

## TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS IN CAMEROON SECONDARY SCHOOLS

**Rosemary Oneke Arrah**

**Kristine D. Swain**

*University of Nebraska*

*This study examined teachers' perceptions of including students with special education needs in Cameroon secondary schools. Teachers (N = 130) from five secondary government, denominational or lay private schools in Buea subdivision of Cameroon, Africa, completed a 26-item survey. The survey was analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and ANOVA. The results show teachers' perceptions of students with special education needs were favorable; however specific areas of concern were noted that included insufficient resources for special education, lack of training to work with students with special education needs, additional stress and anxiety when teaching students with special education needs, and preventing the learning of other students. The discussion focuses on future direction for research and creation of awareness of special education needs of students in Cameroon secondary school.*

The education of students with special education needs has been a concern to the international community since the 1994 United Nations Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education (UNESCO, 1994). World nations committed to provide access for students with special needs to be educated with their peers. As a member of the United Nations, Cameroon has passed laws in relation to the education of students with disabilities. The education of individuals with special education needs was introduced in Cameroon in 1975 with the creation of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA), which was responsible for the well-being of individuals with disabilities (Yuh & Shey, 2008). Cameroon Law No. 83/13, Article 3, of July 1983, provided for the needs and protection of individuals with disabilities with three major provisions: integration of children in ordinary schools, admission in special classes, and admission into specialized institutions (Protection of Disabled Persons, 2003). Understanding teacher perceptions towards students with disabilities continues to be one way to assist with making progress in educating students with disabilities.

A Review of the Present Situation in Special Needs Education in Cameroon suggested that children with severe language, learning or behavior problems were excluded from the public education system. Categories of special educational needs were not included in the legislation (Hegarty, 1995). The review also discussed the lack of administrative structures that deal with specific issues of special education. The government takes an active role in the supervision of private agencies that provide services and education for individuals with special education needs.

Historically, individuals with special needs are not educated in the general education setting. In the school setup, students with special education needs are neither categorized nor registered in the school. As of 2003, only 10 institutions (segregated schools for more significant disabilities such as visual impairments, multiple disabilities (mostly physical), deaf/hard of hearing, and behavioral disorders) existed in Cameroon that serve the needs of individuals with disabilities; out of the ten, only two are government institutions (Yuh & Shey, 2008). The lack of specification in the legislation for the education of students with special education needs leads to the general belief that individuals with disabilities are to be educated in a segregated environment. Many students with special education needs do not have access to basic education in Cameroon (Yuh & Shey, 2008). Titanji (2008) argued that Cameroon needs to move from passing the laws on Education for All in an inclusive environment to the actual implementation. This move will involve all stakeholders in education in Cameroon: parents, teachers, principals and head teachers, and policy makers.

The attitudes and perceptions of teachers towards students with disabilities in both developed and developing countries has been researched (Fakolade, Adeniyi, & Tella, 2009; Gal, Schreur, & Engel-Yeger, 2010). Teachers' attitudes were found to contribute to the success of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Dupourx, Hammond, Ingalls, and Wolman (2006) discussed that the attitudes and beliefs of teachers contributed to their abilities to accommodate students with disabilities in their classes.

Kataoka, Kraayenoord, and Elkins, (2004) researched principals' and teachers' perceptions of learning disabilities in Japan. Five factors of principals' and teachers' perceptions of learning disabilities were analyzed: changes in the family and social situation, insufficient knowledge of and support for learning disabilities, teachers' abilities and professional development, teacher's situation, and government issues. The study indicated that the busy lives of teachers and the pressure of teaching contributed to the difficulties of teaching students with disabilities. On the other hand, principals perceived that learning disabilities were caused by family and social issues, which included parental discipline of the students.

Lopes, Monteiro, Sil, Rutherford, and Quinn (2004) surveyed first through ninth grade general and special education teachers' perceptions about teaching problem students in general education classrooms in Portugal. The majority (85%) of the general and special education teachers indicated that resources were limited to teach students with learning and behavior problems in general education classrooms and more than 90% of the teachers indicated that inclusive education is a set of services and not a specific place. The authors also suggested that even with collaboration with special education teachers, general education teachers do not see much improvement in the academic performance of problem students.

