

**PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHERS REGARDING
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN GHANA**

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Abstract

The study explored teachers' perspectives on the curriculum, the physical environment and their preparation for the inclusive education programme. Data was collected using questionnaires. A sample of 120 teachers from schools identified as inclusive was used for the study. The t-test of independent samples and chi-square test were used to analyse the data. Results showed that differences do not exist between males and females' views on the type of curriculum, the physical environment, and teacher preparation for inclusive education. Also, age, teaching experience, and professional qualification influenced teachers' perceptions of the inclusive schools. It was recommended that teachers' preparation programmes must have a component of inclusive education courses to enable prospective teachers acquire the skills of teaching children with special needs.

Key words: teachers' perception, inclusive education, inclusion

Introduction

Among all the factors that account for the growth and development of education is significantly and indisputably the teacher factor. Hence, no country can afford to neglect the education and training of teachers. The quality and standard of education provided will primarily depend on the quality of teachers. In Ghana, teacher training in respect to inclusive teaching has not received the recognition and importance that it deserves. The existing patterns and programmes of teacher training follow the traditional teacher education with emphasis on teaching general education students and little regard for inclusive pedagogy. Sharma, Forlin, Guang-xue, and Deppeler (2013) espoused that quality teacher training should be available before and during the implementation of an inclusive programme. This training should be grounded in sound inclusive pedagogy.

Education of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in inclusive settings is an emerging venture involving several challenges. The range and complexity of changes taking place in the field of special education implies that there should be a transformation of teacher training curricular to include materials and methods that are relevant to meet the challenges of inclusive education. Teachers' knowledge, emotions and skills about inclusive education are particularly important in the successful implementation of the inclusive education programme.

Over the past decades, inclusive education approaches have been proposed and accepted for the education of children with SEN. The move towards inclusive education has been promoted as a reaction to segregated schooling, against children with special needs (UNESCO 1994). The argument for inclusive education is that it largely hinged on human rights as well as social issues. Inclusive education more generally, has dominated public policy and social discourse and this is an attempt to make education more meaningful and accessible to children with SEN, who otherwise, would not benefit from the regular school programme. Inclusive education can therefore be conceptualised as good education for everyone and the best way to educate children with SEN (Ainscow, 2013; Deppeler, 2012).

Policy Initiatives

To guide the practice of inclusive education in the country, the Ghana Government recently developed a policy to guide its operation (Ministry of Education, 2015). Another initiative taken by the Government of Ghana was to pass a disability law (Act 715), which made provisions for inclusive education (Republic of Ghana, 2006). Notwithstanding this, the Special Education Division of the Ghana Education Service (GES) also developed a policy on special education in 2005 based on the key policy objectives of the Education Strategic Plan - 2003 (Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, 2003). The special education policy seeks to address the challenges of marginalisation, segregation, and inequality that have constituted barriers to inclusion of persons with disabilities into mainstream activities.

The follow up to these initiatives by the education authorities was the initial national support programmes including series of workshops for teachers, supervisors including the blind instructors as well as courses in sign language (Deku & Mensah 2004). The Ministry of Education also adopted a 'trainer-the-trainer approach' whereby teachers who received the initial training were required to train other teachers in inclusive education approaches. A resource team of eight resource teachers was set up to provide subsequent training for resource teachers appointed and new teachers in the districts where the initial inclusive programme began. Again, more resource teachers were employed and posted to the district education offices. For example,

in 1999, there were only 65 resource teachers, in 2000 the number increased by 12.3% and in 2001, the Ghana Education service recorded 40% increase (Deku & Mensah 2004). It is noteworthy that a number of UNESCO Resource Pack for teachers on inclusive education was printed and distributed to teachers in four regions. This set the stage for the implementation of the pilot schools in 2003. From the initial 35 inclusive schools in 10 districts that began on a pilot basis, by the close of 2011 the number of pilot inclusive schools in the country increased to 529 in 34 districts (Ministry of Education, 2015). Since 2012, UNICEF in collaboration with The Ministry of Education implemented inclusive education in 14 additional districts. All the 2,493 schools in these districts are practising inclusive education. As a result of this, currently there are 3,022 inclusive schools in 48 out of the 216 districts in Ghana.

