



Teacher Educators Trepidations towards Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in Cameroon: An Evaluation of Implementation Efforts

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ABSTRACT

All children deserve access to education, including those in low income countries. Educators and teachers share a desire to promote inclusive education, and can come together, to educate themselves about current developments. Teachers have been shown to affect their inclination and ability to implement an inclusive approach to education. This study examined teacher educator's concerns towards inclusive education in Cameroon secondary schools in order to further understand the challenges faced by countries that are economically marginalised in implementing educational reforms that even developed countries sometimes struggle with. Twenty teacher educators from the South West Region of Cameroon participated in the qualitative study designed to explore participants' understanding and perspectives of inclusion. Teacher educators' attitudes towards inclusive education was generally positive, however participants were unsure how to implement inclusive education. The findings are considered alongside the Cameroon government's objective of inclusive education and further research opportunities are identified.

INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges facing education system in Cameroon is provision of education, as a constitutional right, to those learners who have been marginalized and could not be accommodated by the learning institutions because of different disabilities. Even the majority of those who are accommodated cannot fully participate in learning activities meaningfully in their classroom. These are the students whose needs are special that some modifications within the education system as whole are a precondition in order to enable them to fully participate and benefit from the process of teaching and learning. Cameroon is still a far away from effective inclusion in terms of quality. Underlying the process of inclusive education is the assumption that the general classroom teacher has certain knowledge and understanding about the needs of different learners, teaching techniques and curriculum strategies. Florian and Rouse (2009) state: *'The task of initial teacher education is to prepare people to enter a profession which accepts individual and collective responsibility for improving the learning and participation of all children'*. Savolainen (2009) notes that teachers play an essential role in quality education and quotes McKinsey and Company (2009) who say: *'the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers'*. Studies suggest (e.g. Sanders and Horn, 1998; Bailleul et al., 2008) that the quality of the teacher contributes more to learner achievement than any other factor, including class size, class composition, or background. The need for 'high quality' teachers equipped to meet the needs of all learners becomes evident to provide not only equal opportunities for all, but also education for an inclusive society. Reynolds (2009) says that it is the knowledge, beliefs and values of the teacher that are brought to bear in creating an effective learning environment for pupils, making the teacher a critical influence in education for inclusion and the development of the inclusive school. Teachers are considered as protagonist in the process of inclusive education.

This paper addresses the complexities of implementing inclusive education in a challenging politico- economic context. Cameroon is a country with a history that pre-disposes it to social justice, but also makes it hard to achieve. It is in this context that initiatives take place to develop inclusive education for children with disabilities. Internationally the concept of inclusive education for children with disabilities is an interrogation of normative schooling practices that marginalise to the point of exclusion from the benefits of education those who have some form of physical, sensory or intellectual impairment. There is the dual challenge in Cameroon to make education universally

available and to transform the limitations of earlier practices.

Education context in Cameroon

Ensuring education for all is a stated priority of the Cameroon education system. This reflects a contemporary philosophical commitment to social justice in the country's education provision and is in keeping with a number of international declarations and initiatives such as the UNESCO Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990), the Dakar Framework (UNESCO, 2000) and the Salamanca Declaration on Inclusive Education (UNESCO, 1994). These declarations both advocate for, and impose legal as well as ethical obligations on nations to include all children with disabilities in educational settings. As a result, an inclusive approach to education has featured as the means of achieving education for all children in Cameroon (Ahsan & Burnip, 2007). To further understand the challenges faced by countries such as Cameroon in implementing the comparatively new concept of inclusion there is a need to examine factors involved in inclusive education. Specifically, this study examined the attitudes towards inclusion held by those tasked with the responsibility of providing initial teacher education.

Based on a national commitment to make education available to everyone, teacher education is a large sector of the **Cameroon** education system. Teachers are trained in more than 191 large, medium and small, public and private institutes, academies, colleges and universities (Cameroon National Institute of Statistics, 2006). The challenges in improving teacher education programmes in terms of inclusive education are enormous. In particular, developing an appropriately qualified and knowledgeable teaching workforce is essential to ensuring schools are able to provide for the needs of all students in **Cameroon**.

Cameroon had ratified the UN Convention on the rights of people with disabilities (CRPD) of 2006 (United Nations, UN, 2006). This ratification comes from endorsement of the vision, even though the education system is far from achieving inclusion of all students in regular school classes. Article 24 of the convention states a legal obligation - to ensure the educational rights of all people with disabilities without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. Thus education will be inclusive and students should not be excluded from the general education system including free and compulsory primary education and secondary education. Examples of the obligations under the declaration include the following from Article 24: "Persons with

disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live...

