PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS IN REGULAR SCHOOLS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN TANO SOUTH DISTRICT, BRONG AHAFO REGION, GHANA

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the extent of awareness of teachers on the concept of inclusive education, the perception teachers have on inclusive education and the perceived effects of inclusive education in the public basic schools towards the implementation of inclusive education in the Tano South District in Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. Three research questions were formulated. Survey approach was adopted using questionnaire as the main data collection instrument. Forty (40) head teachers and one hundred and eighty five (185) teachers were selected from forty (40) basic schools for the study. In all, a total of two hundred and twenty two (225) teachers and head teachers were randomly selected across the district and questionnaires administered to them. The questionnaires were semi-structured. Data was captured and analyzed. The results presented in tables showed that most teachers and head teachers in Tano South District were aware of the concept of inclusive education but have no understanding on how the concept works. Teachers and head teachers alike disagreed inclusion of special needs children in regular classroom increase the child's circle of friends, limit the child's level of education or make a child well-adjusted socially among others. However, when the concept is implemented it would come with some benefits in the area of increase in the child's circle of friends, limits the child's level of education and also make a child well-adjusted socially. The study recommended that; teachers in regular basic schools in Tano South District be educated on the issues of the new policy of inclusive education concept. This, Ghana education service can achieve by organizing workshops at the district levels as well as regional levels for basic level teachers. Conscious effort should be made to make it visible and available to the schools in the district. Necessary equipment and instructional resources should be put in place for successful implementation of inclusive education*

KEYWORDS: Perception, Regular Schools, Inclusive Education, Mainstream education, Basic Education, Tano South District

INTRODUCTION

Most countries in the Commonwealth Caribbean have adopted the educational philosophy of "Education For All" (EFA), which was articulated at the "World Conference on Education for All" (WCEFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand, March, 1990. These countries "recognize that the greatest hope for the future lies in the full development of the potential of its children". General estimates of the World Health Organization (WHO) suggest that about 10% of each population has special needs. The results of the surveys conducted show some diversity. On the basis of WHO's estimate of 10% and the enrolment figures for each country, it is possible to get some global idea of the situation of special needs in Ghana (Hall & Figueroa, 1998). The Tano District was carved out of Sunyani District in 1987 with Bechem being its capital.

The district population stood at 137,281 in the year 2004 according to 2000 population and housing census.

According to Cushner et al (2012), inclusive education refers to "the practice of including another group of students in regular classrooms: students with physical, developmental, or social-emotional disabilities, and those with chronic health problems". Teachers do not feel that they are prepared or competent to teach both regular learners and learners with special educational needs. The main reason is that they did not have sufficient training to deal with these inclusive educational activities (Hay et al., 2001). These findings are consistent with those which underline the fact that teachers who have an opened perception over the inclusion are more confident in their own abilities to implement the inclusive education (Buell, et al., 1999).

Previous studies support the idea that teachers perceive students with behavioural or emotional disorders as being more difficult to work with in the classroom than the other children with different disabilities (Chhabra et al., 2010). There are many mainstream teachers who believe that children considered "different" are not their responsibility, which revealed the fact that there are many schools where the medical pathological model still dominates the educational activity (Angelides et al., 2006). Another factor which has a great influence on teachers' attitudes is the previous experience with children with special educational needs. Those who had a more frequent contact with people with disabilities have a more positive attitude towards inclusion than those who experienced little contact (Forlin et al., 1999). A large number of teachers believe that the successful implementation of inclusive practices should be based on a review of the curriculum and of the teaching strategies used in classes with children with special educational needs (Ghergut, 2010). Despite all these, the pertinent questions to address, therefore, are to examine the extent of awareness of teachers on the concept of inclusive education, the perception teachers have on inclusive education and the perceived effects of inclusive education in the public basic schools towards the implementation of inclusive education in the Tano South District in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana

Statement of problem

The Tano South District was carved out of Sunyani District in 1987 with Bechem being its capital. The population of the District stood at 137,281 in the year 2004 according to 2000 population and housing census.

Teachers do not feel that they are prepared or competent to teach both regular learners and learners with special educational needs. The main reason is that they did not have sufficient training to deal with these inclusive educational activities (Hay et al., 2001). These findings are consistent with those which underline the fact that teachers who have an opened perception over the inclusion are more confident in their own abilities to implement the inclusive education (Buell, et al., 1999).

