

Interactions Between Able-Bodied and Disabled Pupils in Inclusive Public Elementary School in Togo

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Abstract: The aim of this research was to examine the interactions between teachers and pupils with disabilities in an inclusive school environment in Togo's public elementary school (EPP). The field survey covered 20 EPPs through 27 observations of inclusive classrooms and over a hundred interviews with teachers and children with disabilities (CWD). The field data show that relations between the two categories of pupils are cordial, given that able-bodied children do not mind sitting on the same bench in class, playing or eating with their disabled classmates.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Students, Interactions, Inclusive Classrooms, Public Primary School

A. Introduction

Education is a powerful force for change. It underpins the development of every human being and of society as a whole: as such, it is a product of socialization. Education has been the subject of analysis by a number of researchers, as it raises the question of the aims, values and meaning to be attached to the transmission of culture (Vergnaud & Plaisance, 2012). Schools play a distributive role in social status. The primary school institution, specifically, prepares children to lay the foundations for an appropriate upward mobility. When access to education and learning improves, the knock-on effects on communities and countries are remarkable. Within the school, there are many players working in synergy to make the school environment a welcoming environment for all types and categories of children. These include teachers, pupils, parents and educational authorities.

In Togo, since the adoption of the 2010 Education Sector Plan (PSE), an inclusive education policy has been announced. From that date onwards, classes in the public education system at least are supposed to be inclusive. Despite Togo's signature on September 23, 2008 of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the adoption on June 24, 2009 of the bill authorizing its ratification, a report notes that "children with disabilities in Togo continue to face strong exclusion, whether from their families or their communities, and the prospects open to them are very limited" (UNICEF Togo, 2015: 7).

According to Interview Info (2021), there were 13,282 disabled children and only 7,139, or 54% were enrolled in school, while most of those enrolled ended up in specialized schools, while more than 50% of disabled children who attended school did not reach secondary level. In line with this, another study (UNDP, 2018) reveals that there are around 900,000 disabled people in Togo and two-thirds (2/3) of disabled young people in this category are not in school. UNICEF (2018) confirms this figure of 900,000 as the registered disabled population in Togo people with disabilities on Togolese territory. According to data revealed by FETAPH (2013), out of a total of over 13,282 children with disabilities, only 54% went to school and 40% of girls never set foot in school. According to Togo's Ministry of Education, disabled children account for just 1% of primary school pupils (MEPSTA, 2020: 14).

Once in the educational institution, disabled and non-disabled students alike are called upon to make advances and educational progress. And this requires an appropriate school environment in which learners are called upon to participate, with a view to deriving greater benefit from the teaching they receive. Student participation is an important aspect of learning progressive democracy. In an inclusive school environment, students should not limit themselves to learning knowledge alone; they need to learn to interact, to live as a group, and to forge bonds of solidarity. That's why, in this article, we study the interactions between able-bodied and disabled pupils in public elementary school in four educational regions of Togo. What is the nature of these relationships? Specifically, what is the perception of able-bodied pupils in terms of equality with CWD? What are their attitudes when the CWD are late or unable to answer the teacher's questions? How cooperative are they when it comes to dealing with homework or working in groups?

B. Methods

The study population for this qualitative research was teachers of inclusive classes, CWD, able-bodied pupils and parents of CWD. The survey took place in 20 schools: 3 in IEPP Assoli, 4 in IEPP Kozah Centre, 5 in IEPP Mô, 4 in IEPP Tone Ouest and 4 in IEPP Haho Sud. Around 100 interviews were conducted and 27 class observations were made.

Data collection was carried out using the KoBo Collect toolbox application, while Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excell were used to process and analyze field data and produce graphs. Interviews were transcribed and content analysis provided verbatims for the discussion section of the results.