Ocloo and Subbeya (2008) investigated the factors that influenced teachers' perceptions and attitude, and teachers' views towards the placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms perceptions in Ghana. The results indicated that teachers were aware of inclusive education and also had a positive disposition towards inclusive education, but that inadequate resources were a challenge to implement inclusive education.

A study by Mamah, Deku, Darling, and Avoke (2011) indicated a positive perception towards including students with vision loss in three Ghanaian universities. Teachers' lack of knowledge about disabilities was a factor that was discussed in the study. The research suggests that in-service training, conferences, and professional development for the teachers were necessary for teachers to include students with vision loss in Ghanaian universities.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of students with special education needs in the general education environment in Cameroon secondary schools. The attitudes of teachers with regard to educating students with special education needs, inclusive education, and challenges of teaching students with special education needs were investigated. Two research questions were investigated: 1) What are teachers' perceptions of students with special education needs in Cameroon secondary schools? 2) What are the challenges of teaching students with special education needs in Cameroon secondary schools?

#### **Method**

##### *Participants*

The participants in this study included 130 general education teachers from five secondary schools in Buea Subdivision in the South West Province of Cameroon. The schools surveyed did not have a special education teacher on staff. Teachers were purposively selected from public-general education, denominational (Catholic, Baptist, and Presbyterian), and day-private schools in the Fako Division of the South West Province of Cameroon. Students who attend these schools pay tuition and fees. The payment in the government school is lower than the denominational and lay private schools. Eligibility criteria in the study included: a) accessibility for participant recruitment and survey, and b) proximity of the schools to each other. It was assumed that the target participants in these schools would have students with special education needs and must have come in contact with them or have them in their classes.

##### *Instrumentation*

The survey instrument was adapted and modified from a previous study on university teachers' perception of inclusion of the visually impaired in Ghanaian universities (Mamah, et al., 2011). The Likert scale format was used in the 26-item teachers' survey to ask the participants to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the

statements presented to them by selecting one of the choices presented: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). In adapting the survey, the researcher took into consideration the fact that the previous survey dealt with teachers' perceptions based on a specific disability. For most of the items in this study, visual impairment was substituted with special education needs. The adapted instrument covered two factors used in the original instrument: 1) the general perception of the teachers and 2) the perception of teachers towards the concept of inclusion. A third factor was added to the present instrument: the challenges of teaching students with special needs.

### *Procedure*

The participants in this study (N = 130) were administered a 26-item survey soliciting information regarding the special education needs of students in general education environments. The survey was administered by the researcher in person. Having selected the participants for the survey, permission was granted by the delegation of education, Senior Divisional Officer (SDO), and the Catholic Education Secretary (CES). The principals of the various schools were contacted ahead of time to gain access to the schools and to build rapport. Because of the prior contact, there was a lot of cooperation from the teachers. Data was collected over a five-day period in the five secondary schools in Buea Subdivision. The 130 teachers who participated in the survey were present in the school at the time of data collection and all responded to the survey.

## **Results**

### *Demographics of Participants*

One hundred and thirty teachers were surveyed from denominational, government, lay private schools. School 1 was a Catholic school (n=21), school 2 was government (n=40), school 3 was Catholic (n=30), school 4 was Presbyterian (n=25), and school 5 was a Lay Private school (n=14).

**Table 1. Demographics of Survey Respondents**

Characteristic	N	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	69	53.08
Female	61	46.92
<b>Teacher's level of education</b>		
Bachelor's degree	88	67.70
Master's degree	16	12.31
Bachelor's degree and DIPES I & II	5	3.84
DIPES I & II	7	5.40
High school diploma	4	3.07
Ph.D.	1	0.77
Other	3	2.30
<b>Years of teaching experience</b>		
0-5	64	50
6-10	30	23.44
11 or more	34	26.56
<b>Content area teaching</b>		
Business	7	5.38
English	27	20.77
Home Economics	1	0.77
Math	9	6.92
Science	35	26.92
Social Science	45	34.62
Religion	3	2.31
Philosophy	2	1.54
Other	1	0.77
<b>Type of School</b>		
Denominational	3	60
Government	1	20
Lay Private	1	20

The teaching experiences for the respondents from all five schools ranged from five months to 29 years with a mean of 7.41 years. More respondents were male ( $n=69$ , 53.08%) than female ( $n=61$ , 46.92%). Out of the 130 teachers who responded to the survey, 97.70% were Cameroonians ( $n=127$ ) and 2.30% were non Cameroonians ( $n=3$ ). See Table 1 for teachers' level of education and complete demographic information.

