Perceptions and Attitudes of Teachers on the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Mainstream Classrooms in the East Mamprusi Municipality of the Northeast Region of Ghana

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental human right and should be made accessible to all learners. However, lack of knowledge and preparation adversely affect teachers' willingness to embrace children with special needs in their classroom. This study ascertained teachers' perception and attitude to embrace children with special needs in regular classroom in the East Mamprusi Municipality in the Norther region of Ghana. The study used a descriptive design and qualitative data collection method to collect information on the topic from five basic schools in the East Mamprusi Municipality. Convenience, purposive, and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the schools and 40 respondents, comprising five head teachers, and 35 classroom teachers. In-depth interviews were used to elicit responses from participants. The data were analyzed thematically. The findings indicated that teachers had little knowledge of inclusive education. It also revealed that classroom teachers were not adequately prepared towards the implementation of inclusive education. The researchers recommend that Ghana Education Service, in collaboration with the Special Education Division, should make adequate provision to introduce more practical courses on special needs education (Sign language and braille) in teacher training institutions (colleges).

Keywords: attitude, children with disabilities**,** inclusive education, perception, teachers

Introduction

Inclusive education was introduced in response to the global concern about limited access to education to some children, especially those with disabilities. This global concern was motivated by the belief that all children are capable of being educated and have the right to access a free and compulsory basic education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2000). Inclusive education addresses and responds to the diverse needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education (UNESCO, 2005). A major benefit of inclusive education is that it allows children with different needs to be educated in the same school setting. That is, be enrolled and taught together in the mainstream setting by teachers in the mainstream. In the inclusive education setup, the school environment is adapted to suit the varying needs, learning styles, and preferences of children (Berg, 2004). Inclusion is, thus, about creating an environment within which all children, irrespective of their ability, language, ethnic or cultural origin and gender, can be accommodated and educated (Carrington et al, 2012).

Ghana has joined the global movement towards inclusive education and has put in place several programs to ensure the successful implementation of the program. The shift began between 2003 and 2018. During this period, Ghana developed several Educational Strategic Plans (2003, 2010, & 2018) to serve as the framework for the implementation of the new educational policy (Government of Ghana, 2015). Following this, some schools across the country started piloting the new educational program. Implementation has, however, been a bit slower than expected, considering the resources that have been committed into the program, and duration of the program (Opoku, et al. 2017). In fact, enrolment of children with disabilities in mainstream schools within the period declined (Ministry of Education, 2013). Several factors accounted for the challenges in the implementation of inclusive education in Ghana. However, a major one is about the quality of teachers, which is reflected in their perception and attitude toward the program. Generally, it has been observed that despite the apparent benefits of inclusive education, teachers generally have been concerned about the program. Teachers concerns centred on the academic, social, and behavioral adjustments of children with disabilities in the inclusive system and how these affect educational outcomes (Heiman, 2002; Priestley & Rabiee, 2002). This study assessed the readiness of teachers in a rural setting in Ghana to embrace the new educational system.

Literature Review

This section reviews literature on the perception and attitude of teachers towards inclusive education. According to Robbins and Judge (2013), perception is a process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment. Knowledge, expectation, and evaluation are the three dimensions of perceptions (Wulandari, 2014). These dimensions influence perception either positively or negatively. Attitude on the other hand is a positive or negative affective reaction towards a denotable abstract or concrete object or proposition (Bruvold, 1970). Wood and Wood (1980) also defined attitude as a relatively stable evaluation of a person, object, situation, or issue. These two human attributes are important determinants of adoption of new ideas or innovations.

Teachers are one of the key resources and the most important determinant of quality education (Deku & Vanderpuye, 2017). The success of any (new) educational program, such as inclusive education, is highly dependent on the quality of teachers available. Well trained teachers are likely to have positive perception and attitude required to create an enabling environment for children diverse needs to reach their full potentials (Ingrid & Sunit, 2013). A positive attitude towards inclusive education, for example, is an indication of teachers' willingness to allow children with disabilities in their classrooms. It suggests teachers' readiness to create an inclusive environment and to use instructions that meet the diverse needs of all learners in their classrooms (Lindsay, 2003, Ali, Mustapha & Jelas, 2006).