- a) Facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring;
- b) Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community" (UN 2006,). If the Cameroon education system is to meet the commitments under the declaration, there is an urgent need for reform of the existing teacher training system. For example, current teacher training programmes provide no sign language, Braille or other forms of communication that may be appropriate for effective inclusion of all students.

A key protagonist of teacher educators is to concoct pre-service teachers for the changing classroom environments of the future (Clement, 2010). As teacher attitudes are highly influential on the support and inclusion of students with special needs in regular classrooms (Macfarlane, 2007; Sze, 2009), teacher educators must play active roles in developing inclusive attitudes among pre-service classroom teachers. The values instilled in classroom teachers during their pre-service education are critical to their development of classroom practices that support the inclusion of children with diverse learning needs (Mortier, Hunt, Leroy, van de Putte, & van Hove, 2010). Mortier *et al* (2010) research implies the need for teacher educators to support pre-service teachers' development of inclusive attitudes by emphasizing the need for partnership between teachers and parents within local contexts. In the field of pre-service teacher education, there is no published research on inclusive education in Cameroon. There is an urgent need to conduct research in this area to ensure that policies and practices are informed by research.

Though the terms "inclusion" and "inclusive education" are often used, the concept of inclusion remains difficult to define. Research suggests there is no commonly understood meaning of *inclusion* (Epstein & Elias, 1996). *Inclusive education* is a strategy to ensure education for all students in the same classroom. A comprehensive definition of inclusive education could be achieved by considering Mitchell's (2010) „*Magic Formula*’ of inclusive education. The formula is:

Inclusive Education = Vision + Placement + Support + Resources + Leadership + 5As (Acceptance, Access, Adapted Curriculum, Adapted Assessment, Adapted Teaching)

Conferring to the formula, for achievement of an inclusive education system there should be a *vision* at all levels of education in a country; *Placement* that should be age appropriate and in community/neighbourhood schools; *Support* which must be available for students, families and professionals; *Resources* (e.g., trained teachers, assistive technologies, infrastructure); appropriate educational *leadership* that facilitates inclusion; and, the "5As" (Mitchell, 2010). Thus, inclusive education is a strategy to address educational needs of all children in a systematic way in a regular school classroom.

Inclusive education therefore demands a need for teacher educators to support pre-service teachers to develop knowledge and skills in developing classroom environments that support learning for all children. For example, the consideration of seven best practices identified by De Jong (2005) in pre-service teacher education programmes could support the development inclusive learning environments. These practices include:

- A culture that promotes health and well-being;
- A relevant, engaging and stimulating curriculum;
- Effective pedagogy;
- A clearly articulated and comprehensive behaviour management policy;
- A democratic, empowering and positive classroom management approach;
- Well established internal and external support structures and partnerships; and
- An alternative flexible learning environment, (De Jong, 2005).

Preferably, teacher educators should have a clear understanding of these and other practices and well developed skills in supporting pre-service teachers to develop knowledge and abilities in these practices. Because, teacher actions have a direct link with students "learning in schools, and Teacher-educators" actions have great influences on the effective practices of student-teachers (Paris, Polson-Genge & Shanks, 2010).

Research has indicated that teachers' positive attitudes have a direct link with the success of inclusion (Kuyini & Desai, 2007; Sze, 2009). Several researchers have focused on teachers attitudes related to inclusion (Chhabra, Srivastava, & Srivastava, 2010; Cook, 2004; Cook & Cameron, 2010; Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007; Grace, 2006; Heiman, 2001; Ross-Hill, 2009; Ryan, 2009).

Sharma, Moore and Sonawane (2009) investigated attitudes and concerns of 480 pre-service teachers enrolled in a Bachelor of Education programme. The findings suggested that students' attitudes towards inclusion are somewhat negative and that this negative tendency was related to the attitudes

and beliefs of the teacher educators within the programme.

The study of Kuyini and Desai (2007) in Ghana showed that attitudes towards inclusion and knowledge of inclusion are directly linked with effective teaching practices in an inclusive setting. Mortier et al. (2010) identified five teachers' perspectives that appeared to support the development of educational opportunities for children with disabilities and promote effective inclusion practice in regular classrooms. These included;

- a) An open attitude,
- b) A safe group environment,
- c) Equal input into the construction of ideas,
- d) Committed to success, and
- e) A positive atmosphere. To ensure classroom teachers have positive and supportive attitudes towards children with disabilities, there is a need to understand the attitudes of teacher educators who are responsible for the provision of pre-service training for classroom teachers.

