

Knowledge and Teaching Competencies of Physical Education Teachers on Students with Special Needs in the Central Region, Ghana

Kodwo Owusu¹, Daniel Apaak², Charles Domfeh³, Alexander Kweku Eshun⁴

^{1, 2&3} *Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation-University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana*

⁴ *Department of Physical Education, Seventh-Day Adventist College of Education, Agona-Ashanti, Ghana*

ABSTRACT

Background: This research investigated the inclusion of students with special needs during Physical Education lessons in the Central Region, Ghana. Many learners only observe during Physical Education lessons because the teachers simply ignore them or are challenged with how to integrate them into the lessons. There were also challenges with the nature of the facilities and equipment available for lesson delivery.

Methodology: A concurrent research design was used thus, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The design selected presents the best perspective of the issues. Participants were made up of 230 respondents sampled from Senior High Schools purposively consisting of 116 Physical Education teachers and 114 students with disabilities. The qualitative data was thematically analysed according to the objectives. Chi square was used for the analysis of the quantitative data.

Results: Many Physical Education teachers perceived inclusive Physical Education as a right to full participation for every learner; therefore, expected full participation by all students irrespective of their physical, mental status, sex orientation ethnic origin but confirmed that they did not have adequate knowledge, expertise and are challenged in other ways to successfully integrate students with special needs at their lessons.

Conclusion: Physical Education teachers perceived inclusive education as a right for everyone including persons with disability. Though they had some training in inclusive education, they were not equipped enough to handle persons with special in their PE lessons to the appreciable level. They supported the idea of including students with special needs during their lessons due to the benefits they will gain but of the opinion that this most often disrupts the harmony of their teaching because they are unable to handle them the best way.

Keywords: inclusive education, physical education lessons, students with special needs, in-service training.

INTRODUCTION

Social treatment of children with disabilities characterised by misconceptions and negative societal attitudes is well presented in historical records of education all over the world. Children who are different due to exceptionality have often been denied fair access to educational opportunities. Some children with special needs are often

neglected and hidden away from the community; others are abused, exploited or even put to death (Kassah, Kassah, & Agbota, 2012). Gulosino, & Miron, (2017) opined that, in the past, many children with special needs were excluded entirely from the public school system. This was due to the belief that the disabilities were contagious. It should

be noted that the endorsement of the Salamanca Statement on Inclusive Education and the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Children by Ghana meant that the country must make regular schools accessible for children with special needs. This has seen a shift in paradigm from exclusion to inclusion nationally to provide a more unbiased and all-inclusive system of education which will address the needs of all students.

Inclusion is the modern way of educating learners living with disability for that matter have special needs (Greenstein, 2015). The change from special education to inclusive education indicated a philosophical shift because it then became an intrinsic right of all persons to partake meaningfully in humanity (Dudley, Cairney, Wainwright, Kriellaars, & Mitchell, 2017). Inclusive education implies acceptance of differences and making room for persons who would otherwise be excluded from mainstream education. This must include a key aspect of their education, Physical Education. As asserted by Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, & Algozzine, (2012), the practice of educating children who have special needs together with their counterparts without disabilities means creating learning groups that appreciate and respond to the diverse needs of its members. Though seen as a contemporary issue, the inclusion of pupils with special needs in the mainstream school has been in existence for a long and can be traced to the mid-1800s (Spaulding, & Pratt, 2015).

Karbo, Ogah, and Domfeh, (2015) postulated that, as a phase of general education, Physical Education aims at producing an educated individual who is physically fit, mentally alert, emotionally sound, and socially adjusted. The three main reasons for providing Physical Education in the schools as stipulated by Karbo *et al.*, (2015) are movement education, fitness and wellness, sports performance and leisure. These are very important in the development of the life of every individual not excluding students with special needs. Regardless of these benefits, students with special needs in many schools in the Central Region often experience difficulty in gaining access to the same opportunities available in Physical Education and sports as their peers without disabilities due to the nature of facilities and equipment available (Geidne & Jerlinder 2016). Also, their teachers do not integrate them even if they hope to do so because they will impede the smooth running of the lessons and cause time wastage. This inequality limits their ability to acquire core developmental skills, knowledge and

