Sociology of Education: Exploration of Stakeholders Experiences of Inclusive Education in Schools

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Abstract

The study explored lived experiences of major stakeholders with regard to Inclusive Education (IE) practices in mainstream public basic schools using heuristic inquiry of descriptive phenomenological approach. The sampled participants were selected using purposive sampling technique. Six set of semi-structured interview guides were used to collect the data. The data were manually analysed reflexively using Braun and Clarke six-phase model of thematic analysis. The study revealed that there is some level of misconception about IE on the part of stakeholders. Also, these stakeholders have malfunctional experiences regarding their lived experiences of IE practices in schools. Nevertheless, when teachers are able to employ innovative, gender and culture responsive instructional strategies that take into consideration the sociocultural and Special Education Needs and Disabilities differentials of learners, they will be able to ensure inclusion of all learners. Regular organisation of in-service trainings to stakeholders, particularly those in the working and lower classes, regarding the conceptualisation and practices of IE based on our IE policies and laws will help in ensuring that we educate all learners in well-integrated school settings.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, mainstream school, public basic school, stakeholders

Globally, education is seen as the fundamental human right of each child irrespective of his/her religion, culture, gender, or Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Nevertheless, many children in developing societies are not getting opportunity to get quality education due to certain ascriptive factors that are manifested from their sociocultural practices (Mantey, 2014, p. 13). This phenomenon is becoming an obstacle to achieving the goal of universalising access to education for all in these societies. According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund ([UNICEF], 2017), an effective education should improve learning for all; promote understanding, reduce prejudice and strengthen social integration; and ensure that all learners, especially learners from minority groups, are equipped to work and contribute economically and socially to their communities. This calls for the need for all countries to reform and transform their schools by adapting to Inclusive Education (IE) so they can respond to the diverse needs of heterogeneous students' population including those with SEND.

Historically, public schooling systems in English-speaking West African countries such as Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Gambia have always created room for inclusionary practices to manifest in public basic schools by ensuring that learners are not denied access to education on the basis of their cultural practices, socioeconomic status and disabilities (Milledzi & Saani, 2018). For instance, the spirit and the letter of article 21(1) (b) (c) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana which clearly specifies that: "all persons shall have the right to-freedom of thought, conscience and belief…" and "freedom to practise any religion and to manifest such practice", affirms the country's quest for IE. This shows that mother Ghana and other sub-Saharan African countries have always seen IE as eufunctional element in the achievement of their Education for All (EFA) and national integration agenda.

Unfortunately, in the early 1950s, learners with explicit SEND were not allowed to be integrated into the mainstream public basic schools in Ghana and Nigeria (Mantey, 2014). This was so because most stakeholders, by then, believed in the medical model of disability, an orientation that believes that learners with SEND should be sent to special schools (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). However, after independence, these countries witnessed significant positive revolution in their educational system which has created room for them to adopt the social model of disability, an orientation that allows the adaption of IE in mainstream schools (Opoku et al., 2022). Mainstream public basic schools are schools from the general public education system that receives all learners, irrespective of their culture, socioeconomic status or SEND differentials (UNICEF, 2017).

Major stakeholders in Ghana and other sub-Saharan African countries, particularly parents, started to understand that their "special" children are able to learn better in the school with their age-mates and friends rather than in special schools that comes with some level of social discrimination (Milledzi & Saani, 2018). According to Milledzi and Saani, this understanding led to an establishment of non-profit societies in these countries that ended up providing education in church basements for learners with SEND. To some extent, this intervention made by these groups of parents helped in satisfying the socio-educational needs of learners with SEND, and also narrowing the countries' IE gaps (Opoku et al., 2022).

Tactlessly, the intervention made by these parents and other stakeholders regarding the education of these "special" children created the impression in the minds of stakeholders that IE is synonymous to special education, as a result, the countries' quests of IE over emphasised on the inclusion of learners with disability, thus putting premium on 'disability-inclusive education' (Aboagye, 2020; Adjanku, 2020). This view is consistent with the outcomes of Achmad's (2023) study, which systematically reviewed the literature and found that IE policies substantially ensures that children with special needs are given their right with regard to education. Thus, it makes education more accessible to learners with SEND. The work of Achmad largely presented IE as the inclusion of learners with SEND in mainstream schools. He did not consider the incorporation of gender, culture and religion of minority groups in the school curriculum as an element of IE.

Also, in looking at the predictors of parental attitudes, knowledge and perceived social norms influencing IE practices in Ghana and Nigeria, Opoku and colleagues (2022) defined IE as promoting the education of students with disabilities in regular classrooms located in their communities. This definition is consistent with the historical view of IE in Ghana. The question therefore is: *What is IE, and how is this concept conceptualised in today's Ghana?*

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2005), IE is a process of focusing on and responding to the diverse needs of all learners, removing barriers impeding quality education, and thereby increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education. The IE system creates room for all learners to be accommodated irrespective of their abilities or requirements, and at all levels of education, including life-long learning (UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF, 2017). Regrettably, the term "disability-inclusive education" (inclusion of people with disabilities in education) is increasingly being manifested by major donor agencies and developed nations to implicitly describe IE (Aboagye, 2020; Malek, 2017); a phenomenon which is influencing negatively the implementation of IE in Ghana and other heterogeneous West African countries.

