

# Attitude of Teachers Towards Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Centres in the Sissala West District

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**Abstract:-** The study investigated the attitude of teachers towards children with disabilities in early childhood centres in the Sissala West District. The sequential exploratory mixed-method design was used in this study. With this, the qualitative data was used to augment initial quantitative results. The sample size for the study consisted of 118 kindergarten teachers. The sample was selected from an accessible population of 168. They were selected using a systematic sampling technique. 8 teachers were selected for interview using the homogenous sampling technique. Questionnaires and interviews were instruments used to collect data for the study. The study revealed that teachers in the Early Childhood Centres in Sissala West District exhibited positive attitudes toward children with disabilities. It also emerged that teachers in the Early Childhood Centres in Sissala West District can handle children with disabilities though they do not have much knowledge of these groups of learners. The study recommends that Teachers in Early Childhood Centers in the Sissala West District must be required to take periodic refresher courses and training. These courses and training should focus on developing personalized learning approaches for all students as well as the necessary values, attitudes, skills, and competencies to manage inclusive classes.

**Keywords:-** Teachers; Attitude; Children with Disabilities; Early Childhood Education.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Disability awareness, training, and education are essential requirements for all professionals. Instructors need to possess a complete understanding of the dimensions of particular impairments for the learning experience when working with special learners. Lodge and Lynch (2004) contend that education providers often fail to identify, recognise or understand a child's disability. Globally, recent research has indicated significant efforts from teachers, the public, and communities to express positive attitudes towards children affected by various impairments. However, at a closer look, specific behaviours, if explored, may be exposed as negative (Hernandez, Keys & Balcazar, 2010). For instance, although theoretically, instructors agree with inclusion projects for this group, practically, in the classroom they are

only minimally committed and reserved (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2016). The position of teachers toward children with disabilities has a major impact on the overall educational experience (Kenny, McNeela, Sevlín & Daly, 2010; Lodge et al., 2004; Stubbs, Myers, Lewis & Kumar, 2013).

Although legal provisions state that children with disabilities (CWD) may participate in regular classrooms, these do not guarantee acceptance or fair treatment from instructors or peers (Marks, 2014). Hence, schools need to eliminate pervasive societal attitudes of rejection and discrimination against these vulnerable groups. The literature spotlights that inclusion could fail to deliver the expected results for special learners because the prejudice remains (Cook, Tankersley, Cook & Landrum, 2010). The stereotypical beliefs about CWD can strongly impede the development of children who are simultaneously exposed to both blatant and subtle conversation that affects their integrity as learners (Gleason, 2011; Derman-Sparks, 2013).

Many would never achieve their full potential because of their discrimination and marginalisation. The self-esteem of the teacher is an essential factor in the perception of self-efficacy; in other words, if the teacher has a high/low sense of estimate, he/she can influence other teachers, and ultimately the quality of inclusive education. Thus, if the positive attitude of the educators' drives, among others, the success of the inclusive education experience, a negative attitude translates into unsuccessful practice of inclusive education, aggravating further the position of disabled children in school.

For all children, early childhood provides an important window of opportunity to prepare the foundation for lifelong learning and participation, while preventing potential delays in development and disabilities. For children who experience disabilities, it is a vital time to ensure access to interventions which can help them reach their full potential (UNESCO, 2011; Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2010). Despite being more vulnerable to developmental risks, young children with disabilities are often overlooked in mainstream programmes and services designed to ensure child development (Simeonsson, 2010). In many cases, discriminatory attitudes from teachers are as a result of lack of awareness as to how children with disability should be included in early childhood centres (UNICEF, 1989). The

attitude of teachers to commit to inclusive education is a recurrent topic in the extant literature (Wapling, 2016). Ahsan, Sharma and Deppeler (2012) argued that in order for inclusive education to work, teachers should be prepared to accommodate the needs of all learners and promote positive attitudes towards inclusion. accordingly, in the present study, we ask about the attitude of teachers towards children with disabilities in early childhood centres in the Sissala West District.

## II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Over 60% of children between the ages of 6 and 18 years identified as living with disabilities are not in school. The number of persons with disabilities who had the opportunity of formal education to the basic level until 1998 was estimated at 2,500 persons. The individuals who proceeded through to the second cycle and tertiary levels are not very many (Deku & Mensah, 2014). In a comparative report, Yekple and Avoke (2016), revealed that numerous Children with Disabilities (CWDs) in Ghana are either formally rejected from the standard training framework or get less positive treatment than other youngsters. Yekple and Avoke (2016) further contend that the Development of Education National Report of Ghana on the 2000 populace evaluation shows that with a populace of 670,000-804,000 school-age CWDs, just 0.6% get any type of instruction.

