

Ghanaian teachers' implementation of Inclusive Education in primary schools: Conceptions and Misconceptions

This study aimed at assessing Ghanaian teachers' willingness or unwillingness to include children with disabilities in their classrooms. Using a qualitative research approach, 10 teachers and principals were interviewed and observed in the classrooms. Respondents' answers were categorized and put into themes and well analysed. The results showed that teachers and principals' willingness and unwillingness to include children with disabilities in their classrooms is a result of personal and school related factors. Factors identified as personal factors are related to teachers' behaviour, competencies and skills as well as experiences, while school related factors include school administration and organisation as well as availability of resources. It is recommended that more training of teachers and adequate support with resources and material will enhance teachers' ability to manage diverse needs of students to increase learning outcomes.

Keywords: implementation of inclusion, willingness, unwillingness, conceptions, misconceptions

Introduction

In the U.S. and other OECD countries inclusion has been strongly advocated because of presumed social benefits ((OECD, 2011a). Flexibility, positive teacher attitudes, consistency and good observation are seen amongst others to create diverse and enriching learning environment for children with special needs (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2010). Various researchers support the argument that creating a diverse social group would enhance the social competence of children with disabilities by providing them with more sophisticated social models while providing the non-disabled children with opportunities to interact with peers with disabilities. This is likely to reduce the stigma associated with disabilities (Cole et al, 1991; Coleman, 1985; Stainback & Stainback, 1996,). Strong indication of the social benefits of the inclusive school is evidenced in the improvement found in the personal adjustment and self-esteem of included children with disabilities (Fryxell & Kennedy, 1995). Such an improvement is contingent upon interactions between peers in the classrooms (Faubert, 2012).

In the United States the special education system is very comprehensive as a result of a prescriptive law governing special education (Kritzer, 2014). For example, when a child needs special assistance and is not available at the child's local community the district will provide transportation for the child to the school with that service. The process of qualifying for special education services for a child with learning problems is very smooth and all resources available (Kritzer, 2014). There is a very uniform process in which struggling students in the United States are identified as qualifying for special education

services. After identification of the needs of the child a consistent special education with similar services is implemented no matter where the child attends school (urban or rural, rich or poor).

In Canada, which is possibly currently the most inclusive country in the world for persons with disabilities (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2007), critical factors for successful inclusion practices are in evidence. Despite education policies varying from one province to another, three critical factors that achieve inclusion-based schools and classes have been identified (Porter, 1997):

1. Leadership in the policy, administration and implementation of the inclusive proposal;
2. Establishing a new role for the special needs teacher as a resource expert who offers his/her support to the school, and
3. Strategies for an inclusive class teacher, such as personal development strategies, teams of colleagues to overcome problems, and strategies for inclusive-related methodologies, e.g., multilevel teaching. In Canada, IEPs called “personalised intervention programmes” to determine the academic needs of SEN students.

The work of Booth and Ainscow (2002, 2011) is popular in the United Kingdom (UK). Their work is known for the six indices of inclusion, which they identify. These include welcoming differences, value-based resources for inclusive schools, removing challenges and barriers to learning, mobilizing resources for support, and a valued-based resource for improvement in schools. All children should be included in inclusive implementation, to encourage a participatory approach (Booth, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan, Shaw & Ainscow, 2000, 2002, and 2011). These findings compare the concept of IE in its philosophical terms and practice from eight countries. In their research elaboration is made from the given indices used to come to a consensus of index for inclusion.

Scandinavian countries such as Norway, Denmark and Sweden have embraced the philosophy of inclusion and have made great strides in its implementation. Sweden, for example, has a national school policy that allows the placement of places deaf and severely mentally retarded students in special schools as official policy, whereas national policies in Norway assume all children will be integrated based on teacher willingness to accept a child, the availability of resources, and family social status. Once placement has been determined, most countries use IEP plans (variously called “targeted action programmes” [Scandinavian countries]. Denmark is notable for its five principles followed when making placement decisions in respect of special educational needs (SEN) students: proximity, minimum intervention, integration, effectiveness and motivation.

In Italy targeted action programmes is called “didactic programming”. Also, policies in Italy assume that the child’s integration be based on teachers’ acceptance and in developing IEPs, a positive strengths-based approach and needs-based assessments are generally used to determine appropriate curriculum accommodations and adaptations. Italians didactic programming is congruent with the accepted pedagogical practices of IE. Effective pedagogical

practices such as nurturing the well being of all pupils, also a teacher should be available and accessible to his or her pupils is in accordance with the international trend of providing quality education for all learners within regular schooling.

South Africa is not left behind, the country has also committed itself to the global clarion call for realising this IE goal. Many studies in that country have documented the inclusion of pupils with disabilities, by addressing how their needs are met, the experiences of both teachers and schoolchildren, and what inclusion encompasses. Notable studies include those of Jairaj (1997) and Engelbrecht, Green, Swart & Muthukrishna (2001). These researchers focused on pupils' and instructors' experiences of integration/inclusion. Other researchers such as (Arbeiter & Hartley, 2002) and (Ntombela, 2003) focused on the issue of addressing or not addressing the special education needs and teachers' behavior. Most of these studies concluded that teacher training and teacher readiness to implantation of IE is of paramount importance. And that barriers and challenges to learning could be solved through teacher knowledge of IE and their readiness as well as preparedness to implement the concept in practice (Ntombela, 2003; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Engelbrecht et al., 2001).