The IE policy of Ghana sees IE as ensuring access and learning for all learners: especially those disadvantaged from linguistic, ethnic, gender, geographic or religious minority, from an economically impoverished background as well as learners with SEND (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2013). The Pre-Tertiary Education Act 2020 Act (1049) also defined IE as the value system that holds that each child, irrespective of his or her physical or personal circumstance is given the same and stable opportunity and access to basic education (Parliament of the Republic of Ghana, 2021). This shows that in Ghana IE is no longer defined by physical and cognitive disabilities of students, but also includes a full range of human diversity with references to culture, gender, language, ability, and all other human features. It is seen as an ideology that addresses all barriers and provides access to quality education to meet the diverse needs of all learners in the same learning environment. This makes IE a process and not an event. It provides room for all learners to participate in the general education system irrespective of their cultural and ascriptive factors.

Regrettably, Ghana's contextualisation of IE in public schools is not being manifested in her schooling system. Her mainstream schools are behind diversity (Gyimah, 2021) and that is not upright for her children's civilisation if she considers that IE sets the foundation for all-encompassing society. Also, most people consciously discriminate positively in favour of learners with disabilities when dealing with IE at the detriment of cultural, social, and gender inclusions. Mohammed (2021) posits that current trends in Ghana seem to suggest that non-disability factors such as religion of minority groups are not given much attention regarding implementation of IE policy. These situations are creating room for cultural, gender and socioeconomic status segregations of minority groups in the curriculum of the country.

In its quest to promote the provision of quality education for all learners in an inclusive setting, Ghana has been able to put in place some interventions, including the development of IE policy and implementation plan [2015-2019] (Gyimah, 2021). Despite these efforts, it appears the desired goal has not been achieved, particularly at the first cycle of our educational system. There are still reported cases of children being denied access to education in some first cycle schools as a result of their cultural, religious, gender and SEND diversities (Kefallinou et al., 2020; Mohammed, 2021).

Also, anecdotal reports seem to suggest that IE in Ghana is all about the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in mainstream schools (Aboagye, 2020; Adjanku, 2020; Opoku et al., 2022). This call for the need to revisit the concept of IE sociologically by exploring the lived experiences of major stakeholders regarding the meaning and essence of IE in mainstream schools so we can unearth the successes and challenges of IE practices in the schools for purposes of policy enhancement and sustainability. Outcome of this study will help to review the curriculum from a sociocultural and inclusive perspectives to ensure a well-integrated curriculum that will help in producing an ideal man or woman for Ghana and for the world in general.

Theoretical Framework

An in-depth structural understanding of major stakeholders lived experiences regarding the meaning and essence of IE practices is underpinned by the assumptions of symbolic interactionism and Ajzen's planned behaviour theories. Thus, major stakeholders' behaviours and actions toward IE practices, in general, are based on the meanings they assign to IE. Likewise, their planned behaviours toward IE practices are determined by their intentions which are largely influenced by their knowledge and attitude toward IE and the social values and norms governing the manifestation of the practices (Ajzen 2011; Cameron et al., 2012).

Generally, our beliefs influence our intentions towards a given behaviour (Ajzen 2011). The current study assumed that the meaning and essence of IE by major stakeholders is influenced by their intentions towards it. As the saying goes, "one's action must be judge according to his or her intention." This implies that how stakeholders act toward IE practices depends largely on how they were socialised with the concept either by the family, school, church, media or the society and their intentions toward their action. Thus, major stakeholders naturally act

logically, according to their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control which is largely influenced by their social orientation and communication process (Ajzen, 2011; Cameron et al., 2012). Likewise, the meaning and essence of IE practices by these stakeholders are largely constructed by their communication process. This conceptualisation serves as motivation that influences stakeholders' intention and behaviour toward IE practices hierarchically (Kefallinou et al., 2020).

From the launching of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 to Salamanca Statement (1994) on IE and a more recent UN Convention on the Rights of PWDs, Ghana has supported the vision of transforming school policies and practices toward educating all children in mainstream education facilities, including learners with SEND (MoE, 2013). However, literature seems to suggest that there are evidence gaps in prior research concerning the achievement of effective IE practices in schools. In relation to stakeholders' misconception of IE, Lui and colleagues (2015) indicated that knowledge and perceived social norm are leading influencers of parents' assertiveness towards IE.

