

Pre-service Parents Teachers' Attitude and Perceived Challenges about Inclusive Education in Ghana: The Ghanaian Inclusive Education Policy

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Received May 04, 2021; Revised June 06, 2021; Accepted June 14, 2021

Abstract The inclusion of learners with special educational needs into regular schools is a significant pillar in the New B. Ed Basic Education Curriculum for teacher education in Ghana. Based on this, the study aimed at finding the attitude of pre-service parent teachers and their perceived challenges about inclusive education in Ghana. The study employed a convergent mixed method with a sample of 112 sandwich pre-service parent teachers at the Gambaga College of Education. The quantitative research approach consisted 10-item questionnaire scale adapted from the works of Paseka and Schwab (2020) on 'Parents' Attitude towards Inclusive Education' (PAIE) scale. Data was collected using both the questionnaire and focus group discussion. The analysis of quantitative data involved the use of multiple statistical procedures; frequency counts, simple percentages, and standard deviation, while the inductive thematic analysis (ITA) was used to analyse the qualitative data. The findings revealed that the pre-service parent teachers have positive attitude towards inclusive education. They believed that Ghanaian teachers will be able to recognize their children's strengths and support them with the appropriate contents in inclusive classroom and they can also work well in a good relationship with learners with special educational needs. However, they stressed on some few challenges that may hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education in Ghana. Among the challenges included inadequate resources and the lack of peaceful cooperation among learners in inclusive environment (such as stigmatization). It is therefore recommended that the government and other significant stakeholders ensure that these challenges are remedied for effective implementation of inclusive education in Ghana.

Keywords: *inclusive education, pre-service parent teachers, attitude, challenges, Ghana's inclusive policy*

Cite This Article: Matthew Nyaaba, Joseph Aboyinga, and Bismark Nyaaba Akanzire, "Pre-service Parents Teachers' Attitude and Perceived Challenges about Inclusive Education in Ghana: The Ghanaian Inclusive Education Policy." *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 9, no. 6 (2021): 341-346. doi: 10.12691/education-9-6-3.

1. Introduction

Inclusion is the response to the human rights movement that requested equal rights for all people, independent of their gender, race, socio-economic background and/or disability in all areas of (public) life. The UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 was one of the starting points for implementing the idea of inclusion into all areas of society worldwide [1].

In line with this, in the year 2018, the Cabinet of Ghana approved the Policy for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Reform. The reform brought about a New B. Ed Basic Education Curriculum which outlines inclusive education as one of its key pillars. As part of the policy the curriculum ensures that all pre-service teacher training (Colleges of Education) courses include training on inclusive education to enable teachers to deal with the diversity in their classroom and be equipped with relevant teaching and learning competencies and strategies to meet

the needs of all learners [2]. This clearly indicated that unlike the previous special schools for special educational needs children, all special educational needs children would be accommodated in the regular school settings except in cases where the Ministries responsible for Education, Health and Social Welfare have assessed the child and concluded that the regular school may not be the best placement for the child's education.

Consequently, inclusive education, that is, the inclusion of learners with special educational needs into regular schools is now one of the most significant core subject in the New B. Ed Basic Education Curriculum for all teacher education in Ghana. Pre-service parent teachers in their first year per the curriculum are introduced to inclusive education and this is aimed at equipping them to understand inclusive education and acquire the competencies to ensure the effective realization of inclusive education in Ghana [2].

However, the attitude and challenges of inclusive education have a great influence on how successfully inclusive educational practices would be implemented [3].

In the implementation process of inclusive education, various groups of players are involved: students, professionals (class teachers, special needs teachers, psychologists), school-management, external support groups (like social and youth welfare, leisure facilities) and of course parents who have in many countries the right to choose a school for their child. Nonetheless, there are differences between these groups concerning the concrete implementation and the current situation [4]. Whereas the amount of research on (student) teachers' and students' attitudes has become quite large within the last years, parents remained a neglected group.

Nevertheless, ref. [5] posited that the attitude and views of parents have a major impact on the success of the implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, this study investigated the attitude of all sandwich pre-service parent teachers and their perceived challenges about inclusive education in Ghana. The sandwich pre-service parent teachers have been introduced to the New B. Ed Basic Education Curriculum in Gambaga College of Education, Ghana.