In South African educational circles, much has been done for the training of teachers to include all kinds of pupils including those with disabilities. Sethosa (2001) agrees with Artiles and Kosleksi (2010) that children with mild disabilities are sensitive to both biological and environmental triggers and that school environment should be child friendly to create a congenial learning conditions for all children. According to UNICEF (2013, 1993) large number of mild intellectual disabilities are found in many developing countries and South Africa is not an exception and teachers lack of knowledge to the plight of disabilities and also inclusion will compound the already existing learning difficulties of learning disabilities.

Sethosa's findings confirm those of Bouwer and Du Toit (2010) who found that in-service training for teachers is of utmost importance for inclusive school practices. Sethosa (2001), Donohue & Bornman (2014) largely attribute all pupils' learning difficulties to teachers' lack of knowledge and skills in IE. Solution to some of these learning problems proposed by Sethosa include the establishment of certain services, such as support teams. Pather (2013) notes that, even though, Southern Africa adopts strong inclusive policy where they are developing inclusive education models these are essentially focused on the integration of children with disabilities and not considering the wider aspects of educational needs such as poverty or other conditions hindering successful implementation of inclusion. Donohue & Bornman (2014) point out funding as a significant barrier to the effective implementation of inclusive education in South Africa.

In Ghana the implementation of inclusion is well recognized and policies enacted however, there are inconsistencies with regards to practices, teachers 'varying attitudes to include children with learning problems as well as skewed allocation of resources/services visa-avis rural and urban areas (Agbenyega, & Sharma, 2014; Agbenyega & Deku, 2011; Gyimah, 2010; Hayford, 2013).

1 Instruction within many of the Ghanaian Education System is not tailored to
2 the needs of children with disabilities.

3 One of the major concerns of educators and researchers with regard to the
4 inclusion process is how instruction is tailored to the needs of children with
5 disabilities in the context of the ordinary classroom. Mitchell and CSER (2000)
6 note that inclusion is everything that goes on day to day in the classrooms and
7 the playgrounds. Thus, teachers' interventionist attitudes ought to transcend
8 the school organisational level to the classroom level, to create enabling
9 classroom environments. This will allow for different forms of information
10 about students to be sought, making accommodations to layout of classrooms,
11 conducting informal assessments to design interventions, and making use of
12 effective teaching strategies and practices to meet the needs of the children
13 with disabilities and those without disabilities (Jordan, Kircaali-Iftar &
14 Diamond, 1993; Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Mecklenberg, & Graden, 1984).

15 The classroom level component of inclusion implementation, therefore is
16 most critical as it plays an indispensable role in defining how instruction will
17 be delivered, and the chances of successful learning outcomes for children with
18 disabilities. The need to consider the significance of instruction in the process
19 of inclusion is made more relevant in the knowledge that teachers are required
20 to make instructional adaptations to meet the individual education programme
21 requirements of included children. Inclusion, therefore, will not be meaningful
22 unless steps are taken to provide effective instruction in inclusive classrooms.
23 Since one of the central requisites for the success of inclusion in the classroom
24 is the use of effective teaching behaviours /practices, this review will further
25 look at what constitutes effective teaching practices.

26 The notion of effective teaching is premised on the assumption that
27 certain teaching behaviours are more likely than others to lead to desired
28 students' outcomes (Mitchell & CSER, 2000). Significant research in the
29 general education literature (known as the "effective instruction literature")
30 supports the idea that certain teaching behaviours are linked to student
31 achievement (Brophy & Good, 1986; Rosenshine, 1983; Rosenshine &
32 Stevens, 1986; Walberg, 1986). Effective teaching behaviours are therefore
33 teacher behaviours that have been shown to exert positive effect on student
34 achievement (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2010).

35 There are challenges in the implementation of inclusive education in
36 Ghana (Agbenyega, 2006; Deppeler, Moss, & Agbenyega, 2008; Kuyini &
37 Desai, 2007, 2008). These challenges are mirrored in teachers' unwillingness
38 to include children with disabilities in the regular classrooms, despite Ghana's
39 ratification of their commitment to international human rights declaration and
40 Education for All (EFA) goals.

41 In Ghana meeting the needs of children with disabilities in the school and
42 general society is still an issue, even though there have been some progress
43 (Kuyini & Desai, 2008).

44 Agbenyega & Deku (2011) saw teachers' unwillingness to include
45 children with disabilities as a factor of insufficient knowledge of inclusion and
46 the inability to manage diverse needs, as well as the lack of ability to adapt
47 curriculum and instructional strategies to facilitate learning outcomes (Scruggs
48 & Mastropieri, 1996).

