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Inclusive School Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusion of Children with Special Educational Needs in Ghanaian Schools

Emmanuel Tawiah Aboagye

Assistant Test Administration Secretary, Department of Test Administration
National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations, Ministry of Education, Ghana

Abstract:

Teachers' attitudes toward children with special educational needs could be based on the teachers' years of experience, understanding of the characteristics of these children and the kind of training the teachers have received. It is assumed that teachers who are employed in inclusive schools should have more positive attitudes toward children with special educational needs and the inclusion policy. The main objective of the study was to assess inclusive school teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of children with special educational needs in the schools which are implementing inclusive policy. In all, 243 teachers were involved in the study. The teachers were selected from inclusive schools from four Regions in Ghana. Their attitudes were analysed using mean and standard deviations. The research confirms that most teachers in these inclusive schools have positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs but there are some teachers who not support the inclusion policy. The study recommends the need to increase sensitization programme to promote the inclusive education in Ghana.

Keywords: Teachers, attitude, inclusion, children, special educational needs

1. Introduction

Inclusion of special educational needs project started in September 2003 in Ghana. The implementation started in ten districts within three regions. These were Greater Accra; Central; and Eastern. It involved a total of thirty-five schools in the target region and districts. Teachers' attitude is said to be one of the most important predictors of successfully including students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Many reviews indicate that one of the most important ingredients in implementing inclusion successfully is the will to make it succeed. The attitude of the teachers as well as the whole school is a significant and contributing factor as to whether the implementation of inclusion policy will be successful or not. Norwich (1994) supports this idea by arguing that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are critical in ensuring the success of inclusive practices since teachers' acceptance of the policy of inclusion is likely to affect their commitment to implementing it. Teachers' attitudes are also closely linked with professional satisfaction and professional perspectives. Professional satisfaction of teachers could be a very important factor in encouraging teachers in inclusion setting.

Avramidis & Norwich (2002) have argued that although the inclusive education movement is part of a broad human rights agenda, many educators have serious reservations about supporting the widespread placement of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. D'Alonzo & Ledon (1992) found that many educators believe that students with disabilities should be isolated and educated in separate environments. Padelidiadou (1992) cited in Padelidiadou & Lampropoulou (1995) indicates that a study conducted by the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki has shown that teachers (n=140) have a negative attitude towards inclusive education. The research conducted by Avramidis & Norwich (2002) has indicated that the majority of the teachers who were not currently participating in inclusive programmes, had strong, negative feelings about inclusion and felt that decision-makers were out of touch with classroom realities. In the United Arab Emirates, studies conducted by Gaad (2001) found that a set of beliefs and values behind the assumption, by some teachers that the best place for a student with disability is in a 'center for the preparation and rehabilitation of the handicapped'.

So it is assumed that teachers working in inclusive schools should have positive attitudes towards inclusion policy than their counterparts in non-inclusion school.

Those who support inclusion believe that the child always should begin in the regular environment and be removed only when appropriate services cannot be provided in the regular classroom. Much research shows that the inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the ordinary school has yielded positive result. The research conducted by Villa et al. (1996) noted that teacher commitment often shows at the end of the implementation cycle, after the teachers have gained mastery of the professional expertise needed to implement inclusive programmes. The studies conducted by Avramidis, Bayliss & Norwich (2000) indicated that the teachers who had been implementing inclusive programmes for some years held significantly more positive attitudes than the rest of the sample who had apparently little or no such experience.

The researcher therefore concludes at this point that there are mixed attitudes when it comes to inclusive education policy. It all boils down to the commitment of the policy makers and the implementers. The researcher believes that successful implementation of any inclusive policy, mostly depends on the management teams, who are committed to the policy and supportive towards the staff, helping them to develop new skills and confidence to handle the children with special needs in an inclusive setting. There are several factors that teachers have identified that affect the success of inclusion, including class size, inadequate resources, the extent to which all students would benefit from inclusion and lack of adequate teacher preparation.

1.1. *The Development of Inclusive Education Policy in Ghana*

The Salamanca Statement (1994) stressed the importance of inclusive education, calling on government to give the highest policy and budgetary priority to enable them to include all children regardless of individual difference or difficulties" and "to adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education". In the light of the global developments and as a participant at the Salamanca and Dakar Conferences, the Ministry of Education in Ghana has adopted an Inclusive Education approach. Under the policy, the major goal is to increase access to and participation in education and training; and the related policy objective of providing equitable educational opportunities has the indicative target of integrating all children with non-severe special needs in mainstream by 2015.