experiences that contribute to blazing their trail to a healthy life. Regardless of the numerous benefits of Physical Education, students with special needs often experience difficulty in gaining access to the same opportunities available in Physical Education and sports as their peers without disabilities (Geidne & Jerlinder 2016). This inequality limits the ability to acquire core developmental skills, knowledge and experiences that will contribute to their healthy lifestyle. Most of the studies emphasised issues of general inclusive education and the challenges faced by students but very little has been mentioned specifically on teaching students with various levels of disability in Physical Education. There are two main institutions which train Physical Education teachers in Ghana and they are all located in the Central Region. Hence, there are more Physical Education personnel than in the other regions. The researchers therefore perceive that there will be an improvement of the situation regarding teaching students with special needs but anecdotal records showed that the phenomenon is the same as it appears across the country.

The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which Physical Education teachers integrate students with special needs in Physical Education lessons in second-cycle institutions in the Central Region of Ghana.

The study was therefore guided by the following research questions.

1. What is the knowledge level of Physical Education teachers in the Central Region on inclusive education?
2. Do Physical Education teachers have the requisite training to teach persons with special needs?
3. To what extent do Physical Education teachers support the inclusion of
4. persons with special needs in their lessons?

METHODOLOGY

This study explored the perception and knowledge of inclusive education as well as the support teachers in Senior High Schools in the Central Region give to students with special needs during their Physical Education lessons. A mixed-method concurrent research design was used for the study. This was to ensure that the right perspectives on the various issues were presented. For this reason, quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The population for the study consisted of all Physical Education teachers and students with special needs

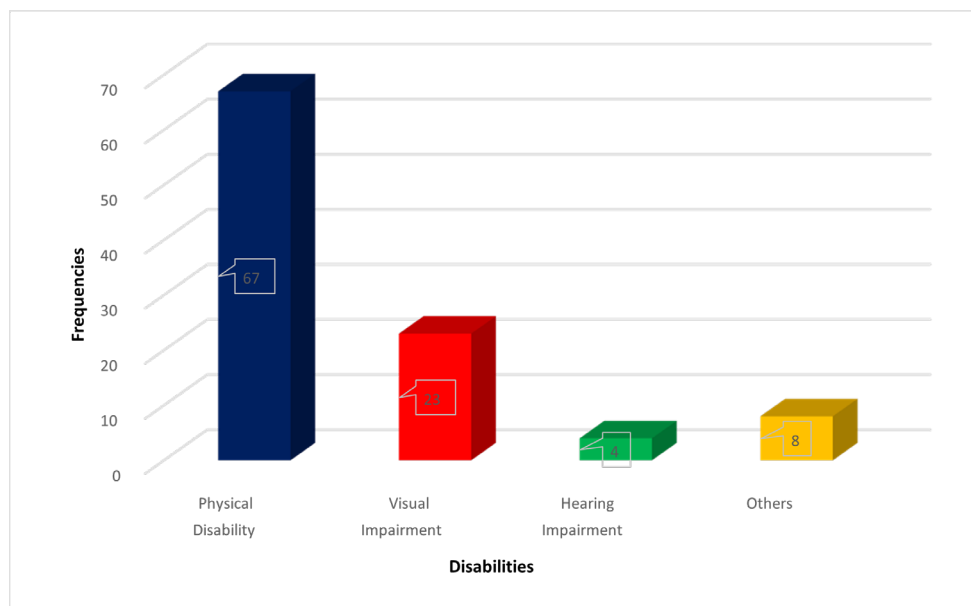
in all the seventy-five public second-cycle schools in the Central Region of Ghana (GES, 2017/18). Purposive sampling was used to select the teachers and students because some schools did not have students with special needs that are easily identifiable. Participants of this study comprised of 116 Physical Education teachers and 114 students with special needs. Figure 1 shows the distribution of forms of disability of the students who took part in the study.

