

**REGULAR TEACHER'S PERCEPTION OF INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION IN THE NORTHWEST REGION OF CAMEROON**

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Abstract

One of the most serious issues raised by stakeholders in Cameroon's educational sector is the widespread discrimination in the admission of children with special needs into mainstream schools, even though there are original texts and regulations governing them. One of the major challenges in implementing inclusive education is a lack of qualified personnel, as schools of education engaged in teacher training do not provide students with inclusive education skills/courses. Laws and regulations have been enacted without considering the views of these teachers, who are tasked with ensuring that all students in their respective classrooms have equal access to education. The study aims to understand mainstream teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in relation to their level of training, using Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as a guide. The study employed a phenomenological research design. The study used a convenience sample of six participants, with data collected through semi-structured phenomenological interviews. The interpretative phenomenological analysis method was used to analyze data from interviews (IPA). Even though these regular classroom teachers face several challenges in the form of rigid curriculums, limited level of training, lack of resources, limited administrative support, and a lack of infrastructural modification, data analysis revealed that teachers have a positive perception of inclusive education because they have come to understand from personal experience the importance of leaving no child behind and granting them equal opportunity. They believe that inclusive education can be effective if changes are made to the existing curriculum to accommodate learners with special needs, the development of IEP plans and collaborative teaching, the introduction of more in-service training programs, seminars, and conferences, and the provision of necessary resources through administrative support.

Keywords: Special Needs, Mainstreaming, Inclusive Education, Teachers' perception.

INTRODUCTION

The education of children with special needs is a worldwide phenomenon that many international bodies, governments, and organizations have realized it's importance, thereby striving for the need for inclusion with mainstream educational institutions alongside children without special needs. Most societies of the world have either marginalized or excluded special needs children from schools and

other institutions of learning by creating special schools for them. The children are more often considered misfits in society and sometimes looked upon as a burden and therefore a waste of time, energy, and resources if sent to school or any institution of learning to improve their future standards of well-being (UNESCO, 2001).

The sustainable development goals have as one of its goals that vulnerable people must be empowered. This includes all children, youths, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous people, refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrants. Goal number 4 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Goal 4a states that there should be a build and upgrade of educational facilities that are child, disability, and gender-sensitive, and provide a safe non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environment for all. Target 4c equally states that by 2030, there should be a substantial increase in the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries especially least developed countries. Teachers play a key role in achieving all the Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets, requiring urgent attention. The equity gap in education is further broadened by the shortage and uneven distribution of professionally trained teachers. Fostering teachers' professional development is an important catalyst for inclusive, lifelong learning and equality in education. Ill-equipped buildings, lack of pedagogic materials, weak professional skills, and the need for continuous training are huge constraints to inclusive education. For the requirements of the convention on the rights of the child to be met, not only the number of teachers but also their training is at stake (UNESCO institute for statistics 2006,2015).

Inclusive education in Cameroon is backed both by national and international legal instruments. Laws, legislation, and policies have been put in place at all levels of education to encourage the education of children with special needs in regular schools to prepare them for full integration into society void of complexities including discrimination. Law No 2010/002 of April 13, 2010, on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities article 3(2) states that disability is not, in any case, a reason for refusing the admission or registration of a student in a conventional institution or training center. In Article 4, the state promotes inclusive education and vocational training for persons with disabilities through: The provision of specialized teachers and trainers in public schools and universities that receive pupils and students with special needs. The development of standards in schools, universities, and vocational training programs for teachers to learn sign language and braille. The assignment of qualified personnel in private special education institutions. Initial and continuous training of specialized staff in the supervision of persons with disabilities. However, the call for inclusion has faced challenges that affect special needs children in mainstream schools. In Cameroon, these schools have been put in place without taking into consideration the availability of infrastructure and facilities to support children with special needs. Ngoe and Noe (2006) in a study on Inclusive Education and Children Living with Disabilities in Cameroon noted that even with the introduction of Inclusive Education in Cameroon backed by state laws and regulations, these laws protecting children with disabilities exist only in principle and are not practiced in Cameroon.

The implementation of laws and policies governing inclusion rest in the hands of the classroom teacher as they are charged with delivering instructions in the classroom. One of the main challenges faced in implementing inclusive education is the lack of qualified personnel given that the schools of education engaged in teacher training do not provide students with skills/courses in inclusive education. Exceptionally, the Higher Teachers Training College Bambili in the Northwest Region of the country has introduced courses in inclusive education for guidance counselors but there is still a need to move further and extend this training to regular classroom teachers. Even though there are provisions made in teacher training colleges in the country to train regular teachers on the basics of inclusive education, older teachers who have been trained only for the regular classroom settings will find it difficult to accommodate students with special needs in their different classes. Laws and regulations have been passed without taking into consideration the opinions of these teachers who are faced with the responsibility of ensuring that all students present in their respective classrooms enjoy equality in education. Danne, Beirne-Smith, & Latham (2000) suggested a need for proper training of teachers

because teachers perceive themselves as unprepared for inclusive education because of a lack of appropriate training in this area. The competence required to teach heterogynous classes develops gradually through initial in-service training and professional development (Lambe & Bones, 2006).

Khan, Hashmi & Khanum (2017) also recognized teachers' capacity as an essential component of inclusive education and recommended that inclusive education should be a part of pre-service and in-service teacher education. Literature on inclusion argues that teachers need training in special education to include students with special needs (Heward, 2003; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005; Mock & Kauffman, 2002; Zigmond, 2003). With regards to mainstream teachers' perceptions of inclusion, there is a world of existing research that has been carried out but in Cameroon, one realizes that this topic has not been extensively researched. This study focuses on teachers' perspectives and aims to understand their perceptions of inclusive education and the challenges they think they face in a mainstream classroom setting.

The main objective of this work was to identify what Cameroonian teachers, think about inclusive education in general, and including students with special educational needs in their own classrooms. 4 research questions were set in order to answer these research objectives. They include, what level of training did the teachers receive, and did it include elements of inclusive education. What are the difficulties that teachers face in meeting the diverse needs of students with special educational needs in the classroom? What are teachers' perceptions of including students with special educational needs in a mainstream classroom? What do teachers believe they require in order to be effective in inclusive classroom settings?

Inclusive education has become a focus of debate in discussions about the development of educational policies and practices around the world (Ainscow, Howes, Farrell, & Frankham, 2003; Thomas, 2012). Lindsay, 2007 states that the education of children and young people with disabilities is now an established key policy objective in many countries. The organizational model (Ainscow, 1991; Dyson, Millward, Skidmore, & Clark 1997) advocates educational provision for every child, disabled or not in the same ordinary setting or classroom and the child's academic performance is the responsibility of both the child and the school. This model requires the school to make adaptations to meet the child's needs. Inclusive education has been defined differently by different authors some of which include:

12 (60) Armstrong & Spandagou (2010) defines inclusive education as a means of meeting and responding to the variety of needs of students by increasing involvement in learning, cultures, and communities, and lessening elimination within and from education. It encompasses changes in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, through a general vision that reaches out to all children within a suited age range. According to Ebersold & Watkins. (2011), inclusive education refers to the type of education that allows students with diverse needs to find their own place and receive their education in regular schools and classrooms. UNESCO, 2007 defines inclusive education as the process of responding to the diversity of children through enhancing participation in classrooms and reducing exclusion from education. Inclusion in education is defined by Schroth, Moorman & Fullwood (1997) as the provision of educational services to students with a full range of abilities and disabilities in the general education classroom with appropriate in-class support. Another definition by Forlin, (2004) and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, (1994) suggests that inclusion refers to all students being valued, accepted, and respected regardless of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, abilities, gender, age, religion, beliefs, and behavior.

Inclusion is the provision of services to students with disabilities, including those with severe impairments, in the neighborhood school, in age-appropriate general education classrooms, with necessary support services and supplementary aids (for the child and the teacher) both to assure the child's academic, behavioral, and social success as well as prepare the child to participate as a full and contributing member of the society (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996, p.763). In Africa as a whole, the practice of inclusive education is driven by political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Every effort to improve practice is geared towards the promotion of human rights, decentralization, partnership for change, and integrated teacher training (Peters, 2003; Thomas, 2012). Most African countries have

adopted Community Rehabilitation Programs which are widely used to facilitate ordinary school and community inclusion of people with disabilities (Khatleli, Mariga, Phachaka, & Stubbs, 1994; Thomas, 2012).