One of the factors that influence teachers' perception and attitude towards inclusive education is training. Well-trained teachers, who can adequately support and manage children with diverse needs in the inclusive setting, are required to successfully implement inclusive education (Obi & Mensah, 2005; Burch, 2019). Indeed, inadequate supply of qualified teachers is a major challenge to the implementation of inclusive education in many countries, especially those in low-and-middle-income countries, such as Ghana (Global Campaign for Education and Education International, 2012; International Disability and Development Consortium, 2013). A positive attitude is therefore a prerequisite for all teachers in the implementation of inclusive education. In an inclusive educational setting, the teachers perform multiple roles that requires patience and understanding. Their role is not only to teach, but also to provide training, such as, mobility, self-care skills and preparation of teaching materials for children with diverse learning styles and preference (Sharma, 2006). However, many teachers lack these important qualities due to inadequate training, and therefore, do not have the requisite knowledge and attitude towards inclusive practices (Florian, 2008; Agbenyega, 2007). Many teachers believe that inclusion of students with disabilities in their classroom will adversely affect teaching and

learning, as well as the general performance (Westwood and Graham, 2003). Teachers were also reported to have negative attitude and unwilling to accept children with disabilities in their class because they are though the school's curriculum could be displaced and slowed down (Burch, 2007). Avrimides and Norwich (2002), for example, reported that teachers were not ready to include children with disabilities in their classroom because they would be required to constantly monitor and develop special materials and manage the behavior of the children. For these reasons, Yoon-Suk Evans, and David (2011) suggested that special schools are the best places for students with disabilities because they would receive better attention only in special education classrooms.

Studies in Ghana reported similar negative attitudes among teachers. For example, Yekple and Avoke (2006) confirmed this finding and indicated that a number of teachers were concerned as to whether they were practically prepared to teach children with disabilities effectively. For this reason, some teachers had negative attitude towards inclusion of children with disabilities and felt that any child who has some form of impairment should be sent to a special school; children with disabilities who attended mainstream schools were labeled stupid and lazy because they could not cope with instructions. Teachers thought the inclusion of children with disabilities in their classroom would be time consuming and affect their instructional time, thus making it difficult for them to complete their syllabi (Agbenyega, 2007).

Many of the studies on the subject were conducted in urban settings in Ghana. However, it has been established that negative perception and attitude about disability is high in Ghana and more serious in rural than in urban areas (Sliker, 2009). But little is known about how teachers in the remote areas, such as East Mamprusi Municipality, perceived children with disabilities and their attitude towards inclusive education. Since, inclusive education is a national policy, it is important to understand how teachers in general feel about the policy. It was for this reason that this study was conducted. The study examined perceptions and attitudes of basic schoolteachers in the East Mamprusi Municipality on inclusive education. The study specifically investigated teachers' knowledge of disability and inclusive education, their perception of the capabilities of children with disabilities, and their attitude towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

This research was guided by the diffusion innovation theory, propounded by Everett Rogers in the year 1962. It is one of the oldest theories used in the social sciences to describe the spread and to forecast the dynamics of a new idea or product. It describes the process by

which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system. According to Rogers (2003), there are five categories of individuals, who adopt innovation at different times. They are the innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. The innovators are people who want to be the first to test an innovation whiles early adopters are already aware of the need to change and so are very comfortable adopting new ideas. The early majority adopt new ideas before the average person whereas the late majority are skeptical of change, and will only adopt an innovation after it has been tried by the majority. The laggards are very skeptical of change and are the hardest group to bring on board.