Many studies have found challenges in relation to teacher related issues such as teacher competencies and skills, as well as the schools' organisation of inclusive programs. More recent studies, (Agbenyega & Deku, 2011, Gyimah, 2010, Hayford, 2013; Kuyini & Desai, 2007) have echoed these earlier findings, including the fact that many children with disabilities do not always benefit from the inclusive education; there is lack of specialised teaching skills, negative teacher attitudes, and lack of knowledge of inclusion on the part of the school authorities. Kuyini & Desai (2006, 2008) recognised the lack of regular in-service training sessions for teachers, and rigidity of school programs, which hindered creative initiatives for inclusive programs, including lack of support from school principals.

The lack of support from principals in the schools (Kuyini & Desai, 2006, 2009) draws attention to the type of attitudes these principals had toward the inclusion of students with special needs into regular schools. The general lack of knowledge of inclusion on the part of school authorities (principals) and the lack of regular in-service training sessions for teachers (Agbenyega & Deku, 2011; Ofori-Addo, et al., 1999) put a question mark on the level of educators' knowledge of the inclusion education initiative.

These identified issues raise the question of whether or not schools in Ghana are conceptualising and implementing inclusive education in line with the basic philosophical ideas, as well as research underpinning the concept. In other words, are schools restructured, re-oriented and re-organised to create school norms /climates conducive for inclusive education? And are teachers implementing inclusion in any meaningful way to foster academic and social inclusion?

Statement of the problem

In a nutshell, the problem to be investigated is related to inclusive education practices, teachers' attitudes toward including children with disabilities, teachers' knowledge of inclusive education practices and principals' expectations (Gadagbui, 2008). The education system is seen as a problem for the following reasons; negative attitudes of teachers involving child labelling, unacceptability and undermining child's ability, lack of support, using the same methods of teaching as well as poor knowledge of teachers (Avoke & Avoke, 2004; Kuyini & Desai, 2006, 2009; Ocloo & Subbey, 2008; Yarboi-Tetteh, 2008; Gadagbui, 2008). Agbenyega & Deku (2011) and other researchers and concerned professionals found both school practices and implementation of Inclusive Education to be ineffective.

Research aims

1. To examine how Ghanaian teachers implement Inclusive Education.
2. To examine why teachers implement Inclusive Education the way they do.

Rationale for the study

The rationale for this study is two -fold: A personal motivation based on the frustrations, doubts and complains about teachers` knowledge and attitudes toward inclusion reported by colleagues and friends with children with disabilities in primary schools. Parents of these children with disabilities have expressed challenges relating to the schools` organisation of inclusive programmes and other “unprofessional” inclusive teaching practices.

Method

Philosophical base and participants

Interpretive/Constructivist paradigm. The paradigm relevant to this article is the constructivist or the interpretive theory. This is concerned with members of a research groups` understanding of a given situation, including how these members define the situation (Schwandt, 1994). Interpretive Theory is different from positivist theory through the foundation of a second- order theory or the theory of members, and so dependent of people. So objective reality and meanings devoid of members is not what constructivist paradigm is about, rather knowledge and meaning are subjects of interpretation. Meanings of reality are shared among members (Schwandt, 1994). Essential features are addressed collectively in interpretive research bringing about collective meanings and understanding, the implication being that truth is not absolute but relative in a contextual setting. Relevant to this study is the fact that collected original sentences will be rephrased, allowing for more numerous possibilities of meaning (Kvale, 1997).

Subjective meanings characterize the interpretive paradigm. The key matter is how individuals within a group or community understand and make sense of societal events concerning them. The comprehension of these social events is the interplay of individual subjectivity, objectivity and intersubjective knowledge. Establishing inter-subjectivity entails the process of knowing other peoples` minds. Philosophers have always struggled with the issue of knowing other minds (Mertens, 1998). Interpretive socially constructed concepts will therefore mean different things to different people.

The current study involves interactions between different social groups with divergent views. Thus, the ontology employed in this study takes a holistic and systems perspective, which sees everything and everyone as unique yet interconnected.

Constructivist epistemology argues that knowledge is not discovered. For them knowledge is constructed, and that constructed knowledge constitutes the world reality to be addressed by the researcher. In this view, different branches of institutions or organizations shape their knowledge based on time and space. Doctors for example shape their own medical knowledge based on the values they deem fit, and all scientists including social scientists as institutions do the same by following certain values and criteria. Here, both the research and interview questions chosen by the researcher convey a set of values about IE,

1 and these became the subject of engagement with the study participants. In
 2 other words, the questions elicited subjectively constructed information or
 3 knowledge from the participants.