### Survey

#### *General Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers*

The overall mean for secondary teachers' perception was 2.62 with a standard deviation of 0.47. Item 7 indicated that teachers believed that they have knowledge of students with SEN ( $M = 2.98$ ) with 82% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Item 8 indicated that teachers believed that they were prepared to teach all types of students ( $M = 3.09$ ) with 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Item 9 indicated that teachers did not take a course in special education ( $M = 2.00$ ) with 76.6% of teachers disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. See table 2 for survey item information.

**Table 2. General Perceptions of Inclusion of Secondary School Teachers**

Item	Mean	SD (%)	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
7. I have knowledge about students with special education needs	2.98	0.81	7.8	10.2	58.6	23.4
8. I am prepared to teach all types of students	3.09	0.86	6.2	13.8	44.6	35.4
9. I took a course in Special Education	2.00	0.92	33.1	42.5	15.7	8.7
10. I have read about teaching students with special education needs	2.38	0.89	20.3	28.1	44.5	7.0
11. I have skills for teaching students with special education needs	2.36	0.83	15.3	40.3	37.1	7.3
12. I adapt my lessons to meet the unique need of students with special education needs	2.69	0.9	13.1	20.8	50.0	16.2

#### *Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers on the Concept of Inclusion*

The overall mean of secondary teachers' perception of the concept of inclusion was 2.75 with a standard deviation of 0.64. Item 13 indicated that 92.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is a good to teach students with and without disabilities. Item 15 indicated that teachers believed that teaching students with special needs requires a different technique with 95.4% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Item 21 indicated that teachers believe all children with disabilities benefit from inclusive education with 78.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing. On item 17 respondents disagreed with the statement that teaching children with special education needs will cause stress and anxiety with a mean of 2.11 with 65.1% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. See Table 3 for item information.

#### *Challenges of Teaching Students with Special Education Needs*

The mean for challenges of teaching students with special education needs was 2.43 with a standard deviation of 0.44. Item 22 indicated that 83.6% of teachers collaborate to help students with SEN. Item 23 indicated that 52.9% of respondents believe that they did not receive support from the principal to help students with special education needs. Item 24 indicated that 78.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed that there are sufficient resources to help students with special education needs. Item 25 indicated that 62% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that there is a system to detect and help students with special education needs. Item 26 indicated that 51.2% of teachers agreed or strongly disagreed that the number of students in the class was too large to help students with disabilities. See Table 4 for item information.

#### *Differences between Male and Female Teachers*

An independent samples t-test (see table 5) was used to compare perceptions between male and female respondents on research question two about the challenges that teachers face teaching students with special education needs. There was a significant difference in their responses male ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) and female ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ;  $t(128) = -2.91$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). Results suggest that male respondents perceive that they will face more challenges working with students with special education needs. No significant difference was found between male and female respondents on the general perceptions of inclusion ( $t(128) = -1.56$ ,  $p = .122$ ) or the concept of inclusion ( $t(128) = .73$ ,  $p = .466$ ).

**Table 3. Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers on the Concept of Inclusion**

Item	Mean	sd	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
13. It is good to teach students with and without Disabilities	3.36	0.72	3.1	4.7	45.7	46.5
14. Only special educators can teach students with special education needs	2.36	1.04	23.1	36.9	20.8	19.2
15. Teaching students with special education needs requires different techniques	3.40	0.58	0.0	4.7	51.2	44.2
16. Teaching students with special education needs would prevent the teaching and learning of other students that do not have special education needs	2.15	0.93	26.2	42.3	21.5	10.0
17. Teaching children with special education needs will cause stress and anxiety for me	2.11	0.86	27.9	37.2	31.0	3.9
18. Teaching children with special education needs will be too much work	2.32	0.92	20.9	36.4	32.6	10.1
19. Inclusive education is a good idea	3.15	0.78	3.2	14.3	46.8	35.7
20. Inclusive education should replace segregated Education	2.85	1.00	12.1	21.8	34.7	31.5
21. All children with disabilities can benefit from inclusive education	3.07	0.72	0.8	20.5	50.0	28.7