Within the context of Ghana, Amponteng and colleagues (2021) indicated in their study that parent have low knowledge about inclusive practices. This may lead to their misconceptions regarding IE, a phenomenon that can be dysfunctional to the country's efforts regarding IE for national integration. Also, examining the issues of IE from a descriptive and positivists perspective does not allow researchers to understand the issues better from heuristic and phenomenological perspectives

In looking at the challenges in implementing IE, Kelly and colleagues (2014) assert that most learners in mainstream schools are not participating in schooling because the schools are not meeting their academic, social, emotional, behavioural, and resource needs. Kelly et al. added that the academic needs of learners with SEND are not matching the school environments, leading to such learners' irregularity to school. Also, inadequate preparation of teachers to handle learners with SEND in mainstream classrooms (Chitiyo et al., 2019), parents' low knowledge about IE (Amponteng et al., 2019), teachers' poor attitudes towards learners with SEND (Wang, 2023), insufficient administrative support and teachers inadequate training on IE (Ahiava & Thomas, 2021) were major factors impeding the implementation of IE. Employing qualitative methodology, Beyene and colleagues (2023) also found that access and accessibility difficulties that spring from the learners' diverse background and lack of teaching resources were among the problems identified as some of the challenges impeding inclusionary practices in schools.

The assertions from the empirical works reviewed seem to suggest that there are still some emerging dysfunctions of IE in Ghana. Also, there seems to be an ostensible knowledge gap in the prior research concerning the meaning and essence of IE practices leading to some misconceptions about the concept (Amponteng et al., 2019; Kefallinou et al., 2020), stakeholders differential narratives regarding IE practices, IE policy implementation challenges (Kelly et al., 2014), lack of instructional and assessment innovative approaches on the part of teachers (Chitiyo et al., 2019; Wang, 2023), lack of resources (Gyimah, 2021; Beyene et al.,

2023) and non-tracking of IE trends, both overt and covert (Beyene et al., 2023). In addition, the few studies conducted on IE practices in Ghana have largely focused on non-symbolic and non-sociocultural gaps (Ahiava & Thomas, 2021; Amponteng et al., 2019; Gyimah, 2021).

Methodology

Design

The philosophical orientation of the study with regard to the pursuant of the virtues of reality and truth were based on the ideas of heuristic inquiry of descriptive phenomenological approach. That is, the reality of IE practices was seen as a sociocultural construct that requires an understanding of the context in which it is constructed and experienced symbolically by those with such lived experience (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This design helped in discovering the underlying meanings and essence of IE in major stakeholders' experiences (Mihalache, 2019). Using heuristic inquiry helped me to gain better insights regarding stakeholders' attitudes and actions toward IE practices that challenge conventional views (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

Participants

The study population was major stakeholders (headteachers, teachers, learners, parents, Special Educational Needs Coordinators [SENCOs] and Local Directors of Education [LDoE]) within the basic school sub-sector. Most eclectic Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the three zones in Ghana were considered, one LGA from each zone. According to Educational Management Information System ([EMIS], 2022), there are three LDoE, five SENCOs, 564 headteachers, 7,639 teachers and 140,640 learners (basic 7–9) in the three areas. Estimate from Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2022) also show that there are about 37,983 parents within the various basic schools in these three areas.

The sample was 90. This comprised of three LDoE, 17 parents, 20 headteachers, 26 teachers, 19 learners and five SENCOs. This sample was decided based on the recommendation that for a qualitative study that requires an analysis of participants lived experience, a sample of 20-30 is appropriate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Purposive sampling was used to select one eclectic local government area from each of the three zones. Schools (both inclusive and non-inclusive) and categories of respondents were also selected purposively. Emphasis was on mainstream public basic schools that are perceived to be most diversify and inclusive in nature. Individual participants were also selected purposively to ensure heterogeneity and diversity in participants' views.

The six categories of participants were handpicked because they are seen to be living with the manifestation of the IE policy implementation. In the selection process, I focused on those living with the phenomenon and they have the needed characteristics that can help yield the most needed information. Some of the participants were selected as the data collection progresses. This created room for me to interact with some of the participants, analyse their

thought in order to decide what data to collect next and from whom. The three LGAs selected have diverse people with multicultural practices, as a result may have different symbolic understanding of IE.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

Six set of semi-structured interview guides were used to collect the data. Using this type of instrument created room for me to explore participants' thoughts, feelings and beliefs about IE practices. The interview guides were in sections and were participants specific. The field work started in August 2023 and ended in November 2023. Prior to administering the instruments, I sent permission letters to the selected education directorates and schools. This was supported by an ethical clearance, with a reference number UCCIRB/EXT/2023/19, from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Cape Coast (UCC). Participants were interviewed individually on face-to-face basis to ensure that other participants would not influence the thoughts of others.

