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SKILLS READINESS OF HEAD TEACHERS AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES FOR LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON

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Abstract

This study examined the skills readiness of head teachers and the implementation of inclusive education practices for learners with visual impairments in public primary schools in the North West Region of Cameroon. It was guided by one objective: to find out how ready head teachers are, in terms of skills, to implement inclusive education practices for these learners. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was used. Probability and non-probability sampling techniques were combined to select 78 head teachers from divisions of the region. Data were collected with a questionnaire and an interview guide. Quantitative data were analysed with SPSS version 20 using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation, and interview data were analysed thematically. Across the ten statements on training, an average of 68.3% of respondents disagreed that they or their teachers had been adequately trained, and the grand mean was 2.18 on a four-point scale. Training was positively and significantly correlated with implementation, $r(76) = .42$, $p < .001$, a moderate association that accounts for about 18% of the variance. Interviewees reported that training promised by government had not begun and that learners with severe visual impairments were often not admitted. The study recommends that government and teacher-training institutions make initial training inclusive, provide continuous professional development to serving head teachers and teachers, and supply the materials and devices that national policy already promises.

Keywords:
Skills readiness, head teachers, inclusive education, visual impairments, primary schools, Cameroon.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education rests on the principle that every child has the right to learn alongside peers in an ordinary school, and that the school, not the child, should do the adapting (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994, 2005). The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) describes it as a process

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of systemic reform in content, teaching methods, structures and strategies, and not merely a question of where a child is seated. For learners with visual impairments the reform is concrete. It means Braille, large-print, audio and tactile materials, assistive devices, and teachers who know how to use them. Admission to a mainstream classroom without these supports is placement, not inclusion.

Cameroon's Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities commits the State to education adapted to the learner's condition, specialised teachers and suitable teaching materials (Republic of Cameroon, 2010). Whether these commitments reach classrooms depends largely on people inside schools, and the evidence from Yaoundé is not encouraging. Tanyi (2016b) found that none of the teachers surveyed had been trained to teach children with special needs, and Tanyi (2016a) reported that curriculum and teachers' attitudes significantly shaped how inclusive classrooms were. In the North West Region the problem has an added dimension. Conflict since 2017 has closed or disrupted large numbers of schools, and humanitarian agencies reported that 54% of schools in the North West and South West regions were still closed in 2022–2023 (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2023; see also Yenika, 2024). Schools that remain open do so with stretched staffing and limited outside support, which arguably makes the preparedness of the head teacher more important, not less.

Head teachers sit at the centre of this problem. They administer the school, supervise teachers, mobilise resources and decide, in practice, which learners are admitted and what support they receive. A study in Kenya linked head teachers' support for professional development to the extent of inclusive education implementation (Shiwani et al., 2021), and international work argues that school leaders determine whether inclusive values become routine practice (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; DeMatthews et al., 2020). Leaders can only guide others towards what they themselves understand, which is why leadership preparation is regarded as a lever for improving school practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

Professional preparation matters for another reason. Teaching learners with visual impairments calls for skills in adapting instructional materials, making classroom communication accessible, and using Braille, large print, audio and tactile resources. Evidence reviews identify professional development as a recurring element of successful implementation (Van Mieghem et al., 2020, 2023), and a study in Namibia found that inadequate training, attitudes, resources and curriculum issues together constrained inclusion (Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020). Professional learning tends to work best when it is sustained, tied to teachers' daily work and backed by coaching (Desimone & Pak, 2017).

Despite this, little is known about how ready head teachers in the North West Region are to lead inclusion for learners with visual impairments. Most local and regional studies have surveyed classroom teachers. This study therefore examined head teachers' skills readiness, understood as the training, knowledge and practical competence they report for implementing inclusive education practices for learners with visual impairments, and tested whether training is associated with implementation.

RESEARCH QUESTION, OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESIS

Research question: How are head teachers' skills in inclusion related to the implementation of inclusive education practices for learners with visual impairments in primary schools?

Objective: To find out how ready head teachers are, in terms of skills, to implement inclusive education practices for learners with visual impairments in primary schools.

Hypothesis: $H_0 1$: Training has no significant relationship with the implementation of inclusive education for learners with visual impairments in primary schools. $H_1 1$: Training has a significant positive relationship with the implementation of inclusive education for learners with visual impairments in primary schools.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Teachers' training and professional development

Sustainable inclusion depends on the knowledge and capacity of everyone in the school, starting with its leaders. Ainscow and Sandill (2010) argue that leaders shape the organisational culture in which inclusive values either take root or fade. Teachers, in turn, need to understand how thinking about inclusion has changed, what it now means in their own school, and what it asks of them. That understanding encourages reflection on classroom practice and on how teachers see their pupils (Anderson & Boyle, 2015), and it allows unexamined assumptions about disability to be challenged.

