
Original Paper

An Investigation into the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Selected Primary Schools in Kenema District, Eastern Sierra Leone

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Abstract

This research report focuses on the investigation of the implementation of inclusive education in selected primary schools in the Kenema District of Sierra Leone. The study explored stakeholders' views on the implementation of inclusive education, examining the attitudes of teachers towards Inclusive Education, determining the level of preparedness of Primary Schools in the implementation of inclusive education, assessing the competences of teachers involved in Inclusive Education and identifying the challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive education.

The study used the mixed methodology design as it entailed the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from the various respondents. The population for this study consisted of male and female teachers in all 444 Government Assisted Primary Schools in Kenema District. In addition, three representatives from the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), the Teaching Service Commission, and the Sierra Leone Teachers Union were part of the research.

The study revealed that inclusive education is essential despite some challenges including inadequate materials, unfriendly school environments, and shortages of teachers trained in special education. Inclusive education is well perceived by both pupils and teachers, parents, and the community. In conclusion, it will be for no if there is no collaborative effort amongst the various partners to play their part in order to make inclusive education successful for the development of the country.

Keywords: Persons with Disabilities, Inclusion, Inclusive classroom, Inclusive education, Radical Inclusion, and Special education.

Introduction

Inclusive education is an emerging issue in Sierra Leone's education system and the world at large. The 1960 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention against Discrimination in Education and the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in Jomtien, Thailand, call on countries to take measures to ensure equality in education and no discrimination in access to learning opportunities for under-served groups. Inclusive education means that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions.

In the past education for children with disabilities was established in a segregated setup whereas no separate setup is found for these children in the secondary or postgraduate level in Sierra Leone. Because they were not properly catered for, most of them could not access or complete their studies.

The Sierra Leone Constitution (1991) guarantees the rights of all to education and states that it is the responsibility of the government to direct its policy toward ensuring that there are equal rights and adequate educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels by ensuring that every citizen is given the opportunity to be educated to the best of their ability, aptitude, and inclination by providing educational facilities at all levels and aspects of education such as primary, secondary, vocational, technical, college and university.

In the past, education for children with disabilities was established in segregated sets ups at the primary level. The Blind and Deaf Schools were established in Freetown in the 1960s and by the end of that decade, other blind and deaf schools had been established in the main provincial towns. As stated earlier, these schools were operating only at primary level and only in the headquarter towns. Children who did not reside in the capital city and provincial cities could not access even primary education. Children who wanted to progress to the secondary level found it difficult to do so as most of the schools were not willing to admit them. There were a lot of drop-outs of children with special needs at the next levels of education.

Inclusive education started in Sierra Leone with the introduction of the Child Friendly School (CFS) programme in the 2010s. In April 2011 the Parliament of Sierra Leone therefore passed “The persons with Disability Act 2011”, a law which guarantees the rights of all persons with impairment. This law state that every person with a disability has the right to free education at all levels and it has been approved by the MBSSE. The government is to ensure that facilities for persons with disability are available in such institutions. The law provides that no one has the power to deny persons with disabilities to enter into any educational institution primary, secondary and tertiary or university because of his/her disability.

A Director of the Special education department at the University of Makeni, which is the only institution providing basic training for special education teachers in Sierra Leone, noted that the absence of legislation and a policy framework enabling the implementation of inclusion is not the only challenge facing inclusive education in Sierra Leone (M. Weeney, personal communication, 2015). The lack of materials and infrastructural support, adequate government funding, and teacher input regarding inclusion in their classrooms are other factors impeding the implementation of inclusion (Amr et al., 2016).

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education in collaboration with the World Bank has reacted to the multi-dimensional exclusion by focusing on inclusive education for all by 2025. Special Education needs have been focused on by development partners but there are still special exclusionary factors such as providing the required teaching-learning materials that still need to be addressed. The teaching-learning material is also insufficient for children with and without special needs. There is a lack of infrastructure and furniture in the schools. Children with special needs require a learning environment in which they can learn by participating in small groups; a learning environment that will benefit both them and normal children.

Statement of Problem

In West Africa, as with many other regions of the world, people with disabilities are largely excluded from the process of development, with extremely limited opportunities to engage in public consultations and decision-making. This exclusion only serves to reinforce the marginalization, critical poverty, and isolation experienced by people with disabilities in the region.

