



Inclusive Education in Cameroon: Students' with Disabilities Perceptions on Inclusive Practices at the University of Buea, Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is a social model that can be substantially linked to the 1960 United Nations Convention against Discrimination in Education, and the 1990 and 1994 UNESCO sponsored Jomtien Declaration on "Education for All" and Salamanca Statement on Special education respectively. It is a process of increasing the attendance, involvement, and achievements of all learners in schools, regardless their physical, social, political, economic and cultural status. Inclusive education is anchored on the premise that; we live in a diverse society where every individual needs to acknowledge the values and differences of each other; and have equal rights in contributing to the progress of society regardless different levels of abilities. This article sought to establish the current state of inclusive education in Cameroon. Emphasis was on the perceived gains of inclusive education, challenges in its implementation and how the challenges could be addressed. A case study research design was used. Four undergraduate students with disabilities reading Special Education in the Faculty of Education of the University of Buea were purposefully selected for the study. Data was collected using an interview guide. Thematic analyses were used to analyse the data. The results revealed that the participants perceived inclusive education as having resulted in social acceptance of students with special educational needs. It is worth noting that respondents were well grounded on issues and trends of inclusive education. They perceived inclusion as having encouraged positive attitudes among teachers, students with and those without disabilities both in the classrooms and communities. Stigmatisation and discrimination were perceived as having been reduced. Challenges such as lack of specific policy on inclusive education in Cameroon and scarcity of human and material resources were outlined as barriers to inclusive education in Cameroon. The participants suggested several ways to address some of the above challenges. These included among others, enacting a specific policy on inclusive education, training more teachers in special needs education, implementing more community awareness programmes, having itinerant specialist teachers, sufficient education funding, and availing more resources for inclusive education in Cameroon.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the Cameroon's government adoption of many international conventions on inclusive education and the launching of an inclusive action plan in schools in 1998, the only overriding concept that buttressed the framework of school equity and national unity was a Bilingual and Bicultural Integration Policy which was launched in 1961 after the Federation between the former British Southern Cameroons and The Republic of Cameroon. However, recent developments in national and international perspectives to promote inclusion under the UNESCO plan of Education for All (EFA) have brought changes in bilingual (mainstream) school practices. However "integration and inclusion", as seen in Cameroon as two terms representing one concept, are still used interchangeably in theory and practice in the Cameroonian educational system due to the influence of the "French Speaking" community that prefers the former and the "English Speaking" community that are familiar with the latter.

As defined in the Cameroon's Constitution of 1996, the Disability Law No. 2010/02 of April 13, 2010, the Prime Ministerial Degree of July 26, 2018 laying down the procedures for implementing Law No. 2010/02 of April 13, 2010 on the protection of persons with disabilities and older persons, and other legal provisions, the state offers protection and support in health, social welfare and educational services to people with different categories of special needs in Cameroon: ranging from disadvantaged minority groups; vulnerable women, men, elderly people and children; people at risk of developing or already living with a disabilities. However, prominence is placed on those with severe disabilities who are given official priority with few private organisations also giving support to people with different categories of disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, the Decree No. 77/495 of July 7 December 1977 outlines the official categorisation of disabilities in Cameroon, and makes provision for the creation of private social welfare services and specialised institutions like orphanages, private Rehabilitation centres, socio-professional/vocational training centres, day centres, respite care homes, among others (Constitution, 1996; MINAS, 1977, 1990, 2005) to support persons with disabilities in Cameroon.

Education contributes to well-being and human development (Vygotsky 1978; WHO & World Bank 2011). The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Articles 7 and 24 (UN Enable, 2006), and on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Articles 2 and 23 (United Nations 1990) state that all children have the right to develop their potential and access education. African children living with impairments and disabilities are less likely to start and attend school, and to transition to higher levels of education (Filmer 2008; Hashemi, Njelesani & Parnes, 2014; Uchem, Ngwa and Asongwa 2014; UNESCO 2005; UNICEF 2004), and may experience violence

(Boersma 2013). Strategies to improve the development of inclusive education which shall improve access to education for persons with disabilities in mainstream schools are needed. This article therefore examines erudite work germane to Inclusive Education in Cameroon, using a policy perspective as an analytic framework (UN Enable, 2006; United Nations, 1990). The purpose of this work is to contribute to the knowledge base about Inclusive Education in Cameroon and to critically identify catalysts in promoting inclusive educational practices particularly for students with disabilities in higher educational institutions in Cameroon.

