

Pupils' Perception of the Implementation of Inclusive Education in the Littoral Region of Cameroon

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Abstract

This paper investigated the perception of pupils on the implementation of the inclusive education pilot project in the Littoral Region of Cameroon. Three research questions were formulated in order to provide answers to the phenomenon under study. A descriptive survey research design was used in the study with a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative procedures. The main sampling strategies used in the study was purposive and convenience. The institutional sample in this study was five (5) primary schools selected from all Divisions of the Littoral Region of Cameroon. Sixty (60) pupils were used as respondents. The main research instruments used for data collection were a questionnaire and an interview guide. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data while content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. The findings of the study indicate that pupils were generally satisfied with facilities provided to them by the schools.

Key Words: Pupils' Perception, Inclusive Education, Inclusive Pilot Schools

Introduction

With the adoption of the Cameroon's New Education Sector Strategy (2010-2020), the Ministries of Education, in collaboration with national and international partners are giving considerable attention to making the Cameroon school curriculum as friendly as possible for all learners. Sightsavers, Cameroon, an international non-governmental organization is in the forefront of this challenge and has provided remarkable initiative and leadership in terms of resource mobilization, in-service teacher training and advocacy (Tambo, 2014). Following recommendations of a study conducted by Tchombe, Shey, Lo-oh and Nsagha (2012) on situational analysis on policies, practices and barriers to inclusive education in the Primary Education Sector in Cameroon, Sightsavers commissioned a review of the Cameroon's primary school curriculum. This review was followed by the organization, in collaboration with the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education, of a workshop in Ebolowa from the 18 to 20 December 2013 to develop an operational plan for putting in place a pilot project on inclusive education in selected primary schools in Cameroon.

Literature

In line with this paper, it is imperative to draw a conceptual map on Cameroon's efforts to educate children with special education needs in regular schools. Thus literature review is based principally on policies and institutional Developments on Inclusive Education in Cameroon. It was also deemed important to look at some empirical works that have been carried out on pupils' perceptions on inclusive practices.

Policies and Institutional Developments on Inclusive Education in Cameroon

All children have the right to learn, as set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to which virtually all governments in the world including Cameroon have ratified. Moreover, all children can learn, without regard to their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. This includes children with disabilities and the gifted and talented; street and working children; children of remote or nomadic populations; children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities; children affected by HIV/AIDS; and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups. Furthermore, while all children can learn, they may not all learn the same things at the same time, and with the same results, but this is completely normal and acceptable.

In order to take care of this challenge, it is generally agreed that schools need strong inclusive policies and philosophies that support the right of all children to participate in an inclusive way (Special Education Review Committee, 2000; Lupart and Webber, 2002; Bunch, 1999). According to Raymond (1995) the tenets of a positive inclusive philosophy include the fact that every learner has the right to participate in all aspects of school life. In addition, a Saskatchewan report (1996) states that inclusion exceeds the meager idea of physical placement and assimilates the basic values of participation, friendship and interaction. In line with these, we find that African governments in response to global initiatives, have undertaken measures to ensure the educational rights of children irrespective of disabilities.

The main innovation worth mentioning is the adoption, in August 2009, of the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP). It is one of the documents of the shared vision of Cameroon Development by 2035 (Vision 2035), and covers its first ten years. Thus, GESP focuses on accelerating growth, creating formal jobs and reducing poverty. GESP aims at increasing the average growth rate to 5.5% annually between 2010-2020; reduce underemployment from 75.8% to at least 50% by 2020 with the creation of tens of thousands of formal jobs per annum in the next ten years; and reduce the monetary poverty rate from 39.9% in 2007 to 28.7% by 2020. In this light, the Government intends to accelerate ongoing reforms and then take all necessary measures, so that the improved economic performance is thus translated into concrete results in terms of job creation, poverty reduction, and tangible improvement on the people's living conditions, with particular emphasis on women and persons with disabilities.

With this innovation, Cameroon has recently made considerable progress in the area of economic and social rights, by adopting measures to protect and empower persons with disabilities especially in the area of education.