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influence on teachers' attitudes is the previous experience with children with special educational needs. Those who had a more frequent contact with people with disabilities have a more positive attitude towards inclusion than those who experienced little contact (Forlin et al., 1999). A large number of teachers believe that the successful implementation of inclusive practices should be based on a review of the curriculum and of the teaching strategies used in classes with children with special educational needs (Ghergut, 2010).

It is in the light of the above that this study is embarked upon. This is done by taking a critical study of some selected basic schools in Tano South District. The pertinent questions to address, therefore, are to examine the extent of awareness of teachers on the concept of inclusive education, the perception teachers have on inclusive education and the perceived effects of inclusive education in the public basic schools towards the implementation of inclusive education in the Tano South District in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana

Research questions

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions were formulated;

1. What is the extent of awareness of teachers on the concept of inclusive education in Tano South District?

2. What are the perceptions of teachers on inclusive education in Tano South District?

3. What are the perceived effects of inclusive education in Tano South District?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research hinges on McGhie-Richmond (2009) when he noted that schools may exclude or refuse to include certain learners on the basis that teachers do not have the knowledge and skills to teach them. Rix and Sheehy (2014), however, state that effective pedagogy for inclusion is based on skills already available to teachers, so there is not always a need for 'additional' or 'special' skills to overcome barriers to learning. Hart et al. (2004) put forward the idea of 'transformability', believing that the capacity of all children to learn can be transformed. They show that, if teachers are not limited by pre-conceived ideas about ability and accept difference as something positive, they can find ways to make learning accessible by ensuring that there are options available for everybody.

Inclusive Education

According to Cushner et al (2012), inclusive education refers to "the practice of including another group of students in regular classrooms: students with physical, developmental, or social-emotional disabilities, and those with chronic health problems". Inclusive education is when all students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighborhood schools to receive high quality instruction, interventions, and supports that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum (Bui, Quirk, Almazan, & Valenti, 2010; Alquraini & Gut, 2012). The school and classroom operate on the premise that students with disabilities are as fundamentally

competent as students without disabilities. Therefore, all students can be full participants in their classrooms and in the local school community

Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education

Despite the continued movement toward inclusive practices, recent studies Mantoan and Valente (2001) educational legislation in Brazil is full of good intentions but fall short of realization. (Dupoux et al., 2005; Loreman et al., 2007; Barco, 2007; RossHill, 2009) have found that many teachers have less than positive attitudes towards students with disabilities and their inclusion in general education classrooms. Several studies have shown that primary and high school teachers share similar perceptions regarding inclusive education; some negative, and some positive as well (Barco, 2007; Ross-Hill, 2009). Wiggins (2012) found a significant relationship between high school teachers' perceptions of inclusion and classroom setting.

Lene (2006) noted that inclusive educational learning disabled children in Nigeria that teachers' opinion on the benefits of inclusive education was social effect. Recent studies have shown that much hasn't changed over the past decade regarding high school teachers' perceptions of inclusive education; in a study which investigated the perceptions of general education in grades K-12, Dev (1996) revealed that overall, teachers expressed more positive attitudes toward mainstreaming than inclusion. Sharma, Ee, & Desai (2003) found that training in special education appeared to lessen pre-service teacher's concerns regarding inclusive education. Similarly, Subban and Sharma (2001) revealed that teachers who reported having undertaken training in special education were found to hold more positive perceptions about implementing inclusive education. According to Loreman et al. (2007) reported that findings which showed that teachers' perceptions of inclusive education were negatively impacted by their training, or lack thereof, in special/inclusive education. In contrast, Ali et al (2006) found that in general, teachers held positive attitudes towards inclusive education. According to the results of their study, the teachers agreed that inclusive education enhanced social interaction and inclusion among the students and thus minimizing negative stereotypes on special needs students.

Inclusive education represents a very big challenge for educational systems from all over the world, no matter how long their tradition in education. This is a process that implies not only the integration of children with disabilities in mainstream schools but also the curricula adjustment in order to satisfy the needs of every child, no matter the level of his psychological development, physical development, social background, ethnic background or family. More than that, it is necessary a change on organisational and managerial level of educational institutions, an extent of the role and the importance of school in order to accomplish all children educational demands.