The article scrutinizes academic works to address three extents:

- 1) Contextualizing disability issues in Cameroon;
- 2) Special Education in the University of Buea
- 3) Students with disabilities' perceptions on Inclusive education.

It is hoped that the study may succor researchers, educators, governments, parents, stakeholders, and non-governmental organizations surrounding action planning about inclusive education (IE) in Cameroon and elsewhere.

Contextualising Disability Issues in Cameroon

In a bit to conceptualize disability we used the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), a bio psychosocial model (WHO & World Bank. (2011); World Bank. (2014): Shey 2014). The ICF views disability as the intersection of impairment of body structure or function, limitations in engagement in activities, and/or participation in social life. From this perspective, "disability" in children is the result of an interactive process: children live with impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions which affect them in different ways, and which lead to unique experiences of disability. For example, a child who has a visual impairment may require different adaptations in the classroom than a child who has a cognitive or learning impairment. The ICF provides a framework for understanding the complexity of disability as not being solely located within an individual and emphasizes that disability is not the same as impairment. A child whose impairment is accommodated by his or her environment may have a full and active life with very few or no limitations and not have the experience of disability, for example, visual impairment accommodated by glasses. The ICF framework provides ways of understanding interventions as being located beyond the person, for example in services, school policies, and accessible structures.

Although the concept of inclusive education has been promoted internationally for more than a decade, multiple barriers remain to the full participation of

children with disabilities in education particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Amongst some of the pertinent barriers include, Lack of information, combined with discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities at all levels of society, contributes to the continued neglect of their right to education. This partly explains the minimal rate of progress that has been made towards the enrolment and participation in the education process of children with disabilities in Cameroon (Tani & Nformi, 2016).

It is only when a national commitment through the adoption of a national policy on inclusive education shall be made system that any real progress is made towards achieving the goal of full enrolment for children with disabilities. The reforms that will need to take place in the education system will affect all areas, starting with policy, legislation and the commitment of budgetary and other resources.

Administrative procedures need to be effective from central to local school levels. The focus in the early stages must be on building support and creating positive attitudes, and preparing the school for the necessary changes. Another focus must be on establishing methods of finding children who are out-of-school, and encouraging them to attend. One of the most important keys to success is the preparation of teachers so that they have the skills necessary to teach children with a wide range of abilities. A further critically important area is to establish effective systems for collecting data, so that the progress of children with disabilities can be monitored and evaluated, and included in the EFA process. The role of parents, organizations of persons with disabilities and the community must be considered and their expertise harnessed.

Regardless of the barricades faced, and the slow progress made in achieving access to education, it is imperative that it is increasingly clearly understood by governments, schools, and the wider community, that children with disabilities, together with all children, have a basic right to education. It is the responsibility of the government of the respective country to fulfill this right for all children, including children with learning disabilities.

Special Education in the University of Buea

The Undergraduate Programme in Special Education at the University of Buea was launched in October, 2006 with the main aim to develop specific skills and enabling individuals to realise their potential. This programme since its inception has been housed by the Department of Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Education and now offers a Bachelor of Education Degree (B.Ed) in Special Education, a Professional Master's Degree (M.Ed) in Special Education with specialization in three areas (visual impairment, hearing impairment and learning disabilities) and a professional Doctorate Degree (Ph.D) in Special Education.

The Department of Educational Psychology seeks to train educational and counseling psychologists

as well as special needs education teachers and personnel for both educational institutions, specialized services for persons with disabilities and other social services in the society. This is done through the undergraduate and postgraduate courses offered in the various programmes. The undergraduate programmes, B.Ed. in Educational Psychology and in special needs Education, provide opportunities for majors and minors with course and related experiences that give increase understanding of teaching and learning in educational settings.

The emphasis on both theoretical and practical training ensures a solid foundation for advanced field study leading to careers in the field of educational psychology, guidance and counseling and special education. There are possibilities for inter-disciplinary or combined degree/double majors. The Department also seeks to promote research in the fields of educational psychology, special education and counseling psychology, through its postgraduate programmes. It also seeks to train personnel for services in Higher Education. To make its programmes relevant to local and national needs, the Department undertakes outreach activities in the local communities and schools.