The Ghana Government has endorsed inclusive Education Policy drafted jointly by Ghana Education Service (2003) and several stakeholders involved in the provision of education in Ghana. The overarching goal of Ghana's Inclusive Education (IE) policy is to redefine and recast the delivery and management of educational services to respond to the diverse need of all learners within the frame work of Universal Design for Learning and Child Friendly School Concept. Policy development has become necessary due to the Salamanca Statement, which focus on the basis for inclusion education (UNESCO, 1994). This was proclaimed by delegates representing ninety-two (92) governments and 25 international organisation in June 1994 at the world conference on Special Needs Education. Paragraph two (2) is the key statement of belief and comprises five clauses:

Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning.

- Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs.
- Education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs.
- Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools, which should accommodate them within a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs.
- Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective measures of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

The first clause is in line with the constitution of Ghana, which indicates that all persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities, and with a view to achieving the full realisation of that right. Basic education shall be free, compulsory and available to all. As far as secondary education goes, including technical and vocational education, this should be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular, by the aggressive introduction of free education (the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, pg. 27, clause 25).

Clause 2 is derived from the idea of uniqueness of individual and therefore is about individual differences. It is about children's characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs which are unique to every child and therefore there should be recognition and acceptance.

Clause 3 in my opinion is there to alert policy makers and implementers to acknowledge and respect the differences in children which includes age, gender (girls and boys), ethnicity, language, culture, disability, diseases including HIV and the like of, and that schools should be designed to accommodate all these children. This implies that all mainstream inclusive schools should be designed to be user friendly for all disability children.

The fourth clause is about access to regular schools which is perceived as the most effective form of provision for pupils with special educational needs. Therefore 'the inclusion of children with disabilities, as an effective way of providing educational services for all, needs to be brought to the attention of as many teachers as possible' Alghazo&Gaad (2004: 94).

The final clause confirms the importance and the idea that the most effective way of creating an inclusive society is to have more regular schools with inclusive orientation. Inclusive schools make sure that organisation, curriculum options and teaching strategies are valued within the school and the community as a whole.

It is in this vein that Ghana's actions in promoting inclusive approaches in education aims at forging a holistic approach to education which ensures that the concerns of marginalised and excluded groups are incorporated in all education activities, and cooperating to reduce wasteful repetition and fragmentation and making education accessible to and functional for all learners with special educational needs (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 2015)

Clough (1998) also argues that inclusive education is thus about responding to diversity, it is about listening to unfamiliar voices, being open and empowering all members of society. It is about learning to live with one another. The question of listening is a particularly important issue when applied to individuals and groups who have their voice marginalised. This I think includes the people who live in abject poverty, disabled people and all other people with special educational needs. What Clough argued is in line with the final clause.

Ghana inclusion and mainstreaming policy indicates that 'the current trend in special education provision is towards normalization- educating the disabled in the mainstream. The mild to the moderately impaired are to be educated in the mainstream. The profoundly disabled will continue to be educated in special schools. This group is encouraged to interact with their non-disabled peers in educational and social setting' (Ghana Education Service, 2003).

The researcher can infer from the Ghana's inclusive policy document that Ghana is not embarking on full inclusion. Full inclusion, Delta (1993) means that all students, regardless of any handicapping condition or severity will be in a regular classroom/programme full time. I think that the decision to implement universal and compulsory basic education system cannot be successful if inclusion in Ghana is not defined to include the poor and the special needs children who are on the street and begging for money because their parents cannot afford to send them to school. It is detailed in Ghana Constitution and Educational Policy that there is free and compulsory universal basic education but still some children do not go to school.

1.2. Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education

Attitude is a social entity that encompasses way of thinking, ways of feeling and experiences that are developed in specific interdependent cultural contexts (Vlachou 1997, p. 53). Attitude is defined by Daft (2003) as a cognitive and affective evaluation that predisposes a person to act in a certain way. Daft noted that attitudes determine how people observe the work environment, interact with others, and behave on the job. Explaining further, he noted that a person who has the attitude "I love my work; it's challenging and fun" will probably tackle work-related problems cheerfully, while those who come to work with the attitude "I hate my job" are not likely to exhibit much enthusiasm or commitment to solving problems. It is therefore very important that employees such as teachers are supported in developing positive attitudes towards their work. Avramidis & Norwich (2002) argued that teachers' attitudes are being influenced by a number of factors, which are, in many ways, interrelated. Avramidis & Norwich reviewed many factors/variables and have summarized to include Gender, Age-teaching experience, Grade level taught, Experience of contact, Training, Teachers' beliefs, Teachers' socio-political views and Educational Environmental-related Variable (Avramidis&Norwich, 2002, pgs. 129-147). The researcher hopes to consider all these variables in this research. The study conducted by Clough & Lindsay (1991) indicated that the majority of the teachers surveyed ranked the needs of children (child-related variables) with emotional and behavioural difficulties as being most difficult to meet, followed by children with learning difficulties. While this might be true in some developed countries it might not be necessarily true in developing countries like Ghana. Avramidis&Norwich (2002) noted in their literature review that the greatest differences of attitude between countries were about the integration of children with sensory impairments (visual and hearing) and the lowest were for the integration of children with moderate learning difficulties.