Educational authorities worldwide including Sierra Leone have adopted the principle of inclusion to address their social and moral obligation to eradicate all learners (Forbes, 2007). With the implementation of inclusive education that started late in the 1990s in Sierra Leone, persons with and without disabilities are to achieve their maximum potential in regular schools. The issues are that most of the teachers in Sierra Leone schools are educated through the general teacher education system except for very few who get a chance to be educated in in-service education at the University of Makeni. The University of Makeni is a university where teachers who have taught regular skills are sent to study more about providing services to children with disabilities. However, as a result of a lack of resources including teachers trained in special and inclusive education (Mnyanyi, 2009), persons with disabilities rarely enjoy the right to education.

It is against this background of the seen continued problems in the education of children normally excluded from participating in primary schools that this study was conceived with the aim of investigating stakeholders’ perception of the implementation of inclusive education in the Kenema district. In more specific terms the study is designed to respond to the following research objectives.

- i. Examine the attitudes of Teachers towards Inclusive Education in primary schools in Kenema District.
- ii. Determine the level of preparedness of Primary Schools in the implementation of inclusive education in Kenema District.

Methodology

The study used the mixed method design as it entailed the collection of qualitative and quantitative data from the various respondents.

Qualitative research is a process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting. It focuses on the "why" rather than the "what" of social phenomena and relies on the direct experiences of human beings as meaning-making agents in their everyday lives. Qualitative research is based on the disciplines of social sciences like psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Therefore, the qualitative research methods allow for in-depth and further probing and questioning of respondents based on their responses, where the interviewer/researcher also tries to understand their motivation and feelings. Understanding how your audience takes decisions can help derive conclusions in market research. Qualitative research methods are designed in a manner that helps reveal the behaviour and perception of a target audience with reference to a particular topic. There are different types of qualitative research methods like an in-depth interview, focus groups, ethnographic research, content analysis, case study research that are usually used.

Quantitative research is referred to as the process of collecting as well as analysing numerical data. It is generally used to find patterns, averages, predictions, as well as cause-effect relationships between the variables being studied. It is also used to generalize the results of a particular study to the population in consideration. Quantitative research differs from qualitative research in several ways, one being that quantitative research works with numerical data whereas qualitative research uses more conversational or linguistic data. There are two methods through which you can conduct quantitative research; they are primary quantitative research methods and secondary Quantitative Research Methods

The study is carried out in Government Assisted Primary Schools in Kenema District Eastern Region of Sierra Leone. Kenema District is in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Attitude of Teachers toward Inclusive Education

Attitude rating	Agree		Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree		Strongly Disagree	
	Fre.	%	Fre.	%	Fre.	%	Fre.	%	Fre.	%
Teachers believes that pupils with disability is a curse from God	210	44.5	95	20.1	40	8.4	60	12.7	66	14
Teachers are doing their best to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities in Sierra Leone.	90	19.1	215	45.6	30	6.3	55	11.6	81	17.1
Teachers need media sensitization on the importance of inclusive education.	140	29.7	90	19.1	45	9.5	156	33.1	40	8.4
Teacher are not doing enough to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities in Sierra Leone	40	8.4	130	27.6	60	12.7	40	8.4	201	42.6
Inclusive special education is a new concept in Sierra Leone	190	40.3	80	16.9	35	7.4	100	21.2	66	14

Source: Field Data 2020

Result from Table 10 indicates that majority of the teachers have negative attitudes towards persons with disability. Having negative perception about disability may contribute to the performance and growth of inclusive education schools. Two hundred and Ten respondents (44.5%) agree to the statement that disability is a curse from God; One hundred and ninety respondents (40.3 %) said Inclusive education is a new concept in Sierra Leone. One hundred and forty respondents (29.7%) agree to the fact that teachers need media sensitization on the importance of inclusive education to provide for the needs of pupils with disability. Forty respondents (8.4%) said teachers are not doing enough to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities.