Attitudes and values are necessary but not sufficient. Inclusion is achieved only when principles are turned into daily classroom practice. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) plans lessons from the outset to offer multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression (CAST, 2024). Differentiated instruction adjusts content, process and products to learners' readiness, interests and preferences, and teachers' confidence in using it has been linked to the quality of the professional development they receive (Dixon et al., 2014). Both approaches serve all learners, yet neither removes the need for individual accommodations. A pupil who cannot read print needs Braille, large print or audio texts, and a teacher able to produce and use them. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) describe inclusive pedagogy as extending what is ordinarily available to everyone rather than offering something separate to some learners, and Opertti and Brady (2011) make a similar case for preparing teachers through an inclusive curricular perspective.

The shift away from traditional whole-class teaching is easy to underestimate. Teachers who have not been shown how to differentiate find it hard to build such practices into their routines, and their sense of efficacy grows with good professional development (Dixon et al., 2014). Professional learning for inclusion has also not always been well designed. Avalos (2011), reviewing a decade of research, noted that traditional approaches were criticised for weak evaluation and poor adherence to principles of effectiveness. Features associated with real change include extended duration, expert facilitation and follow-up through mentoring or coaching (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Where resources are tight, a common response is cascade training, in which a few people are trained and then expected to pass on what they learned. The difficulty is that content can be diluted as it passes down the line (Hayes, 2000). For head teachers the implication is

twofold: they need training of their own, and they are expected to create the conditions in which others can learn.

Training also shapes attitudes. Reviews of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion report that experience of working with learners with special needs, and training for it, are associated with more positive attitudes, while teachers who feel unprepared tend to be more reluctant (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; De Boer et al., 2011). A teacher or head teacher who doubts their own competence may therefore resist inclusion, not from hostility but from a reasonable fear of failing the learner. Poorly prepared staff and inaccessible materials can themselves become barriers to learning.

School leaders add a further layer. A review of principal leadership for students with disabilities highlights practices such as building professional capacity and creating supportive organisational conditions (DeMatthews et al., 2020). In Kenya, head teachers' support for staff development was statistically associated with the implementation of inclusive education (Shiwani et al., 2021), and studies of exemplary principal-preparation programmes argue that purposeful preparation produces leaders better able to improve teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

In Cameroon the policy framework is clear on paper. Law No. 2010/002 requires education adapted to the condition of children with disabilities, specialised teachers and suitable materials (Articles 30 and 31), and provides for initial and continuing training of the staff who support them (Article 26) (Republic of Cameroon, 2010). The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) likewise expects states to back inclusion with trained teachers and accessible learning environments. The empirical question is whether school leaders have the skills to turn these provisions into practice.

Theoretical Framework

The Path-Goal Theory of Leader Effectiveness (House, 1971)

The study draws on the path-goal theory of leader effectiveness (House, 1971, 1996). The theory asks how a leader can help subordinates see a clear route to goals they value, and how that route affects their motivation and performance. Its central idea is that a leader is effective when his or her behaviour complements what is missing in the situation. Where the task is unclear, the leader clarifies it; where the work is frustrating, the leader supports; where capacity is lacking, the leader helps to build it. House's original statement identified four leader behaviours: directive, supportive, participative and achievement-oriented. The 1996 reformulation widened the set to include behaviours such as work facilitation, group-oriented decision making and value-based leadership. Which behaviour works best depends on characteristics of the subordinates, such as their ability, and of the environment, such as task structure and the formal authority system.

Applied to schools, the head teacher is the leader and teachers are the subordinates. In an inclusive school the shared goal is that learners with visual impairments participate and learn alongside their peers. A head teacher can clarify what inclusion means in the school and what each teacher is expected to do; supply or request the materials and devices teachers need (work facilitation); arrange coaching and peer support (supportive behaviour); involve teachers, parents and learners in decisions (participative behaviour);

and set and monitor realistic targets for inclusive practice (achievement-oriented behaviour).

Two features of the theory need adapting to Cameroonian public primary schools. First, some accounts stress the leader's power to reward good performance, including through pay. Head teachers in public schools have little control over salaries, so the rewards open to them are of a different kind: recognition, access to training opportunities, workable timetables and visible support. Second, the theory assumes that the leader has the knowledge needed to clarify the path. That assumption is exactly what this study tests.

