

# Implementation of Inclusive Education in Ghanaian Primary Schools: A Look at Teachers' Attitudes

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*Received February 26, 2014; Revised March 05, 2014; Accepted March 10, 2014*

**Abstract** Studies have revealed that teachers' attitudes toward students with disabilities are different, and these various differences/reasons are dependent on schools' practices of inclusion. The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' attitudes in implementing Inclusive Education in primary and junior high secondary schools in two districts in Ghana (Bole and New Juaben). Interviews were conducted and two classroom observations were undertaken in selected primary and junior secondary schools. 108 teachers responded to questionnaire measures of attitude and ten were interviewed. 20 students were also interviewed. The data was analysed qualitatively and results tabulated with percentages. Results were discussed with respondents to enhance reliability. Based on the theoretical framework used in the study, the results showed differences of teachers' attitudes depending on the type of students' disabilities and disability severity. Negative attitudes of teachers were associated with large class-sizes and the presence of a student with disability in the classroom. A large scale study is required to identify other possible factors or predictors of attitude. It is recommended by this study that awareness-raising about disability is a good step towards an equal position of students with disabilities in the schools in particular and people with disabilities in the society in general. Changes at policy level and support facilities for special needs students as an explicit concern are needed to achieve this equalization.

**Keywords:** *inclusive education, implementation, teachers' attitude, Ghana*

**Cite This Article:** Awal Mohammed Alhassan, "Implementation of Inclusive Education in Ghanaian Primary Schools: A Look at Teachers' Attitudes." *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2014): 142-148. doi: 10.12691/education-2-3-5.

## 1. Problem Statement

The 2008 Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report, published mid-way between the Dakar World Education Forum of 2000 and the EFA target date of 2015, notes the substantial progress made towards universal enrolment and gender parity in primary education in developing countries. Progress has also been made on access to secondary education. However over 69 million children are still out of primary school, the quality of learning in many countries remains low and many significant social, geographic and other inequities remain, including those associated with disability (UNESCO, 2007, 2011). There are challenges in the implementation of inclusive education in Ghana (Agbenyega & Deku 2011; Anthony, 2009; Kuyini & Desai, 2007, 2008). These challenges include lack of professionalism and attitudes of teachers, which have resulted in separation and segregation of students with disabilities.

The implementation of public policy coupled with teacher attitudes toward persons with disabilities in Ghana has been saddled with problems. These findings raise concerns regarding the implementation of the Inclusive Education Program in Ghana, Anthony (2011), Ofori-Addo (1994) and O'Toole, Hofstlett, Bupuru, Ofori-Addo, & Kotoku (1996).

## 2. Literature

Factors including effective school practices, positive teacher attitudes toward and adequate teacher knowledge of inclusion are among others contributing to making implementation of Inclusive Education a success (Avramidis et al. 2000; Kuyini & Desai, 2007; Sharma & Desai, 2002) as well as the use of effective teaching practices (including making instructional adaptations) to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Kuyini & Desai, 2007; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000).

According to Avramidis et al (2000) and Cook (2001), although the roles practice, teacher knowledge and attitudes are considered as crucial to successful inclusion, most mainstream principals' and teachers' attitudes toward inclusion were often negative. Further, principals and teachers have often demonstrated considerable lack of knowledge about students with disabilities and inclusion (Schumm & Vaughn; 1995; Tomlinson, Callahan, Eiss, Imbeau, & Landrum, 1997), and teachers have often used more undifferentiated large-group instruction with few adaptations to meet the needs of included students (Baker & Zigmond, 1990; Kuyini & Desai, 2008). Further, the contextual realities of regular education schools including notably principals' expectations (Kuyini & Desai, 2007;

Sodak & Podell, 1994), shape the school cultures or climates for successful inclusion.

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

These findings reinforce an earlier assertion by Welch (1989, 2000) that the reluctance of teachers to include students with special needs must be addressed if a policy of inclusion is to be successful. Highlighting the importance of these elements, Avramidis, et al. (2000), Stanovich, & Jordon, (2002) and Moberg, Zumberg, and Reinmaa (1997) stated that educator beliefs, perceptions and training should be viewed as potentially influential antecedents to their commitment toward implementing a successful inclusion policy. Studies in Ghana, by Gyima, (2010), Ofori-Addo, Worgbeyi and Tay (1999) identified some key challenges, similar to those reported earlier by O'Toole, et al. (1996). The three studies found challenges in relation to teacher attitudes, knowledge and skills, as well as the schools' organization of inclusive programs. More recent studies, (Agbenyega & Deku, 2011, Gyimah, 2010, 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 (2007) 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? Rigidity and curricular inflexibility is a result of teachers' attitude and poor teacher knowledge (Avoke & Avoke, 2004; Kuyini & Desai, 2006, 2009; Ocloo & Subbey, 2008; Yarboi-Tetteh, 2008; Gadagbui, 2008).

