



# The Study on the Operations of Early Childhood Teachers in Providing Early Intervention (EI) Services for At-Risk Students in Educational institutions

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## Abstract

This study aimed to study the operations of early childhood teachers in providing Early Intervention (EI) services for at-risk students in educational institutions. This was qualitative research. The data was collected from focus group discussions. The target group for this research consisted of 10 early childhood teachers in educational institutions under the Chiang Mai Primary Educational Service Area Office 2. The data was presented in descriptive analytics.

According to the result of this study, the interviewees emphasized the importance of special education in promoting inclusive opportunities and social integration for children with special needs. Effective early intervention required adapting curricula, fostering collaboration among teachers, parents, and stakeholders, and addressing challenges like limited knowledge and communication issues. Key strategies included comprehensive teacher training, curriculum adjustments, and enhanced communication with parents. Regular monitoring, expert guidance, and multidisciplinary collaboration were vital for creating a supportive environment, ultimately improving developmental outcomes through coordinated efforts across schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations.

**Keywords:** Early Intervention, at-risk students, early childhood teachers



## Introduction

In Thailand, challenges remain in providing education for individuals with disabilities or special needs, despite their rights to receive comprehensive educational services from birth or the onset of disability across all levels, as mandated by the National Education Act B.E. 2542 and its amendments (B.E. 2545). Article 10, Section 2, of the Act specifies that individuals with physical, mental, intellectual, emotional, social, communication, and learning impairments, or those unable to care for themselves, have the right to receive specialized basic education.

The Education for Persons with Disabilities Act B.E. 2551 further emphasizes that individuals with disabilities are entitled to free education from birth or the time of disability diagnosis throughout their lives. This includes access to technology, educational materials, services, and other forms of assistance tailored to their abilities, interests, and specific needs. Scholars such as Dettmer, Dyck, and Thurston (1999), Deiner (2010), and Lewis & Doorlag (1995) highlight the principles of “equity” and “normalization” in special education, focusing on basic human rights and freedom.

However, in practice, challenges persist. Children with intellectual disabilities, learning disorders, ADHD, and autism, referred to as “special children,” often receive inclusive education with their peers, which may lead to inadequate support for their full potential development. Early childhood teachers are critical in this process as they influence children’s development. Yet, issues such as delayed development in various domains and the lack of clear teacher development plans highlight the need for better screening tools and professional training.

The current screening methods primarily target students from Grade 3 onwards, leaving a gap in early childhood education. Therefore, there is a pressing need to develop early childhood teachers’ capacity in special education, in alignment with the national strategy (B.E. 2561-2580). Continuous and effective professional development is essential for enhancing teachers’ skills, expertise,



and ethical standards, ensuring they can adapt to new challenges and promote students' success in a diverse society.

The 2023 report from the Chiang Mai Primary Educational Service Area Office 2 highlights that out of 131 schools under its jurisdiction, 110 provide inclusive education. The Quality Development Project for Inclusive Education, in collaboration with Rajanagarindra Hospital, aims to enhance the skills of teachers responsible for inclusive education. The project has two primary objectives: (1) to improve teachers' understanding of how to support children with disabilities in reaching their full potential, and (2) to foster cooperation among multidisciplinary teams to create a consistent approach to student screening.

Five schools voluntarily participated in this study. The increasing need for inclusive education presents challenges for teachers, particularly in screening students to identify their individual developmental needs. Effective initial screening is crucial for gathering relevant information that allows teachers to customize educational strategies for each child. The screening process should be clear, contextually appropriate, and continuously refined. Educational institutions need to prioritize the development of early childhood teachers' capabilities in delivering high-quality special education.

Given the reasons mentioned above, the researcher aims to conduct a study on the operations of early childhood teachers in providing Early Intervention (EI) services for at-risk students in educational institutions. This research will be beneficial to administrators and all relevant parties in utilizing the findings to improve the quality and effectiveness of special education services provided by early childhood teachers for special needs children, ultimately achieving the intended goals.