The theory therefore predicts that head teachers who are well trained will be better placed to clarify paths, facilitate work and support teachers, and that implementation of inclusive practice will be stronger as a result. In the conceptual model guiding the study, training is the independent variable and implementation the dependent variable, with resources, policy support and the security situation as contextual conditions. One limitation should be stated at the outset: the study measured head teachers' reported training and implementation, not their leadership behaviours directly, so the theory serves as an interpretive lens rather than a model tested in full.

Empirical Review

Two studies by Tanyi (2016a, 2016b) are the closest to the present context. In a descriptive survey of 150 personnel from 12 public primary schools in the Yaoundé IV sub-division (Mfoundi, Centre Region), Tanyi (2016a) found that curriculum and teachers' attitudes had a significant impact on inclusive classrooms, whereas infrastructure did not. The study recommended that the curriculum be made more flexible and that teacher training be revised to build the skills needed for handling individual differences. A second survey in regular schools in Yaoundé found negative attitudes among both teachers and learners with special needs, with teachers' attitudes the more negative. Although 90% of the teachers held academic qualifications, only 27% held a professional teaching qualification, and none had been trained to teach children with special needs (Tanyi, 2016b).

In Ghana, Chitiyo et al. (2019) surveyed 232 of 250 invited general and special education teachers (a 93% response rate) in basic and secondary schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis, using convenience, purposeful and random sampling. The teachers felt inadequately prepared to teach students with disabilities, and about 90% rated professional development on the subject as important. Sikanku (2018) surveyed 59 teachers in three inclusive basic schools and reported difficulties linked to class size, the availability of materials and knowledge of how to operate assistive devices, most of which had not been provided. The study recommended in-service training in Braille and large print and a better supply of Brailled textbooks and devices.

In Kenya, Shiwani et al. (2021) surveyed 71 head teachers and 297 teachers, supplemented by document analysis and interviews with eight Quality Assurance Standards Officers and four Education Assessment Resource Centre Officers. A chi-square test showed a relationship between head teachers' support for teachers' professional development and the implementation of inclusive education. Even so, roughly three-quarters to four-fifths of head teachers and teachers lacked specialised skills in assessing diverse learners, managing behaviour and differentiating teaching. This is the study

closest in focus to the present one, since it treats head teachers as respondents and not only as supervisors. Korir (2015) used a case study with questionnaires, focus group discussions and document analysis, involving 200 respondents in secondary schools in Ainamoi Sub-County, Kericho County. Students viewed the integration of learners with visual impairment mostly positively, but teachers' views differed significantly from students', and many teachers reported receiving little sensitisation and lacking the skills to teach these learners.

Mwakyeja (2013) studied four general teachers in a secondary school in southern Tanzania through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The teachers knew little about inclusive education, were not applying what they knew, and cited shortages of both general and special-needs teachers, scarce resources and low commitment as obstacles. Mokaleng and Möwes (2020) surveyed a stratified sample of 90 secondary school teachers in Namibia's Omaheke region and found that implementation was hampered by policy weaknesses, teacher attitudes, lack of training, inadequate support and resources, and curriculum issues. Belay and Yihun (2020) followed a single visually impaired student, Bedlu, through interviews and classroom observation in Ethiopia and concluded that inadequate budget, lack of materials, a shortage of qualified professionals and limited professional development outweighed the opportunities for inclusion.

Taken together, these studies point the same way: where inclusion is attempted, training is thin and the materials needed to teach learners with visual impairments are scarce. Three limits stand out. First, almost all of them surveyed or interviewed classroom teachers, and only Shiwani et al. (2021) included head teachers. Second, most are descriptive, rely on self-report and use small or single-site samples, so their findings cannot easily be generalised. Third, none, to the authors' knowledge, examines head teachers' skills readiness for learners with visual impairments in the North West Region of Cameroon. The present study addresses that gap.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research design

The study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Ivankova et al., 2006). Quantitative data were collected and analysed first. Interviews followed, with the aim of explaining and adding depth to the survey results. The design suits the research question: the survey shows how widespread the training gap is and whether it is related to implementation, while the interviews show how head teachers make sense of it.

Area of the study

The study was carried out in public primary schools in the North West Region of Cameroon, an Anglophone region made up of seven divisions Which include Bui, Momo, Mezam, Menchum, Boyo, Donga-Mantung, Ngoketujia. Data were collected in 2023, when schooling in parts of the region was still affected by insecurity.