On 1 October 2008, Cameroon signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Within the framework of harmonising national laws with this new international legal instrument, the President of the Republic of Cameroon enacted Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and empowerment of persons with disabilities. This Law focuses on the prevention of disabilities, rehabilitation and psychological, social and economic insertion of persons with disabilities and the promotion of national solidarity for persons with disabilities. This Law therefore repeals previous provisions, particularly, those of Law No. 83/013 of 21 July 1983 on the protection of persons with disabilities. Circular letter No. 86/L/1656/MINEDUC/CTZ of January 1986 instructs school administrators to facilitate the admission of children with disabilities in

ordinary schools. This may be difficult with severe cases of disability if the school is not equipped to cater for these needs.

Highlights from decree No 90/1516 of 26 November 1990 addressed the modalities for applying this law as stipulated in article one (1) that “the education of handicapped children and adolescents is assured in the regular schools and in centers for special education.” Article 2 of the same decree says precisely that “children with hard of hearing, visual impairment and mental disabilities will benefit from special education that will permit them to register in regular school”. This approach addresses the integration model. The Law also lays down conditions for implementing the 1983 Presidential Decree that grants certain privileges to children with disabilities amongst which are an age waiver, the right to repeat, financial support and others. Children with special needs with exception of those with disabilities (poverty, orphans, street children etc) do not benefit from this decree directly, even though these categories of children are equally vulnerable to exclusion from education.

In spite of these good intentions for the education of persons with special needs, Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 laid down guidelines for education in Cameroon, grants equal opportunities without discrimination of gender, political, philosophical and religious opinion, socio-cultural, linguistic or geographical origin. The only short coming in this law is that no mention is made of persons with disabilities. Furthermore at no point in time has any of the decrees and laws mentioned the training of teachers nor the curriculum to respond to the needs of inclusion.

Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities came to strengthen the requirement to reinforce the need to include the disability approach in all projects of construction of infrastructure and buildings open to the public. Sanctions, including criminal sanctions are provided for to that effect.

In the area of prevention, the following could be noted:

- guaranteeing free primary education, recruiting and training teachers, constructing and equipping schools, and creating education-priority areas in the Eastern and three Northern Regions are all in a bid to boost the enrolment rate and reduce, by extension, child exploitation.
- encouraging girl child education especially girls with disabilities as much as that of the boy. In June 2004, Cameroon, in collaboration with many NGOs launched campaigns to issue birth certificates to the children of the Centre and North Regions who did not have them, thereby enabling these children to enrol in schools.
- adoption and implementation of the National Education Programme on Human Rights by the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF) in the Basic and Secondary levels of education. This programme is aimed at educating the citizens on their rights and, consequently, reducing child exploitation.

Pupils’ Perceptions of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education involves several stakeholders, not least of which are pupils with special needs and their peers without disabilities. A question like what are their perceptions of inclusive education is usually asked by stakeholders and researchers of inclusive education in order to understand pupils’ opinions on inclusive education. Klinger & Vaughn (1999) presented a synthesis of 20 US studies of programmes involving students with high incidence disabilities in settings ranging from kindergarten to grade 12. The consensus of the findings is that those with and without disabilities

wanted the same activities, books, homework, grading criteria and grouping practices. Both groups recognised that since not everyone learns in the same way or at the same speed, teachers should slow down instruction when necessary, explain concepts more clearly, and teach learning strategies.

A recent New Zealand study by Hornby (2010) challenged the assumption that inclusive education is applicable to all students with special education needs, irrespective of their degree of disability. He studied former students of two special schools – one for students with learning disabilities and the other for students with behavioural difficulties - who had been re-integrated into mainstream schools for the last few years of their schooling. The results indicated that many of the students subsequently exhibited limited inclusion in their communities in terms of low levels of employment, education and community adjustment. The students also reported mainly positive experiences regarding their time in special schools or units and mainly negative experiences in mainstream classes. Hornby (2010) attributed these findings, in part at least, to the goals of education for the last few years of schooling being focused on academic attainments, when vocational, social and life skills may have been more useful in assisting the students with special education needs to make successful transitions to adult life.

The Problem

Although neither in the structure and functioning of the Ministry of Basic Education nor in the basic educational legislation in Cameroon is there any discrimination against particular groups of learners, such as children with disabilities, in practice such discrimination exists. Responsibility for the provision of education at the nursery and primary levels is split between the Ministry of Basic Education, which has responsibility for the regular schools, on the one hand, and the Ministry of Social Affairs, on the other, which has responsibility for special education centers. Government perspectives on this issue aim at the equalization of opportunity as a master principle in the training of educational personnel at the same time as advocacy for inclusive school develops and a revised legislative and regulatory framework is being produced. From all indications, there is no clear cut legal frame guiding the education of children with special needs in regular schools. The curriculum of teacher training colleges in Cameroon does not have courses in special or inclusive education. Children with special educational needs in regular schools in Cameroon are abandoned to themselves because a majority of teachers lack the necessarily skills required to take care of the needs of these category of learners. It is against this backdrop that a study on pupils' perception of the implementation of inclusive education in the Littoral Region of Cameroon was carried out.