The current study is buttressed by the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This model provides a commonly accepted theoretical framework for considering the inclusion of students in educational settings. The ecological model emphasizes the links between contextual factors and human development (Macfarlane, 2007). For example, the model suggests that children's learning is influenced by factors such as the provision of classroom support, teachers' skills, and the influences of family and community values (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Within this model, teacher educators have a vital role in helping teachers to expand their skills. Therefore, teacher educators are likely to influence the scope and nature of inclusion at all levels of schooling. They can motivate teachers and teach how to create appropriate inclusive environments in classrooms. Along with the ecological model, the current study is also linked to the socio-cultural theory of teaching. This includes the Vygotskian and Deweyan principles as outlined by Beck and Kosnick (2006): "knowledge is constructed by learners; knowledge is experience based; learning is social; all aspects of a person are connected; learning communities should be inclusive and equitable".

Teacher Attitudes towards Inclusive Education in Cameroon

Teachers, as leaders in the class, should replace parents in their attitudes towards children and show empathy especially to impaired children. But most teachers have lost their sense of professional ethics and that is why they have not been able to enhance positive skills and attitudes to diversify their teaching strategies for effective learning and inclusive pedagogy. Tanyi, (2006), advises that special training is important in

teacher education because ethical values are taught to enhance positive attitudes of the teachers that may affect their attitudes in the classroom and may bring the expected norms and standards for quality education in Cameroon. Tanyi (2002) identifies, using the Student's Adjustment Inventory (SAI), that both abnormal and handicap children have complex behavioural patterns. She further explains that they consider their physiological built to self-evaluate themselves and form a negative self-concept to think that people perceive them negatively. This often gives them the feeling of self-worthlessness. With these feelings, a classroom teacher with limited training may not be able to identify their problems. This is why Petrovsky, Brushlinsky, Itelson, Leites, Mukhina, Pirogova, Sereda, Yaroshevky, Zinchenko, and Zinchenko (1989) summarise that a feeling experienced by an individual in a peculiar mental state may ultimately lead him/her to an emotional state that may bring about negative attitudes in the classroom.

Perception influences an individual's behaviour. The teacher's attitude is complimentary with the training programme and it is also an element of ethical value of the teacher. Most teachers look at the disabled as totally unproductive and there is no need to waste energy and time to enhance their learning and abilities. In Cameroon, most teachers are not trained to effectively manage the diversified needs of their learners. Lamport, Graves, & Ward (2012), expressed that for inclusion policy to be successful, it is important to provide educators with professional special training, and adequate resources to meet the needs of students. They went on to explain that it is when teachers are fully prepared morally that the inclusion model will yield positive results. Jobe, Rust and Brissie (1996), added that it is wise to nurture them to have a positive mind on the type of children they teach. According to Cardona (2009 p.35), "inclusion in education involves changes in teacher's attitudes, knowledge and behaviour". Furthermore, information from Save the Children (2002) and UN (2006), hold that teachers need training about inclusive principles and the basics of disability, to ensure that their attitudes and approaches do enhance the behaviour of the disabled. Conversely, teacher training schools should prepare teachers to be able to design action plans following the different disabilities to match the different learning styles of their learners.

Children with disabilities in Cameroon

Information about the prevalence of children living with impairments and disabilities, and their daily lives, is now emerging. We are aware of some studies which provide information about the prevalence of disabilities in children: a prevalence of impairments and disability study in the North West Region (Cockburn, Wango, Benuh and Cleaver, 2011; Cockburn, Cleaver and Benuh, 2014; ICED, 2014), and national census

information which included the Cameroon Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), (Loaiza & Cappa, 2005; CNIS, 2010; CNIS 2012). Cameroon was one of the West African countries that was included in UNICEF's MICS studies rounds 2 (2000-2001) and 3 (2005-2008). The module on child disability provided some insight into the state of children with disabilities in the country. The data from MICS-2 indicate that 23% of children between the ages of 2 and 9 in Cameroon are living with at least one type of impairment (Loaiza & Cappa 2005). Common impairments are difficulties with spoken communication (7%) and mental impairment (6%).