Teachers' Perceptions of inclusive education

Literature on inclusion argues that teachers need training in special education to include students with disabilities (Heward, 2003; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005; Mock & Kauffman, 2002; Zigmond, 2003). Implementing inclusive education largely depends on teachers' attitudes (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2017). According to Urton, Wilbert, & Hennemann, (2014), belief in one's own ability to be successful in inclusive settings is important in promoting positive attitudes. However, many teachers are still concerned about the lack of training for inclusion, insufficient resources (Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2010), and lack of administrative and special education teacher support or other practical concerns related to implementing inclusive education (Burke, Sutherland, 2004; Hwang&Evans,2011). Special pedagogical knowledge seems to positively impact teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (Avamidis Bayliss & Burden, 2000). Malinen (2013) found that positive self-efficacy increased teachers' positive attitudes toward inclusive education. According to studies by Villa, Thousand, Meyers, and Nevin, (1996); Avramidis et al; (2000), when teachers learn new skills and develop their professional competencies to meet the requirements of inclusive education, they begin to adopt more positive attitudes. Teachers have expressed their belief in the concept of inclusion while simultaneously declaring their reluctance to teach an inclusive class (Farrell, (2000); Gordon, (2006); Damore & Murray, (2009). Reluctance gradually revolves around the fear of unknown disabilities, lack of training, perceived loss of time with general education students, and insufficient support staff to assist the more challenging students (Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000; Gartin & Murdick, 2005; Goodman & Williams, 2007). The perceptions of teachers can affect students with special needs present in their classrooms by lowering their self-esteem, decrease in learning outcomes, and socialization within the school environment among others. The formation of teachers' perceptions about students with disabilities and inclusion is often based on student characteristics, classroom makeup, and previous experiences with inclusion (Leatherman & Niemyer, 2005; Rubie-Davis, Hattie,& Hamilton, 2006). According to Leatherman & Niemyer (2005), three elements combine to form a personal perception. They include cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. The affective consists of feelings, moods, and emotions which may be positive or negative. This domain is based on the cognitive understanding of the disability, which can motivate people to get involved in working with a child that has a disability or produce feelings that could cause them to exclude a child with a disability (p.24). The behavioral element is based on the measures a person takes concerning a particular outlook. This deals with the tendency to behave or respond in a particular way when in contact with students that have a disability (p.24). The cognitive element relates to a person's thoughts and attitudes towards students with disabilities. Leatherman & Niemyer (2005) states that "the cognitive component pertains to knowledge and thoughts about the causes of the behavior of children with disabilities in inclusive settings (p.24).

This study was guided by the social learning theory by Albert

Again, in a study aimed at investigating the perceptions of educational partners towards the implementation of inclusive education by Iryayo, Anggriyani, & Herawati, (2018), all subjects confirmed that inclusive education in their respective schools is critical. However, its implementation does not prove to be satisfactory due to the following reasons: no facilities (limited textbooks and learning materials), curriculum content, teacher qualifications, and level of training. In a recent study by Navarro et al; (2020) on teachers and teachers and teaching students' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns towards inclusion in Spain, female students showed a more positive attitude towards inclusion. These attitudes were associated with empathy and social dominance. Younger teachers and students had a greater predisposition towards inclusion. Therefore, prior teacher training and updated training become vital to the better preparation of teachers to work with children with special educational needs, increasing self-confidence that will help them develop a more positive attitude towards inclusive practices. In trying to understand primary school teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education, Khan, Hashmi, & Khanum's (2017), findings indicated that most of the teachers in mainstream schools

had positive attitudes toward inclusion but teaching all types of children with disabilities in the same classroom is not feasible. This study also revealed that teachers have a more favorable attitude towards children with visual impairments, hearing impairments, and the physically challenged (mild or moderate disabilities). This reflects that teachers are confident that they can address their educational needs. Again, a less favorable attitude is shown towards learners with more severe disabilities, and this is due to the limited capacity of the teachers and the unavailability of assistive technologies.

Bandura.

According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is a person's particular set of beliefs that determine how well one can execute a plan of action in prospective situations (that is a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation). He described self-efficacy as consisting of two parts: efficacy expectations and outcome expectations. Efficacy expectation refers to the belief in one's capacity to affect behavior.

Regular classroom teachers are often faced with the challenge of accommodating students with special educational needs in the regular classroom setting. Therefore, a failure or success in this new role will determine the level of self-efficacy of these teachers hence, developing a positive or negative perception/attitude toward students with disabilities. Bandura, (1977) noted that teachers faced with the daily struggle of teaching non-achieving or disruptive students, often develop a faltering sense of self-efficacy. This low sense of self-efficacy may spiral, resulting in a lower level of instruction and commitment on the part of the teacher, ultimately leading to continued student non-achievement and disruptive behavior. Conversely, teachers with a well-developed sense of self-efficacy encourage students to develop an intrinsic interest in learning and can highlight positive student achievements both academic and non-academic (Idol, 2006). Positive feedback while performing a new task encourages a person to believe that they have the skills and capabilities to succeed. Self-efficacy is influenced by the encouragement or discouragement of an individual's performance or ability to perform (Redmond, 2010). General education teachers are faced with the complex task of teaching learners with different forms of disabilities in the regular classroom setting. Verbal persuasions from the different stakeholders will likely encourage the building of self-efficacy on the part of the teachers. This is supported by findings of research by Messemer (2010) where general education teachers felt capable of teaching inclusive classes if provided with consistent administrative support.

METHODOLOGY

This study followed the qualitative research method. The broad approach to this study was experiential. That is, it validates the meanings, views, and perspectives of participants. It is focused on their own experiences and understanding of the phenomenon. An experiential approach is a specific mode of phenomenological analysis in which the investigators question, explore, and arrive at conclusions regarding psychological processes within themselves (Barrell, & Barrel, 1975). The subjects of the research contribute not only to the content of the research (that is the activity that is being researched), but also to the creative thinking that generates, manages, and addresses conclusions from the research. The phenomenological research design was used in this study. Research grounded in phenomenology opens qualitative dimensions of human experiences. The purpose of this approach is to illuminate, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation. This method is particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their perspectives. In the human sphere, this normally translates to gathering deep information and perceptions through inductive qualitative methods (that is interviews, discussions, and participant observation).

The study population included six regular classroom teachers with different levels of training in secondary education, in the North-West region of Cameroon. Regular classroom teachers in mainstream secondary schools were the focus of the study, hence the accessible population. The researcher identified inclusive schools by obtaining information from the Northwest Region of Cameroon's regional secondary education delegation. Three inclusive schools were identified from the database, and the researcher then proceeded with a letter of introduction to the various school administrators,

explaining in detail the purpose and significance of the study. The research then proceeded with the permission of the various school administrators to select two teachers from each of the three inclusive schools that participated in the study. The consent of participants was obtained after they signed a consent form agreeing to participate in the study. Regular classroom teachers trained in government teacher training colleges were among those who took part in the study. Some of them have had a few basic inclusive education courses during their training period, while others have had no basic inclusive education training. The number of years the participants had been in the teaching profession was used as a selection criterion. In qualitative research, the typical approach to sampling is purposive, to generate "insight and in-depth understanding" (Patton, 2002:230) of the topic of interest. In some cases, the focus might be narrow, for example with experiential research where the researcher wants a sample that has experienced a particular phenomenon.