4 The basic assumption is social construction of knowledge in this paradigm
 5 and that knowledge is socially constructed. When constructing knowledge in a
 6 research all stakeholders are involved and it is the duty of the researcher to take
 7 into cognizance and to grasp with the complex processes from the point of
 8 view of those taking part in the research (Mertens, 1998). In this study, as a
 9 researcher practitioner I was much closer to the situation (interview process)
 10 and could, in effect, interpret life through the experiences of my respondents.
 11 In fact, the scientific process is really an engagement between me, as the
 12 researcher, and the participants. This study will address the social status of
 13 pupils including those with mental and intellectual challenges, teachers'
 14 attitudes towards, and knowledge of, inclusion based on their own meaning,
 15 feeling intention and motivation, at a much deeper level of understanding. This
 16 ontology takes a holistic and systems perspective, which sees everything and
 17 everyone as interconnected. Constructivists hold that the inquirer and the
 18 inquired influence one another, and it is for this reason that they opt for a more
 19 personal collection of data which is interactive in nature (Mertens, 1998). For
 20 this paradigm, the values that influence the researcher are made explicit to the
 21 researched individual.

22 Related to the current study is the fact that interpretations are iterative or
 23 circular, in that understanding the parts will lead to a better interpretation of the
 24 whole, while an interpretation of the whole will allow an interpretation of the
 25 parts. Thus, interpretations will take the form of a dialogue between the
 26 researcher and the participants – a spiral rather than a linear arrangement.
 27 Researchers within this paradigm suggest that old understandings are
 28 transformed in the light of new understandings, and that this occurs against the
 29 backdrop of certain assumptions, beliefs and practices of which the researcher
 30 and participants are never fully aware (Mertens, 1998).

31 To gauge the perceptions of the participants, researchers employing this
 32 paradigm use qualitative methods such as observations, interviews and
 33 document reviews (Mertens, 1998; Robson, 2002). Mertens (1998, p. 14)
 34 argues: "These methods are applied in correspondence with the assumption
 35 about the formation of reality in the social world".

36 Reality construction is done in a way that involves interactions, especially
 37 between the researcher and participants in the research process since there is
 38 the possibility of multiple realities in any finding as realities tend to revolve
 39 and change as the study progresses (Mertens, 1998). It is argued that the
 40 interpretive paradigm is predominantly qualitative and positivism is
 41 quantitative and both are useful. Researchers argue that there is no right
 42 paradigm, and categorising and separation of paradigms into groups is not
 43 necessary (Niglas, 2001; 2007). What is most important is the appropriateness
 44 and suitability of paradigms in research (Niglas, 2007). This study is broad in
 45 its focus and it is process oriented. The approach followed entails a close
 46 involvement with those involved in the research process, and as a researcher it
 47 is crucial to consider the total context of respondents' lives and the conditions

in which data were gathered. In a broader sense, the context of any study includes the economic, political and cultural framework in which it unfolds.

The empirical data for this study was collected during fieldwork in primary schools from Bole and Koforidua in from 10 teachers and principals. Five of the participants were male and five were female to enhance gender balance.

Data collection

Observation and interviews were used as data collection methods. Within each school teachers were randomly selected. Thereafter a snowball method was employed with the aim of getting diverse information about their narrations. data (). Semi-structured interviews was chosen in the context of this study as it afforded some flexibility to both the researcher and the interviewee (Freebody, 2003; Castro et al., 2010). Interview guide lends a degree of structure and organization to the process. To reduce the possibility of it being unrestricted, an audio tape recorder was used to record interviews (Castro et al., 2010).

Over about five months from June 2016, teachers were observed in classrooms and meetings and all conversations recorded and transcribed. Finally, all interviews were recorded with the ten teachers to obtain additional information. A tape-recorded interview allowed for more accuracy in data collection and allowed the researcher to be more attentive to the respondents (Patton, 1990). Each tape-recorded interview was transcribed verbatim to ensure a greater degree of accuracy during analysis.

Data analysis

The coding method of Strauss (1987) was used, by repeatedly looking over the collected data to discover patterns and categories, focusing on the two research questions. Through the interactive process of coding final themes and subthemes were arrived at which included (i) teachers' willingness and unwillingness of implementing inclusion, (ii) inclusive conceptions and misconceptions, (iii) inclusive school practices and (iv) challenges to implementing inclusion. These themes formed the major findings presented in this article and were examined qualitatively.

Results and discussion

Overview

By way of review, a summary of the respondents' background information is presented in Tables 1 and 2 below and followed by analysis of data.

1 *Table 1. Principals` Background Information*

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender	Female =5	50%
	Male =5	50%
School location	Rural =5	50%
	Urban =5	50%
Training	Some training 7	70%
	No training 3	30%
Experience	Some Experience= 6	60%
	No Experience= 4	40%

2

3 *Table 2. Teachers` Background Information*

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender	Female =6	60 %
	Male =4	40%
Class-size	Small Classes =45	45.9 %
	Large Classes = 53	54.1 %
Training in	Some training 4	40.0%
	No training 6	60.0%
Experience with Students with Disabilities	Some Experience 4	40.0%
	No experience 60	60.0%

4

5 Based on teachers` and principals` background data in Table 1 and Table 2
6 interviews were conducted to answer the following questions:

7

- 8 1: How do Ghanaian teachers implement Inclusive Education?
9 2: Why do Ghanaian teachers implement Inclusive Education the way
10 they do?