## Early Intervention (EI)

Guralnick (2001) defines early intervention as “a system of coordinated services that promotes the child’s age-appropriate growth and development and supports families during the critical early years.” He emphasizes that early



intervention is intended to mitigate developmental delays and enhance outcomes for children at risk.

Shonkoff and Meisels (2000) describe early intervention as “an array of services provided to very young children who are identified as having or being at risk for developmental delays or disabilities and their families, to enhance the child’s developmental progress and the family’s ability to meet the needs of the child.”

Dunst and Trivette (2009) define early intervention as “family-centered practices and a collection of interventions aimed at supporting both the child’s development and the family’s ability to promote and sustain that development.” They emphasize a family-centered approach where families play a central role in decision-making and intervention processes.

Hebbeler and colleagues (2007) define early intervention as “services provided to infants and toddlers who have developmental delays or disabilities, to support developmental outcomes and family functioning by addressing the child’s specific needs through individualized strategies.”

In addition, Early Childhood Intervention refers to systematic activities or services designed to support and promote the appropriate growth and development of children, particularly in infancy and early childhood. The goal of early intervention is to help children develop essential skills and abilities according to their age effectively, including motor skills, speech, cognitive abilities, and social learning (Komonwatana, 2018 and Theerasawat, 2021

## Theoretical Foundations of Early Intervention

**1. Developmental Systems Theory (Guralnick, 2001):** Guralnick’s theory views child development as an outcome of complex interactions between biological, familial, and environmental factors. Early intervention should address these multiple layers to create optimal developmental conditions.

**2. Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979):** Bronfen-



brenner's model highlights the significance of multiple environmental systems (e.g., family, community, societal context) in shaping child development. EI programs focus on interventions across these systems.

**3. Transactional Model of Development (Sameroff & Chandler, 1975):** This model emphasizes the dynamic interplay between a child and their environment. The model advocates for interventions that promote positive transactions between the child and their surroundings.

## Key Aspects of Early Intervention

**1. Identification and Assessment:** Early screening and evaluations to detect developmental issues.

**2. Individualized Plans:** Develop tailored intervention plans, often through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

**3. Multidisciplinary Approach:** Involvement of a team of professionals including educators, therapists, and medical experts.

**4. Family-Centered Support:** Engaging and empowering families in the intervention process.

## Core Components of Early Intervention

**1. Identification and Screening:** Early identification is a key element, involving regular developmental screenings and assessments to determine whether a child is experiencing delays. Early identification ensures timely support, reducing the risk of more significant developmental issues later in life.

**2. Family-Centered Approach:** EI services emphasize the role of the family as central to the child's development. Family-centered practices include involving parents and caregivers in decision-making, providing them with knowledge and skills to support their child's development, and respecting the cultural and social values of the family.

**3. Individualized Services:** Early intervention plans are customized to meet each child's specific needs through an Individualized Family Service Plan



(IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP), which outlines goals, strategies, and the specific services to be provided.

**4. Multidisciplinary Teams:** A multidisciplinary team of professionals (e.g., special educators, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and psychologists) collaborates to assess the child’s needs and deliver services, ensuring comprehensive and holistic support.

**5. Natural Environments:** EI services are often provided in natural environments such as the child’s home or early childcare settings. The rationale is to promote development in the context of the child’s everyday routines and interactions.

**6. Evidence-Based Practices:** Effective early intervention relies on evidence-based strategies and approaches, with interventions grounded in research on child development and learning.

## Benefits and Impact of Early Intervention

Early intervention has been shown to have significant long-term benefits, particularly in cognitive, social, and emotional development. Research indicates that early and sustained support can improve outcomes for children with developmental delays and disabilities, reduce the need for more intensive services later, and contribute to better academic and social outcomes.