In 2009, a study in the North West region used the ICF framework to identify the prevalence of impairments and disabilities in the general population (Cockburn, Cleaver and Benuh, 2014). This study found that 11.9% of the people identified as living with a disability were children (0 – 14 years). Common impairments were seeing impairments, hearing impairments and mobility impairments. Based on these reports, it is estimated that there are significant number of children with disabilities living in Cameroon. There are limitations of these two studies: for example household surveys often do not include children who are living in institutions or orphanages and those hidden away from the community.

Evolution of Teacher Education in Cameroon

Formal training of teachers in Cameroon is not a relatively new phenomenon as it dates back to about 70 years. Schools in Cameroon during the pre-colonial and colonial eras were responding only to the needs of evangelisation and colonialism rather than education for national development. By the late 19th century therefore, the earliest kind of teacher education appeared in the training of men to teach the doctrines of various religions. Alfred Saker (1885) and the Roman Catholic Mission (1907) respectively provided such training in Douala. In these early days in French Cameroon, teacher education was carried out in the senior primary school in Yaoundé, which trained elementary school teachers. Early attempts to provide teacher education were by private endeavour. The first training college; Foullassi, was opened in 1925 near Sangmelima in the Dja-et Lobo by the Presbyterian American Mission with the objective to train teachers for the primary schools and for evangelisation. These teachers also served as community and religious leaders. The duration of the training was two and half years with one year spent for pedagogical activities and the rest for content, general culture and the bible. With a high demand for teachers, professional regional schools were opened in Ebolowa, Dschang, Ngaoundere, Garoua and Maroua, with an autonomous professional training centre in Douala (Fonkeng 2007). From the aforementioned during this early beginning, the aims of teacher education and training were limited, reflecting the narrow aims of the

schools for which they were trained. Schools were to provide basic skills in the 3Rs and other useful information. Since the colonial masters' main objective was to spread their culture and civilizations, teaching methods encouraged, lacked a scientific base, and this had implications for all training and teaching endeavours. In the British part of Cameroon, the first school for the training of teachers was opened in Victoria in 1922 but was later moved to Buea and renamed the Normal College. Between 1927 and 1931 four batches of students were admitted in the Normal College in Buea for a two year course. In 1932, the student teachers who had completed the first year in the Buea Normal College were transferred to Kake in Kumba. The implications here were two-fold: (1) the need for more trained teachers and (2) the need for a new and polyvalent teacher for a rural society whose role would be diverse and multifarious. These teachers were prepared for teaching in the lower primary classes.

The three-year Teacher's Grade III was not terminal as it provided grounds for continuous development. Successful Grade III teachers taught for a year and qualify for admission into a two-year higher elementary Training Course (Grade II) some of whom went to Nigeria. In some cases they did a straight four-year course. Further growth of teacher education was the institution of the Grade II course in Cameroon in 1945 at the Government Teacher Training College (GTTC) Kumba. From then onwards, more training colleges were opened by both the state and private initiatives for the training of Grade III, Grade II and even Grade I Teachers. The curriculum included courses for the professional development of the teachers, primary school subjects and subjects for specialist teachers such as manual arts, rural science, home economics, handicraft and woodwork. Grade I certificates were also awarded to candidates who after their courses obtained both "O" and "A" Level papers in the General Certificate of Education examination and passed in the practical teaching examination in either a secondary or teacher training classroom. More transformations in teacher education were precipitated in the 1960s with the clearing off of pupil-teachers from the field. This was to ensure quality and also maintain job security for existing trained teachers. This led to the introduction of a five-year course leading to the award of a Grade II Teacher Certificate. Entry qualification was Primary School Leaving Certificate with a pass in the Common Entrance Examination. The first three years were for personal development of the student teacher in secondary school subjects. The last two years were for professional development. The importance given to education and training of teacher was emphasized by the pioneer President Ahmadu Ahidjo of Cameroon in 1966 who reiterated in the statement; "Cameroon must undertake the training en masse of teachers who are worthy of their vocation; such masters must be supplied both in the particular subject given and where they are wanted, in

whatever part of the country that may be". (Cleaver and Benuh, 2014)

Priorities for Policy for Teacher Education and Practising

Teachers Increasing Decentralization of Teacher Training Colleges at the Provincial and Divisional Levels; Appropriate compensation for teachers serving in rural areas; By 2011; 40,000 teachers will be recruited; Presently 18,800 have been recruited and deployed; Creation and use of locally produced didactic material; Institution of a National Day for didactic materials on 4th October yearly; Improving teacher's morale by celebrating the International Day for Teachers on the 5th of November each year.