However, there are five major factors that influence the adoption or a rejection of an idea or product. The first factor is relative advantage of the new idea. This is the degree to which an innovation is seen as better than the idea or product it replaces. The second factor is compatibility, which describes how the new idea or product is consistent with the value system of users. It also describes the availability of appropriate materials to facilitate easy access and usage. The third factor focuses on the complexity of the product or the innovation. This explains difficulty or easiness to use the innovation. Trialability which is the fourth factor, measures the extent to which an innovation can be experimented to determine how reliable or dependable it is, before a decision is made by the user. The last factor, which is observability, measures the extent to which an innovation can give tangible results. These factors are related to the innovation itself, in this case, inclusive education.

Rogers (2003) also suggested that for effective dissemination of an innovation in the local situation, the cultural values, the historical and social elements, together shape the attitude of the community. That is, social network of relationships and communities which form people's lived experiences have substantial influence. It is worthy to note that with time, attitude towards innovation may change as the positive sides of the innovation become manifested. This is particularly important in case of new policies, such as inclusive education, which are influenced by socio-cultural, environmental, and economic factors.

The diffusion theory has been used in several disciplines, including education to explain the process involved in adopting innovation to new educational technology (Jwaifell & Gasaymeh, 2013). The theory was also applied by Kamau (2014) to examine the degree to which training in technology influenced mathematics teachers' decisions to adopt or reject technology in teaching secondary students in Kenya. Recently, the theory was used by Frei-Landau, Muchnik-Rozanov, and Avidov-Ungar (2022) to explore the process of adopting and implementing mobile learning in classroom teaching by in-service and preservice teachers in

Israel during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the case of inclusive education, the perception and attitude teachers hold about the policy affect their decision to embrace and implement the policy. Teachers who are innovators, and had some training, are likely to have a positive perception towards inclusive education and will be willing to accept children with disabilities in their classrooms. On the other hand, teachers who lacked the training and resources to handle children with disabilities will be apprehensive and would have difficulty accepting the policy- these are the laggards. Since disability is associated with misconceptions and negative perception, the adoption of inclusive education will be influenced by the socio-cultural values of teachers and their exposure to disability-related issues, thus making the adoption of the policy among teachers occurring in stages, depending on teachers' perception and time.

Rogers's diffusion innovative theory is therefore considered the appropriate theoretical framework for the study because it provides a framework for understanding teachers' perception in embracing the new educational policy that has been received by many Ghanaians with mixed reactions. The theory also helps to attribute meaning to the different adopter categories which will help to customize training for teachers.

Methods

Study design and approach

A descriptive study design was used for this study. A descriptive design involves providing a succinct and thorough account of a situation, without concerning oneself with "why" a particular phenomenon occurs (Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas, 2013). In the case of the current study, our interest was to describe participants' understanding of inclusive education, as well as their perception and attitude towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in the inclusive classrooms. A descriptive design was useful as it enabled the researchers to obtain an in-depth descriptive understanding of the issue being investigated – how teachers in the study area are likely to react to the inclusion of children with disabilities in their classroom and factors influencing their actions. The descriptive data therefore provided vital lessons for the implementation of the policy.

Research Setting and population

The study was conducted in selected public basic schools in the East Mamprusi Municipality of the then Northern Region of Ghana (now, Northeast Region). The East Mamprusi Municipality has a total population of 121,009, of which 3,855 persons, representing 2.8% have some form of disability (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). The major economic activities of the people in the Municipality are trading and farming.

This study targeted five basic public schools, selected from the Municipality. Out of the 140 teachers in the five schools, 40 participants were chosen for the study, consisting of five headteachers and 35 classroom seven teachers from each school. Out of this number, there were 28 male teachers and 12 female teachers. All the headteachers were males.

Three sampling techniques were used convenient, purposive, and simple random sampling techniques. The schools were conveniently selected whereas purposive and random sampling were used to select participants. Our main inclusive criteria for selecting participants were teaching experience of the teachers. In each school, we selected professional teachers, who had taught for more than two years in the Municipality. These teachers had enough experience in the classroom, familiar with conditions in the Municipality, and were able to tell if they could handle children with disabilities in their classrooms.