At the University of Buea, as is the case of most university institutions in Cameroon, the BMP system (Bachelor's, Master's and PhD) was implemented as a strategic plan to professionalise programmes in institutions of higher learning in Cameroon (Tchombe and Shey, 2012). Most programmes have been re-oriented towards entrepreneurship, enabling graduates to create jobs and generate their own income upon graduation. The new approach has shifted more of the responsibility for learning to the students, with a focus more on learning processes than on teaching.

This new approach also led to the creation of the UNESCO Chair in Special Education Needs (SEN) and Inclusive Education (IE) in 2009 at the University of Buea. This service is aimed at providing an enabling environment for students with special learning needs. It has a responsibility of building capacities for the staff in this area of specialization. Special education needs and inclusive education have three major components: curriculum adaptation, assistive technology, and human resources. Using these three components as a yardstick, the UNESCO Chair in Special Education Needs and Inclusive Education is geared towards providing most enabling environments (MEE) or the least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with special learning needs in the University of Buea in particular and in Cameroon in general. This is evident not only in the undertaking of research and publications but also in the acquisition of assistive technology, thereby giving each learner a chance and promoting community outreach. The Chair has also created of a Diagnostic Centre for Screening and Intervention of Disabilities. With three programmes (Bachelor's, Master's and PhD) on Special Education, this Centre will enhance clinical activities and the University's mission of outreach, whereby parents with children with disabilities

can be screened for diagnosis and eventual intervention. Parents will be able to receive counselling on how to manage their children's respective conditions. The activities of the Chair will continue in this direction to enhance and enrich inclusive practices and research.

The above discussions illustrate that the issues related to sustainability cannot be managed by a single institution. UNESCO's role is to ensure there are bridges between societies and its institutional structures necessitate the establishment of other mechanisms such as the UNESCO Chair that will address and support many of its programmes. From the educational perspective UNESCO's major concern about equity, access and inclusion led to the creation of the UNESCO Chair to ensure that these goals are achieved. Special education needs and inclusion are critical in this context.

The University of Buea at this point is responding to the expectations of the International Conference of Education held in Geneva in 2008 (UNESCO, 2008). The conference provided a forum to all members for policy dialogue (including ministers of education) from the perspective of the theme of inclusive education and Cameroon participated at that meeting. The Chair now has the important role to realise the vision of the conference by building institutional capacity for research and for delivering quality education to persons with disabilities, in difficult and disadvantaged situations in the Central and West African Regions. With support from UNESCO, it is expected that the Chair will promote an integrated system of research, training, information and documentation in the field of special needs education and inclusion. If projected resources are made available, the Chair is to serve as a means of facilitating collaboration amongst high-level, internationally recognized researchers and teaching staff of the University and other institutions in Cameroon and the sub-regions. The Chair of the University of Buea draws from the experiences of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chair Programme as a stimulus for academic mobility and the rapid transfer of knowledge through twinning, networking and other linking arrangements. The Chair no doubt has suffered setbacks on account of the economic downturn in UNESCO.

The Chair has organized and participated in international workshops, conferences and policy dialogue forums whereby rich experiences were shared and best practices learnt particularly in the domain of policy. The issues of policy for inclusive education for sustainable development requires much reflection as the deficits in this perspective can be seen in poorly trained teachers, inadequate or irrelevant education programmes and disability unfriendly infrastructure. The Chair's research outcomes (Tchombe, 2006) have illuminated, substantiated and created awareness of these deficiencies which obstruct access of all people to education for sustainable development in the following dimensions. Firstly, they illustrate that there are persons living with disability, facing difficulties and living in disadvantaged conditions in all classrooms and communities. The fact that these institutions are

unprepared to fully engage all these persons demonstrates that not all Cameroonians have the opportunity to participate in all forms of development in their respective communities. Secondly, it demonstrates the need to make educational institutions more disability friendly in all dimensions. Thirdly, the findings emphasize the need for qualified personnel. Fourthly, the findings strongly recommend South-South and North-South collaborative research, with universities engaging with schools to understand the realities of education practices, so as to better inform policy. Finally, there is an invaluable role and need for a strong policy with guidelines for implementation jointly formulated with contributions from all stakeholders (e.g., children, parents, teachers and the community among others).