Segregating children into 'special needs' and 'mainstream' schools prevent equal access to social and curricular opportunities and labels children (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2009; UNESCO, 1994). Thus inclusion of children with disabilities and special educational needs in mainstream education has been encouraged through legislation internationally for over 20 years. It is unclear though whether inclusive education is effective in terms of promoting positive educational and social outcomes, due to mixed results and a lack of well-designed studies in this area (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Kavale & Forness, 2000; Lindsay, 2007; Walther-Thomas et al, 2000; Woolfson, 2011). Mainstream teacher attitudes may be a contributory barrier to successful inclusive practices (Avramadis, et al, 2000;

Bender et al, 1995; De Boer et al, 2010). Teachers tend to be broadly positive about the principle of inclusion while at the same time viewing its practical implementation as problematic (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). However it has been argued that neutral, even negative, attitudes toward inclusion may better characterize teacher viewpoints (De Boer et al., 2010; Soodak, et al, 1998). Indeed teachers in mainstream schools were less positive about the potential of children with learning disabilities than special school teachers. Some studies have reported in-service training (INSET), support (Cagran & Schmidt, 2011), and experience (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007) to influence teacher attitudes, while others have not (Brady & Woolfson, 2008; Woolfson & Brady, 2009).

Effects of inclusive education

Inclusive education has been a great challenge for the Romanian educational system because it provides the principles of a new paradigm: the „interactive" or „organisational" paradigm (Clark, Dyson, Millward and Skidmore, 1995). Bearing this in mind, the concept of inclusion may become an educational priority and may replace the one of the integration of children with special needs. But, in order to do so, it is necessary to know and understand the difference between these two concepts. The term integration refers to the „placement of a student with disabilities into an ordinary school environment and regular curriculum, usually without the curriculum being modified to any great extent" (Chhabra, Srivastava and Srivastava, 2010). On the other hand, inclusion „implies such a restructuring of mainstream schooling that every school can accommodate every child irrespective of disability (accommodation rather than assimilation) and ensures that all learners belong to a community" (Avramidis, Bayliss, Burden, 2000). Inclusion implies the extent of the main purpose and role of school in order to respond to the needs of a larger diversity of children. One of the main barriers in the practice of inclusive education is represented by the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and its principles. These attitudes are influenced by several factors such as: the degree of children's' difficulties, the nature of children's' disabilities, the teachers' experience with children with special educational needs, the trust in their own capabilities to implement inclusive activities (the teachers' preparedness for integrated classrooms) or the expectations towards the children no matter what are the differences between them, the curricula and so on. Previous studies support the idea that teachers perceive students with behavioural or emotional disorders as being more difficult to work with in the classroom than the other children with different disabilities (Chhabra, Srivastava and Srivastava, 2010). Teachers do not feel that they are prepared or competent to teach both regular learners and learners with special educational needs. The main reason is that they did not have sufficient training to deal with these inclusive educational activities (Hay, Smit, Paulsen, 2001). These findings are consistent with those which underline the fact that teachers who have an opened perception over the inclusion are more confident in their own abilities to implement the inclusive education (Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, Scheer, 1999). There are many mainstream teachers who believe that children considered „different" are not their responsibility, idea, which revealed the fact that there are many schools where the medical pathological model still dominates the educational activity (Angelides, Stylianou, Gibbs, 2006). Another factor which has a great influence on teachers' attitudes is the previous experience with children with special educational needs. Those who had a more frequent contact with people with disabilities have a more positive attitude towards inclusion than those who experienced little contact (Forlin, Tait, Carroll, Jobling, 1999). A large number of teachers believe that the successful implementation of inclusive practices should be based on

a review of the curriculum and of the teaching strategies used in classes with children with special educational needs (Ghergut, 2010).

RESEARCH METHOLOGY

Descriptive research survey was used in an attempt to describe some aspects of a population or an existing phenomenon by selecting unbiased sample of individuals to take part in the research. According to Boyle (2004:18) "surveys are good for asking people about their perceptions, opinions and ideas though they are less reliable for finding out how people actually behave". The approach to this research is a qualitative study. Hossain (2011:145) asserts that qualitative researchers study people in their natural settings, to identify how their experiences and behaviors are shaped by the contexts of their lives such as the social, economic, cultural and physical contexts. Qualitative studies aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior.

