

Inclusive Education in Cameroon: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

This paper centres on inclusive education in Cameroon. The study assessing the limitations of the Cameroonian education system in inclusive education; identifying the challenges faced by teachers in managing learners with special needs and proposing a way forward for the success of inclusive education in Cameroon. Two inclusive schools were used CEFED Inclusive Nursery and Primary School Santa and Model Bilingual Nursery and Primary School Nkwen. This descriptive survey made use of a questionnaire, an interview guide, and an observation guide as instruments for data collection, all constructed by the researchers. The sample of the study was 20 teachers purposively selected from the two inclusive schools under investigation. The self-delivery method was used to collect the data. Data analysis was descriptive with the use of frequency counts and percentages. The findings indicated that teachers have insufficient knowledge on effective classroom management strategies in inclusive classrooms (75%); *Teachers' professional training does not meet the challenges in inclusive classrooms* (70%); *Teachers use abstract materials in teaching pupils in inclusive classrooms* (75%) of the 20 teachers of the study used only abstract materials in their teaching; and that teachers have limited competences in teaching inclusive classrooms (75%). It was concluded among others that all teacher training colleges and universities should include inclusive education as a subject in their curriculum so that the graduates are empowered with skills to teach pupils with special needs.

DOI: 10.7176/JEP/10-12-14

Publication date: April 30th 2019

1. Introduction and the problem

Education is the landmark of every society. Education aims at producing healthy, happy, well-behaved, well respected hardworking people who can earn a living, contribute in community affairs as well as individuals who are dutiful and will raise families of their own. Education is life itself. Through the socialisation process, children and adults learn. According to Farrant (1990), education takes many forms. It encompasses the whole process of human learning through which knowledge is transmitted and skills learnt. Education is an ongoing, gradual and continuous process. It leads to a quality of understanding that gives rise to new mental perspectives in the learner. It deals with knowledge that is recognisable, worthwhile and capable of achieving a voluntary and committed response from the learner. It uses methods that encourage the exercise of judgement by the learner and the use of his critical faculties.

Three forms of education are identified by Farrant namely Informal, Non-formal and Formal education. As regards informal education, Farrant states that "there are no attempts in structuring it. Most of the learning that goes on is almost unconscious as with those things the child learns from his family, friends, experience and environment". Non-Formal Education is any organised learning activity outside the structure of the formal education system that is consciously aimed at meeting specific learning needs of particular groups of children, youths or adults in the community. While formal Education is carried out in specially build situations, such as schools and colleges. What is taught in these institutions is carefully structured by means of syllabi and time tables and the teaching provided is carefully supervised by an external administrative body. The achievement of those who learn in formal education is often recognised by the award of certificates. Today with diversity and complexity of our school systems, the teacher has been introduced to new terminologies such as mainstreaming, inclusive education, etc. Mainstreaming/integration is an approach by which pupils with Special Educational Needs are integrated in different ways in normal schools (Corbett, 2001). This approach tends to rely on a relatively small number of ordinary schools being equipped with the resources to admit pupils with Special Educational Needs. Inclusion is an approach by which all ordinary schools cater for pupils with Special Educational Needs as well. All schools include pupils with physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, sensory or other needs.

The term inclusive education has attracted much attention in recent years. An examination of the theory and practice reveals that the term has come to mean different things to different people. According to (UNESCO, 2005), the term refers to the diversity of needs of all learners through increased curriculum content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. It is a process of reforming schools and attitudes, ensuring that every child receives quality and appropriate education within the regular school. In this way,

inclusion is more complex than mere physical placement of children with special needs in the regular classroom. Inclusion implies that the regular classroom should change to accommodate all different learners and, in the process, desirable services be offered to all children within the regular classroom.

It has often been said that most literate nations are the most developed. In the same order of ideas, one can say that education enhances the full development of an individual. Most developed and less developed countries have put in place structures and commitments to foster the education of their citizens. Amongst these countries is Cameroon, which recognises the fact that inclusive education is also a strategy of development (Yuh, 2014).