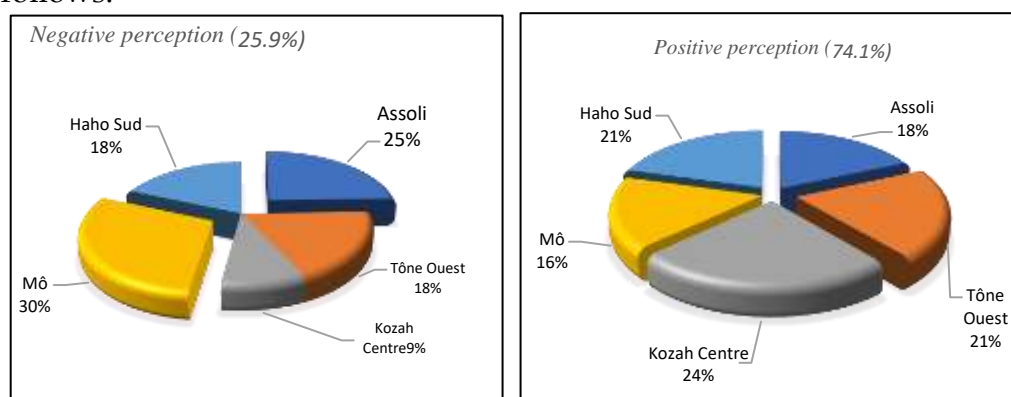
Two theories were used to analyze the data. The first is the contact hypothesis or intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), which states that the more frequent contact between groups, the more inter-knowledge there is, and the less negative attitudes towards exogroups will be. In other words, contact is a factor contributing to the reduction of prejudice, and a major factor in the consolidation of more tolerant and inclusive societies.

Next, Konu and Rimpelä's (2002) model of well-being at school was considered, on the understanding that the quality of relationships between learners creates a livable school environment for learning that benefits both categories of learner (Baudoin and Galand, 2021).

C. Results and Discussion

Able-bodied schoolchildren's perceptions of equality with their disabled peers

Able-bodied schoolchildren's negative perception of their non-disabled peers was low (25.9%) compared to their positive perception (74.1%). Specifically, the data is as follows:



Graph 1. Peer perceptions of CWD equality

The information contained in graph 2 indicates the following: as far as negative perception is concerned, Mò comes first (30%), followed by Assoli (25%), Tone Ouest and Haho Sud (18%). The area is landlocked. Plan International is practically the only organization (both international and local) working on disability issues. The testimonies gathered on site show that other NGOs or initiatives for the promotion of disability are not very present. This means that messages on the issue of disability are new and difficult to get across in people's minds (including the teachers who run the inclusive classes, see 5.5.1.). Positive perceptions are highest in Kozah Centre (24%) and in Tone Ouest and Haho Sud (21%). Perceptions are more positive in urban centers, compared to less urban areas such as Assoli (18%) and Mò (16%).

Able-bodied learners' reactions to working in groups, playing sports or sweeping with their disabled peers

Table 1. Reactions of able-bodied people when they have to work in a group, sport or sweep

Reactions of able-bodied people when working in groups			
Acceptance	Outright refusal	Silence (neutral)	Total
25 92,6%	3,7%	3,7%	100%

Table 1 shows that when able-bodied learners are asked to work in groups, play sports or sweep with their disabled peers, their attitudes are very much

conciliatory in nature, i.e., acceptance (92.6%) dominates over categorical refusal (3.7%) or silence (3.7%), which is a sign of neutrality. This data shows that able-bodied children, by dint of rubbing shoulders and living together with their peers who are not quite like them, have come to get used to and get used to it (see 2.2.1.; 2.2.3 and chapter 6). It's worth pointing out that sociability is greater in classes where the benches are arranged by group, as the following pictures show:



Photo 1: Classroom organization by group EPP



Photo 2: Arrangement of benches by group at EPP Camp

This arrangement of the children facilitates cooperation, solidarity and exchanges between them, and helps to ensure that able-bodied pupils accept those with disabilities.

Number of visits by CWD parents to the school

Table 2. Number of visits to the school by CWD parents, according to learners

Number of parent visits to the school									
02 times / year	2 to 3 times / week	No support	No school visits	Every two /weeks	Every day	Rarely	1 time / quarter	1 time/ month	Total
13,7 %	27,4 %	13,7 %	10,37 %	27,4 %	11,1 %	11,1 %	13,7 %	14,8 %	100 %

The data recorded in the table above show that, according to learners (both able-bodied and disabled), CWD parents' visits to the school are downright rare and non-existent (37%), monthly when they exist (14.8%). Other remarks are made: parents' visits to their disabled children are rare (11.1%), sometimes daily (11.1%); other parents visit every two weeks (7.4%) or two or three times a week (7.4%). Some parents don't seem to be concerned with their children's schooling: they visit twice a year (3.7%) or once a term (3.7%). Some parents prefer other people (family or non-family) to accompany their own children to school (3.7%).

