effects of professional training programmes as well as the impact of real-world systemic barriers to IE.
2. Future research could explore TEP/EP perceptions on IE, encompassing vulnerable groups other than/ as well as those with SEN e.g. refugee students, students in homeless accommodation, students from diverse ethnic backgrounds.
3. Findings of the current work illustrate that attitudinal differences between TEP and placement supervisors can present challenges regarding the extent to which the TEP works in line with his/her values around IE. This theme could be explored further in future research, exploring the importance of supervisor-supervisee relationships in developing understanding of and attitudes towards inclusion.
4. The current findings elucidate the perceived key role TEPs play in empowering parents to advocate for an IE for their children and young people. Future research could explore parents' perceptions of collaborating with a TEP/EP to support their pursuit of an inclusive educational experience for their child. This would highlight aspects of the profession that parents value and furthermore, may offer insight into areas for development.

4.9. Impact Statement

The present study set out to explore TEPs' understanding of and attitudes towards IE and the impact of this on their professional role. From the outset, it was hoped that this would provide valuable insights towards the IE debate, as well as the field of educational psychology more generally.

To the author's knowledge, the current research is the first Irish study to explore the perspectives of TEPs in relation to the topic of inclusion within the education system. While international literature has occasionally included TEPs' perspectives on the topic, these voices have typically been embedded within broader discussions, thereby diluting the specificity of the trainee perspective. By centring the voice of the TEP in the Irish context, this study offers valuable insights into how future EPs conceptualise and experience IE during their formative training years. The current study provides an originality to the field of educational psychology by elucidating this underrepresented perspective. It also addresses gaps in both national and international literature by illuminating how attitudes are shaped through personal, professional

and academic experiences. Furthermore, the study offers new theoretical insight through the application of SIT and EST. Together, these frameworks illuminate the interplay between personal, educational and systemic factors that influence how TEPs perceive and implement inclusion in schools. This unique combination of focus, context, and theoretical framing distinguishes the study as a novel and meaningful addition to the discourse on IE.

One of the main impacts of the current research relates to the contribution to the IE debate, particularly around defining the term. Participants clearly indicated the highly individualised approach necessary for working with children, families and schools with the vision of achieving an inclusive educational experience. The role of empowerment and advocacy on the part of parents and young people permeated this topic, with TEPs highlighting the importance of parent and student voice regarding their preferences and concerns. Overall, the current research supports the continuum of provision available to students while also recognising the significance of the misplacement of some students in specialised settings. Findings highlight that stringent requirements of psychological reports that are necessary for access to specialist settings do not always align with current attitudes towards IE. As such, implications are advised around mandated reviews of specialist settings as well as updated report-writing protocols for psychologists to follow which align with their understanding of IE.

A further impact of the current research relates to university training providers for Educational Psychology in the Republic of Ireland. Findings shed light on the criticality of providing TEPs with the time and space to explicitly explore views around inclusive practice in schools. Considering this, a dedicated CoP for TEPs around the topic of IE is advised, as well as a termly requirement to provide a written reflection on understanding of and attitudes towards IE. Furthermore, the findings impact the professional body responsible for maintaining high standards of psychology, namely the PSI. Recommendations for improving and updating the training standards for TEPs in Ireland in relation to IE are offered. Namely, these comprise the mandatory requirement for TEPs to undergo personal therapy while undertaking their studies in addition to formally recognising the importance of TEPs reflecting on their past personal and professional experiences and the impact of these on their attitudes.

Dissemination of the current research is envisaged to meaningfully contribute to the field of Educational Psychology in the Republic of Ireland and further afield. Thus far, the researcher has presented to EP colleagues within NEPS as part of the teams CPL. Similarly, research has been presented as part of a '3-Minute Thesis' forum to peers within the Educational Psychology course and as a poster presentation at the PSI and NEPS Conferences 2025. Further plans for dissemination include presenting at the Research Summer School in May 2025 in Mary Immaculate College, where many participants will be present and will receive the opportunity to hear the findings of a study which they partook in. Finally, the researcher hopes to publish the current study with relevant peer-reviewed journals to further contribute to the field of Educational and Child Psychology and the conversations around IE.

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Appendices

4.10. Appendix A: Excluded Studies, following full-text review*

Reference	Exclusion Criteria
Harkins, B., & Fletcher, T. (2015). Survey of Educator Attitude Regarding Inclusive Education within a Southern Arizona School. *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*, *6*(5).	**4**
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Kjær, B., & Dannesboe, K. I. (2019). Reflexive professional subjects: Knowledge and emotions in the collaborations between teachers and educational-psychological consultants in a Danish school context. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, *28*(2), 168–185. https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2018.1552179	**7*** Full-text review not possible

4.11. Appendix B: Mapping the Field

Author(s)	Location	Participants	Design	Aim of the study	Results
Palomo et al. (2024)	Madrid, Spain	177 EP's working in Counselling Teams	Qualitative design using focus groups. Reflexive Thematic Analysis used.	Analyse the role of the EP within the framework to IE and the barriers within the education system	EPs identified the systemic barriers which hinder them in achieving a more inclusive society. EPs expressed hopes for the future to perform other functions to provide a more inclusive education system.
Nkoma (2018)	Zimbabwe,South Africa	13 EPs and TEPs at three different offices	Qualitative design based on phenomenological perspective. Inductive Thematic Content used.	Explore EP and TEPs experiences on learning about their role and responsibilities around IE.	EPs and TEPs expressed that a lack of specific inclusive education policy results in EPs not having a framework for inclusive education. TEPs and EPs noted that education circulars can guide them but do not state their role regarding IE. This study highlighted a lack of systematic training of educational psychologists within Zimbabwe, which impacts the quality and standard of work from EP profession.

Toye et al. (2019)	Scotland, England	135 education staff within primary sector, comprising classroom teachers, school managers, support staff and 31 school-based educational psychologists.	Quantitative design using the following measures: - Multidimensional Attitudes towards Inclusive Education Scale (MATIES) (Mahat, 2008) -ADHD Stigma Questionnaire (ASQ) (Kellinson, Bussing, Bell et al., 2010) -Knowledge about Attention Deficit Disorders Scale (KADDS) (West et al., 2005) -ANOVA, correlational analysis, regression and mediational analysis used	Investigate the effect of ADHD knowledge and stigma on professionals' attitudes towards mainstream inclusion.	Results showed that psychologists displayed more knowledge, less stigmatising beliefs and more inclusive attitudes than other education staff. Specifically, psychologists reported more positive attitudes towards mainstream inclusion than other education staff.
Winter & Bunn (2019)	England	207 EPs and TEPs working in local authority services and private practice	Mixed-methods study, using online survey. Analysed through descriptive	Explore the perspectives of EPs regarding their professional	Findings suggested variation in frequency of EP visits and indirect contact with the schools. This study found that

			statistics and content analysis.	role and contribution with special schools for young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties.	completing systemic work, rather that individual casework was the ideal contribution and that EPs views on their role within special school settings was somewhat limited.
Vivash et al. (2018)	East England	5 EPS, 3 Speech and Language Therapists (SLT) and 3 Specialist Teachers (STs), recruited through Local Authority Meetings	Two-phase sequential, mixed methods design, using focus groups, classroom observations and questionnaires	Explore the perspectives of EPs, SLTS and STs in how speech, language and communication needs can be supported within schools and how the re-alignment of EP practice could support this.	EPs emphasized that children benefitted from inclusion in a mainstream classroom that supported speech, language and communication needs through classroom practice rather than withdrawal. EPs noted that rather than relying on external agencies, they can support teachers to increase their own capacity at a classroom-level. There was also a suggestion that children with speech and language difficulties can be inapropriately referred to EPs, who often did not feel it was within their remit.

Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014).	Denmark	8 EPs who worked in the same EP centre in a middle-sized Danish municipality	Small-scale, qualitative, empirical study using interviews and classroom observation	To investigate governmental funding cuts on 1) the implementation of a consultation service and 2) the role of EPs in facilitating inclusive education in schools	In relation to Aim 2 of the study (as this is most relevant to current review), findings show that EPs view IE as meaningful participation in classroom settings and identify that many EPs go into the job as they want a more inclusive education system. Findings of this study also illustrate that budget cuts make the provision of specialist settings for children with SEN 'impossible' (p.50).
Nkoma & Hay (2018).	Zimbabwe, South Africa	13 EPs/TEPs located in three separate offices and 3 university 'experts' on inclusion (p.850)	Qualitative study using interviews	To explore the meaning EPs/TEPs ascribe towards their role in IE, to explore the views of EPs/TEPs on IE, to explore their experiences regarding inclusive practices, to	Participants had diverse perspectives on inclusion, with one psychologist identifying that it is beneficial for students of all abilities to learn together, while another participant noted that the curricula for children with disabilities and without was vastly different. Participants noted that children

				explore how their lived experiences with IE imapact on their rendering of support services	have a right to a meaningful education regardless of setting. Participants identified capacity of teachers, assessments and consultations as critical in successful IE.

4.12. Appendix C: Weight of Evidence Framework (Gough, 2007)

Weight of Evidence A (WoE A)

The WoE A addresses the generic quality of execution of each study, including transparency, accuracy, accessibility and specificity (Gough, 2007). The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018) checklist was used to assess the strengths and limitations of qualitative studies. The findings from the CASP tool are evidenced in Table C1.

Table C1: **CASP (2018) used to appraise included qualitative studies**

CASP Question	Was there a clear statement of the aim of the research?	Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims?	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the study?	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the issue?	Has the relationship between researcher and participant been considered?	Have ethical issues been considered?	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Is there a clear statement of findings?	Total score
Study Palomo et al. (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	8 (High)
Nkoma (2018)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	8 (High)
Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	No	No	5 (Medium)

Nkoma & Hay (2018)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	9 (High)

*As question 10 of the CASP (2018) tool is open-ended, it is not included in Table C1

Numerical Score on CASP	Descriptor
0-2	Low
3-5	Medium
6-9	High

The mixed-methods studies were critically appraised using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018), as evidenced in Table C2.