A structured questionnaire, interview guide and observation checklist were used for collecting data. These questionnaires were self-constructed by the researcher using the themes from the research

questions. The purpose of the interview guide and observation checklist was to augment the information that was provided on the questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted in selected schools in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis of the Western Region, Ghana. The researcher conducted the pilot test using 20 students (7 male, 13 female) and 20 teachers (12 male, 8 female) from six schools.

The pilot study was to ensure that, the reliability of items was higher than 70 per cent (Cronbach alpha greater than 0.7). The result of the pilot study is presented in Tables 2 and 3. To ensure validity, copies of the structured questionnaires, interview

Figure 1: **Distribution of student's disabilities.**
 Source: Field Survey (Owusu, 2019)



guide and observation checklist were given to two senior lecturers in the Physical Education department, the University of Cape Coast to assess the necessary forms of validity of the instrument. Suggestions were offered, therefore they were incorporated in the reframing of parts of the instruments. Table 1 shows the test for the reliability of students' questionnaire.

Table 1: **Table Reliability of Students Questionnaire**

Sections	No. of items	Cronbach alpha	Remark
B1	9	0.76	Accepted
B2	8	0.64	Accepted after deleting 2 items
B3	5	0.82	Accepted
B4	6	0.58	Accepted after deleting 3 items
B5	6	0.61	Accepted after deleting 4 items

Source: Field Survey (Owusu, 2019)

The test for the reliability of the teachers' questionnaire is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Table Reliability of Teachers Questionnaire

Sections	No. of items	Cronbach alpha	Remark
B1	8	0.92	Accepted
B2	13	0.41	Accepted after deleting 4 items
B3	8	0.77	Accepted
B4	13	0.71	Accepted
B5	9	0.52	Accepted after deleting 4 items
B6	7	0.84	Accepted

Source: Field Survey (Owusu, 2019)

The final questionnaires therefore had some items removed to ensure the reliability of the instrument. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board after meeting requirements for all ethical issues concerning the study.

As a mixed analytical approach, both qualitative and quantitative data were obtained and entered into SPSS version 21 for the analysis of the quantitative data. The descriptive statistics used for the

quantitative analyses were mean and standard deviation. With regards to the qualitative data 15 teachers and 21 students were interviewed; then themes were created after the responses to the interviews indicated data saturation. Themes on how the students and teachers have responded to the questions on how facilities support inclusive teaching, support by teachers and heads of school and general organisation of the Physical Education lessons were then created and analysis was done according to these themes.

RESULTS

From the analysis of data, the following were the results from the study.

Research Question 1: What is the knowledge level of Physical Education teachers in the Central Region on inclusive education?

This section presents the opinions of PE teachers on their knowledge of inclusive education.

Table 3: Responses of Teachers' Knowledge of Inclusion Education

Statement	N	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	χ^2	Sig.
Inclusive education about the right to fully participate in all school activities	115	108(93.9)	7(6.1)	88.70	<.001
Inclusive education concerns only students with disabilities	114	26(22.8)	88(77.2)	33.72	<.001
Inclusive education is about accessibility to appropriate aids, assessment and support	114	98(86.0)	16(14.0)	58.98	<.001
Inclusive education is about creating better ways to attend to diversity	111	103(92.8)	8(7.2)	81.31	<.001
Inclusive education is about the elimination of learning barriers in school	114	26(22.8)	88(77.2)	33.72	<.001
Inclusive education is about catering for the needs of all children in school.	111	94(84.7)	17(15.3)	53.41	<.001
Inclusive education calls for the involvement and achievement of all children	114	101(88.6)	13(11.4)	67.93	<.001
Inclusive education favours only children with disabilities	114	19(16.7)	95(83.8)	50.67	<.001

Source: Field Survey (Owusu, 2019) χ^2 tabulated = 3.84 (α = 5%)

As indicated in Table 3, most teachers agreed that inclusive education involves the right to the full participation of all students in all school activities, accessibility to appropriate aids, assessment and support. This was represented by 93.9% of teachers while the remaining 6.1% disagreed.

Research Question 2: Do Physical Education teachers have the requisite training to teach persons with special needs?

This section addresses how PE teachers handle persons with special needs in practical PE lessons. The objective was to discover if the training that PE teachers received during their initial teacher training was tailored towards inclusive teaching and whether PE teachers received training while on the job in relation to the handling of special needs in class.