One hundred Fifty-six respondents (33.1%) strongly agree that teachers need media sensitization on the importance of inclusive education. Hundred respondents (21.2%) strongly agree that Inclusive education is a new concept in Sierra Leone. Sixty respondents (12.7%) strongly agree that a pupil with disability is a curse from God. Fifty-five respondents (11.6%) strongly agree that teachers are doing their best to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities. Forty respondents (8.4%) strongly agree that teachers are not doing enough to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities.

On the other hand, two hundred and fifteen respondents (45.6 %) disagree that teachers are doing their best to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities. One hundred and thirty respondents (27.6 %) disagree that teacher are not doing enough to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities. Ninety-five respondents (20.1%) disagree that teachers believes that pupils with disability is a curse from God. Ninety respondents (19.1%) disagree that teachers need media sensitization on the importance of inclusive education. Eighty respondents (16.9%) disagree that Inclusive education is a new concept in Sierra Leone.

Two hundred and one (42.6%) strongly disagree that teacher are not doing enough to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities. Eighty-one respondents (17.1%) strongly disagree that teachers are doing their best to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities. Sixty-six respondents (14%) each strongly disagree that Teachers believes that pupils with disability is a curse from God and Inclusive education is a new concept in Sierra Leone. Forty respondents (8.4%) respondents strongly disagree that teachers need media sensitization on the importance of inclusive education

Sixty respondents (12.7%) took the neutral position to say they teachers are not doing enough to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities. Forty-five respondents (9.5%) took the neutral position on teachers need media sensitization on the importance of inclusive education.

Forty respondents (8.4%) the teachers took the neutral position to say teachers believe that a pupil with disability is a curse from God. Thirty-five respondents (7.4%) teachers from the neutral position said Inclusive special education is a new concept in Sierra Leone. Thirty respondents (6.3%) of the teachers took the neutral position to say they teacher are not doing enough to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities.

Attitudes of teachers towards their teaching in inclusive education

Attitudes of teachers towards their teaching in inclusive education	Agree		Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree		Strongly Disagree	
	Fre.	%	Fre.	%	Fre.	%	Fre.	%	Fre.	%
I feel that inclusion is a good idea	210	44.5	00	00	00	00	261	55.4	00	00
I feel it difficult to modify instruction and my teaching style to meet the need of pupil with impairment.	100	21.2	110	23.3	90	19.1	110	23.3	61	12.9
My pupils feel positive about my class.	100	21.2	110	23.3	90	19.1	110	23.3	61	12.9
My pupils have become more accepting of individual diversities.	210	44.5	50	10.6	100	21.2	100	21.2	11	2.3

My pupils academic performance has become negatively affected.	00	0	210	44.5	20	4.2	00	00	247	52.4
Are teaching and learning materials available appropriate to pupils with impairment?	10	2.1	230	48.8	35	7.4	15	3.1	181	38.4

Source: Field Data 2020

Regular teacher's views of inclusion were also of interest are the following highlights explain the outcome.

Out of two hundred sixty-one respondents (55.4%) strongly agreed while two hundred ten respondents (44.5%) agree that inclusion is a good idea and should be maintained. One hundred ten respondents (23.3%) strongly agree one hundred respondents (21.2%) agree with the claim of difficulty in modification of teaching strategies. One hundred and ten respondents (23.2%) disagree, Ninety respondents (19.1%) stay neutral and sixty one respondents (12.9%) strongly disagree.

On the other hand, one hundred and ten respondents (23.3 %) strongly agree and other one hundred and ten respondents (23.3 %) disagree they my pupils feel positive the class Hundred respondents (21.2) agree, Ninety respondent (19.1 %) stay neutral and sixty one respondents (12.9%) strongly that the pupils feel positive in my class.

The rating on pupils becoming more accepting individual diversities. Two hundred and ten respondents (44.5%) agree, hundred respondents (21.2%) strongly agree, another hundred respondent's stay neutral, fifty respondents (10.6%) disagree and eleven respondents (2.3%) strongly disagree.

The perception of teachers with regards to how learners have been **negatively affected** by inclusive education was sought. Two hundred and ten disagree, two hundred and forty seven respondents (52.4%) strongly disagree, two hundred and ten disagree and twenty stay neutral.