In Ghana, five types of inclusive programmes exist. These are:

- i. Units for children with intellectual disability within regular education complexes.
- ii. Integrated educational Programme for children with low vision.
- iii. Hostel Support, Units for the blind in schools for the deaf
- iv. Inclusive schools with special resource teacher support and
- v. Inclusive schools without resource teacher support.

Despite the tremendous effort the country has put in the implementation of inclusive education there are many challenges on the national front. The implementation has a far reaching implication for personnel preparation, curriculum, pedagogy, learning environments, funding, and management.

Literature Review

Research suggests that, given the necessary legislation and resources, teachers play a pivotal role in the effective implementation of inclusion (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2011; Sapon-Shevin, 1996; Banerji & Daily, 1995). It is therefore important to study teachers' views on inclusive schools. Davern, et al, (1997), in support of this idea, claimed that 'clear distinctions between comprehensive and coherent inclusive practices and partial fragmented efforts must be made. According to these authors, many initiatives that are implemented under the guise of inclusion are based on "faulty conceptions of ability and disability and outmoded special education practices." (p. 31). From this perspective, it is imperative to make a critical appraisal of the inclusive programme in Ghana.

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) opined that teachers' perceptions are important to successful implementations of inclusive education. Furthermore, Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi and Shelton (2004) pointed out that one of the important conditions needed for successful inclusion of children with SEN is the positive perspective of school staff members who work with these children. On the other hand, the negative perspective of these professionals could be the main factor that impedes the process of inclusion of children with SEN in the regular classrooms.

Many studies have been done on inclusion. Reviews of these studies have highlighted child outcomes, classroom practice variables, teachers and family belief systems, social and educational policy implications (Pearce 2009; Odom & Diamond 1998; Buysse & Bailey 1993; Lamorey & Bricker 1993). Similarly, much of the professional literature on inclusion has focused on the importance of the beliefs and attitudes of both special and regular education teachers (Vidovich & Lombard 1998; Wigle & Wicox 1997) and on recommended practices that are seen as essential to making inclusion work (Blenk & Fine, 1995). The elements of teacher

preparation, the curriculum and the physical environments therefore have the potential to impact significantly on the implementation of the inclusive education programme in Ghana. Although these studies stressed the importance of investigating teachers' perceptions, few studies have explored teachers' perspectives on the curriculum, the physical environment and teacher preparation in Ghana.

In recent years, it appears that the desire to measure and improve the quality of inclusive education practices has been impeded by the need to provide a common understanding of what is meant by inclusive education. Although the practice of inclusive education is known to be broad, it however depends on the perspective of the individual (Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007). The purpose of this study therefore, is to attempt to provide an understanding of the perspectives of teachers on the curriculum, the physical environment and teachers' preparation for inclusive education in Ghana.

Research Questions

1. What is the perception of teachers regarding the inclusive education curriculum, physical environment and pre-service teacher preparation?
2. What is the difference between male and female teachers' perception about inclusive education in terms of the curriculum, physical environment and pre-service teacher preparation?
3. How do teachers' age, qualification, and teaching experience influence the way they perceive the inclusive education curriculum, physical environment and pre-service teacher preparation?

Methodology

A survey design comprising 120 teachers selected from 35 inclusive schools constituted the respondents. The population of the teachers in the schools was 550. Purposive sampling and simple random sampling were used to select the male and the female respondents respectively. The purposive sampling was used because the number of males in the sampled schools were few, therefore the researchers decided to purposively include all the males in the sample. Twenty nine respondents representing 24.2% were males while the majority 91 representing 75.8% were females.

Instrument

The data collection instrument was a questionnaire developed by the researchers. The instrument was finalised after it was scrutinised for clarity, relevance of terminology and concepts by a team of special education experts in the University of Cape Coast. The instrument was piloted in three schools using 30 teachers. The internal consistency of the instrument yielded Cronbach's' Alpha of .87.