Table 1:

Names of Inclusive Primary in the North Wes Region of Cameroon

DIVISION	SCHOOLS	POPULATION
BOYO	I GBS BELO	1
	I GS SONGKA	1
	I GS FUNDONG TOWN	2
	I GBS ATEINILAH	1
BUI	I GS JAKIRI	1
	I GS MVEB	1
	I GS BANDE	1
	I GS TATUM	1
	I GS NKOR	1
	I GS KEYON	1
DONGA MANTUNG	I GBS MISAGE	1
	I GES NDU	1
	I GBPS NKAMBE	2
	I GES NWA	1
MENCHUM	I GES ZHOA	1
	I GES FURU-AWA	1
	I GES MANAKUM GRM	1
	I GS WANENGWEN	1
MEZAM	I GS BOJONG	1
	I GS NAKA	1
	I GS BAMENDA STATION	2
	I GPS ATOUAKOM GRI	2
	I GS NIBUNG	2
	I GS SANTA GRI	1
	I GS BAMBILI	1
MOMO	I GS BATIBO	2
	I GS NGWOKONG	1
	I GS BARAMBA	1
	I GS OSHIE	1

	I GS BIFANG	1
NGOKETUNJIA	I GES BABESSI	1
	I GES BALIKUMBAT	1
	I GPS BAMUNKA 1	2
TOTAL		40

Source: Field survey 2023

Population and sample

The sample consisted of 78 head teachers of public primary schools, selected through a combination of probability and non-probability techniques to select 78 head teachers out of the total population of 80 head teachers. The probality sampling technique used was the random number method which was used to select the schools and elements to be used in the research. Here a table of random numbers was used to select schools from which data was collected, a table of random digits was used to number all the elements in the population and from it a sample was randomly selected. This method was used to eliminate bias and get a sample that is representative of the target population to which findings were generalised. The snow ball was to get to head teachers the researcher and judgmental sampling was used to select those who were considered to have the information needed. The Researcher selected 10 participants for the interview who were able to provide rich descriptions of their experiences and were willing to articulate their experiences, thereby providing information that was rich and able to enrich the researcher's understanding. The researcher also used the crejcie and Morgan table to obtain a smple of 78, which shows that if your target population is up to 80, the sample must be 66 and above.

Instruments

Data were collected with a questionnaire and an interview guide. The questionnaire used a four-point Likert scale (strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1) and included the ten statements on training, made of 10 items shown in Table 1 and 10 items to measure implementation in table 2. The interview guide asked head teachers whether they had been trained for inclusive education and what, in their view, was needed to practise it for learners with visual impairments.

Validity and reliability

Content validity was assessed with the Content Validity Index and the content validity index The was .87, which is acceptable, and internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha. Values of .70 or above are conventionally regarded as acceptable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The reliability coefficient was .83 which is reliable.

Ethical considerations

Before data collection the researcher obtained a formal letter of introduction which was submitted to the head teachers and proprietor of each school before data collection which the purpose and scope of the research. Approval was also sought from the regional delegation of basic before data collection ever began. Each participant also received an informed consent formed which explained the study purpose and what participation

involved. Participants were told that taking part was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time without penalty. The questionnaire did not request, names, signature or any identifying details.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed with SPSS version 20. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations described the responses, and a mean below 2.50, the midpoint of the four-point scale, was read as general disagreement with a statement. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to test the hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance, with composite scores for training and implementation treated as interval-level data, a common practice for summed Likert items (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). Coefficients were interpreted following Schober et al. (2018), who describe values of .40 to .69 as moderate. Interview responses were analysed thematically, in line with the approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

RESULTS

Research question: How are head teachers' skills in inclusion related to the implementation of inclusive education practices for learners with visual impairments in primary schools?

Table 2:

Head teachers' responses on training for inclusive education (N = 78)

