



EXAMINING PRE-SERVICE TEACHER PREPARATION FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN GHANA

Opoku-Nkoom Isaac¹ and Daniel Dogbe (Ed.D)²

¹Special Education Coordinator, KEEA Municipal Education Office, Elmina & Part-time lecturer, Community College of Education, Takoradi. Mobile contact:+233244696584

²Head, Department of Special Education, University of Education, Winneba – Ghana. Mobile contact: +233207947980

ABSTRACT: *The study investigated the pre-service teacher preparation in terms of theoretical and practical experiences towards inclusive education in Ghana. This was premised on the argument that teacher preparation is a key consideration in the implementation of inclusive education. The study was a descriptive survey with a sample size of 300 student-teachers randomly selected from 3 Colleges of Education in Ghana. The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. Percentages and frequencies were used as statistical indexes to analyse the result. The findings revealed that prospective teachers in the Colleges of Education in Ghana were aware of the concept of Inclusive Education (IE) and were also knowledgeable about some inclusive issues such as parental involvement. They also had the basic skills in identifying some learners with special educational needs (LwSEN) in regular classrooms during their teaching practice and also adapted the regular school curriculum to meet their needs. It was recommended that the Special Education Division of the Ghana Education Service (GES) should ensure that pre-service teachers are adequately prepared and equipped with simple strategies to identify, support and assist (LwSEN) in community neighbourhood schools. Additionally, pre-service teachers should be equipped with basic screening skills to be able to identify learners who are at-risk in regular schools and put in appropriate interventions to meet their needs.*

KEYWORDS: Inclusion, Pre-Service Teachers, Inclusive Education (IE), Ghana Education Service (GES), Special Educational Needs, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, educational systems across the world are experiencing major changes. One of these changes is related to the increase in the diversity of school populations (Romi & Leyser, 2006). This means that the educational system is increasingly becoming responsible for including a large diversity of pupils and for providing a differentiated and appropriate education for everyone (UNESCO, 1994).

The Government of Ghana has over the years emphasized the ‘All-Inclusive’ approach to education using various policies to facilitate discussions by different stakeholders including educators, parents, learners, Non-Governmental Organisations, Faith-Based Organisations, policymakers and disability organisations to discuss strategies for including all learners who have different abilities. Ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and in partnerships with their



communities in our education system to achieving the quality learning outcomes and improving the overall well-being of all learners should be our goal. Hence the Inclusive Education (IE) Policy and Implementation Plan was launched in May 2016. The overarching goal of the Inclusive Education (IE) Policy is to redefine and recast the delivery and management of educational services to respond to the diverse needs of all learners within the framework of Universal Design for Learning and Child-Friendly School Concept.

As educational systems become more inclusive, UNESCO (2001) emphasised the fact that professional development is particularly important because of the major and new challenges that confront regular school teachers who have to respond to a greater diversity of students' needs, Mittler (2000, p.137) reaffirms this fact by stating that "Ensuring that newly qualified teachers have a basic understanding of inclusive teaching in inclusive schools is the best investment that can be made". Obi, Mamah and Mensah (2005) indicated that the adoption of the inclusive ideology apparently means regular classroom teacher must be prepared to teach children with disabilities. This implies that if teachers are to be trained in inclusive approaches, then their training programmes also have to be organised on inclusive lines

UNESCO (1994) points out that in Teacher Training Colleges, specific attention should be given to preparing all teachers to exercise their autonomy and apply their skills in adapting curricular and instruction to meet pupils' needs regardless of their disabilities. Teaching in an inclusive environment must actually attend to the intellectual quality, relevance, social support and recognition of difference. However, the challenge for pre-service teacher education is to equip teachers with the right attitudes, knowledge, skills, and competencies for the successful implementation of Inclusive Education Policy (Forlin, 2010; Rouse, 2008). Several studies from both the Global North and South have found that initial teacher education programmes do not adequately prepare teachers to teach in inclusive settings. Teachers also felt unequipped with the knowledge and skills to address the needs of children with special needs and disabilities (Chhabra, Srivastava, & Srivastava, 2010; Mangope & Mukhopadhyay, 2015)

The Special Education courses in the initial teacher education programme have been described as too theoretical and providing limited basic knowledge and skills in SEN with no provision for practical experience (Sawhney, 2015). As a result in 2014, the government of Ghana launched a programme called Transforming Teacher Education and Learning (T-TEL) funded by the DFID in ensuring that pre-service teachers are equipped with adequate with the right values, attitudes, knowledge and skills to meet the needs of all learners including Learners with Special Educational Needs (LwSEN) in regular schools.