With purposive sampling, the sample units are chosen because they have features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and questions researchers need to study (Bryman, 2012). Purposive sampling was chosen, which according to Welman & Kruger (1999) is the most important kind of non-probability sampling technique to identify primary participants. Participants were therefore selected based on those who have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched (inclusive education) (Kruger, 1988 p.150). Because the number of mainstream schools in Cameroon's Northwest Region is limited, a sample size of six participants (four females and two males) was considered for this study. Again, due to the country's ongoing civil war, which has lasted for four years and counting, most teachers have abandoned their teaching positions out of fear of the unknown. Semi-structured phenomenological interviews were used to collect data for this study. Questions were directed to the participant's perceptions and, experiences in teaching students with special educational needs in a regular classroom setting. Data was obtained about how the participants "think and feel in the most direct ways" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 96). The interview guide was prepared well in advance and the researcher came up with a series of questions. However, the interview was flexible and responsive to the participant's spontaneous and unplanned questions that came up. Open-ended questions were asked to encourage participants to provide in-depth and detailed responses and discuss what is important to them. Interviews were audio-recorded, with the permission of the interviewees (Arkley & Knight, 1999; Bailey, 1996). The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis method (IPA) was employed to analyze the data that arose from the interviews. This method focuses on how people make sense of their lived experiences; it can be used to analyze individual cases or generate themes across a small group of participants. It is interpretative because understanding how people make sense of experience is achieved through interpretative activity on the part of the researcher.

RESULTS

The classroom teacher oversees delivering instructions in the classroom, so the implementation of laws and policies governing inclusion is in their hands. One of the major challenges in implementing inclusive education is a lack of qualified personnel, as schools of education engaged in teacher training do not provide students with inclusive education skills/courses. Laws and regulations have been enacted without considering the views of these teachers, who are tasked with ensuring that all students in their respective classrooms have equal access to education. According to the literature on inclusion, teachers must receive special education training to include students with special needs.

(Heward,2003; Kauffman and Halallahan, 2005; Mock and Kauffman, 2002; Zigmond, 2003) Khan, Hashmi, and Khanum (2017) also identified teachers' capacity as an important component of inclusive education and advocated for inclusive education to be included in pre-service and in-service teacher education. Being posted to a mainstream school I noticed that even with all the skills acquired from the extra courses taken, there was no room for specialization. Scholastica: "I have been a teacher for 21 years now. During my period at the teacher's training college, we only had one course throughout the training which gave an overall introduction to special education. However, when we went into the teaching profession the concept of special education was not a part of the general education curriculum at that time. (pause) well after a while of being in the teaching profession, I had to make the decision of going back to school to improve my knowledge and skills. So, I went in for a master's degree course in Special

Education and obtained a degree after two and a half years. I still have the drive to pursue a Ph.D. program in the same field in the nearest future.

yeah, if I could base my judgment on whether the training I received was sufficient after going through the teacher's training college I'll say not really. (.) but with the initiative, I took by going further with my education and pursuing a master's degree specializing in special and inclusive education I can that I now have a sufficient level of training enough to work with students with special needs in a classroom. Oh, let me also mention that I did a special course in sign language interpretation as well yeah.

RQ 2: what are the difficulties teachers face in meeting the diverse needs of students with special needs in the classroom?

To gain an understanding of the challenges that regular classroom teachers face in meeting the educational needs of students with special needs, participants were asked to define the concept of inclusive education from their own perspective.

Definition of Inclusive Education

Bertrand: Based on my understanding of what inclusive education is a situation where every learner ahh besides his or her limitations either physically or mentally is educated alongside the 'normal students' in the same classroom setting. (pause) it is now up to the instructor to diversify his teaching methods to meet the different needs of the learners depending on the different forms of disabilities. The teacher is also charged with the responsibility of helping these students unfold the potentials they possess. Erm, that said I will conclude by saying that Inclusive education is education for all despite their learning difficulties or disability.

According to the response of the participant, every child, regardless of physical or mental limitations, is educated alongside 'normal students' in the same classroom setting. The responsibility for implementing the concept of inclusive education falls squarely on the shoulders of the classroom teacher, who is directly confronted with the challenge of meeting the needs of these students. As a result, the teacher must change or modify his teaching methods and techniques based on the various types of disabilities present in the classroom to ensure students with special needs follow up on concepts being thought and reach their full potential. As a result, inclusive education is education for all, regardless of whether they have a disability or not. Patricia: "Yeah, I'll define inclusive education as bringing together students with special needs and those without in the same classroom. That is taking away all barriers that hinder the education of students with impairments". Most school administrators have failed to recognize that admitting students with special needs into their institution does not automatically imply that education is inclusive if the barriers to inclusion have not been removed completely. If these barriers are not removed, students with special needs will become more excluded rather than included in the educational system. In an inclusive school setting, such as the one where I teach, I've noticed that the physical environment hasn't been completely made disability friendly, particularly for those who are physically challenged to ease their movements, such as the creation of ramps and lifts. These students have been further excluded due to a lack of well-equipped resource rooms and specialized teachers, particularly in the areas of sign language and braille interpretation. When students with special needs are not fully included, they drop out of school due to frustration, and as a result, they end up with low-wage jobs or no jobs at all, and they will continue to rely on the community for survival.

Scholastica: "According to me, inclusive education refers to the type of education that includes any child irrespective of any challenges they may be facing erm that provides the children the opportunity to attend school (pause) and to have high-quality instruction as well intervention and support that will enable them to meet success. When I talk of challenges mm that will be either a specific disability, race, or gender, should not hinder them from having quality education and the right intervention and support that will push them to a successful end".

According to the above definition, every child can attend a regular school and receive high-quality instruction, intervention, and support in order to achieve academic success. These difficulties may be caused by a specific disability, race, gender, ethnicity, or membership in a minority group. These

obstacles should not prevent them from receiving a quality education and appropriate intervention alongside their regular peers in a regular classroom setting.

From the word itself, Inclusive, simply means that everyone must be included. So, regardless of the challenges, every child has the right to be included, and to be given an equal opportunity to succeed academically. Students with hearing impairments, learning disabilities (slow learners), and other forms of special needs, as well as normal students, are all in the same environment and classroom and are given equal opportunities as well as the right intervention and support to succeed. It is clear from this that the school is welcoming.

Wendy: "According to my own understanding, I would define inclusive education that is available and accessible to all learners with or without a disability, the less privileged, and vulnerable groups, regardless of sex, racial or ethnic origin, or religious background. I have defined inclusive education this way in line with the sustainable development goals. According to goal 4, inclusive education is Education for All regardless of any other challenges they may face or ethnic group they belong in ". The definition is based on SDG 4 on education, which states that education should be available to all people regardless of gender, race, vulnerable group, socioeconomic status, or whether they have a disability. Based on the various definitions provided by the participants, it is safe to say they have a basic understanding of what inclusive education entails. Participants recognize that inclusive education ensures that all students, regardless of whether they have a special need, have equal access to education in a regular classroom setting alongside their normal peers within the community to which they belong. Inclusive education will be successful only if all barriers to the process are removed; otherwise, these students with special needs will be further excluded, defeating the purpose of inclusion.

Participants were able to identify various types of special needs students in their respective classroom settings, including those with learning disabilities (slow learners), those who are visually impaired, hard of hearing, physically challenged, and those who have ADHD. Based on their personal experiences, study participants have identified several challenges encountered in the classroom when teaching students with diverse educational needs. Among these difficulties are: Insufficient levels of Training Due to their levels of training, regular classroom teachers in mainstream and inclusive classroom settings face a challenge in meeting the diverse needs of special needs learners. According to the responses of the study's participants, they were not fully prepared to teach in an inclusive classroom setting due to inadequate training during their teacher training programs. Faced with this challenge, they have gone above and beyond to broaden their knowledge and skills in teaching these students, with some even enrolling in specialized courses in sign language and braille interpretation. Despite this, they believe they are far from being effective teachers in a diverse classroom setting.

Bertrand: "Er with my current level of training er I believe we learn even on the job while working because we are faced with different challenges every day in meeting the educational needs of all students in the classroom. But with the extra training, I had outside the regular teacher training school I believe I am well equipped to meet the needs of especially the students with disabilities. Ok let me give you an example of a hearing-impaired student in my classroom, erm he is not totally deaf but suffers from hard of hearing and understands sign language so from time to time I'll use sign language to further explain certain concepts to him since I have a sound background in sign language as well". With additional in-service training from specialized institutions in areas such as sign language interpretation and braille interpretation, this teacher has been able to ensure that students with special needs in the form of hearing impairment and the visually impaired followed up lectures effectively alongside their 'normal peers.' In the case of a student who is hard of hearing in his classroom, the teacher must use sign language to clearly explain a concept that has been thought during a specific lesson period in order to ensure that his student is not left out. As a result, the teacher considers himself to be qualified for this position.

