

ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AMONG INCLUSIVE BASIC SCHOOLS TEACHERS

Abstract

Assessment techniques in special education provide information on how learners with special educational needs can be evaluated to ease educational placement and instructional decisions. *However, there seems to be no study regarding teachers' knowledge and assessment techniques in inclusive schools in the country. This article, therefore, aims to investigate assessment techniques used by teachers in evaluating learners with special educational needs in inclusive schools. The descriptive survey design was employed for the study. The study involved 80 teachers in all selected pilot inclusive schools in the Volta Region of Ghana, who was the study's target population. A questionnaire with closed-ended items was developed for data collection. Percentages and frequencies were used as statistical tools to analyse the research data generated from the questionnaire. The findings revealed that most teachers have insufficient knowledge and did not use appropriate assessment techniques in assessing children with special educational needs in the schools. Based on the results, some recommendations were made for the Ministry of Education through the Ghana Education Service to organise workshops, in-service training, and seminars for trained and untrained teachers on assessment techniques in special education.*

Keywords: *Assessment techniques, Inclusive basic schools, Teachers, Ghana, Practices, knowledge.*

Introduction

Special and general education teachers are expected to provide services in general education classrooms historically offered in two different educational settings. This is now conceived as inclusive education. Inclusion is a generic term that refers to “the practice of educating students with moderate to severe disabilities alongside their chronological age peers without disabilities in general classrooms within their home neighborhood schools” (Alper, 2003, p. 15). Mittler (2002) views inclusion as a process of reform that allows all learners to have access to the whole range of educational and social opportunities offered by the school. This includes the curriculum, the assessment, recording, and reporting of pupil’s achievement, the decisions taken on the grouping of learners within school or classroom, pedagogy, sport, and leisure. Such reform aims for the school to provide equal opportunities to all pupils to avoid segregation, isolation, or discrimination.

Similarly, Booth (1999) defines inclusion as a process of increasing the participation of learners in regular schools, reducing their exclusion from the curriculum, cultures, and communities of neighbourhood mainstream centers. For this to succeed, teachers, schools, and systems need to change to accommodate better the diversity of needs that pupils have. It also means that barriers

within and around the school that hinder the learning and participation of all students should be identified and removed. Hence, inclusive education enables all students, including previously excluded groups, to learn and participate effectively within the mainstream school system. According to Angelides, Stylianou, and Gibbs (2006), inclusive education is related to participation and learning, acceptance of difference to the school as a whole, to democracy, and society in general. They further pointed out that inclusive education is about all children having the right to attend the school in their neighbourhood. This implies this practice does not simply refer to the placement of children with special educational needs and disabilities into mainstream schools. Still, it is also concerned with the conditions under which all children can be educated effectively. Thus inclusive ideology means adapting the school curriculum to respond to the uniqueness of individuals, increasing their presence, access, participation, and achievement in learning society (Booth, Ainscow, & Kingston, 2006; Opong, 2003).

It has been said that without assessment, there will be no special education. Hence, special needs education begins with assessment and ends with assessment. Without assessment, professionals will find it challenging to identify the learner's needs and provide specific services. For inclusion to be a reality, it requires novelty in assessment practices to foster the participation of all learners. Assessment in special education is more than administering tests designed to yield scores. The use of informal assessments provides essential information that standardised tests by themselves may not. Assessment can be said to be a process of collecting and interpreting data to determine students' strengths and weaknesses to assist in decision-making in a mainstream setting. Gyimah et al. (2005), citing McLoughlin and Lewis (1990), sees assessment as a systematic process of gathering educationally relevant information to make legal and instructional decisions about special education services.

The use of informal assessments provides essential information that standardised tests by themselves may not. It samples specific areas of the curriculum instead of the general ones. This help teachers to know the strength and weakness a child has. It thus enables assessors to identify the specific difficulties a child experiences. (Gyimah et al., 2018). According to Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel (2005), the professional should not be engaged in the assessment of the learner, but the focus of the professional should at all times, be on assessment for learning. This means that it is essential to break away from the performance-oriented perception of assessment when dealing with a learner who is experiencing a learning difficulty of some kind. It is this researcher's observation that without an inclusive curriculum in place, teachers in the country find themselves using assessment methods that do not take into account the needs of learners with special needs in their classrooms.