No.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	x̄	SD[1]	SA & A	D & SD
1	I understand inclusion of learners with visual impairments in practice	5(6.4%)	24(30.8%)	33(42.3%)	16(20.5%)	2.23	0.85	29(37.2%)	49(62.8%)
2	Teachers have received adequate training in inclusive education[2]	24(30.8%)	6(7.7%)	24(30.8%)	23(29.5%)	2.40	1.22	30(38.5%)	47(60.3%)
3	Continuous professional development takes place regularly to facilitate inclusion[2]	28(35.9%)	8(10.3%)	12(15.4%)	29(37.2%)	2.45	1.32	36(46.2%)	41(52.6%)
4	We have been given skills that can help us integrate learners with visual impairments	22(28.2%)	5(6.4%)	15(19.2%)	36(46.2%)	2.17	1.28	27(34.6%)	51(65.4%)
5	I have sufficient training to teach pupils with special education needs	16(20.5%)	6(7.7%)	22(28.2%)	34(43.6%)	2.05	1.16	22(28.2%)	56(71.8%)
6	I am proficient in operating special devices and equipment used for visually impaired children	15(19.2%)	2(2.6%)	33(42.3%)	28(35.9%)	2.05	1.08	17(21.8%)	61(78.2%)
7	Inclusion of learners with visual impairments is possible because teachers have been trained	15(19.2%)	1(1.3%)	32(41.0%)	30(38.5%)	2.01	1.09	16(20.5%)	62(79.5%)
8	My training on inclusive education has helped me to be more knowledgeable about pupils with diverse educational needs	21(26.9%)	3(3.8%)	25(32.1%)	29(37.2%)	2.21	1.21	24(30.8%)	54(69.2%)
9	Teachers have been given knowledge and skills required to teach pupils with disabilities	10(12.8%)	4(5.1%)	40(51.3%)	24(30.8%)	2.00	0.94	14(17.9%)	64(82.1%)
10	My school is capable of accommodating students with visual impairments because it has inclusive training	22(28.2%)	8(10.3%)	17(21.8%)	31(39.7%)	2.27	1.26	30(38.5%)	48(61.5%)
	AVERAGE					**2.18**	**1.14**	**24.5(31.4%)**	**53.3(68.3%)**

Note. SA = strongly agree (4); A = agree (3); D = disagree (2); SD = strongly disagree (1); x̄ = mean. Percentages are of N = 78. [1]Standard deviation, recalculated from the response frequencies. [2]One missing response (n = 77); mean and standard deviation are based on valid responses. The average row gives the mean of the ten item means, the mean of the ten standard deviations, and the average number of respondents agreeing or disagreeing. Source: Field survey (2023).

Table 2 shows that head teachers rated the training they and their teachers had received poorly. The mean on every statement fell below the 2.50 midpoint, ranging from 2.00 to 2.45, and the grand mean was 2.18. Averaged across the ten statements, 31.4% of respondents agreed and 68.3% disagreed.

Disagreement was strongest on statements about teachers' preparation and practical competence. Sixty-four head teachers (82.1%) disagreed that teachers had been given the knowledge and skills needed to teach pupils with disabilities, 62 (79.5%) that inclusion is possible because teachers have been trained, and 61 (78.2%) that they themselves could operate the special devices and equipment used by learners with visual impairments. Only 22 (28.2%) felt they had sufficient training to teach pupils with special education needs, and fewer than four in ten (29; 37.2%) said they understood inclusion of learners with visual impairments in practice.

The most favourable responses concerned continuing professional development: 36 head teachers (46.2%) agreed that it takes place regularly, although 41 (52.6%) did not. Responses to this statement, and to statements 2, 4 and 10, were polarised. Many respondents chose strongly agree, many chose strongly disagree, and few chose the middle options, which is why the standard deviations reach 1.2 to 1.3. A split of this kind suggests that head teachers' experiences differ sharply, perhaps because some had access to training offered by churches or non-governmental organisations and others had none, but the data cannot test that explanation.

Table3:

Implementation inclusive education for learners with visual impairments in primary schools

SN	STATEMNT	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SDev	SA &A	D&SD
11	Children with visual impairments learn together with those without disabilities	15(19.2%)	42(53.8%)	13(16.7%)	8(10.3%)	2.18	0.86	57(73%)	21(27%)
12	Learners with disabilities have equal opportunities in your school as those with disabilities	4(5.1%)	11(14.1%)	24(30.8%)	39(50.0%)	3.26	0.89	15(19.2%)	63(80.8%)
13	Resources needed for inclusion have already been made available	3(3.8%)	4(5.1%)0	18(23.1%)	53(67.9%)	3.55	0.77	7(8.9%)	71(91%)
14	School building have been modified to enable movement for learners with disabilities	4(5.1%)	6(7.7%)	25(32.1%)	43(55.1%)	3.37	0.84	10(12.8%)	68(87.2%)
15	Teachers have received special need education and training to teach the visually impaired	1(1.3%)	14(17.9%)	23(29.5%)	40(51.3%)	3.31	0.81	15(19.2%)	63(80.8%)
16	Teachers have the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to teach leach learners with visual impairments	1(1.3%)	16(20.5%)	34(43.6%)	27(34.6%)	3.12	0.77	17(21.8%)	61(78.2%)
17	Teaching learning materials to teach learners with visual impairments have been made available	1(1.3%)	9(11.5%)	30(38.5%)	38(48.7%)	3.35	0.74	10(12.8%)	68(87.2%)
18	My school has been provided materials like white cane, magnifying lenses, large print text books, braille writer and papers, teaching aids and hearing aids	20(25.6%)	36(46.2%)	15(19.2%)	7(9.0%)	2.12	0.90	56(71.8%)	22(28.2%)
19	Children with visual impairment receive quality services in our schools	12(15.4%)	43(55.1%)	12(15.4%)	11(14.1%)	2.28	0.90	55(70.5%)	23(29.5%)
20	Learners with visual impairments are included in learning	17(21.8%)	34(43.6%)	19(24.4%)	8(10.3%)	2.23	0.91	51(65.4%)	27(34.7%)
								29.3(37.5%)	48.7(62.4%)