11

12 The researcher presented this qualitative results by identifying some
13 themes related to implementation of Inclusive Education regarding teachers`
14 willingness or unwillingness to include children with disabilities in their
15 classrooms. Responses were transcribed and subsequently formal analysis done
16 by categorising the data into;

17

- 18 (i) Teachers` willingness and unwillingness of implementing
19 inclusion
20 (ii) inclusive conceptions and misconceptions,
21 (iii) inclusive school practices
22 (iv) challenges to implementing inclusion.

23

24 **Theme 1: Teachers willingness or unwillingness towards inclusion.**

25

26 Generally, and according to responses from the interview teachers show
27 positive attitudes towards including children with disabilities in ordinary
28 classrooms, despite the fact that there are variations in attitudes when it comes

to practice. Teachers who are willing to include children with disabilities in their classes adapt curriculum and instructional strategies to facilitate learning outcomes of all children. The concern expressed by teachers could further be explained in how teachers expressed their views.

Teachers are less willing to include children with mobility and those with behavioural problems

The concept or idea of inclusion is embraced by many teachers in Ghana, however teachers are less willing to include students with mobility and physical disabilities in ordinary classrooms, especially those with vision and hearing problems. Children who cannot hear conversation, those using sign language and students having speech disorder are among those teachers will have less in the ordinary classroom.

A principal also a teacher commented:

There is a lot of things to do in the classroom..... but it is extra work to help students needing help to move.....physical aggression and truancy are disturbing factors. We send out children whose behaviours are uncontrollable. Quick students are given extra work.....and some of them are used to help the weaker students” An interview with a principal who is also a teacher revealed that students who relate very well with each other are placed together. (A principal also a teacher from a primary school in Koforidua)

Some principals mentioned that schools located in areas with a lot of social and financial problems have negative impact on the children, and such children develop behaviours detrimental to effective inclusive practices. Rural schools and schools dominated with children from poor communities pose a lot of challenge to teachers as said by one principal. To include students with behavioural problems teachers in this category use recreational activities such as football and netball. This study finds the inclusion of children with emotional and behavioural problems to be a matter of common sense whereby teachers ensure safety first and arrange the environment for physical and emotional comfort.

Teachers are willing to include children with social problems

Most teachers demonstrated positive attitudes towards students who are withdrawn and basically shy. In this category of social concern issue are also students who are verbally aggressive and also do not follow school rules.

Asked teachers about children with social disabilities an eager teacher had this to say:

Some of these students are very good, but they are shy to show what they know until you make them talk.....and they have it all.....others talk a lot and can be verbally violent on others...but they are also good and can be corrected. It is not difficult to include these children in the ordinary

classroom because we can deal with what they are struggling withyou can tell them to keep quiet or give others the chance to express themselves. (A teacher from primary school in Bole)

However, most teachers agreed with the fact that children with social problems especially those who are shy and quiet all the time exclude themselves from others, at the same time do what they are expected to do in the class. Teachers in this category practice adaptive instruction and multi-level teaching practices to include all students.

Teachers mentioned of slow learners and students who may be one or two years behind their peers in academics in the same class. Most teachers in the study did not find any problems with including slow learners in ordinary classrooms.

A teacher asserted:

Slow learners are not the worst in class ..you just have to be patient with them and give them the time they need.... Even though their performance generally may affect the school academic records on the average having one or two of them in a class is not bad. (A teacher from primary school in Bole)

Most teachers are of the view that there are benefits to have fast learners in the class, as these children help the weak ones. In, this regard there is social interaction among the students which promotes learning.

Teachers` attitudes towards inclusion seemed to be underpinned by their understanding of inclusion. It is the finding of this study that positive attitude is the most important quality for teachers working with children with disabilities, which in some cases may outweigh the negative attitudes of highly trained specialists unable to interact with children with disabilities.

Theme 2: Conceptions and misconceptions of inclusion

Teachers in the study area have understood Inclusive Education differently. The responses of teachers are given under the following sub-themes.

Educating all students. Some teachers have understood inclusion as provision of teaching to all students irrespective of children`s abilities or disabilities.

A teacher had this to say:

All children should participate in classroom activities and those who need help should be provided with the support that they need....in my class for example I try to place students in class such that the stronger ones can help the weak ones.....all children with disabilities should be included in ordinary classroom. That the concept of inclusion is holistic and broad and that it involves participation including those with disabilities in a supportive learning environment. (A teacher from a primary school in Koforidua)

Accommodating students with disabilities. On the other hand some teachers were with the opinion that inclusion is the accommodation of disabled students in a form of integration. A teacher related his understanding of inclusion as follows:

It is an educational system where children with disabilities are mixed with normal students. Merging children with disabilities and regular students with the right support will benefit the school administration and that all types of students are supported. (A teacher from primary school in Bole)

In the individual and group interviews this research tried to explore teachers and principal's conception of inclusion. The interview data showed that involving others in collaboration and reducing prejudice was seen by most teachers and principals as a good way to implement inclusion. A teacher also a principal remarked:

The best way of approach when it comes to dealing with difficult situations and also planning as well as carrying out activities is to talk to colleges on the staff who are more knowledgeable in this field..... In this business you don't stand alone.....we help each other our major problem is the parents of many of the students who are giving us tough time....we don't see these parents or guardians of these students.....at any rate we have to help these students not to be discriminated against. (Teachers and a principal from primary school in Koforidua)

It is clear from the views of teachers and a principals that inclusion is equated to giving children equal opportunity to learn. It is not surprising by these teachers that in a society where disability is seen as a stigma, teachers take up the responsibility of removing all forms of prejudices from the school playing down the deep misconceptions on inclusion.