The recent success at the University of Buea in her efforts to promote special education, was the installation of the Atomic Absorption Electro Spectrophotometer. Atomic absorption spectrometry (AAS) has many uses in different areas of special education, chemistry. Clinical analysis. In special education, it is used to analyse trace minerals in children with disabilities. This helps to decipher deficit or excess in persons with disabilities. Thus, analysis guide specialists in the treatment process. It is equally used in Analyzing metals in biological fluids such as blood and urine, in environmental analysis in monitoring our environment e.g finding out the levels of various elements in rivers, seawater, drinking water, air, petrol and drinks such as wine, beer and fruit drinks. In some pharmaceutical manufacturing processes, minute quantities of a catalyst used in the process (usually a metal) are sometimes present in the final product. By using Atomic absorption spectrometry (AAS) the amount of catalyst present can be determined. Also, Many raw materials are examined and Atomic absorption spectrometry (AAS) is widely used to check that the major elements are present and that toxic impurities are lower than specified e.g in concrete, where calcium is a major constituent, the lead level should be low because it is toxic. In Mining, By using Atomic absorption spectrometry (AAS) the amount of metals such as gold in rocks can be determined to see whether it is worth mining the rocks to extract the gold. Therefore, the installation of the Atomic Absorption Electro Spectrophotometer at the faculty of education, University of Buea, will health enhance and strengthen inter faculty/school research collaboration in terms of training students in specialties such as, Geology, chemistry, environmental science, medicine etc.

Students with Disabilities' Perceptions on Inclusive Education

Inclusion, at its very broadest of terms, represents accommodating the unique learning needs of all students, regardless of their abilities. Cohen L, Manion L, Morrison K 2007, Slavin RE 2007 state that although not without its controversies, inclusion represents in

practice the ideals of social justice and equality for all students. Over the last ten years, research has demonstrated both the positive impact and concerning issues of inclusive education. Silverman D (Ed.) 2004 are of the opinion that when considering what inclusive education means in terms of student perception, we must consider students both with and without disabilities. But the purpose of this present study only concentrates more on the opinions of students with disabilities as far as inclusive practices are concern.

From the perspective of students with disabilities, the major benefits of inclusive education include equal access to social and academic opportunities. The benefits of such opportunities are well documented. In particular, a study by Fitch (2003) tracked students with disabilities for 6 years. Some students began their school experience and remained in segregated classrooms while others began in a segregated classroom but moved to an inclusive setting as they got older. The results are particularly striking. For students who were educated in segregated classrooms all their lives, they strongly identified with being an outsider, were embarrassed and ashamed, and wanted to escape their special setting. Often, students reported feelings of resignation as being stupid or not smart enough for regular classrooms. This study supports the findings by Hall & Strickett (2002) who also report that students with disabilities who are educated in segregated settings lack age-appropriate social interaction and have decreased levels of peer engagement. Students in inclusive classrooms, on the other hand, "constructed relatively confident hopeful sense of themselves as legitimate participants in the mainstream school culture" (Fitch, 2003, p. 237). It is important to note that inclusive classrooms here were defined as those with a culture of acceptance, and not just traditionalist classrooms within an inclusive school. Students in inclusive classrooms reported feeling like they learned more, made more friends and had higher levels of self-concept, including self-efficacy and self-esteem.

The Problem

The question of discrimination and exclusion from education is not exclusive to children with disabilities. In addition to children who never attend school, there are large numbers of children who drop out early and fail to complete basic primary education. A recent UNESCO publication lists the following groups of children at risk for exclusion and acknowledges that it may not be comprehensive: Children from ethnic minorities, language minorities, refugees or displaced children, child workers, domestic workers, children who have HIV/AIDS or are HIV/AIDS orphans, children who are abused, migrant children, children from religious minorities, poverty-stricken children, street children, children in conflict zones and child soldiers, nomadic children and children with disabilities. This discrimination in education needs to be understood within a broader

context. Globally, children with disabilities are part of a population of 600 million people with disabilities. Discrimination against people with disabilities has been long-term and widespread with a number of significant effects. Persons with disabilities have been prevented from accessing rights that are freely available to other members of society in such areas as health, education, employment, community participation and other basic social and political rights. They have also been denied access to the disability-specific services that they need in areas such as early intervention and rehabilitation. Failure to access these services, combined with prejudice and rejection, has resulted in economic and social exclusion for children and adults with disabilities and their families. This marginalization has meant that their needs have not been considered in the development of basic mainstream services such as education and health. Where services have been provided, it has usually been in the context of welfare or charity, often initiated by non-governmental organizations, with responsibility less likely to be taken by the government.