In Ghana, criticisms have been leveled against most basic school teachers' capacity to provide needed support for learners with special educational needs. For example, Gyimah and Amoako (2016) observed that regular class teachers use assessment practices that alienate children with special educational needs learners. As a result of these practices in general education, some of the learners with special educational needs feel uncomfortable and thus, turn to be truant and,

finally, drop out of school. It is unclear whether inclusive schools teachers in the Volta Region provide the individual supports that learners with special educational needs require to access the general school curriculum.

Statement of the problem

In Ghana, information gathered from other authors (Hodofe 2014: Gyimah & Amoako, 2016; Amoako, Attia, Dinko (2021) including the researchers who are experienced special educationists, indicated that teachers fail to provide the individual supports that learners with special educational needs require to access the regular school curriculum. It is unclear whether inclusive basic schools teachers in the Volta Region use assessment techniques in special education. In the Volta Region of the country, parents complained that most learners with special educational needs are progressing through schools without proper assessment (Noonan & McCormick, 2014).

Learners who miss assessment cannot access the specific educational programmes, including modified classroom instruction, curriculum, tests, and examinations (Khosa & Mapsolla, 2016). To them, teachers have difficulty assessing learners for information that will help them to identify logistics and materials required to teach. And that they are also unable to maintain a social and learning environment, order, discipline as well as cooperation in the classroom. The situation may have a negative impact on the academic achievement and quality of life of the learners. The research objective that guided the study was to find out the extent to which inclusive basic schools use assessment techniques in evaluating learners in the Volta Region.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The use of the design is appropriate because the researchers sought to describe and to interpret what in such studies look at individuals, groups, institutions, methods, and materials to describe, compare, contrast, classify, analyse and interpret the entities and the events that constitute their various fields of enquiry (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Furthermore, for a detailed study, The researchers purposefully chose eight (8) selected pilot inclusive basic schools. These schools were chosen because they were the regular schools that had special education resource teachers and part of the Special Education selected inclusive pilot schools in the Region at the time of the study.

Proportional sampling technique was used to select the total number of respondents from each school, and simple random sampling (table of random numbers) was used for choosing the 80 respondents out of 200 for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a self-developed questionnaire on a Likert scale. The questionnaire was in two main sections. The first

dealt with respondents' demographic information, while the second section mainly contained items that measured assessment techniques used in special education. Teachers were asked to tick which technique (s) they use in assessing learners with special educational needs.

The instrument was pilot tested using twenty-five (25) non-participating teachers' responses from St. Joseph practice inclusive basic school in the Ahafo Region, to fine-tune the instrument and test the main data collection exercise (Amadehe, 2002). The Cronbach's coefficient alpha, a measure of internal consistency, was used in determining the reliability of the instrument. Since the items on the questionnaire were multiple-scored, especially on the Likert scale, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was deemed appropriate. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the questionnaire was 0.76. The instrument was again given to experts (lecturers) in Special Education and other seasoned researchers for their perusal. After the refinement of the document, the administration of the instrument was done in about four weeks. The exercise was carried out by two of the researchers themselves together with three trained research assistants. Respondents were given assurance of confidentiality and anonymity and the right to opt-out if they deemed wished. The data to answer the research question were analysed using descriptive statistics. The data were coded using SPSS version 22 for analysis and discussion.

Table 1 gives the breakdown of the accessible population selected to represent the region for the study.

Table 1

Results and Discussion

Table 2: Assessment techniques used in assessing learners in inclusive schools

Statement	Strongly Disagree%	Disagree%	Agree%	Strongly Agree%	Total
1. Ecological assessment in assessment	19.3	45.1	22.5	13.0	100
2. Task analysis in assessment	34.2	10.2	50.7	5.0	100
3. Behaviour rating scale in assessing learners	5.0	60.3	25.0	9.66	100
4. Checklist in assessing learners	19.8	25.8	39.0	15.4	100
5. Performance assessment	11.3	54.8	14.7	19.2	100
6. Teacher made test	14.2	4.0	63.5	18.0	100
7. Work sample analysis	10.0	14.8	44.8	30.4	100
8. Portfolio assessment	10.8	27.8	40.8	20.6	100
9. Observation	8.3	17.7	50.5	23.5	100

Overall, (13%) of respondents strongly agree, and (22.5%) agree with the statement. However, (45.1%) disagree and (19.3%) strongly disagree. This implies that most respondents (64.4%) disagree with using ecological assessment techniques in inclusive schools.