The findings on the implementation of inclusive education for learners with visual impairments in primary schools reveal mixed trends, with notable differences between the perceived availability of general inclusive education resources and the actual participation of learners with visual impairments in classroom activities. The findings indicate that the availability of resources needed for inclusion was rated highly, with a

mean of 3.55 and a standard deviation of 0.77. According to the response frequencies, 71 respondents (91.0%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while only 7 (8.9%) agreed or strongly agreed. This pattern suggests that respondents generally perceived the resources needed for inclusion as not yet adequately available. Similarly, the modification of school buildings to facilitate the movement of learners with disabilities recorded a mean of 3.37 (SD = 0.84), with 68 respondents (87.2%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that the necessary modifications had been made. These findings point to significant concerns regarding the availability of resources and the physical accessibility of primary schools for learners with visual impairments.

Regarding teacher preparation, the findings show that 63 respondents (80.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that teachers had received special needs education and training to teach learners with visual impairments, producing a mean of 3.31 (SD = 0.81). Likewise, 61 respondents (78.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that teachers possessed the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to teach these learners, with a mean of 3.12 (SD = 0.77). These results suggest that teacher preparation may be a major challenge in implementing inclusive education. Without adequate training and appropriate teaching competencies, teachers may experience difficulties adapting instructional methods and learning activities to accommodate the specific needs of learners with visual impairments.

A similar pattern emerged regarding the availability of teaching and learning materials. The statement on the availability of teaching and learning materials recorded a mean of 3.35 (SD = 0.74), with 68 respondents (87.2%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that such materials had been made available. More specifically, 56 respondents (71.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that their schools had been provided with specialized materials, including white canes, magnifying lenses, large-print textbooks, Braille writers, Braille paper, and other assistive devices. This statement recorded a mean of 2.12 (SD = 0.90). The findings suggest that the shortage of specialized educational materials may be an important barrier to effective inclusive education for learners with visual impairments.

The findings concerning equal educational opportunities and the quality of services also indicate implementation challenges. For the statement on equal opportunities for learners with disabilities, 63 respondents (80.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 15 (19.2%) agreed or strongly agreed. The statement on the quality of services provided to learners with visual impairments recorded a mean of 2.28 (SD = 0.90), with 55 respondents (70.5%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that learners received quality services. These findings indicate that equal access and the quality of educational support remain areas of concern in the sampled primary schools.

Concerning actual classroom participation, 57 respondents (73.0%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that children with visual impairments learned together with children without disabilities. Similarly, 51 respondents (65.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that learners with visual impairments were included in learning activities. These results suggest that meaningful participation in shared classroom learning may not be consistently achieved. They also highlight the possibility that the existence of inclusive education policies or general school provisions does not necessarily translate into effective classroom inclusion.

Overall, the findings suggest that the implementation of inclusive education for learners with visual impairments in the sampled primary schools faces considerable challenges. The response patterns point to concerns about resource availability, school accessibility, teacher training, specialized instructional materials, equal educational opportunities, service quality, and classroom participation. Addressing these challenges requires improved provision of assistive materials, targeted professional development for teachers, accessible school infrastructure, and practical measures to ensure that learners with visual impairments participate meaningfully in classroom activities.

Ho1: Training has no significant relationship with the implementation of inclusive education for learners with visual impairments in primary schools.

Table 4:

Correlation between training and implementation

		Training	Implementation
Training	Pearson correlation	1	.422**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	78	78
Implementation	Pearson correlation	.422**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	78	78

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Field survey (2023).