Table C2 : **MMAT Criteria used to appraise included mixed-methods studies**

Category of Study Designs	Methodological Quality Criteria	Winter & Bunn (2019)	Vivash et al. (2018)	Toye et al. (2019)
Screening Questions (For all designs) *Not included in overall score, used to ensure MMAT was appropriate tool.	1. Are there clear research questions? 2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	1. Yes 2. Yes	1. Yes 2. Yes	1. Yes 2. Yes
1. Quantitative Descriptive	1.1) Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question? 1.2) Is the sample representative of the target population? 1.3) Are measurements appropriate? 1.4) Is the risk of nonresponse bias low? 1.5) Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?	N/A	N/A	1.1) Can't tell 1.2) Yes 1.3) Yes 1.4) Can't tell 1.5) Yes
2. Mixed Methods	2.1) Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	5.1) No	5.1) Yes	N/A

	2.2) Are the difference components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question? 2.3) Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted? 2.4) Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed? 2.5) Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	5.2) Yes 5.3) Yes 5.4) Yes 5.5) Yes (Overall) (4x Yes) (1x No)	5.2) Yes 5.3) Yes 5.4) Yes 5.5) No (Note: Reliability/Validity not clear in design of survey) (4 x Yes)	
Total Score		4	4	3
Overall quality rating		3(High Quality)	3 (High Quality)	2 (Medium Quality)

Table C3 :**Criteria indicators for MMAT scores for mixed-methods studies**

Criteria	Rating	Descriptor
Studies receiving a score of 4-5 between across all areas on MMAT	3	High
Studies receiving a score of between 3-4 across all areas on MMAT	2	Medium
Studies receiving a score of between 2-3 across all areas on MMAT	1	Low
Studies receiving a score of between 0-1 across all areas on MMAT	0	Very low

Table C4 : **For the purpose of WoE D, each study was assigned a value of 1 (Low), 2(Medium) and 3 (High), given that there are different number of questions in CASP for qualitative versus mixed-methods/quantitative**

Study	WoE A	Assigned Value
Palomo et al. (2024)	8	3
Nkoma (2018)	8	3
Winter & Bunn (2019)	4	3
Vivash et al. (2018)	4	3
Toye et al. (2019)	3	2
Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014)	5	2
Nkoma & Hay (2018)	9	3

Table C5: Scoring Criteria for WoE B (Petticrew & Roberts)

Rating	Criteria
1. Design Type	• Non-experimental, qualitative design, no control condition=3 • Mixed-Methods=2 • Quantitative=1
2. Sample Size	• Large sample size=3 • Moderate sample size=2 • Small sample size=1

Mean Score	Rating
1-1.9	Low
2-2.9	Medium
3	High

Table C6: **WoE B Mean Scores**

Study	Ratings	WoE B Mean Score
Palomo et al. (2024)	1. 3 2. 3	3 (High)
Nkoma (2018)	1. 3 2. 2	2.5 (Medium)
Winter & Bunn (2019)	1. 3 2. 3	3 (High)
Vivash et al. (2018)	1. 3 2. 1	2 (Medium)
Toye et al. (2019)	1. 2 2. 2	2(Medium)
Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014)	1. 3 2. 1	2 (Medium)
Nkoma & Hay (2018)	1. 3 2. 2	2.5 (Medium)

Table C7: **Scoring Criteria for WoE C**

Score	Criteria
A. Population	• Participants comprise EPs and TEPs only =3 • Participants comprise EPs only=2 • Participants comprise EPs or TEPs alongside other disciplines e.g SLTs=1
B. Participant Qualifications *If participants vary i.e some with Master/Doctorate, others with undergraduate degree and internship, the score that aligns with the majority of participants within the study was assigned.	• Participants are studying for or obtain a Master's or Doctoral Degree suitable to their country's requirements to practice =3 • Participants are studying for or obtain an undergraduate degree in psychology and complete internship requirements, suitable to their country's requirements to practice=2 • No information provided about qualifications=1
C. Context	• Study taken place within the UK/Ireland=3 • Study taken place within the EU=2 • Study taken place outside of the EU=1
D. Outcome	• Exploring the attitudes of participants around the role of EP within inclusive education is the/one of the main outcome measures of the study=3 • Exploring the experiences of participants' learning about their role with regard to inclusive education is the main outcome measure of the study=2 • Attitude towards the role of the EP regarding a specific facet of Inclusive Education e.g EP's role in a specific school setting

Table C8 : **Mean WoE C Scores**

Study	Ratings	WoE C Mean Score	Descriptor
Palomo et al. (2024)	A. 2 B. 3 C. 2 D. 3	2.5	(Medium)
Nkoma (2018)	A. 3 B. 2 C. 1 D. 2	2	(Medium)
Winter & Bunn (2019)	A. 3 B. 1 C. 3 D. 1	2	(Medium)
Vivash et al. (2018)	A. 1 B. 1 C. 3 D. 1	1.5	(Low)
Toye et al. (2019)	A. 1 B. 1 C. 3 D. 1	1.5	(Low)

Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014)	A. 2 B. 1 C. 2 D. 3	2	(Medium)
Nkoma & Hay (2018)	A. 1 B. 2 C. 1 D. 3	1.75	(Medium)

Table C9: **Criteria for WoE C Descriptor**

Low	Medium	High
1-1.5	1.6-3	3.1-4.5

Table C10: **Weight of Evidence D**

Study	WoE A	WoE B	WoE C	WoE D
Palomo et al. (2024)	3 (High)	3 (High)	2.5 (Medium)	6.8 (High)
Nkoma (2018)	3 (High)	2.5 (Medium)	2 (Medium)	2.5 (Low)
Winter & Bunn (2019)	3 (High)	3 (High)	2 (Medium)	2.6 (Low)
Vivash et al. (2018)	3 (High)	2 (Medium)	1.5 (Low)	6.5 (High)
Toye et al. (2019)	2 (Medium)	2 (Medium)	1.5 (Low)	5.5 (Medium)
Szulevicz & Tanggaard (2014)	2 (Medium)	2 (Medium)	2 (Medium)	2 (Low)
Nkoma & Hay (2018)	3 (High)	2.5 (Medium)	1.75 (Medium)	2.41 (Low)

Scoring Indicators for WoE D descriptors

1-3	Low
4-6	Medium
7-9	High

4.13. Appendix D: Interview Schedule

Topic	Interview Questions
Definition of Inclusive Education (IE)	How would you define Inclusive Education, with regard to children with SEN? Is Inclusive Education important?
IE in relation to the role of the Educational Psychologists	From your experiences on placement, do you think Inclusive Education is an important part of the role of an Educational Psychologist? You've mentioned…Is recommending a suitable educational setting for children with SEN something that you or your supervisor have done within your role?
Experiences influencing viewpoints	What might influence your decision around inclusive strategies? What might influence your decision around appropriate school placement? From a governmental level, is there anything that influences your role with regard to IE? e.g policies, circulars etc. What sort of an impact do you feel an EPs work in this area has? e.g. on the child, school etc.
Role of past experiences/values in forming views around IE	Prior to enrolling on the Educational Psychology course, what were your views around IE? Have your own personal experiences with IE had any influence on your attitudes towards IE? E.g memories from your own schooling experience, in the workplace etc.

Role of the Educational Psychology training course in forming views on IE	Have your views on IE changed since enrolling on the Educational Psychology doctoral programme?
TEPs' experiences of inclusion within their everyday practices	Has course content around IE contributed towards your role as a TEP on placement? What are your professional experiences of promoting inclusive practices in your everyday work? Is there anything about this that you find challenging?
Closing of Interview	Is there anything else you would like to add? Thanking participant and terminating interview

4.14. Appendix E: Sample Interview Transcription

Interviewer0:53
Lovely. Thank you so much. And so just to start off, can I ask how would you define inclusive education with regards to children with SEN?

Participant 4 (Student) 1:02
Yeah, it's a great question. And I suppose a question that has attracted multiple definitions for me ehmm In terms of what does inclusive education mean for children with additional needs..for me personally, in my experience of inclusive education, it's very much came from my practical experience supporting children with quite complex additional needs. So I would have worked in special school settings for children with comorbid diagnosis of moderate ID and autism. And from that perspective and then following this working in mainstream post primary and primary schools, I believe I have quite a multi-faceted approach to inclusive education. Ehmm I believe terminology such as the likes of inclusion, if you were to characterise it as you know if you look at Ainscow's research around like total or full inclusion, looking at the likes New Brunswick as a flagship, you know, for me personally that's not the approach that I would take to inclusive education. I believe that my perspective or my definition of inclusive education is somewhere within the middle of, you know, in between having an opportunity for inclusion however, also where required, giving that opportunity for children that do require that more specialist support for that to be there as well. And I think, you know, like some of the, I suppose, people or researchers that I would align my thinking with of an inclusive education would be the likes of Gary Hornby around that approach of inclusive special education. So trying to I suppose not only focus on the need for full inclusion, but also understanding not only from the perspective of the young people and the voices of the children with additional needs themselves and you know, policymakers, everything more systemic than that. The need that we have to appreciate both perspectives. I don't believe that either one is correct entirely. I believe that there is a merging of the two and the enmeshing of the two. So for me, I suppose my understanding of what inclusive education is for children with additional needs really centres on the opportunity to be included within the wider spectrum within the wider community, in their school and also in within their wider community as a whole, while also receiving that specialised support for their needs and I suppose then trying to see how do we measure the efficacy of, you know, inclusive education, we really are like the children's outcomes more broadly. So I think probably that the merging of the two would be how I would define.