Patricia: "I wasn't well equipped to meet the needs of these students initially and I had to improvise but as time went on and learned from my experience, I will say yeah I have improved and will say I am equipped to a certain extent to meet the needs of these students". Even though elements of inclusive

education were not part of the curriculum during the teacher training program, the teacher used alternative teaching methods to assist students in meeting their educational objectives. Participating in in-service training seminars and conferences on inclusive education has resulted in increased effectiveness in teaching students with special needs, the most recent of which was held on December 4, 2021, and was organized by the Northwest Economics Teacher Association. These seminars improved the knowledge and skills required to teach students with special needs in traditional classroom settings. Scholastica: "I think I erm I cannot say am super skilled but with my current level of education having a master's degree in special education, have carried out internships, and erm also ahh carrying out ahh specific training in hearing impairment so I think I am equipped to a certain level to handle er an inclusive classroom. Yeah, my level of education permits me to handle some of these challenges in the classroom setting". With her current level of training, the participant believes she is adequately prepared, even though much work remains to be done in meeting the educational needs of students with special needs. Wendy: "Well erm I'll say I have a pretty good level of training in special needs education, but I wouldn't say it was sufficient enough since it was only in the final year of the training course that we were thought about the different techniques on how to identify especially learners with learning disabilities. the training did not really go into detail on the mastery of different teaching methods that could be employed to meet the diverse needs of learners with special needs. So, there was no opportunity given for specialization in inclusive education within the training program, and with that, I cannot say I have really had sufficient training in this aspect".

Only a few courses on inclusive education and the identification of various forms of learning disabilities were thought during the training to become a regular classroom teacher, as well as limited techniques of the appropriate teaching methods and materials that should be used in the teaching-learning process. There were only a few opportunities for student teachers to specialize in specific aspects of special education within the training program. Personal advancements have resulted in most of these techniques and adaptive methods for teaching in an inclusive classroom setting.

Miranda: "Well with regards to the level of formal training I would not say I am effectively equipped to meet the diverse needs of learners with special needs in my classroom. (pause) erm however as a teacher you are obligated to be ready to come up with different solutions to face different kinds of challenges in the classroom to facilitate the teaching and learning process". Though not effectively equipped to meet the educational needs of students with special needs in a mainstream class due to a lack of inclusion training, this teacher has developed various teaching techniques to help bridge the gap between students with special needs and those without special needs, ensuring that no student falls behind when it comes to understanding a particular concept being thought.

Curriculum adaptations

Existing curricula have not been completely modified or adapted to accommodate students with special needs. These rigid curricula were developed for regular school settings without considering the needs of special learners. Those with special needs have been completely excluded from instructional techniques and materials. There is also a noticeable issue with time allocation for each subject period. This is typically 45 minutes for the secondary level and 1 hour 30 minutes for the higher secondary level, making it difficult for teachers to closely monitor special needs students. The lack of individualized educational plans has made the teaching process even more difficult, as teachers are unable to identify specific areas of need where students require assistance. Evaluation systems have not been modified to accommodate students with special needs. It is only fair to allow extra time during exams for those with learning disabilities (slow learners). Unfortunately, identifying these students has been difficult because teachers have not been adequately trained to identify these students. As a result, many students have had to retake the same exams more than once, and some have dropped out.

Bertrand: "Meeting the educational needs of the students there are real challenges in an inclusive setting, and these challenges are based on the experiences I have had. During my 4 years working as a teacher, I observed that these students are often excluded from the regular curriculum giving the teacher an additional load in the teaching-learning process such that the teacher must engage in remedial teaching

with the students involved. Another challenge I have been facing from experience is time allocation. As a teacher, I would take a longer time to guide special needs students through a particular concept to make sure that they are at least at the same comprehension level as their regular peers". Curriculum adaptation is one of the most difficult challenges this teacher faces. School curricula are rigid, and this leads to the exclusion of students with special needs. Teachers have been forced to shoulder the additional burden of meeting the diverse needs of students with special needs by engaging in remedial teaching without additional compensation from the state or school administration. The time allotted for each subject period is limited, and no consideration is given to special needs students for them to effectively follow and understand lectures. This disadvantages those with learning disabilities (slow learners), those who are hearing impaired in the absence of a sign language interpreter, and those who are visually impaired in the absence of a braille specialist.

Anthony: "Ok with regards to the curriculum using my own school and from experience yes we say it is an inclusive school setting, but you will realize that the curriculum is yet to be fully modified or adapted to include teaching methods and materials, and yes erm not forgetting time allocation for teaching a particular subject which averagely lasts for 45 mints for the first circle and 1hr 30 mints for the second cycle. From the time allocation for each subject period, you can clearly tell that not enough time is provided for the teacher to work with slow learners especially and the objectives for that day may not be met".

Patricia: "In most cases, I have had to use the same stoppage time in exams which has caused most slow learners to repeat exams severely".

Scarcity of Resources.

According to the study's findings, participants expressed concerns about the availability of resource rooms on the school campus. Resource rooms are essential in inclusive settings because they must be outfitted with the necessary teaching materials as well as assistive technologies to help special needs students achieve their educational goals. These resource rooms also serve as a safe space for remedial teaching, with special needs students being pulled out of regular classroom settings at specific times of the day to be closely monitored on their daily academic progress and the necessary help provided. Depending on the types of special needs present in the school, these resource rooms are outfitted with assistive technologies. For example, braille machines, laptop computers, hearing aids, charts, tape recorders, slates, and so on. According to the data, these resource rooms are not present in many schools, and even when they are, they are not fully equipped, making it difficult to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

According to the findings of the interviews, there is also a lack of human resources. These regular classroom teachers believe that collaborative teaching is critical if inclusive education is to succeed. Specialized teachers are brought into the regular classroom to assist the regular teacher in the teaching-learning process with collaborative teaching. Bringing in a sign language interpreter or a braille specialist into classrooms with students who have hearing or visual impairments, for example. Most regular classroom teachers do not believe they can be effective in teaching students with special needs without collaborative teaching.

Anthony: "My dear if we want to talk about the availability of resource rooms and provision of assistive technology I will say they are completely absent in my school I begin to wonder if this school is actually fit to be called an inclusive school (.) I will give you an example of a visually impaired student in my classroom who is not able unfortunately because of her financial background to get a braille machine and has to still use the old method of taking down notes using slats. This is just one of the many obstacles I have faced so far. Another hindrance is the absence of trained personnel in specific areas of disabilities. I will say without any reservation that I have little, or no knowledge of braille or sign language interpretation so how then can effectively assist these students in meeting their educational goals? For instance, I am not able to keep up with the visually impaired student to help make corrections on notes taken down during lectures and it has always been a frustrating feeling for me. Another example is having a student who is hard of hearing in your classroom with no sign language interpreter

and you do not understand sign language how do you as a teacher make sure that student is not left behind when it comes to understanding the concept being thought for that day"?

Wendy: "There is a problem with the lack of instructional materials that are necessary to teach these students with special needs. Most resource rooms that are equipped fully are mostly found in specialized institutions and non in regular mainstream schools. Even when there are available, they are not well equipped. Assistive technology is somehow absent or limited. for instance, there are no hearing aids made available to assist students who are hard of hearing as well as limited braille machines as compared to the number of visually impaired students admitted into the institution".

Lack of alterations to the infrastructure

The physical environment and infrastructure in mainstream schools were built without regard for those with special needs, particularly the physically challenged. With the introduction of inclusive education, proper adaptations and modifications to existing infrastructure have not been made. The mobility of the physically challenged, particularly those in wheelchairs, has been hampered as a result of this. Only a few ramps have been built, and no lifts have been provided for these students. Classroom seating arrangements have completely excluded those in wheelchairs, making it difficult for them to remain comfortable in class during lectures. This increased the pressure on the teacher, who must ensure that all students in the class are comfortable enough to effectively follow up on lectures. Making sure that all students are at ease in their physical surroundings is also an important aspect of inclusive education. Those with special needs are more likely to be excluded than included if the environment is not disability friendly. According to the study's findings, restrooms are typically in disrepair and have completely excluded students with special needs. Bertrand: "About the physical environment, I would say there is only a limited noticeable level of modification made on infrastructure by creating ramps for the easy movements of the physically challenged. So, the question is what happens to those with other forms of disabilities? Sports or games are totally not inclusive as most students with special needs are excluded from these games because there are no modifications to games that are socially inclusive to special needs students".