Statement of the Problem

Inclusive education requires that regular education teachers be prepared to receive adequate knowledge and exposure to theory and practice on meeting the needs of students with SEN and disabilities. Since Ghana government in the 2007 Educational Reforms has demonstrated its commitment and support for the inclusive education programme, it is expected that it will implement policies and practices of inclusion to the latter. This includes preparation of teachers which is paramount.

Though inclusion started in Ghana in the year 2000 on a pilot basis, the policy has been in existence since 2016 which implies that every regular school must be inclusive where



learners with disabilities are accepted and supported to achieve. It also expected with the T-TEL inclusive education programme which has restructured the Colleges of Education curriculum on pedagogy and teaching, it is expected that the pre-service teachers must be prepared adequately in respect of theory and practice for effective implementation of inclusive education in regular schools in Ghana. The study, therefore, seeks to investigate the extent of teacher preparation for inclusive education in Ghana in terms of knowledge and experience.

Objectives of the Study

Generally, the objective of this study was to find out whether teacher trainees are equipped during their training to cope with the demands of inclusive education. The specific **objectives** of the study were to investigate:

1. Teacher knowledge on inclusion.
2. The practical experience of teacher trainees relative to curricular adaptation in an inclusive classroom.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. to what extent are pre-service teachers in Ghana knowledgeable about the concept of inclusive education?
2. what is the pre-service teachers' knowledge on the core issues of inclusive education?
3. what practical experience have the prospective teachers in Ghana received?

Significance of the Study

The study was principally geared towards the promotion of an educational ideology centred on creating a society of equal rights and opportunities and mutual interaction of individuals irrespective of disabilities. To promote inclusive education in Ghana as a government policy, pre-service teacher preparation is one of the critical issues that can guide policy framework. It is therefore expected that the results of this work will sensitise and prompt the government and policymakers about the importance of teacher education in relation to effective implementation of inclusive education.

This study will bring to the fore the knowledge base of the prospective teachers in Ghana on inclusion in terms of theory and practical experience. This information will help the Teacher Education in collaboration with the Special Education Division to modify the teacher education programmes to make it more inclusive oriented.

METHODOLOGY

This section is categorised into areas such as research design, population, sample and sampling techniques, instrumentation and procedure for data collection and data analysis.



Research Design

A descriptive survey design was chosen for the study because the ultimate goal of the study was to learn about issues relative to teacher preparation and inclusive education in Ghana by surveying a sample of that population and describing the situation.

Population

The third-year students of public Colleges of Education in Ghana formed the population of this study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Three hundred final year students selected from 3 public Colleges of Education (Wesley, Akrokeri, and Fosu Colleges of Education) formed the sample size for the study. The convenience sampling procedure was used to select the schools while simple random sampling (lottery method) was used to arrive at actual participants involved in the study. Simple ratio and proportion was also applied to arrive at the number of students to be taken from each selected College to form the sample size. In so doing, the researcher divided the population of each of the three Colleges by the sum total and multiplied it by the total sample size of 300. For instance, Wesley College had 381 as number on roll for the third-year students and as a result, 120 students were selected as sample size. Similarly, the number on roll for Akrokeri College of Education was 267 and such 84 was selected as sample size, while Fosu College of Education had 305 as number on roll which resulted in the sample size of 96.

Instrument

Questionnaire developed by the researcher was used to gather the relevant data for the study. Basically, it was a closed-ended type of questionnaire and was designed to capture a range of responses in a rating scale and comparatively few dichotomous and multiple-choice questions. The Likert scale consisted of a five-point type which involved using “Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree or Strongly Disagree”. However, for the purpose of clarity ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Agree’ were combined as ‘Agree’ likewise ‘Disagree’ or ‘Strongly Disagree’ were treated as ‘Disagree’.

The items were developed to elicit information on the following:

1. Theoretical knowledge of the pre-service teachers about inclusive education.
2. Practical experience with Children with Disabilities (CWD) in an inclusive classroom.