1.1. Challenges towards Inclusive Education

Generally, a major barrier to successful inclusion seems to be the lack of resources or that resources are not addressing students' concrete needs. Ref. [6] resources in inclusive education can be divided into personnel resources (teaching and non-teaching staff), teaching and learning materials and special resources. Referring to the Index of Inclusion [7] the three mentioned aspects (inclusive culture, inclusive policy and inclusive practices) can therefore be seen as resources within inclusive education. Schools have the possibility to reject students with SEN with the justification of lack of resources available [8]. Studies indicate that schools have not been very successful in supporting inclusive education [9].

1.2. Attitudes towards Inclusive Education: the Parents' Perspective

For a successful implementation of inclusion, positive attitudes seem to be a key-issue [10]. Ref. [11] attitudes can be understood as a mental and neural state of readiness, organised through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related and therefore, attitude can be positive or negative.

Ref. [12] study indicated that only a very small minority of parents accepts the inclusion of all children, making no differences between types of disabilities. Parents' educational and (socio) economic background affected their attitudes towards the inclusion of students with physical and learning disabilities. The higher the educational level and income the more positive were parents' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with physical disabilities. For attitudes towards students with learning disabilities, a paradox effect was found. Parents from lower educational levels seem to have a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with learning disabilities compared to parents with higher educational levels.

Also worth mentioning, inclusive teaching practices predict parents' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with learning disabilities. In this context, a limitation of this study needs to be addressed: The operationalization of teaching practices in this study is geared more towards a general approach to heterogeneity in the classroom than social perspective.

Moreover, mothers in comparison to fathers had a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with learning disabilities and mental disabilities. However, for the inclusion of students with physical disabilities and behavioural disorders no such gender effect occurred. Also in the parents' age inconsistent effects were found. A lower age related with a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with behavioural disorders and mental disabilities, but not for students with physical disabilities or learning disabilities [13].

There are also findings that parents trust teachers quite well, although the answers of parents with handicapped children show that they have less confidence concerning some aspects and that they feel much more often exhausted [12].

Parents perceive teachers as able to pick up content related to their students' lives and personalise their teaching according to the individual students' needs. According to the parents' views, teachers, especially those from inclusive classes, are very engaged as they try to ensure that all students, especially the 'weaker ones', have success and learn a lot [10].

According to parents' ratings there are no differences between inclusive and regular classes in dealing with the students' socio-economic background. Perhaps different views on inclusive education might be a part of the explanation of the lacking effect. Inclusive education often refers to the needs of students with SEN [14].

2. Research Questions

1. What is the attitude of pre-service parent teachers towards inclusive education in Ghana?
2. What are the challenges pre-service parent teachers perceive about inclusive education in Ghana?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The study employed a mixed method approach with convergent mixed method design. The convergent mixed method design is a single-phase method where both quantitative and qualitative data are collected, analyze separately, and then the results compared to see if the findings confirm or disconfirm each other. The key assumption for adopting this design was to detail the views of the participants qualitatively and quantitatively which aimed at yielding results that will be the same or reliable [3].

The purposive and census sampling techniques were adopted for this study. Purposively, the study involved sandwich pre-service teachers who were parents and have enrolled on the various sandwich programmes in

Gambaga College of Education. The sample didn't include the regular students as it was assumed significant number do not fall within the category of parenthood. The census sampling was used to select all sandwich pre-service parents at the various levels during the sandwich sessions. Ref [15] stated that census study occurs if the accessible population is very small or it is reasonable to include the entire accessible population. It is called a census sample because data is gathered on every member of the accessible population. The study was made up of all the accessible population which involved all sandwich pre-service parent teachers at the Gambaga College of Education of which 72 were males and 40 females. Thirteen were students enrolled for Certificate in Basic Education, 11 were students enrolled for Diploma in Basic Education and 88 were students enrolled for Degree in Basic Education. The age range of the participants was 24 to 48 years. Ninety-seven (97) of the participants were having a child or two (2), Fifteen (15) of them had 3 or 4 children each. Eight (8) of them had children with special educational needs (impairment).

3.2. Data Collection Procedure

In the phase of quantitative data collection, 10-item questionnaire scale adapted from the works of [13] on Parents Attitudes towards Inclusive Education (PAIE) was used to collect data on pre-service parent teachers' attitude towards inclusive education in Ghana. The items on the questionnaire were rated on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 – 5 with a mean of 3. Using the Likert scale for the ten items on the questionnaire, a descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data collected. A Cronbach Alpha Reliability Co-efficient of 0.81 was obtained. Ref. [16] posited that co-efficient of reliability value above 0.6 is considered reliable.

