

Attitudes and Concerns of Parents as Determinants of Effective Implementation of a Pilot Inclusive Education Project in Winneba, Ghana

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Abstract

This study is about parents' attitudes and concerns as determinants of effective implementation of an inclusive education project in Winneba Ghana. The study seeks to advocate that the existence of positive attitude and concerns on the part of parents is a critical requirement for the effective implementation of inclusive education. The researcher employed a questionnaire and an interview guide to gather data from 110 parents for the study. The data that were analysed showed that the respondents had positive attitudes and strong concerns about the implementation of inclusive education in the pilot schools in the Winneba Municipality. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made to improve upon the attitudes and concerns of parents in the study area.

Keywords: Attitudes, Concerns, Determinant, Inclusive

Introduction

Inclusive education as a major reform in education is much talked about around the world because of its incorporation into the policy documents of various international organisations (Florian, 1998). Some of these notable documents are the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), The UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Educational Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994).

These policies affirm the right of all children to equal educational opportunities without any form of discrimination within the mainstream education system. Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts the right of every child to education and also requires that this education be provided on the basis of equality of opportunity. The Convention in other words calls for non-discrimination in relation to access to education on grounds of disability. Farrell and Ainscow (2002) assert that Articles 28 and 29 together with Articles 2, 3, and 23, seem to suggest that all children have a right to inclusive education, irrespective of their disability or background.

Further, Florian (1998) intimates that although the philosophy of inclusive education means different things in different places, there is universality to the underlying human rights philosophy of inclusion which suggests that the concept is destined to persist rather than represent the latest educational fad or bandwagon. Inclusive education is used to refer to a

philosophy of education that promotes the education of all pupils in mainstream schools (Florian, 1998).

The increased acceptance of inclusive education has been articulated by the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education CSIE (1996) as follows:

- all children have the right to learn and play together;
- children should not be devalued or discriminated against by being excluded or sent away because of their disability or learning difficulty;
- there are no legitimate reasons to separate children for the duration of their schooling they belong together rather than need to be protected from one another CSIE, (1996).

The Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education advocates further in their Integration Charter that:

we see the ending of segregation in education as a human rights issue which belongs within equal opportunities policies. Segregation in education because of disability or learning difficulty is a contravention of human rights as is segregation because of race and gender. The difference is that while sexism and racism are widely recognized as discrimination ... discrimination on the grounds disability or learning difficulty is not (CSIE, 1989, P.7)

As a result of its popularity, inclusive education has been accepted as a very progressive educational intervention on the international education landscape. In both developed and developing countries, inclusive education is being used as major tool to provide education for all children of school going age (Evans & Lunt, 2002). The relevance of inclusive education is stressed by Slee (1998) who argues that inclusion is an ideal that for several years has been universally accepted by many as an inalienable right and necessary condition for any fair and equitable social or educational system. Ghana as a member of the international community has embraced the inclusive education agenda. Inclusive education has therefore, been piloted in Ghana since the year 2003.

In spite of the popularity of inclusive education globally, there are certain ingredients that are necessary for its successful implementation. Notable among these ingredients is the attitude and concerns of parents towards inclusive education. As noted by Palmer, Fuller, Arora, and Nelson (2001), parental support and involvement is regarded as being greatly important in facilitating inclusive education. de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2009) assert that it seems reasonable that when both groups of parents-those of children with special needs and those without- are positive towards inclusive education, teachers and support staff will be more inclined to realize inclusion. This study was therefore designed to find out the attitude and concerns of parents regarding inclusive education in a pilot inclusive education programme in the Winneba Municipality of Ghana.

Literature review

Parents' concerns about inclusive education

Parents' concerns about inclusive education have been identified as an important ingredient to the success of inclusive education. De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2009) contend that in various countries, inclusive education was initiated by parents of children with disabilities. As noted

by Scheepstra, Nakken, & Pijl (1999), although parents motives to place their disabled child in a regular school might vary, they may choose a regular education setting because of the possibilities for their child to participate socially in the peer group. Parents therefore hope and expect that physical integration- 'being there'- will lead to their child participating socially with the peer group. (Scheepstra et al. 2009).

In this context, Koster, Nakken, Pijl and Van Houten (2009) contend that the social dimension of inclusive education covers various aspects namely: (1) the presence of positive contact/ interaction between children with special needs and their classmates, (2) acceptance of them by their classmates, (3) social relationships/ friendships between children with special needs and their classmates, and (4) the pupils' perception that they are accepted by their classmates.