The instruments were administered personally with the support of six field assistants who assisted in the data collection process, including the administering of consent forms. The field assistants were given a brief one-day training and orientation regarding the study a week after receiving the ethical clearance. The data collection commenced immediately after obtaining the informed consents. All participants were interviewed at an agreed place and time of their choice. The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants. Also, notes were taking to ensure that in the event that the recording equipment fails I will still have the data. Fortunately, none of the audio recorders failed. Two of the adult participants who consented to the study did not agree to be audio recorded. As a result, they were given opportunity to provide their responses to the questions in a written form. In the case of the learners, the interviews were recorded manually by writing their responses. Participants were compensated with some stationaries at a cost range of Gh¢20.00 to Gh¢30.00 for their participation.

In all, data were collected from 77 participants before reaching the point where I was not observing new information or theme. At this point, participants started confirming what I already found. Generally, as indicated in Table 1, the participants' characteristics were reflective of the EMIS (2022) and GSS (2022) statistics on basic school teachers and students' enrolment and population census respectively.

In order to ensure value free and to deal with reflexibilities and serendipity issues, I and the field assistants were explicit in our activities and also ensured that our experiences, interest, values, beliefs, assumptions and biases did not influence the interpretations of the data. This created room for us not to create favourable or unfavourable conclusions about the study issues and the participants. Also, our perceived assumptions and personal goals and reasons for doing this research were documented in the field notes as memos and they were kept overtly during the data collection. I ensured that there is consensus between me and the field assistants on the interpretation given to each theme and associate narrative. I employed peer-observation tactics

by creating room for another interviewer to observe sessions and to peer-reviewed others field notes.

Table 1

Description of Participants' Characteristics

Characteristics	Sub-characteristics	Frequency (%) (N=77)
Sex	Male	36 (46.8%)
	Female	41 (53.2%)
Category of participants	LDoE	1 (1.2%)
	SENCOs	4 (5.2%)
	Parents	14 (18.2%)
	Headteachers	18 (23.4%)
	Teachers	23 (29.9%)
	Learners	17 (22.1%)
Age	Less than 18 years	17 (22.1%)
	18 – 45 years	50 (64.9%)
	Above 45 years	10 (13.0%)
Religion	Christianity	52 (67.5%)
	Islam	23 (29.9%)
	Traditional	2 (2.6%)
Zone	Southern zone	30 (39.0%)
	Middle zone	32 (41.5%)
	Northern zone	15 (19.5%)

Source: Field data (2023)

Data Analysis

The data analysis started while some of the interviews and writing of memos were going on. The audio recordings were transcribed manually. The data were organised, categorised, and coded into sub-headers based on the emerging themes of the research objectives. I first broke down the transcripts into discrete excerpts that represented labels, descriptions, definitions, and category names. Recurring patterns and themes regarding meaning and understanding of IE and lived experiences of IE practices were identified and coded uniformly. Furthermore, the coded excerpts were put into one overarching code to describe the emerged patterns. In the case of participants meaning and understanding of IE, they were re-coded to better understand the emerging incidents symbolically.

Reflexively, the data were analysed using Braun and Clarke six-phase model of thematic analysis as cited in Byrne (2021). Firstly, the recorded data from the interviews were playback to listen to them actively. Later, they were transcribed into written form patiently. The transcripts were read and reread in order to obtain general ideas and notes that emerged from

the data and to become intimately familiar with the data to better understand the tone of participants' ideas.

Secondly, the data were organised in a meaningful and systematic way by coding the germane sections of the data that were linked to the objectives of the study. Thirdly, the codes were carefully observed and sorted into themes and subthemes applicable to the objectives. Some of the codes that share similar underlying concept were collapsed into one single code. Example, personal meaning and understanding of IE and cultural view on IE were collapsed into symbolic meaning and understanding of IE practices.

Fourthly, the themes were carefully studied in order to enhance the ideals obtained earlier. Finally, the findings of the study were supported by direct quotations from participants, taking into consideration the written memos. The transcribed data were sent to participants to confirm or disconfirm if it represented their thoughts and ideas.

Ethical Considerations

The research protocols were performed in compliance with relevant laws and institutional guidelines. As indicated earlier, ethical approval was received from IRB, UCC. All participants who were above 18 years signed information sheet and written consent prior to participation. However, in relation to the learners, their respective parental opt-in or opt-out consent was used. All, but two participants who favoured the interviewer take composed notes, assented to the sound recording. The data obtained from these two participants were consistent with that of the other participants. Participants were invigorated to feel unrestricted and air their opinions as factually as possible and that they had the liberty to choose whether to participate or not. They were given the right to pull out from participation without any form of adverse consequences ones they do not feel like continuing to take part in the study.

Findings

Latent Meaning of IE

Firstly, I looked at the symbolic understanding of major stakeholders regarding IE practices in mainstream public basic schools. The participants' thoughts and understanding of what IE is show that they have some level of misconception about the concept. For example, five of the participants (FPN2, FPS3, MPM2, FLS2 and MLM2) see IE as an educational system that allows the participation of PWDs.