This picture of Ghana's inclusion program from the forgoing creates a crucial need for broader investigation into inclusive school practices, the nature of school-principals' and teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and their knowledge of inclusive education. It is also essential

to acquire an understanding of the impact of these variables on practices of inclusion.

#### **Research aims**

1. To examine how Ghanaian teachers implement Inclusive Education.
2. To examine why teachers implement Inclusive Education the way they do.
3. To examine variables of educators' attitudes toward Inclusion.

#### **Research questions**

1. How do Ghanaian teachers implement Inclusive Education?
2. What attitudes do teachers have toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms?

### **3. Significance of the Study**

The study will be useful in providing an understanding of how each of the study variables impact on inclusive school practices in Ghana.

Further, the study is hoped to make a significant contribution to an understanding of inclusive education practices in Ghanaian schools by identifying what needs to be done to ensure effective implementation of Inclusive Education. Finally, the study is also hoped to contribute to national and international debates on Inclusive Education growing global literature on educators' attitudes toward inclusive education and the specific factors / educator variables that impact on these attitudes and the implementation of effective inclusive practices.

### **4. Theoretical Framework**

The Theory of Planned Behavior and the Theory of Intergroup Contact underpin this study. The variables selected for the study, (inclusive education practices, educators' attitudes toward including students with disabilities, educators' knowledge of inclusive education practices, and principals' expectations) when seen in the context of Ajzen's (1985) Theory of Planned Behavior and Allport's (1954) Intergroup Contact Theory, collectively represent the determinants of behaviors. Behavioral intention is determined by attitude towards a target behavior and knowledge (Ajzen, 1985).

The Theory of Planned Behavior is an extension of The theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) which asserts that the more favorable the attitude towards a behavior and the more favorable the subjective norms towards the behavior, the stronger will be the individual's intention to perform the behavior. Thus the proximal cause of behavior is the individual's intention to engage in the behavior. The extension of The Theory of Reasoned Action (Theory of planned behavior) introduced a third element, the element of perceived behavioral control. This means the extent to which the person feels in control of engaging in the behavior. This theory is linked to The Intergroup Contact Theory.

The Intergroup Contact theory posits that bringing members of opposing groups together under conditions involving cooperation, equal status, and personal acquaintance can improve attitudes toward the out-group and facilitate intergroup harmony (Pettigrew, 2011). These

conditions are met, to a large extent, through structured intergroup encounters that emphasize commonalities between the groups (Cook, 1978) or through contact that occurs between friends (Pettigrew, 1998; Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, 2007). The Intergroup Contact Theory states that the nature of contact between two groups determines the social acceptance / rejection of the minority group members (Allport, 1954). Intergroup Contact Theory is used intensively by researchers to reduce tension among groups (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Dovidio et al., 2003; Pettigrew, 1998), and, indeed, there is impressive evidence that positive contact is associated with more favorable attitudes toward the out-group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Allport (1954) stated that not all types of contact between diverse groups lead to acceptance of each other. There is a common belief that merely assembling diverse groups of people together facilitates acceptance of each other. However, Allport (1954) concluded that there is no formula to establish successful contact. He summarised that “Prejudice may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goal. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports” (Allport, 1954. p. 281).

Thus, according to Allport (1954) the three factors that have a positive influence on the intergroup contacts are equal status within the situation, common goals and authority support. Allport’s formula continues to receive support across a variety of situations, groups and society (Favvaza & Odom, 1997; Kennedy, Shukla & Fryxell,

