

# Teachers' Willingness and the Inclusion of Pupils with Hearing Impairment in Regular Primary Schools in Cameroon

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## ABSTRACT

The study examined teachers' willingness and the inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment in regular primary schools in Cameroon. The objective that guided the study was transformed into a hypothesis namely; to find if there was a significant effect of teachers' willingness on the inclusion of pupils with Hearing Impairment in primary schools in Cameroon. The study was a survey which made use of mixed methods. Participants constituted 318 regular primary school teachers of public, mission and lay private primary schools in six regions of Cameroon. Data were collected using a questionnaire and a structured interview guide. Validity and reliability were established and reliability analysis stood at 0.83. Data were analyzed quantitatively using the Pearson Moment Correlation statistical tool, while data from the interview were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between teachers' willingness and the inclusion of the hearing impaired pupils, with the value  $R=0.721$ . The study recommends that policy makers and stakeholders should further enhance teachers' willingness by training teachers on issues about inclusion of Hearing Impairment pupils and create more sensitization through seminar and workshops to increase awareness.

**KEYWORDS:** Teachers' Willingness, Inclusion, Hearing Impairment, Regular Primary Schools, Cameroon

## INTRODUCTION

Education for children with hearing impairment addresses their differences and individual needs. This process involves individually planned and systematic instruction, designed to help pupils achieve a higher level of success in the school and community (Lyonga, 2016). A number of countries have organizations to aid pupils living with hearing impairment and focus on training teachers to teach these pupils using a variety of approaches. Changes in recent years in the field of special education have significantly influenced the education of individuals living with hearing impairment. The movement against segregation and towards integration and most recently inclusion, have created the conditions for educational changes in regular schools (Lambropoulou and Vlaishou, 2003). Regulations in Cameroon permit pupils with disability including the hearing impaired to attend regular schools. Yet it is not known if teachers who are the key actors in implementing these regulations are willing to include pupils with hearing impairment in their classrooms. This is important in making predictions and enhancing the success of implementing these regulations.

## Background

Over the last two decades, many organizations and governments around the world have demonstrated a great interest in the inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment and other groups with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in regular schools. Hearing impairment (HI) is an umbrella

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term that embodies the deaf and the hard of hearing. "Deaf," when capitalized means those who are severely or profoundly H.I and use sign language as their main means of communication, while "deaf," with a small "d" refers to those with mild or moderate loss who can communicate through a total communication or oral approach (Bakia, 2016). The difference is that the former concept represents a Deaf Community which has shared values, views and history and whose first language is sign language. In Cameroon, the hearing impaired are classified as deaf and hard of hearing, based on the severity of their hearing loss.

The right to education is stated clearly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO, 1946). "Everyone has a right to education" the participants in the world conference on Education for All reaffirmed the right to education, particularly basic education. In the Cameroon context, the education of pupils with hearing impairment has come a long way. Before the education of the hearing impaired in regular schools, most of these children were denied their basic rights especially the rights to go to school in spite of global movements towards the universalization of access to schooling for all children. This was expressed at the World Conference on education for all, in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, the Salamanca conference on special needs education, Spain in 1994 and in the Millennium Development Goals (2000).

Yuh&Shey (2005) report that education for the hearing impaired began in an informal setting especially in the family circles where some parents and family members of persons with disabilities tried to teach their children life skills, for example showing the hearing impaired child how to make signs when communicating in the early days in Cameroon. Formal education for the H.I was done mostly in specialized centres with very few attending regular primary schools. The first centre created in 1972 was called "Ecole Specialisee pour Enfant Reficients Audit if-ESEDA (Special School for Children with Deafness), Yaoundé. This centre was run and managed by religious groups and parents of children with special needs.

Cameroon law N° 83/13, of July 1983 provides for the needs and protection of individuals with disabilities with major provisions on either their inclusion in regular schools, admission into special classes, and admission into specialised institutions. As of 2003, only very few institutions of the deaf and hard of hearing existed in Cameroon that served the needs of pupils with hearing impairment (Yuh and Shey, 2003) and so the access to regular schools was supposed to provide some kind of relief for parents of children with HI.