Similarly, both parents of children with and without special needs show concerns about inclusive education. Notable among these concerns is what Green and Shinn (1995) assert that some parents of children with special needs argue that a regular class is not an option for their child. Further concerns expressed indicate that parents of children with special needs have concerns about the social impacts on their child such as social isolation, rejection, and bullying (Bailey & Winston, 1987; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Salisbury, 1992). Additionally, parents are apprehensive that regular teachers are not well trained enough, have insufficient time, and lack appropriate support and resources to educate their child properly (Bennet, Deluca & Bruns 1997; Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997; Grove & Fisher, 1999). Moreover, parents with typically developing children are concerned that their child might not develop appropriate behaviour (Riechart et al., 1998).

Parent's attitude toward inclusive education

The attitude of parents toward inclusive education has been a topical issue in recent times. As noted by de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2009), due to the increasing interest of researchers in aspects relating to successful inclusive education, knowledge about attitudes has increased over the last decade. According to Palmer, Fuller, Arora and Nelson (2001), parental support and involvement is regarded as being greatly important in facilitating inclusive education. It should be noted that when both groups of parents – those of children with special needs and those without- are positive towards inclusive education, teachers and support staff will be more inclined to realize inclusion (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2009). It is therefore necessary to acquire knowledge about parents' attitudes towards inclusive education and variables relating to their attitudes since they could be useful in developing interventions to create positive ones (de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2009). Research on parental attitudes towards inclusive education has shown that parents seem to hold predominantly positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Miller & Philips, 1992). It has been found that parents of typically developing children report that inclusive education helps their offspring to learn about and accept individual differences (Gallagher et al., 2000; Miller & Phillips, 1992). As noted by Innes and Diamond (1999), research has found that the attitude of parents including the fact that those who have experience of there being a disabled child in their child's classroom hold more positive attitudes than parents without this experience. Besides, the type of disability seems related to parents' attitudes in that parents are most positive towards the inclusion of children with mild disabilities (Innes & Diamond, 1999).

Statement of the Problem

Even though inclusive education has been on in Ghana since 2003, literature reveals that no broad study has been undertaken on the attitudes and concerns of parents as determinants of its effective implementation. Literature on parental attitudes and concerns regarding inclusive education reveals that parental support and involvement in inclusive education is regarded as being greatly important in facilitating its implementation (Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson 2001). The attitudes and concerns of parents towards inclusive education represents a very important factor because as noted by Holden (1995), parents' attitudes and behaviour influence those of their children, which is then carried over into later life. Palmer, Fuller, Arora and Nelson 2001, assert that it seems reasonable that when both groups of parents those of children with special needs and those without are positive towards inclusive education, teachers and support staff will be more inclined to realize inclusion. In view of the important role parental attitudes and concerns play in the successful implementation of inclusive education, this study is designed to find out the attitude and concerns of parents regarding the implementation of inclusive education in pilot schools in the Winneba Municipality of Ghana.

Objectives of the Study

The study is underpinned by the following objectives:

- to find out the attitudes parents have towards the implementation of the pilot inclusive education programme in the Winneba Municipality of Ghana.
- to ascertain the concerns parents have towards the implementation of the pilot inclusive education programme in the Winneba Municipality of Ghana.

Research Questions

The following questions were posed to guide the study.

1. What attitudes do parents have toward the implementation of the pilot inclusive education programme in the Winneba Municipality?
2. How are parents concerned with the implementation of the pilot inclusive education programme in the Winneba Municipality?

Significance of the Study

The study is significant since it would provide valuable information to critical stakeholders of the pilot inclusive education programme namely national officers of the Ghana Education Service, school administrators and teachers on the attitudes and concerns parents have towards the implementation of the pilot inclusive education programme in the Winneba Municipality of Ghana.

Methodology

Research design

The research design for this study is the descriptive survey design. The study also sought to find out the concerns of parents towards a pilot inclusive programme. Therefore, the study made use of the sequential mixed method approach to enable the researcher to gather qualitative data to support the quantitative data generated from the questionnaire administration.

Population

The population of the study consisted of all parents who had their children in the pilot inclusive schools in the Winneba Municipality.