Cronbach Alpha Value	No. of items
0.81	10

Each item consisted of a statement followed by a five weighted options; Strongly Agree (SA) = 1, Agree (A) = 2, None (N) = 3, Disagree (D) = 4 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 5. For the purposes of analysis and easy conclusion, Strongly Agree and Agree were merged as 'Agree' whereas Disagree and Strongly Disagree were also merged as 'Disagree'. The sample was made up of one hundred and twelve (112) pre-service parent teachers in Gambaga College of Education. One of the limitations stated by [13] study on parents' attitude towards inclusive education was the difficulty for parents to judge some of the statements which describe the situation in the classroom and the endeavours of teachers, hence the use of parent student-teachers set to fill this gap as they are assumed to understand the situations of teachers as well as their responsibilities as parents.

In the phase of qualitative data collection, a focus group discussion (see Appendix A) was done concurrently following the administration of the questionnaire. Ref [3] expounded that focus group includes gathering people from similar backgrounds or with the same experiences together to discuss a specific topic. The focus group discussion aimed to up-close information gathered by actually talking directly to the participants and seeing them behave and act within their context [3]. In the natural setting, the researchers had a face-to-face interaction over 45 minutes with the pre-service parent teachers. The synergetic effect of the participants engaged in discussions with each other often generates more elaborate accounts compared with individual interviews [17] and this was the experience in this study.

The discussion was guided by predetermined themes generated from the reviewed literature (Teachers competent in handling different learners, Schools preparedness to implement inclusive education, parents' readiness to support inclusive education, etc). The discussion was controlled in such a way that each and every participant's view was captured. Based on the discussions, the data collected was analysed through inductive thematic analysis (ITA). Inductive Thematic Analysis was considered to be the most common and appropriate data analysis procedure associated with the focus group discussion [3]. The process involved the reading through the textual data collected, identifying, and then interpreting the content of the themes.

3.3. Data Analysis

The responses of the participants to the questionnaire were organized into frequency counts, and converted into percentages. The results were used to describe attitude of the pre-service parent teachers towards inclusive education in Ghana. Respondents' with mean scores less than the average mean of 2.0 were considered to have negative attitude while respondents with mean scores greater than 2.0 were considered to have positive attitude. Negative worded items were recoded. The results are presented in Table 1. The focused group discussion was analysed thematically based on the predetermined topics regarding participants' perceived challenges about inclusive education. Member checking was used to ensure the validity of the results, whereby participants were asked to verify whether the transcripts represented their views [8].

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 112 pre-service parent teachers were purposively sampled from Gambaga College of Education for the study. The background information of the participants were collected using the questionnaire designed for the study.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-service parents' attitude towards Inclusive Education

Items	A	N	D	M	SD
I am sure the teachers of my child can recognise the child's strengths and support them.	63 (56.2)	4 (3.6)	45 (39.8)	2.16	.97
Teachers of my child can pick up content that is related to the learners' lives	59 (52.7)	4 (3.6)	49 (43.8)	2.09	.98

Items	A	N	D	M	SD
Teachers can do everything they can to ensure that the weaker learners also come along.	59 (52.7)	8 (7.1)	45 (40.2)	2.13	.96
Teachers will work well in a good relationship with learners with special needs.	67(59.8)	18 (16.1)	27(24.1)	2.36	.85
Learners will cooperate well with each other regardless of their differences	26(23.21)	16 (14.3)	70(62.5)	1.61	.84
Schools can deal with the different financial and required resources to meet the circumstances of all	22 (19.6)	26 (23.2)	64 (57.1)	1.63	.80
Taking care of learners with special needs will lead to an additional cost on parents/guardians	81 (72.3)	12 (10.7)	19(17.0)	2.55	.77
It is the right of a child with special educational needs to get into a special education classroom	93 (83.0)	11 (9.8)	8 (7.1)	2.76	.57
A child with special educational needs should be moved to a special education classroom	81 (72.3)	15 (13.4)	16(14.3)	2.58	.73
The best result will be achieved if children with special educational needs are placed in inclusive classroom	61 (54.5)	11 (9.8)	40(35.7)	2.19	.94

Source: Field Data (2020) D=Disagree A=Agree N=Neutral NB: Percentages in parentheses.