The questionnaire was in three sections A, B and C. Section A was concerned with information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents while section B consisted of the variables such as teachers' perception of inclusive schools, physical characteristics of the schools, curriculum and pre-service teacher preparation. The participants were asked to rate these variables in terms of adequacy of their preparation, appropriateness of the curriculum, whether

the environment was satisfactory, and their own perceived competency of teaching in inclusive schools. In section C the teachers were requested to indicate their responses on a 4-point Likert type scale ranging from Strongly Agree 4, Agree 3, Disagree 2 and Strongly Disagree 1, which measured the overall views on the variables.

Procedure for Data Collection

Four research assistants who were knowledgeable in special education were trained to collect the data from the selected schools. In each school, permission was sought from the school administration and informed consent of the participants obtained. The selected teachers were contacted in their classrooms in their various schools. The distributed questionnaires were collected after one week. All the respondents returned the questionnaires.

Data Analysis

The completed questionnaires were serially numbered and coded. Different statistical techniques for data analysis were used. Frequencies and percentages were employed to analyse the data for the demographic characteristics of the respondents and research question 1. In addition, the independent t-test and the chi-square test were used to analyse the data for research questions 2 and 3 respectively.

Results

Table 1 presents the analysis of the results of the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Table 1 show that out of the 120 respondents 29 (24.2%) were males and 91 (75.8%) were females. Gender disparity has been highly skewed in favour of females. This is because all the schools visited had females as the majority. Perhaps the preponderance of female participants in the schools was as a result of female teachers refusing postings to rural areas than their male counterparts. The probable reason is that female teachers tend to seek placement in schools located in the urban and semi urban settlements, and also to be with their spouses who are located in towns and cities where these schools are located.

Results indicated that 49(40%) participant were aged between 25-30 years, 19 (14.2%) were between 31-35 years, 7 (5.8%) fell between 36-40 years, 16 (13.3%) and those above 46 years were 31 (25.8%). The results indicate that there were a range of ages representing the teachers in the inclusive schools.

Teaching experience of the participants was also of interest to the researchers. From the responses, more than half of the respondents had been teaching between 1-10 years. A good number, 53 (44.2%) however, had taught for more than 10 years indicating that they had been teaching for over a decade. It should be noted that teaching experience in this sense was considered within the context of teaching in either general education or inclusive education.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographics		Number	%
Gender	Male	29	24.2
	Female	91	75.8
	Total	120	100
Age	25-30	49	40.8
	31-35	19	14.2
	36-40	7	5.8
	41-46	16	13.3
	46+	31	25.8
	Total	120	100
	Teaching experience	1-5	36
	6-10	31	25.8
	11-15	8	6.7
	16-25	20	16.7
	21+	25	20.8
	Total	120	100
Qualification	Cert A 3-yr	65	54.2
	Diploma	25	20.8
	Degree in Education	23	19.2
	Degree in Special education	1	0.8
	Others	6	5.0
	Total	120	100

Table 1 also indicates the responses of teachers on their qualification. Teachers who had Certificate ‘A’ 3-year Postsecondary were 65 (54.2%), Diploma holders were 25 (20.8%), Degree in Education were 23 (19.2%), Degree in Special Education was only 1 (0.8%) while other teachers with other qualifications were 6 (5.0%). It is interesting to note that teachers who qualified as Special Educationist were limited in the pilot schools. This implies that the inclusive schools were denied of the expertise of these qualified specialist teachers. The reason could be that there is a high attrition rate as a result of teachers accepting more lucrative jobs.

Table 2 presents the results of the analysis of the teachers’ responses on their perception about the curriculum, the physical environment, their ability to teach all children in inclusive schools, their pre service training and the success of inclusive education in Ghana.

Table 2

Teachers' perception ratings of inclusive education

Items	Response	Number	%
How would you rate the type of curriculum used in inclusive schools?	Appropriate	28	23.3
	Not appropriate	92	76.7
What is the state of the physical environment for inclusive education?	Satisfactory	46	38.3
	Not satisfactory	74	61.7
How would you rate yourself in terms of teaching all children in inclusive schools?	Competent	54	45.0
	Not competent	66	55.0
How adequate is your pre-service preparation for inclusive education?	Adequate	49	40.8
	Not adequate	71	59.2
On the whole, how would you rate the success of inclusive education?	Successful	29	24.1
	Not successful	91	75.9