However, the academic difficulties confronted by pupils even when they have access to support services include the fact that, hearing impaired pupils who rely on interpreters were unable to participate fully in class discussions, because it normally takes the teacher 5 to 10 seconds to sign what the s/he has said. This time delay does not provide the hearing impaired pupil sufficient time to engage in the class discussion before the teacher calls on other pupils or move to another topic. Hearing impaired pupils who rely on lip reading encounter problems and difficulties when they cannot see the teacher's lip which may be covered with a moustache, or a teacher holding his/her paper to close to their faces or turning their faces away to write on the chalkboard. According to the Africa Disability Right Yearbook (2013), before 2008, concerns for the needs of disabled persons in the school environment began to be formally recognized when Law No. 83/013 of 21<sup>st</sup> July 1983 provided for the protection of disabled persons including the hearing impaired and decree No. 90/1516 of 26<sup>th</sup> November 1990 laid down the conditions for its implementation.

Endeley (2010), asserts that, following the 1983 Presidential decree, other regulations were introduced, mainly through the initiative of the Ministry of Social Affairs in collaboration with the Ministries of Primary, Secondary and Higher Education. In this respect, the following circulars have been cited: Joint Circular No. 34/06/LC/MINBAS/MINAS of 2 August 2006 relating to the admission of disabled children (including the hearing impaired) and children born of needy disabled parents into government Primary educational establishments; Joint circular No. 283/07/LC/MINESEC/MINAS of 14 August 2007 relating to the identification of disabled children (hearing impaired) and children born of needy disabled parents enrolled in government primary schools and their participation in official examinations; Joint Circular No. 08/0006/JC/MINESUP/ MINAS of July 2008, relating to strengthening the improvement of accommodation and supervision of conditions of disabled and vulnerable pupils in Cameroon Schools. These regulations permit special needs children to attend regular schools, yet teachers have not been trained and do not have the resources to teach pupils

with hearing impairment. Therefore, given the above circumstances, it is important to investigate if teachers are willing to teach pupils with hearing impairment, because their responses may constitute the basis for a professional development programme for teachers in order to make inclusion more effective.

### Review of Literature

Theoretically, willingness is influenced by one's sense of self-efficacy. The "Self-efficacy" theory was propounded by Bandura in 1977. He defined self-efficacy as the belief that one has of one's capabilities to successfully organize and execute a desired course of action or given task. He maintained that self-efficacy beliefs, or perception of ability, are often the strongest predictor of resultant behaviour, even more so than one's actual ability. Individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy have been found to take on challenging tasks willingly, show increased persistence, exert greater effort, have lower anxiety, self-evaluate their academic performance accurately and self-regulate better than others (Bandura and Schunk, 1981). Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy are open to new ideas and are willing to experiment with and apply new strategies to meet pupils needs (Stein & Wang, 1988). Generally, teachers with high efficacy beliefs think that they can influence pupils learning, even when faced with pupils who may be more challenging to teach. Those teachers are less critical of pupils, show more persistence in working with low achieving pupils and are less likely to refer pupils to special education.

The self – efficacy theory, defines how people think, feel, and motivate themselves to succeed (Bandura, 1994). In addition, self-efficacy beliefs constitute one major part of social cognitive theory and refer to one's confidence engaging in specific activities that would lead to the fulfilment of particular goals (Bandura, 1994). Findings have shown that self- efficacy beliefs can help predict behaviours such as those related to whether one will engage, persevere, and accomplish one's goals (Bandura, 1994). This research intends to investigate the effects of teachers' willingness on the inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment. This is an indicator of teachers' self-efficacy and based on that teachers can be helped through training.