Legislation for the creation of Parents' Teachers' Association (PTA) and School Management Councils were established. By the Law of 19th December 1990 on the Freedom of Associations, teachers' syndicates went operational. Teacher management in public and private schools moved from more central administration to school base with decisions taken at provincial, sub-divisional and school levels. Decisions on the management of teachers in private schools are undertaken at the school level. Some issues were based on the following: Bottom-Up approach to make schools to become more effective; Instituting school good governance with increasing pupils' effective participation, well-disciplined schools, reduced dropout and absenteeism; Provision of aggregate statistics for all levels of education on enrolment, number of teachers, gender and schools classrooms.

Indicators of Quality for Teacher Education

- Pedagogic practices and existence of quality assurance mechanism;
- Professional preparation;
- Research activities and dissemination;
- Degree of autonomy;
- Teacher commitment;
- Libraries;
- Infrastructure;
- Connectedness.

New Capacity Needed to Facilitate Education Quality to be inculcated in Teacher Education

Strategies and techniques of handling overcrowded classrooms;

- Use of ICT in teaching / learning and follow up strategies of inspection;
- grade teaching techniques;
- Pedagogic accountability skills;
- New techniques for enhancing reformative learning strategies;

- Embracing inclusive educational practices
- Meeting the diverse needs of every learner

In order to ensure quality education is achieved by meeting these objectives, research is needed into the various aspects of teacher education and outcomes for students with diverse learning needs. Therefore, it was important to conduct research on teacher education in Cameroon to find out teacher educators' attitudes towards inclusive education for pupils with disabilities to ensure quality education for all. The study investigated the following research question: What are teacher educators' attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs towards inclusive education practices for children with disabilities in Cameroon?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey design in order to answer the research question in a pragmatic way by using "what works" (Rocco et al., 2003). Three open-ended questions and 11 closed questions focusing on participants' background information were included to provide an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives on inclusion.

Specific Research Questions

- A. What are the main barriers in the education for a student with a disability?
 - B. what is the future of inclusive education in Cameroon?
 - C. Discuss your thoughts about inclusive education?
- Interviews were recorded and then transcribed for analysis.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A variety of barriers to inclusion were reported at different levels, including society, family, school and individuals. For example one teacher portrayed a societal barrier to inclusion as:

Inclusion is a good concept, but you need to remember child labour is prevalent. Many children need to work and earn to supplement a meagre family income and therefore do not attend school. Schools often lack facilities and teaching aids including classroom space, toilets, drinking water, blackboards, and chalk.

Such a negative situation is likely to challenge the inclusive education initiatives of the Cameroon government. Further barriers to inclusion were reported by participants. The following example focused on teacher training: We have every wish to include children

with disabilities into our regular classroom, even though it may increase our workload, but we are not sure how to handle those children, I had no training on disability [inclusive education] during my pre-service B.Ed., I received inadequate knowledge on disabilities. This is also supported by Ahsan and Burnip (2007) who identified lack of training as one of the barriers of inclusion.

Outside the negative circumstances identified, a consistently positive finding from the survey was the positive potential of inclusive education. When discussing the best educational options for children with disabilities, 90% of the teacher educators interviewed were in favour of inclusive education, while only 10% believed that separate special education was still the best option for students with disabilities. The teachers who expressed favour for special education indicated that most of the regular schools were not ready to include students with moderate disabilities, and no meaningful support system has yet been developed or introduced. One teacher identified class sizes in general were too large to manage the inclusion of students with disabilities. Another teacher educator also pointed out: The student with disabilities would get better service from special schools and there might have a better chance to acquire some vocational skills along with academic skills. We do not yet have any therapy services (e.g., for students with physical and/ or speech and language disabilities) at school level.

Responding to this open-ended question "What do you think that are the main barriers in education for a student with a disability?" the respondents identified five barriers:

- Lack of access to mainstream education;
- Low [or lack of] expectation of teachers and peers;
- Negative attitude of family and non-disabled peer;
- Lack of friendly atmosphere in the classroom;
- Demanding special attention.

One teacher educator stated:

To be honest, I've never dealt with a disabled student. I don't even have a little knowledge about the nature of education of such students.

Conversely a teacher with an understanding and desire for inclusion expressed:

Inclusive education is the only way for students with disabilities to enter into the mainstream. So this chance should not be hindered with lame excuses.