## Challenges in Early Intervention

Despite its benefits, early intervention faces challenges such as inconsistent access to services, disparities in service delivery based on socioeconomic status, and variability in the quality of interventions. Ensuring that all children and families have equitable access to high-quality services remains a critical focus.



## Findings

From the focus group, ten issues were found as follows:

1. Crucial things for improving preschool teachers' implementation of early intervention services?

Interviewees emphasized the importance of special education in providing inclusive opportunities for students with special needs, ensuring they could integrate socially and develop effectively. They highlighted the necessity of adapting education to meet individual abilities and needs, aiming for equal educational opportunities, and screening for early intervention. Differences opinions of the interviewees lay in the specific focus: the first point addressed social integration and mutual support; the second focused on adjusting educational content and assessments; the third was about directly helping special needs children; the fourth point discussed ensuring equal rights and opportunities; the fifth emphasized early screening and intervention; and the sixth point was about overall developmental improvements and the right to a fulfilling life for all students.

2. Key factors for the success of early intervention services in schools

The similarities among interviewees' point of view were centered on the collaborative approach needed to support students with special needs, emphasizing the roles of both teachers and parents in creating an effective learning environment. They all highlighted the importance of assessment, involvement, and support to ensure appropriate educational development. The different opinions were in their specific focus: the first point emphasized the importance of assessing students' basic abilities and needs to tailor education effectively; the second point stressed the collaborative efforts between parents and teachers; the third point underscored the involvement of all stakeholders; the fourth and point focused on parental support and active participation; the sixth point mentioned family involvement and educational resources; and the seventh point highlighted administrative support in providing resources and facilitating cooperation.



#### 4. Obstacles for preschool teachers in providing early intervention services in schools?

The similarities among interviewees' opinions involved challenges in supporting students with special needs, with a common theme of insufficient understanding and collaboration. They all addressed issues that hindered effective early intervention and inclusive education. The differences lay in their specific areas of concern: the first point identified a lack of teacher knowledge and an unsuitable learning environment; the second highlighted time constraints and additional responsibilities; the third emphasized the need for understanding and acceptance of the child; the fourth focused on communication issues and lack of parental cooperation; the fifth point deals with communication and familiarity with the child; the sixth addressed gaps in special education knowledge and parental understanding; and the seventh point reflected on parental acceptance and understanding as potential barriers.

##### 1. Ideas for developing the work of preschool teachers in providing early intervention services

Most Interviewees highlighted the importance of comprehensive teacher development and early intervention support, emphasizing the need for collaboration among various stakeholders including schools, teachers, special education centers, hospitals, child development institutes, and communities. The focus was on providing diverse and effective training for teachers to enhance their ability to support students, including improving communication with parents and understanding individual students' needs. The development should also involve updating technology and ensuring cooperation from all relevant sectors—medical, social, and familial—to achieve effective student development.

##### 2. Ideas on developing preschool teachers regarding curriculum, activities, and learning management suitable for inclusive education

The interviewees underscored the need for adapting curricula and activities to better support students with special needs. They emphasized de-





veloping teacher knowledge and training to customize educational approaches according to individual student requirements and increasing numbers of special needs children, particularly in early childhood education. Key areas included revising curricula, organizing appropriate and integrated activities, and ensuring that teachers receive adequate training. The focus was on creating an inclusive and effective learning environment that promotes both the academic and emotional well-being of students.

1. Opinions on developing communication skills for preschool teachers to enhance communication with parents, fostering understanding and cooperation in supporting children with special needs

The interviewees emphasized the crucial role of communication in the development of students, particularly those with special needs. Effective collaboration between schools, teachers, and parents was essential for understanding and addressing student needs. Teachers should develop strong communication skills to ensure clear, mutual understanding and gain parental acceptance. This included explaining the benefits for students, creating opportunities for discussion, and addressing parental concerns. Overall, good communication fostered better cooperation and supports student development more effectively.