After selecting the five schools, an introductory letter from the department of Health Promotion and Disability Studies was sent to the heads of each of the schools, explaining the purpose of the study, eligibility criteria, and seeking their permission and support to conduct the study in their respective schools. The heads of the schools, then, informed their respective teachers. Afterwards, a visit was paid to the schools to meet the teachers and brief them on the purpose of the study and to garner their assistance. Each school fixed a date for the researchers to meet the teachers again for recruitment. At each meeting, teachers were screened for eligibility by using the eligibility criteria teaching experience in the Municipality and their professional status. Teachers who met our criteria were recruited using purposive sampling, after signing an informed consent form. In schools where the number of teachers, who met the eligibility criteria were more than seven, (this happened in three schools), a simple random sampling technique was used to select seven teachers.

Data collection instruments

Two different semi-structured interview guides, one for the heads and the other for the teachers, were used to interview the participants. The interview guides offered some level of flexibility, which gave us the opportunity to probe for more information and allowed the participants to freely express their views on the issue being investigated. In fact, the researchers had the opportunity to vary the questions to suit each participant but made sure they did not deviate from the objectives of the study. The flexible nature of this method was helpful in exploring the different perspectives of teachers on the inclusive education. This helped the researchers to get a 'deeper' understanding of the diverse views of teachers in the district.

The interview guide was structured into three sections. The first section assessed the level of knowledge of the teachers on disability and inclusive education while the second part examined the perception of the teachers on the capabilities of children with disabilities. The last section focused on whether the teachers were willing to accept children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The interviews were conducted by the researchers in English, and the proceedings were recorded with an audio recorder.

Data analysis

Consistent with descriptive research, a content analysis was used to analyze the data. We wanted to provide a vivid picture of who said what while minimizing interpretation of the data (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013; Bloor & Wood, 2006). The analysis involved systematically coding and categorizing the data to determine trends and patterns, their frequency of occurrence and grouping them into themes (Mayring, 2004 content analysis 1). The audio-recordings of all the interviews were transcribed by two researchers. The audio recordings were listened to severally by the researchers and transcribed separately. The transcripts were compared, and variations reconciled. The transcribed results were sent back to some of the participants for confirmation. The next stage was coding. To ensure consistency in the coding, we developed a small coding manual, which consisted of category names, operational definitions of some terms, and rules for assigning codes (Weber, 1990 content analysis 2). Based on the codes, we pulled together similar responses to form categories, which were then refined into themes. Supporting quotes from the transcripts were identified and linked to their respective themes.

Ethical consideration

Approval of study was obtained from the committee on human research and ethical clearance, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. All participants were taken through informed consent process before they were recruited. They were given information on the purpose of the study, the potential risk and benefits of participation as well as having the opportunity to withdraw any time they felt uncomfortable or unwilling to participate. Confidentiality was also ensured by making sure that no other person or individual who was not involved in the study had access to the information. We therefore protected the information obtained from the participants on a password protected computer. The participants' privacy was addressed by not taking their names and other personal identifiers, such as house numbers, phone numbers, and name of schools.

Results

Demographic characteristics of participants

The demographic features analyzed in the study included the participants' age, qualification, gender, and teaching experience (Table 1). With respect to age, majority (65%) of the participants were within age group 20-30, while the 41-50 age group had the least participants. On gender, male teachers were more (70%) than female teachers. More than half (65%) of the teachers were between 20 and 30 years old, while those with age ranging from 31 to 40 constituted 30%. Most participants (85%) had diploma education whereas the remaining had first degree. Regarding teaching experience, 75% of the participants had working experience of between 3 and 5years, 25% had worked for 6 years and above.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Category	No. Participants	Percentage (%)
Age Range		
20 – 30	26	65
31 – 40	12	30
41 – 50	2	5
Education		
Degree	6	15
Diploma	34	85
Sex		
Male	28	70
Female	12	30
Years of Teaching		
3-5 years	30	75
6 and above	10	25
Total	**40**	**100**

