Interactions Between Teachers and Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Public Primary Schools in Togo

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Abstract: This research examines the interactions between teachers and children with disabilities (CWD) in Togo's public elementary schools. The field survey involved 20 schools through 27 inclusive classrooms observations and over a hundred interviews with teachers as well as children with disabilities (CWD) and some of their parents. The findings show that relations between teachers and CWD pupils are positive, given that the teachers are aware of the challenges of inclusive education, but they complain about the lack of training in differentiated pedagogy, which prevents them from playing their roles effectively in inclusive classes.

Keywords: Children with Disabilities, Teachers, Interactions.

A. Introduction

The concept of "leaving no one behind", at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aims to eradicate all types of disadvantages worldwide. One way of addressing this is education, which is a powerful instrument for reducing poverty and inequality, improving health and social well-being, and laying the foundations for sustainable economic growth (Prud'Homme, Duchesne, 2016). It's a fact that disability is part of social reality, since "we know of no time or place on our planet where, in various forms, disability does not manifest itself. This expression of fragility, universally present in time and space, is likely to affect the entire living chain. Here or there, no one escapes it" (Gardou, 2010: 9).

Inclusive education refers to the adaptation of the school environment to the diversity of learners (Plaisance, 2020). Inclusive education is based on the idea that all children have the right to attend their local school, whatever their differences (Barton and Armstrong, 2007). For these authors, this implies a cultural and educational transformation of the school so that all children are welcomed. For Corbett and Slee (2000), if integration is assimilationist, inclusion is, on the contrary, a struggle for the valorization of difference and identity.

In Togo, since the adoption of the 2010 Education Sector Plan, 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[1] . In line with this, another study (UNDP, 2018) reveals that there are around 900,000 disabled people in Togo[4] 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 Togolese Federation of Disabled People's Associations (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).

Within the school, several actors work in synergy to make the school environment a welcoming environment for the benefit of all types and categories of children (teachers, pupils, parents and educational authorities). We propose to study the interactions between teachers and children with disabilities (CWD) in an inclusive school environment in public elementary school in four educational regions of Togo. What is the nature of these relationships? More clearly, what is the perception of the knowledge potential of CWD by teachers in inclusive classrooms? What are the communication methods between CWDs and teachers? What forms of punishment or reward are given by teachers when CWD react well in class, or when they are at fault?

B. Methods

This research is essentially qualitative. A preliminary survey was carried out with the directorate of disabled people in Lomé, as well as some leaders of NGOs operating in the field of disability. The study population was made up of teachers of inclusive classes, CWD, able-bodied pupils and parents of CWD. The survey took place in 20 schools: 3 in Assoli, 4 in Kozah Centre, 5 in Mô, 4 in Tone Ouest and 4 in Haho Sud. Around 100 interviews were conducted and 27 class observations were made.

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[1] https://linterview.info/2021/09/01/togo-education-promouvoir-leducation-inclusive-dans-la-prefecture-de-mo/ consulted on 1/22/23 at 6 p.m.
[4] www.pa-lunion.com/82-des-personnes-handicapees-sans.html , consulted on March 9, 2023 at 2 p.m. [5]https://ngojobsinafrica.com/job/consultation-nationale-elaboration-dun-modele-national-deducation-inclusiveau-togo/ , consulted on 23/8/2022 at 3 p.m.

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 the field data and produce the graphs. Interviews were transcribed and content analysis provided verbatims for the discussion section of the results.

Two theories were used to analyze the data from this research. Firstly, the theory of social interaction, or the current of symbolic interactionism, understood in terms of the work of Mead (1934), Goffman (1973) or Moscovici (2014). In this sense, Blumer (1969) makes "orthodox" symbolic interactionism explicit in three considerations: (i) human beings act on the basis of the meanings that things have for them; (ii) the meanings of such things are generated by the interactions that individuals have with each other; and (iii) in the course of their encounters, individuals make use of an interpretative process, which modifies the meanings attributed. Next, Konu and Rimpelä's (2002) model of well-being at school was considered, on the understanding that teachers' practices influence students' well-being, and vice versa (N. Baudoin and Galand, 2021).