Two main types of data were used in this study. These are primary and secondary data. The primary data included those that came from the questionnaire which formed the basis for the analysis. The secondary data involved data that were collected from the review of relevant books, journals magazines, newspapers and websites. Data was collected using questionnaire as major instrument. Several strategies were used to ensure data quality. Forty (40) head teachers and one hundred and eighty five (185) teachers were selected from forty (40) basic schools for the study. In all, 225 teachers and head teachers were randomly selected across the district and questionnaires administered to them.

ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of the Teachers

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. A total 155(68.9%) of the respondents are males while 70(31.1%) are females. The educational qualification of the respondents shows; 73(32.4%) have 4- year Certificate 'A', 95(42.2%) have 3 year Post-Secondary Certificate, 33(14.7%) have Diploma, 15(6.7%) have Bachelor Degree and 9(4.0%) have no qualification. On the respondents years of teaching experience, 76(33.8%) have less than five years, 52(23.1% have 5-10 years of teaching experience, 48(21.3%) have 11-15 years, 21(9.3%) have 16-20 years, 15(6.7%) have 21-25 years, 10(4.4%) have 26-30 years and 3(1.3%) have 31 and above years of teaching experience. On the matter of the rank of teaching respondents, 58(25.8%) are at Teacher Certificate A, 33(14.7%) are at Superintendent II, 12(5.3%) are at Superintendent I, 25(11.1%) at a Senior Superintendent II, 52(23.1%) are at Senior Superintendent I, 35(15.6%) are at Principal Superintendent and 10(4.4%) are at Assistant Director Rank.

From the Table 1 it can be seen that the male teachers are more than the female respondents. The responses are skewed towards the male sex. Similarly, teachers with 4 year and 3 year Certificate combined, 168(74.6%) is more than the rest of the qualifications combined. It can be seen that respondents have relatively low educational/professional qualification. The respondents years of teaching experience is relatively low too. Most, 176(78.2%) of the

teachers have less than 16 years in teaching. Only 13(5.7%) have more than 26 years teaching experience. In terms of their rank in service, it is fairly distributed across the various ranks.

Table 1 Demographic characteristic of Teachers in Tano South District

Demographic parameter	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	155	68.9
	Female	70	31.1
Qualification of Respondents	4 year Certificate A	73	32.4
	3 year Post-Secondary Certificate	95	42.2
	Diploma	33	14.7
	B.E.D	15	6.7
	No qualification	9	4.0
Years of Teaching Experience	Less than 5 years	76	33.8
	5-10 years	52	23.1
	11-15 years	48	21.3
	16-20 years	21	9.3
	21-25 years	15	6.7
	26-30 years	10	4.4
	31 and above	3	1.3
Rank of Respondent in Ghana Education Service	Teacher Certificate A	58	25.8
	Superintendent II	33	14.7
	Superintendent I	12	5.3
	Senior Superintendent II	25	11.1
	Senior Superintendent I	52	23.1
	Principal Superintendent	35	15.6
	Assistant Director	10	4.4
	Total	**225**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2015

When respondents were asked if they have ever heard of the concept of inclusive education, the responses are shown in Table 2. A total of 215(95.6%) said "Yes" and only 10(4.4%) said "No", to the question. The follow up on those who said "Yes" whether they understand how the concept of inclusive education work, yielded the results in Table 2 as well.

Table 2 Extent of awareness of Respondents on the Concept of Inclusive Education

Item	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Have you heard of the concept of inclusive education?	Yes	215	95.6
	No	10	4.4
	Total	**225**	**100.0**
Do you understand how the concept of inclusive education works?	Yes	43	20.0
	No	172	80.0
	Total	**215**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Apparently the responses in Table 2, suggest respondents have heard of the concept of inclusive education but have no fore knowledge on how the concept works. About 80% admit to not knowing how the concept works.