Theme 3: Inclusive School Practice

Implementation of Inclusive Education warrants the use of effective inclusive school practices. The conceptions and misconceptions of inclusion has dictated teachers in this study use of various methods of instruction. To satisfy teachers understanding of inclusion recreational activities, adaptive instruction and multilevel teaching were practiced. Most teachers said that students play together during break time.

A teacher explained;

It is nice to see these students play togetherthe extroverts are the ones taking initiatives and all others follow except with very mobility problem students who need help to move....however, they also play with the very withdrawn ones" Another teacher added; "During playtime all children are acknowledged including those with disabilities, poor or rich.....slow

1 learners can be good at physical activities, such as football and handball
2 (A teacher from primary school in Bole)

3
4 Teachers mentioned a lot of teaching strategies to explain the way they
5 teach in the classrooms. A teacher tried to express herself this way;

6
7 We use our limited resources in a form of teaching material such as visual,
8 auditory or tactile cues... always have Plan A and B and we allow children
9 to work in small groups.....we feel that in this way students learn
10 better.....in some cases we use less adaptive methods because of lack of
11 availability of teaching aids. In special cases we discuss problems with
12 principals and other teachers for moral and professional support. We
13 always have plans. (A teacher from a primary school in Koforidua)

14
15 To implement inclusion children needs at all levels are supposed to be met said
16 one teacher. Elaborating further on multi-level teaching the teacher had this to
17 say:

18
19 We are not able to give the extra time needed to students who are
20 struggling in the class.....sometimes we try to use the good children to
21 help the struggling ones but it seems that both get frustrated “Our school
22 is a performing school.....the very good students should really be
23 motivated by giving them more challenging lessons (A principal from
24 primary school in Koforidua)

25
26 Teachers who are positive and knowledgeable seem consistence in the
27 discharge of their duties and have plan A and B, plan B being a back-up plan to
28 create room or space to calm down unforeseen events. They seem to focus on
29 what children can do and not the opposite. On the other hand, teachers who are
30 less positive were employing less of multilevel instruction practices and using
31 more of the same curriculum, use of reinforcement and class rules
32 maintenance. Perhaps, the researcher’s presence in the classroom as an
33 observer influenced the whole teaching and learning process in the class.

34 35 **Theme 4: Challenges of implementing inclusion**

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37 Though most participants interviewed in the study showed positive
38 attitudes towards students with disabilities in ordinary classrooms, teachers and
39 principals expressed concern about the challenges they face in the
40 implementation of Inclusive Education in the study area. The challenges
41 include inadequate knowledge, over-crowded classes, presence of student with
42 disability in the class, lack of experience and training, lack of material and
43 resources.

44 A teacher added “ There is lack of communication among stakeholders and
45 low parental involvement.....no one tells you anything” Challenges mentioned
46 are summarised in the sub-themes as follows:

47

Inadequate knowledge. Majority of the teachers and principals interviewed in the various schools expressed the fact that they had inadequate knowledge (both theory and practice) in the field of inclusive education. This inadequacy clearly reflected in the inclusion concept and their organisational and teaching practices. A teacher complained;

I understand this concept on the surface and not deep enough to tackle students with learning problems and other issuesI'm doing all my best to manage the difficult class I have.....there is no sort of any training from anywhere, no material to read to help us understand this concept...I mean even with our little knowledge we need to practice. (A teacher from a primary school in Bole)

Another teacher added;

How can we implement Inclusive Education with little knowledge of the concept coupled with skill deficit.....it is not a small programme we need to understand the concept of inclusion from its inception and application.....these big concepts are often imposed on us without any information from the authorities.....who benefits? What about the smart students?I think we are not doing anybody any justice be it slow learners, mentally retarded or the very smart children.....the average ones are Ok. (A teacher from a primary school in Bole)

Many teachers asserted that inclusion should not only be seen in its theoretical form, it must be practiced and that experts in the field should be in the classrooms to implement inclusion for teachers to see how it is practiced.

Misconception. Teachers and principals expressed the view that inclusive education is confusing and as such its implementation also reflects their understanding of the concept.

Participants expressed their confusion in many forms as a principal tried to explain;

As I told you inclusive education is not a small terminology and there are many opinions about this concept..... our school is not organised for the handicap, our teachers are not trained in special education to handle the mental retarded students....I really pity these students because they are losing most. (A principal from a primary school in Koforidua)

Many teachers are confused about the philosophical underpinnings of inclusion resulting in generic teaching practices and at its best a trial and error procedures to handle children with learning problems. Teachers feel that they are either teaching children with special needs in regular classrooms or may be responding to the diverse needs of all children, and feel that, perhaps special needs students should attend special schools and all others attend regular schools to benefit both.