Table 4: Responses of PE Teachers on the extent to which they are trained to teach Persons with Special Needs.

Statement	N	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	χ^2	Sig.
My training as a P.E tutor included	115	92(80)	23(20)	1.40	<.001
I have done courses on inclusive education while receiving my physical education training	114	85(74.6)	29(25.4)	27.51	<.001
I have gone through training in teaching of persons with special needs	114	76(66.7)	38(33.3)	12.67	.004
I have undertaken professional training development in in-service training specifically on teaching pupils with disabilities	114	46(40.4)	68(59.6)	4.25	.039
My education in inclusive education during my training as a P.E teacher is not enough to practice inclusive education	114	71(62.3)	43(37.7)	6.88	.009
In the course of my pre-service orientation, I had the opportunity to go through the methodology of teaching persons with disabilities	114	53(45.7)	63(54.3)	0.86	.354
My pre-service training was solely geared towards teaching pupils in the regular classroom	116	68(58.6)	48(41.4)	3.45	.063
There are always opportunities to liaise with other teachers who have experience and training in special education for advice	115	63(54.8)	52(45.2)	1.05	.306
I never had a course on training in inclusive education during my training to be a P.E tutor	114	37(32.5)	77(67.5)	12.45	.004

Source: Field Survey (Owusu, 2019) χ^2 tabulated = 3.84 ($\alpha = 5\%$)

Table 4 presents the result of how teachers are equipped to handle persons with special needs in physical education practical classes. It was also to find out whether teachers received other training in the form of in-service training for them to be current in terms of teaching methodologies. In terms of instruction and courses provided by teachers as part of training as physical education instructors, the claims were accepted by 80% of teachers. Similarly, 62.3% of teachers also agreed that they had

gone through training on teaching persons with special needs and that their training as a P.E. teachers is not enough to practice inclusive education. Also, 67.5% disagreed that they have not undergone any form of training as PE teachers on how to handle persons with special needs. However, 62.3% agreed that they have not had adequate training to practice inclusive education. Even though many of the teachers think they know about the practices of inclusive education, they admit that their knowledge

is not enough to enable them to carry out their task of handling students with special needs in their physical education practical lessons. In confirming this, 58.6% of teachers agreed that their pre-service training was mainly on regular classroom and

practical activities. On the other hand, 59.6% of teachers disagreed that they have had some professional training and have undergone some form of training on the methodology to teach persons with special needs.

Table 5: Students' Perspectives on How They Are Handled during PE Lessons

Statements	N	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	χ^2	P-Value
P.E teacher gives a different activity whenever difficulties to perform an activity is encountered during P.E lesson	103	68(66.0)	35(44.0)	10.57	0.0011
Another teacher is always available to help me apart from my P.E teacher	103	72(69.9)	31(30.1)	16.32	0.0001
Activities are modified to allow me to participate	104	51(49.0)	53(51.0)	0.04	0.8415
Classmates offer encouragement to me during P.E lessons	104	34(32.7)	70(67.3)	12.46	0.0004

Source: Field Survey (Owusu, 2019) χ^2 tabulated = 3.84 ($\alpha = 5\%$)

Table 5 presents the perspectives of students on how teachers handle them during practical physical education lessons. From the responses, 66% of students indicated that PE teachers do not engage them in a modified form of the activity whenever they have challenges in performing planned activities during PE lessons. Again, 69.9% of the students also indicated that they are not given another teacher to train them differently from others. Similarly, 51% of students disagreed that activities are modified to allow them to participate in PE lessons in their various schools. This implies that students with special needs were engaged in the same activities as the regular students while those students with extreme disability conditions were left unattended. Also, 67.3% of students agreed that their colleague

students encouraged them to participate in PE lessons by offering assistance when they are in need. The general perspective of students on how they are handled by teachers was very discouraging.

Research Question 3: To What Extent do PE Teachers support the Inclusion of Persons with Special Needs?

This section presents the result of the analysis of the extent to which the PE teacher accepts and supports the idea of having persons with disabilities in their classroom. This question was necessary due to the preliminary finding of inadequate knowledge levels of PE teachers on inclusive education and how it could be inculcated in practical physical education lessons.