### Teacher's Willingness to Teach with Pupils with Hearing Impairment

Current literature in other contexts suggests teachers' willingness to teach or work with children with disabilities especially H.I. Self-confidence and/or willingness to work with pupils with hearing impairment presumably is a key factor affecting regular school teachers' attitudes. Obi and Eyang (2008) investigated teachers' attitudes about including pupils with H.I. into the regular school. More specially, they analysed the way teachers mentally accept this form of education for pupils with physical or emotional needs, or sensory disabilities. Obi and Eyang's (2008) findings suggest primary school teachers were more willing to integrate pupils with H.I.; believed that children with H.I. are capable of becoming useful members of society; believed that regular schools should educate children with exceptionality. Koutrouba (2006) continues by saying that the willingness of regular classroom teachers to accommodate children with H.I. in their classes has limitations, which are clearly listed in the literature. However teachers' levels of self-confidence seem to be an essential factor in accepting pupils with H.I., be it physical or emotional.

Teachers' willingness to work with pupils with hearing impairment in the regular school context are not clear-cut; there have always been gray areas. This could be because regular classroom teachers have viewed the inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment in a numbers of ways. Some teachers see inclusion as a large mandate requiring blanket acceptance, while others think inclusion is disruptive to the educational process, particularly for pupils with higher abilities and levels of intelligence (Brophy & Good, 1974; Hamdan, 1980; Guskin & Spicker, 1968 Jordan, 1971; Sattler, 1977). At the heart of this investigation is a desire to know whether the Cameroonian teachers' attitudes are more similar to the first or the second group. Cameroonian teachers should be compared to their colleagues in the United States and Europe with regard to their belief that children with H.I. will misbehave and disturb a schools routine (Akoson & Cheda 2009).

### Statement of the problem

Even though regulations in Cameroon permit pupils with disabilities to attend regular schools, some categories of disabilities including hearing impairment are rarely found in regular schools in Cameroon. Studies on disabilities reveal that disabilities like hearing impairment are major challenges in most regular primary schools especially in developing countries, where pupils exhibit repetition and failure in class and national examinations. Pupils exhibit difficulties to read and write and do not achieve compared to their hearing peers in schools. These pupils suffer because they have limited vocabulary and they are termed difficult to teach by their teachers. If attention is not paid to this phenomenon persons with hearing impairment may never be able to contribute to societal development and even take care of themselves. Amongst other factors that may account for this, teachers' willingness to teach pupils with hearing impairment needs to be investigated because they play a

significant role in the success of inclusion. Their level of willingness may indicate their concerns. Thus the study set out to investigate teachers' willingness towards the inclusion of pupils with disabilities in primary schools in Cameroon. Findings may inform policy makers and stakeholders on how to enhance inclusion.

### Research Question

- How does teachers' willingness affect the inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment in regular primary school?

### Hypothesis

- Teachers' willingness has no significant effect on the inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment in regular primary schools in Cameroon

### Methodology

This study adopted a survey design, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative techniques in gathering data. The population of this study comprised of all public, denominational, private and lay private regular primary school teachers in Cameroon from which 318 primary school teachers from six regions in Cameroon, namely the South West, North West, Littoral, Centre, West and Far North Regions were purposively selected to participate in the study. A questionnaire with 9 items (including closed and open-ended items) and an interview guide were used to collect data about teachers' willingness in teaching pupils with hearing impairment. The interviews guide contained seven itemson the concepts of inclusion and willingness. Descriptive statistics by way of thematic analysis were used in analyzing data from interviews and the open-ended items on the questionnaire, while the Pearson Moment Correlation statistical tool was used to analyze data from the questionnaire.

## Findings and Discussion

**Table 1: Teachers' willingness to teach pupils with hearing impairment**

	Agreed	Disagreed	Uncertain
Inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment is a good educational practice	252 (79.2%)	54 (17.0%)	12 (03.8%)
I have identified learners with hearing impairment in my class	214 (67.3%)	74 (23.3%)	30 (09.4%)
I act on teaching methods appropriate for pupils with hearings impairment	80 (25.2%)	136 (42.8%)	102 (32.1%)
I act on instructional materials appropriate for teaching pupils with hearing impairment.	158 (49.7%)	59 (18.6%)	101 (31.8%)
I am aware of government regulations permitting children with disabilities to be taught in regular schools	134 (42.1%)	103 (32.4%)	81 (25.5%)
I act on the advantages of teaching pupils with hearing impairment together with regular pupils	109 (34.3%)	71 (22.3%)	138 (43.4%)
The teaching of children with hearing impairment will be more effective with the collaboration of a special educator.	192 (60.4%)	110 (34.6%)	16 (5.0%)
Regular class teacher's professionals skills are limited to teach pupilswith hearing impaired*	283 (89.0%)	31 (9.7%)	04 (01.3%)
Children with hearing impairment need more attention	279 (87.7%)	29 (9.1%)	10 (03.1%)
<b>MRS</b>	<b>1441 (50.3%)</b>	<b>842 (29.4%)</b>	<b>579 (20.2%)</b>