Intervieweier3:42
Thank you so much. And do you think inclusive education is important and if so why or why not?

Participant 4 3:48
Yeah, I absolutely do. I believe as you know a Trainee Educational Psychologist, we are in a really unique position that we bring a lens of education and psychology to things. And I think throughout our training, from working in complex disability services, primary care, mental health and NEPS that we really do..And I'm really seeing it at the moment myself and being in CAMHS, I'm on placement in CAMHS at the moment, the importance of bringing that educational psychology lends to it and the need to be focusing on inclusive education. If you look at us as EPS and trainee education psychologists, the need to be not only a scientist and practitioner, but also an advocate. And I really think it's our role there to be able to say 'OK, we need to advocate for what is most appropriate in terms of inclusive education for this young person. And I don't believe that you know it's it's our value or perspective as the Ed Psych that leads that. I'd be very much centred on inclusion of the voice, the child and voice, the family. So you

know what may look like inclusive education for one young person in their family may look entirely different for the other, and I think we need to be sensitive to the needs in that regard.

Interviewer 5:06
Mm hmm. Yeah, absolutely. Meeting them where they're at, I suppose. Yeah. Lovely. Thank you. So you've touched on this a small bit in your answer there, but from your experiences on placement, do you think that inclusive education is an important part of the role of the EP?

Participant 4 5:12
Yeah, absolutely. And I feel like the variety of the course really shows you different elements of inclusive education. So I suppose for me, I started off in a CDNT service. I worked on a 0 to 18 team and within that we were often supporting children who were making the transition to primary school and the transition to post primary school and also children who school's placement may be at risk of breakdown. So I suppose from that perspective we were looking to see what is the most inclusive setting for them that is most sensitive for their needs. I think really trying to inform the information we gave and I'm very conscious not to use the words like decisions we make because we don't make decisions. The parents make the decisions and I believe that their voice is a huge part to play in that I feel like in terms of placement, it will be one of my core values to include the voice, the child and the voice of the family. And within that, I think that CDNT perspective you were dealing with children, with really to be honest, quite complex needs and from that perspective, my view on inclusive education from that would be around what's the most suitable place for the child's needs, you know, and let's see how we can make that that environment inclusive for them. You know, because I suppose there's no denying that we still have special school settings and although now we may be looking at more of like a community space for schools where we have shared spaces of special schools and mainstream schools on the same campus, you know, which may promote greater inclusion and but for those kids from my placement that was really my focus of inclusive education there. Moving on to NEPS then, I suppose within NEPS you're typically seeing maybe more so children who are within the school context already so you're supporting them round transition to post primary be really key area for NEPs to support children and their families. Often you know that could be a time when you could review, if needed their cognitive ability and their attainments to see if there's any query around learning if it hadn't been assessed to date. And I think that within NEPS because it is a school based organisation, there definitely is a need for further liaison to create that informed decision for the parents around inclusive education. But if you look at like the EPSEN Act and the review that's coming up now, you know the need was set out in the EPSEN Act that there should be multifaceted individualised education plans fed in from the HSE, fed in from NEPS, fed in from parents and unfortunately we don't really see that process of that real collaboratively informed approach. We're drawing on different strands. So from NEPS, the level of influence you have on the type of inclusivity of that can be done by a suppose on the Continuum of Support like that support for all and try and support schools to become more inclusive. So your role is a little bit different there from my perspective. You're fostering that sense of inclusion for the school and maybe guiding them towards it as opposed to maybe in CDNT where you're really more so meeting the needs of the children. And then lastly in CAMHS, it's a very different approach to inclusive education that I'm seeing now it's more so I suppose how can you support this young person to engage with their school community in a way that is supporting their mental health needs. Are they in a school, which is I suppose, you know, I already talked about additional needs more broadly, you know, I do feel like mental health does come in with under that, you know, because often we have comorbidities and everything, but I feel from that perspective around CAMHS we really are looking to see and what I've learned from CAMHS is to see how we can support the child still be included in their school and you know really honouring their voice within that and trying to see how can we actually support this school environment and these teachers and these staff to include this child and maybe support their return to school or even support them with..And again I suppose

to go back to liaison with NEPS and everything and trying to reopen those doors of communication. That was a very long winded answer, I hope I answered your question. If I didn't ask, ask me again.

Interviewer 9:46
No. You did absolutely. It's so interesting because it's it just highlights it is such an important part of the role, but in different settings that looks very different, doesn't it? Yeah.

Participant 4 10:00
Mmmm I think it does anyway, yeah.

Interviewer 10:19
So you've touched on this in your answer.I am wondering is are is giving recommendations for a suitable educational setting for children with additional needs. Is that something you have come across in your role as a trainee?

Participant 4 10:37
Yeah, it has. In both CDNT and NEPS, I would have worked obviously under supervision, supporting young people..we'll say in CDNT setting it was supporting children mainly in the transition to primary school and all practise varies but I personally would be very much grounded in the policy that we have here. It's the parents decision. You are providing information and I know, I suppose the structures that we have now in the policies that we have requirements from the likes of the NCSE, for psychologists to state this child 'requires' this placement. You know, I would query how much in line that is with the Education Act or the EPSEN Act.. We have in our legislation that this is the parents decision at the end of the day and I don't know where we stand in terms of writing, you know, very specific recommendations around this is the school placement for this child. Similarly in NEPS I would have supported a number of children to transition to post primary school and for a few there was queries around you know should they remain in mainstream or should they transition to special school..And it was really, I suppose, the purpose of my involvement there was conduct cognitive assessments to inform that practise and also to engage in some consultations around behaviour support for those children. And again, I feel that recommendations as such, I suppose that maybe they sit a little bit uneasy with me. I would very much lean towards the parents voice and maybe just providing the information and supports them along that guidance and that journey. However, I suppose making a specific recommendations for me it's a bit of a challenge for me. I suppose you know you are you are I suppose the the person with the knowledge going in and if you're looking at like the knower and the would-be knower and you're trying to think where are you. But yeah, I have I have seen and made recommendations for both.

Interviewer
Yeah, no, it's definitely a tough one. There can be a lot of pressures from all sides with that one as well. So it can be really tricky. So then just thinking about inclusive strategies, I suppose in general, whether that is providing information around school placement or inclusive strategies within the school environment and what kind of factors might influence your decision around inclusive strategies?

Participant 4
Like what strategies I might recommend to parents and schools?

Interviewer
Exactly. Yeah. And what might influence your decision around giving those inclusive strategies?

Participant 4 13:33
Yeah. OK. So I suppose really you'd be looking at the child where they're at and like, you know, I'd be very much looking out of strength based perspective around what can we capitalise on that the child already interested in that we can almost like trying to support them to be get off to the best start they possibly can. And you know, it's really just trying for me and when I'm thinking about inclusion and schools, I'd be saying you're not going to change everything overnight, you know, you meet one psychologist once, you know, you need to start small. And I suppose by starting small and having those gradual gains for the young person is how I would view that I've become more and more inclusive, and I suppose there's two parts to this obviously I'd be looking at like the child's needs, the child's strengths. What can be capitalised on that's already there? What are the school doing well already? You know, I think that part. I just feel like maybe gets lost a little bit, you know, because schools are really good. And they I think often, you know, we just need to maybe reaffirm that and say, you know, I think you're doing that really well and keep doing that. School capacity as well around what's the resourcing like? What's actually possible for the school? I often would bring my recommendations in draft format and I'd often ask for feedback and ask like Does this seem feasible to you? Because you know you can go off and make all these recommendations for inclusive education and strategies and they're saying 'we have no staff to do this' and it's almost just trying to say how can we troubleshoot around that to say, OK, let's, where can we start and how can we build on it? And the other part then is for school communities more broadly, I'd be definitely recommending around, you know, developing a sense of togetherness and that sense of belonging for the young people in the school and that really starts by educating their peers and educating staff. And it's almost just around, I suppose, trying to begin that conversation around whether it's an understanding of intellectual disability or Autism or Down Syndrome or whatever the need is for that child or even just difference. You know, there doesn't have to be a label on it. Just an appreciation of difference and like small strategies, you know might even be.. I did a piece of work with a school around their code of behaviour in their mission statement trying to see you know how can we really support them to be more inclusive and how can that guide staff then moving forward.

Interviewer
Mm hmm. Thank you. And similarly then what might influence your recommendation? I know we've discussed this a bit, but what kind of factors might influence your recommendation around appropriate school placement?

Participant 4
Yeah, like, I suppose, like probably the biggest factor for me would be just looking at, I suppose, the child's needs then and there and you know, we have several barriers in our education system and access to school placements and really access to appropriate school placements. And the main factors I'd be considering there. First of all, the child's needs, where would they be best met? You know, there may be somewhat of an over-reliance or over recommendation to the likes of autism classes, and I suppose you just really do need to consider what are the factors in the family as well you know, is togetherness a factor for that family? Do they want to see if they, if there's older kids do that family want their kids to remain in the same school? Can you support the young person with additional needs to attend their local mainstream school as is laid out in EPSEN and you know, I think that those factors for me would be huge. First of all, the child's needs, second of all the family characteristics.
And then looking at the likes of resources. You know, I would really try not to be guided by resources that are available in the area, but it's very hard if there's only one school place... If there's only one place and one autism class in a 20 kilometre radius or 50 kilometre radius, you know that that makes it really, really hard.
And I think just child voice and parent voice is huge here as well and really just trying to collect that meaningfully because and I think as well, I think there's almost an element of kind of finality about school placement and it's just

saying, you know, it can be reviewed you know, I would have seen children who may have started mainstream education and parents say you know we want them to go to our local school.. We're going to see how they get on and should they require additional support in a more specialised setting to review it at that point. So I do think there does need to be an element of flexibility and you know, I suppose we are seeing a move away. We're seeing a huge exponential increase in the provision of autism classes from the NCSC. And by comparison, huge decrease in intellectual disability classes and multiple disability classes by comparison. So are we moving towards a more total inclusion model where we have all children included in their schools and will my recommendations be entirely different in 10 years time? Very possibly. But I think there is and I will probably hold those factors regardless around kind of child needs, family characteristics, family context. And then just like parent and child views and then be led by resourcing, if you can, but it's very, very hard.