Reactions of the able-bodied when the CWD are unable to answer a question in a course or class/homework assignment

Table 3. Able-bodied schoolchildren's reaction when CWDs fail to answer a lesson or homework question

Reaction when CWD can't answer a question properly							
No reaction	Chat	They struggle to give the real answer	Indifferent	Whispers the answer	Mockery	Silence	Total
18,5 %	3,7 %	3,7 %	7,4 %	11,1 %	18,5 %	37 %	100 %

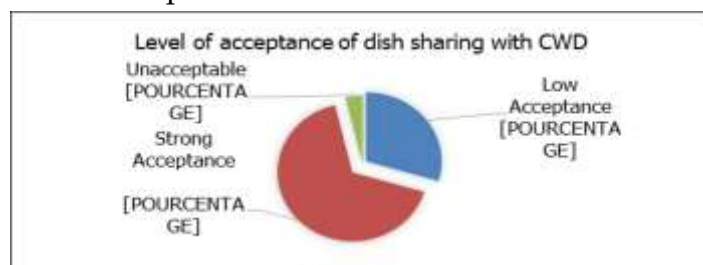
From this table, it can be seen that reacting in class is a habit almost congenital to all the schoolchildren observed in all the inspections. When their classmates fail to

answer a question correctly in class, able-bodied learners show no reaction (18.5%), remain indifferent (7.4%) in some cases, or remain completely silent (37%) in classes where the inclusive class teacher has succeeded in disciplining them.

We have also noted that some children show empathy towards their classmates with assimilation difficulties, going so far as to whisper the answer (11.1%) or struggle to give the right answer (3.7%) in support of those who have answered the teacher's questions incorrectly. From another point of view, we shouldn't overlook the mocking attitudes (18.5%) or the chattering (3.7%): this noisy attitude is characteristic of a lack of interest in what's going on between the teacher and the CWD interacting.

Level of acceptance of sharing dishes with invalid children

Several possibilities emerge when able-bodied learners are asked to share a dish with their disabled companions:

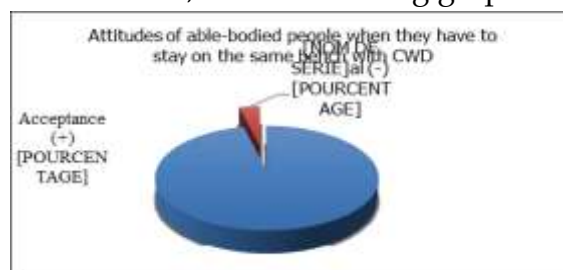


Graphics 2. Level of acceptance of dish-sharing with disabled children

Looking at graph 4, the data available are as follows: high level of acceptance (67%), low level of acceptance of dish-sharing (29%) and an attitude of offence for children who consider this situation unthinkable (4%). It should be pointed out that these observations were made in the canteen (at recess), at the start of lessons or on leaving the classroom or in the vicinity of classrooms, a way of observing situations in a direct, real-life situation.

Attitudes when having to stay in the same bench as non-abled peers

When we have observed learners sitting in class, it turns out that the attitude of inclusion is by far the most evident, as the following graph shows:



Graphics 3. Attitudes of able-bodied pupils when they have to stay on the same bench with CWD pupils

According to graph 5, able-bodied schoolchildren agree to sit on the same bench with their disabled peers (96%). Only a few refuses to do so (4%). This means

that cohabitation is largely peaceful and inclusion is accepted by non-disabled learners. The observation was also made in the sense that disabled children are happy to stay with the others, they are happy to be accepted. Cases of refusal to stay on the same bench (4%) are due, according to some field observations, to the following non-exhaustive facts. Overall, it's the inconvenience caused by certain disabled children, in particular: drooling, lack of hygiene and property that repel others, parental indoctrination with regard to disabled people, fear of seeing others who are different from oneself. We have found in the field those good relations between teachers on the one hand, and between teachers and taught on the other, depend on the level of teacher training. This is why the following result concerns teacher training on the themes of disability and inclusive education.