There has been quite some studies conducted in the area of inclusive education (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Gasser, Malti & Buholzer, 2013; Nilholm & Alm, 2010; Tisdall, 2012). These studies have outlined the advantages and disadvantages of having an inclusive education system in various countries more specifically in the public sector. One of the studies revealed that the disadvantages, if not tackled can negatively affect the lives of children with multiple disabilities (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Furthermore, it is evident that numerous studies conducted on the subject matter were conducted in developed countries (Gable, 2009; Gasser et al., 2013; Winter & O'Raw, 2010), with few studies conducted in developing countries like Ghana. Therefore, the study hopes to bridge this gap by conducting this study in the public Early Childhood Centres of Ghana.

Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou (2006) contend that regular education teachers hold some restrictive as well as conflicting beliefs about disability and educational inclusion. The findings of Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou (2006) contradict the study by Dukmak (2013). Dukmak (2013) contend that general teachers show positive attitudes toward educational inclusion but male teachers showed more positive attitudes than females did. The researchers have observed that some teachers in early childhood centres have a negative attitude towards children with disabilities in their classrooms since they have limited knowledge of inclusive practices. Thus, most teachers do not provide individual support to children with disabilities to offer assistance to enable them to overcome their problems and participate in learning successfully. Most general education classroom teachers in Ghana have limited knowledge in identifying special needs children and usually express concerns about inclusive education. One of the concerns is that

they lack the specialised training required to teach academic, social or adaptive behaviours to learners with disabilities (Hayford, 2016).

Information gathered by the researchers from resource teachers in the Sissala West District revealed that Kindergarten teachers in the general education classroom have difficulties in adapting the general curriculum to suit the learning needs of children living with disabilities. Thus, Kindergarten teachers tend to see assessment practices that alienate children living with disabilities. As a result of these practices in the early childhood centres, some of the children with disabilities seem uncomfortable and thus tend not to be regular in class and finally, drop out of school. It is against this and other backgrounds that it is necessary to investigate teacher attitudes toward teaching children with disabilities in early childhood centres in Sissala West District in Upper West Region, Ghana.

## III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study sought to find out about teacher attitudes toward teaching children with disabilities in early childhood centres in Sissala West District in Upper West Region, Ghana.

## IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study sought to find out about:

1. Teachers' attitude towards children with disabilities in early childhood centres in the Sissala West District.
2. Teachers' ability to handle children with disabilities in early childhood centres in the Sissala West District.

## V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions

1. What are teachers' attitudes towards children with disabilities in early childhood centres in the Sissala West District?
2. How are Teachers able to handle children with disabilities in early childhood centres within the Sissala West District?

## VI. METHODOLOGY

### A. Research Design

The sequential exploratory mixed-method design was used in this study. This is a two-phase mixed method approach with the goal of using qualitative data to explain or augment initial quantitative results (Creswell, 2018). Its central premise is that combining quantitative and qualitative methods yields a more comprehensive understanding of research issues than either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This method was adopted because the qualitative data were required to explain the results obtained during the quantitative phase (Creswell, 2018). Moreover, numerous sources or techniques of data collection boosted the reliability and dependability of the data as the strengths of one source compensate for the possible deficiencies of the other (Watson & Welch-Ross, 2000).

**B. Population**

The population for the study was 247 participants. It was made up of 79 headteachers and 168 kindergarten teachers. However, the accessible population was 168 kindergarten teachers in Sissala East District.

**C. Sample and Sampling Technique**

The sample size for the research consisted of 118 kindergarten instructors. The sample was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a representative sample of 118 from an accessible population of 168 is required for the successful generalisation of the findings to the entire population. As a result, a sample size of 118 for this study was deemed sufficient to produce the desired results while also allowing for the generalisation of the findings across the entire population. Systematic sampling technique was used to select the 118 teachers. 8 teachers were selected for interview using the homogenous sampling technique.

**D. Instruments for Data Collection**

A self-designed structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide were used for this study. A structured questionnaire was used for the study because it offered the researcher the opportunity to sample the perceptions of a larger population. It is also appropriate in obtaining and give a vivid description of the data (Yeng, Woode-Eshun & Badu, 2022). Similarly, it allowed a wide range of participants’ understanding to be explored and also revealed important aspects of the phenomena under study. Furthermore, the interview guide helped the interviewer to focus on the research objectives, yet open up new avenues for further questions (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen 2010).

