Teachers’ Culture and Attitudes towards the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Cameroon Public Secondary Schools

ENDELEY Margaret Nalova
Department of Curriculum Studies and Teaching
Faculty of Education, University of Buea, Cameroon

Abstract: The implementation of inclusive education has not been effective in secondary schools in Cameroon. Teacher perception or attitudes have been found to be one of the strongest barriers to the implementation of inclusive education. Yet in determining the factors that affect teachers’ attitudes, research has been more prolific on resources, experience, training, gender and type of disability. Cameroon’s peculiarity in running two systems of education - the Anglophone and Francophone systems may have other latent factors such as culture or linguistic background. Thus the study aimed at finding out if culture affects the implementation of teacher education and if teachers differed in their perception due to their linguistic background as well as in various components of their attitudes. It was a descriptive survey which made use of a questionnaire and a focused-group discussion as methods of data collection. Four regions and 15 schools were surveyed and a return rate of 430 out of 500 questionnaires was obtained. Eight teachers participated in the focused-group discussion. Data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially. Findings revealed that teachers generally hold positive perceptions and there is no significant difference in their perception of the implementation of inclusive education based on culture, even though bilingual teachers the most positive. Findings and recommendations are discussed.

Key words: Teacher perception, Attitudes, Inclusive Education, Integration, culture, Linguistic Background

1. Introduction
The idea that the education of children with disabilities and special needs should be taken care of in the ordinary school has gained a general acceptance worldwide. In Cameroon, government regulations and prescriptions for implementing inclusive education have been developed at the policy level. However, over two decades afterwards, the implementation of these regulations do not seem to be effective in secondary schools. Teachers are perceived to be integral to the implementation of inclusive education (Haskell, 2000). One of the main barriers to the implementation of integrating students with significant disabilities has been identified as teachers’ attitudes” Avramidis et al., 2000). The success of an inclusionary program may be at risk if regular classroom teachers hold negative perceptions toward the inclusion of students with disabilities (Van Reusen et al., 2001). Literature highlights many factors that affect teachers’ perception in the implementation of inclusive education like the teachers’ training (Shade and Stewart, 2001; Subban and Sharma, 2006), experience (Bowe, 2002; Tabakhmelashvili, 2008) gender (Leach, 2005: Fakolade and Adeniyi, 2009) resources Engstrom, 2003; Mastropieri, 2000) Type of disability (Al-Zyoudi, 2006), teachers’ academic discipline (Endeley, 2015) but very little attention has been given to the effect of culture or linguistic background on teacher perception.

A historical survey of Cameroon reveals that foreign influences especially the British and French colonial administration have played a big role in the history of Cameroon making Cameroon the only bilingual country in Africa, with two prominent education sub-systems: The English (Anglophone) and the French (Francophone) sub-systems. These two sub-systems are expected to co-exist with each jealously keeping its values or culture (Ngalim, 2014), yet working within the framework of common educational goals. Therefore, this study aims at investigating whether the culture or linguistic background of teachers affect their perception of the implementation of inclusive education as well as analyze components of their attitudes to find out if there is dissonance.

2. Review of Literature
2.1. Conceptual Framework
Santrock, (2000) defines attitudes as beliefs and opinions about people, objects and ideas. Attitudes may not only be favourable and unfavourable but could be neutral and also ambivalent towards a target where people may simultaneously possess a positive and a negative
bias towards the attitude in question (Wikipedia, 2008). There are three components of attitudes: the cognitive, emotional or affect component and the behavioural components. The cognitive component is our thoughts, beliefs about the attitudinal object (Wood and Wood, 1993; Feldman 1996). In other words, what you think. The emotional or affect component describes our feelings towards the attitudinal object (Wood and Wood, 1993). It encompasses our positive and negative emotions about something. It is what you feel. The behaviour component consists of a predisposition or intention to act in a particular way that is relevant to our attitude (Feldman, 1996; Wood and Wood, 1993). It is what you do.

The cognitive dissonance theory holds that two cognitions are consonant if one cognition follows from or fits with the other, for example if

2.2. Culture and Attitudes towards Students with Special Education Needs

As observed from literature, perception and treatment of people with disabilities vary across culture. This was aptly demonstrated from Greek and Roman perception of disability. Historically, people with disability were often placed in hospitals, Asylums and other institutions that provided little or no education. There are variations in the attitudes of persons with disabilities in Africa and other parts of the world. A study by Garcia-Nevarez, Stafford and Arias (2005) focused on the attitudes that elementary teachers have toward their English Language Learner (ELL) students’ native languages (e.g. Spanish) and their use of instruction. A questionnaire was administered to 152 first through fourth-grade teachers from five school districts in Maricopa County, Arizona. The researchers found that teachers’ attitudes towards their ELL students differ significantly with the type of certification. The bilingual certified teachers were more supportive of their ELL students using their native language in the classroom than were traditional and English as a Second language – certified teachers.