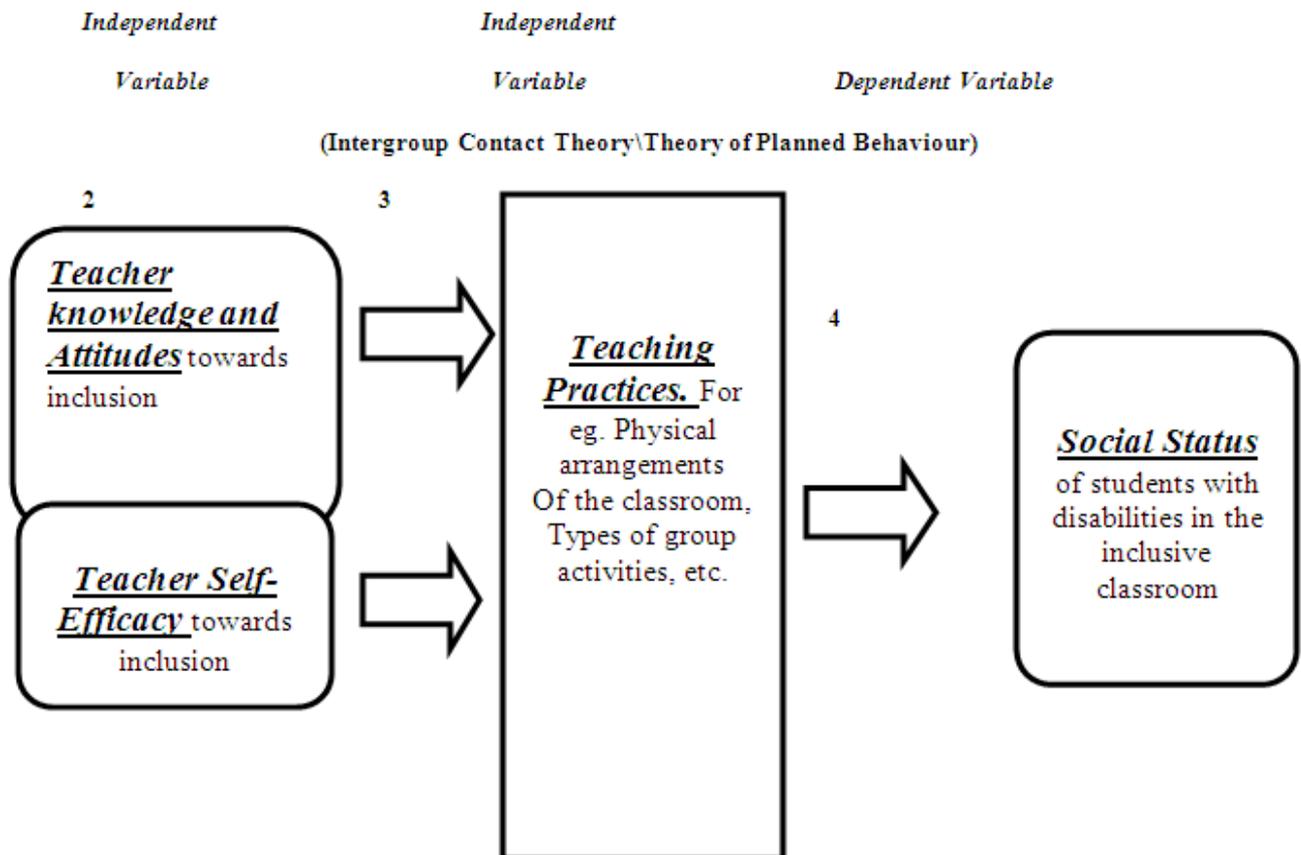
1997; McClenahan, Cairns et al., 1996; Pettigrew, 1998; Stein, Post & Rinden, 2000; Schwartz & Simmons, 2000; Wittig & Grant-Thompson, 1998).

Supporting Allport’s (1954) theory, Amir and Sharan (1984, p. 11.) stress that although direct contact between different groups may be essential for positive interactions, it is not sufficient by itself. They also believe that well controlled contact between children from different ethnic groups in school can have positive effects on social interactions among groups. Contact situations that encourage rapprochement between the different groups are that intimate contact permits the discovery of unique aspects of one’s counterpart in the other group. As a result people relate to each other not group representative but as individuals. Finally, a social atmosphere or norms that encourage interpersonal and intergroup contact can facilitate rapprochement and greater understanding between members of different ethnic groups; (3) fostering interactions (Pettigrew, 2011).

In the field of inclusive education this theory is without doubt of great importance.