Understanding of disability

Majority (85%) of the teachers were of the view that disability is a health condition that affects one's body functioning. That is, a problem located in the body, or a malfunctioning of the body, as stated by one of the teachers: *"It [disability] is when a person's organ is not able to perform as it is expected or perform the real function it was supposed to perform due to ailment."* A headteacher 002, with a similar view said, *"disability is when you have malfunction in any parts of the body",* whiles another headteacher 001 described persons with disabilities as *''those individuals who are weak in the community due to malfunctioning of body parts.''* Another related theme in relation to the definition is viewing disability as a loss of body parts: *"disability is a loss of any body organ, it can be the eye, ear, or hand"* (Female Teacher 014), and this affects the ability of individuals with the condition to perform certain activities or functions*: "The person who loses part of his organ and cannot do certain things due to the loss of body parts or organ"* (Male Teacher 021). Three teachers described disability as deviation from the norm. For example, a teacher said that, *''disability is about children [who] are not all that normal as a result of deviation in their system. Everything about them seems different from others''* (Male Teacher010). Similarly, another teacher defined it as *"any person who deviates from being normal, either psychologically, physically, emotionally, and the deviation can be positive or negative"* (Teacher022), whereas a third teacher saw it as an *"abnormality in the body, making them not able to do what the normal people are doing"* (Male Teacher033). From the above, it could be seen that the teachers' definitions of disability are consistent with the traditional notions of disability, which sees persons with disabilities as a defect, a deviation from the norm, and inability to perform daily activities that are expected of everyone.

Teachers' perception of the abilities of children with disabilities

On the teachers' perception of the capacity of children with disabilities, the majority (82%) were of the view that children with disabilities have low IQ and slow learners.

Children with disabilities have low IQ

Most of the participants thought that persons with disabilities have low IQ compared with their counterparts without disabilities. Once one acquires a disability, one loses some of one's capabilities. This perception appears to be the reason for which the participants had negative perception about the capability of children with disabilities, as the quotation below depicts:

Immediately someone is disabled or becomes disabled, some of his or her capabilities are lost. So, it affects their emotional stability and their way of thinking. So, it does not matter whether, physical, intellectual, vision among others, but every disabled person loses their self-esteem which also have effect of their ability to cope with others without disability (Female Teacher 022).

Supporting the teacher, a headteacher, argued that *"disabled children have low IQ and it affects their ability in all areas"* (headteacher 002). From a critical observation, their understanding rate and academic performance is not exempted from this limitation", while a Female Teacher said: *"...their inclusion will lower the academic performance and standards of the school as well as other students without disability because they have low IQ ..."* (Teacher 010). Because of their low IQ, children with disabilities cannot compete with their peers without disabilities. Their participation in class will be low because of the feeling that they will be mocked. A participant elaborated:

Children with disabilities' beliefs and lifestyles are different from the "normal ones". Also, they will be inactive and cannot participate in classroom because they will always feel shy and inferior because of their low intelligence, especially when their colleagues label or mocked at them (Male Teacher006).

Children with disabilities are slow learners

Some of the teachers in the study believed that children with disabilities are slow learners so they will be unable to cope with teaching and learning in the mainstream classrooms, as one of the teachers noted: *"Disabled children are generally not good and most of them are slow learners. Their understanding rate is very low and demands a lot of time before they can cope with their colleagues without disabilities"* (Male Teacher 023). In this regard, some teachers insisted that children with disabilities would be incapable to participate in an inclusive classroom as reported by another male teacher, who stated that, *"they [children with disabilities] cannot compete with the 'normal' students in the inclusive system because they are slow and can't participate in classroom activities"* (Teacher 017).