Over-crowded classes and availability of disabilities in the class.

Participants in the study expressed the view that large class-size and the presence of students with disabilities is a challenge in the effective implementation of Inclusive Education in schools generally and classrooms in particular. Class size range between 40 and 55 as observed.

A teacher explained;

It is really difficult to manage large class-size and you can't attend to all the students at the same time and at all times. The class is full and you can't even walk around to see who are coping and who need help...in my class for example there are 45 students with diverse needs and I know that I'm not able to meet everybody's needs in the class and is not good feelings for me. In some classes there are over 50 students. (A teacher from a primary school in Koforidua)

With the presence of students with disabilities in a class of over 50 students teachers may seem overwhelmed in their attempt to implement inclusion.

Lack of experience and training. Teachers mentioned in the interviews that to be able to implement inclusive education they need training in the field of inclusion. A teacher noted:

I for one lack experience in this field and I have insufficient knowledge too because I am not trained in special education... I think staff should be properly trained in inclusive education and school authorities organise practical sessions on its implementation for teachers to gain practical knowledge of the programme. Teachers need appropriate skills in the field of inclusion...few of my staff have only a semester course in special education at the training college many years backbut there should be a follow up in the form of in-service training for the staff. (A principal also a teacher from a primary school in Koforidua)

A teacher concluded by making this remark; "Government budget support in purchasing educational\teaching aids, materials and organising workshops on inclusion...also full dissemination of information to schools is crucial to the implementation of inclusion"

Generally principals and most teachers explained that contextual issues and difficulties regarding general agreement on inclusion and this coupled with unwanted behaviours of students is a challenge. These challenges are constrained by government budget lapses and the provision of resources crucial to effective implementation of inclusion.

Discussion

This study examined the willingness or unwillingness of primary school teacher's implementation of inclusion in Ghana. To assess this situation teachers and principals were requested to answer questions as to how they implement inclusion and why they implement inclusion the way they do.

Quotations by participants cited in this study are the best representations of common emerging themes of all respondents. Teachers and principals were generally positive towards inclusion, but there was some variability. While teachers view inclusive education as a challenge, they emerge as accepting of children with disabilities into their regular classrooms. It is argued that mere accommodation of children with disabilities in the general classrooms is not enough but rather provision of high-quality instruction for all and creation of congenial and flexible learning environment to enhance school performance for all students.

About positive attitude of some teachers this study is in line with the literature review which sees positive attitude of teachers to lead to a better implementation of Inclusive Education (Kuyini & Desai, 2007, 2008; Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2007). As regards teacher knowledge, this study has found teacher knowledge of inclusion to be minimal and in this regard supports the literature on poor teacher knowledge to have adverse impact on successful implementation of inclusion (Avoke & Avoke, 2004; Yarboi-Tetteh, 2008; Gadagbui, 2008). Teacher knowledge has long been recognised as a significant contributor to the quality of education and the role of knowledge of inclusion has also been found to be central to the success of inclusion (Ackah, 2010; Kuyini & Mnagope, 2011; De Bettencourt, 1999; Van Reusen, et al., 1997; Reynolds, 2010).

These findings are consistent with research studies which point to a generally positive view held by teachers in mainstream settings regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities (Agbenyega, 2008; Avramidis et al., 2000; Jenkinson & Gow, 1989; Kuester, 2000; McLeskey & Waldron, 2006; Snyder, 1999). It is believed that in other areas where teachers are willing to have students with disabilities into the classrooms are often dependent on the provision of adequate support services. Teachers in the interviews relate their unwillingness toward inclusion to lack of resources in a form of specialized instructional materials as well as design of architecturally-friendly school buildings, in an over-crowded, but under-resourced classrooms and a limited number of professionals with expertise in inclusion.

Ghanaian teachers' view and the results of the interviews support the findings of (Leung & Mak, 2010, Kuyini & Mangope, 2011) who argued that helping children to move is an extra strain on the teacher. They also found that most teachers had negative attitudes including children with hearing and vision problems. Contrary to this study is the findings of (Charema, 2010) where teachers were more positive to include students with hearing problems, the fact being that there was a school with all facilities for them.

It was understood from this study that participants who had members of their family with a disability and are also teachers appeared to be aware of the

1 importance of including children with disabilities into the regular classroom.
 2 However, it seemed that their understanding was mainly related to the extreme
 3 pressures on parents having children with disabilities at home, and this could
 4 be related to experience with children with disabilities.