Thus in the light of the Intergroup Contact Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior the present study would examine the factors of teacher efficacy, teacher knowledge and attitudes toward inclusion, teaching practices and the social status of students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom, as following the direction of the flowchart\study model below:

### 5. Study Model



### 6. Method

A total of 108 teachers and 20 students participated in the study. Two set of questions, one to the teachers and one to the students were used to collect data. Teachers

responded to both questionnaires and interviews while students responded to interviews only. Group interviews were undertaken with both groups. Group interviews were undertaken for reasons of contact and interactions reflecting Allport's Theory of contact (1954), where opposing groups are put together to generate useful information for textual analysis on intergroup relationships (Favvaza & Odom, 1997; Kennedy, Shukla & Fryxell, 1997; McClenahan, Cairns et al., 1996; Pettigrew, 1998; Stein, Post & Rinden, 2000; Wittig & Grant-Thompson, 1998).

## 7. Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed, and the unstructured qualitative data was coded and categorised according to the main procedures and techniques of Grounded Theory (Wesley, 2010; Kvale 1997). Qualitative data was analysed using observations, conversational and textual analysis of data. Emerging themes from interviews was coded and analysed with the respondents. The data about personal and background information of respondents was analysed using descriptive statistics.

## 8. Results and Discussion

In a group interview with students, they were asked to talk about learning and teaching activities in the classrooms and outside classrooms. Responses of students were quoted verbatim. One student with vision impairment had this to say; "the teacher told me to sit in front so that I can see properly what is written on the board" Teachers say I disturb so I should sit in front" said another student with hearing problems. A third student added; "As for me I have a kind and smart friend, we sit at the same desk he helps me a lot, he explains everything the teacher teaches in the classroom to me". A JHS slow learner said he was supposed to be in JHS 3 but that he was repeated. Another student said she was advised to stop school and concentrate on finding work because she was not coping with school work.

Asked about students playing and learning activities, one of the disabled students said they feel good during playtime there they play well with other students. Some call us names which we don't like said another student and sometimes I don't feel like playing because other students tease me and teachers don't do anything to stop those who bully us.

The last students' socialisation with others is minimal. Pettigrew (2011) sees the school as a socialisation system and teaching and learning as a socialisation process without which learning may be hampered. Thus, facilitating intergroup harmony is important should be the responsibility of teachers).

## 9. Social Status of Students

Many students interviewed reported that teachers get disappointed when they don't get their work done and teachers do nothing to help them. Students' responses are summarised in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Students' responses**

Students school A	We help each other. Teachers tell us to help those who don't understand well. We do activities together
Students school B	We are sometimes separated from other students. We play together during break time
Student school C	Sometimes I don't have anybody to play with
Student school D	I don't like school because I have to behave all the time. Some teachers shout on us and we are told to sit in front. Outside I do a lot of activities with others
Student school E	Teachers punish me because I disturb.
Student school F	School is boring and I have no one to play with and when you have to sit quiet all the time and listen to the teacher
Student school G	I like gymnastics and when we are playing football
Student School H	All my friends are girls because the boys don't like to play with me
Student school I	I tell others not to tease my friend just because she has problems
Student school J	I help my friend in the class because he does not always understand

There was a general notion by students interviewed (Table 1) that teachers were not actively involved in helping their social life both in the classrooms and outside, so getting friends to play with is often a problem for disabled students. Students' socialisation with others is not on the optimal. Research shows that, school is a social system with both formal and informal socialisation processes, and without formal socialisation happening among individuals and groups learning is not enhanced. Teachers fail to understand that inclusion is the bridge that brings students closer to the general education curriculum, and also gives students that special push to succeed.

It should be noted that students' identity, self – awareness and self-esteem are developed through relationships with others, teaching social skills to students with variable social deficits may benefit peer interaction in a learning environment (Pettigrew, 1998). These findings support the theoretical framework of the study that positive contact leads to favorable attitudes toward inclusion in a learning situation (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Teachers responded to both interviews and questionnaires, and their background information provided in Table 2.

**Table 2. Variables related to Background Information of teachers**

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender	Female =60	55.6%
	Male =48	44.4%
Class-size	Small Classes =28	25.9 %
	Large Classes = 80	74.1 %
Students with Disabilities in Class	Students with disabilities in class =58	53.7%
	No students with in class =50	46.3%
Training in Inclusion	Some training 28	25.9%
	No training 80	74.1%
Experience with Students with Disabilities	Some Experience 48	45.0%
	No experience 60	55.0%

In Table 2 most teachers were having class-size of over 35 students in which at least there is one student with disability. One of the two teachers observed in the classroom was female and the other one a male teacher. The female teacher with no special education training and

no experience teaching students with disabilities taught in a large class. The responses of this teacher and others were cited and their attitudes reflected. However, it was found in the study that gender did not have any significant role on teachers' attitude in inclusion. The absence of gender differences in this study is perhaps a result of similarities in the country's traditional beliefs and culture.