Perception and attitude of teachers towards inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools

Almost all the participants thought children with disabilities should not be allowed to participate in mainstream schools. Their reasons were that children with disabilities will give teachers extra burden, their inclusion will affect the image of schools, they will not benefit from inclusive education, and that inclusive education is expensive. The few participants who

had positive attitude towards inclusive education thought it will reduce stigma and marginalization of children with disabilities.

Extra burden on teachers

Some of the teachers thought that children with disabilities will put more burden on the teachers, slow down and disrupt class activities, and, thus, affect the overall teaching and learning outcomes. A male teacher for example, said if you have children with disabilities in your classroom, *"...you are likely not to always meet your objectives with respect to time because you will have to give special attention during and after lesson and class and this will be a burden and affect other children*'' (Teacher 008). Another teacher likewise thought that it will give teachers *"...extra burden because spending additional time in designing teaching and learning materials and explaining just to cater for their special needs will affect the instructional time and the overall outcome of children without disabilities''* (Male Teacher 016).

> *The time you are going to spend on the normal students will not be as much as the time you will waste on the disabled children because most of them [students with disabilities] don't easily understand no matter how you explain. Though it does happen among the normal students but comparably, it is far better than the children with disabilities. So, I think it will lower teaching and classroom outcome* (Female Teacher 014).

Adversely affect image of schools

Some teachers were concerned with the effect children with disabilities will have on the reputation of mainstream schools. According to these teachers, having children with disabilities in mainstream schools will damage the image of the schools; children with disabilities will negatively affect the performance of children without disabilities, teachers' output, and the overall reputation of the schools.

> *Like this school and all basic schools in this district, the end of term exams questions comes from the municipal level, and they expect some particular topics to be covered per term. But with disabled children in your classroom, you will not and cannot cover up to the target of the term. Imagine that the municipal set their questions and your students are not able to answer them. It will affect the performance of the students and the school's reputation in general* (Headteacher005).

> *As a teacher, you cannot complete the required topic per the term on time. Imagine a situation where the end of term examination questions are set from the above (District level), so if questions comes from where you are not able to reach to because of*

someone with a disability, can your students answer the questions? This will affect the school negatively (Female Teacher011).

Inclusive education will not benefit children with disabilities

The general perception among most of the participants was that inclusive education will not benefit children with disabilities because they have unique needs that cannot be met in the inclusive system. According to the teachers who held this view, although some children with disabilities are gifted, their talents can only be harnessed and maximized in the special schools as noted by headteacher 005: *"some disabled children are more capable, but they need support and special care before we can feel their importance, and this can be realized only in special schools."* A Female Teacher 010 also thought that, *"inclusive education is not good for disabled children because it will suppress their ability and talents. Meanwhile those talents could be realized and nurtured at special schools.''* Supporting the above, three teachers elaborated in the quotes below.

> *Academically, most children with disabilities are not good, but they have some special skills and talents that usually they can perform. Some of these ability and skills cannot be realized and maximized in the general school. It is only at the special schools that this potential can be realized and fully explored* (Female Teacher002)

> *I think they should be separated for special time and special resources to be given to them because they need more attention and resources to develop their skills and talents. But if you mixed them with their colleagues without disability, they will always be lagging behind in a sense that the "normal" ones in class will always be far ahead of those with disabilities due to the differences in abilities and time to cope up* (Male Teacher019).

> *I watched a documentary titled everyone is special. With reference to this video, you can see that the specially trained teacher was able to identify one student with intellectual impairment's special talent. When the needed time and support was given to the child, his potential really manifested as an artist. I think such teachers should be given to them for them to realize their gifted talent. This can be realized in special schools only* (Male Teacher 011).

Some of the participants even accused the government of "imposing" inclusive education on children with disabilities. According to them, government has failed to provide more special schools that are well resourced for children with disabilities and it was reason it pushing children with disabilities into mainstream schools.