Table 2 reveals that the majority 92 (76.7%) of the teachers surveyed indicated that the curriculum used in the inclusive schools was not appropriate with, only 28 (23.3%) who viewed the curriculum as appropriate. Most of the teachers also rated the physical environment as not satisfactory 74 (61.7%), while 46 (38.3%) rated it as satisfactory. When the teachers were asked to rate themselves in terms of their competency in teaching all children in inclusive education 54 (45%) rated themselves as competent, while 66 (55%) rated themselves as not competent to teach in inclusive education setting. On the adequacy of their pre-service preparation, 49 (40.8%) said that the preparation was adequate whereas majority 71 (59.2%) said that it was not adequate. Table 2 further indicates that 29 (24.1%) of the teachers viewed the inclusive programme as successful while the majority 91 (75.9%) rated the programme as not successful.

Table 3 presents the results of the t-test showing the differences in perception between males and females teachers. The data presented in this table helps to answer research question 2. Results in Table 3 reveals that there were no significant differences between male and female teachers' perception (mean =28.2082, SD =2.81621); $t(118) = -.683, p > 0.05$; physical environment (mean = 17.0583, SD =5.84146); $t(118) = .890, p > 0.05$; pre-service training mean = 31.6333, SD = 5.28029); $t(118) = 1.611, p > 0.05$; and curriculum (mean = 23.5833, SD = 5.40243 $t(118) = .633, p > 0.05$). This means that both male and female teachers perceived the physical environment, the curriculum and the pre-service teacher preparation in the same perspective.

Table 3

Results of t-test showing differences in perception between males and females

		Number	Mean	Sd	T	df	sig
Perception	Male	29	27.8966	1.77974			
	Female	91	28.3077	3.07568			
	Total	120	28.2083	2.81621	-0.683	118	0.496
Physical	Male	29	16.2759	5.58631			
	Female	91	17.3077	5.92864			
	Total	120	17.0583	5.84146	0.890	118	0.410
Pre-service	Male	29	33.0000	3.61544			
	Female	91	31.1978	5.65729			
	Total	120	31.6333	5.28029	1.611	118	0.110
Curriculum	Male	29	24.1379	4.86771			
	Female	91	23.4066	5.57570			
	Total	120	23.5833	5.40243	0.633	118	0.528

p < 0.05 sig

Table 4 presents the results of the Chi-square test showing the relationship between teachers' perception and the variables. In Table 4 the results of the chi-square test revealed that significant differences were found in teachers' views on the curriculum, the physical environment and pre-service preparation. Teachers perception of the curriculum shows that teachers qualification $\chi^2 (60, N = 120) = 202.420, p < 0.05$; age, $\chi^2 (60, N = 120) = 97.599, p < 0.05$ and teaching experience, $\chi^2 (60, N=120) = p < 0.05$ were significant. The physical environment and qualification was not significant $\chi^2 (68, N = 120) = 99.067, p < 0.05$, implying that qualification influence teachers views on the physical environment. However, teachers' perception in terms of age, $\chi^2 (68, N=120) = 104.819, p < 0.05$ and teaching experience, $\chi^2 (68, N = 120) = 130.729, p < 0.05$ were significant.

Table 4 also shows how pre-service was perceived. It is clear from the results that qualification, $\chi^2 (64, N = 120) = 211.678, p < 0.05$; age, $\chi^2 (64, N = 120) = 107.733 p < 0.05$ and teaching experience, $\chi^2 (64, N = 120) = 124.092, p < 0.05$ were found to be significant. The implication is that there is a significant relationship between teachers' qualification, age, teaching experience and the curriculum, the physical environment and pre-service teacher preparation but no relationship was found between teachers' qualification and the physical environment. In other words. teachers' age, qualification, and teaching experience have influenced the perception of the curriculum, the physical environment and the pre-service teacher preparation.