The implementation of inclusive educational practice in Cameroon's states universities has for several years experienced snail pace action. Achievements in some areas of development for students with disabilities have been significant but progress towards enacting pure inclusive educational laws and gaining equal access to quality education for students with disabilities has remained unacceptably slow. It is against this backdrop that this study on inclusive education in Cameroon: students' with disabilities perceptions on inclusive practices at the university of Buea was proposed.

Goals of the Study

The study sought to establish the present status of inclusive education in Cameroon as perceived by undergraduate students with disabilities in the Special Education Programme of the University of Buea.

Research Questions

- What are the gains of Inclusive Education?
- Are there any challenges faced by students with disabilities in relation to the implementation of Inclusive Education?
- What measures can be taken to overcome such challenges?

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

Since the present study sought to obtain students with disabilities perceptions on the status of inclusive education at the University of Buea, the case study design was chosen to be more appropriate for this study. The reason for choosing this design was to have

an in-depth analysis on the gains and barriers of inclusive education, and measures that can be put in place to overcome the challenges for an effective implementation of inclusive practices at the University of Buea.

Sample

Four (2 males, 2 males) second and third year students with disabilities of the Special Education Programme in the Faculty of Education of the University of Buea, South West Region of Cameroon were purposively selected to take part in the study. The reason for using the purposive sampling technique was because the participants had particular characteristics or knowledge being sought and because of their knowledge and experience in inclusive education.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

S/N	Gender	Age	Level of Study
1	Male	21	300
2	Male	20	400
3	Female	19	300
4	Male	20	400

Table 1 above shows that 4 students with disabilities took part in the study. Out of the four, one was female and three were males. Two were in Level 300 (second year) and two in level 400 (second year). Their ages ranged from 19 to 21.

Instrumentation

The interview guide used in this study consisted of two sections: Section A focused on demographic issues, while Section B addressed attitudinal and perception variables on the implementation of inclusive education at the University of Buea. Section B included 9 interview items. The content and face validity of the instrument was ensured because respondents were undergraduate students in Special Education who are familiar with the issues discussed.

Data Analysis

The data was content analysed and this helped to produce a relatively systematic and comprehensive summary of data collected from the field. Recurrent instances were systematically identified and grouped together.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was first sought and granted by the relevant university authorities prior to approaching all the participating students and before administering the interview guide. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity (that is why the disability types have not been mentioned in the study), as well as voluntary participation.

Findings

The findings were presented following the different major categories under investigation (gains of inclusive

education, current challenges faced and measures to overcome the challenges).

Gains of inclusive education

Social acceptance and feeling of belongingness

When asked about their feeling of belongingness with the school community, the participants were unanimous on the fact that they have been fully accepted by the University community. They were of the opinion that students without disabilities and university teachers are willing to help them whenever they are in difficulties. One of the participants is quoted saying:

'Our relationship is good because my mates all show me love since they know I cannot see. You see my friend and classmate dictate notes to me at home and I am able to take them down in Braille and we always move together.'

Reduced discrimination and stigmatization

The participants also said they have realised that there is less discrimination and stigmatization towards them. According to them, their teachers always make sure that they are part of their teaching. One of the participants said:

"My teachers know I am in class, they teach in speed that I can easily follow...they ask me all the time if I understand. At any time they feel I am in difficulties they are willing to help."

When asked whether the school authorities are doing anything to satisfy their needs, the participants all accepted and praised the faculty for always listening to them at any time they bring up complaints. This is what one of them said:

“During examination periods the faculty provides me with all the necessary material resources to make me comfortable. There are always faculty staff ready to intervene whenever I lodge a complaint. We have a resource room and a resource teacher put at our disposal by the faculty. All these will makes us feel we are listen to.”

Participation in community activities

Participants in the study acknowledged the fact that they have gained a lot when they participate in community activities. They involvement in outreached activities generally organised by the university and particularly the Faculty of Education has given them a lot of exposure. One of the participants intimated:

“I have made several friends as a result of my participation in the University games. Thanks to the University for giving me the chance to be part of the team. I know I have the talents but in other institutions I would not have been selected. I now participate in national competitions for persons with disabilities. Although these are sporting activities we also use it as a means of sensitizing the public that we can do it and do better. It is also a way to entertain the public”.