It is important to note that special education constitutes a major preoccupation nowadays in most developing countries such as Cameroon. The question on inclusive education goes beyond the task of educating and training challenged children to boost their intellectual, physical, civic and moral development. Bearing in mind the prevailing atmosphere as concerns economic, socio-cultural and moral factors, inclusive education will foster national integration in Cameroon. According to Yuh (2014), inclusion outlines many functions such as instructive, socio-psychological, and historical.

The instructive function of inclusive education programme is of capital importance. It provides information which will help researchers on the field. Information gathered from this paper will instruct Cameroonians and other specialists on what is going on in specialised institutions as far as inclusive education is concerned. It permits the examination of the means and aims of the programme in order to verify if it works or not and eventually propose actions that could aid in its rectification. The importance of this function is that it does not only detect the ineffectiveness of the programme but shows its forces.

As concerns the socio-psychological function, inclusion gives to the beneficiaries a feeling of security. It works for the promotion of peace within groups. We initiate an atmosphere for peace through this research endeavour by looking into the fact that disadvantaged pupils are well educated in order to foster their participation in society.

The last function implores inclusive education to be a system of prospects. Any person, institution or researcher interested in the question on inclusive education in Cameroon will find a response and report on what is currently being done. If for any one reason, inclusive education should be the preoccupation of any government, institution, community, or a single individual, it is so because of the need to establish, in concrete terms, an evaluation of such programme in a community which is useful. After all, it is clear that no efforts, be they individual or collective, will be employed on any development initiatives to which the community's attitudes are negative. Such efforts are bound to fail since there are no possibilities for community involvement; thus assurance of sustaining these efforts does not exist in the community. Such is the case with inclusive education and the situation where most individuals tend to underrate the importance of this education. As can be seen from the above conception, it is clear that only a timely intervention can enable promoters of these programmes to determine not only the degree of acceptability but also the reasons for accepting them. It is only in this way that the programme will be adjusted and reinforced.

Inclusive education should be geared towards professional training. It should operate as a component of economic and social development. It should aim at ensuring the integration of the disadvantaged child in the economic and social circuits. For specialised institutions to meet these goals there is a clear need to assess relevant curricula so as to provide quality education. Curricula must therefore be reviewed to reflect and adequately prepare pupils to respond to their environment and its challenges (Corbett, 2001; Bryant & Bryant, 2008.; Materechera, 2002).

In Cameroon, many children attend primary basic education but fail to meet their basic learning needs (Yuh, 2014). These needs comprise both essential learning tools and the basic learning content required for them to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, and to continue learning. These problems have led to major setbacks in basic education from the 1980s till present. The World Declaration on Education for All, Article 1, Paragraph 29, sets clearly the goals and strategies needed to establish a Framework for Action that is designed to enable all individuals to realise their rights to learn and fulfil their responsibility in order to contribute to the development of their society. Quality is at the heart of education, and what takes place in classrooms and other learning environments is fundamentally important to the well-being of children. Education for All is a basic human right at the heart of development. Achieving the goals necessitates a broad-based approach which extends beyond the confines of formal education systems. The Cameroon government is doing her best to ensure basic education of quality for all. A successful special education programme requires:

- Healthy, well-nourished and motivated pupils.
- Well-trained teachers and active learning techniques.
- Adequate facilities and learning materials.
- A relevant curriculum that can be taught and learned in a language that builds upon the knowledge and experience of the teachers and learners.
- An environment that not only encourages learning but is welcoming, healthy and safe.

- A clear definition and accurate assessment of learning outcomes including knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.
- Respect for and engagement with the community and culture.

The Ministry of Basic Education suggests a wide range of ways in which special schools can respond to the needs of their pupils, including a range of imaginative and diverse approaches to address and actively engage children who are not yet enrolled in school.

In Cameroon, government policy of social justice and the fight against social exclusion and national solidarity shows concern in ameliorating the existing conditions of the vulnerable population in general and the physically challenged in particular. Following the ratio of World Health Organisation (W.H.O), 20% of the Cameroonian population is made up of physically challenged persons for which transversal action are schemed, notably:

The reinforcement of the legal and institutional framework for the protection and promotion of vulnerable persons with favourable dispositions found in legal text amongst which is: Law N° 83/013 of 21st July 1983 relating to the protection of these persons as stipulated in its article 3: “The prevention and screening of persons with disabilities, their care, education, professional training, employment, access to specialised sports or hobbies in such a way that an adult with disability constitutes an obligation of national solidarity to be concretised by the state, the family, physical and moral persons”.