**Table 4. Challenges of Teaching Students with Special Education Needs**

Item	Mean	sd	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
22. Teachers collaborate to help students with special education needs	3.09	0.84	7.0	9.4	50.8	32.8
23. There is support from the principal to teach students with special education needs.	2.43	0.89	15.5	37.2	35.7	11.6
24. There are sufficient resources in the school to teach students with special education needs.	1.89	0.81	35.7	42.6	18.6	3.1
25. The school has a system to detect and help students with special education needs	2.26	0.92	22.5	39.5	27.9	10.1
26. The number of students in the classes is too large to help students with disabilities	2.50	0.01	19.4	29.5	32.6	18.6

**Table 5. Differences in Perception between Male and Female of the Challenge Teaching Students with Special Education Needs**

Item	Gender	Group Statistics	
		Mean	t
General perception	Female	2.50	-1.56*
	Male	2.66	
Perception of Inclusion	Female	2.77	.731
	Male	2.72	
Challenges of working with students with SEN	Female	2.29	2.91*
	Male	2.67	

Note.\* p &lt;.01

*Differences between Years of Teaching Experience*

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the differences in years of teaching experience (0-5, 6-10, 11 or more years). The comparison was between respondents' years of teaching experience and their perceptions of students with SEN (see table 6). There was a significant difference between teachers who have taught for 0-5 years and teachers who have taught for 11 years or more [(F 2, 125) = 3.68,  $p = .028$ ]. Post hoc comparison using Tukey HSD test indicate that respondents with 0-5 years teaching experience and those with 11 or more years teaching experience perceive the inclusion of students with SEN differently. No differences were found for respondents with 6-10 of teaching experience.

**Table 6. One Way ANOVA Results Showing Differences in Years of Teaching**

		Sum of sq	df	Mean sq	F
Gen. perception	Between groups	.093	2	.047	.120
	Within groups	48.247	125	.386	
	Total	48.340	127		
Perception of inclusion	Between groups	1.027	2	.514	3.677*
	Within groups	17.465	125	.140	
	Total	18.492	127		
Challenges of sped	Between groups	.249	2	.124	.375
	Within groups	41.508	125	.332	
	Total	41.757	127		

## Post Hoc Tests

## Multiple Comparison

Dependent variable	Yrs group	Yrs group	Mean Difference	Std.error	Sig
Perception of inclusion	0-5 years	6-10 years	-.11220	.08271	.367
		11+years	-.21146*	.07932	.023

Note \*  $p < 0.05$  level.

*Differences among Schools*

A one way ANOVA was conducted to compare the differences in perceptions between respondents in the five schools who were surveyed (see table 7). Differences were found in the general perceptions of teachers in schools 2 and 5 and challenges of teaching students with special education needs in schools 1 and 2. There was a significant difference between school 2 and school 5 on the general perception of students of students with SEN [(F4, 125) = 3.22,  $p = .015$ ]. Post hoc comparison using Tukey HSD test indicate that respondents in school 2 and 5 perceive students with SEN differently. There was also a significant difference between school 1 and school 2 on the challenges of teaching students with SEN [(F4, 125) = 3.55,  $p = .009$ ]. Post hoc comparison using Tukey HSD test indicates that respondents in schools 1 and 2 perceive the challenges of working with students with SEN differently.

**Discussion**

The findings of this research indicated that teachers were willing to teach students with special education needs. From responses, teachers agreed that they had knowledge about students with SEN, were prepared to teach all students, and have read about students with SEN; therefore, the teachers in this study have a positive perception of teaching students with special education needs. The results answer the first research question about the teachers' perceptions of students with SEN with the results consistent with previous research that positive attitudes and abilities affect teachers' abilities to accommodate students with special needs in their classrooms (Dupourx et al., 2006). With positive perceptions, teachers are more likely to be open to teach students with SEN.

Teachers in this study were in agreement (80%) that they were prepared to teach students with SEN. However, it was noted that 75% of the teachers in this study did not take a course in special education. Also 55.6% of the teachers indicated that they did not have skills to teach students with special education needs. The teachers'

responses show that they may be willing to teach all students but lack the skills and knowledge to teach students with SEN (Kamens, Lorete, & Slostad, 2003).