Patricia: "Oh well the challenges are so many. To begin the environment is not friendly to them in that they are mocked and humiliated by some students and even some teachers.

The stairway does not permit those with wheelchairs Benches are not adapted to some with specific cases. The chalkboards are not adaptive" Scholastica: "About the environment being disability friendly I'll say it is equally a major problem. I'll give you an example of my own school the terrain alone is hilly, stony, dusty and so many other obstacles, and children with visual impairments and physical challenges have a problem with mobility and will always depend on the support of others to move around the campus. The practice of inclusive education is beautiful but very challenging as the necessary resources are not readily available".

Insufficient Administrative Assistance

In mainstream schools, administrative support is minimal to non-existent. According to the study's findings, the central administration of these mainstream schools has failed to provide the resources required for the smooth implementation of inclusive education. This could take the form of resource rooms that are equipped, or incentives given to regular classroom teachers to compensate them for remedial lessons. The provision of learning materials or assistive technologies has been entirely placed in the hands of the parents of these special needs students, who are often from middle-class families. The lack of these assistive technologies has exacerbated the work of these regular classroom teachers, as their limited efficiency prevents them from devising alternative measures to help these students follow up on lectures. Scholastica: "In most cases, the administration expects or relay on the families to give support meanwhile most of these students come from low-income families, yeah take for instance a low-income family having to provide for a brille machine or modern computer for the child you know that is difficult. These students don't get much support from the school administration as far as assistance is concerned. I will really say administrative assistance from my observations all these years is absent and

if there is any assistance it's not professional assistance which means there is no specific administrative assistant that has been trained in handling administrative issues of inclusive education".

Patricia: "Administrative assistance is ineffective because some students with disabilities are exempt from paying tuition fees, while others are only partially exempt depending on the severity of their disability. Some of them find it difficult to complete their studies due to the high cost of the various assistive aids required to study effectively, which they cannot afford (e.g., computers or braille machines for the visually impaired)".

RQ3 What are teachers' perceptions towards including students with special needs in the regular mainstream classroom?

According to the data gathered through interviews with participants, it is safe to say that while teachers face several challenges in effectively implementing inclusive education in their various mainstream classrooms, they have always found ways to deal with these challenges by ensuring that every student in the classroom at least follows up on lectures effectively, even though much work remains to be done to assist special needs students. Participants recognize these challenges as well as the importance of providing every child with an equal opportunity and access to quality education, and their opinions reaffirm a positive stance toward inclusive education and encourage the practice. Bertrand: "Despite the numerous challenges that a regular classroom teacher faces, especially as the burden of implementation and meeting the diverse needs of all students in their classroom falls more heavily on their shoulders, the participant believes that inclusive education is critical because no child should be left behind. With the support and active participation of all stakeholders, inclusive education is very possible, and every child will be helped to meet their educational goals and become a better fit in society in the future". Patricia: "Every human being, in my opinion, has some form of disability. While some are obvious, others may go unnoticed. The concept of inclusive education has been implemented to bridge these gaps in educational systems, thereby providing equal opportunities for every child to empower themselves through education and become less dependent on those around them for survival, as well as making them feel welcomed in society in which they find themselves". Scholastica: "Every child deserves a fair chance at a quality education, regardless of whether they have special needs or not, which is why I have taken the personal initiative to better understand the concept of inclusion while working hard to make inclusive education a success and to assist these special needs students in achieving their academic goals". Wendy: "Inclusive education is a great idea because it is critical that all students, regardless of whether they have one or more special needs, have equal access to a high-quality education. This concept, however, was introduced in Cameroon without any proper feasibility studies being conducted to determine whether the necessary resources for its smooth implementation were in place. From personal experience, much more needs to be done in terms of training more teachers on the concept of inclusion, more fully equipped resource rooms, modifying infrastructure to accommodate those with special needs, and sensitization campaigns to encourage inclusive education". Anthony: "No child should be left behind because education is the key to a successful future for all children. Families play an important role in bringing these students forward for enrollment into the school. therefore, inclusive education needs a lot of sensitization for all stakeholders in education while ensuring that the necessary facilities are put in place for its proper implementation".

RQ 4 What do teachers believe they require in order to be effective in inclusive classroom settings?

According to the data gathered from the interviews, teachers believe they can still be effective in an inclusive classroom if certain adjustments are made, and the necessary resources are made available to facilitate the teaching-learning process that meets the diverse needs of all learners. The following recommendations were made by participants, and they are critical if inclusive education implementation is to be effective in regular school settings.

Changes to the existing curriculum. It is widely accepted that the general curriculum in Cameroon was developed without considering the needs of special needs students. These curricula were implemented prior to the introduction of inclusive education in Cameroon. Little has been done in Cameroon since the

introduction of special education to make modifications and changes to the existing regular curriculum to include learners with special needs, resulting in them being excluded rather than included. Participants in the study believe that these rigid curricula require modifications and changes to help them become more effective in meeting the educational needs of all learners in an inclusive classroom setting. Participants have recommended changes in teaching methods, particularly for children with special needs (particularly remedial teaching for students with learning disabilities), Modifications to didactic materials used for special needs students are also urgently needed. Evaluation and assessment methods have not been modified to allow for more time during evaluations, particularly for those with learning disabilities.

This has made it difficult for teachers to assign fair grades to these students.

These regular teachers believe that if the evaluation and assessment methods are changed, they will be more effective in evaluating students. Bertrand: "With regards to the curriculum, I would recommend that it be modified and made flexible to include all students especially those with special needs. Modifications should be made at the level of teaching methods, teaching materials made available as well as upgrading the resource rooms. Rules and regulations on assessment and evaluation should also be modified to include special needs students by giving them more extra time to complete tasks". Patricia: "I am of a strong opinion that didactic materials be improved by including those that will cater to the needs of learners with impairments. Examination timetables and duration of exams be modified to accommodate those with special needs".

Collaborative teaching

When it comes to inclusive education, collaborative teaching is critical. This is a practice in which at least one specialized teacher works alongside a regular teacher in the same classroom to assist them with special needs students. Participants advocated for the practice of collaborative teaching, which is currently lacking in mainstream settings if inclusive education is to be effective. According to data from interviews, participants believe that all stakeholders should be involved in developing individualized educational plans for all students in the classroom in order to help identify specific areas of need for each student, which will help determine which specialized teacher will be introduced in the classroom to assist regular teachers. Bringing in specialized teachers will relieve pressure on regular teachers in terms of time management and ensure that all students effectively follow up on lectures. Bertrand: "From my experience and the challenges I have mentioned above and will say there is a need for collaboration. As concerns the issue of time allocation I mentioned earlier, it is difficult for a single regular teacher to single-handedly meet the needs of these students given the limited time frame for each subject period. There will therefore be a great improvement in the quality of education if collaborative teaching is put in place. So, what I mean by this is that sign language interpreters and braille specialists are brought into the regular classroom that has learners with hearing and visual impairments to assist the regular teacher where needed. You see, for inclusive education to be effective there must be the active involvement of all stakeholders especially in preparing IEPs for all students. It is important to bring in parents of these children with disabilities when preparing IEP plans because these parents will have to play an active role back home in helping these children meet up with homework and revision. So, I am not only recommending that IEPs be drawn up for each student but all stakeholders are actively involved in the process".

Scholastica: "Teachers who have not had special training in inclusive education could be given refresher courses from time to time because normally in inclusive classrooms more than one teacher can be in the same classroom at any given time here, I am talking about collaborative teaching. These refresher courses will be very essential to upgrade the skills of the regular teachers so that if a situation ever comes up like the example, I quoted earlier of the absent sign language interpreter the regular classroom teacher can at least step in to assist in any way possible not leaving the student concerned completely blank. I don't know whether I have said enough(laughs) but am talking specifically from my personal experiences".

Miranda: "I will equally recommend that the curriculums be modified and adapted to meet the diverse needs of all learners. This could be done first and foremost by involving all stakeholders in the drawing up of IEP plans especially for students with special needs which is what I find lacking in the educational system".