Sample

The sample for the study consisted of one hundred and ten (110) parents who were selected for both the quantitative and qualitative data collection. In case of the of quantitative data collection, 100 parents were contacted with letters sent through their children. In this respect, the first 100 parents who responded were purposively selected. Another set of letters were sent to the parents asking for volunteers to be interviewed. Once again, the first 10 parents who responded were purposively selected for the interview.

Sampling technique

The non-probability sampling technique was use to select the sample for the study. As indicated above, the purposive sampling technique was used to select the 110 respondents for the study. Letters of intent were sent to the parents to seek their consent and the first 100 parents who responded to the first letter which asked for volunteers to respond to the questionnaire were selected for the quantitative data collection. Another letter which solicited for volunteers to be interviewed was sent out and the first ten volunteers were selected for the interview phase of the data collection.

Instrumentation

The study made use of a ten item questionnaire and an interview schedule to parents who had their children in the pilot schools and as well volunteered to take part in the study. The questionnaire sought information from parents on their attitudes towards the pilot inclusive education programme in the study area while the interview schedule solicited information on the concerns parents had toward the implementation of the pilot inclusive education programme in the study area. The questionnaire was made up of a Likert scale of strongly agree (5), agree (4), uncertain (3), strongly disagree (2), disagree (1).

Data analysis

The data gathered for the study were analysed with descriptive statistics and t-test for the quantitative data and that of the interview sessions were analysed in line with the themes that emerged from the transcription of data.

Results

Research question1: What attitudes do parents have towards the implementation of the pilot inclusive education programme in the Winneba Municipality?

Table 1.1 below presents the questionnaire responses on parents’ attitudes towards the pilot inclusive education programme in the Winneba Municipality.

Table 1.1a: Attitudes of parents towards inclusive education

S/ N	STATEMENT	SA F (%)	A F (%)	UN F (%)	SD F (%)	D (%)
	Inclusive education provides a conducive atmosphere for education of all children	4 (4.3)	5 (5.3)	22 (23.4)	34 (26.2)	29(30.9)
	Pupils with special needs should be educated in the regular classroom.	30 (31.9)	40 (42.6)	6 (6.4)	2 (2.1)	16(17.0)
	Inclusive education facilitates appropriate behavior of all children	32 (34.0)	22 (23.4)	22 (23.4)	5 (5.3)	13(13.8)
	I get irritated when I see my child studying alongside children with special needs	13 (13.8)	18 (19.1)	4 (4.3)	30 (31.9)	29(30.9)
	I am concerned that attending the same school with children with special needs will affect my child academically	32 (34.0)	19 (20.0)	21 (22.3)	4 (4.3)	18(19.1)

SA = Strongly Agree; A=Agree; UN = Uncertain; SD = Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree

Table 1.1b: t-test analysis of attitude of parents

	Attitudes of parents
t-test	37.7
Df	93
Asymp sig	0.00
Standard deviation	7.22
Sample mean	30.17
Cal-value	35.96
Critical value	2.5

P-value=0.05

Source: Doctoral thesis 2014.

Tables 1.1a and 1.1b presents the findings of research question 1 which was designed to find out the attitude of parents towards the inclusion of pupils with special needs in the pilot schools. To determine this, a one sample t-test was conducted using a scale of 1-5 where one represents strongly disagree and five strongly agree. A test value of 2.5 was chosen because a value less 2.5 is negative while a score greater than 2.5 implies a positive view. The result shows that the sample mean of 30.17 (SD = 7.22) was significantly different from 2.5, df (93)

=37.17, $p = 000$. The indication is that the parents of pupils without special needs do have positive attitude towards the inclusion of pupils with special needs in the pilot schools.

Research question2: How are parents concerned with the implementation of the pilot inclusive education programme in the Winneba Municipality?

In order to provide triangulation for the study, interviews were conducted with 10 parents of children with special needs in the study area. The responses were analysed qualitatively. The main themes that emerged from the interviews were possibility of children participating socially in the peer group, social relationships/ friendship between children with special needs and their classmates, social impacts on their children such as social isolation, rejection and bullying, insufficient teaching time and lack of appropriate support and resources to educate their children properly.

Possibility of children participating socially in the peer group

On this issue one parent commented as follows:

I am always concerned about how my child will be accepted in the peer group. I expect my child to be treated decently.