Table 4

Chi-square test showing the relationship between teachers' perception and the variables

Variables	Respondents	Number	df	Chi-square	sig
Curriculum	Qualification	120	60	202.420	0.000
	Age	120	60	97.599	0.002
	Teaching exp	120	60	141.325	0.000
Physical Environ	Qualification	120	68	99.067	0.008
	Age	120	68	104.819	0.003
	Teaching exp	120	68	130.729	0.000
Pre- service	Qualification	120	64	211.678	0.000
	Age	120	64	107.733	0.001
	Teaching exp	120	64	124.092	0.000

p < 0.05 sig

Discussion

The study revealed that, 75% of the teachers rated the inclusive programme as not successful. The teachers also viewed the curriculum as not appropriate. In the case of the physical environment, the teachers perceived it as not satisfactory. The findings from this study evoke the debate as to whether placement of children with disabilities in inclusive schools offer the best option in Ghana and cast doubt on the capacity of the inclusive schools surveyed in Ghana to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Indeed, providing appropriate curriculum, attractive physical environment with good facilities and well-trained teachers in inclusive education is an integral part of the process of meeting the needs of individuals in an inclusive setting.

The perception of teachers on the curriculum did not support what UNESCO (2003) indicated, that the curriculum for inclusive schools must be flexible enough to meet the needs of all students. The results indicated that majority viewed the curriculum as not appropriate. Any curriculum for students with disabilities should include social skills and should be based on carefully and individually targeted behaviours (MacFarlane, 2007; Wood, 2006). Vanderpuye, Gyimah and Deku (2009) identified the lack of social skills training in the preparation of teachers in Ghana. Thus the teachers themselves lacked training on how to promote social skills training among children and therefore would not be able to adapt the curriculum in this direction. Adapting the curriculum is critical for the success of many students in the regular classroom as they will be required to employ positive social skills in various settings with different people in changing circumstances (MacFarlane, 2007). In Ghana, children with SEN participate in the same curriculum as regular children, and are all expected to write the Basic Education Certificate Examination conducted by the West African Examination Council. The situation as found in this study implied that adaptations to the curriculum were not made in order to make it more suitable for the children with SEN in the inclusive schools.

It is also noteworthy that the physical environment must be stimulating and attractive to allow for effective interactions of both teachers and students. Looking at the results, a good

number of teachers observed that the physical environment was not suitable for inclusive education. This finding is consistent with the observation made by Deku and Vanderpuye (2008). They observed that the physical environments are not contributing enough to enable classroom teachers to facilitate the education of children in general and the education of children with SEN, in particular. In Ghana, one cannot deny the fact that the general physical environments of many schools, especially those in the rural areas, leave much to be desired. The implication is that the promotion of good teaching and learning in such unattractive environments would be negated. Inclusive education is likely to succeed in welcoming and attractive environments. Researchers have argued that the physical conditions of the environment including teaching spaces, seating, furnishings, spatial density, privacy, noise and acoustics, climate and thermal control, air quality and windowless classrooms impinge on students' attitude to school, engagement, achievement and general wellbeing (Earthman, 2004; Higgins, Hall, Wall, Woolner, & McCaughey, 2005; Keep, 2002; Lackney & Jacobs, 2002). Being in a good physical environment is important for children with disabilities as well as all other children, as good school environments enhance positive identity formation (Agbenyega, 2008).

The study also found that there was no difference in perception between males and female teachers on the way they viewed the curriculum, the physical environment, and pre-service teacher preparation. Male and female teachers do not perceive the inclusive variables differently. This means that gender does not influence teachers' perception of the inclusive programme. This result is not surprising because, in Ghana the preparation of teachers for the general education programme is the same for all the sexes.

In Table 2, it was realised that 55% of the teachers perceived themselves as not competent in teaching all children in inclusive schools and again 59.2% also indicated that their preparation was not adequate. This is supported by the results in Table 4, which showed the relationship between qualification, $\chi^2 (64, N = 120) = 211.678, p < 0.05$; age, $\chi^2 (64, N = 120) = 107.733, p < 0.05$ and teaching experience, $\chi^2 (64, N = 120) = 124.092, p < 0.05$ and pre-service preparation as significant. In other words, significant relationships were found among these variables. This significant relationship showed that teachers perceived their training as not adequate for teaching in an inclusive school. This finding affirms that of Burns and Ysseldyke (2009) and Cook, Cameron, and Tankersley, (2007). They found that teachers felt that their training inadequately prepared them to teach diverse learners. Avoke and Avoke (2004) noted that teacher preparation in Ghana especially in the universities were focused on methodologies and assessment practices that were not tailored to the needs of children with disabilities in inclusive schools. According to them, the methodologies at the initial training programmes continue to be directed towards the practice of regular schools and not inclusive schools. Caseley-Hayford (2002) and Vanderpuye, Gyimah and Deku, (2009) also noted that the course content in the Colleges of Education in Ghana were not adequate to prepare teachers for the task of inclusive education. Furthermore, Vanderpuye et al., (2009) found that, in-service training programmes were almost non-existent and even when available; areas covered were inadequate, leaving teachers not fully equipped in teaching children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. For this reason, teachers do not see themselves as adequately prepared for the implementation of inclusive education. Quality in-service and pre-service teacher training is critical for the successful implementation of inclusive education. To develop quality teachers to foster successful inclusive education, the content of teacher training programmes for inclusion must include locally proven workable approaches and practices (Forlin, 2013; Sharma et al., 2013).