The participants also expressed great satisfaction with their involvement in practicum sessions organised by the faculty to better equip them with practical skills during their training.

During the interview session, one of them told the researcher:

“My participation in practicum sessions organised by the Faculty has given me the opportunity to gain some practical skills in helping children with and those without disabilities. As a policy we are sent to ordinary and special schools for our practical training. In these schools we are given the opportunity to learn and also practice the knowledge gained from our normal class sessions. Children in these schools have learned that persons with disabilities can also go to school right up to the university level”.

Challenges faced by students with disabilities in inclusive settings

Absence of a specific policy on inclusive education

One of the major challenge as outline by the students was the absence of a specific policy on inclusive education in Cameroon. The participant complained that the Ministries of Education, Social Affairs and Vocational Training were slow in developing a policy on special needs and inclusive education in Cameroon. The students were concerned that they do not know the goals and objectives of inclusive education in Cameroon as there was no policy document in the country to guide them. One of the students said:

“We are perhaps doing injustice to ourselves as we have no policy and no guidance about their goals and objectives. In the absence of a policy, no program can be implemented successfully. The Ministries of Education, Social Affairs and Vocational Training should collaborate to make a policy for a successful inclusion program in our schools.”

Poor infrastructure and Financial Limitations

The students seemed to be very concerned about the state of infrastructure at the University of Buea. According to them, the poor state of infrastructure prevented many students with special needs in participating in various school activities. One of them lamented:

“Most of our classes are scheduled on the second floor of the newly constructed classroom blocks. We cannot go there with our wheel chairs as we do not have any lifts in the school.”

The issue of inadequate financial resources was also raised by the students interviewed.

While acknowledging that some assistance is offered to them by the government and other non-governmental organisations, this does not even meet their basic needs such as the purchase of educational material and assistive technologies. They also felt that financial limitations did not allow the University to buy enough resources that would support special students with special needs' learning. This is what one of them said:

“Although we have computers in our resource room we still lack the latest technology which should be available for students with special needs. For example, students with hearing impaired can learn from computer technology but we are not able to purchase this because of financial limitations”

Negative attitudes towards disabilities

The students also complained about the negative attitudes of some teachers and students as a major challenge to inclusive education. According to them, although there is rapid attitudinal change towards students with disabilities in the University of Buea, the students with special needs still deserve better and the teachers, students and other administrative staff having negative attitudes towards inclusive education must be prepared and trained by the University to improve their attitudes. One student is quoted:

“The teacher is a central figure in inclusive education. Many University teachers do not have knowledge or skills with regard to teaching students with special needs. Some are perhaps directly negative, others only

confused and afraid, still others overlook or overprotect us."

Measures to overcome challenges faced by students with disabilities

Focusing on the above challenges faced by students with disabilities in the University of Buea to normally pursue their education, the participating students proposed some measures that can be taken to overcome barriers to their education.

Organising refresher courses, workshops and seminars on inclusive education for university teachers

The students were of the opinion that the University of Buea authorities in collaboration with the Faculty of Education should organise seminars and workshops to equip University teachers with issues of inclusive education. According to the students, the issues should be curriculum adaptation, behavioral management, collaborative teaching techniques, problem-solving strategies, and preparing meaningful IEPs which can be used in the regular classroom. One of the students also insisted that:

"Support personnel will also have to receive such training in order that they can provide more effective support to university teachers."

The students were also of the opinion that university teachers should be trained to promote the participation and involvement of parents, particularly parents of students with disabilities, on a frequent and consistent basis within the classroom and in the decision-making process. Similarly, the teachers should be given sensitivity training in order to work more effectively with parents and to understand both their feelings about the nature of their children's disabilities and how they perceive the educational and career decision-making process.

Implement Steps to Overcome Prejudice and Resistance through policy

The participants were of the opinion the first step in changing existing attitudinal barriers to inclusive education is for university to adopt mission statements and policies which explicitly support the implementation of inclusive practices. These policies should convey accurately both what inclusion is and what it is not while reinforcing both the recognition of the rights of students with disabilities and the value of serving all students within the school setting.

One student said:

"These statements should be widely disseminated in order that all segments of the school and broader

community perceive an administrative commitment to the implementation of inclusive practices."