Interviewer 19:12
OK. So then you've mentioned some of the legislation, I suppose that can guide us around inclusive education. And so my next question is from like a systemic or from a governmental level, is there anything that influences your role with regards to inclusive education, so whether that's policies from the NCSE or any publications, circulars, legislation, things like that?

Participant 4
Absolutely yeah I definitely would remain up to date with recent publication, particularly from the likes of the NCSE and often I suppose there is an element of policy proliferation within our system, our policy is changing rapidly and there is often conflicting messages and tensions between not only our policy here in Ireland but then we're being led by the UNCRPD. So like you know there are, there are huge tensions there and you know we've been told that our policies aren't in line with UNCRPD. So like that side of it as well it's very hard because you're making your decisions as a trainee education psychologist and later as a psychologist around do I follow the policy guidance that is given to me by my government here that's, you know, probably employing me or do I go back to, I suppose international legislation on best practise and then you've got your own code of ethics. So you know, there's a huge volume there, I suppose, like I my decisions, I feel I've worked very hard to develop my own perspective on inclusive education, it's something that just probably was an interest to me. I would definitely review all publications that come out but the extent to which those influence my perspective varies. It varies significantly, and the reason it does is because there is often quite little cohesion between those documents and we can see, you know, in the most recent NCSE publication, they're claiming they're inclusive. However, if you were to look at UNCRPD, it's not in line with it. So. I think I absolutely review the documents not only because I'd be interested in them, but also you should be doing it but then I think as well just like trying to probably align yourself with best practise in terms of your profession. That would be where I will go first and then following that, take the information from policy and guidance, but it's going to change and we're going to see the EPSEN review come out now in the next couple of years and I think we're going to have an entirely different outlook and should that be enacted, I don't know. I think we could see huge changes.

Interviewer
Yeah. It's so hard and there's so, as you say, there's so many gaps between all the different policies and publications trying to even connect the dots to them sometimes is just a minefield. And I always think if it's a minefield for us, then you know that parents can be lost at sea with it, you know.

Participant 4
Yes it is.
Absolutely, yeah.

Interviewer
So thinking about, I suppose prior to enrolling on the doctoral course, can you reflect back on what were your views on inclusive education before you started the course?

Participant 4
Yeah, absolutely. And I think it's for me, it's quite it's quite diverse because I suppose I worked in, as I said, a special school for children with comorbid diagnosis of autism and mod ID. So really quite complex needs for those kids there and I also then worked in mainstream primary and mainstream post primary schools and I think that, I suppose the rounded view of school placement options that I got from that experience was probably more aligned at that stage with the special education system and I'm not now, but at the time I was because the level of need that I was seeing, particularly in that special school, was so high and I really couldn't see how those children could be safe in a mainstream school at that time. Now I believe more so in the idea of space and that we have shared learning spaces where children are safe. But prior to the course and prior to my experience as a trainee, it's like I would have been more aligned with the need really for segregated and special settings where only and to be honest, yeah, mainly only for those kids, but really quite complex needs but then I worked in mainstream primary post primary schools, both which had autism classes, and I did see elements of inclusion there. There were elements, but this also was, you know, four years ago at this stage. But definitely from coming on the course and I suppose coming in almost like at that helicopter view, because I feel like when you are like I was working in behaviour support at that time and you're, you're in it like you are within that setting. You're dealing with crises. It's really, really busy. But whereas maybe you're coming in with a different lens as an Ed Psych, you kind of get to see the holistic picture more so and I definitely gained a lot from not only you know input as in lectures, placement and all, then just my pieces and conversations with my research supervisor around inclusion that I definitely now would have a different perspective than what I did pre course right and rolling.

Interviewer
OK, great thank you. And then thinking about, you've mentioned your professional experience, I guess and how that has impacted your current attitudes and so thinking then about your own personal experiences with inclusive education and maybe thinking back to memories from your own schooling experience or otherwise.
Have your own personal experiences had any influence on your attitudes towards inclusive education?

Participant 4
Absolutely, yeah without a shadow of a doubt. it was. I think my secondary school was the first in the county to have an autism class. So that was normal for me. Like you know, we had those kids in my class who were autistic, and they attended some classes, and they went to the at that time unit. We don't use that terminology anymore. But back then it was. For other parts of their day and it definitely had an impact on me and then even in my own personal life, I have a number of family members who are autistic and I suppose even just seeing them go through school and seeing how hard it was for them at times and some of them had really fantastic experiences in school and some didn't. And I think even just like seeing that and hearing that, you know, not only in college, but also then in my personal life like that really does influence you. And I think you see the benefits for the family, and I think that's really why I keep banging on about it but like just like I really feel like we need to include children's voices more

and we need to include parents voice more because I suppose I've heard that, you know, from the family, from my family. So I think definitely that has guided me and you know, like memories of my family.

Interviewer
Thank you. That's really interesting. So we're nearly there. You mentioned the influence of lectures and that's my next question if course content around inclusive education, if that has contributed towards your attitudes.

Participant 4
Yeah, absolutely. I remember being in a class in first year and the lecturer said, 'Who thinks we can have a fully inclusive education system?' All the hands went up. I was sitting there I was like I was so shocked. I was like, and I was actually coming out of a year in a special school. I was like how because at that time, it was all New Brunswick. Like, that was the key term, the NCSE it went over in 2019, and like, we're reading about all this. So anyway she saw the one hand that wasn't up and she said 'Why? Share your opinion.' And I really felt like it went down like a lead balloon. Like I would have said, you know, I don't feel like we have a system that would support children but I think if you were to ask that question again, now you get a different response from the class, so that that was one of our very first lectures actually and then besides that, we had some lovely input. In second year from people with lived experiences of disabilities, and I felt like that, you know, these were adults now who had a range of additional needs and sharing their experience of not only education, but life more broadly. And I think that that definitely, I suppose, highlights to me that like it's not just inclusive education, it's inclusion in our communities, you know..It's almost like school is just a stepping stone into our greater life, like school is such a small component of our lives. So like, should we be supporting these children, these young people, to be able and support our community to be able to be inclusive more broadly? And I think that that was the kind of learning I took from fthem around the people who lived experiences. I think they were probably. Like we did, we had we had so much input, but they're the ones that really stand out to me.. I will never forget it..the lived experience really did guide my thinking. I think the rest of it came from placements, to be honest.

Interviewer
So then we've touched on this as well, you've probably answered this. My next question is what are your professional experiences of promoting inclusive practises in kind of your everyday work now as a trainee psychologist?

Participant 4
Yeah. So it looks like just in CAMHS is a little bit different now, but I suppose within NEPS it's really trying to, I suppose, you have a real opportunity in NEPS to do that systemic work with the school and try and support them to almost have like a grassroots initiative. And I feel like that does need to come from the school. You know, you can you can push an agenda, you can push it but unless you have that interest and if you do get that interest, I feel like that work can be so much more powerful, that systemic work. So even I think around like my everyday engagement with school. I will be very focused on their ethos and their mission statements, things like that, before I go to school and you often then can see elements of that when you're meeting with staff. And I think it shows that you're interested in the school and it also then can support when you are making recommendations around inclusion. Say OK, well, this fits in with your mission statement around X, Y or Z. And then just like my terminology and my language. I would definitely be more comfortable using terminology such as additional needs and additional education needs. However, it isn't recognised in our legislation. You know, our legislation still utilises special education needs and I suppose we do have a duty to remain within the bounds of policy. However, when I would be speaking particularly to young people, I would never use terminology like special education, special needs, anything

like that. It would be more like additional needs and then particularly working with autistic young people, I'd say what terminology would you like me to use because there has been very loud voices around, you know, oh, it can only be person first or only be identity first. But really if you I think you kind of have to just ask, you know and some people will say I actually I don't know will you decide will you use whatever and other people tell you straight out OK I want you to call me autistic. So I think you know really trying to be open is a huge part of it. And the same with parents like I was, say, if a kid was coming in with an existing diagnosis and it was just been really aware of, like, is a child aware of their diagnosis? What's the conversation around the diagnosis? What's the conversation around the need? And that part is a huge part of inclusion because I think it tells you a lot about family dynamics and characteristics and the same with schools. You know, what do you call your autism class? How do you refer to it? You know things like that. So I think language is a huge part to play within it all. And I feel like it's a tricky one and it's one that's quite a contention at the moment and it's one that there should be more research on us looking at what the perspective of people are with lived experience of the additional needs. That'd be, I suppose, yeah. How would I do it every day? I suppose just be open. I definitely like try to ask people you know what's their view, what's their perspective and then we're working with schools I suppose really just trying to see where they're at and trying to see how can I get in and how can I support them in the best way that I can without maybe pushing your agenda because you could have great ideas for inclusion but you can't have to meet them where they're at as well.

Interviewer
That's great. Thank you. And then my last question is, is there anything about the concept of inclusive education that you find challenging?