Main Research Question

The main research question of this study was: what is the perception of pupils on the implementation of the inclusive pilot project in the Littoral Region of Cameroon?

The specific research questions included:

- What are pupils' levels of satisfaction of inclusive facilities in pilot schools in the Littoral Region of Cameroon?
- What are the types of services expected by pupils to receive in schools?
- How are changes in teaching and the environment perceived by children with and those without disabilities?

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive survey research design was used in the study with a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative procedures to investigate pupils' perception of inclusive education practices in the Littoral Region of Cameroon. For data collection the study employed methodological triangulation approaches which involved the use of a questionnaire and an interview guide.

Sample and sampling procedure

The main sampling strategies used in the study was purposive. The institutional sample was five (5) primary schools selected from all Divisions of the Littoral Region of Cameroon. The schools selected were: Ecole Publique Inclusive Baressoumtou in the Moungo Division, Ecole Publique Inclusive Bonadissake in the Nkam Division, Ecole Publique Inclusive Edea Centre in the Sanaga Maritime Division, Ecole Publique Inclusive Bali Group I, and Ecole Publique Inclusive New Town Group IV in the Wouri Division. The human sample of the study was made up of 30 children with disabilities and 30 children without disabilities giving a total of 60.

Instrumentation for data collection

The comprehensive documentary review of inclusive education policies, programmes and practices in Cameroon offered insight into policy issues. In this wise, state policies and legislation were reviewed in order to establish perspectives or indicators for effective inclusive practices in Cameroon's education system. This desk study analyses facilitated the development of two instruments (a questionnaire and an interviews guides) used for data collection.

Method of data analyses

A triangulation of quantitative and qualitative techniques of analysis was used to analyse the data. In this respect, descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data while content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. Interviews responses were analyzed using the process of thematic analysis whereby concepts or ideas were grouped under umbrella terms or key words. As for the quantitative data, a pre-designed EpiData Version 3.1 (EpiData Association, Odense Denmark, 2008) database which has in-built consistency and validation checks was used to enter the data. Further consistency, data range and validation checks were also performed in SPSS version 17.0 to identify invalid codes. The association between categorical variables was appraised using the Cramer's V test. For instance, this test was used to appraise whether pupils appreciation of inclusive practices was dependent on the different categories of pupils (children without disabilities and children with disabilities). Data were presented using frequency tables, charts, and code-grounding-quotation tables.

Presentation of Findings

Sample description

Five (05) inclusive pilot schools were used in the study namely Ecole Publique Inclusive Baressoumtou in the Moungo Division, Ecole Publique Inclusive Bonadissake in the Nkam Division, Ecole Publique Inclusive Edea Centre in the Sanaga Maritime Division, Ecole Publique Inclusive Bali Group I, and Ecole Publique Inclusive New Town Group IV in the Wouri Division.

Pupils' characteristics**Table 1: Pupils' characteristics**

Categories	%(n)	Class	%(n)	Type of impairment	%(n)
Children with disabilities	50.0% (30)	1	20.0% (12)	Hearing problems	9.0% (2)
Children without disabilities	50.0% (30)	2	20.0% (12)	Physical impairment, poor development of fine motor skills	11.0% (3)
Gender		3	13.3% (8)	Speech disorder	15.0% (5)
Male	36.7% (22)	4	13.3% (8)	Intellectual/mental impairment	11.0% (3)
Female	63.3% (38)	5	6.7% (4)	Visual impairment	45.0% (15)
Age	Mean=10.60 Median=11.5 Min=6 Max=17	6	26.7% (16)	Multiple disabilities	9.0% (2)

Both pupils with disabilities and those without disabilities were used in the study with equal weights, whereby 50.0% (30) were from each of the above categories. The female pupils were more represented with a proportion of 63.3% (38) as compared to 36.7% (22) for the male. As for the age, the youngest pupil was aged 6 years, the oldest 17 years. The mean age was 10.6 years, and the median was 11.5 years. All the classes were represented as the pupils were from class 1 to class 6.