A participant, FDM1, said:

> "…there was a time I visited a school where one learner with some chromosomal disorder was denied access. When I intervened, I was told by the headteacher that the teachers in the school do not have the requisite competencies required to teach her. She needs to be sent to a special school. Parents in the various schools also do not

agree to the idea that both 'special' and 'non-special' learners should be in the same class. In my catchment area IE simple means allowing learners with physical disabilities to participate in mainstream schools" (FDMI).

Also, most of the headteachers (16 of 18) viewed IE as an educational system that aims to provide accommodated public education to learners with disabilities. The views of the headteachers are consistent with that of the teachers. Most of the teachers (19 out of 23) also indicated that IE involves a range of interventions and services provided by schools and teachers to help learners with disabilities learn and make progress in school. The understanding of most of the participants regarding IE seems to suggest that cultural integration in the area of religious, gender and social inclusivity are not considered. Rather emphasise is on instructional and school inclusivity of learners with SEND, particularly ensuring that physical school infrastructures are accommodative to PWDs.

Almost all the participants (75 out of 77) were of the view that IE is an important element of education policies in Ghana. However, the government and other major stakeholders are not committed to IE policy and its implementation. For example, FDM1 said:

> "…mainstream public basic schools in this LGA do not admit learners with overt conditions such as visual and hearing impairments. However, those who are physically disabled are admitted even though the environments of the various schools in the area are still not accommodative and conducive for them" (FDM1).

Manifestation of IE in Public Basic Schools

When the headteachers were asked whether their respective schools admit learner with SEND, most of them (11 out of 18) said no. The reasons they gave for their answer was that they do not have the needed qualified teachers to serve as resource persons in the schools and to handle these learners. However, seven of the headteachers indicated that their schools admit learner with mild SEND, particularly those with non-cognitive and non-emotional difficulties. The seven participants further indicated that their schools have specific classrooms for learners with SEND and SENCOs come to the school regularly as resource person to support teaching and learning activities.

In line with the social model of disability, almost all of the participants disagreed to the classroom differentiation policy of inclusive schools. They rather call for special schools with their own homogeneous school culture. However, MSN said:

> "…creating a special class for learners with SEND in inclusive schools is very important ... These classrooms and the 'special' teachers serve as resource centres and persons respectively. These classrooms allow us to give extra support and more attention to learners with SEND so they could catch up with their classmates ..." (MSN).

Another participant said:

> "…placing learners to special schools or special classes should be the exception and not the norm. I think learners with severe cases are those that should be placed in special classes or schools" (FTS7).

The analysis of participants' narratives revealed that major stakeholders in education are having some level of misconception regarding IE. This is largely as a result of their orientation towards the concept which is influencing their planned behaviour towards the concept and the meaning they assigned to it. Their understanding of the concept seems to be variants with the meaning of IE in the various acts of education in Ghana. They do not see the integration of the peoples' culture (especially minority groups) in the curriculum and the day-to-day classroom instruction as part of IE. The pre-tertiary Education Act, 2020 (Act 1049), for example, define IE to mean "the value system that holds that every child, irrespective of his or her physical or individual circumstance is given equal and balanced opportunity and access to basic education" (p. 5). This conceptualisation by policy makers goes beyond physical it also considers personal circumstances that are define by culture values and norms of the family, society and the country in general.

Symbolically, the country sees mainstream basic education as a 'melting pot' where all learners from different cultures, with or without SEND, are converted into one metal with some significant level of sameness. This understanding of IE embraces inclusivity in the area of vision, placement, curriculum, assessment, instruction, acceptance, access, support, resources and leadership.

Practices of IE in Mainstream Public Basic Schools

The second objective explored key stakeholders lived experience regarding overt and covert IE practices in mainstream public basic schools. The views expressed by the participants seem to suggest that inclusion of all learners in mainstream schools sounds good in theory, but does not work in practice. Even though most of the teachers (21 out of 23) indicated that they continue to work in order to create an atmosphere where differences are understood and appreciated in their respective schools, the reality 'in action' regarding the implementation of IE policy show that it is not being achieved. This is so because teachers focus on learners with disability and not sociocultural integration. For instance, participants such as FHS5, MHN1, MPN1, FTM3, FLN1 and FSM indicated that the Ghanaian negative mentality regarding PWDs is the main reason why we are not able to witness incremental experiences regarding IE practices in public schools and Ghana as a whole.

Trends of IE practices

In relation to the overt experiences, participants were questioned regarding the trends at which their respective school environments celebrate diversity for the past three years (2020–2022). Generally, the views of the participants show that there is low level of increment at a decreasing

rate for the past three years with regard to school-social interaction, school physical infrastructures including walkways and pavements, classroom sitting arrangement including illumination and ventilation, and suitable furniture, toilets and urinals facilities for all learners.