Participant 4
Yeah, like I definitely do. And I think you know, it's been a journey for me to, I suppose, develop my own understanding of what inclusive education is and inclusion more broadly. Even I suppose the term inclusive education, should it just be education? You know, that's another thing like why do we have another word described by education is for everyone. But I think as a trainee EP, I suppose you're so busy with coursework and placement and thesis and everything you actually do kind of need to prioritise the time to think about what inclusion is because it's in every aspect of your work. Whether you're in disability, whether you're in CAMHS or Primary Care, you will come across in considerations for inclusion in any of those roles and I think you know, for me that's been a long journey. There's so much change within it and I think it's very hard if you were to align yourself with the most recent, you know, idea or the most recent policy, you'd be changing your mind every few minutes.

Interviewer
That's great. Is there anything else that you feel I haven't touched on or anything you'd like to add?

Participant 4
It was a very, very comprehensive interview so well done. It was, it was very enjoyable to speak to you. Your questions were excellent.

Interviewer
You're so good. Thank you. I'll just stop the recording there.

4.15. Appendix F: Online Questionnaire

Q1

How would you define Inclusive Education, with regard to children with additional needs?

Q2

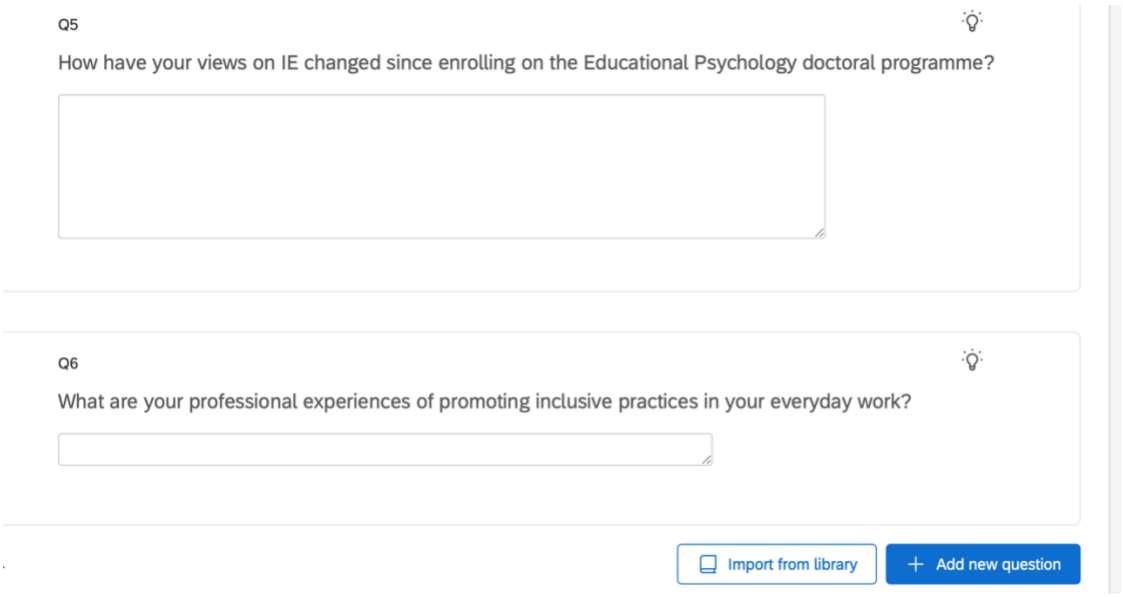
Is Inclusive Education important? Why?

Q3

From your experiences on placement, do you think Inclusive Education is an important part of the role of an Educational Psychologist ?

Q4

What might inform your decision around inclusive strategies and appropriate school placement?


Q5
How have your views on IE changed since enrolling on the Educational Psychology doctoral programme?
Q6
What are your professional experiences of promoting inclusive practices in your everyday work?
Import from library
Add new question

4.16. Appendix G: Recruitment email to Acting Head of DECPsy

Dear XXX,

I hope this email finds you well.

I am a Year 2 Trainee Educational and Child Psychologist at Mary Immaculate College. I am currently completing my doctoral thesis exploring Trainee Educational Psychologists' understanding of and attitudes towards Inclusive Education and the impact of these on their professional role. I am completing this research project under the supervision of Dr. Trevor O' Brien and Dr. Niamh Higgins.

This is a qualitative study with two components 1) An online semi-structured interview and 2) An online anonymous questionnaire. I am seeking 12 participants for semi-structured interviews and between 20-30 participants for the anonymous online questionnaire. Participants of the current study will comprise students enrolled in a Doctorate Programme in Educational Psychology. Please note that trainees can complete either the semi-structured interview **or** the anonymous questionnaire, **not both.**

I am writing to request if you could kindly share this information with students currently enrolled in the doctoral programme, between Year 1-3. I have attached a poster which you may forward directly to the trainees, along with this email. If trainees wish to complete the anonymous online questionnaire, the link is as follows:

https://qualtricsxmp2s4wkfbn.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1NX2bRLZO4Nqq90

If trainees wish to complete a semi-structured interview, my contact details are provided on the poster and at the end of this email.

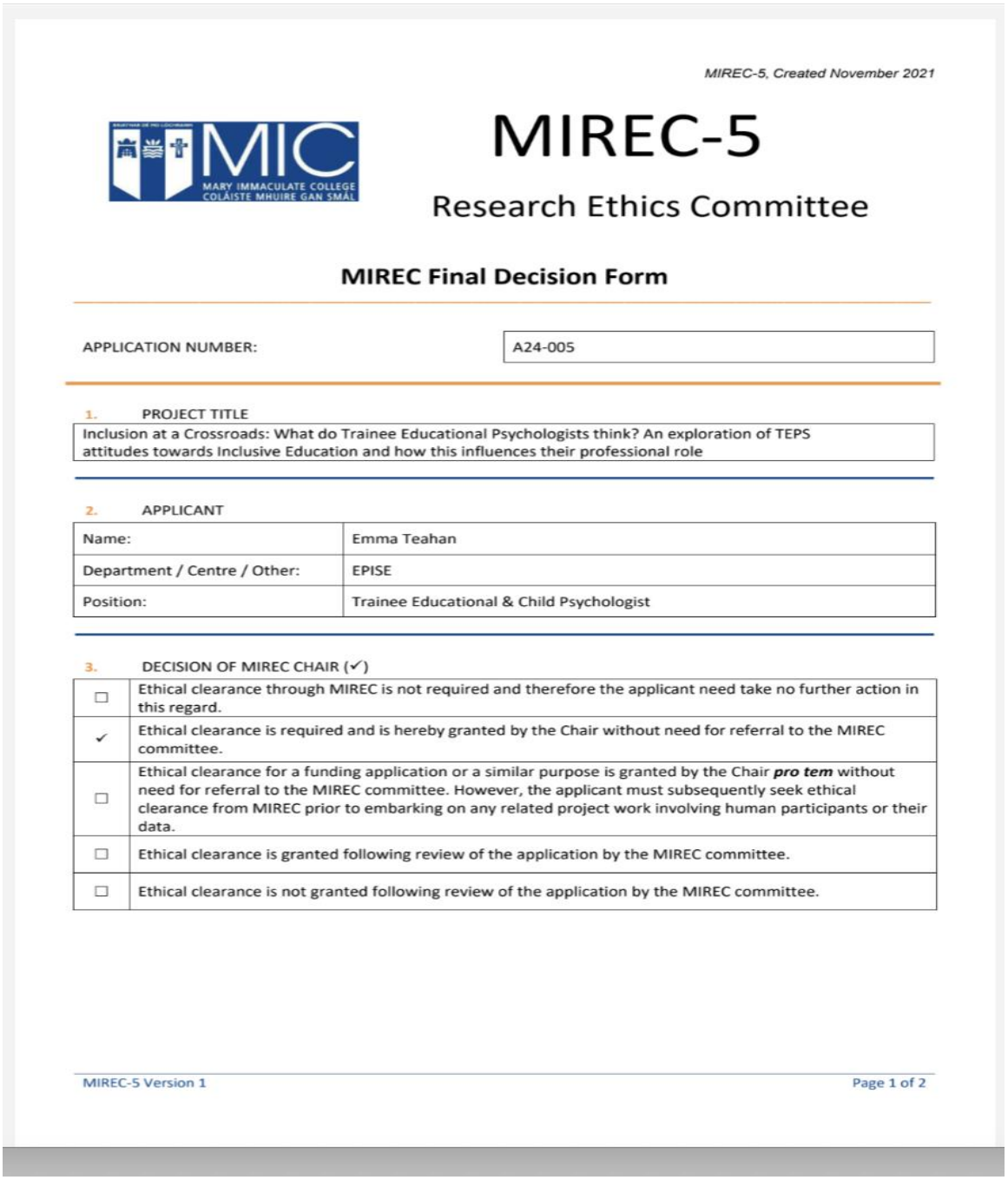
I greatly appreciate your support in forwarding on this email and the recruitment poster to trainees.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further queries.

Kind regards,

Emma Teahan, [redacted]

4.17. Appendix H: MIREC Confirmation Letter of Ethical Approval



MIREC-5, Created November 2021

MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE
COLÁISTE MHUIRE GAN SMÁL

MIREC-5

Research Ethics Committee

MIREC Final Decision Form

APPLICATION NUMBER: A24-005

1. PROJECT TITLE

Inclusion at a Crossroads: What do Trainee Educational Psychologists think? An exploration of TEPS attitudes towards Inclusive Education and how this influences their professional role

2. APPLICANT

Name:	Emma Teahan
Department / Centre / Other:	EPISE
Position:	Trainee Educational & Child Psychologist

3. DECISION OF MIREC CHAIR (✓)

☐	Ethical clearance through MIREC is not required and therefore the applicant need take no further action in this regard.
✓	Ethical clearance is required and is hereby granted by the Chair without need for referral to the MIREC committee.
☐	Ethical clearance for a funding application or a similar purpose is granted by the Chair ***pro tem*** without need for referral to the MIREC committee. However, the applicant must subsequently seek ethical clearance from MIREC prior to embarking on any related project work involving human participants or their data.
☐	Ethical clearance is granted following review of the application by the MIREC committee.
☐	Ethical clearance is not granted following review of the application by the MIREC committee.