Although the responses show that the materials are not enough for the teaching of children with impairment, the fact remains strategies and supports are needed for such teachings. Two hundred and thirty respondents (48.8%) disagree, One hundred and eighty one respondents (38.4%) strongly disagree, thirty five respondents (7.4%) stay neutral, fifteen respondents (3.1%) respondents strongly agree and ten respondents (2.1%) agree.

Research Finding

The findings revealed that;

- i. Large numbers of teachers believe that pupils with disability are a curse from God.
- ii. They are not doing enough to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities in the district, teacher were not well equipped to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities,
- iii. Teachers need media sensitization on the importance of inclusive education.
- iv. Majority of the teachers have negative attitudes towards persons with disability. Having negative perception about disability may contribute to poor performance and growth of inclusive education schools.
- v. There is a lack of support and resources for teachers in inclusive education, majority of the teachers believed that inclusive education would not succeed in the District due to the absence of necessary components; inclusion will remain an unachievable idea.
- vi. It is not possible to teach pupils with special needs in inclusive classrooms because pupils with impairment differ in understanding capacity and their needs
- vii. Pupils with special needs special care and attention of which most teachers do not have.
- viii. Teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards students with disabilities are invariably connected to

inclusive education outcomes.

The level of preparedness of Primary Schools in the implementation of inclusive education

The third research objective was to determine the level of preparedness of Primary Schools in the implementation of inclusive education. The findings revealed that;

- i. Majority of the primary schools have over ten years of experience in enrolling pupils in inclusive education. The primary schools in this enrolling number of years in inclusive education may be well prepared to embrace inclusive education system.
- ii. Result indicates that Sierra Leone did not address issues of disability with the kind of attention that defines equity and fairness. Children and other persons with disabilities continued to undergo societal discrimination in many facets of life, which continues to this day.
- iii. That Disadvantaged children are denied the opportunity to reach their maximum potential. Denying children with disabilities the educational support they need has had disastrous consequences, in some cases causing them to beg for their survival in the streets.
- iv. The study revealed various obstacles on how to teach special needs pupils, given attention and time to all students, and modification of instructional strategies or lesson plan were barrier to teachers' students with special needs.
- v. The study revealed that there are still many parents who have not understood the purpose of inclusive education.
- vi. Majority of the Schools have not had any cooperation with other institutions other than the education office, which has been providing seminars on inclusive education, whereas they need cooperation with other institutions such as universities with inclusive education programs, especially learning methods in inclusive classes.

The study revealed that Inclusive education lack support, acceptance and resources within classrooms and school environment.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that inclusive education is a worthy initiative as it enhances quality of education despite the many challenges. This research has presented data and information that bring out a clear picture of stakeholders Perception towards inclusive education in Primary Schools in Kenema District, Eastern Sierra Leone. The study has relied on the teachers themselves giving their perception on the important issues that affect inclusive Education, especially at the primary school level. Stakeholders' views and perceptions on Inclusive Education have also been used to give a comprehensive picture on the level of preparedness of teachers in implementing inclusive education, Qualitative and quantitative analyses helped to portray the demographic factors that affect inclusive Education in Primary Schools. Secondary data revealed unfulfilled promises and incomplete strategies by the Government that could have enhanced inclusive education in the district.

In the past, there have been series of international meetings on educational reforms held such as the World Conference on Education for All, organized by the United

Nations and the Dakar Framework for Action to argue for the inclusion of all children regardless of their abilities or disabilities (UNESCO, 2014). Results from these meetings ultimately pushed the government of Sierra Leone to legislate the Persons with Disability Act (2011). The government's approach was to ensure that every child in the country gets equal access to education. Despite all of these international and domestic efforts, recent studies conducted have indicated that about 75% of all children with disabilities are either out of school, or do not have similar access to high-quality instruction as their abled peers. The implication for this is that Sierra Leone is struggling to embrace fully the inclusion model, which guarantees and respect the equal partnership rights of every child in every learning environment. Legislative policies alone are not enough to close the widening gap between government policy and implementation of inclusive education .The purpose of this study was to examine the perception of stakeholders towards inclusive education in Kenema district, Eastern Sierra Leone. The study revealed

that the general perception and attitude of teachers towards inclusive education in the district were negative. Teachers have negative thoughts about government's ability to provide the resources needed for inclusion to succeed. The study also indicated that the relationship between professional development and teachers' readiness to implement inclusion in their classrooms were positive. The lesser training teachers say they have received, the lesser their confidence and knowledge to influence inclusion in their schools. Thus, even though teachers in both their responses to the questionnaire as well as one-to-one interviews were willing to embrace inclusion, yet they were absolute in their belief that they lacked the training, parental support and resources to provide an inclusive general education classroom that would meet the needs of students with severe disabilities.