Pupils level of Satisfaction with Facilities provided by the Schools

Table 2: pupils' levels of satisfaction of inclusive facilities in pilot schools in the Littoral Region of Cameroon

School Programmes	Stretched					Collapse		N
	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Highly Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Undecided	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	
Satisfy with Classrooms	26.7%(16)	70.0%(42)	3.3%(2)	0.0%(0)	0.0%(0)	96.7%(58)	3.3%(2)	60
Satisfy with Toilet facilities	10.0%(6)	76.7%(46)	6.7%(4)	0.0%(0)	6.7%(4)	86.7%(52)	13.3%(8)	60
Satisfy with offices	23.3%(14)	76.7%(46)	0.0%(0)	0.0%(0)	0.0%(0)	100%(30)	0%(0.0)	60

Pupils were generally satisfied with their classrooms with a proportion of 96.7% (58). The level of satisfaction with toilet facilities generally stood at 86.7% (52). For school offices, the level of satisfaction recorded was 100% (60).

Types of services expected by pupils to receive in school

Table 3: Existence of services pupils expect to receive in school that they have not been given as perceived by pupils with disabilities and those without disabilities

			Existence of services pupils expect to receive in school that they have not be given		Total
			No	Yes	
Type of pupil	Children with disabilities	N	10	20	30
		%	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
	Children without disabilities	N	22	8	30
		%	73.3%	26.7%	100.0%
Total	N	32	28	60	
	%	53.3%	46.7%	100.0%	

Cramer's V: V=0.401; P=0.028

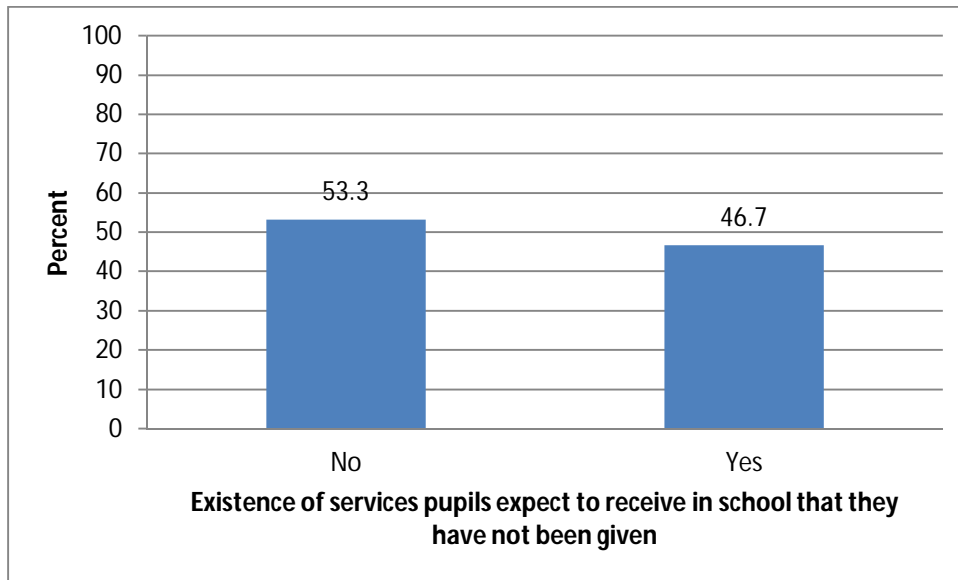


Figure 2: Existence of services pupils expect to receive in school that they have not been given

Table 2 and figure 1 above show that pupils with disabilities were significantly (Cramer's V: $V=0.401$; $P=0.028$) more of the opinion that there exist services they expect to receive in school that they have not been given with a proportion of 66.7% as against 26.7% for those without disabilities.