If our educational aim is to educate vulnerable children to be functional in their environment and develop awareness, then we have to exploit the environment through which they have to conceive ideas. The content of what is taught in school must be adapted to the environment. What children acquire in school has a vital role to play. The learners and their needs should be the focuses of any inclusive education, in order to enable them develop themselves and their society. This system of education should therefore be practical. The standards of the learners must be improved. This will enhance social change. It should be handled with care. The context of the course should be directly involved in solving some of their problems.

According to Yuh (2014) a good inclusive education policy or programme should fulfil the following characteristics:

- 1) It should not limit itself or end at elementary level. There should be a minimum level of education that all challenged people should have. It should be at least Advanced level to permit some to further their studies at home and abroad.
- 2) For this to occur, there is need for continuity. Inclusive education must continue, involving all aspects of life, be they formal, informal and non-formal education.
- 3) Inclusive education must not only be formal. Physically challenged people should involve in other organised, systematic educational activities carried outside the framework of the formal system to gain from other professional types of learning like vocational training. This system of education frees the individual from underdevelopment, poverty and socio-economic crisis. It should respond to the views of the following conferences which portray special education as a means to impact human rights and dignity.

The United Nations declaration of 9 December 1975 on the rights of the disabled stood in accordance with raising their living standards, ensuring equal rights to education, full employment, development of economic and social levels of all handicapped, the world at large. It is therefore imperative to carry out this study whose answers to these questions will enable us know the difficulties of inclusive education.

2. Objectives of the study

The study sought:

- To assess the limitations of the Cameroonian education system in inclusive education
- To identify the challenges faced by teachers in managing learners with special needs
- To propose a way forward to the implementation of inclusive education in Cameroon

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in inclusive institutions in Mezam Division in the North West Region of Cameroon namely; CEFED Inclusive Nursery and Primary School Santa and Model Bilingual Nursery and Primary School Nkwen. These schools were chosen because they are actively involved in implementing school inclusion through curricular and extra- curricular activities with emphasis on classroom teaching and learning process. The population of this study consisted of 23 teachers found in these institutions. 20 teachers from both inclusive schools were conveniently selected. The research instruments included a questionnaire, an interview guide, an observation guide and a checklist all constructed by the researchers. The Questionnaire and interview guide were semi-structured to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. The observation checklist was established to naturally witness what was going on practically in the classroom. The self-delivery method was used with each researcher collecting data from only one school. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

4. FINDINGS

Limitations of the Cameroonian system of special education

The problems that exist in the Cameroonian education system especially in special schools are multifaceted. One of the challenges most teachers face today in Cameroon is the inclusion of children with special needs in regular classrooms. This is probably because many classroom teachers have little knowledge or no professional training in inclusive education. Consequently learners with intellectual disability are increasingly finding themselves in disadvantaged situations that stem mostly from lack of competence from teachers and specific learning needs. Remediation of the problems of learning in disabled children is a highly specialized subject area which requires specific knowledge and skills from teachers. According to Olivier & Williams (2005), inclusive education literature reveals that most regular teachers face challenges in the process of accommodating children with disabilities in schools and classrooms because of their limited knowledge, skills and experience in working with children with special needs.

Teachers are expected to be specifically trained for this skill, to identify and teach children with special needs and to help them with their particular problems. According to (Kapp 2002), many classroom teachers have little knowledge or experience working with children with special needs. Without knowledge of human development and professional skills in instructional design and delivery, most of them will face many difficulties in inclusive classrooms (Yuh 2014). Therefore, it is imperative that all teachers be well trained and equipped to teach children with and without special needs so that they can secure the future of all children.