\*MRS: Reversed conceptual polarity;  $N_{cases}=318$ ;  $N_{responses}=2862$

The findings on Table 1 above indicate that majority (79.2%) respondents agreed that inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment is a good educational practice. Still majority (67.3%) respondents indicated that they have identified learners with hearing impairment in class while some (23.3%) disagreed. However some (25.2%) respondents agreed that they act on teaching methods appropriate for pupils with hearing impairment while most (42.8%) disagreed. Again, almost half (49.7%) respondents agreed that they act on instructional materials appropriate for teaching pupils with hearing impairment.

Moreso, most (42.1%) respondents agreed that they were aware of government regulations permitting children with disabilities to be taught in regular schools while some (32.4%) disagreed. Furthermore some (34.3%) respondents agreed they

act on the advantages of teaching pupils with hearing impairment together with regular pupils while some (22.3%) disagreed while most (43.4%) respondents were uncertain. Likewise majority (60.4%) respondents agreed that the teaching of children with hearing impairment is more effective with the collaboration of a special educator while some (34.6%) disagreed.

Similarly, majority (89%) respondents agreed that regular class teachers professional skills were limited to teach pupils with hearing impairment while very few (9.7%) disagreed. Additionally majority (87.7%) respondents agreed that children with hearing impairment need more attention while very few (9.1%) disagreed. The multiple response set revealed that slightly above half (50.3%) respondents agreed that teachers were willing to teach pupils with hearing impairment while some (29.4%) disagreed.

**Table 2: Thematic analysis depicting willingness of Cameroonian regular teachers to include pupils with hearing impairment in regular schools**

Code	Code description	Quotations
Perceive importance	The rational perception that it is important to teach these pupils in an integrated setting whereby they will be mixed up with their normal peers, as to reduce stigmatization and their social integration	"...It enables teachers to teach all learners such that they can acquire knowledge and skills and it would enable them to adapt to their environment."
Acceptance in class	The perception that the fact that teachers accept them in class is an expression of willingness to teach them, this is also stated by the regulations in forced.	"Well! I will say it is good, positive attitude because they accept them in class"
Social inclusion	The perception that inclusive education helps these children to be amid their normal peers, their normal peer get use to them, they learn how to interact each other, and this then facilitate their integration.	"Yes but you know that they are difficult to teach." "Well at times they complain, they say they should send them to special school but for social reasons they like them to be in the same school with their peers so that they can interact, they can socialize, they can gain other things that other children have but if they are left in segregated school they will have an inferiority complex."
Equality	The perception that inclusive education makes other children to perceive their peer with impairment as equal and also potential social contributors, and helps those with impairment not to develop complex of inferiority.	"...they can gain other things that other children have but if they are left in segregated school they will have an inferiority complex."
Knowledgeable	The fact that people have endeavoured acquiring knowledge on inclusion education is also an indicator that they are willing to cope with inclusive requirements.	"Inclusive education simply is teaching that involves all groups of children together, in fact that integrates disabled children, children with impairment, and others, all kind of children, Pupils; Hearing impairment is the inability for the learner not to hear well, some don't even hear at all." "Inclusive education talks about the education where we include both the normal children and the disable"

Findings from interviews further revealed that regular school teachers are willing to integrate learners with hearing impairment in their classrooms as they perceive it is important, they accept the learners in class, perceive inclusion as social inclusion, equality and indicate respondents are willing to acquire knowledge and skills on the practice as indicated on Table 2 above. Interviewees reiterated that inclusion enables teachers to curb inequality and stigmatization and foster the social integration of pupils with hearing impairment as presented below.