In a similar study by Creese (2004) of six Turkish/English bilingual English as Additional Language (EAL) teachers from the secondary schools participated in the study. Findings show that these bilingual EAL teachers resist the support role usually played by EAL teachers for a more traditional subject teacher role of transmitter and explainer of curriculum content. Findings of this study must be generalized with caution due to its small sample.

While the widespread principle underlying second language (L2) teaching is to adopt a monolingual approach, some studies have suggested that the monolingual approach may not necessarily be the most appropriate, especially when the teacher and the students share the same first language (L1).
focused-group discussion was to investigate whether teachers’ perception of teaching students with special needs and disabilities was influenced by their culture: English-speaking, French-speaking or bilingual (teachers who are proficient or function in both languages). Therefore, the questionnaire which appeared in both English and French contained a series of 33 Likert scale items representing the cognitive attitude (items 1-8); emotional attitude (items 9-20) and behavioural attitude (items 21-33) derived partly from a review of literature and the Attitude Towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES) by Wilczewski (cited in Subban and Sharma, 2006) which was adapted to the study. Participants were expected to rate items on a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree to agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree. Each point was given a value ranging from 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively. The higher the value of the response the more positive was the attitude towards that item. The reliability estimates ranged from 0.83 to 0.85. Eight teachers took part in the focused-group discussion and the three categories of teachers were represented. The focused-group discussion guide was geared at finding out if perceptions of teachers varied according to their linguistic background and also to find out what teachers thought could be done to improve on the implementation of inclusive education. This was analyzed thematically while data from the questionnaire were analyzed inferentially using a t-test and ANOVA.

4. Statement of the Problem

The regulations for inclusion in Cameroon prescribe placement of persons with disabilities and special needs in regular schools as an initial step to inclusion. For over two decades after regulations were instituted, this has not been effective. Very few students with disabilities and/or significant special needs are found in secondary schools and many eventually drop out. Without an education this category of people will not be able to contribute to their individual and societal development. Yet many factors seem to have been retarding the effective implementation of inclusive education amongst which may be the perception of the teacher. The teacher is the main actor in the implementation process and without a positive attitude, implementation may not be successful. Research has identified resources, experience, training, type of disability, gender as factors that affect teachers’ perception of inclusive education. However, Cameroon’s dual educational systems, makes it peculiar and unique. Therefore, amongst other factors identified in literature as affecting teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion, culture may be a latent but significant factor that may affect either teachers’
awareness, feelings and intentions towards implementing inclusive education.

5. Objective of the Study

The study aims at finding out if public secondary school teachers’ attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education are affected by their culture.

5.1. Specific Objectives

1. To find out if Anglophone, Francophone and bilingual public secondary school teachers differ significantly in their attitude towards the implementation of inclusive education
2. To find out if there is dissonance in the attitudes of public secondary school teachers towards the implementation of inclusive education

5.2. Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between the linguistic background of public secondary teachers and their attitudes towards inclusive education.

6. Findings and Discussion

With regard to the focus group discussion eight teachers took part. Teachers had similar perceptions and did not seem to differ based on culture or linguistic background. They were generally positive towards inclusive education but expressed constraints which need to be addressed. Several mainstream educators view the philosophy of inclusive education as an exciting challenge, the stresses associated with its introduction being seen as life-sustaining, enjoyable and beneficial (Bernard, 1990). Discussions revealed that, teachers’ perceptions will be more positive if the following are strengthened: Awareness on inclusive education (including the regulations in Cameroon), Pre-service and in-service training on inclusive education, Human and material resources for inclusion (Personnel in special education and material resources), improvement of working conditions (e.g. increase in salaries) and incompetence in handling all forms of disability.