The field data revealed that social relations between learners are not always friendly. Many learners were found to be friendly and helpful. The presence of CWDs in the classroom has given other children the opportunity to learn other ways of communicating (sign language), to discover that we can speak without speaking, without necessarily opening our mouths. As an example, we quote the statement of a non-disabled pupil we met at EPP Sangoul in Djarkpanga: "since we've been in class with our friend who doesn't speak there, the teacher has taught us the language of the deaf and dumb, using finger and hand signs. It's a bit difficult! But the teacher encourages us to do it.

Furthermore, Graph 3 showed that able-bodied schoolchildren's negative perception of their non-able peers was low (25.9%) compared to their positive perception (74.1%). This data shows that "educating them together is a good thing, as it enables disabled children to learn on an equal footing with others. The aim is not necessarily for these children to go far or go to high school, but for them to be included in society and feel like full citizens", as this teacher from EPP Dapaong Centrale puts it.

Another adds: "We're already seeing changes: when we ring the bell for recess, you'll see that the other pupils don't hesitate to reach out to disabled children to give them something to eat; they help each other; we don't feel intimidated, we always give them advice in that direction" (teacher at EPP Lassa Elimdè). The following comments are along the same lines:

Inclusive education is really essential. First of all, it encourages parents who have a child like this; they're no longer going to say I gave birth to a child who isn't normal like the other children. It also gives courage to some people, perhaps because they hold the children and tend to neglect them because they have a disability, so they need to know that all children have the same right to education as the others (teacher at EPP Saiboudè G/B).

It's clear that when able-bodied learners have to live together with their peers who aren't quite like them, they've got used to it, playing sports and sweeping with their disabled peers, since the acceptance rate is very high, at 92.6%. The following further illustrate the point: "Yes, he's my friend, he can't walk or write, and I help him write and push his bike when he wants to go somewhere. I want us to stay

together" (Yenyane's non-disabled child); "He's my comrade. We walk together every day to school and back home. Sometimes when he misses the chalk in class, I give him this. Once he gave me something to eat at recess too. The bad thing is that he can't talk. I want him to stay with us and learn together" (non-disabled child, EPP Sourì Kadanga).

By living together, able-bodied children discover positive traits in their disabled peers. This positive interaction extends to sports and play activities, as the following testimonial explains: "Our friend is a bit violent with us. He disturbs us a lot when we're busy with the teacher's explanations. But he's very good at math. Often, the teacher explains even more with signs. And his bench-mate also helps him when he doesn't understand. He plays soccer with us. He's a good goalkeeper. He's rarely absent. We've been in class with him from CP1 to CE2 now. We're used to him. At recess, when we ask him for his lunch, he gives it to us, and he also plays with us" (non-disabled pupil from EPP Saiboudè).

All the above verbatims highlight the effect of contact between different groups of people. Originally proposed by Allport (1954), the intergroup contact hypothesis postulates that contact between members of different groups can be beneficial if it occurs in situations characterized by four conditions that Pettigrew (1998) evokes in these points: equal status (which presupposes equality of status between group members at the time of interaction, here in our case all are primary school pupils); cooperation: cooperation between group members; common goals (pursuit of an attainable collective objective through team spirit and cooperation); institutional and societal support (expressed by the social group or institution to which the group belongs, or the social environment in which the social interaction takes place, in this case the school).

It has to be said, however, that putting children in learning situations together is not all good news. Sometimes, the cohabitation of able-bodied and disabled children creates friction and conflict. According to Table 15, when their classmates fail to answer a question correctly in class, able-bodied learners show no reaction (18.5%), remain indifferent (7.4%) in some cases or remain completely silent (37%), whisper the answer (11.1%) or struggle to give the right answer (3.7%). On the other hand, teasing (18.5%) or chattering (3.7%) should not be overlooked. For example, a visually impaired child at EPP Saiboudè G/B said: "I come to school alone. No one accompanies me. I walk with the children at home. When I'm alone at recess or lunchtime, a friend comes in under the bench to poke me".