Pre-service and in-service training

Participants in the study advocate for a well-tailored inclusive education program to be implemented at all levels of teacher training colleges throughout the country in order to train more inclusive classroom teachers in the future. This will facilitate the teaching-learning process for these teachers in a traditional classroom setting, while also increasing their self-efficacy. Wendy: "Well erm in terms of recommendations I will recommend a common well-tailored program on inclusive education be introduced and thought in all teacher training colleges across the country and at the different levels of education".

Teachers recommend in-service training and seminars for regular teachers who have had no pre-service training or have only had a few elements of inclusive education in their teacher education programs. Regular teachers should be encouraged to enroll in short courses or specialized programs on inclusive education to help them acquire the knowledge and skills required to effectively meet the diverse needs of special needs students. Participants also advocate for in-service training in the form of seminars and conferences where regular teachers can improve their teaching, evaluation, and assessment skills.

This will significantly improve the efficiency of the teachers. Miranda: "In-service training in the form of seminars and conferences should be organized on a regular basis to update regular teachers' knowledge and skills on the various instructional and evaluation methods that should be implemented to facilitate the teaching-learning process of all students".

Scholastica: "We have to sensitize and encourage more teachers to take special courses in inclusive education and be part of the team that will want our children to be included fully in the educational setting".

Availability of Resource Rooms

When it comes to inclusive education, well-equipped resource rooms are a must. Participants expressed concern about the lack of these resource rooms in their inclusive school settings, citing it as one of the challenges they have faced in their respective mainstream classrooms. Participants recommended that resource rooms be fully equipped with the necessary assistive technologies and didactic materials to facilitate the teaching process for them to be effective teachers in mainstream classrooms. These resource rooms will also be used for remedial teaching, with students with special needs being pulled out of the regular classroom at specific times of the day to ensure that they follow up on lectures. Anthony: "

I will propose that special materials for instance braille machines amongst other assistive technology should be provided through resource room in all-inclusive settings".

Miranda: "The school administration should make an effort in providing well-equipped resource rooms within the school environment that will facilitate the teaching process".

Adequate administrative assistance

Various education stakeholders, including school administration, should be charged with providing the necessary resources to effectively implement inclusive education in mainstream settings. This should be accomplished by encouraging and financially supporting regular classroom teachers to enroll in additional courses or specialized programs on inclusive education. This will improve knowledge and skills, as well as teaching output efficiency. Participants also recommended that financial assistance be provided to them in addition to their basic salaries in order to encourage them to create remedial teaching periods for special needs learners as job satisfaction is critical to effective teaching output. Scholastica: "Actually the recommendations are many but if I want to be specific and relate to my own experiences as a teacher and my school, the problem is that of the stakeholders in charge of education.

They should take the responsibility to provide what is needed. Ok, I'll give you an example let's say all the necessary assistive technologies needed are made available, more teachers are being trained on inclusive education, and they are well paid I think some of these problems will be resolved". Regular classroom teachers are fully aware of the responsibilities placed on them to ensure that the educational needs of all students, particularly those with special needs, are met, as evidenced by the findings presented above. Given the limited level of training in inclusive education, educating these special needs students in regular classroom settings has proven to be a very difficult process. These challenges, however, have been met with a positive attitude from regular classroom teachers who understand the importance of including every student, regardless of whether they have a disability, and providing them with equal access to quality education. Personal experiences interacting with special needs students and introducing alternative instructional methods that will meet the diverse needs of all learners have resulted in the development of new skills. Inservice training, seminars, and conferences on inclusive education, as well as full enrollments in inclusive education courses at higher levels of education, have increased these teachers' self-efficacy. This increase in self-efficacy has encouraged these regular classroom teachers to advocate strongly for the concept of inclusive education while hoping that stakeholders will make modifications and changes to curriculums and general educational systems to accommodate learners with special needs.

DISCUSSION

This study used a qualitative research methodology through semi-structured phenomenological interviews to understand regular teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, guided by Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy. This theory was used to better understand teachers' abilities to meet the needs of their students. Successful inclusion necessitates the consideration of numerous and disparate facts, but teachers are the primary force influencing the success of inclusive practices (Pajares & Urdan, 2016). The goal of this chapter is to elaborate and highlight the study's major or main findings based on the various themes that emerged from the various research questions posed at the start of the study.

Level of training and elements of inclusive education

According to the study's findings, regular classroom teachers do not believe they have received adequate training in the area of inclusive education to effectively meet the diverse needs of special students in their classrooms. This limited level of training is because, while elements of inclusive education were present in their teacher training programs, they were only at the introductory level. These training programs did not provide regular classroom teachers with the knowledge, skills, and techniques they needed to be effective in inclusive classroom settings. When faced with setbacks during instruction, these regular classroom teachers have resorted to using personal initiatives to provide solutions. This is reflected in Bandura's theory of self-efficacy's performance outcome level, where experience is gained when an individual takes on a new challenge and succeeds at it. Participants in the study frequently identified visual impairment, hard of hearing/hearing impairment, the physically challenged, and learning disabilities as areas or categories of special needs. Some solutions implemented by regular classroom teachers included moving students who are hearing impaired to the front seats of the classroom where the lights hit the instructor's face to help them lip read. Students with low vision are assigned to the front rows of the classroom to assist them in reading from the chalkboards. Many students with one or more types of learning disabilities go unnoticed because regular classroom teachers have not been trained in proper identification skills.

When participants identified a slow learner, they used remedial teaching to help the slow learner catch up on the material being taught. Teachers' confidence in their own ability to succeed in inclusive settings is critical for promoting positive attitudes toward the concept.

Teachers are still concerned about their level of training because it lacked extensive elements of inclusive education. While they have devised temporary solutions in the classroom, they are unsure that these solutions will be effective in the long run. These findings are like those reported by Tournaki (2003), who found that teachers' perceptions of inclusive education are influenced by their level of

experience and training in teaching students with different learning styles. Another study, by Deppeler, and Harvey (2010), found that teachers are still concerned about a lack of inclusion training.

Difficulties faced by teachers in meeting the diverse needs of students with special educational needs in a regular classroom setting.

The effective implementation of inclusive education in Cameroon has been fraught with difficulties. Many of these challenges fall on the shoulders of regular classroom teachers, who are tasked with enforcing the laws and regulations governing inclusive education. While these regular classroom teachers understand the concept of inclusive education and its importance, they believe it is far from being effectively implemented. For starters, teachers believe they are not adequately prepared to teach special needs students. Interacting with these students during the teaching-learning process has inspired these regular classroom teachers to enroll in short training courses or full-time university courses on inclusive education. This has aided in the improvement of their knowledge and skills on inclusion, as well as their self-efficacy levels.

New skills can be learned or improved by practicing, but how can one be certain that practicing and acquiring new skills will result in positive experiences? Most of these regular teachers have taken specialized courses in the most used areas of braille and sign language interpretation. However, there is more to sign language interpretation than a regular teacher may be aware of. With such a short training period, it is unclear how well these skills have been effectively mastered to assist students with hearing impairments in reaching their full potential. The deaf culture is extremely important to the deaf community, and a hearing teacher teaching hearing-impaired students may not fully comprehend certain aspects of the culture. Failure to understand these cultures will exclude students with special needs more than it will include them. Traditionally, mainstream teachers have not been trained to deal with learning barriers, but the shift toward inclusive education has made them feel obligated to accept a diverse range of learners in their mainstream classroom. The current study's findings are mirrored in a similar study by Nel et al; 2014, which reported that policy implementation is not carried out effectively due to teachers' lack of skills required to practice inclusive pedagogies in their classrooms. Findings from Mangope, Kuyini, & Major, 2012; Mangope, 2013; Mukhopadhyay, 2009, support the current study's findings that there is a lack of clarity in relation to the roles and responsibilities of general education teachers who provide instruction in an inclusive setting. Participants also expressed concerns about the existing curriculum, which has been described as "very rigid" because it was developed without considering the needs of students with disabilities. The current curriculum has not been modified or adapted to accommodate the various instructional methods and didactic materials required for effective teaching. Individualized educational plans, particularly for students with disabilities, have not been developed, making it even more difficult for regular classroom teachers to identify specific areas of need, particularly with students who have one or more forms of learning disability. This inability to identify these areas of need stems from the fact that these regular teachers have had no prior training in the identification and placement of various categories of special needs. This has made it even more difficult for these teachers to use specific teaching methods or didactic materials to help students with special needs achieve their full academic potential. According to a study on teachers' perceptions of educational reform aimed at inclusion conducted by Kakkala and Thuneberg (2018), positive attitudes toward inclusive education occurred if a teacher participated in the process of developing individualized educational plans for students with special needs.