On the teacher-related variables, Bacon & Schultz, (1991) indicate that 'the attitudes of teachers are most important variables affecting the relationships with students with disabilities' and their inclusion in regular classroom. There are a host of research concerning teacher- related variables or characteristics that seem to determine the relationship between those characteristics and attitudes towards special needs children. The researcher is of the opinion that any effective inclusion policy should consider all these variables to see how best some could be altered to enhance implementation.

2. Method

The design for this research is survey; the researcher used questionnaires to gather the responses from the teachers. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyse the data collected. The ethical issues and the method regarding the data collection were carefully considered. Anonymity of the respondents was assured.

2.1. Population and Sample

In all there were 243 teachers involved in the study. These teachers were selected from inclusive schools from four selected Regions in Ghana. The reason for selecting only inclusive school's teachers is that the inclusive policy has been implemented by the Ministry of Education, Ghana for some years now. It is considered as one of the critical area in Ghana Education System and one of the pillars of Education 2030 strategic plan. These teachers in inclusive schools, by now should have positive attitudes toward children with special educational needs.

2.2. Data Collection tool and Procedure

For the purpose of this research Likert scale questions were used. The questionnaire was piloted before the final distribution was done. The questionnaire meant for piloting was given three schools under Accra Metropolitan Education office. The schools selected were inclusive Primary and Junior High public schools. This was meant to check for clarity of the questions, whether the questionnaire covers the areas supposed to cover and also to check for face validation the reliability of the questions. The test for consistency of the questionnaire items was done by using Cronbach alpha.

Cronbach Coefficient Alpha	
Variables	Alpha
Raw	0.757791
Standardized	0.772700

Table 1: Cronbach Coefficient

Source: Field data, 2016

2.3. Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered was analyzed using Scientific Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer software. Mean and standard deviation of responses of questions from the attitude scale were used to analyse the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. The independent variables used include Inclusion experience/Years of experience of teachers, age of the teachers, gender of the teachers and the region in which they teach.

Demographic respondents' (teachers) profile information is presented in table 2.

Gender Distribution of Teachers		
	Frequency	Percent
Male	95	39.1
Female	148	60.9
Total	243	100.0

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Teachers

Source: Field Data, 2016

Table 2 shows the gender distribution of teachers. Ninety-five (95) of the respondents representing 39.1 per cent were male and 148, representing 60.9 per cent were female.

Table 3 represents the age category of teachers involved in the study. The data collected revealed that 52(21.4 %) belongs to age category of 20 to 30 years. Seventy-five (75) of the respondents representing 30.9 per cent belong to age category of 31 to 40 years. Majority of the teachers belonging to age category 41 to 50 represented 82(33.7%). The respondent belonging to the age 51 years and above represented 34(14%) of the total respondents of the teachers.

Age Category of Teachers		
Years	Number of Respondents	Percentage
20 – 30	52	21.4
31 – 40	75	30.9
41 – 50	82	33.7
51 or older	34	14.0
Total	243	100.00

Table 3: Age Category of Teachers

Source: Field Data, 2016

Regarding the years of experience as teachers with the Ghana Education Service, table 3 indicates that teachers with 5 years or less experience represent 47(19.3 %) of the respondents. Teachers with 6 to 10 years' experience constitutes 47(19.3 %) of the respondents and teachers with 11 to 15 years' experience form 50(20.6) of the respondents.