2. Opinions on supervising and monitoring education management in schools with both special needs and typically developing children

The interviewees highlighted the critical importance of communication between schools, teachers, and parents in developing students, especially those with special needs. Effective communication helped align understanding, build trust, and foster cooperation among all parties involved. Teachers needed to continuously develop their communication skills to explain and address student needs, ensure parental acceptance, and promote effective collaboration. The goal was to create a supportive environment where students could thrive and be accepted by their families and society.



1. Organizations should be involved in promoting and supporting preschool teachers in providing early intervention services

The interviewees emphasized the importance of regular supervision and evaluation in schools with special needs students to ensure educational effectiveness. Monitoring was essential for assessing the success of previous efforts, identifying problems, and making improvements. Regular evaluations helped teachers understand how to enhance their teaching methods and provide better support for students. The process should include periodic assessments, ideally monthly or at least once per term, to ensure continuous development and address any shortcomings. Overall, consistent monitoring and feedback were crucial for improving educational practices and outcomes for students with special needs.

1. Idea on special education management in schools?

The interviewees emphasized the importance of involving experts and specialized resources in the development and support of teachers and students with special needs. Schools were encouraged to collaborate with organizations such as special education centers, development institutes, and local education offices to provide training and guidance. Experts should offer specialized knowledge and practical resources like easy-to-read manuals and assessment tools for special education. Additionally, schools should include special education teachers and ensure that training programs were accessible and tailored to improve understanding and effectiveness. Overall, effective development relied on the integration of expert advice and tailored educational support.

2. Additional suggestions or perspectives on improving the work of preschool teachers in early intervention services in schools?

The interviewees underscored the necessity of collaborative efforts from various sectors in providing early intervention support for students with special needs. Effective assistance required the involvement of schools, administrators, teachers, parents, students, healthcare providers, community organizations, special education centers, local government, and private agen-



cies. This comprehensive cooperation ensured the most effective support and development for students. Key contributors included medical professionals, therapists, educational institutions, and health departments, all of whom must work together to achieve optimal outcomes.

## Discussion

The key insights from the interviewees highlighted several crucial aspects of improving early intervention services in preschool education. First, the significance of special education was emphasized in promoting inclusive opportunities for children with special needs, ensuring their social integration, and enhancing developmental outcomes. Effective early intervention required adapting curricula, focusing on social inclusion, adjusting educational content, and fostering equal opportunities through early screening and assessment. Additionally, collaborative efforts among teachers, parents, and stakeholders were essential for tailoring educational strategies to individual needs and for creating an inclusive learning environment. Challenges such as limited teacher knowledge, time constraints, and communication issues were barriers that need to be addressed for successful implementation. Developmental strategies included comprehensive teacher training, stakeholder cooperation, curriculum adaptations, and enhancing communication with parents to achieve effective support for students.

Furthermore, consistent supervision, expert guidance, and multidisciplinary collaboration were key factors in improving educational practices. Regular monitoring and evaluation, ideally through periodic assessments, were necessary for assessing and refining early intervention efforts. The integration of specialized resources and expert knowledge, along with community and organizational support, played a critical role in enhancing both teacher capabilities and student outcomes. The overall goal was to create a supportive and inclusive environment through coordinated efforts from schools, healthcare providers, special education centers, and other sectors to deliver effective intervention services.



## New knowledge

Here's a diagram summarizing the key points for improving preschool teachers' implementation of early intervention services. Each of the ten points is represented in a step-by-step flow, highlighting crucial aspects, key factors, challenges, and strategies for enhancing early intervention in preschool settings. The diagram visually connects the main ideas and organizes the points into a clear sequence for better understanding.

## Conclusion

Early intervention provides targeted support for young children with developmental delays or those at risk, aiming to address their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs. It involves collaboration among educators, healthcare professionals, and families to create personalized strategies that improve development and prepare children for future learning. Key aspects include adapting curricula, enhancing teacher training, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to address challenges. Regular monitoring and consistent supervision, supported by multidisciplinary efforts, are essential for creating an inclusive and supportive environment for children's growth.

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