Open ended response analyses

Children with disabilities' perception of changes in teaching and the environment

Table 4: Changes in teaching and the environment as perceived by children with disabilities

Question	Code	Code Description	Grounding	Quotation
Have you observed any changes in your studies since you came to this school?	Listening	Pupil is able to listen and answer questions in class	2	'Yes because I can listen and answer questions even though I cannot write'
	Ability to spell, read and write	The pupil is now able to read and write unlike before and is also able to spell	10	'Yes because at first I could not read and write but now I can try' 'I could not spell my name before but now I, thanks to the school'
	Interaction	The child freely interacts with others and is able to express his/her feelings	4	'Great changes because I can interact easily and freely with others' 'I have realized very great changes with respect to my studies as I can freely interact and express myself as compared to before'
What is your opinion of your teachers' teaching styles since you came to this school?	No change	The teacher uses the same teaching style as was used before the introduction of inclusive education	4	'Not changed, the teacher explains and writes on the board and since I cannot see I cannot write'
	Assistance	The teacher provides assistance to learners with disability	4	'When the teacher teaches she demonstrates for us to see and also hold my hand to help me write'
	Flexibility	Teachers make use of various teaching styles to facilitate the teaching learning process	6	'Flexible as the teacher makes sure we follow the lesson and are not left behind'
What is your opinion of classroom arrangement since you came to this school?	Well arranged classroom	The classrooms are well arranged for effective inclusion	12	'Good because the benches are well arranged and I sit in front of the class'
What is your opinion of the school environmental modifications since you came to this school?	No modifications made	No modifications have been made to accommodate learners with disabilities	10	'I don't think there has been any change in the environment since I came to this school. As you know, I can see. The school compound has so many stones and this prevents me from moving around. I would also like to play with other children but I am afraid to fall'

Question	Code	Code Description	Grounding	Quotation
	Expression of satisfaction	Pupils express satisfaction on the modifications made to suit people like them	2	'Satisfactory because we have a big field which serves as our play ground'
What is your opinion of the attitude/behavior of teachers towards you since you came to this school?	Positive	Teachers show positive attitude towards children with disabilities and assist them in learning	12	'Good because the teacher always helps me to write' 'Very good; they all love and care for me' 'Very good as they all see me as their friends and are there to help me when need be'
What is your opinion of the attitude/behavior of children without disabilities towards you since you came to this school?	Acceptance	Children without disabilities love and accept those with disabilities	14	'Good because they all show me love since they know I cannot see.' 'Good because we always play together' 'They are all my younger ones and friends and we play together always'
	Learners' supportiveness	Learners without disabilities provide support to those with disabilities	6	'Good because when I want to go and ease myself they help me out'
What is your opinion of the use of specialized materials in the class?	Not available	There is the lack of specialized materials for children with disabilities	6	'None at all. No provision has been made with respect to specialized materials in the class to help us learn well and faster'
	Availability		2	'I have my stylus and Braille papers. The teacher gives me whenever I need them'
Services expected to receive in school that have not been given	Provision of specialized materials	Pupils expect that specialized materials should be provided to facilitate learning	6	'Since I find it difficult to write because I cannot see, I need writing materials for children with visual impairment, that is materials that will aid children with special needs like us to study well'

Children without disabilities' perception of changes in teaching and the environment

Table 5: Changes in teaching and the environment as perceived by children without disabilities

Question	Code	Code Description	Grounding	Quotation
What are the changes you have observed in your school since the inclusion of children with disabilities?	No change	The teacher teaches the same way like before the introduction of inclusive education	4	'I don't see any change because the teacher teaches the same way as before' 'None, because teaching and learning is still going on smoothly'
	More attention paid to children with disabilities	Teachers pay special attention to Children With Disabilities than their peers	2	'The teacher at times pay much attention to the children who cannot see than us' 'It has made the teacher to be slow a bit in her teaching since she takes time to explain to them and I also have to spend time trying to read to them what is written on the board'
	Delay in teaching	Teaching is delayed as the teacher pay more attention to children with disabilities	4	'Not much changes except that we are a bit slow because the teacher stops at times to explain to the pupils with who cannot see thereby making teaching very slow'
	More time to deliver lesson	The teacher uses more time to teach lesson as compared to when children without disabilities were not in class	2	'Great changes because the teacher always takes out time to explain well when teaching so that the visually impaired pupils will understand and I also benefit from that' 'I have observed changes in the way the teacher teaches because she takes out time to explain to us well because of the presence of the visually impaired in our class'
	Acceptance	Children without disabilities accept and are happy with the fact that those with disabilities are with them	1	'I feel happy that they are here because we learn together'
What is your opinion of your teachers' teaching styles since children with disabilities were included in your school?	Good	The teacher teaches well to make sure all the pupils understand and follow up in class	5	'She teaches very well, at times demonstrating the lesson so that we can understand well' 'Our teacher teaches well, she will ask after the lesson if we have understood'
	No change	The teacher uses the same teaching styles as before	14	'It has not changed'