Table 4 shows a positive, moderate and statistically significant correlation between training and implementation, $r(76) = .42$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.22, .59]. SPSS prints the significance as .000, which should be read as $p < .001$. Training accounts for about 18% of the variance in implementation ($r^2 = .18$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected: head teachers who reported more training also reported more implementation of inclusive practices. Three cautions apply. The design is cross-sectional, so the direction of the relationship cannot be established, and schools already practising inclusion may simply have attracted more training. Both variables come from the same self-report questionnaire, which can inflate associations. And more than four-fifths of the variance remains unexplained, so other factors, such as resources, school location and security, must also matter.

The interviews were used to explain the survey results. Table 3 summarises the three themes that emerged. The most frequent was that head teachers had received no training. Asked whether they had been trained, most said it is impossible to practise inclusive education for learners with visual impairments when most head teachers and teachers have not been given inclusive teacher training. One head teacher said, “the government has promised to train us but the training has not yet begun, training still has to take place on inclusive education.” Another put it more bluntly: “Teachers cannot perform miracles, it is funny that teachers are expected to do what they are not given the knowledge and skills needed to meet the special needs of these learners.”

Table 5:
Themes from head teachers' interviews on training for inclusive education

Theme	Frequency	Illustrative quotation
No training	10	*"Teachers cannot perform miracles, it is funny that teachers are expected to do what they are not given the knowledge and skills needed to meet the special needs of these learners."*
Need for continuous professional development	3	*"If this must be practicable then the government has a responsibility to make teacher training inclusive and provide continuous professional development for the teachers that are already on the field."*
Promised training	2	*"the government has promised to train us but the training has not yet begun, training still has to take place on inclusive education."*

Number of coded responses

Two further points emerged from the interviews that go beyond training. First, head teachers linked the lack of readiness to a lack of resources. One said, "inclusive education in Cameroon is mostly about policy and too much talking but nothing is being done to prepare the ground for implementation. Little is done to train teachers, also resources to teach like the braille, talking computers, tape recorders and the school environment is not accessible to visually impaired learners." Second, and more troubling, two of the head teachers quoted said that their schools do not admit learners with severe visual impairments. One explained: "We have learners with other disabilities in the schools but for those who have severe blindness we cannot handle, we don't admit them here but we send them to centres or CBC (Cameroon Baptist Convention) where they can meet their needs." The other concluded: "So we do not offer admissions to those with severe visual impairments."

In summary, the descriptive analysis showed that most head teachers have not received adequate training or professional development to educate learners with visual impairments, the correlation analysis showed that more training goes with more implementation, and the interviews showed that the missing training makes implementation difficult.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to establish how ready head teachers in the North West Region are, in terms of skills, to implement inclusive education for learners with visual impairments. On the evidence of both strands of data, most are not ready. On average, two in three respondents disagreed with statements describing adequate training, no statement reached the midpoint of the scale, and interviewees described training as promised but not delivered. Training and implementation were positively and significantly correlated (r = .42), which supports the view that skills matter for what happens in schools.

The size of the training gap is similar to that reported elsewhere. In Kenya, roughly three-quarters to four-fifths of head teachers and teachers lacked specialised skills in assessing diverse learners, managing behaviour and differentiating teaching (Shiwani et al., 2021). In this study, between 53% and 82% of head teachers disagreed with statements on training, depending on the item. Teachers in Ghana felt inadequately prepared for inclusive classrooms (Chitiyo et al., 2019), and the teachers surveyed in Yaoundé had no training in teaching children with special needs (Tanyi, 2016b). The common thread is

that training has not kept pace with policy. What this study adds is that the gap extends to the people who lead schools, not only to classroom teachers. It also points to a gap in specific skills. Only 21.8% of head teachers said they could operate the devices used by learners with visual impairments, which echoes Sikanku's (2018) finding that Ghanaian teachers lacked know-how with assistive devices and Korir's (2015) report that teachers lacked the skills to teach learners with visual impairment.

The positive correlation is consistent with Shiwani et al. (2021), who found a relationship between head teachers' support for professional development and implementation, and with Mokaleng and Möwes (2020), who identified lack of training as one of several constraints. Path-goal theory offers a way to read it. A head teacher who understands how a learner with visual impairment can be taught is able to say what teachers should do, find the materials they need and offer informed encouragement. A head teacher without that knowledge cannot clarify the path, however willing. The interviews suggest that the path is also blocked higher up, since the promised government training "has not yet begun". The association should not be read as proof that training causes implementation. It is moderate, it comes from cross-sectional self-report data, and it leaves most of the variation unexplained.