Table 6: Responses on Teachers Support of the Idea of Including Students with Special needs in Physical Education lessons

Statement	N	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	χ^2	Sig.
There should be a combination of able and disabled pupils in physical education classes	116	108(93.1)	8(6.9)	86.21	<.001
Students with disabilities should be given equal access to physical education	116	111(95.7)	5(4.3)	96.86	<.001
Government should have separate schools for persons with disabilities to make teaching easy	116	34(29.3)	82(70.7)	19.86	<.001
Having students with disabilities in the regular classrooms will disrupt harmony in teaching	115	80(69.6)	35(30.4)	17.61	<.001
Persons with disabilities participate equally in physical education with their able counterparts during lessons	116	77(66.4)	39(33.6)	12.45	.004
Teaching both able and disabled students in the same classrooms is quite a heavy load of work for me as a P.E teacher	116	82(70.7)	34(29.3)	19.86	<.001
I'm not comfortable as a teacher for both students with and without disabilities to mix up in my class	115	36 (31.3)	79(68.7)	16.08	.001
It will be an advantage to people with disabilities to have special and separate schools of their own than to be in regular school	116	46(39.7)	70(60.3)	4.97	.026

Source: Field Survey (Owusu, 2019) χ^2 tabulated = 3.84 ($\alpha = 5\%$)

As indicated in Table 6 above, 93.1% of teachers agreed that there should be a combination of both regular students and those with special needs in a regular Physical Education class. Similarly, 95.7% of teachers agreed that students with special needs should be given equal access as given to regular classroom students. Undoubtedly, the teachers

agreed with the concept of inclusive education and understood the merits thereof. Again, 66.4% agreed that students with special needs participate equally in physical education lessons as their peers. In addition, 70.7% of teachers agreed that teaching these two categories of students in the same classrooms is too much work.

Table 7: Responses of Teachers on their Support of the Idea of Including Students with Special Needs in Physical Education

Statement	N	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	χ^2	Sig.
I invite people with the know-how in disability studies to assist me in handling classes involving persons with disabilities	115	38(33.0)	77(67.0)	13.50	0.002
I look for monetary support to acquire adapted equipment to handle students with disabilities	115	35(30.4)	80(69.6)	18.00	<.001
Modifications of physical activities have been one of the strategies I use to include students with disabilities in my lessons	115	76(66.1)	39(33.9)	12.15	0.001
Students with disabilities would be better suited to a segregated learning environment	114	45(39.1)	69(60.9)	5.05	0.025
Since physical education is a non-examinable subject, it doesn't matter if students with disabilities are allowed to stay out of it	115	87(75.7)	26(24.3)	32.93	<.001
When there is a game during physical education, all students with disabilities are made to stay out for safety sake	115	25(21.7)	90(78.3)	37.42	<.001

Source: Field Survey (Owusu, 2019) χ^2 tabulated = 3.84 ($\alpha = 5\%$)

From Table 7, most teachers disagreed with the statement that they invite people with the requisite knowledge in handling students with special needs to assist them in handling classes involving students with special needs and look for monetary support in order to acquire adapted equipment that is suitable for teaching students with special needs. These represented 67% and 69.6% of the teachers respectively. The absence of co-teachers, therefore, implies that when it comes to Physical Education lessons, the students with special needs face social exclusion in the schools. Similarly, 60.9% of teachers disagreed that students with special needs would fit better in a segregated learning environment. Again, 75.7% of teachers agreed that it does matter if students with special needs are allowed to stay off lessons for the sake of their safety at the time when students are engaged in rigorous physical activities.