From table 2, the data suggests that teachers are not familiar with the use of ecological assessment techniques. This implies that assessments in schools are ineffective. However, assessment should focus on the learner's educational needs to enable them self-actualized. These may include the individual's emotional, physical, communication, and social difficulties that adversely affect their academic achievements. It is important to note that the use of ecological assessment could elicit information on the emotional state, social competencies, and the physical fitness of the learner (Gyimah, Ntim, Deku, 2018). The ministry of education must make funds available for trainers at all District levels to help train teachers all over.

A total of (55.7%) agree with the use of task analysis, while (44.3%) disagree with the statement. This suggests that most respondents use the task analysis technique to assess information in the schools. This implies that task analysis could be the surest means for children with learning disabilities and other disabilities because the task is usually broken into pieces. Each part is learned within a given period (Quansah, Amoako & Ankomah, 2019). The use of task analysis will be continuous because the tool is used for both teaching and assessment for the learner where needs such as communication and intellectual need can be assessed (Noonan, & McCormick, 2014).

From table 2, the use of the behaviour rating scale in assessing learners is not a widespread tool used in assessing learners in inclusive schools. A total of (34.66%) of respondents agree while (65.4%) disagree. This may be due to teachers' lack of knowledge in developing the behaviour rating scale (Noonan, & McCormick, 2014). To correct the lack of knowledge in using and constructing behaviour rating scales by teachers, there is a need to train personnel to write and administer rating scales. If not then, the use of a behaviour rating scale to evaluate performance, skills, and product outcomes as well as its flexibility and adaptability as assessment instruments are denied the learners.

Again, table 2 shows that (54.4%) of the respondents agree while (45.6%) disagree. This implies that most teachers use a checklist in assessing the learners in the schools. This might be as a result of the fact that a checklist does not only inter-individual comparisons, easy to use and updated but also requires little training to administer and is adaptable to subject matter areas.

Additionally, from the findings shown in table 2 (33.9%) of respondents agree while (66.1%) disagree. This implies that two-thirds of the respondents do not use the performance assessment technique. This suggests that performance assessment is not given the impetus in the school curriculum in colleges of education in Ghana (Gyimah et al, 2018). This might be the reason for

low account usage in inclusive schools. This will make it difficult for teachers to collect data on learners by observing and rating of learners.

Moreover, It was found as shown in table 2 that (81.8%) respondents agree to the use of teacher-made test while (18.2%) of the respondents disagree. This suggests that most of the teachers in the schools are familiar with the use of teacher-made test more than any of the assessment techniques. However, the findings contradict studies conducted in the country's Central Region reported that teachers lack adequate test construction skills (Quansah et al., 2019; Amedahe, 1989).

From table 2, the findings revealed that (75.2%) agreed to the use of work sample analysis while (24.8%) disagree. This means that most teachers in the schools are using work sample analysis to assess the learners in the schools. This implies that teachers can determine the error pattern of the learners. When this error pattern is determined it tells the teacher that the student is missing a vital skill or has a misconception of the content learned. This can serve as feedback to the teacher that the student is missing essential skills. These are error analysis and response analysis (Gyimah et al., 2018).

Also, the findings from the table show that (61.4%) of the respondents agree while (38.6%) disagree with the use of portfolios. This implies that children's work collected overtime should be appropriately documented for safekeeping. Reasons for keeping certain information must be clearly stated on children's files for easy reference. For example, in an inclusive school, a child may engage in different activities, and not all information may be kept.

Finally, from table 2, the findings that (74%) of respondents agree to the use of observation techniques to assess learners but (26%) disagrees. In the service of observation, the teacher could employ participant or non-participant observation. It is direct or indirect observation (Gyimah et al., 2018). Teachers need to note the frequency, incident, and duration of the event or the behaviour. Teachers should rate how far the behaviour or the event deviates from the normal group's. The behaviour observed could be recorded systematically through event recording, duration recording, interval recording, and latency recording (Alberto, & Troutman, 2013).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The researchers finally that teachers are not comfortable and do not use most the assessment techniques in inclusive schools but only, use teacher-made test that suitable for learners, with, with educational needs. For assessment to be effective, it requires improving the quality of teachers' training and equipment, and instructional materials to facilitate the assessment in inclusive schools.

The researchers, therefore, suggest that there is a need for the Ministry of Education to organise workshops, in-service training for both trained and untrained teachers on the use assessment of techniques in special education.,

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