C. Results and Discussion

Below is the content of the data related to the teacher-teacher relationship. Perception of CWD knowledge potential detected in teachers' practices in the classes studied

Teachers' perceptions are shown in the following graph:

Graph 1: CWD knowledge potential as perceived by master teachers

The graph above shows that, on the whole, teachers' perceptions were positive (81.5%), compared with 18.5% for negative perceptions. Teachers, who are close to CWDs through their work, end up having a positive perception of their potential, given that they know of cases in the community of people with disabilities (PWD) who are doing well in socio-professional terms. This is more pronounced in the larger towns: 38% in Kozah, 22% in Tone Ouest and 18% in Assoli. On the other hand, the negative perception is more pronounced in less urban areas.

Level of CWD involvement in sports activities

Table 1. Level of involvement in sporting activities

Level of involvement in sports activities				
They do nothing	CWD play with others of their own accord	The teacher makes an effort to get the CWDs to play with their classmates.	CWDs sidelined	Total
25,9%	7,4%	59,3%	7,4%	100%

According to this table, when it comes to including CWD in school sports activities, 25.9% of teachers do nothing, CWD play sports with others on their own (7.4%) and 7.4% are left out. However, it should be noted that 59.3% of teachers make an effort to get CWD to play with their classmates.

Communication between disabled children and their teachers.

Table 2. CWD communication methods with the teacher

CWD communication methods with teachers		
No action	Raise your hand	Total
3,7 %	96,3 %	100 %

The data in table 2 show that raising hands is the CWD's preferred method of communication with teachers, at 100% in all four pedagogical inspections.

Time given to CWD during lessons by class teachers

Table 3. Time allocated to CWD by teachers during lessons

	Time		Total
No	A few times	Often	
3,7 %	59,3 %	37 %	100 %

An analysis of this table shows that teachers give time to children with disabilities in their respective classes only a few times (59.3%), compared with a reasonable frequency (37%). This means that during teaching activities, the teachers surveyed are much more concerned with able-bodied pupils, and only remember non-able learners at certain points in their teaching.

Frequency of appointment of CWDs to intervene during lessons

Table 4. Frequency of designation of CWDs to intervene during the course

Frequency of designation of CWDs to intervene during the course				
Common	They are not designated at all	Rare	Often	Total
37 %	1 3,7 %	55,6 %	1 3,7 %	100 %

The above table shows that CWDs are rarely designated to intervene in lessons (55.6%), and teachers do not designate them frequently (37%); they are often designated just for 3.7% of the total, and teachers sometimes do not designate CWDs at all to intervene in lessons during the week (3.7%).

Teachers' reactions when CWD students are late for class

Table 5. Reaction when CWD are late for class

Reaction when CWD students are late for class				
No reaction	Understandable / Tolerant	Unacceptable	The distance between school	Total
18,5 %	74,1 %	3,7 %	3,7 %	100 %

Table 5 shows clearly that the teachers surveyed are understanding and tolerant when their disabled pupils arrive late to class (74.1%); some remain indifferent to this late situation (18.5%) and a few find the lateness of CWD unacceptable (3.7%) or think that the distance between home and school is the cause of these delays (3.7%).

Types of punishment when CWDs are at fault in inclusive classrooms

Table 6: Types of punishment when CWDs are at fault

Types of punishment when CWDs are at fault								
No punishment	Valid assistance	Correct	Scolding	Ignore	Instilling the right way	Pinch	Copy a number of times	Total
44,4 %	14,8 %	18,5 %	7,4 %	3,7 %	3,7 %	3,7 %	3,7 %	100 %

Analysis of the data recorded in the table above shows that several means are used to correct CWDs at fault during pedagogical acts. These are: assistance of a valid (14.8%), correction (18.5%), scolding (7.4%). Some teachers decide to do nothing (44.4%) when faced with students who fail to answer a question or complete an exercise. Other correction methods, such as instilling the right way, copying a number of times, ignoring and pinching, are used at the same rate (3.7%) by the teachers surveyed.