What I am seeing is that government failed to provide enough special schools across the country for disabled children, and that is why they want to integrate them. But they should not overlook the burden and struggles of teachers and the cost involved (Female Teacher010)

I think Government is not committed in making this successful, so we will not also put the burden on ourselves. More special schools should have been provided, at least, in every district or teachers should have been trained adequately with special resources, and the educational structure needed should have been put in place in the special schools for these children (Headteacher003).

Inclusive education is expensive

A teacher thought Ghana cannot implement inclusive education because it is expensive, so, much emphasis should rather be placed on special schools.

You people are all talking about inclusive, inclusive. Do you know how much it will cost the country, just to favor the minority. In fact, a small section of our population, how many are they if I may ask? Meanwhile this people are already enjoying their educational rights in the special schools. Government should rather focus on providing more special schools than focusing on this all-inclusive, which is not possible and expensive (Male Teacher011).

However, some of the participants seemed to have positive attitude towards inclusive education. These participants were of the view that inclusive education will reduce stigma, develop the self-esteem of children with disabilities, and increase their social inclusion. The following statements illustrate the perception of participants who had positive attitude toward inclusive education.

It is good for them just because of socialization. They will socialize and become used to the environment. If they were shy, one way or the other, they will definitely become used to the stigmatization that will have been given to them if they keep staying away from their colleagues without disability (Male Teacher002)

Separating the disabled children to one particular place where teaching and learning takes place, indirectly, is like we are encouraging isolation. Some will feel they are neglected and for that matter will not put in their best. But don't forget that at the youthful stage, we learn by imitation. So, they can learn and

copy things they could not do by their own from colleagues without disability to build themselves (Male Teacher020)

It can be deduced from the above findings that most of the headteachers and teachers did not support inclusive education. This is because of the belief that inclusion will present greater risk for the maximization of the potentials of children with and without disabilities as it will affect class activities.

Discussion

The study investigated the perception and attitude of teachers in public basic schools in the East Mamprusi Municipal in the Northeast Region of Ghana towards inclusion of children with disabilities in general education program, using the diffusion theory as a theoretical framework. The findings of the study revealed that most of the teachers in the study had negative perception about the capabilities of children with disabilities, and their attitude toward inclusive education was generally discouraging. The negative perception and unprogressive attitude of the teachers towards disability reflect the general situation in Ghana. The general perception and treatment of people with disabilities in Ghana is negative and influenced by traditional beliefs that ascribe the causes of disability to curses, punishments for sins committed by family members or the result of witchcraft, magic or sorcery. This belief has often caused people to avoid persons with disabilities (Agbenyega, 2003; Slikker, 2009; Kassah, 2008).

Teachers' attitude towards inclusive education could be attributed to inadequate training on disability issues. This finding is consistent with many studies on the subject in Ghana. Studies have reported that most teachers in Ghana, including those who pursued courses in special needs education, did not have adequate knowledge on inclusive education. According to Obi and Mensah (2005), for example, many teachers from the teacher training colleges and universities in Ghana lack adequate knowledge on children with special educational needs and were unable to handle them in inclusive classes. This is because the curriculum of these training institutions did not have enough courses on inclusive education. As such, teachers were not adequately prepared to work in inclusive classrooms. A report by Caseley-Hayford (2002) likewise identified inadequate course content on inclusive education in the curriculum of teacher training institutions. According to the report, this has led to many teacher trainees not having adequate knowledge on disability issues and ill-prepared for inclusive education.

Teachers' concerns that inclusion of children with disabilities would adversely affect class activities, the performance of other children, and, therefore, the reputation of the schools has some bases. In Ghana, schools are under pressure to maintain academic standards (Mamah, 2006; Avoke and Avoke, 2004). This is enforced by annually displacing the performance of

schools, ranked in the order of performance, at the district, municipal and metropolitan education offices. Teachers and school heads are therefore concerned that having children with disabilities in their schools could jeopardize the image of the school. The findings of the study confirm findings by Mambo (2011) and Burch (2007), which indicated that teachers thought that children with disabilities are not capable of being in the regular classrooms because they are slow at learning and their presences could affect those without disabilities negatively. Other studies have also discovered that inclusive education was not appealing to many school principals because of the concern that children with disabilities are likely to weaken academic standards of their schools (Burch, 2019). This perception is reinforced by the belief that children with disabilities have special needs, which cannot be provided in an inclusive system, as the teachers in the study indicated. Yoon-Suk Evans, and David, (2011) found that majority of the participants in their study felt that students with disabilities would receive better education only in special education classrooms.