Another parent also commented that:

I wish my child is treated humanely in the peer group. I don't expect the treatment my child receives in the community to be extended to the school.

A third parent remarked that:

Even though I want my child to be educated in an inclusive education setting, I am worried that the school mates will not accept him in their midst.

Insufficient teaching time and lack of appropriate support and resources

With respect to this issue, one parent commented as follows:

My main worry with the inclusion of my ward in the school is that I am afraid the teachers will not have adequate time, support personnel and resources to provide for her needs.

Another parent shared the view that:

I like the idea that my child is having his education with his counterparts in the regular school. I am however afraid that the teachers will not have sufficient time to take care of his needs.

A third parent observed that:

I am delighted to see my child having his education with children of his same age and within the same community. I am however concerned that the teachers may not have adequate time for him. I am equally afraid that there may not be appropriate support services and resources to take care of his needs.

Inappropriate training of teachers in inclusive education delivery

With respect to this issue, a parent asserted that:

I see the presence of my child in an inclusive education setting as very positive development. However, my main concern is whether the teachers are properly trained to deliver in an inclusive education setting.

Another parent commented that:

It is a positive development to have a child with special needs in an inclusive education environment. My fear is that the teachers may not have the requisite knowledge and skills to cater for them.

A third parent stated that:

I am happy to see my child in an inclusive education system. I however wish that the teachers will have adequate knowledge and skill to meet her needs in the school.

Discussion

Parents' attitudes and concerns towards inclusive education

Generally, the attitudes of parents were found to be positive as far as the implementation of the pilot inclusive education programme in the Winneba Municipality was concerned. Attitudes of respondents that this study focused on include: inclusive education provides a conducive atmosphere for all children, pupils with special needs should be educated in the regular classroom, inclusive education facilitates appropriate behaviour of all children, I get irritated when I see my child studying alongside children with special needs, I am concerned that attending the same school with a child with special needs will affect my child academically. This finding supports the view of Miller & Phillips (1999) research on parental attitudes towards inclusive education has shown that parents seem to hold predominantly positive attitudes towards inclusive education. The finding also confirms that of Gallagher, Floyd, Stafford, Taber, Brozovic & Alberto (2000) that parents of typically developing children hold positive attitudes towards inclusive education when they report that inclusive education helps their children to learn about and accept individual differences.

Regarding the concerns of parents towards the implementation of inclusive education in the study area, the focus of the study was on: possibility of children participating in the peer group, insufficient teaching time and lack of appropriate support and resources and inappropriate training of teachers in inclusive education delivery. As to whether their children will be able to participate socially in the peer group, the general view reported by the respondents was whether their children will be accepted and treated humanely in their peer groups. Another area of concern to the parents was whether the teachers will have sufficient time, appropriate support and resources to provide for the needs of their children

Respondents in the study were also concerned as to whether the teachers have the appropriate training in inclusive education delivery to take of the needs of their children.

These findings support that of (Bailey & Winston 1987, Leyser & Kirk, 2004 Salisbury, 1992) that parents of children with special needs have concerns about the social impacts on their child such as social isolation, rejection, and bullying. The findings again confirm view of (Bennet & Deluca, 1997, Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997, Grove & Fisher 1999) that parents are apprehensive that regular are not well trained, have insufficient time and lack appropriate support and resources to educate their children properly.

Conclusion

This study set out to find out the attitudes and concerns parents had toward the implementation of the pilot inclusive education programme in the Winneba Municipality of Ghana. The findings of the study showed that parents of children without special needs had positive attitude towards the implementation of the programme.

The findings again revealed that parents of children with special needs showed concerns about whether their children will be accepted and treated humanely in their peer group. The results also revealed that the parents were concerned as to whether teachers had sufficient time, appropriate support and resources to provide for the needs of their children. It also emerged from the study the parents of children with special needs also expressed the concern as to whether teachers in the pilot had the appropriate training in inclusive education delivery to provide for the needs of their children.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made for the study.

- Stakeholder meetings should be periodically organised to educate the parents on operations of the inclusive education system in order to change any negative perceptions they may harbour against the programme.
- Regular supply of resources and support services should be injected into the schools to enable them to effectively provide for the needs of the children.
- Adequate pre and in-service training in inclusive education delivery should be provided to the teachers to improve upon their performance so as to win the confidence of the parents as key stakeholders of the education system.

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