Table 1: Teachers’ Linguistic Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Teacher Linguistic Background and Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglophone</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>3.2771</td>
<td>0.44923</td>
<td>0.03656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francophone</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3.2504</td>
<td>0.44933</td>
<td>0.05449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3.3641</td>
<td>0.41653</td>
<td>0.05290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>3.2899</td>
<td>0.44261</td>
<td>0.02640</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: ANOVA on Teachers’ Linguistic Background and Attitudes towards Inclusive Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>0.472</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.236</td>
<td>1.206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>54.381</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>0.196</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54.853</td>
<td>280</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the Table 1 above 239 participants were English-speaking, 105 were French-speaking and 99 participants were Bilingual, bringing the total number of participants to 443. Table 2 shows the means of the three groups of teachers. The number of participants (n) was identified as well as the means of their responses. All three categories of teachers are generally positive towards the implementation of inclusive education. A total mean of 3.2899 above the 2.500 cut off point confirms this assertion. However, bilingual teachers were the most positive towards inclusion while francophone teachers were the least positive. Table 3 shows an ANOVA carried out on the means to determine the degree to which they were different. Results 0.301 (above the 0.05 level of significance) showed that there was no significant difference. Therefore, teachers do not differ significantly in attitude towards inclusive education with respect to their linguistic background, and so linguistic background does not significantly influence teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education. As such the research hypothesis is rejected and the null hypothesis is accepted. There is no significant relationship between teachers’ linguistic background and attitudes towards inclusive education. This finding differs with that of Creese (2014) where even teachers who were bilingual had a negative attitude towards diversity and that of Ukpokodu’s (2004) where majority of white pre-service teachers had negative and racialized dispositions towards diverse students. However, the fact that bilingual teachers are the most positive reveals similar results with the findings of Garcia-Nevarez, Stafford and Arias (2005) and Youngs and Youngs (2001) where bilingual teachers and those who had taken foreign language courses were open to teaching diverse students.
In this study inclusive education was not limited to ethnic or linguistic diversity. It included disabilities, behavior problems, linguistic problems and other types of special needs. A possible explanation of results in the context of Cameroon is that whether a teacher is French-speaking, English-speaking or Bilingual, their experiences are common: the awareness, teaching conditions, training and experiences are the same since they are all trained in public secondary teacher training institutions that offer a common programme with the language of instruction being the only difference. The participants, who were all practicing teachers, had not received any pre-service training during initial training and very little has been done in both systems to equip them with competencies. Therefore, they may not differ significantly, in their perception or disposition towards inclusion. Working in the same context and governed by the same policy may cause teachers of varied linguistic backgrounds to have similar perceptions. This may not be the same in other contexts where regulations may differ from state to state or from district to district. A closer look at the findings shows that the bilingual teachers are the most positive. Language is an aspect of culture. If a teacher is bilingual, he or she is bicultural and therefore is in a better position to handle linguistic and ethnic diversity more than a monolingual teacher as revealed in Leach’s, (2005) study.

### Table 4: Various Components of Attitudes and General Attitudes towards Inclusive Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude Components</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
<th>Std Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>3.1383</td>
<td>0.53266</td>
<td>0.02644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>3.4380</td>
<td>0.66954</td>
<td>0.03620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>3.2654</td>
<td>0.54048</td>
<td>0.02906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Attitudes</td>
<td>3.2899</td>
<td>0.44261</td>
<td>0.02640</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the Table above attitude was broken down into three components: Cognitive, emotional and behavioral. Teachers are positive in their cognitive attitude (3.1383); emotional attitude (3.4380) and behavioral attitude (3.2654). This brings about an overall positive attitude of public secondary general education teachers towards inclusive education (3.2899). However, a closer look at the statistics reveal that teachers are more positive in their emotional attitude than in their behavioral and cognitive attitudes, and they are least positive in their cognitive attitude.

A possible explanation of the result of the cognitive attitudes (thoughts) which was measured mainly through their awareness of the concept of inclusion, regulations on inclusion, types of disability, methods of teaching an inclusive class, is the fact that generally teachers have not received training of any kind towards the implementation of inclusive education. Research reveals that lack of training affects teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education (Shade and Stewart, 2001; Subban and Sharma, 2006). This could either be in the cognitive, affective or psychomotor component of attitude. The fact that teachers’ knowledge of inclusive education is not as positive as the emotional and behavioral components may be explained by the fact that teachers may not be very aware of the complexity of implementing inclusive education.

### 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Teachers are generally positive towards the implementation of inclusive education and so they need to be encouraged. Bilingual teachers are the most positive towards inclusion. Unfortunately, traditional teacher training programs have not prepared educators to be effective in educating bilingual special education students who may have different language and cultural characteristics and needs from the mainstream student.

Therefore, if teacher education institutions could train more bilingual than monolingual teachers, attitudes towards inclusive education may be enhanced. Part 1, Section 5 of the 1998 law to Lay Down Guidelines For Education in Cameroon prescribes the teaching of national languages (Tambo, 2003) and so teachers could go beyond bilingualism in terms of the two official languages to multilingualism. Language is an aspect of culture and when a teacher is bilingual or multilingual he/she can better handle diversity in the classroom.

However, it takes more that culture to equip teachers with competencies. Since the barrier of teacher attitude towards inclusive education is minimal, knowledge about children with special education needs should be passed on to teachers through pre- and in-service training. This is important in improving their self-efficacy in implementing inclusive education (Alkhatteeb, 2002). Teachers should be encouraged to carry out action research to individually identify their personal knowledge gaps on inclusive education. This will help them know strategies that have worked elsewhere thus reducing some anxieties. Also, teachers should make adaptations where necessary. The government should identify and put in place the necessary human and material resources for inclusive education. Special educators as well as
experts must be trained to diagnose the different forms of disability and work in collaboration with the general classroom teacher. Also, a number of pilot schools should be identified and teachers in the pilot schools may act as resource persons in other schools by sharing their experiences on successful strategies.

References