**E. Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data. The items on the questionnaire were coded and fed into the Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS) version 26 and analysed using descriptive statistics. The qualitative data analysis of data was made through the thematic approach. Thematic analysis is an analytical strategy which requires the researcher to organise or prepare the data, immerse himself or herself in and transcribe the data, generate themes and code the data, and describe them (Kusi, 2012). Following the completion of the interviews with the participants, the researchers transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews. First, the whole interview was read, and then it was grouped into themes. Next, the transcripts were given some serial numbers, and last, notes were made on the elements of the interview that were the most remarkable in relation to the aim of the research.

**VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**A. Research Question One: What are the attitudes of teachers toward children with disabilities in early childhood centres in Sissala West District?**

This question sought to investigate the attitudes of teachers toward children with disabilities in Early Childhood Centres in the Sissala West District. Simple frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to analyse the quantitative data while interviews were analysed in themes. Quantitative results are shown in Table 1.0 followed by the interview results.

TABLE I. ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS TOWARDS CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

<b>Attitudes of Teachers Towards Children with Disabilities</b>	<b>SD (%)</b>	<b>D (%)</b>	<b>A (%)</b>	<b>SA (%)</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
I am prepared to effectively teach children with disabilities	24(20%)	21(18%)	11(9%)	62(53%)	2.6	.43
I feel comfortable teaching children with disabilities	7(6%)	6(5%)	37(31%)	68(58%)	2.8	.46
Children who are diagnosed with disabilities need to be in special education classrooms	13(11%)	19(16%)	33(30%)	55(47%)	2.4	.42
All efforts should be made to educate children with disabilities in the regular education classroom	11(9%)	26(22%)	25(20%)	51(43%)	2.5	.43
Collaborative teaching of children with disabilities can be effective particularly when they are placed in a regular classroom	9(8%)	13(11%)	54(46%)	42(36%)	2.2	.31
I feel supported by my headteacher when faced with challenges presented by children with disabilities in my classroom	8(7%)	11(9%)	38(32%)	63(53%)	2.6	.53
My district provides me with sufficient professional development training opportunities in order for me to appropriately teach children with disabilities	4(3%)	9(8%)	44(37%)	61(52%)	2.6	.53
My educational background has prepared me to effectively teach children with disabilities	7(6%)	8(7%)	31(26%)	72(61%)	2.7	.53

<sup>a</sup>Source: Field data, (2022)

<sup>b</sup>Key: SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; A=Agree and SA=Strongly Agree; M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation.

Results from Table 3 indicate that 68 (representing 58%) of the teachers strongly agreed they feel comfortable teaching children with disabilities ( $M=2.8$ ,  $SD=.46$ ). Also, 72 (representing 61%) of them strongly agreed that their educational background has prepared them to effectively teach children with disabilities ( $M=2.7$ ,  $SD=.53$ ). Again, 62 (representing 53%) of the teachers strongly agreed that they are prepared to effectively teach children with disabilities ( $M=2.6$ ,  $SD=.43$ ). Furthermore, 63 (representing 53%) of them strongly agreed that they feel supported by their headteachers when faced with challenges presented by children with disabilities in their classrooms ( $M=2.6$ ,  $SD=.53$ ). Similarly, 61 (representing 52%) of them strongly agreed that the district provides them with sufficient professional development training opportunities in order for them to appropriately teach children with disabilities ( $M=2.6$ ,  $SD=.53$ ).

Moreover, 51 (representing 43%) of the teachers strongly agreed that all efforts have to be made to educate children with disabilities in the regular education classroom ( $M=2.5$ ,  $SD=.43$ ). Further, 55 (representing 47%) of them strongly agreed that children who are diagnosed with disabilities need to be in special education classrooms ( $M=2.4$ ,  $SD=.42$ ). Also, the results show that 42 (representing 36%) of the teachers strongly agreed that collaborative teaching of children with disabilities can be effective particularly when they are placed in a regular classroom ( $M=2.2$ ,  $SD=.31$ ).

The results show that teachers at the early childhood centres were not much boarded in teaching children with disabilities. The results also suggest that these teachers were willing to teach children with disabilities. The results can further connote that these teachers were not much disturbed by the presence of children with disabilities in their classrooms. It can further be deduced from these results that kindergarten teachers were prepared to handle children with disabilities.