5 Further, the responses of participants revealed that previous experience
 6 with including children with disabilities into regular settings appears to better
 7 prepare teachers for inclusion. Such teachers have interacted with many people
 8 who have children with disabilities and some of the parents of these children
 9 are friends, and are well able to interact positively with all children including
 10 those with disabilities. Whereas teachers with no experience would show panic
 11 and be anxious of having a child with disability in their class, It could be
 12 argued that teachers' previous experience with children with disabilities makes
 13 them show understanding. Similar to these findings are the studies of (Morris
 14 2013; Kuyini, Ishawr, Desai, & Sharma 2018, 2009; Ocloo & Subbey, 2008;
 15 Yarboi-Tetteh, 2008; Gadagbui, 2008). Agbenyega & Deku (2011) who also
 16 found that teachers with more experience held more favourable attitudes than
 17 those with less experience. Such teachers, it is argued capitalise on the child's
 18 strengths focusing on what the child can do and not what the child can't
 19 contribute. Bargerhuff, M. E., & Wheatley, M. (2004), noted that positive
 20 attitudes of teachers and others towards children with disabilities has good
 21 impact on the implementation of inclusion.

22 It is argued in the Ghanaian situation that negative attitude is influenced by
 23 teachers' insufficient knowledge of inclusion and lack of skills to deal with
 24 children with disabilities. It was expected from this study that principals'
 25 expectation of teachers would have impact on implementation of inclusive
 26 education by mitigating negative views and increasing teachers' effort, this was
 27 not realised in the findings as a result of the fact that some of the principals
 28 were also involved in teaching. There is a lot of misconception about inclusive
 29 education perhaps as a result of teachers' inadequate knowledge of the
 30 inclusive process or unclear government inclusive policy documents or both as
 31 found in this study.

32 This finding is similar to other studies which found the education system
 33 in Ghana and inclusive policy documents ambiguous and confusing (Avodke &
 34 Avoke, 2004; Kuyini & Desai, 2006, 2009; Ocloo & Subbey, 2008; Yarboi-
 35 Tetteh, 2008; Agbenyega & Deku, 2011), argued that the educational system
 36 and inclusive policies are dualistic with good policies on one side and poor
 37 implementation on the other side and also rigid curriculum. Teachers'
 38 conceptions and misconceptions are related to knowledge as well as the
 39 experiences of inclusion they have, reflecting clearly in their methods of
 40 teaching.

41 Even though teachers were much concerned and making a lot of effort in
 42 their implementation of inclusion, it was found from this study that teachers
 43 were not varying their teaching methods to the fullest. Some teachers were
 44 found using the same curriculum and also using recreational activities to
 45 include all students, while few teachers were making use of instructional
 46 adaptations including the use of cooperative learning / peer-tutoring strategies
 47 in inclusive classrooms.

Findings on conceptions and misconceptions reflected in how teachers have understood the concept of inclusive education differently and have therefore practiced it differently in the various schools. Some participants especially most of the general school teachers have resisted inclusion claiming that it does not benefit anybody. Such a notion and as the literature review suggested, general school teachers find it hard to accommodate children with disabilities in the regular classrooms. It is evident that in a situation of problems in the classrooms teachers will easily attribute their difficulties to lack of time and resources to meet the needs of all children including those with disabilities. On the other side of the coin teachers who feel that inclusion benefits all interact effectively and are more positive to inclusion. These teachers are more consistent keeping track of all children to give the support they need to flourish.

Teachers' views and understanding of the concept of inclusive education ranges from separation to accommodation and integration denoting clearly the conceptions and misconceptions of inclusion. These conflicts are such that official inclusive policy and actual school environment operate differently, and this is likely to impose difficulties on implementing inclusion. It could be argued that teacher quality does not separate children with disabilities from children without disabilities rather a good teacher is a good leader of the class well prepared and visionary who sees the needs of the student and is able to direct teachings to meet the needs of all children. If school heads can encourage teachers to instill consistency in implementing inclusion, foster positive teacher attitude, be flexible in teaching and provision of visual, auditory or tactile cues teachers' implementation of inclusion will improve.

Conclusion

This study set out to assess Ghanaian Primary School teachers' willingness or unwillingness to include students with disabilities in the regular classrooms. The findings showed that teachers in Ghanaian primary schools are making effort to implement inclusive education, but they have less positive attitudes to IE. Also, contextual variables such as limited knowledge of inclusion, unclear policy guidelines, low parental involvement, school organisational issues in a form of professional support are the major concerns of the teachers. Thus, teachers' unwillingness to include students with disabilities in the classroom is both personal and school-related factors. The findings of this study are related to professional development in the education system, which suggests that successful inclusion hinges on developing and sustaining positive attitudes, increasing educator knowledge of inclusion through professional development. Since studies indicate that changes in teachers and principals behavior and teaching practices could improve quality of education and the support of students with disabilities as well as learning differences (Roberts, Park, Hye, Brown, Steven & Cook, 2011). In the case of Ghana an integrated approach of resource allocation and educational development based on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) a research-based framework can improve quality of education.

The limitation of this study is that the scope is largely limited to the situation in Ghana. There is therefore the need to extend new insights regarding effective inclusive school practices, with respect to factors including policies, legislations, district support and research to practice translation, which can vary widely from region to region and from country to country.

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