Questionnaire for respondents were developed into 4 sections. Section A dealt with the personal data of the respondents such as age and gender. Section B was on theoretical knowledge of the respondents on inclusive education. Section C elicited responses on the knowledge of participants on the core concept of inclusive education while section D demanded information on the practical experience of respondents and how to adapt the regular school curriculum to meet the needs of children with disabilities and SEN in an inclusive setting.



Procedure for Data Collection

Permission was sought from the heads of the Basic Schools where the mentees were assigned to for their teaching practice. I established rapport with the teachers in order to win the confidence of the participants to accept and complete the questionnaires. The questionnaires were personally administered to the participants. The participants were given four days to complete them. This was to give them enough space and time to complete the questionnaires, to avoid putting pressure on them considering their busy schedule. The lead mentees were asked to supervise and collect the completed questionnaires from their colleagues and made it ready for me. In all, it took the researcher six weeks to collect the data. Even though 300 questionnaires were administered, the return rate was 287 representing about 96%.

Method of Data Analysis

Percentages and frequencies were used as statistical tools to analyse the data for all the research questions in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the study are presented according to the research questions.

Research Question 1: *To what extent are pre-service teachers in Ghana knowledgeable about the concept of inclusive education?*

The items elicited responses on prospective teachers' understanding of the term inclusive education. Result of this investigation is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Participants' Understanding of Inclusive Education

ITEMS	SA	%	A	%	UN	%	D	%	SD	%
1. Inclusion is the process of bringing Children with Disabilities into the mainstream schools	126	48.3	107	40.9	14	5.4	10	3.5	4	1.5
2. Inclusion involves educating all children in regular school regardless of their disabilities.	118	43.9	99	36.9	27	10.1	20	7.4	5	1.7
3. Inclusion defines the whole child on the basis of his or her impairment.	17	6.8	61	24.6	38	15.4	91	36.7	41	16.5



In Table 1, inclusive education was defined in three ways and participants were expected to select the one that best explained the term. Table 1 shows that about 89% of the participants understood inclusive education to mean bringing CWDs into the mainstream schools as against 81% who understood inclusion to mean educating all children of school-going age in the regular school regardless the degree of their disabilities. This may imply that majority of the pre-service teachers have not understood the meaning of the term inclusive education as implied by the (UNESCO, 1994), even though it appears they might have been introduced to it.

Research question 2: *What is the pre-service teachers' knowledge on the core issues of inclusive education?*

The objective was to find out the level of knowledge of prospective teachers about core inclusive issues.

Table 2: Participants' Responses on Core Issues on Inclusion Education

ITEM	SA	%	A	%	UN	%	D	%	SD	%
1. Parental involvement is essential in inclusive education.	123	46.1	112	41.9	18	6.7	12	4.6	2	.7
2. Inclusion is essential to human dignity.	106	38.8	136	49.8	18	6.6	10	3.7	3	1.1
3. Inclusion creates enabling environment for all children.	84	30.9	137	50.5	29	10.7	19	7.2	2	.7
4. Inclusion recognises the fact that children have a wide diversity of characteristics.	85	30.9	145	52.7	18	6.6	25	9.1	2	.7
5. Community participation is essential to inclusion.	70	26.5	120	45.5	34	12.9	15	5.7	25	9.4

The items in Table 2 are all core issues on inclusion and participants were asked to rate them. Eighty-eight percent agreed that parental involvement is crucial to inclusive education. Also, 88.6% which is quite a significant number of the participants agreed that inclusion is essential to human dignity. This finding is in line with what is indicated in the literature. Booth, Ainscow and Kingston (2006) indicated that the notion of right has become of vast symbolic importance in the last and present centuries and demands for rights have been used as a rallying cry for those denied the common humanity, that all children are equally human.

About eighty-one percent of the respondents agreed that inclusion creates an enabling environment for children with different categories of disabilities. On inclusion and diversity, 83.6% indicated that inclusion recognises the fact that children have a wide diversity of characteristics. Also, 72% of the participants agreed that community participation is essential to inclusion. The results in the table actually meant that basically majority of the participants had knowledge about some core issues of inclusive education. According to Stainback and Stainback (1996), inclusive schools believe in "All children belong". In these schools, no



students, including those with disabilities, are relegated to the fringes of the school by placement in segregated wings, trailers, or special classes. Inclusive schools also believe in a sense of community, diversity is valued, resources are combined, curriculum is adapted where necessary and also support collaborating teachers. This knowledge about the nature and characteristics of inclusive schools will go a long way to help successful implementation of inclusive education in Ghana.