**Table 7. One Way ANOVA Results Showing Differences between Schools**

		Sum of sq	df	Mean sq	F
Gen. perception	Between groups	4.530	4	1.132	3.218*
	Within groups	43.994	125	.352	
	Total	48.523	129		
Perception of inclusion	Between groups	.942	4	.235	1.645
	Within groups	17.889	125	.143	
	Total	18.831	129		
Challenges of sped	Between groups	4.276	4	1.069	3.553**
	Within groups	37.615	125	.301	
	Total	41.891	129		

**Post Hoc Tests Multiple Comparison**

Dependent variable	schoolcode	Schoolcode	Mean Difference	Std.error	Sig
General perception of teachers	School 2	School1	-.40294	.15987	.093
		School3	-.20500	.14328	.609
		School4	-.29767	.15125	.288
		School5	-.57357*	.18422	.019
Challenges of teaching students with SEN	School 1	School2	.43744*	.14783	.030
		School3	.38619	.15608	.103
		School4	.16486	.16238	.848
		School5	.00714	.18927	1.000

Note \*\* p < .01 P < 0.05 level.

More than half of the teachers in this study did not take a course in special education nor have the skills to teach students with special education needs. The data in this research suggest that general education teachers will need intensive training in special education in order to meet the needs of students with special education needs in their classrooms. Shade and Stewart (2001) stated that it is important to provide preservice and in-service teachers with knowledge and examples of meeting the needs and individual differences of students and adapting the lessons to meet the unique needs of students' special needs. Wotany (2012) also stated that due to inadequate training on intervention programs in the general education, the education system in Cameroon fails to provide accommodations for students with learning difficulties.

*Challenges of Teaching Students with Special Education Needs*

The findings to the second research question on the challenges that teachers face teaching students with SEN found that teachers agreed that collaboration exists among teachers to help students with SEN. Consistent with prior research, collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers is a significant indicator for successful inclusion of students with disabilities (Zalizan, 2000). Collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers could be a successful indicator for the success of students with disabilities. This present research found that there were no trained special education teachers in the five schools surveyed. General education teachers collaborated among themselves to help students with SEN.

On the issue of support from the principal, slightly more teachers (52.7%) disagreed that they have support from principal to work with students with special education needs. The specifics in this lack of support from principals

are not clear from the results of the present research. This may be a topic for further research as to what type of support the teachers need from their principals and to know the type of training and qualifications that the principals are required to have in order to provide support to the teachers. Schumm and Vaughn (1995) attest that support from administration is necessary for including students with SEN. Lack of support from the principal is a negative indication for effective inclusive practice. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) suggested that principal support of teachers favors positive perception of including students with SEN.

The other challenge indicated through the responses was that there was a lack of a system to identify students with special education needs. More teachers disagreed that there is a system to detect students with special education needs. The lack of a system to detect students with SEN in this study is consistent with literature. Dupoux et al. (2006) found that the lack of formal identification of students with special needs makes it difficult to determine the prevalence of disabilities, the categories of the disabilities of the students in question, and to identify appropriate interventions. The lack of adequate plans for the identification of students with special needs was also found to be a challenge in Nigeria (Garuba, 2003).

There was an overwhelming negative response (78.3%) to the question of sufficient resources for working with students with special education needs. The results of this study indicate that lack of resources is a great challenge for the teachers. This was not a surprising response; the response is consistent with literature on the problems of special education provisions in Nigeria. Obiakor and Offor (2011) noted that lack of funding, educational philosophy, and high illiteracy rate in Nigeria could be contributing factors to the problems of lack of resources for special education.

The class size was another challenge that impacted the teaching of students with special education needs. The present research shows that 51% of the teachers thought the number of students in their class was too large to help students with disabilities. The result of the present research is consistent with previous research findings that large classes impact the abilities of teachers to teach students with SEN (Ocloo & Subbeya, 2008). Also, a report on the increase in class sizes in Cameroon indicates that in an average primary classroom in Cameroon students increased from 52 in 1991 to 63 in 2000 (Weiner, 2010). An international Labor Organization study found that the maximum number in a secondary school classroom was 40 students (International Labor Organization, 1991).

There was a significant difference in the perceptions of the challenges of teaching students with special education needs between males and females. This indicates that male teachers perceive that they face more challenges working with students with special education needs. This result is consistent with research by Fakolade, Adeniyi, and Tella (2009) who found that female teachers have a more positive attitude towards including students with special education needs in a general education classroom. Cultural differences between males and females may play a role in the challenges of teaching students with SEN. This may suggest why females in this study have a positive perception of facing the challenges of working with students with special education needs.