Years of Experience as Teachers		
Years	Number of Respondents	Percentage
5 years or less	47	19.3
6 – 10	47	19.3
11 – 15	50	20.6
16 – 20	42	17.3
21 – 25	20	8.2
26 – 30	22	9.1
31 or more	15	6.2
Total	243	100.00

Table 4: Years of Experience as Teachers with Ghana Education Service (GES)

Source: Field Data, 2016

4. Results

The respondents were asked to answer series of questions to ascertain the level of agreement held with the implementation of the inclusive education policies. Table 5 contains series of questions which were intended to elicit the teachers' attitudes to inclusion policies and philosophy. The researcher thought that if the teachers responded positively about the statement such as 'I am interested in reading about inclusive education', 'I feel very enthusiastic at the thought of working with pupils with special educational needs', 'I think it is a waste of resources to cater for pupils with special educational needs', This would imply a positive attitudes towards the policy as suggested by Algahzo & Gaad (2004) in the research on whether teachers agree with the philosophy of inclusion. Scores 1 to 5 were assigned to 8 items which form the attitude scale. Response to item indicating positive statement were scored with 5 indicating strongly agree, 4 equals to agree, 3 equals neutral, 2 disagree, 1 representing strongly disagree and the vice versa for response items indicating negative items. The higher the mean score, the more positive the attitude and the lower the mean score, the less positive the attitude.

Inclusive Education				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I am interested in reading about inclusive education	243	4.06	.983	.063
I feel very enthusiastic at the thought of working with pupils with special educational needs.	243	3.42	1.341	.086
The curriculum content I teach can be adjusted for children with special educational needs	243	3.85	1.245	.080
Pupils with special educational needs should be included in the mainstream schools	243	4.06	.983	.063
I think it is not a waste of resources to cater for pupils with special educational needs	243	3.38	.998	.064
Pupils with special needs should be socially integrated into the mainstream school.	243	3.72	1.274	.082
Pupils with special educational needs can attain a positive self-concept in the regular classroom atmosphere	243	3.53	1.318	.085
Children with special educational needs learn better when they are in the mainstream school	243	3.03	1.408	.090
Average of Averages/Weighted Averages		3.63		

Table 5: Teacher's Attitudes towards Inclusion Policy
Source: Field Data, 2016

Table 5 shows that majority of the respondents are interested in reading about inclusive education and thinks that pupils with special education needs should be included in the mainstream schools. These statements affirmed by respondents have the highest mean of 4.06 and a standard deviation of standard deviation of 0.983. This was followed by the responses on the statement the curriculum content I teach can be adjusted for children with special educational needs. This is represented by mean of 3.85 and a standard deviation of 1.245. A mean of 3.38 shows that respondents also agree that it not a waste of resources to cater for pupils with special educational needs. Some respondents with a mean of 3.03 and a standard deviation of 1.408 agree with that children with special educational needs learn better when they are in the mainstream school. On the average, respondents have positive attitudes towards the inclusion policy and children with special education needs with a mean of 3.63.

Table 5 reveals teachers' attitude towards inclusion policy and children with special needs. An overwhelming number of the respondents showed interest in reading about inclusion education as well as believe that pupils with special educational needs should be included in the mainstream school. These have the highest mean of 4.06 and a standard deviation of 0.983. A mean of 3.72 with a standard deviation of 1.274 indicates that teachers are of the view that pupils with special needs should be integrated into the mainstream school. Most of the respondents agreed that pupils with special educational needs can attain a positive self-concept in the regular classroom atmosphere. This is evident in Table 5, with a mean of 3.54 and 1.318 as a standard deviation. Furthermore, when teachers were asked if they feel very enthusiastic at the thought of working with pupils with special education, a mean of 3.42 and 1.341 as standard deviation confirms that they agree. Most of the respondents also think that it is not a waste of resources to cater for pupils with special educational needs. A mean of 3.38 and a standard deviation of 0.998 supports this. Majority of the teachers agreed to the fact that children with special educational needs learn better when they are in the mainstream school. This is represented by a mean of 3.03 and 1.408 as standard deviation. On the average, a mean of 3.62 indicates that teachers have very positive attitude towards the inclusion policy and children with special educational needs.

4.1. Gender Difference in Teachers' Attitudes toward Children with Special Educational Needs

The test of significance (t-test) was used to determine whether there were significant differences between male and female attitudes towards children with special educational needs. The results of the t-test showed significant differences based on gender. There was significant difference in attitude on the statement "I feel very enthusiastic at the thought of working with pupils with special educational needs" The difference between male and female teachers were significant at ($\chi^2_{Calc} = 6.0613, P - value = 0.0483, DF = 2$)

Gender	Opinion			
	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	Total
Male	76	13	7	96
Female	96	32	19	147
Total	172	45	26	243

Table 6: Male and Female Attitudes towards Children with Special Educational Needs
Source: Field Data, 2016

At the 5% level of significance, there is a relationship between gender and opinion (i.e. Gender and Opinion are not independent) ($\chi^2_{Calc} = 6.0613, P - value = 0.0483, DF = 2$). This means that whether the respondents feel enthusiastic at the thought of working with special educational needs is dependent on gender.