A participant said

> "…errm … no. Overtly, I do not think there has been a significant or moderate increase in the trends of IE practices in my catchment area. There are some learners in my catchment area who have reading disorders (dyslexia). However, only two qualified professionals have been employed for the past three years to operate in the various schools as resource persons to handle learners with SEND" (MSN).

Another participant, FSS1, also said

> "… hmm my area has over 50 public basic schools with more than 10,000 learners. But I cannot really say that in all the schools there are trained professionals who can handle 'special' learners such as dyslexics, and also ensure cultural, curriculum and instructional inclusions when teaching" (FSS1).

> "Hmmm … I will say for instructional inclusiveness, the teachers are expected to employ a well-integrated cultural and gender responsive curriculum approach that ensures that all learners, irrespective of their physical, gender, cognitive, emotional and cultural differences, enjoy class instruction. Unfortunately, the trend for the past three years seems to be the same. Even if there is an increase, I will say it is insignificant. Realistically, this is so because I still see teachers in my school teaching learners with examples that are alien to the Ghanaian culture" (FHM1).

In support of FHM1 submission, FHN said

> "…some of my teachers still list fruits such as apple, berries, cherries, plums, and strawberries as types of fruits simple because these fruits are listed in the textbooks they are using. These fruits are type of fruits that are not produce in this community as a result are unknown to most of the learners. I expect my teachers to adapt the textbook and apply the content in their lesson plans so they can teach from known to unknown as expected in the instructional policy of IE. Teachers should start with fruits that are common in the community (Examples: mango, banana, orange, pear, watermelon, pawpaw and pineapple) before listing those that are not common or even produce in this country. Unfortunately, this is not happening. Therefore, I do not think the trend of IE practices regarding instructional inclusion is significant" (FHN).

Furthermore, FSS1 said

"…most headteachers and teachers downplay the practice of non-Christian religion (Islam and Traditional African Religion) in our schools. As a result, they do not allow the practice of these religions in their schools. Nonetheless, they put much premium on Christian religion. This may be as a result of the country's colonial influence. The start of western education in Ghana is attributed to the European Christian missionaries. Even though we are no more under colonisation, these missionaries have been able to incorporate Christian values and practices in Ghanaian public basic school culture which has, and continue to, influence majority of Ghanaians. This practice in my view is not helping to benefit fully the IE policy of the country, particularly regarding religious tolerance and sociocultural integration in our pre-tertiary schools" (FSS1).

Instructional Inclusion

Also, MHS2 said

"…some teachers do not design inclusive lesson plan, as a result they fail to teach in a way that will help them consider the diverse culture, needs and abilities of all learners. For example, I witness a lesson last week where a teacher was teaching her learners the things we get from animals. In her examples, she indicated that cow, sheep, goat and camel give us meat, milk, wool and leather. Animals such as python (snake) and agama (lizard) are seen as wildlife while dog, cat and rabbit are used as pets, as a result we do not slaughter them for food. These examples use by the teacher do not reflect the Ghanaian culture. This is so because meaningful number of Ghanaians consider the meats of these animals (cat, dog and python) as special delicacy and as animals that give us meat" (MHS2).

In line with MHS2 assertion, FDM1 said

"…the teacher should have presented the content to indicate that these animals are use as pets for some people while others use them as meat for food. Using such content to teach our children may influence them negatively to dislike some of our 'favourite' meats in Ghana. In my view, these practices do not help in promoting national integration in our basic schools and communities at large" (FDM1).

The participants (FHM1, FSS1 and FSM) views suggest that professional teachers are not using multi-sensory, differentiated, cooperative, individual and collaborative approaches to teaching. Rather, they prefer using direct teaching approaches that do not create meaningful room for them to differentiate their teaching in order to create room for them to teach multi-culturally and also give more attention to learners with SEND.

Consistent with the views of other participants, FLS1 also said

> "…for the past three years there has not been any meaningful improvement regarding our classroom illumination and ventilation, and school walkways, pavements, toilets and urinals facilities" (FLS1).

Furthermore, FPS1 said

> "…I do not belief in this thing call IE. There are still issues of gender disparities and discriminations of minority groups with regard to their cultural practices in our schools" (FPS1).

The views of the participants show that the IE culture of the people with regard to belief, ideas, knowledge, attitude, norms and values are not improving as expected. Even though the IE policy is being implemented for the past nine years, the covert practices in public mainstream basic schools is not encouraging.

> "… I think the teachers in the various schools within my catchment areas are aware of the need to practice IE. However, I do not think their demonstrated knowledge and attitudes are helping in the achievement of the main goal of the policy, which is education for all. As I indicated earlier, most of the teachers do not have the competencies to handle learners with dyslectic" (FSS1).

In line with the view of FSS1, FSS2 also said "…in most cases these learners are not able to participate meaningfully in classroom reading activities" (FSS2). This lack of knowledge and negative attitude of teachers is not helping to achieve instructional inclusion.