However, the debate on education for students with disabilities continues in the country. Many of the teacher educators suggested:

If resources are available to support inclusion, and if there is adequate administrative support and appropriate infrastructure, teaching material and technological devices, then the aim of inclusive education will be successful.

One teacher educator expressed a mixed position regarding inclusion:

All student/children regardless of disabilities or abilities should have equal privilege by being inclusive specific needs must be catered for individually through a specialised system.

Teacher educators also made suggestions regarding the steps to eliminate those barriers. The steps identified included : ensuring effective identification, diagnosis and appropriate early intervention; developing a positive attitude at all levels (from family to society); creating barrier free learning environments; ensuring parental involvement in educational decision making; curriculum modification and simplification; and develop school based support services, serve necessary aids and appliances for the special child.

Regarding the existing teacher training curriculum, the teacher educators expressed their frustration that the curriculum is not developed enough to support the transformation of school teachers into effective inclusive educators. The highest number (70%) of teacher educators said that the existing curriculum did not address the needs of different types of learners. They also expressed their concern regarding the evaluation system. One teacher educator said:

There should be a scope for rethinking the appropriate academic evaluation system for different types of learners in the same class, especially in high schools. It is not fair to expect the same result from a student with and/or without disabilities. The aim of education is different for them. So, the evaluation system needs to be changed.

Macfarlane (2007), writing in the western world, reminds us that there may be a high degree of resistance from educators towards inclusion. This is also true in Cameroon. This may be due to perceptions and myths surrounding disabilities and also observed behaviour difficulties. It is the duty of teacher educators to manage and support teachers to develop an understanding and positive attitudes towards inclusion. With academic learning, inclusion provides a unique opportunity for our children to learn about humanity (Epstein & Elias, 1996).

Systematic inclusion needs reform in the overall teacher education system so that initiatives can emerge from the entire system. For the reason that “public education is like a Web: each strand touches many others, depending upon as well as providing support for the entire structure” (Ferguson, 1995,). Currently there are no policies or laws strictly on the implementation of inclusive education in Cameroon. Preparing the schools as well as teachers for inclusive education is a serious challenge. Appropriate policy formulation and adaptation are required to overcome such challenges. Changing the attitudes of teacher educators in terms of cognition, skills and understanding of inclusion should be a national priority.

Concerns for future assessment

Inclusive education is a great challenge for Cameroon’s education system, especially for the teacher training system. Building positive attitudes along with equipping teacher educators with appropriate knowledge on inclusion is an issue for education reform. Educators need to tackle the issues of: “how to include the excluded” and „how to improve the quality and relevance of education in increasingly diverse settings” (Acedo, Ferrer, & P`amies, 2009). Kibria (2005) identified seven general barriers towards inclusive education. These are: negative attitudes of people; invisibility in the community; cost; physical access; class sizes; lack of trained teachers; gender discrimination; and identification problems. Teacher educators must work in ways that work to overcome these barriers in order for change to take place.

Conceptual barriers in teacher education endanger the success of plans for inclusive education initiatives. Contradictions remain regarding education for people with disabilities. The Ministries of Education favours inclusive education. However, the Ministry of Social Affairs controls the education initiatives for children with disabilities and is still advocating for a mixed (specialised or separate education) approach. In this initiative, teacher educators are not equipped to work with children with disabilities in regular classrooms. This is another example of the many factors that will influence the success of inclusive education in Cameroon.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

Implementing inclusive education practices in Cameroon will not be easy. However Cameroon’s historical predisposition to social justice, including its long struggle to preserve its cultural identity and language, creates a positive context for recognising the need to provide inclusive education services at the same time as acknowledging barriers. An initial local step in this provision may be found in supporting the development of

teacher educators. To become a teacher educator requires reflection to examine the identity and practices of oneself as educators. Willams and Power (2010) define this reflective process as “a process by which teachers reflect on their practice, incorporating an examination of personal beliefs, mission and identity”. This reflective process must also include input and support to help teacher educators understand how their beliefs and identities are influenced by broader issues. These include examination of issues such as unequal relations of power and complexities and contradictions within local, global and inter-related social hierarchies that generate and preserve conditions of exclusion. There remains a continuing need to question if the barriers that are related to historical and existing social hierarchies require more complex analyses and ideological engagements with ideas of modernity and schooling rather than just the development of personal knowledge, skills and reflection. In Cameroon both processes are needed. Through consideration of and reflection on both macro- and micro- level issues, policymakers, teacher educators and teachers may well move closer towards providing classrooms where all children are welcomed and provided with effective educational experiences.

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