Recommendation

The purpose of this research was to examine the perception of stakeholders towards inclusive education in Kenema district, Eastern Sierra Leone. It is evident that the research undertaken can be of outstanding help not only to educational planners and policy makers but to all stakeholders engaged in managing inclusive education. With the findings from the research, stakeholders can profit from the resulting better knowledge of issues entailed in inclusive education and steps can then be identified for the improvement of inclusive education.

Research inferred that there were more male than female teachers in the teaching profession in the district. This result is not surprising as generally there are more male teachers than females in the Primary schools in the district. The Sierra Leone Government and the Teaching Service Commission TSC have to engage in fruitful discussions with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to recruit more female teachers into the teaching profession.

Result indicated that most of these teachers were living in overcrowded homes and they may find it difficult to meet their physical and emotional needs and majority of the teachers were married. A conscious effort must be made to provide teachers and their household with staff quarters in each school across the district.

The findings of the research revealed that large numbers of teachers believe that pupils with disability are a curse from God. The Ministry of Gender and Children's affairs have to embark on massive sensitization to prepare the mind set of teachers about inclusive education. Special effort has to be made to ensure that Government provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities in the district. Also teachers should be well equipped to provide for the needs of pupils with disabilities,

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) should ensure that teachers are provided with the necessary support and resources for teachers in inclusive education, majority of the teachers believed that inclusive education would not succeed in the District due to the absence of necessary components; inclusion will remain an unachievable idea.

The government should encourage the development of people with disabilities, empower families of people with disabilities by establishing a Disabled Persons Development Fund so as to enable them participate effectively in income generation and bring about their development, review or amend legislations that are not disability friendly, improve service delivery, to allow the participation of people with disabilities in decision making and implementation of important activities in the society and to enable families of people with disabilities and the society at large to participate in decisions and implementation of important disability friendly activities. To identify NGOs to provide services to people with disabilities and coordinate their activities.

The Ministry should ensure that Teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards students with disabilities are invariably connected to inclusive education outcomes. Result indicates that Sierra Leone did not address issues of disability with the kind of attention that defines equity and fairness. Children and other persons with disabilities continued to undergo societal discrimination in many facets of life, which continues to this day. Government Should Ensure that necessary support are given to children with disability.

School authorities should ensure that disadvantaged children are not denied the opportunity to reach their maximum potential. Denying children with disabilities the educational support they need has had disastrous consequences, in some cases causing them to beg for their survival in the streets. Majority of

the Schools have not had any cooperation with other institutions other than the education office, which has been providing seminars on inclusive education, whereas they need cooperation with other institutions such as universities with inclusive education programs, especially learning methods in inclusive classes. Higher learning institutions including Teachers training Colleges Should cooperate with schools in implementing inclusive education.

The study revealed that inclusive teachers were poorly paid and this seriously affects their performance. The Sierra Leone government and the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) have to engage in fruitful discussions with the ministry of finance to make the teaching profession lucrative and enviable.

Result indicated that there is lack of human capital in schools that offer inclusive education settings. The human capital here is defined as the capacity, qualifications and expertise of the teachers in handling students with special abilities. The Ministry of Education Should provide scholarship opportunities and Grant in Aid to build the capacities of teachers in Inclusive Education. Also there is lack of infrastructure, trained teachers because of the insufficient funding. These insufficient facilities affect the success of the inclusion and those who are involved in the program. Government involvement is very less as compare to the non-governmental organizations. Government should scale up their interventions in inclusive education.

Implementation of the policy will involve an initial sensitization and training process in schools, followed by the introduction of criteria that reflect radical inclusion in all school census and data collection programmes, as well as benchmarking and tracking the progress of these targeted groups of marginalized children. Training will be provided to school officials and staff who will play central roles in implementation.

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