Practical Barriers to IE Practices in Ghana

More than half (14 of 23) of the teachers indicated that school structures and facilities and also teaching and learning resources are not allowing them to teach effectively when both SEND and non-SEND learners are admitted to the same class.

> "Eiy … in this community ... I do not think all learners can be put together in the same class or school. I remember last year I had a learner who was mildly suffering from one of the sensory impaired disorders. Unfortunately, most parents were not confortable for her to be in the same class with their children. About 11 per cent of the parents removed their children from the school to a nearby school. The school recommended to the parents to send the child to a special school for better attention. But I disagreed with the recommendation because her average performance in the class showed that she was the 19th person in the class of 36. Some of the parents were calling her "nsuoba", meaning 'water child'. The attitudes of the parents were largely influenced by their lack of knowledge regarding the issues of IE and also the values and norms of the community" (FTN1).

In line with the views expressed by FTN1, FTS1 also said

> "Hmm … unfortunately, some of the cultural beliefs, values and norms of this community and Ghana as a whole are not helping in achieving the intended gaols of IE policy, not to mention poverty. As the saying goes, 'religion is the opium of the masses'. Some religious leaders in this community are those telling the people negative things about children with sensory, cognitive or emotional disorders" (FTS1).

The views expressed by the participants show that most parents and teachers have negative perception and attitude toward IE practices. However, policy implementers such as headteachers, SENCOs and the director expressed positive trend regarding covert practices of IE in mainstream public basic schools. This may be so because these categories of participants seem to be more exposed to the IE concept and policy.

Discussion

Uniformity in the conceptualisation of IE and its practices is a significant factor to the survival of the IE agenda of Ghana, which is to ensure that all mainstream schools are equipped to meet the multi-cultural and varied needs of all learners so they can school and learn together notwithstanding their unique characteristics. Therefore, the meaning and value major stakeholders attached to IE should be homogeneous (Kefallinou et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2005). However, the views outlined by participants show that there is some level of misconception of IE, particularly between policy makers and implementers which may be as a result of the differences in their sociocultural and professional orientations.

Policy makers see it to be the 'value system' that holds that all children are given equal and balanced opportunity and access to basic education (Kefallinou et al., 2020). Most of these policy makers are within the upper- and middle-class status groups. Their beliefs largely influence their intentions (Ajzen, 2011) which in turn predict their planned behaviours and the essence of IE to them (Opoku et al., 2022). This conceptualisation is from the perspective of cultural, curriculum, social and instructional inclusionary practices. However, policy implementers such as teachers and SENCOs concur with this conceptualisation, but their reality 'in action' show that they, and also parents and learners, see it to be the incorporation of learners with SEND in schools, and not cultural and curriculum integration as conceptualised in many of the laws governing pre-tertiary education in Ghana, including the Pre-tertiary Education Act, 2020 [Act 1049] (Parliament of the Republic of Ghana, 2021).

The misconception in major stakeholders' conceptualisation of IE support the findings of Amponteng and colleagues (2019) which indicate parents low knowledge about inclusive practices. Also, the views of the parents, SENCOs and some teachers are consistent with the submissions of Kefallinou and colleagues (2020) who indicated that not all stakeholders have clear and common understanding of the values IE represents, the benefits it can bring to all learners and teachers and the ways it can be implemented. Opoku and colleagues (2022) also

found that parents have limited knowledge about implementation of IE. 'Knowledge is power', as a result, knowledge producing institutions such as schools can be used as a social engineering tool to change people's attitudes and behaviour. Therefore, as posited by Mantey (2014) and Aboagye (2020), boosting stakeholders' knowledge of IE can help enhance their levels of awareness and practices of IE.

Major stakeholders' figurative understanding of IE practices is largely influenced by the meanings and values they assign to the practices and their intention toward the practices of IE (Lui et al., 2015). Further evidence from recent studies show that these dynamics are in turn influenced largely by the stakeholders' beliefs and attitude toward IE, and the social values, norms and control governing the manifestation of IE (Cameron et al., 2012; Opoku et al., 2022).

With regard to stakeholders lived experience regarding overt and covert practices of IE in schools, the findings suggest that there is a minor increase at a decreasing rate for the past three years. However, the overt experiences such as school-social interaction, school physical infrastructures including walkways and pavements, classroom sitting arrangement including illumination and ventilation, resource person and toilets and urinals facilities witness higher trends as compared to covert experiences such as major stakeholders' belief, knowledge, attitude, norms and values toward IE practices. This shows that the covert trends of IE practices in Ghana is not encouraging. Evidence of stakeholders' lack of knowledge and poor attitude toward IE, and the norms of the society being the factors that thwart the achievement of IE practices in both micro (school) and macro societies comes from studies by Lui et al. (2015) and Opoku et al. (2022). This calls for an immediate intervention to help enhance the lived covert experiences of stakeholders in order to strengthen the implementation and realisation of IE practices in the country.