DISCUSSION

From the findings of the study most teachers agreed that inclusive education involves the right to the full participation of all students in all school

activities, accessibility to appropriate aids, assessment and support. This concurs with that of Ugwoke, Eseadi, Ugwuanyi, & Ikechukwu-Ilomuanya, (2015) and Kantavong, (2018) who opined that inclusion is about the right to participate fully in school life and the school's duty to welcome and accept the students with special needs in this regard, the school is to ensure they are comfortable in school. On the other hand, the teachers believed that inclusive education does not concern only students with some level of disabilities and favours only that group (Norwich, 2014). In terms of instruction and courses provided by teachers as part of training as Physical Education teachers pointed out that they had gone through training on teaching persons with special needs but their training is not adequate to fully practice inclusive education (Tant, & Waterlain, 2016). As much as teachers think they know about the practices of inclusive education they have difficulty fully integrating students with special needs during their practical lessons. Conceptually, resourcing physical education teachers with the needed teaching and learning materials for regular schooling activities is a significant challenge for Ghanaian senior high schools as such it was always

going to be difficult when it comes to equipment that will assist students with special needs (Kafui, Huagie, & Sorkpor, 2018). Though training institutions have programmes that inculcate inclusive education in the training of all pre-service teachers including Physical Education teachers, it was found to be inadequate. Banks (2015) opined that the school curriculum represents the community's economic, social and cultural circumstances and gives a voice to all members of society. It is, therefore, in order for tertiary institutions to streamline their curricula to meet the dynamics of a modern education plan that has inclusive education as one of its topmost priorities.

Many of the teachers admitted not having any form of training at all in teaching students with special needs while others have general professional training and not that which will equip them with the methodology of teaching persons with special needs. Some of the teachers had the opinion that all students should be put together during a Physical Education class and that they should be given equal unrestricted access to facilities and equipment (Winnick, & Porretta, 2016). It was evident that the teachers understood the concept of inclusive education and its importance but stated that teaching both groups of students in the same classrooms and on the field would be an arduous task. Some also stated that integrating students with special needs will disrupt regular classroom teaching. Most teachers did not know whom to consult for assistance and so did not invite people with the requisite knowledge in teaching students with special needs to assist them in handling classes involving students with special needs and as well did not solicit monetary support in order to acquire adapted equipment to facilitate teaching students with special needs (Mintz, & Wyse, 2015). The reason perhaps may be a lack of interest because, in most of the schools, the number of students with special needs is very few. The phenomenon may also be attributed to the generally unsatisfactory initial teacher training towards inclusion, hence making it difficult to probably tell which of the PE teachers may be labelled as an expert in teaching students with special needs (Bačáková, & Closs, 2013). Most of the strategies and methods adopted in teaching students with special needs during Physical Education lessons are through the teacher's own efforts. In effect, a teacher who is not creative enough will have many challenges in including students with special needs in their lessons. Some of the teachers believed that students with special needs would be more suited to a segregated

learning environment (Gasmi, Boutouil, & Azeroual, 2022) Some teachers had the notion that students with special needs are allowed to stay out of the normal Physical Education lessons for sake of their safety and as a means of protecting them when students are engaged in rigorous physical activities.

CONCLUSIONS

The researchers can conclude that Physical Education teachers perceived inclusive education as a right for everyone including persons with disability. Also, although Physical Education teachers had some training in inclusive education, they were not equipped enough to handle persons with special needs in their lessons. Physical Education teachers supported the idea of including learners with a disability during their lessons, on the other hand, they were of the opinion that it would disrupt the harmony of their teaching practical lessons.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommend that more courses in Inclusive Physical Education should be taught during the training of teachers in the various institutions, in-service training must also be organised on an interval basis for the teachers at their various schools for them to adopt modern trends of integrating students with special needs in their regular lessons. Finally, facilities and equipment must be modified for easy access as well as finding sources of funds to purchase modern equipment that will facilitate the teaching of Physical Education to learners with special needs.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Dr Kodwo Owusu contributed to the original conceptualisation of this research. He supervised the collection of data with trained research assistants.

Dr Daniel Apaak being one of the supervisors of the original thesis contributed to the initial conceptualisation of the research, representation of

data and interpretation of findings.

Professor Charles Domfeh also one of the supervisors was part of the initial conceptualisation and gave feedback on the structure and content of the paper.

Alexander Kweku Eshun was primarily in charge of drafting the paper from the original work as the structure and content were agreed upon by the authors of the manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data used in this research was part of a large research study submitted for the award of a PhD at the University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast-Ghana.

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