Themes, direct quotes and explanations were used to analyse the qualitative data. For example, the theme of positive attitude towards children with disabilities emerged as indicated by the analysis. For instance, one kindergarten teacher said:

We normally put children with disabilities and normal children in the same class. And when am teaching, I make sure I balance the teaching methods. What I mean is that I make sure I varied my teaching methods so that both the normal and children with disabilities can benefit from that lesson. [KGT: 9]

➤ *Another respondent said:*

I most of the time I use more practical ways of teaching lessons and this helps children with disabilities to feel part of the class. [KGT: 8]

➤ *One other respondent also said:*

I do not only instruct children with disabilities to perform activities in my class. Rather, I allow them to demonstrate it using practical [KGT: 10]

These comments suggest that kindergarten teachers are practising inclusive education. They do so by giving children with disabilities more practical work to do. This helps these children to catch up with their counterparts with disabilities.

➤ *Another teacher shared her views by saying:*

I give children with disabilities more chances to practice the lesson I will teach and this helps them to better understand the lessons I teach them. [KGT: 3]

➤ *Similarly, one teacher further said:*

I welcome and handle children with disabilities very well in my class. Thus, I pay more attention to them so as to help them feel at home. [KGT: 7]

➤ *One teacher said:*

Handling children with disabilities by kindergarten teachers is like collaborative work. All the kindergarten teachers in this school show love and care for these children because of the situation they find themselves in.. [KGT: 4].

These comments suggest that children with disabilities are given care during teaching and learning in kindergarten centres. These comments again suggest that kindergarten teachers come together to perform this all-important duty for children with disabilities. From the qualitative data, it can be deduced that kindergarten teachers at the study centre have a positive attitude towards children with disabilities. As a result of the quantitative and qualitative data. It was concluded that teachers in the Early Childhood Centres in Sissala West District have positive attitudes towards children with disabilities.

*B. Research Question Two: How are teachers able to handle children with disabilities in early childhood centres within the Sissala West District?*

This question sought to investigate the attitudes of teachers toward children with disabilities in Early Childhood Centres in the Sissala West District. Simple frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to analyse the quantitative data while interviews were analysed in themes. Quantitative results are shown in Table 1.0 followed by the interview results.

TABLE II. TEACHERS' ABILITY TO HANDLE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES IN THE SISSALA WEST DISTRICT

Ability of ECE Teachers to Handle Learners with Disabilities	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	M	SD
I have the ability to identify different learning needs of all my learners	14(12)	30(25)	58(49)	16(14)	2.6	.86
I am able to plan and prepare for learners with special needs	12(10)	34(29)	33(28)	39(33)	2.8	1.0
I am able to assist slow learners	31(26)	26(22)	39(33)	22(19)	2.4	1.1
I am able to create a warm and motivating learning atmosphere that supports all learners	1(1)	39(33)	47(40)	31(26)	2.9	.79
I am able to provide feedback that caters for learners' individual differences	0(0.0)	28(23)	41(35)	49(42)	3.2	.79
I am able to use different student activities to suit learner's interests and abilities	6(5)	29(24)	46(39)	37(32)	3.0	.88
I am able to acquire learning materials that suit different instructional needs	0(0.0)	19(16)	59(50)	40(34)	3.2	.89
I am able to organize learning methods and activities to cater for the different needs and preferences of learning	9(8)	35(30)	37(31)	37(31)	2.9	.95
I am able to create teaching materials that meet the varying needs of learners	9(8)	35(30)	34(29)	40(33)	2.8	.97

<sup>c</sup>Source: Field data, (2022)

<sup>d</sup>Key: SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; A=Agree and SA=Strongly Agree; M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation.

Table 2.0 presents response ratings to various statements on teachers' ability to handle children with disabilities in early childhood centres using a Likert scale which ranges from 1 as strongly disagree (SD) to 4 as strongly agree (SA). The results indicate that 16 of the respondents representing 58% of the sample size strongly agreed with the statement 'I have the ability to identify different learning needs of all my learners' while 58 of them representing 49% agreed with the statement. However, 30 of the respondents representing 25% disagreed; and 14 of them representing 12% strongly disagreed with it. The statement recorded a Mean of 2.6 (SD=.86). Also, 39 (representing 33%) of them strongly agreed that they plan and prepare for learners with special needs while 33 of them representing 28% agreed with the statement. Yet, 34 of the respondents representing 29% and 12 representing 10% of the sample size strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively with the statement. It recorded a mean of 2.8 and a standard deviation of 1.0.

The analysis also showed that 19% and 33% of the respondents respectively either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that "I am able to assist slow learners". However, 22% disagreed while 26% strongly disagreed with the statement. The statement recorded a mean value of 1.1 (SD=1.1). Also, the result shows that 31 of the respondents, representing 26% and 47 of them, representing 40% either strongly agreed or agreed respectively that "I am able to create a warm and motivating learning atmosphere that supports all

learners". Even so, 39 of the respondents representing 33% disagreed while 1 person disagreed with the statement. The statement recorded a mean value of 2.9 (SD=0.79).