Table 3 is the response of the perception of inclusive education. Bipolar scaling methods of Likert scale of either agree or disagree with frequencies and their corresponding percentages of the positive statements. Respondents disagreed, 180(80%) special needs of children in regular classroom increase the child's circle of friends, similarly, 169(75.0%) disagreed special needs of children in regular classroom limit the child's level of academic performance. From Table 2, only in two constructs out of ten constructs that respondents agreed to. That is; respondents agreed, 186(82.5%) that special needs of children in regular classroom worsen the child's learning problem and 119(53.0%) agreed that special needs of children in regular classroom increase the amount of social rejection by the child's peers. On regular teachers the responses can also be seen in the Table 3. Respondents marginally agreed, 122(54.0%) regular teachers do not understand problems associated with disabilities. Similarly, 117(52.0%) agreed that regular teachers do not make appropriate educational provisions for children with disabilities. However, 129(57.0%) agreed regular teachers are well-prepared to teach children with disabilities in regular class. Finally, 136(60.5%) agreed regular teachers are happy to have children with disabilities in their classes.

Table 3 Perception of Respondents on Inclusive Education

S/N	Variable	Agree		Disagree	
	On Special needs of children in regular classroom	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	Increase the child's circle of friends	45	20.0	180	80.0
2	Limit the child's level of academic performance	34	15.0	169	75.0
3	Make the child's well-adjusted socially	64	28.5	161	71.5
4	Ensure that non special needs children will be happy to play with special needs children	107	47.5	141	62.5
5	Worsen the child's learning problem	186	82.5	39	17.5
6	Have a negative effect on the social development of other children	56	25.0	169	75.0
7	Provide more opportunities for the other children to benefit from the specialized instruction of the children	30	13.5	195	86.5
8	Develop a stronger feeling in the child of confidence in his/her academic ability	84	37.5	141	62.5
9	Increase the amount of social rejection by the child's peers	119	53.0	106	47.0
10	Ensure that non-special needs will be more appreciative of children with disability	66	29.5	159	70.5
	On the Regular Teachers				
11	Do not understand problems associated with disabilities	104	46.0	122	54.0
12	Do not make appropriate educational provisions for children with disabilities	108	48.0	117	52.0
13	Are well-prepared to teach children with disabilities in regular class	96	42.5	129	57.5
	Are happy to have children with disabilities in their classes	89	39.5	136	60.5

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 4 is responses of what the perceived benefits of inclusive education. Respondents agreed, 169(75.1%) that, special needs of children in regular classroom increase the child's circle of friends. Similarly, 161(71.5%) agreed that special needs of children in regular classroom make the child's well-adjusted socially. Also most respondents, 170(75.0%) agreed that special needs of children in regular classroom have a negative effect on the social development of other children and 140(62.0%) respondents agreed that special needs of children in regular classroom increase the amount of social rejection by the child's peers. However, 129(57.5%) disagreed that that special needs of children in regular classroom ensure that non special needs children will be happy to play with special needs children.

Table 4 Perceived Effects of Inclusive Education

Variable		Agree		Disagree	
	Special needs of children in regular classroom	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	Increase the child's circle of friends	56	24.9	169	75.1
2	Make the child's well-adjusted socially	64	28.5	161	71.5
3	Ensure that non special needs children will be happy to play with special needs children	129	57.5	96	42.5
4	Have a negative effect on the social development of other children	57	25	170	75.0
5	Increase the amount of social rejection by the child's peers	86	38	140	62.0

Source: Field Survey, 2015

CONCLUSION

Based on the data collected and analyzed, the researchers came to the following conclusions; that regular teachers in Tano South District of Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana are aware of the inclusive education, they have little idea on how the concept works. Regular teachers are therefore apparently lack understanding of problems associated with disabilities and are not able to make appropriate educational provisions for children with disabilities in the district. However, regular teachers are happy to have children with disabilities in their classes. Special needs of children in regular classroom do not increase the child's circle of friends and children in regular classroom do not limit the child's level of academic performance.

Perceived benefits of special needs of children in regular classroom were and child's circle of friends increase, children are well-adjusted socially. The perceived effects however are; special needs of children in regular classroom experience negative social development of other children and increase in the amount of social rejection by the child's peers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings from the research, the following recommendations were made;

1. Inclusive education should be integrated into the training of the teacher,

2. In-service training should be organized for teachers who are already in the teaching business. The reason is that many of our teachers are non-professionals. Graduates from non-teacher training institutions are sometimes recruited into the teaching job due to either unavailable jobs in trainees filed of training or due to acute shortage of trained teachers.

3. The in-service training would go a long way to help build the capacity of these categories of teachers in the basic education.

4. Governments should also increase support for training of more teachers to avert teacher exodus as well as shortage of teacher which usually will compelled management to rely on non-professional teachers to teach our future leaders.

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