It should be noted that almost all the teachers in the present study had obtained Teachers Certificate “A” Diplomas and Degrees in Education. This means that they are qualified teachers; the pertinent issue is if these qualified teachers perceive themselves as inadequately prepared to teach in inclusive classrooms then siding with Smith and Tyler, (2011), we are of the opinion that it is high time Universities and Colleges of education that train teachers improve upon their curriculum. A laudable suggestion made by Forlin (2013; 2012) and Sharma et al., (2013) is that, these teacher educators themselves must be properly equipped to handle the requirements of effective teacher training for inclusion.

Conclusions

As reported by the teachers, the school environment, the curriculum and the general teacher preparation cannot be said to promote a sense of community for inclusion. When taken as a whole, inclusive education as implemented by the Ghana Education Service would not lead to appropriate educational outcomes particularly for students with disabilities. Thus, the finding that teachers viewed the inclusive programme as not successful highlights the general concerns raised about inclusive education and lends support to the conclusion that, students in inclusive classrooms may continue to face the likelihood of not being provided with appropriate and effective instruction (Baker & Zigmond, 1990; Kuyini & Desai, 2008; Schumm & Vaughn, 1995; Westwood & Graham, 2003). Accumulated evidence underscores the significant need to prepare educators in special knowledge, skills and competencies for working effectively with children with SEN in inclusive environments. Of critical importance for teacher preparation is to provide a comprehensive competency - based curriculum that is based on researches that have shown practices that are effective for inclusive education delivery. The issues identified in this study regarding teacher competency, curriculum and the physical environments are particularly critical for successful inclusion. It is important that the school environment, the curriculum, and teacher preparation must be looked at and be improved upon.

Recommendations

One of the major barriers to achieve inclusion is pre-service preparation of teachers. Research reveals that lack of professional training in inclusive techniques and practices for general education teachers are the main barriers (Schumm & Vaughn, 1995). The implication is that at the pre-service training level, all the prospective teachers should be exposed to at least a compulsory component on inclusive and special education. An additional comprehensive special education course along with a practical component should be introduced in the Colleges of Education and the Universities to widen teacher trainees’ teaching perspectives in order to equip them with the skills to enable them appropriately teach children with special needs. Any teacher preparation programme must address appropriate accommodations in the curriculum, instructional activities, and the modification of materials and methods. In-service training programmes should form part of a grand agenda for all teachers to develop the essential competencies that are vital for teaching children with special needs in the regular schools. Schools should adapt the physical environment to help students with disabilities access their regular classes, for example, installing elevators in the schools makes it easy for students with physical disabilities and other students to move between floors. Finally, inclusive education must be guided by clear policies that are geared towards addressing the shortcomings in the

implementation of the inclusive agenda in Ghana. Since the current study was based on data collected through a self-reported instrument, we recommend that the study should be replicated using observational studies to determine the effectiveness of teachers in inclusive schools.

Limitations

The study was limited to only teachers from Ghana who are teaching in the initial pilot inclusive schools. Hence, generalisation cannot be made about the perceptions of teachers from other newly created inclusive schools. Another limitation was the respondents' understanding of some key concepts particularly as it relates to special education that were noted in the survey questionnaires. This limitation was compounded by the participants selecting any response and therefore may not have provided a true reflection of the situation in the schools.

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