Question	Code	Code Description	Grounding	Quotation
What is your opinion of classroom arrangement since children with disabilities were included in your school?	Comfortable classroom	The classrooms are comfortable enough and clean to accommodate children with disabilities.	28	'Our class is big and good. We all clean it every day in the morning before classes begin' 'Good and well ventilated'
	No change	The classroom is still the same as before the introduction of inclusive education	2	'Our classroom is still the same'
What is your opinion of the school environmental modifications since children with disabilities were included in your school?	No modifications	No modifications have been made to suit children with disabilities	26	'None at all' 'Our school environment has not been changed. Our field and class are still the same'
	Good	The environment is good enough to suit learners with disabilities	4	'Our school environment is good, we have a big field' 'It's better now because they have removed all those blocks that were there before'
What is your opinion of the attitude/behaviour of children with disabilities towards you since they came to this school?	Acceptance/ Interaction	Learners with disabilities love and accept and interact with those without disabilities	28	'Good because we always play together' 'Good because we always interact with each other when we play' 'They are so friendly and they speak so kindly'
	Disturbance	Children with disabilities disturb the teaching learning process	2	'At times when we are in class learning, the child goes off and start saying unnecessary things'
What is your opinion of the use of specialized materials in the class since children with disabilities were included in your school?	Lack of specialized materials	No specialized materials have been provided to suit children with disabilities in the class	18	'I don't see them with any special materials'
Services expected to receive in school that have not been given	Provision of teaching and learning material	Teaching and learning materials should be provided to help facilitate the teaching learning process	8	'Crutches and many devices should be given to those with disabilities so as to help them learn well' 'More materials should be given to my friends to help him learn well'

Discussion

The findings of the study indicate that pupils were generally satisfied with the facilities provided to them by the schools. This ties with a recent survey on children's wellbeing in inclusive schools carried out by Tonon, Mikkelsen, Rodriguez de la Vega and Toscano (2016) in which children gave satisfactory responses on their lives and well being in inclusive schools: With regard to the schools they attend, 70% of the boys and girls declare that they completely agreed that they are heard and taken into account by their teachers, this percentage being higher in the case of the girls. When consulted about whether they like going to school, the general proportions show that half the subjects under study completely agree, with a slightly higher percentage in favour of the girls. On the other hand, 80% of the children express agreement with the treatment they receive from their teachers, the percentage being higher in the case of the boys. Finally, regarding security at school, over 80% state that they feel safe in their educational institutions.

There was statistically enough evidence that pupils with impairment than those without were more of the opinion that there exist services they expect to receive in school that they have not been given. The finding of this study is consistent with the findings of studies conducted by Masimega (1999) and Gaotlhobogwe (2001) in Botswana. They found out that over a period of 10 years, very little was done to provide appropriate resources for learners with disabilities in Botswana. These findings also have been corroborated by other studies in developing countries, including Alur (2002) and Singal (2005, 2006) in India, and Johnstone and Chapman (2009) in Lesotho. These researchers expressed concern about the dearth of resources as one of the challenges for the successful implementation of inclusive education. This important aspect needs to be built into the guidelines for inclusive education.

Findings from qualitative interviews reveal that children with and without disabilities positively perceive changes made in teaching and the environment in their schools. Fullerton and Guardino (2010) in a study on teacher and students' perceptions of a modified inclusion classroom environment found out that overall; modifications have a positive impact on the learning environment. The children had clearly defined group spaces that they used effectively. Although there was an increase in the number of students, the pathways remained clear (could walk without running into things, move between individual and group areas without contacting another student).

Concluding Remarks

This study has shown that when classrooms undergo small changes, meaningful positive perceptions by learners are gained. From the study findings, it is also clearly evident that the social interactions between pupils without disabilities and pupils with disabilities were much better in the five (05) inclusive pilot schools. Not only are the voices of pupils affected by inclusion rarely being heard in research, but there also seems to be an overwhelming lack of research regarding pupils and how they are best served. The research indicated that pupils recognise benefits of inclusive education; however, a number of concerns have been raised that warrant attention. The researcher therefore recommends that more public and private inclusive pilot schools should be established in all regions of Cameroon in order to serve a greater majority of learners with special educational needs.

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