From the table the means for the items ranged from 1.61 to 2.76 and the SD ranged from .57 to .98. The items which obtained the lowest means indicating negative response were on 'Learners will cooperate well with each other regardless of their differences' (1.61, SD=.84) followed by 'Schools can deal with the different financial and required resources to meet the circumstances of all' (1.63, SD=.80), and the highest mean (2.76, SD=.57) was on the statement 'It is the right of a child with special educational needs to get into a special education classroom'. The percentages were used for further discussion of the findings together with the focus group discussions.

4.1. Ghanaian Teachers can Promote Inclusive Education

Parent teachers perceived that Ghanaian teachers will be able to recognize their children's strengths and support them in inclusive classroom. They further indicated that the teachers can pick up content that will be relevant and related to their children's lives. They assuredly believed that teachers can do everything they can to ensure that the weaker learners also come along with the good learners in the classroom. More importantly, the finding indicated that teachers will work well in a good relationship with learners with special needs. Conversely, this findings support the assertion that parents trust teachers quite well in inclusive practices [12].

The findings from the focus group discussion confirmed that since pre-service teachers are introduced to inclusive education as a course and with inclusivity issues considered as key pillar across the entire curriculum, teachers can easily identify learners' characteristics and help them accordingly. This also confirms [14] studies which indicated parents perceive teachers as able to pick up content related to their students' lives and personalise their teaching according to the individual students' needs.

4.2. Learners' Cooperation as a Barrier to Inclusive Education

The results from the quantitative data revealed that majority (70%) of the participated disagreed that learners will cooperate smoothly and support each other regardless of their differences in an inclusive environment. The pre-service parent teachers considered that peaceful cooperation among learners in an inclusive environment

can't be realized and hence will be a major challenge that can affect the effective implementation of inclusive education in Ghana. During the discussion session, the parent teachers associated this challenge to many reasons which among other issues included stigmatization on the part of learners with severe or profound special educational needs. They further explained that the issue of stigmatization and rejection may be high in an inclusive schools in Ghana due to the misconception that some societies have about individuals living with disability.

4.3. Inclusive Education Is Demanding

More than sixty percent (64%) of the parent teachers posited that the schools in Ghana can't deal with the different financial and required resources to meet the demands of inclusive education. This was further expounded from the outcome of the focus group discussion as the participants clearly indicated that the current facilities in our schools are not adequate enough to support the demands of inclusive education. They indicated that inclusive education will require assisted devices and other accommodating infrastructure but currently, the schools in Ghana have no such facilities. In line with this finding is the claim that a major barrier to successful inclusion seems to be the lack of resources or that resources are not addressing students' concrete needs [14].

However, majority (81%) of the participants established their disagreement to the statement 'taking care of learners with special needs will lead to an additional cost on parents/guardians'. Among other reasons supporting this argument emerging from the discussion session, they expressed that parents wouldn't have much cost to bear if only all required facilities are provided in schools. This implies that the parents believe most of the essential and expensive resources required for inclusive education is a responsibility of government and hence wouldn't bring any additional cost to them.

4.4. Children with Special Educational Needs should be placed in Special School

The participants ascertained that it is the right of a child with special educational needs to get into a special education classroom and that a child with special educational needs should be moved to a special education classroom where his/her need will be effectively met.

From the findings from the discussion, it was realized that this assertion was influenced by the challenges they enumerated about inadequate resources to support inclusive education in Ghana. However, they perceived that the best result will be achieved if children with special educational needs are placed in inclusive classroom if and only if the necessary resources are well-provided.

5. Conclusion

The findings revealed that the pre-service parent teachers have positive attitude towards inclusive education. They believed that teachers will be able to recognize their children's strengths and support them in inclusive classroom and Teachers will work well in a good relationship with learners with special needs. Ultimately, they perceived that the best result will be achieved if children with special educational needs are placed in inclusive classroom.

However, they stressed on challenges that may hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education in Ghana. Among the challenges included inadequate resources, and violent cooperation among learners in inclusive environment. The findings suggested that if the available resources with good orientation about inclusivity issues in schools are ensure then inclusive education can be implemented effectively in Ghana. It is therefore recommended that the government and stakeholders ensure that these challenges are met.

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APPENDIX A



Pictures of Focus Group Discussion



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