Furthermore, the findings show that teachers were not employing innovative pedagogical and assessment strategies that are gender and culture responsive and ensure inclusion of all learners, irrespective of their cultural, gender and SEND differentials. As indicated by Chitiyo et al. (2019), teachers must be prepared adequately by teacher training institutions so they can develop pedagogical and assessment techniques that are responsive to IE during lesson planning, preparation and delivery. This suggests that teachers can employ these strategies by using relevant and familiar examples and role-play approaches when teaching.

Parents not allowing their children/ward to be in the same class with learners with cognitive and emotional disorders, and headteachers recommending for parents to send their 'special' children to special schools show some level of negative attitude toward IE. These views are congruent with the comments of Kelly and colleagues (2014) who assert that principals reported an increasing trend (40% over 5 years) in learners enrolling in special schools as a result of the failure of mainstream schools to meet the academic, social, emotional and behavioural needs of learners with SEND.

Furthermore, this study shows that headteachers are able to demonstrate more positive attitudes toward IE practices as compare to other major stakeholders considered. This means, SENCOs,

parents, learners and some teachers are still having some negative perception and attitude toward IE. Lui and colleagues (2015) showed that parents' lack of knowledge and negative perception regarding IE are the dominant predictors of their negative attitudes towards IE practices. Additionally, the finding regarding less incremental covert experiences of IE practices of parents is in line with that of Amponteng and colleagues (2021) who avow that parent have low knowledge about IE practices, a phenomenon that usually leads to some level of misconceptions regarding IE. However, in relation to overt experiences, Gyimah (2021) indicated that there are still significant aspects of school environments that are not conducive/friendly to learners with SEND, and the trend is not improving.

Implications

In this 21ˢᵗ century, the value system that all countries must develop and hold onto when implementing their educational policy, particularly at the pre-tertiary level, is to ensure that each learner, irrespective of his or her sociocultural and individual status quo, is given equal and balanced opportunity and access to education. Such conceptualisation of education can be implemented effectively through the practices of IE. This calls for the need to have sameness in the meaning, essence and practices of IE in a country to avoid misconception.

Within the confinement of this study, major stakeholders lived experiences regarding IE practices in mainstream public basic schools show some level of misconception and misunderstanding. The meaning policy makers attached to the concept embraces cultural, curriculum, physical and instructional inclusivity while that of the policy implementers focuses on the inclusion of learners with SEND in the conventional education system. One can, therefore, conclude that major stakeholders of basic education have some level of misconceptions about IE practices which is as a result of their conventional beliefs and social orientation regarding IE practices. These dynamics largely influences their intentions and planned behaviours toward IE, which largely affect the practices of IE negatively. Consequently, there is the need for re-orientation and re-socialisation of teachers and parents respectively on IE so we can help narrow or eliminate their misunderstanding of the concept and boost their level of awareness. Largely, this will help provide a sense of belonging and school community that values all learners equitably.

Also, in relation to stakeholders lived experience regarding overt and covert inclusionary practices in mainstream schools, the study concludes that there is a low level of improvement regarding the overt and covert trends. Largely, this observation is attributed to teachers who are not employing appropriate innovative pedagogical and assessment strategies that ensure cultural, gender and religious inclusions, and inclusion of all learners when planning and delivering lessons. This call for the need for teachers and parents to nurture positive beliefs toward IE in order for them to develop good intention towards it to ensure positive behaviours that will in turn boost positive IE practices. This intervention will help reduce the socio-cultural barriers to the implementation of IE policies in Ghana.

Recommendations

In line with the finding that major stakeholders symbolic understanding of IE does not propel gender and cultural inclusions with regard to societal values and norms, it is recommended to the various LGA directors of education to collaborate with professionals in the area of Educational Sociology in order to organise series of seminars for stakeholders to help enhance their beliefs, knowledge and attitudes toward IE practices. The training will also help SENCOs and teachers to employ multicultural and gender responsive strategies and multisensory teaching interventions when teaching or supporting learners to learn. Organising such seminars will make it easy for the LGA authorities to nurture parents' positive beliefs and intentions toward IE so they can enrol all their children/wards to be trained in mainstream schools for their day to day living skills and competencies; irrespective of their gender, religious beliefs and SEND differentials.

Also, it is recommended to the Director-General of Ghana Education Service, through the various local area directors of education, to make multisensory teaching resources available to teachers after equipping them with the requisite skills and competencies regarding their usage. This will help them delivery the current integrated curriculum appropriate by ensuring that the needs of all learners are met, both in class and in the school.

Again, it is recommended to the Director-General of Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) to initiate curriculum review of the various teacher-education institutions so they can produce qualified teachers who understand the concept of IE and its practices. This will help narrow the misconception among major stakeholders and the effective implementation of the IE policy.

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