Research Question Three: *What practical experience have the prospective teachers in Ghana received towards children with disabilities?*

The purpose was to find out whether the participants had any interaction with children with disabilities during their teaching practice. This is consistent with the views of Alvramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000), who called for early and continuous exposure of teachers to students with special educational needs, preferably in inclusive settings. They contend that practical preparation will affect teacher performance in inclusive classrooms and the successful implementation of inclusion.

In the first place, the questionnaire items elicited responses on identification of SEN children in regular classrooms during their practical teaching exercise.

Table 3: Teachers' Response on Identification of SEN Children in Class (N=287)

Response	Number	%
Yes	204	71
No	83	29
Total	287	100.0

Out of the total respondents of 287, 71% indicated that they identified some pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in their classrooms during their teaching practice. About 29% indicated that they did not identify any pupil with special educational needs in their classrooms at the time of their teaching practice. This may mean that there are lots of children with special educational needs in regular education classrooms in the country. It is not known whether these children have been identified by regular teachers in these schools and also whether their needs are being met.

According to Stakes and Hornby (2001), most pupils in mainstream schools are subject to a statement of special educational needs. This number of students with SEN varies widely from school to school. In fact, The United Kingdom Audit Report of 1992, cited in Stakes and Hornby (2001), highlighted the considerable variation between the number of students with SEN in different mainstream schools. They indicated figures reported in the Warnock 1978 Report which revealed that around 20% of pupils in schools would need, at some time during their schooling, some form of extra provision to meet their special educational needs. However, in the views of Stakes and Hornby (2001), the most important role of teachers at the primary school level is to identify children who experience difficulties at school. They added, identification of such difficulties is the vital first step to finding out whether there is a SEN or not.



Research also reveals that some pupils with physical or sensory difficulties, the nature of the problem is clearly recognisable. A difficulty with movement is an example of this, as is a child who comes to school wearing glasses or another who wears a hearing aid. However, this will not always be the case and it may not be obvious to the teacher that the child has a disability. Learning disability is typically not as easy to recognise as physical disabilities. Often there are no outward signs to alert the teacher. This implies that with the introduction of inclusive education regular school teachers need special skills and knowledge in order to be able to identify some of these children especially those with learning disabilities so that their needs could be met.

Further items were developed to elicit responses on specific SEN categories identified in regular classrooms by the mentees. Table 4 presents the summary of the results.

Table 4: Categories of SEN Identified in Class (N-287)

SEN Categories	Number	%
Visually Impaired	17	6.3
Hearing Impaired	56	19
Intellectual and Developmental Disorders (IDD)	69	24
Speech and Communication Disorders (SCD)	40	14
Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorders (ADHD)	19	6.7
Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (EBD)	86	30
Total	287	100.0

From Table 4, 24% of the respondents did indicate that they identified children with intellectual difficulties in their classrooms. About 19% indicated hearing impairment. Similarly, 30% indicated that they identified children with EBD in their classrooms. 14% indicated speech and communication disorders. Those who indicated attention deficit hyperactive disorders (ADHD) were 6.7% while 6.3% indicated visually impaired. This result may mean that children with emotional and behavioural disorders form the majority of the categories of SEN children found in basic schools in Ghana in accordance with the SEN categories listed in Table 4. It implies that prospective teachers in Ghana will need adequate knowledge and skills to attend to the educational needs of various categories of SEN children particularly those who appear to form the majority (emotional and behavioural disorders) in the regular schools in the country.

Major Findings

1. Most of the prospective teachers understood inclusive education to mean either the process of bringing children with disabilities (CWDs) into the mainstream school or educating all children in regular school regardless of their disabilities. However, about a quarter of the respondents defined inclusive education on the basis of a child's impairment. Most of the respondents regarded the core issues in inclusion to be



parental involvement, human dignity, creation of enabling environment for all children and bearing in mind the wide diversity of children's characteristics.