## 10. Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusion

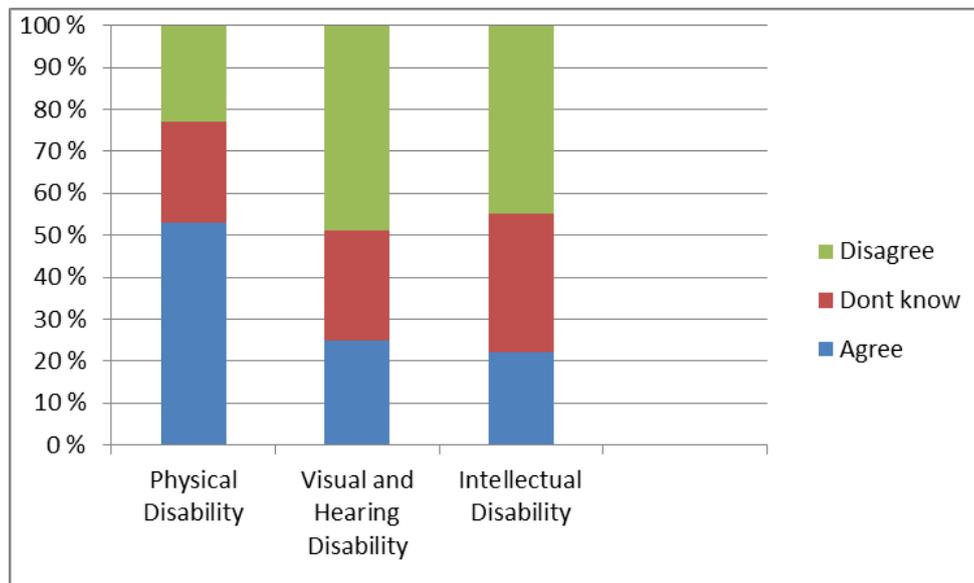
Three themes of disabilities emerged from the responses of teachers; physical/social, visual/hearing and intellectual disabilities (Table 3). Answering questions raised about the implementation of inclusion in an interview with teachers I decided to write some of their responses verbatim; "Inclusive Education in the schools is not holistic" and its implementation is difficult". A teacher added; "we had only a semester (one course) training in special education the fully trained special needs education teachers are sent to special schools.

The general view about including children with disabilities gave in the regular classroom, gave the following typical responses:

It is difficult to teach effectively in a class of over thirty students with more than one student with special needs, such as speech difficulty, sign language student and those needing braille we spend almost half of school time work on attending to these students and this is the first time some of us have students who need a lot of help to cope with everything in the class.

In line with attitude formation theories and results from literature (Cornoldi et al., 1998; Deaux et al, 1993; Praisner, 2003) the results of this study is similar to those of Anthony, (2011), Avramidis, et al. (2000), Kuyini & Desai (2009), Agbenyega, & Deku, (2011) that experience working with disabled students and small class-sizes had positive effects on attitudes toward inclusion. However, a small class-size in a country like Ghana could not be compared to small class-size in developed countries like Norway and Canada.

Table 3. Responses of teachers in including children with disabilities in regular schools



Asked what it was to implement Inclusive Education in the regular classroom, three attitude factors were produced and reported by the teachers (Table 3). These factors included physical disabilities, visual/hearing disabilities and intellectual disabilities. As one of the teachers put;

How can we teach a child with language problems? Another teacher added; we can deal with a child having social problems not those with visual and hearing impairment.

The results showed that teachers are more positive to include students with minor mobility problems, verbal aggression as well as shy and withdrawn students than visual and hearing impairment and those with speech problems.

On the other hand teachers were least willing to include those students with intellectual disabilities such as language disabilities.

In a group interview with teachers and when asked the question: "what do you think about language disability students?" One of the teachers had this to say:

The students use a lot of time to answer simple questions. I can't even hear what they say. I try to give them the time they need, but sometimes I stop them. I don't really know how to deal with these problems without help from colleagues.

We are less informed about how to include students with disabilities in the normal classroom.