The most troubling finding is not in Table 1. Some head teachers said they do not admit learners with severe visual impairments and refer them to specialised centres. Their reasoning is understandable: without Braille, assistive technology, trained staff or an accessible environment, a school may feel unable to offer a child a real education. Yet the practical effect is exclusion, and it sits uneasily with the law. Law No. 2010/002 requires education adapted to the child's condition (Article 30) and provides criminal penalties for heads of educational establishments who discriminate against persons with disabilities in admissions (Article 45) (Republic of Cameroon, 2010). The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) is equally clear that learners should not be excluded from the general education system because of their impairment. The data do not show whether the head teachers knew of these provisions. What they do show is that the readiness gap has a direct human cost: the learners with the greatest need for support are those most likely to be turned away. A policy that holds head teachers accountable for admissions without equipping them to meet learners' needs would be neither fair nor effective.

The interviews also raise the question of what kind of training would help. The literature suggests that one-off workshops, or a thin cascade from a few trained officers, are unlikely to be enough. Training is more effective when it runs over an extended period, is led by people with relevant expertise and includes follow-up such as coaching (Desimone & Pak, 2017), and cascade models can lose content as they move down the line (Hayes, 2000). The polarised responses on continuing professional development, where nearly as many head teachers strongly agreed as strongly disagreed that it takes place regularly, point to uneven access. If training is concentrated in a few schools or networks, a regional average will hide that. Reaching head teachers who have been missed may call for school-based or distance approaches that do not depend on travel, particularly where insecurity restricts movement.

Several limitations should be kept in mind. The sample of 78 head teachers was drawn partly through non-probability methods, so generalisation to all schools in the region is limited. The questionnaire combined statements about head teachers' own training and

about teachers' training, and the two cannot be separated in the analysis. Responses are self-reported perceptions rather than observed practice, and the study did not include teachers, learners or parents, whose views of implementation might differ. The correlational design cannot establish causation, and a single predictor explains less than a fifth of the variance. Security conditions may also have affected which schools could be reached. Future studies could use larger and more clearly specified samples, add classroom observation, and use multiple regression to model training alongside resources and school characteristics.

CONCLUSIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

The study found a substantial perceived training gap among head teachers in the North West Region and a significant, moderate, positive relationship between training and the implementation of inclusive education for learners with visual impairments. The interviews indicate that missing professional preparation, assistive materials and accessible school environments hold back practice, and that some learners with severe visual impairments are not admitted at all. The main implication is that inclusive education needs coordinated improvement in teacher preparation, continuing professional support and resources, with school leaders included in each.

The study contributes to knowledge in four ways. First, it adds evidence from a region and a school level where little has been published, and it focuses on head teachers rather than only on classroom teachers. Second, it quantifies the perceived training gap across ten statements and shows how it varies across areas of competence, from understanding inclusion to operating assistive devices. Third, it documents, in head teachers' own words, the practice of declining admission to learners with severe visual impairments, which deserves policy attention. Fourth, it applies path-goal theory to inclusive school leadership in a Sub-Saharan African setting and shows where the theory needs adapting, notably because public-school head teachers have limited power to reward. The ten statements could serve as a starting point for a readiness checklist for head teachers, although they would need further validation before wider use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, recommendations are made for policy and practice.

The Ministry of Basic Education and teacher-training institutions should integrate inclusive education principles and practical skills for working with learners with visual impairments into initial teacher preparation and into the preparation of head teachers. Continuing professional development should be made available to serving head teachers and teachers, covering differentiated instruction, classroom adaptation, Braille, large-print and audio materials, assistive devices, and the assessment of diverse learners. The training already promised to head teachers should be scheduled and communicated, and delivered through approaches that include follow-up coaching rather than single workshops.

Government and education partners should provide the resources that policy already promises, including accessible learning materials, appropriate assistive technology and improved school accessibility, and should coordinate their supply with training so that staff can use them. Mechanisms for monitoring school-level implementation, including

compliance with the admission provisions of Law No. 2010/002, should be strengthened, with attention to both professional learning and classroom practice. Where a school cannot yet meet a learner's needs, the response should be extra support and resource sharing with specialised centres, not refusal of admission.

Head teachers should work with teachers, families, education authorities and community organisations to identify the barriers faced by learners with visual impairments and to plan appropriate accommodations. Schools should foster a culture that respects learner differences and discourages exclusion on the basis of disability. Regular staff collaboration and follow-up support can help teachers exchange practical strategies, monitor challenges and build confidence. Head teachers should also request and make full use of the assistive technology and accessible materials that partners provide, and report unmet needs to the authorities.

Researchers should build on this study with larger and clearly specified samples, include classroom teachers, learners and parents, and combine surveys with classroom observation and regression models.

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