Another difference is in the years of teaching experience. Teachers with 11 or more years of experience had significantly more positive perceptions towards including students with special education needs than teachers who had 0-5 years of teaching experience. Teachers with more teaching experience may have a better way of working with all students. The reason for the difference cannot be determined by the present research; many reasons may have contributed to the positive perception of teachers with more years of teaching experience. Consistent with previous research, the years of teaching have a positive impact on the inclusion of students with SEN in general education setting (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000).

There were differences between schools in two of the areas: general perceptions and challenges of teaching students with SEN. The differences were found in the different types of schools surveyed: government and Lay Private schools and government and Catholic schools; the differences may have been accounted for by the different educational philosophies of the individual proprietors and the government. The type of students who attend the government and lay private school may account for the differences. Students' tuition and fees are lower at the government school than at the lay private schools. The differences in the challenges of working with students with SEN were found between teachers in the government school and a Christian school (Catholic). These differences may be accounted for by the nature of the school and the type of students who attend Catholic and government schools. The Catholic school is a single gender boarding school of all female students while the government school is a co-educational day school. The differences between the schools may be an interesting topic for further research.

### *Recommendations for Practice*

The present research has demonstrated that teachers perceive the need for more government involvement in the education of students with special education needs in terms provision of resources and funding for the teachers. The laws and legislations are not clear about funding opportunities for schools to educate students with SEN. There is need for clarification from the government on how special education services should be funded in the schools. The lack of education and training of personnel in the field of special education is an important point that was highlighted in this research. The research demonstrates a need for school principals and government to provide teachers with training to include students with SEN in the general education environment. Training in the form of professional development for teachers can be one way to empower teachers to meet the needs of all students.

Professional development is recommended in the following areas: informal assessment of reading and writing, differentiation of instruction, response to intervention, and types of disabilities. Another recommendation is to ensure that student teachers preparing for a career in teaching take a course in special education at the university level or teacher training college. Identification of students with special education needs is highly recommended based on the present research so that teachers can identify the individual needs of each student and implement interventions.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

Several recommendations for future research in the area of special education needs in Cameroon secondary schools can be made based on this research. There is need for more research on the type of support that principals are presently providing to the teachers in general education setting. It would be interesting to know the differences in the perception of teachers and principals towards students with special education needs in the general education environment. Another area of research may be on the effectiveness of inclusive education in secondary schools in Cameroon. It would be a good to know how effective the inclusive movement has been to the education of secondary school students with SEN. Another recommendation for further research will be research on the impact of the years of teaching experience on secondary school teachers' perception of students with SEN. Furthermore, it would be important to research teachers' knowledge of the laws, policies, and guidelines of special education and inclusive education in Cameroon. It would be interesting to know how teachers understand the laws and policies and how to apply them in their classrooms.

An observation by the researcher when administering the survey was the question on the knowledge about students with SEN. The term *slow learners* was used by respondents to refer to students with specific learning disabilities. A future research on the teachers' understanding of the concept of learning disabilities would be important for the inclusion of students with SEN in the general education setting in Cameroon.

### *Limitations*

The researcher realized that most of the teachers have limited skills in working with students with SEN. Furthermore, the research was limited to 5 schools in the South West Province of Cameroon, and therefore extra caution should be taken when generalizing the results of this study to other populations.

### **Conclusion**

The study gives a deeper understanding of secondary teachers' perceptions of students with SEN in Cameroon. Teachers have a positive perception of students with special education needs. However, the lack of support from principals, insufficient resources, and lack of skills in working with students with special education needs some consideration. This research points to the issues that impact the effectiveness of inclusive education in Cameroon. With a positive perception of students with SEN, secondary school teachers can play a significant role in educating all students in an inclusive environment if they have the resources, skills, and support that they need in their classrooms. Gender played a significant role in the results of this research; it showed that male and female teachers perceive the challenges of working with students with SEN differently.

Since most of the teachers surveyed had not taken a course in special education, it is recommended that the universities include a course in the educator and administrator preparation, and that current teachers receive professional development on strategies for serving students with SEN. In order to achieve an effective inclusive education in Cameroon, the recommendations from this research need to be taken into consideration. Awareness among teachers and school administrators on the need for more support can be a motivating factor for the

government and other stakeholders in Cameroon to consider some positive action to support students with special education needs.

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