MIREC-5 Version 1 Page 1 of 2

4.18. Appendix I: Researcher Identity Memo (Maxwell, 2005)

May 2024

The purpose of this memo is to identify how my own experiences and assumptions around inclusive education may impact my approach to this research and indeed my interpretation of findings. Through using this Researcher Identity Memo (Maxwell, 2005), I intend to openly name and acknowledge my professional history, personal perspectives and, crucially, how these factors influence my research journey.

Undoubtedly, my interest in the field of inclusive education is rooted in my experience working in an Autism Class for six autistic children in 2021/2022. In this role, I observed the transformative potential of truly inclusive settings, both within the Autism Class itself and the students' respective mainstream classes. I saw how thoughtfully-designed environments and school staff taking a genuine interest in the student could foster a sense of belonging and facilitate progress for students with SEN. Additionally within this role, I felt a level of frustration with systems-issues for pupils with SEN whereby none of the six students in my class were receiving supports from other disciplines e.g. Occupational Therapy, through the public system. I observed how this negatively impacted their engagement with school-work, socialising with their peers and their overall well-being. Moreover, I recognised the significant impact it had on my role as a teacher, as I often felt I was juggling many roles and responsibilities. This experience instilled in me a belief in the value of truly inclusive systems and the importance of advocacy regarding students with SEN. I will certainly carry these values into my current research. I am aware that my own experience working within an Autism Class was one of positivity, which is not always the case. I am cognisant that this experience may lend itself to biases whereby I may possibly see the benefits of specialist settings more readily than the challenges that they pose. I hope my self-awareness around this will render me more likely to identify my 'blind spots' and deter me from thinking in this way. I am confident that keeping a Reflexive Journal will help me with this process.

Additionally, I have had placement within Child Disability and Mental Health services thus far, which has provided me with a broader view of inclusive education. Through these roles, I have observed schools who are exceptionally supportive of student's needs, as well as schools that are perhaps more rigid in their thinking, leading to disappointing outcomes for students with SEN. As I embark on my placement in the National Educational Psychological Service in September 2024, I am sure this will deepen my understanding of the school system and issues that can present when striving for inclusion in our schools.

My ongoing commitment to keeping up with national and international policy developments further shapes my research lens. I am well-versed in the aspirations of inclusive education frameworks and visions, but I also recognize the logistical difficulties in achieving these goals such as lack of appropriate school places, lack of appropriate teacher training etc. The tension between policy rhetoric and real-world practice is something I have witnessed repeatedly, and it has made me skeptical of overly simplistic solutions that do not account for the complexities of inclusion. I recognise that this perspective may lead me to seek out the evidence for views which give greater weight to narratives that confirm my own experiences. To mitigate this, I am committed to maintaining a reflexive stance throughout the research process, consistently questioning how my own biases may be shaping my interpretations. I am committed to giving a voice to perspectives that may differ from my own and to offer a true reflection of TEPs' attitudes in a comprehensive, rigorous and authentic way.

4.19. Appendix J: Participant Information Sheet

**Inclusion at a Crossroads: What do Trainee Educational Psychologists think?
An exploration of TEPS' understanding of and attitudes towards Inclusive Education and how this influences their professional role.**

Participant Information Letter

What is the project about?

This study focuses on the attitudes of Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) towards Inclusive Education (IE) and how this influences their professional role. IE is a multifaceted and contentious issue which has contradictory interpretations; with the term often used in different ways by different people (Travers, 2023; Zaniolo, 2021). It has been predicated that EPs are in a unique position to support inclusive practices within the education system, due to their collaborative relationships with schools, in addition to their role in providing advice and recommendations around educational supports and placements (DES, 2001; O' Farrell & Kinsella, 2018; Zaniolo, 2021). This project aims to explore TEP's views in order to deepen the discussion on IE, in addition to heightening their own awareness of biases, exploring TEP's understanding of the true meaning of inclusion and supporting them in becoming reflective practitioners. There is currently very little research conducted with EP's around inclusion in the Irish context and, to the authors knowledge, no research completed with TEPs. It is hoped that this research will delve into this under-researched area and help the field of Educational Psychology to further implement and promote inclusive practices.

Who is undertaking the current project?

My name is Emma Teahan and I am a postgraduate student in Mary Immaculate College. I am currently completing the Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology, within the Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education, under the supervision of Dr. Trevor O' Brien and Dr. Niamh Higgins. The current research project will form part of my doctoral thesis.

What are the benefits associated with this study?

Overall, this study will highlight what TEPs understand the definition of Inclusive Education to be and how they interpret their experiences of IE. In delving into their experiences of IE, the

study may obtain information around possible biases and attitudes towards IE and how these can influence the role of the TEP. Furthermore, it will provide a reflective space for TEPs to give thought to their viewpoints on IE, further enhancing their professional development and self-awareness.

What is involved for participants who choose to take part in this study?

Participants will be invited to complete an anonymous, qualitative questionnaire on Qualtrics which will ask TEPs questions around their experiences of IE and how this has influenced their professional role. This questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

A small selection of participants, who choose to opt in, will be invited to partake in an online semi-structured interview with the researcher via Microsoft Teams (MS). This interview will be recorded on MS for data transcription and analysis purposes. The researcher will send participants a consent form to read in advance of the interview, to ensure they fully understand the purpose and what will be involved. Interview questions will delve into participants understanding of IE, their experiences of IE and how this has influenced components of their professional role. The semi-structured interview will take approximately 40-60 minutes.

Participants are **not** required to complete both the online questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. Each participant will complete **either** the online questionnaire or the semi-structured interview.

Right to withdraw

Should you choose to partake in the semi-structured interview, you are free to withdraw at any point during participation without reason or consequence and your information will be removed immediately. However, it is acknowledged that if you participate in the anonymous questionnaire, it will not be possible to withdraw from the study once the form is submitted.

How will the information be used and disseminated?

Data collected from the research will be combined with that of other participants, anonymised, analysed and used to form the results section of my doctoral thesis. The results may be shared in journal articles and conferences proceedings. The focus of the research will be on the researcher's analysis and interpretation of participants responses gathered throughout the study.

How will confidentiality be maintained?

- All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party, thereby only accessible to the researcher and research supervisors. Participants emails will be not be required for the online questionnaire. Participants emails will be required for the online semi-structured interviews and will only be used to invite participants. Prior to anonymising the data, research supervisors will have access to the audio data, from semi-structured interviews, if required. Support staff within MIC may have access to the data, adhering to their specific data protection guidelines and

protocols. Audio recordings will be deleted immediately following transcription. Participants will be welcome to read over the transcripts to ensure data is anonymised. Consent forms and online survey data will be stored in a password-protected and encrypted file on the researcher's laptop.

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) (quote reference number when you have received it).
If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact: Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick Telephone: 061-204980 E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie

Researcher Contact Details:

Emma Teahan, [redacted]

Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Trevor O' Brien, trevor.obrien@mic.ul.ie
Dr Niamh Higgins, niamh.higgins@mic.ul.ie

4.20. Appendix K: Participant Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for Semi-Structured Interview

As outlined in the participant information sheet, the current study aims to explore the experiences of Trainee Educational Psychologists' of Inclusive Education and the influence of this on their professional practice. The participant information sheet should be read fully and carefully before consenting to take part in the study.

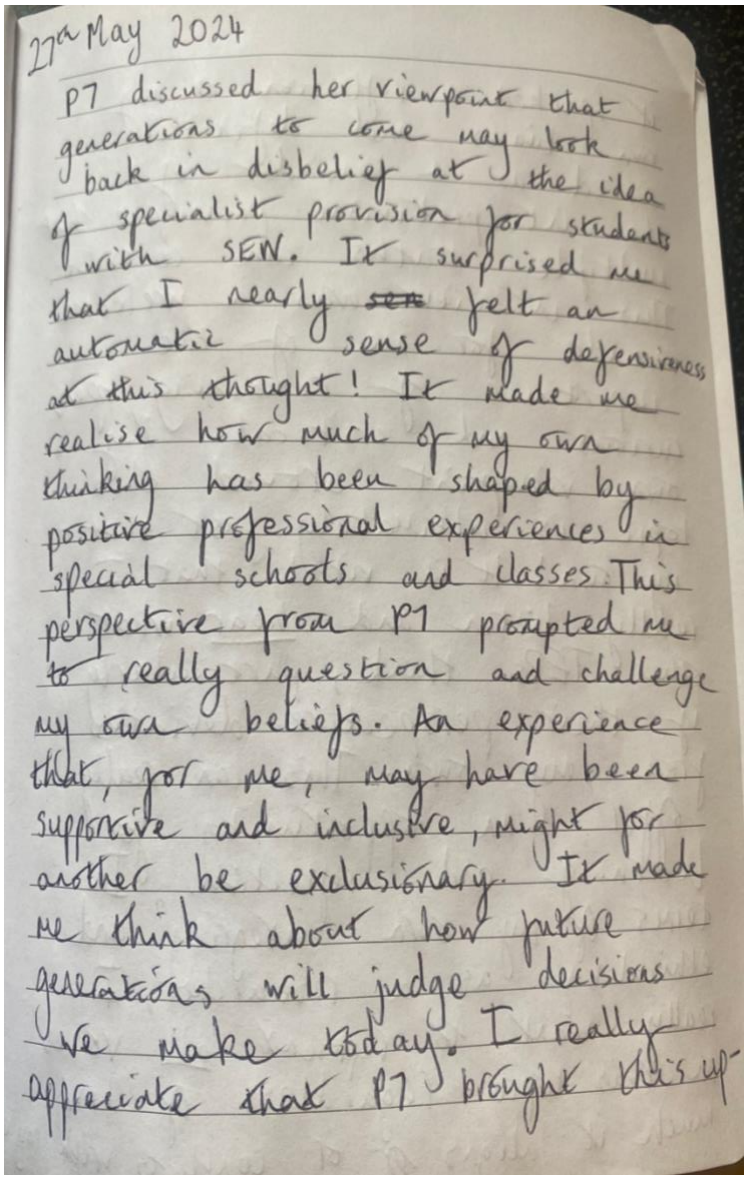
1. I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet.
2. I am over the age of 18 years old.
3. I understand what the project is about and what the results will be used for.
4. I am fully aware of all the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
5. I know that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any stage, without provision of reason or consequence.
6. I am aware that the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. I am aware that audio data will be destroyed following transcription.
7. I am aware that some individual quotations may be anonymized and used in the dissemination of the research.
8. I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.
9. I understand that I can contact the researcher or research supervisors if I have any queries. I may also contact the researcher for a summary of the findings, arising from this study.