This kind of behavior on the part of some able-bodied people is likely to break the morale of CWDs to the point where some of them shout in classrooms to make themselves heard, a way for them to express themselves, break the silence and draw attention to their needs and break what Coleman (2009) calls public solitude, the fact of being alone together with other learners; in so doing they endure their solitudes in this way (Bordiec, 2018). Despite everything, the interviewed child's desire to attend school remains intact, since he declares "I like my school here, I want to stay here", and such commitment on the part of disabled children who resist the hostile

relational environment is highly interesting, because despite conditions that are not optimal in their favor, they continue to show signs of children who want to succeed. The types of problems linked to relationships, in particular disciple-disciple conflict (Gigafox, 2022), were noted by Cala (2017) in his study and can be summed up as fights, insults, problems with adult authority (disrespect) and little mutual aid.

We recall that Gagnaire & al. (2004) classify conflicts between students in the classroom into three categories: psychic conflict (characterized by a confrontation over choices or decisions, but which only concerns the individual in relation to him or herself. This type of conflict can spill over into relationships with others, but is not very common at school); interpersonal conflict (between two people who disagree about their needs and desires. At school, this type of conflict is often present, and is characterized by arguments, insults and even fights) and intergroup conflicts (opposing groups of people who have a strong identity reference that masks individuality. Students go so far as to speak of clans).

Given that these different types of conflict can be observed within an inclusive school classroom, Cala (2017) reports that the aforementioned authors have proposed three main causes for classroom conflict: conflicts of needs, which have as their subject the ownership of a specific object, for example a dispute over a toy on the playground; conflicts of interest, which bring psychological factors into play, subjects that are more difficult to pin down since they touch on issues of feeling; conflicts of values, which are the confrontation of beliefs, of different ideas that risk causing psychological disorders for one of the protagonists and lasting impossibility of cooperation (Bayada & al., 2004). Moreover, "school is not just a place for transmitting knowledge, it is also a place for relationships" (Bowen and Desbiens, 2004:74).

On the other hand, photos 1 and 2 have benches arranged in groups, which facilitates interactions between learners, since they can easily observe each other, exchange directly, and see each other's challenges. It should therefore be noted that "school wellbeing is constructed, at least in part, by the school context and more particularly by the composition of classes" (Fouquet-Chauprade, 2013: 432). Following this same logic, Duval & al. (2016) confirm that classroom organization is a major factor in student success, and in particular the layout of classroom space, school time (time spent by learners in class), and the quality of class activities and materials proposed by the teacher.

It should be noted in passing that at EPP Agamadè, leadership is centered on the pupils, who make up the latecomers control committee, with tall pupils stationed at the corners of the school entrance, since it's not fenced in. They are also responsible for determining the sanctions and punishment to be meted out to latecomers. And they are specifically divided when it comes to punishing handicapped pupils who arrive late. It's also a student who raises or lowers the flag, and who chooses which class should sing or intone the national anthem at the flagpole rally.

Indeed, peer mediation is an important component to consider when implementing a program focused on peaceful conduct (Lane-Garon & al., 2012). Peer mediation enables students to make a significant contribution to the climate of their school, in addition to having beneficial effects on the personal well-being of mediators (Malizia and Jameson, 2018). Further on, graph 4 shows a high level of acceptance on the part of able-bodied pupils (67%), with 29% agreeing to eat with their CWD peers and only 4% refusing to do so. The same observation can be made when analyzing graph 5: able-bodied schoolchildren accept to stay in the same bench with their CWD peers (96%) and only 4% refuse to do so. These data show that cohabitation is largely peaceful, and inclusion is accepted by and experienced by able-bodied learners.