The narrative of the teacher had support from other teachers and the school principal. This statement by the teacher indicates that teachers' and principals' knowledge about and attitudes towards inclusive education are related. This means that the more teachers and principals know about inclusive education the more they have a positive attitude towards it. It could be inferred from teachers' responses that attitudes of teachers' to implement inclusion is related to the type of disability and severity. Teachers are more negative to include students with speech disorders and students who need professional skills to read and write In this regard this study confirms the works of (Avramidis, et al 2000; Kuyini & Desai, 2008; Stanovich, & Jordon, 2002).

## 11. Implementing Inclusive Education

This study set out to examine teachers' implementation of Inclusive Education in Ghanaian primary schools taking into consideration teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of disabled students in regular classroom.

Teachers in the study view inclusive education as difficult, most of them agree that students with disabilities are placed into mainstream schools. In this regard teachers are able to experiment with different techniques and strategies to ensure that all students perform. Teachers in this category are the few with some experience teaching students with disabilities supported by better classroom structures that appear to suit the needs of students.

However, a student's level of disability may emerge as a factor shaping the attitudes of teachers to the inclusion of special needs students. Students with other disabilities other than mental and intellectual such as severe physical problems without disabled friendly structures and other facilities appear to force teachers to view the inclusion of such students with some apprehension. In this regard, a teacher commented:

Mainstream schools, probably are not able to cater for students with extreme disabilities. According to one of the interviewees, students with severe disabilities would pose problem to effective teaching because they take a lot of time and that is unfair for non-disable students.

These findings are consistent with research studies which point to a generally positive view held by teachers in mainstream settings regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities. (Kuyini & Desai 2009) study of attitudes toward including students with disabilities into mainstream schools in Australia found that, teacher attitudes had increased in a positive way. Anthony (2011), allude to the idea that positive attitudes about the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream classes are often dependent on the provision of adequate support services.

Respondents were also strong in their expression of a need for good dissemination of information, knowledge and professionalism in their attempts to include students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms.

Finally, teachers appear to believe that they have had no choice about and no part in the process of inclusion in Ghanaian schools. They feel that they have not been consulted as far as decision-making is concerned. A teacher remarked:

We are told what to do and if you don't you face problems may be losing your job or at best transferred. These politicians are not in the classrooms themselves so they can write what they want!

The above utterances by a teacher interviewed is a concern showing lack of consultation with teachers, thus supporting previous studies such as (Cook, et al. 2000), and that administrators at their schools lack the understanding to effectively implement inclusive practices (Cook, et al. 2000; Kuyini & Desai, 2008). It would appear that regular classroom teachers view inclusive education as a decision from above, which has put them under additional pressure (Gadagbui, 2008). Increased concern has resulted as teachers feel that they have not been given any guidelines or directives about including students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms (Ntombela, 2003, 2009, 2011).

An important dimension with regard to the findings on attitudes was that the principals and teachers in Ghana were more positive towards the inclusion of students with social disabilities than any other type of disability (See Table 3). In this regard, the findings of this study were similar to other studies. Studies by Wilczenski (1992, 1995), in the USA and Muthukrishna (2000) in South Africa also found that teachers were more willing to include students with social deficits than any other type of disability such as language disabilities.

Earlier, Wilczenski (1995) in Kuyini & Desai (2007) concluded that attitude towards the inclusion of students with different types of disabilities was influenced by the amount of extra work or accommodation teachers have to make for the included students. Such a conclusion is supported in the current study where the students requiring major and minor curriculum changes were also less favored in company with those requiring Braille and those students using sign language.

## 12. Conclusion

In the context of The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985) and Intergroup contact Theory Allport (1954), this study set out to examine the extent to which teachers' attitudes, influenced implementation of Inclusive Education in Ghanaian primary schools.

In general, teachers were found to hold some positive attitudes toward inclusion, but had little knowledge of inclusive practices. This was evident in the limited use of instructional adaptations to meet individual needs.

Experience teaching students with disabilities, disabled students in the classroom and knowledge of special needs education were found to be affective of attitudes and knowledge and in teachers' implementation of inclusion. Although, other background variables such as class-size also played a role. Attitudes and there from resulting behavior towards disabled students generally transformed into the classrooms are based on strong religious and cultural beliefs which are entrenched in all aspects of the society. Teachers' attitudes though, deeply entrenched in the religious and cultural beliefs, is also due to the gap existing between either misinformation or lack of information or both about implementation of inclusive education policies. This study recommends future research into teachers' knowledge of inclusion and government policy document on Inclusive Education.

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