Similarly, the analysis revealed that 37 of the respondents which represents 32% and 46 of them, representing 39% either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that "I am able to use different student activities to suit learner's interests and abilities". However, 29 of them representing 24% disagreed while 6 of them representing 5% strongly disagreed with the statement. The statement recorded a mean value of 3.0 (SD=.88). Furthermore, the result shows that 40 of the respondents which represent 34% and 59 of them, which represent 50% respectively either strongly agreed or agreed that "I am able to acquire learning materials that suit different instructional needs" whereas 19 of the respondents which represent 16% disagreed to this statement. The statement recorded a mean value of 3.2 (SD=.89).

Moreover, the study reveals that 62% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement "I am able to organize learning methods and activities to cater for the different needs and preferences of learning". The statement recorded a mean value of 2.9 (SD=.95). Finally, the analysis reveals that 40 of the respondents which represents 33% strongly agreed that "I am able to create teaching materials that meet the varying needs of learners" while 34 of them representing 29% agreed to this statement. This resulted in this

statement being rated mostly by respondents as strongly agreed. The statement recorded a mean value of 2.8 (SD=.97).

To complement the quantitative results, interviews were conducted to ascertain the qualitative view of the teachers. The accrued results of the interviews suggest that most of the teachers have the ability to handle children with disabilities in early childhood centres in the Sissala West District. One of the teachers shared that;

*Hmmm... Notwithstanding some of the challenges we go through here. I make sure I put up to help the learners with special needs to benefit from instructional hours. I make sure I give them the extra attention so they can move at par with their non-disabled peers [KGT: 7].*

Another respondent said:

*In handling children with disabilities in my class, I make sure I use different activities that matches with the learner's unique interests, needs and abilities [KGT: 4].*

Similarly, one teacher further said:

*I make sure to have several textbook levels and other teaching resources accessible for each topic as there will be a range of competency levels in the classroom. The availability of a variety of levels will guarantee that each kid can learn at the proper level [KGT: 1].*

## VIII. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study revealed that study teachers in Early Childhood Centres in Sissala West District have positive attitudes toward children with disabilities. The findings align well with Duckmack (2013) who expressed that general-teachers show positive attitudes toward educational inclusion. This contradicts the findings of Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou (2006) who maintain that regular education teachers hold a number of restrictive as well as conflicting beliefs about disability and educational inclusion.

Again, the study showed that most teachers in early childhood centres in the Sissala West District expressed that they have limited knowledge of handling children with disabilities in the mainstream classroom. This finding agrees with Hayford (2016) who concluded that teachers in mainstream classrooms have inadequate training required to teach academic, social or adaptive behaviours to learners with disabilities (Hayford, 2016). Similarly, Rao (2014) provides an interesting review of the extant literature exploring the behaviour of teachers towards learners with disabilities. At the time, the literature on the nexus between attitudes of teachers and the willingness to accommodate the needs of children with special needs found no clear connections between the two hence teachers should be better informed about learners with disabilities to change their attitude, a factor that could be vital to the success of failure of the educational experience for learners with special educational needs.

The findings further revealed that teachers are able to handle children with disabilities in early childhood centres in the Sissala West District notwithstanding the limited

knowledge they have about them. The teachers in early childhood centres in Sissala West District admitted to being able to plan and prepare for learners with special needs, assist slow learners, create a warm and motivating learning atmosphere that supports all learners, acquire learning materials that suit different instructional needs, create teaching materials that meet the varying needs of learners, organize learning methods and activities to cater for the different needs and preferences of learning. This helps in managing the learning needs of children with some form of disabilities in the classroom.

## IX. KEY FINDINGS

The following were the main findings of the study:

1. It emerged from the study that teachers in Early Childhood Centres in Sissala West District exhibited positive attitudes toward children with disabilities.
2. The study revealed that teachers in Early Childhood Centres in Sissala West District are able to handle children with disabilities though they do not much knowledge of these groups of learners.

## X. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For Early Childhood Centre teachers in the Sissala West District to operate successfully in inclusive settings, they must develop a comprehensive knowledge of the principles of inclusive education that must be tailored to the specific needs of each learner.
2. Teachers in Early Childhood Centers in the Sissala West District must be required to take periodic refresher courses and training. These courses and training should focus on developing personalized learning approaches for all students as well as the necessary values, attitudes, skills, and competencies to manage inclusive classes.

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