Agbenyega (2007) and Westwood and Graham (2003) reported that teachers thought having children with disabilities in their classes would be time consuming and may lead to incompletion of their syllabi. Similarly, Mambo (2011) reported that teachers thought a whole school's curriculum could slow down just because of including children with disabilities. Teachers would have to allocate extra time for children with disabilities after lessons to enable them catch up with their colleagues without disabilities. Moreover, classroom management will be problematic for some teachers, especially for teachers with little or no training to handle children with disabilities (Avrimides and Norwich, 2002). There is also a misconception that children with disabilities are aggressive, hostile, and controversial. For example, Avrimides and Norwich (2002) reported that teachers were not ready to include children with disabilities in their classrooms, because they would need time to develop special materials, and to constantly monitor and manage the aggressive behaviors of these children. Most of these concerns by the teachers are however misplaced because the inability of children with disabilities to cope in class lies in a rigid educational system that fails to consider their learning needs and preferences (Massoumeh and Leila, 2012).

The diffusion theory does not take into consideration resources available to individuals or social support systems that could influence people's behavior. For example, teacher training and availability of resources have been found to positively influence attitude of teachers towards inclusion education (Avrimides and Norwich, 2002),). But the diffusion theory does not take these into accounted, and it may also be difficult to classify teachers into the five distinct adopter categories proposed by Rogers (2003). However, the theory offered insights

into why most of the teachers in the study area would not embrace inclusive education and strategies that could be used to change their perception and attitude towards the new policy. For example, strategies that could make inclusive education appealing to teachers include increasing the knowledge of teachers on the policy by providing information on its effectiveness, such as success stories; that is, examples of schools that have successfully implemented inclusive education.

Implications

As described previously, inclusive education is new in Ghana, and many teachers did not take classes in inclusive education during their training (Marmah, 2006; Obi and Mensah, 2005). This is especially so for teachers who completed their training before inclusive education was introduced in Ghana. Because the course content at the teacher training colleges at that time did not have courses on special education, these teachers did not take classes on inclusive education, and as a result, did not have adequate knowledge on special needs education (Marmah, 2006). Intensive workshops and in-service training for teachers to improve their knowledge on inclusive education is therefore needed. The curriculum of teacher training institutions could be reviewed to include more courses on inclusive education so that all teacher trainees will acquire the needed knowledge during their training. In fact, the feeling of not being able to teach children with disabilities due to inadequate training has been identified to cause a lot of apprehension towards inclusive education among teachers (Yekple & Avoke, 2006), and this feeling can be reduced if teachers are well trained.

The findings also suggest that for more than a decade since the inception of inclusive education in Ghana, much has not been done in terms of improving knowledge on the program. Without adequate knowledge, much cannot be achieved with the implementation of the policy. A lot of efforts are therefore required on the part of advocates and implementers of inclusive education in Ghana to ensure that the program succeeds. In particular, more work needs to be done in the rural areas, where negative perception about disability is very high (Sliker, 2009).

Conclusion

Although this study is limited in scope, it provides a lot of insights into teachers' perception of and attitude towards disability and inclusive education. Since teacher knowledge is key to the implementation of inclusive education, a lot needs to be done in terms of teacher training and provision of resources. This will require a lot of financial outlay, but it is worthy to undertake. The fact that some of the teachers in the study area had positive attitude towards inclusive education suggest that change is possible. The involvement of and collaboration with

key stakeholders, such as teachers, is key to the success of inclusive education, and this should be made central to the implementation of the policy.

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