Managing classrooms so that they become an optimally healthy and inclusive learning environment for all learners is an extremely complex task. This is because inclusive classrooms in Cameroon have pupils with various disabilities. That is, a typical class constitutes gifted children, slow learners, mentally retarded children, hyperactive children, emotionally challenged children, low socioeconomic status children among others. With such a diverse pupil population, effective classroom management, and differentiated instruction are necessary to target each pupil's individual needs in the classroom. The teacher is involved in a number of different roles, each of which needs to be constantly adjusted and coordinated into a harmonious and productive whole. Consequently, teachers need to use a variety of teaching methods and activities to meet inclusively the different learning needs of children. In order for them to succeed, they are expected to grasp the concept of inclusive education such that they will be vest with all the indicators and be able to use the necessary skills that will facilitate learning.

Teachers encounter difficulties when children with special needs are included in their regular classrooms since they do not possess skills and expertise needed to teach these children to promote education for all (EFA) and inclusion. Also, most teachers in special schools do not have professional qualifications due to lack of training. Poor quality of teaching directly affects learning. Training of staff for child health, social welfare and education will improve the quality of education in schools through qualitative training in inter-vocation skills. Cameroon needs government teacher training centers to train staff for special education in Cameroon (Yuh, 2014).

Special schools are hardly equipped with libraries, didactic materials and equipment to enhance effective teaching and learning. Textbooks that are relevant and related to the Cameroon socio-economic political and cultural context are not available. Most children do not have textbooks because they are expensive and this makes teaching and learning cumbersome as well as ineffective. Other factors hindering special education in Cameroon are lack of population statistics, inadequate funds, non-implementation of legislation and poor attitude of the society.

Challenges faced by teachers in managing learners with special needs

Findings show that, teachers have insufficient knowledge on effective classroom management strategies. This can be seen from the responses of teachers, where 60% of the teachers indicated that they have not had training on effective classroom management strategies. Even the 40%, who have had some training on effective management strategies, could not employ and explain the meaning and procedures involved in classroom management strategies. The teachers without formal instruction acknowledged that they found themselves at a disadvantage because learners gave them problems that they could not handle as a result of their short comings in classroom management skills. Classroom observations and interviews with teachers who participated in the study also revealed that teachers of special need pupils in their daily classroom routines, face challenges of dealing with behaviour problems.

From the findings it was revealed that 15 (75%) teachers have not had inclusive training, and 12 (60%) acknowledge that they have difficulties managing problems in the classroom. As a result of this, most of the teachers often punish, send pupils out of class, beat or ignore them. The issue of classroom management strategies and skills at this point was vital because it displayed the teachers' inability and ineffectiveness in maintaining a conducive teaching learning environment. Choate (2004) indicates that creating an orderly setting is the first step in establishing an environment that is conducive for learning. All these problems challenged the managerial expertise of the teachers and at the same time required them to continue the role of handling the teaching process. The fact that teachers could not successfully maintain and monitor classroom events and activities shows the

difficulties teachers face in their classes to deal with challenged pupils. The inability of teachers to deal with classroom management problems has direct effect on the teaching-learning process.

Kapinga (2012) supports this notion by stating that "being able to deal with such problems is extremely important in complementing the ability to set up and sustain effective learning. Good and Brophy (1991) contend that those teachers who regard classroom management as a process of establishing and maintaining an effective learning environment tend to succeed in their teaching because they are prepared to deal with problems when they prevail in class. Many teachers do not have adequate training and experience in classroom management to address the problems" of disruptions in the classroom.

Teachers' professional training does not meet the challenges in inclusive classrooms

In terms of qualification to teach pupils with special needs, 14 out of the 20 teachers involved in the study said that they consider themselves as not qualified to teach pupils with special needs in the general classroom. This can be confirmed from the results which show that 14 (70%) teachers have not had any in-service or pre-service training and consider themselves not qualified to teach children with special needs. Lack of policies and guidelines of how inclusive education should be implemented affect the overall process of preparing conducive environments for inclusive practices, such as training of teachers. Similarly the study of Gordon (2000) in South Africa, also confirms that ongoing professional training is one of the greatest concerns that educators express. It is argued that, the presence of few universities offering courses on both, inclusive and special needs education and lack of sufficient inclusive education training in the existing universities are obstacles to inclusive practices (Kapinga 2010). On the other hand, few universities and lack of sufficient training may also be a reason to the few numbers of teaching staff mentioned by respondents.