I, the undersigned, hereby consent to participate in the above-described project.

Participant Name (Printed): _____

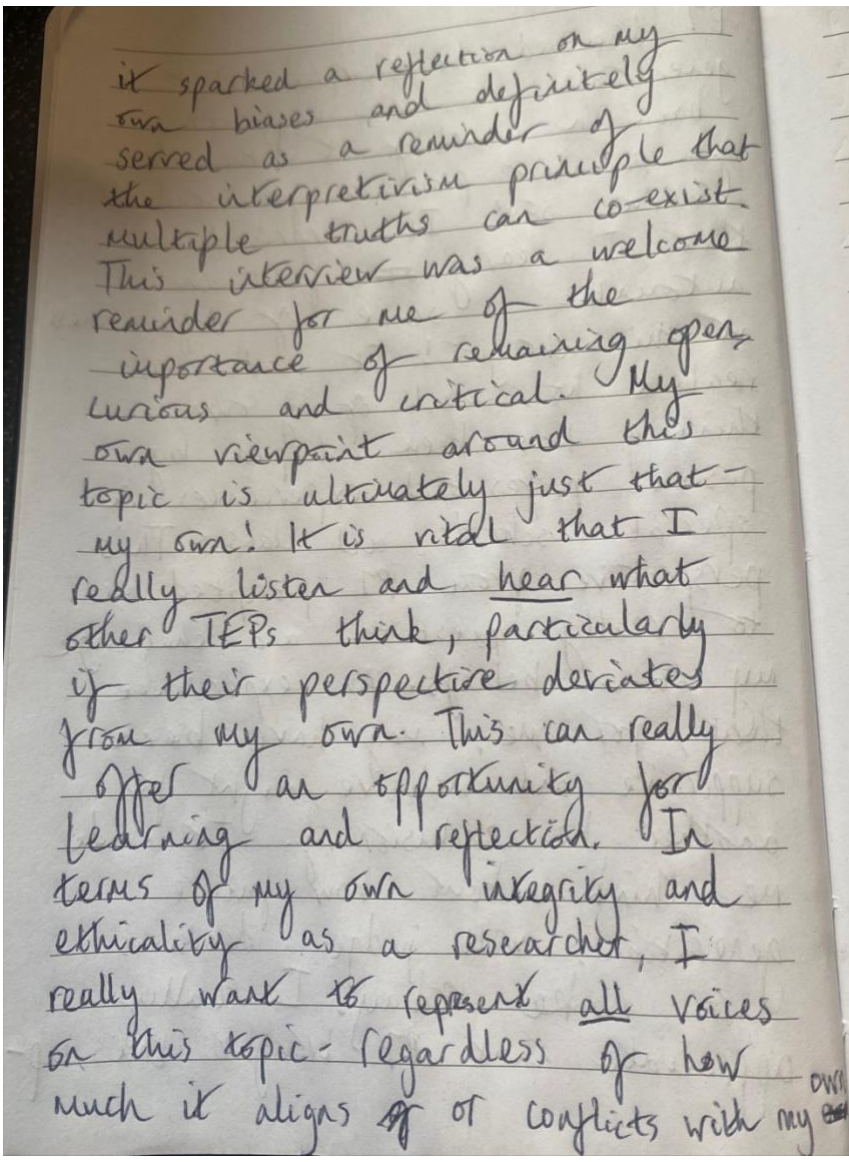
Participant Signature: _____Date: _____

4.21. Appendix L: Excerpts from Reflexive Journal

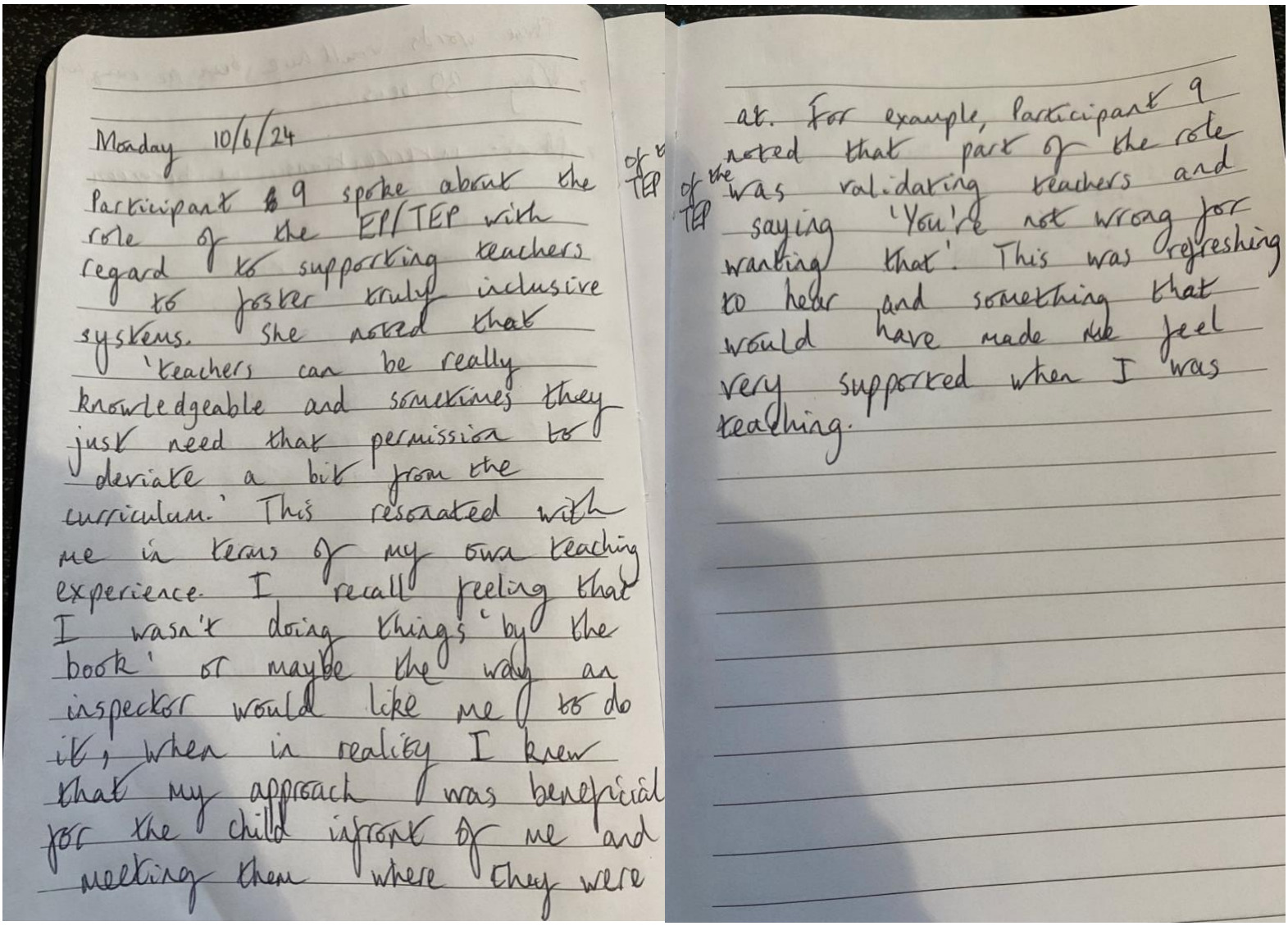


27th May 2024

P7 discussed her viewpoint that generations to come may look back in disbelief at the idea of specialist provision for students with SEN. It surprised me that I nearly ~~SEN~~ felt an automatic sense of defensiveness at this thought! It made me realise how much of my own thinking has been shaped by positive professional experiences in special schools and classes. This perspective from P7 prompted me to really question and challenge my own beliefs. An experience that, for me, may have been supportive and inclusive, might for another be exclusionary. It made me think about how future generations will judge decisions we make today. I really appreciate that P7 brought this up-