2. The participants also had the chance to identify and interact with some pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in their classrooms during their practical teaching. Though the finding shows more than one category of SEN children were identified, majority of the participants indicated that they identified children with intellectual difficulties in their classrooms.

CONCLUSIONS

Teachers are the key implementers of every educational policy; hence any move the country is making towards successful inclusive education must start with teachers. This can be achieved through equipping teachers with adequate practical skills, knowledge and values to meet the needs of all children in the regular classroom including those with disabilities. Although the findings revealed that Colleges of Education in the country have infused special education content into teacher training programmes for general education as in Israel and in other countries reported in literature, evidence suggests that the addition of some content in a single course may not be effective. Preparation of general educators to work in inclusive settings, therefore, requires a more extensive infusion of special education content in the curriculum and also more intensive and varied field experiences in settings with children both with and without disabilities.

Apparently, from the number of findings listed, the prospective teachers in the various Colleges of Education in the country are being equipped in terms of knowledge and practical experience to provide the educational needs of SEN children in regular education classroom to satisfy the demands of inclusive education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on the findings:

1. The authorities of the Colleges of Education in collaboration with Special Education Division should ensure that students acquire in-depth knowledge about the inclusion. Concept and their roles as teachers including the attitudes they should have. This recommendation is due to the result of the study which indicated that some participants had no idea about inclusive education and also where some defined inclusion on the basis of the child's impairment.
2. The Special Education Division in collaboration with the Ministry of Education should ensure that trainee teachers are adequately prepared in simple approaches to identify, support and assist children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Additionally, student-teachers should be assisted to identify children with special educational needs (SEN) in their classrooms during their practical teaching and be able to provide the needed support to meet their needs.



REFERENCES

- Alvramidis, E., Bayliss, P., & Burden, R. (2000). Student teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school, *Teaching and Teacher Education* 16, 889-904.
- Avoke, M. (2004). *Introduction to special education for universities and colleges*. Accra: City Publishers.
- Booth, T., Ainscow, M. & Kingston, D. (2006). *The Index for Inclusion: Developing play learning and participation in early years and childcare*, Bristol: CSIE.
- Chhabra, S., Srivastava, R., & Srivastava, I. (2010). Inclusive education in Botswana: The perceptions of school teachers. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 20(4), 219 – 228.
- Cohen, C. Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2004). *Research methods in education* (5thed.). London: Routledge Falmer.
- Forlin, C. (2010). Future direction for teacher education for inclusion. In C. Forlin (Ed.), *Teacher education for inclusion: Changing paradigms and innovative approaches* (pp. 246–252). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Grosnick, J. K., & Huntz, S. L. (1980). *National needs analysis in behaviour disorders: Adolescent behaviour disorders*. University of Missouri Columbia. Department of Special Education.
- Kwawu, M. (1998). Review of the state of special education programmes and services in Ghana. *National Delegates Conference*, UCEW, 23-24.
- Mangope, B., & Mukhopadhyay, S. (2015). Preparing teachers for inclusive education in Botswana: The role of professional development. *Journal of International Special Needs Education*, 18(2), 60–72.
- Mittler, P. (2000). *Working towards inclusive social context*. London: David Fulton.
- Obi, F. B., Mamah, V. & Mensah, A. (2005). Inclusive education: The challenges of the 21st century Nigerian- Ghanaian teacher. *African Journal of Special Education Needs*, 4(1), 19-27.
- Pearson, S. (2005). SEN- a politically correct phrase to replace terms such as disabled?: A study of the views of students entering a secondary PGCE course. *Support for Learning*, 20(1), 17-21.
- Romi, S. & Leyser, Y. (2006). Exploring, inclusion for pre-service training needs: A study of variables associated with attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 21(1), 85-105
- Rouse, M. (2008). Developing inclusive practice: A role for teachers and teacher education. *Education in the North*, 16, 6–11.
- Stainback, W. & Stainback, S. (1996). *Controversial issues confronting special education: Divergent perspectives* (2nded.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Stakes, R. & Hornby, G. (2001). *Meeting special needs in mainstream schools: A practical guide for teachers* (2nded.). London: David Fulton Publishers.
- UNESCO (1994). *Salamanca statement and framework for action on special education*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2001). *Open file on inclusive education: support materials for managers and administrators*: Paris: UNESCO.