According to Bothma, Gravett & Swart (2000), educators have a negative attitude towards inclusion due to the fact that they are not trained to cope with learners who experience barriers to learning and that their schools lack the facilities or equipment needed by these learners. The educator has the responsibility of creating and maintaining a classroom atmosphere which nurtures the personal, cognitive and social development of all learners. It is evident therefore that, the little knowledge teachers have on inclusive education, affects the teaching process. More to this, most of the teachers have not taught for long and do not have much experience in teaching.

Teachers use abstract materials in teaching pupils in inclusive classrooms

The findings indicate that 15 (75%) of the 20 teachers of the study used only abstract materials in their teaching. Most of the teachers use only the chalkboard and lesson notes. 10 (50%) of them have never use pictures and the other 10(50%). It was also found that all 20 (100%) teachers have never make use of materials such as slides, television or radio cassettes

Teaching materials for special needs pupils are lacking. Lack of /or inadequate teaching and learning resources in schools contribute to hindering schools from practicing effective inclusive education. Findings indicate that most of the teachers do not know which materials to use. Even those that know the materials do not make use of the materials either because they are lacking. This therefore makes teaching and learning a tedious task. Learning and teaching materials have to be adequate, effectively organized and utilized for any meaningful teaching and learning. Keel, Materechera (2002) found that for learners with intellectual problems, the use of concrete instruction could be an effective learner-directed tool for initial acquisition of basic skills.

Studies indicate that instructional materials have positive impact on childrens' learning. Since most regular classroom teachers do not have knowledge of the use of relevant instructional materials, they cannot take care of the needs of children with intellectual disability. Hence, these children are neglected and do not take part or benefit from lessons and classroom activities. Similarly, Materechera (2002) found out that inadequate provision of specialized training and resources to equip teachers in handling children with special educational needs in ordinary classes contribute to many pupils dropping out of school. This can be supported by the rating of teacher opinion as most of the teachers said that the materials they use were not very beneficial to all the pupils especially pupils with special needs. This confirms the fact that most of the teachers do not make use of materials that are beneficial to special needs children. During the education of a child with intellectual disability, teachers' should consider individual needs of the pupil and provide adequate skills by using concrete instructional materials. Without the use of relevant or concrete materials, teachers will find it difficult to teach children with intellectual disability efficiently. The availability of visual aids, books, games and technological support can improve the learning environment by facilitating the learning and teaching process. The unavailability of such materials makes learning and teaching impossible in some circumstances.

Teachers have limited competences in teaching inclusive classrooms

Findings from this study show that adaptation of teaching methods pose a challenge to teachers. However, the findings from responses of teachers suggest that (75%) of teachers have insufficient knowledge on how these methods and teaching resources should be adapted to suit the needs of pupils'. Moreover, teachers are constrained

by so many challenges in teaching these pupils. As a result, teachers do not border to adapt teaching methods so that intellectually challenged pupils can achieve their needs; they teach pupils mostly using common strategies which do not help pupils with intellectual disability in certain areas of study.

More specifically, teachers have “limited competence” in the following: learning strategies, providing immediate and explicit feedback during lesson, adjusting learning task for pupils with special needs, willingness to give them enough time to complete task, providing relevant examples during lessons, creating opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their ability, using positive reinforcement effectively during lessons, and maintaining children’s attention during lessons. Interestingly, another research suggests that gaining and maintaining children’s attention during lessons is an important ingredient for any effective inclusive teaching practices (Westwood, 2004). Thus, gaining learners’ attention during instruction is imperative for any successful inclusive teaching. He also maintains that any effective inclusive teaching that produces learning and understanding has to start with gaining maximum attention of learners. For this reason, a sound theory of instruction would have little meaning without a teacher getting on well with pupils, teaching adaptively, and important of them all, gaining learners’ attention to listen to the teacher’s instructions. Teachers’ lack of competence in those items may imply that majority of pupils’ with special needs are not addressed in the regular classroom.