The students were also of the opinion that in order to overcome the challenges they faced, the university should make aggressive efforts to include staff and the community in planning for inclusion and in making tangible and specific commitments to provide the support needed in order for inclusion to be successfully implemented. This will include delineating the willingness of the university administration to provide personnel, space, training and technology necessary for inclusion.

DISCUSSIONS

It emerged from this study that social acceptance of children with disabilities was perceived to have improved as a result of inclusive education. Thus, the participants perceived society as having developed positive attitudes towards children with disabilities in general and those who were included in particular. The perceived social acceptance could have resulted from students with disabilities having developed social skills from the practice leading them to socialize with those without disabilities. The included students could probably have demonstrated their abilities hence the acceptance. Literature reveals that learners with disabilities achieve high levels of academic and social achievement in inclusive settings than in segregated settings (Bunch 2008). Thus, social achievement may have resulted in the learners in inclusive settings being socially accepted. Related to social acceptance and positive attitudes was the perception that the discrimination and stigmatisation of students with disabilities had been reduced.

Related findings were obtained by (Mutepfa et al. 2007) who believed that Africa (Zimbabwean) regular class teachers were developing positive attitudes towards included students. Continuous exposure to students with disabilities may have led to the perceived improved social acceptance. This is corroborated with the findings of this study. This simply means that, there is significant awareness among stakeholders on what inclusive education is. The study also revealed that lack of specific policy on inclusive education was perceived as a key challenge to successful implementation of inclusive education in Cameroon. However, Carroll-Lind and Rees (2009) cite literature (Bunch G 2008; Peresuh M 2000; Nguyet DT, Ha LT 2010) arguing that inclusive education is still more about attitude than legislation and that inclusive values and beliefs should underpin the whole school culture because they determine the policies and practices that will be put into place. Thus, legislation may be there but if society hold negative attitudes towards and people experiencing disabilities and other marginalised groups, the success of inclusive education process may be far from over. Nguyet and Ha (2010) support the above idea by arguing that inclusive education can only succeed if

teachers, principals and other education stakeholders maintain a positive attitude towards it.

The study revealed that the implementation of inclusive education in Cameroon was perceived to be presently affected by lack of resources. Studies such as (Mpofu 2000; Peresuh 2000; Mpofu et al. 2007; Chireshe 2011) lamented on the shortage of resources as an impediment to the implementation of inclusive education. Similar findings were also obtained in Namibia (Johansson, S. T. (2014)) and South Africa (Eloff and Kqwete 2007). The lack of resources is worsened by the high teacher pupil ratio (1 to 70) in many Cameroonian primary schools. Because of this high teacher pupil ratio, teachers are left with no room to cater for students/children with disabilities. Negative attitudes towards children with disabilities still prevailing in the country may also negatively affect the provision of resources to them. The funding availed for education in the country in general and inclusive education in particular is insufficient.

The participants also felt that some stakeholders did not understand the meaning of inclusive education. This could be because of lack of awareness campaigns focusing on the phenomenon and lack of exposure to inclusive education best practices. Some people were believed to understand inclusive education just as the mere presence of students/children with disabilities in mainstream school even if the schools had not been adjusted to meet the unique needs of these children. This finding confirms Forbes' (2007) argument that there is usually a misconception that inclusion refers to a place where students/children with disabilities are learning and not the process of learning. Real inclusive education entails schools restructuring in order to meet the learning needs of all learners in a given community (Kisanji 1999; Armstrong 2005).

It also emerged from the study that B Ed SPE students perceived that the implementation of inclusive education could be improved by running inclusive education awareness campaigns among communities. Awareness campaigns that involve people experiencing disabilities and significant others are most likely to improve attitudes towards people experiencing disability and acceptability of inclusive education.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that positive gains of inclusive education have been observed at the University of Buea, Cameroon. The implementation of inclusive education has mildly improved although lack of resources is painted as a significant barrier. The lack of resources may be compounded by the perceived lack of a specific policy on inclusive education and the perceived existence of negative attitudes towards students experiencing disability. Inclusive education by its conceptions portends a panacea for getting schools and communities to provide learning in an inclusive setting that will

guarantee equalization or educational opportunities for all students with and without disabilities irrespective of their learning ability and disability status. This means that students are able to benefit from each other through interaction, stable work, and life skills for achieving desirable behavior for successful life in an inclusive setting in our society. To achieve this, the article recommends for an aggressive inclusive education policy in Cameroon that will take care of the needs of all learners in the classroom.

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