A similar finding from Patkin and Timor's (2010) study on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion suggests that teachers' knowledge of learning disabilities was limited.

Furthermore, a lack of resources, both human and material, has made the teaching and learning process extremely difficult for regular classroom teachers. If inclusive education is to be successful, fully equipped resource rooms are a must-have in inclusive settings. Depending on the category of special needs students admitted to the school, these resource rooms serve as centers for remedial teaching using various assistive technologies. The study's findings revealed that resource rooms, even when they are present, are not fully equipped with whatever materials or assistive technology are required to facilitate

the teaching-learning process. The study's findings are mirrored in a similar study by Loreman, Deppeler, and Harvey (2010), in which teachers cited a lack of resources as a major challenge. According to the findings of another study conducted by Sharma and Simi (2015), participants in the study were primarily concerned about a lack of resources required for the proper implementation of inclusive education. Finally, most participants emphasized the significance of a supportive administration in the long-run success of inclusive education. Administrative support in providing equipped resource rooms, infrastructure modifications and adaptations, and financial support to regular teachers for remedial teaching and further training were all lacking. Administrative support provides a solid foundation and shared vision, allowing teachers to be confident in implementing new ideas to accommodate their students and expressing higher levels of self-efficacy when compared to teachers working in an environment that does not include administrative support. This is supported by the findings of a study conducted by Iryayo, Anggriyani, and Herawati (2018), in which all subjects agreed that while inclusive education is critical in their respective schools, implementation is not satisfactory due to a lack of administrative support. In another study, Timor and Burton (2006), discovered that administrative support has a positive effect on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. This suggests that when the administration of a mainstream school expresses support for the inclusion model, teachers' attitudes are similarly positive.

Teachers' perceptions towards including students with special needs in regular classroom settings.

Despite all the challenges that regular classroom teachers face in meeting the diverse academic needs of special needs students in their respective classrooms, study participants continue to strongly advocate for inclusive education. They believe that every child, regardless of whether they have a special need, should be given a fair and equal opportunity to receive a quality education while doing everything possible to help them reach their full academic potential.

However, much more needs to be done for this to work effectively for the benefit of all, particularly at the level of effective follow-up in the implementation process. According to the responses provided by the study participants, it is safe to say they are passionate about the concept of inclusion because, despite the challenges they have faced, they have derived solutions from personal initiative after working one on one with special needs students to help bridge the gaps in instructional methods and didactic materials, as well as assessment and evaluation methods that will accommodate learners with one form of disability or another.

What teachers believe they require in order to be effective in inclusive classrooms.

The inclusive education concept can still be effectively implemented if certain aspects responsible for its smooth implementation are given adequate attention. According to the participants of the current study, these modifications must first and foremost begin at the level of the various stakeholders of the various sectors of education represented in the country charged with the responsibility of providing the necessary resources for full inclusion. Teachers are calling for a complete overhaul or changes to the existing general curriculum. The existing curriculum was created without considering the needs of special needs students. Because they are the ones who interact with these students daily while delivering instructions, regular classroom teachers should be actively involved in the process of curriculum modification. Special educators should also be used in the curriculum adaptation process because they will help with proper identification and placement through the creation of individualized educational plans (IEP). Individualized educational plans will reveal which didactic materials should be changed or modified, as well as the various instructional methods that should be used to teach the various categories of learners in an inclusive classroom setting.

The IEP will also shed light on the best possible assessment and evaluation method to be used to ensure that special needs students have an equal and fair chance to excel academically. Again, regular classroom teachers who took part in the study believe that collaborative teaching should be implemented in regular classroom settings in inclusive schools. Collaborative teaching is critical for achieving full inclusion. This is a procedure in which more than one teacher is present in each classroom. The regular classroom teacher is expected to work alongside one or more special needs teachers specialized in

different areas depending on the category of special needs present in the classroom with collaborative teaching.

Special educators will assist in the effective management of time allotted to each subject area while ensuring that special needs students effectively follow up on lectures.

Furthermore, for these regular classroom teachers to have a higher sense of self-efficacy, there has been a call from their respective school administrators for more in-service training, seminars, and conferences to upgrade their level of knowledge and skills in teaching special needs students. This is supported by Malinen (2013), who discovered that positive self-efficacy increased teachers' positive attitudes toward inclusive education.

According to another study by Villa, Thousand, Meyers, Nevin, 1996; Avramisis et al; 2000, when teachers learn new skills and develop their professional competencies to meet the needs of inclusive education, they begin to adopt a more positive attitude. Finally, the teaching and learning process in an inclusive setting will fail if the necessary resources, such as resource rooms and assistive technologies, are not available to both teachers and special needs students. Regular classroom teachers believe that the school administration should provide these resources and assistive technologies based on the various categories of disabilities present in the inclusive setting. These services will assist special needs students in meeting their educational objectives, as well as the instructor in achieving a positive educational outcome. Fear of the unknown, a lack of training, and insufficient support staff to assist the more challenging students all contribute to aversion to inclusive education. Teachers' perceptions of a particular phenomenon can have an impact on students' self-esteem and learning outcomes in the classroom. Teachers' perceptions of students with special needs are frequently influenced by student characteristics, classroom makeup, and prior experiences. It is therefore critical for teachers to have a cognitive understanding of the various types of special needs students in their classrooms, as this can motivate them to become actively involved in working with these students. According to the study's findings, it is safe to conclude that understanding teachers' perceptions of inclusive education considering the challenges they face daily will assist the various stakeholders in providing long-term solutions to help these teachers become effective.

This is because their willingness to implement an inclusive policy is likely to be affected by their acceptance of it. Teachers' perceptions of inclusion may be influenced by their level of training, which is why it is critical to include regular classroom teachers, as well as other stakeholders when developing inclusive school settings. These regular classroom teachers are the implementers of inclusive education policies and practices, and their level of preparedness for this task should be evaluated. Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and knowledge of inclusion are important predictors of their willingness to accept students with disabilities (Manisha, & Zalizan; 2006). Previous research has shown that teachers are critical to the success of inclusionary programs (Can't, 1994), as they are regarded as linchpins in the process of including students with special needs in a mainstream class (Whiting & Young; 1995). A teacher's belief in his or her ability to meet the diverse needs of students with special needs can have an impact on his or her effectiveness. According to interview findings, teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to persevere even when they are not met with success. Teachers' self-efficacy has grown as a result of additional courses on teaching in an inclusive setting, as well as regular attendance at conferences, seminars, and in-service training. With increased self-efficacy, these teachers approached new situations as challenges to be met rather than avoided. Target 4c of SDG 4 calls for a sustained increase in the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries. Regular classroom teachers have suggested that in-service training and seminars be held on a regular basis in order to improve the knowledge and skills required to teach inclusive classrooms. This in-service training will aid in increasing the supply of qualified teachers capable of handling inclusive classroom settings. The issue of infrastructure modification and adaptation is one that has received insufficient attention in inclusive education. This is another point of concern raised by participants, as they consider not only the academic aspects of inclusion but also the environmental factors that impede the smooth implementation of inclusive education. Some study participants believed that the physical environment had not been modified to accommodate people with

physical disabilities. There are no ramps or lifts in the story buildings, and the general terrain is rugged, making the movement of people in wheelchairs difficult. Those with disabilities have also been completely excluded from restrooms. Extracurricular activities are an important part of all educational systems because they help to bring out the potential in students and provide a forum for socialization. Sporting activities have been seen to exclude people with special needs because no provisions have been made to ensure that people with special needs can participate in sports. This may result in poor social skill development and may further exclude special needs learners in an inclusive setting. To ensure full inclusion, significant attention must be paid to infrastructure changes and inclusive sporting activities. Target 4a of the Sustainable Development Goals calls for educational facilities to be built and upgraded to be child, disability, and gender-sensitive, while also providing a safe, nonviolent, inclusive, and effective learning environment for all.