Abosi (2000) also conducted a study on inclusion of special needs children in the regular classroom which is of relevance to the current study. Findings indicate that adaptive teaching strategies such as explicit teaching, cooperative learning, and social skills instruction enhance learning outcomes of children and should be adopted for other categories of children with special needs. Teachers did not seem to see the need to adapt their methods of teaching. This could be as a result of ignorance or lack of knowledge. It is important for teachers to be aware of different methods that they may use to create lesson plans which are beneficial to all pupils in the classroom. Consequently, the educators need to use a variety of teaching methods and activities to meet inclusively the different learning needs of children.

Due to these difficulties, adaptations of different methods to suit pupils with intellectual impairments seemed to be problematic. In this situation, how are teachers expected to teach better and meet the needs of pupils with intellectual impairments in inclusive classrooms? It is argued that, pupils with intellectual impairments will not be able to understand the lesson and have good performance as long as the teaching methods applied in inclusive classrooms, are not conducive to them. This means that the process of teaching pupils with special needs in inclusive classrooms poses difficulty to teachers in general.

CONCLUSION

Teaching and managing pupils with special needs is a challenging task for teachers in Cameroon. From an overview of the present study which was conducted in two inclusive schools in Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon, it was found out that teachers have difficulties in teaching intellectually challenged pupils in inclusive classrooms. Findings revealed that teachers have some difficulties in managing classroom behaviour problems either because they do not have adequate training in classroom management strategies that would help them deal with classroom behaviour problems. Therefore, classroom behaviour management presents a problem for teachers and thus, hinders them from performing their teaching tasks efficiently.

Findings also suggest that most of the teachers have not yet received training on how to teach pupils with special needs. As a result, they face difficulties in the adaptation of instructional materials and teaching methods in inclusive classrooms. During training, teachers might have not received the basic skills that are necessary to teach such children leading to a lot of difficulties in transmitting knowledge as expected. Thus, challenges are prevalent throughout classroom teaching learning activities. This study proved that teachers are not adequately trained and equipped with such inclusive education knowledge and skills. The outcome of such a situation includes school failure, underachievement, drop out or school expulsion of pupils with intellectual disabilities (ID) on grounds of academic misfit or anti-social behaviours.

In spite of these huddles special education in Cameroon is likely to see the ray of light because the government is doing much since the year 2015 to see to it that all the obstacles to this education are considered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since education is the right of every Cameroonian child, special needs pupils and adults need to be educated in pursuance of the National Policy of Education. The government should therefore;

- Provide modern teaching aids that facilitate the teaching of learners with special needs
- Reform teacher education curriculum. The curriculum of teacher training colleges does not meet up with exigencies of inclusive classrooms. There should be a reform to give special training to primary school student-teachers.
- Reconstruct and innovate the school physical environment by making available pathways for physically challenged learners and including electricity for the use of some modern teaching aids

- Relevant instructional materials have been shown to be of crucial important. It is evident from the present study that inadequate resources or lack of teaching and learning materials, especially materials that can help to make learning accessible to learners who experience difficulties to learning, is a major challenge. Providing these resources cannot be left to the discretion of schools and teachers to improvise. The government should identify, extend and develop resources and materials which will teach, and support teachers to overcome the challenges to teaching all the learners.

Teachers form the pivot in the education of the child in general and in the implementation of inclusive policies in particular. So, teachers need to;

- Adapt lessons, teaching materials and teaching methods in response to the special needs of all categories of learners in their classrooms
- Invest in education by obtaining special training in inclusive education without necessarily waiting on the government.

For the successful implementation of inclusiveness, highly qualified and specialized teachers are needed. Training institutions must stay awake.

- Thus, all teacher training colleges and universities should include inclusive education as a subject in their curriculum so that the graduates are empowered with skills to teach pupils with special needs.
- In-service training for teachers should be implemented in order to create a positive inclusive learning environment not only in the North West Region but in all other areas towards building an inclusive education system. It has become clear from the study that teachers need enough time to gain adequate knowledge about inclusion. So training of teachers through workshops and seminars should be organised more often in schools to train teachers on how to teach and handle children with disabilities in the classrooms.

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