Types of rewards and praise given by teachers to pupils with disabilities
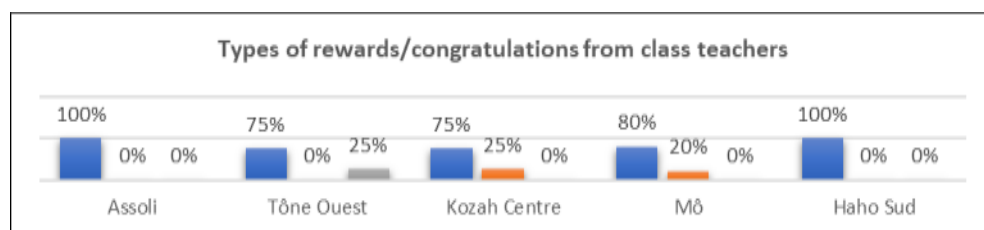
Graph 2: Types of CWD rewards/congratulations

In graph 2 above, applause from classmates (85.2%) and hugs (3.7%) are the main means of reward or praise for learners with disabilities who respond well to teaching acts.

Interactions between teachers and learners take many forms, from cordial to conflictual. Table 1 shows that during sports activities, 59.3% of teachers make an effort to get CWD students to play with their classmates. A class teacher from Nioukpourma commented: "The disabled children in my class like sports activities more. For example, Raphael, who's in my class now, you'll see him running around taking even my things and running with them". This result shows that many teachers are aware of the potential of their learners with disabilities, and strive to bring out these intrinsic qualities in their children through intellectual and recreational activities.

In other words, when the teacher believes in the learner's potential, the latter's self-esteem is raised, and he or she holds on to his or her dreams more, assumes them and expresses them with greater ease and fewer complexes. In the same vein, Henry (2019) recounts how her dreams as a little girl attracted to soccer grew until she was able to sign up for a mixed team at the age of 5. This is clearly what social interaction theory (Goffman, 1973) is all about: direct and indirect encounters between different social actors to achieve a basic goal. This is precisely what the author (Stryker 1981) says: "each person remains flexible and, when he judges that certain meanings are not appropriate to the role he wants to acquire, he is able to develop and communicate new meanings to the group. They are able to influence the group they want to join in an original way" (Stryker, 1981: 16).

Some teachers, in their efforts to help CWD learners understand their lessons, take advantage of able-bodied learners: "I put them and their classmates together for class activities, because sometimes they argue" (teacher at EPP N'Kassaidè). A child from Zoumounta, for example, had this to say about his teacher: "He and I are good in class; he takes good care of me. He brings me to the blackboard". Another teacher at EPP Tchintchinda agrees: "For counting, I send an able-bodied child to the blackboard. It does slow down the lessons though. But what I do is take those with disabilities at recess or lunchtime". This role of closeness to disabled children by certain class teachers is recognized by parents, as evoked by the following testimony: "Oh the teacher there, she helped us a lot. At one point, they asked me to bring the

birth certificates, and I also had to take my child to Kara to complete some formalities. It was she who gave us the money", says a parent of a disabled child we met at EPP Bafilo Centrale.

Beyond the role of transmitting knowledge, teachers also act as educators, or even field agents, to help the able-bodied understand the need for a tolerant attitude towards their disabled peers. A teacher at EPP Lassa Elimdè explains: "We've already told them that what happens to one person can happen to another, so let's learn to live together as a community". Another says: "we try to make efforts to sensitize all the pupils for better inclusion" (Group C class teacher, Camp Notsè). In speaking of the teachers' commitment to supporting CWD trainees in their classrooms, we should not at all overlook the difficult conditions in which the teachers hold the children. A teacher from EPP Agamadè gives the following account:

> I have a disabled child in my class, and he drools and spits all over the notebooks. At first, the other children were afraid of him. We gave him a handkerchief. Over time, things changed. Now, the children in the class understand that what happens to their classmate could happen to someone in their own family, and we ask them if they're going to abandon that person, and the children say no.

Teaching CWD also means guiding them towards the careers that suit them. An itinerant teacher interviewed in Tone Ouest explains: "We don't necessarily want them to go on to higher education. After the CEPD, they're directed towards vocational training. There was a disabled child like that, he learned carpentry and now he knows how to make stools. And in the neighborhood, it's well known that he's the one who makes the stools.

In reality, to guide learners towards a career, you first have to believe in them and believe that they can make it. In fact, according to graph 1, out of the 27 class observations, the perception of teachers was positive (81.5%) versus 18.5% for the negative perception. Such teachers are available to help their learners learn better. In this vein, Dufort (1992) states: "when two or more people interact, their identities change, their roles are recreated, each person influences the actions of the other and orients his or her own actions on the basis of the actions of the other" (Dufort, 1992: 59).