4.2. Age Difference in Teachers' Attitudes towards Children with Special Educational Needs

The t-test was used to determine whether there were significant differences between age of teachers and attitudes toward children with special educational needs. The results of the t-test showed no significant difference based on age. There was no significant difference in attitude on the statement "I feel very enthusiastic at the thought of working with pupils with special educational needs. The difference between ages 20-40 and 41 and over teachers were not significant at ($\chi^2_{Calc} = 2.7146, P - value = 0.2574, DF = 2$)

Age	Opinion			Total
	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	
20-40 years	85	25	17	127
Over 40 years	87	20	9	116
Total	172	45	26	243

Table 7: Age of Teachers and Attitudes towards Children with Special Educational Needs

At the 5% level of significance, there is no relationship between age and opinion (i.e. Age and Opinion are independent) ($\chi^2_{Calc} = 2.7146, P - value = 0.2574, DF = 2$) the ages have been collapsed for easy analyses and observation.

5. Discussion

The research revealed that most teachers are interested in knowing about inclusion. This shows a positive signal as teacher must have interest in reading about the inclusion policy and understanding before its implementation. Teachers to some extent have positive attitudes towards inclusion policy and children with special educational needs but others do not feel positive having special educational needs children in inclusive schools. The study revealed that some teachers do not feel enthusiastic at the thought working with pupils with special educational, this is not very encouraging and this confirms Avramidis & Norwich (2002) assertion that although the inclusive education movement is part of a broad human rights agenda, many educators have serious reservations about supporting the widespread placement of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. This is not too good for the policy because these teachers are all in inclusive schools and are expected to know more about inclusive education and the importance of the inclusive policy in Ghana and the world as a whole. Teachers' acceptance of the policy plays very important role in its implementation and therefore their attitude is very critical in the implementation of the policy. As Norwich (1994) indicated, that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are critical in ensuring the success of inclusive practices since teachers' acceptance of the policy of inclusion is likely to affect their commitment to implementing it.

The study revealed that majority of the teachers are of the opinion that pupils with special educational needs should be included in the mainstream schools but on the more serious note, the teachers think that it is a waste of resources to cater for people with special educational needs. The results revealed that huge number of teachers who took part in the study share the same view.

On the gender differences in teachers' attitudes towards children with special educational needs. There was clear significant difference in attitude of the statement that 'the teachers feel enthusiastic at the thought of working with pupil with special educational needs'. The difference between male and female was significant. This issue needs to be addressed. This indicated that teachers interest in working with children with special educational needs is dependent on gender but all these teachers are in inclusive schools. Teachers interest could be promoted irrespective on the gender differences.

On the age differences in teachers and attitudes towards children with special educational needs, the research revealed no significant differences in attitude on the statement that the teachers feel very enthusiastic at the thought of working with pupils with special educational needs.

6. Conclusion

The study has revealed that Ghana has gone a long way in the implementation of the inclusion policy. The researcher is of the opinion that teachers in the inclusion mainstream schools are expected to have more positive attitudes than teachers in non-inclusive schools. These teachers are already with the children in the inclusive schools and are expected to have more positive attitudes toward these children.

The research confirms that most teachers in these inclusive schools have positive attitudes towards children with special educational needs. This is consistent with the research conducted by Avramidis, Bayliss & Norwich (2000), that with the professional who had been implementing inclusive programmes for some years held significantly more positive attitudes than the rest of the sample who had apparently little or no such experience.

The study still indicates that there are some teachers who do not support the inclusion. There is the need to increase the sensitization programme to promote the inclusive education in Ghana. This will help more teachers to embrace the inclusion policy. These teachers need to learn more on the importance of the policy. There should be more

training to help the teachers to understand the importance of inclusion and therefore appreciate its implementation. The study revealed that there are positive signs that some teachers have more positive attitudes toward inclusion but there is still more to be done to help the teachers develop more positive attitudes toward.

It is therefore recommended that the inclusion policy implementers should still intensify the education on inclusion. There is the need for more sensitization on the inclusion policy. More teachers in the inclusive schools think that Special Educational Needs children learn better when they are in the mainstream school. Though teachers in inclusive schools tend to be less positive to this statement compared to other statements but some teachers in inclusive schools think the children can learn better. This calls for more work to be done to enhance the teachers in inclusive schools' acceptance of children with special educational needs in inclusive setting.

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