Head teachers stated that inclusive education is important because it provides opportunities for all the children to be in the same learning environment. A head teacher reiterated that "...It enables teachers to teach all learners such that they can acquire knowledge and skills and it enables them to adapt to their environment."

Interviewees pointed out that inclusive education provides opportunities to foster equality as pupils with hearing impairment are integrated in primary schools. Thus inclusive education makes other children to perceive their peers with impairment as equals and also potential social contributors, and helps those with impairment not to develop complex of inferiority. A head teacher explained that "...children with hearing impairment can gain other things that other children have and if they are left in segregated schools they will suffer from inferiority complex".

Furthermore interviewees indicated that inclusion helps these children to be amid their normal peers, it enables normal peers to get use to them, learn how to interact with each other, and it facilitates their inclusion. A head teacher, emphasized that "...although there are difficulties to teach children with hearing impairment, inclusion helps them to learn like other children and equally be accepted."

Also interviews revealed that children with hearing impairment through inclusion are accepted in class by their teachers and it is an expression of willingness to teach them. This is evident as a head teacher stated that "...Well! I will say it is good and a positive attitude because they accept them in class." Similarly, interviews pointed out that inclusive education has provided an

opportunity for people to acquire knowledge on inclusive education is an indicator that they are willing to cope with inclusion requirements. Many teachers could give the correct definition of inclusion education. A head teacher defined inclusion as "...Inclusive education simply is teaching which involves all groups of children together, in fact that integrates disabled children, children with impairment, and others, all kind of children, Pupils; Hearing impairment is the inability for the learner not to hear well, some don't even hear at all."

Research hypothesis: **Teachers willingness has no significant effect on the inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment in primary schools**

To further determine the effect of teachers willingness to accept inclusion the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was computed to ascertain the effect of teachers willingness on inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment in primary schools as indicated on table 5 below.

**Table 3: Perceived effect of teachers' willingness to inclusion on the integration of pupils with hearing impairment in primary schools**

		Teachers willingness	Inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment
Teachers willingness	Pearson Correlation	1	.721**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	318	318
Inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment	Pearson Correlation	.721**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	318	318

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From Table 3 above the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $R = 0.721$ ,  $P=0.05$ ) indicates that there is a significant, positive and strong relationship between teachers willingness and inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment in primary schools. The positive sign of the relationship ( $R = 0.721^*$ ) implies that teachers willingness to inclusion influences the integration of pupils with hearing impairment in primary schools. Therefore, the null hypothesis that state there teachers willingness to inclusion has no significant effect on the inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment in primary schools was rejected while the alternative hypothesis was accepted which states that there is a significant effect of teachers willingness to inclusion and the inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment.

The findings revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between the teachers' willingness and the inclusion of pupils with hearing impairment in regular primary schools. This finding complements that of the interview. This implies that if teachers are willing to include pupils with hearing impairment in their classrooms, pupils with hearing impairment in primary schools would be effectively integrated in regular schools. Teachers' self-efficacy with regard to including pupils with hearing impairment is positive in spite of a few concerns. This provides a fertile ground for the inclusion of pupils with HI to be effective if the environment is conducive.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were made: There is a fertile ground for an effective implementation of the inclusion of the hearing impaired in regular primary schools in Cameroon. Teachers are willing and so must be supported to succeed. The findings of the study contradicted prior research which found no significant relationship between teacher willingness and the inclusion of pupils with disabilities in primary schools but was in line with that of Obi and Eyang (2008). Based on the self-efficacy theory one can conclude that teachers have confidence to teach the HI if they are given enough support. Based on this the following recommendations are proposed: In order to encourage teachers' willingness to teach pupils with HI, resources should be made available in schools. Teachers should also receive regular training on the teaching of pupils with HI and should engage in lifelong learning or personal research to upgrade themselves. Other stakeholders of education should provide community resources to help the school in this endeavor. With these efforts there is a future in teaching pupils with HI in primary schools in Cameroon.

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