Peer intervention is noted in the following statements by pupils: "We help him. When we ask him a question and he answer wrongly, we help him to correct himself, because we want him to be with us because he's like us" (able-bodied pupil at EPP Lassa Elimdè). Another said: "He's my friend, he can't speak and he has trouble writing. I often help him understand and write. I always want to stay with him to study together" (nondisabled pupil at EPP Kpanzaba); and another expressed himself in these words: "I'm fine with my friends, they're the ones who help me when I don't understand, so I prefer to stay with them to grow together" (CWD from EPP Zoumounta); "I'm 11 years old. We play ampé together with our friend who's disabled. Whatever the teacher gives us as an exercise; we get together and do it together" (able-bodied child at EPP Kpota G/C). Dutoit and Saint-Pé (2003) refer to this team spirit and conviviality between learners when they state: "Conviviality is that of meeting and welcoming without expectation, without quid pro quo. In turn welcoming, welcomed, the person enters into interrelations with others. Conviviality means making space for one another" (Dutoit et Saint-Pé, 2003: 27).

Some testimonies emphasized the positive changes observed thanks to the cohabitation of CWD and able-bodied children, thus reinforcing conviviality between learners: "inclusive education reduces discrimination vis-à-vis the community and their fellow learners"; "the CWD no longer feels on the bangs of other children his age. They feel free" (teacher, EPP N'Kassaidè Assoli).

Some disabled schoolchildren are at ease in the school environment. A schoolgirl I met at the IEPP Assoli said: "I'm happy to be with my friends in this school; I don't know any other schools where there are only children like me"; "I can see that the school is changing my child. Before, he was shy, but thanks to his friends, he's waking up a bit. At first it was difficult for the others to accept him, but now it's going well" (parent of a disabled child we met in Assoli); "if he was in a special school, for example, after all, he needs to be integrated into society, that's another problem, isn't it? So as he's already with the other children, he grows up with them. When he finds a job one day, it'll be easy for the others to work together with him" (itinerant teacher at IEPP Tone Ouest).

These testimonials concur with Servigne and Chapelle (2017), who assert that "the more we evolve in a cooperative social context, the more we develop prosocial

automatisms. Conversely, the more we evolve in an egoistic and competitive context, the more we develop antisocial automatisms" (idem, 2017: 40). This is exactly what the following learners say: "We want to stay together with him, because he's our comrade. The difficulties we go through with him are that we have to stop and show him what he can't see. But we want to stay with him in the same school, even if he can't see well" (able-bodied child at EPP Djarkpanga G/B); "we're happy to have our classmates in the classroom. The difficulty is that we can't talk to the one who can't talk. But as he's a friend, we prefer to stay together with him to help him" (able-bodied child from EPP Kpanzaba).

The main idea developed by Servigne and Chapelle (2017) is that mutual aid, or cooperation, is the preferred modality for progress, being more effective than competition. In the same vein, Connac (2017) explains that pro-social automatisms, generated by cooperative styles, are those that impose themselves on the context of social life, while egoistic and competitive characters lead rather to anti-social automatisms.

Friendship and closeness free us from the psychological and social blockages maintained on the exogroup, and thus increase our knowledge of others. Such friendships between members of very different groups lead to the development of positive attitudes towards exogroup members, and help to reduce prejudice (Hewstone and Brown, 1986). Allport (1954) expressly states the following:

Prejudice (unless deeply rooted in an individual's character structure) can be reduced by egalitarian contact between majority and minority groups in pursuit of common goals. This effect is greatly enhanced if contacts are sanctioned by institutional supports (i.e., by law, custom or local atmosphere) and as long as this enables the groups to perceive their common interests and the common humanity between members of the two groups (Allport, 1954: 281).

In an analysis of 203 studies from 25 countries, including 90,000 participants, Pettigrew and Tropp (2013) found that 94% of studies supported the contact hypothesis (i.e., 94% of the time, prejudice decreased when there was increased intergroup contact). In schools, cooperative learning techniques increase students' self-esteem, morale and empathy (Aronson and Bridgeman, 1979). Intergroup contact reinforces diversity policies more generally (Yzerbyt and Demoulin, 2019).

E. Conclusion

On the strength of the above, it has to be said that friendship is considered in the literature on intergroup contact to be one of the most effective factors in reducing prejudice (Davies & al., 2011). It has to be said, then, that good collaboration between children in inclusive classrooms prefigures a society that is less and less exclusive and respectful of differences capable of guaranteeing a form of collaborative economy (Rifkin, 2014). Enabling learners to live together and cooperate on school benches already paves the way for active citizenship, personal and social fulfillment, intercultural dialogue and social tolerance towards people who are different (Downes & al., 2017).

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