The experiential approach was used in the study's qualitative research method, which focused on participants' experiences and understanding of the phenomenon (inclusive education). The phenomenological design used has proven to be successful in identifying phenomena based on how regular teachers perceive them from their own perspectives. The semi-structured interviews used for data collection provided detailed information and teacher perceptions of inclusive education.

Self-efficacy and Inclusion.

The attitudes of classroom teachers toward including students with special needs are a significant contributing factor to students' success in an inclusive classroom. A teacher's self-efficacy can be influenced negatively or positively depending on their level of training and experience with special needs students. A teacher's self-efficacy is reflected in their belief and ability to help their students succeed. (General education teachers believe in their own ability to meet the educational needs of special students). Positive and negative experiences, according to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, can influence an individual's ability to perform a given task as they face the daily struggle of teaching non-archiving or disruptive students.

According to Bandura, the most influential source of efficacy information is mastery experiences (performance outcome), which refers to experiences gained when an individual takes on a new challenge and is successful in doing so. It provides the most authentic evidence of whether one can master whatever it takes to succeed.

The study's findings indicate that, despite not having adequate training in handling inclusive classrooms, regular classroom teachers have come up with hands-on solutions to meet the educational needs of these students based on their experience working with special needs students. By enrolling in short courses as well as full-time higher education programs on inclusive education, these teachers have gained new skills and knowledge.

Regular participation of classroom teachers in inclusive education seminars and conferences organized at both the regional and national levels has also been beneficial in acquiring new skills and knowledge in dealing with inclusive classrooms. Improvements in knowledge and inclusion skills have gone a long way toward improving teachers' performance outcomes, resulting in an increase in their level of self-efficacy. With higher levels of self-efficacy, these teachers are more willing to use a variety of teaching approaches and didactic materials to support and include students with special educational needs in inclusive classroom settings, and their success is reflected in students with special needs' positive performance levels. According to the study's findings, an increase in self-efficacy has resulted in a more positive attitude among regular classroom teachers toward including students with special needs. They believe in the process of inclusion and recognize the importance of providing quality and equal educational opportunities to all students, regardless of whether they have special needs. These teachers believe they are fully prepared for the task of educating all students in an inclusive setting as they gain experience and learn new skills. A teacher's belief in their ability to help students succeed has a direct impact on their classroom routines and, as a result, students' motivation and success.

However, study participants believe that more needs to be done if full inclusion is to be achieved. According to Bandura (1977), vicarious experiences contribute even more to the development of self-efficacy. That is, people can develop a low or high level of self-efficacy based on the performances of others. Participants in the study have called for collaborative teaching to be integrated into the school curriculum to help them meet the educational needs of all students. True, a regular classroom teacher may not be able to handle all types of special needs students in their classrooms. The presence of specialized teachers in an inclusive classroom setting alleviates the burden on the regular teacher, who is already working with a limited time schedule for each subject period. Regular classroom teachers will also take advantage of this opportunity to learn new skills related to teaching inclusive classroom settings with the assistance of IEP plans, resulting in an increase in self-efficacy levels. Again, verbal persuasion influences self-efficacy, that is encouragement and discouragement regarding an individual's performance or ability to perform (Bandura, 1977). Participants have expressed a desire for administrative assistance, which they believe is in short supply. Administrators must provide well-equipped resource rooms, financial incentives for remedial teaching, in-service training and seminars, and even verbal praise for extra efforts put in for inclusion to succeed. These motivational gestures will encourage regular classroom teachers to work even harder in order to gain the necessary skills for inclusive classroom settings and to enjoy job satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Laws and legislation governing the establishment of mainstream and inclusive schools place most of the burden of implementation on the shoulders of regular classroom teachers. Regular classroom teachers' perspectives are frequently ignored during the development of these inclusive settings in order to understand their level of training and preparedness to accommodate students with special needs in regular classroom settings.

Classroom teachers are responsible for providing a safe and welcoming environment free of all barriers for all students, particularly those with special needs. The perceptions of regular classroom teachers toward including students with special educational needs were sampled, and the findings revealed that teachers were fully aware of the concept of inclusive education and the overall importance of leaving no child behind when it came to educating them. Despite their understanding of the concept of inclusion, these teachers have expressed several concerns about the difficulties they face daily in their respective classrooms while attempting to meet the educational needs of students with special needs. Teachers do not believe they have received adequate training in dealing with inclusive classrooms. This is because teacher education programs included few or no elements of inclusive education. They have, however, developed creative solutions on teaching methods and didactic materials used to ensure these students effectively follow up on lectures based on personal experience working directly with students with one or more types of special needs. To improve their knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy, these teachers have enrolled in additional inclusive education training courses, primarily in braille and sign language interpretation, which is still a work in progress. Furthermore, teachers face challenges at the regular curriculum level. The existing curriculum was created without consideration for students with special needs (teaching methods, didactic materials, and assessment and evaluation methods). The rigid curriculum has excluded learners with special needs more than it has included them. Within these school environments, there is a noticeable lack of well-equipped resource rooms. Even when there is a resource room, it is frequently lacking in the necessary assistive technologies to help students with special needs reach their full potential. According to the study's findings, administrative support, which is an important component of inclusive school settings, is limited within mainstream schools. School administrators have failed to provide regular classroom teachers with the necessary financial, moral, and physical support, making the teaching process a constant struggle on their part. In inclusive settings, the physical environment is equally important because all students must feel at ease in their learning environments. The findings revealed a lack of disability-friendly infrastructure modification in the form of ramps, lifts, and restrooms to facilitate movement for learners with special needs, particularly the physically challenged.

Despite all the challenges that regular classroom teachers face, they maintain a positive attitude toward including children with special educational needs because it is every child's right to receive a quality education within their community and grow into independent citizens in the future. Teachers believe that if certain changes are made by the necessary stakeholders to prepare them to become effective classroom teachers, the implementation of inclusive education could be successful. Some of these changes include regular in-service training programs, seminars, and conferences on inclusive education to improve knowledge and skills in dealing with inclusive classroom settings.

There is also an urgent need to make the existing school curriculum more adaptable in order to accommodate students with special needs. Modifications should be made to didactic materials as well as teaching methods to accommodate each learner. Teachers advocate for the development of individualized educational plans (IEP) with all stakeholders in education, including parents of students with special needs, in order to determine which teaching method or didactic material is best for any category of special needs. This is an area that is frequently overlooked, making it difficult for regular classroom teachers to understand the specific educational needs of special needs students. The IEP will assist in determining where and when specialized teachers will be brought in to assist regular classroom teachers in the teaching-learning process. It is obvious that regular classroom teachers have not been specifically trained in teaching students with specific types of special needs and require assistance through collaborative teaching with specialized teachers, as specialized teachers will be in a better position to meet the educational needs of a student with a specific type of special needs than the regular classroom teacher. Again, well-equipped resource rooms should be established within the school environment to provide students with special needs with the necessary technological support while also facilitating the teaching process for regular classroom teachers.

Finally, there is a need for structural changes within the school environment. ramps, lifts, and comfortable seating arrangements, particularly for the physically challenged. The success of inclusive education is dependent not only on the educational aspect but also on the physical environment. All learners must feel at ease in their surroundings and participate in all activities in order to develop their social skills. The SDG4 target 4a calls for an improvement in educational facilities that are child, disability, and gender-sensitive, and that provide safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTIONS

The actions suggested include introducing and teaching a well-tailored program on inclusive education in all teacher training colleges across the country and at all levels of education. This will result in a greater supply of qualified teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the diverse educational needs of all learners in a mainstream school setting. Again, the various educational institutions should be charged with the responsibility of creating units that are concerned with inclusivity. These units will serve as a think tank process strategy for implementation, providing funds for research and research findings used to inform educational policies in Cameroon, and monitoring its implementation with the oversight of all stakeholders.

Regular classroom teachers should be involved in curriculum development, and their perspectives on their level of preparedness to accommodate learners with special needs in regular classroom settings, as well as what they believe they need to become effective classroom teachers in inclusive settings, should be solicited. Teachers have recognized the significance of including all students and providing equal access to quality education, as well as their willingness to meet the diverse needs of all learners. The findings of this study could be used to develop an ongoing professional development program that supports the needs of inclusive teachers.

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