However, despite all the foregoing development, it must be stressed that not all teachers are proactive and interested in children with disabilities in their classes. As an illustration, we quote the words of a tenured teacher at EPP Camp B, who said: "ah, there are 46 of them in the class, we try and try to make him understand, but it doesn't work, at some point, we have to leave him to look after other pupils; but there's the exam, and that worries me a lot". The above verbatim is confirmed by the field. In fact, Table 3 shows that teachers only occasionally give time to CWD in their respective classes (59.3%), compared with a reasonable frequency (37%). This leads some teachers to resign themselves to the effort required to help CWD children

academically. Resignation in the dynamic relationship between teachers and learners can be explained by several factors. For example, this teacher in Yenyane said: "In my class, you see that the children are five to a bench, they even defecate sometimes, and fart quite often. And in all this, Nestor himself likes to have fun and often says 'sir, let's go to recess".

The foregoing is not intended to dismiss in one fell swoop the challenges posed by the presence of different children in an ordinary classroom where teachers were used to working without them; in fact, the following comments were made: "We have difficulties with the presence of CWD in the inclusive classroom: repetition of the same lesson, difficulty in managing the class due to the whims of these children, lack of progress in the year's program", declared a teacher with tenure at EPP Kpota G/C. Another said: "We haven't had adequate training, and when we arrive in the field we come across children with deficiencies. The state hasn't provided the resources, the strategies, the financial resources to train teachers. We're obliged to adapt, and we create strategies to help the disabled children in our classes understand better" (EPP Tchintchinda teacher).

On the other hand, some teachers in the field have revealed that children with disabilities fall ill, preventing them from attending classes regularly. Among the challenges and difficulties caused by the presence of CWDs in the inclusive classroom, some CWDs disturb their classmates, as shown by the following testimony: "the CWD in my room is a bit rough" (class teacher EPP Sangoul). A tenured teacher we met in the Haho Sud IEPP spoke of the difficulties he experiences with his pupil who is disabled: "He's slow, but if you give him time, he can manage, he'll do it. For example, he can do two numbers out of five. Drawing is complicated for him, and he can't do the cards either. But in science, it's quite complicated, he has a hard time. He can do 1.5 hours' work for a 1-hour activity".

Furthermore, in graph 2, the main means of reward or praise for learners with disabilities who react correctly during teaching acts are applause by classmates (85.2%) and hugs (3.7%). This is one way of encouraging them to participate more fully in class. Teacher encouragement has an impact on teacher-teacher relations. In this respect, it's worth pointing out that what all the people we met in the field have in common is that they all recognize the usefulness of inclusive schooling. The following statement says it all: "I'm in favor of enrolling CWD children in mainstream schools, because inclusive education reduces discrimination against the community and their fellow learners. When you put CWD and able-bodied children together, it makes disabled children feel just as human, just as useful to society", says a teacher in charge of an inclusive class at EPP Kpanzaba. "I'm all for the idea of schooling the disabled in ordinary schools; it introduces these children into society, makes them feel valued, and builds mutual respect between learners", says another teacher at EPP Djarkpanga G/C.

All this field data confirms that teachers' feelings of confidence and efficacy have a positive impact on young people's school performance. In addition to being the people responsible for imparting knowledge and skills, they are also agents of

change who have direct, daily contact with them. The teacher-student relationship is important in that it influences not only students' academic performance, but also their engagement, self-esteem and social skills (Kincade & al., 2020).

E. Conclusion

Our fieldwork has shown us that the various interactions between teachers and learners are changing. Teachers now have to teach two categories of pupils, each with their own specific difficulties, even though both categories are in the same class, the so-called inclusive class. The teacher must therefore teach and assess all the students in the inclusive class, from the beginning to the end of each semester, and at the same time, the teacher must follow up the CWD students at the end. This was not the case in a monochromatic class, where the teacher dealt only with able-bodied children, or where children with disabilities attended special schools. The new architecture of social relations in inclusive schools includes itinerant teachers, who play a vital role in monitoring children in the school environment. It would be interesting to verify their contribution to the construction of the inclusive education chain.

Acknowledgement

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