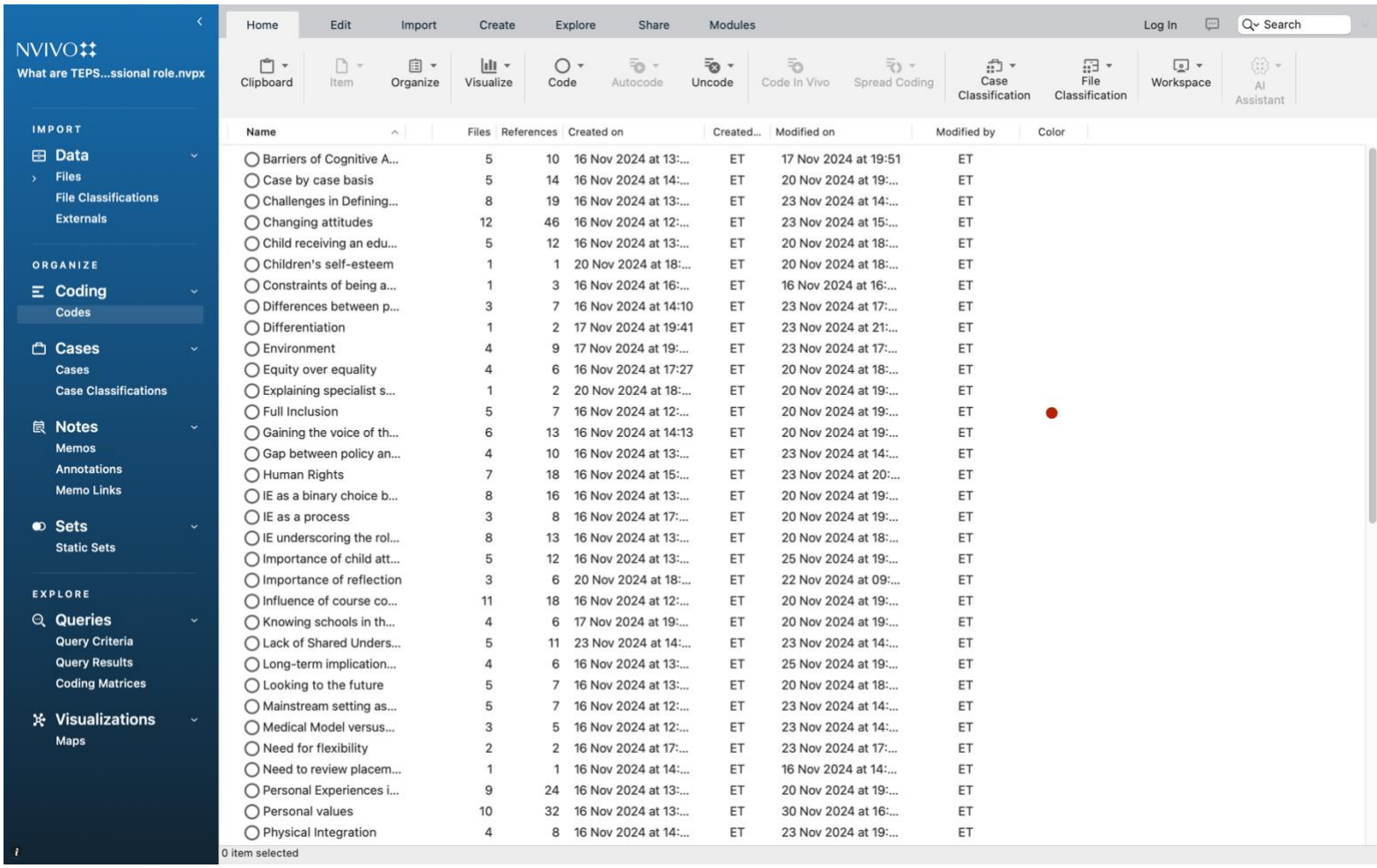
it sparked a reflection on my own biases and definitely served as a reminder of the interpretivism principle that multiple truths can co-exist. This interview was a welcome reminder for me of the importance of remaining open, curious and critical. My own viewpoint around this topic is ultimately just that - my own! It is vital that I really listen and hear what other TEPs think, particularly if their perspective deviates from my own. This can really offer an opportunity for learning and reflection. In terms of my own integrity and ethicality as a researcher, I really want to represent all voices on this topic - regardless of how much it aligns ~~of~~ or conflicts with my own



Monday 10/6/24

Participant 9 spoke about the role of the EP/TEP with regard to supporting teachers to foster truly inclusive systems. She noted that 'teachers can be really knowledgeable and sometimes they just need that permission to deviate a bit from the curriculum.' This resonated with me in terms of my own teaching experience. I recall feeling that I wasn't doing things 'by the book' or maybe the way an inspector would like me to do it, when in reality I knew that my approach was beneficial for the child in front of me and meeting them where they were at. For example, Participant 9 noted that part of the role was validating teachers and saying 'You're not wrong for wanting that'. This was refreshing to hear and something that would have made me feel very supported when I was teaching.

4.22. Appendix M: Generating Initial Codes using NVivo



4.23. Appendix N: Example of structured codebook using Excel Spreadsheet

3	Codes	Case by case basis		5	14
4	Codes	Changing attitudes		12	45
5	Codes	Child receiving an education appropriate to them		5	12
6	Codes	Children's self-esteem		1	1
7	Codes	Constraints of being a trainee		1	3
8	Codes	Differences between primary and post-primary	Influence of this perceived gap on the role of TEP	3	6
9	Codes	Differentiation		1	1
10	Codes	Environment		3	8
11	Codes	Equity over equality		4	6
12	Codes	Explaining specialist settings to students		1	2
13	Codes	Full Inclusion		5	7
14	Codes	Gaining the voice of the child		6	13
15	Codes	Gap between policy and practice		4	9
16	Codes	Human Rights		6	15
17	Codes	IE as a binary choice between mainstream or specialist setting		8	16
18	Codes	IE as a process		3	8
19	Codes	IE underscoring the role of TEP		8	13
20	Codes	Importance of child attending their local school		5	12
21	Codes	Importance of reflection		2	3
22	Codes	Influence of course content		11	18
23	Codes	Knowing schools in the area		4	6
24	Codes	Lack of shared understanding		8	19
25	Codes	Long-term implications of class setting		4	6
26	Codes	Looking to the future		5	7
27	Codes	Mainstream setting as the optimal option		5	6
28	Codes	Medical Model versus Social Model		3	4
29	Codes	Need for flexibility		2	2
30	Codes	Need to review placements		1	1
31	Codes	Personal Experiences impacting attitudes		9	24
32	Codes	Personal values		10	31

Codebook +

4.24. Appendix O: Examples of initial clusters of codes gathered from codebook

Research Question 1

Adapting the Environment	Access to appropriate learning opportunities	Individualised approaches to inclusive settings	Difficulties in defining IE	Fostering sense of acceptance for all pupils
*Physical Space *Universal design for Learning *Differentiation *Medical Model vs. Social Model	*Human rights issue *Students receiving an appropriate education *Providing students with SEN with the same opportunities as their peers *Equity over equality	*IE is not a binary choice between mainstream and specialist settings *Mainstream as the optimal/preferred option *There is a place for special schools *Case by Case Basis *Physical Integration is not the same as inclusive education	*Lack of shared understanding	*School Culture *Sense of belonging and understanding *Inclusion as a process *Importance of attending local school *School as a stepping stone into society

Research Question 2

Professional Experiences	Enrolling in the Doctorate in Educational Psychology course	Personal Experiences
*Past experience working in setting for complex needs *Past experiences working as a teacher	*Completing university placements led to exposure to new settings *Seeing it through a different lens since becoming a TEP *More understanding of the school system *Course content	*Family members experience of school settings and level of support received *Memories from TEPs own time in primary/secondary school *Personal values

Research Question 3

Child-centred advocacy and decision-making	Working collaboratively	Empowering schools towards transformation	Challenges	Driving inclusion through reflection and informed practice	Inclusion as a defining factor of the role
*Gaining the voice of the child *Respecting child's preferences *Advocate for the child *Taking a strengths-based perspective	*Respecting Parental Choice *Facilitating communication between parents and schools *Validating schools existing practice	* Building school-wide practices *Changing the mindset of others *TEP seeing the 'bigger picture'	*Discomfort/frustration with elements of report writing *System-level issues *Feeling restricted/the need to comply with supervisors' opinion *Varied perceptions around the role of the EP *Experiencing pressure from school staff when opinions are conflicting	*Taking a firm stance on their beliefs around inclusive education *TEPs understanding their position of power and the long-term implications of their decisions *Importance of TEPs reflecting on their views around inclusive education *Keeping up-to-date with relevant policies	*Inclusive Education underpinning the job role

4.25. Appendix P: Example outline of TEP Community of Practice Session on IE

Title: 'What does Inclusive Education mean to us?'

Duration: 2 hours

Aims:

- To encourage TEPs to reflect on and share their personal definitions of Inclusive Education.
- To explore varying definitions of IE from national and European policy bodies and academic sources.
- To facilitate reflective discussion about how TEPs' lived and professional experiences align or contrast with these definitions.
- To promote identity formation and deeper critical thinking in a safe, non-judgemental space.

Topic	**Outline**
Welcome & Ground Rules	• Set ground rules collaboratively e.g. confidentiality • Brief overview of CoP model and its purpose for TEPs within this session
Personal Definitions of IE	• TEPs to write down their own definition of IE and what it means for them • Peer discussion
Exploring national and international definitions of IE	• Facilitator to present a variety of definitions to TEPs e.g. EASNIE (2024), DE (2022), Hornby (2014), Ainscow (2020) • Show General Comment Number 4 (UNCRPD, 2016) definitions of inclusion, integration, segregation, exclusion. TEPs prompted to reflect on if they have seen any of these in practice • Small group task: What stands out about these definitions? What is different among them? What aligns with your own view? What, if anything, feels limiting about these definitions?

Identity and Attitude Formation	• TEPs prompted to think about how their own 1) schooling and 2) professional placement experiences have influenced their views • Whole-group discussion: How do our own attitudes influence the advice we give to schools?
Close	• Encourage TEPs to write down one way their attitudes or biases towards IE has been changed or challenged today • Facilitator to signpost any readings/recent publications in the area of IE • Facilitator to encourage TEPs to make suggestions for next month's IE CoP