

Inclusive Education Topics Teachers Learned at Teacher Professional Development Programmes: How Did They Benefit?

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Abstract

This study employed a single case study design involving twenty-two basic schoolteachers from the Ga East Education Directorate in Greater Accra, Ghana. Through interviews, we examined the inclusive education (IE) topics covered in professional development (PD) programmes and the resultant benefits for teachers. The findings demonstrate that IE PD programmes focused on sensitising teachers to IE policies and practices, identifying students with Special Education Needs (SEN), and fostering collaboration among teachers, headteachers, and special education (SPED) coordinators. Notably, participants derive substantial benefits from these programmes, acquiring knowledge on SEN identification, developing a willingness to embrace students with SEN, enhancing teacher agency, and fostering collaborative partnerships among teachers, headteachers, and SPED coordinators to better support students with SEN. The study's findings underscore the imperative for comprehensive support from diverse education stakeholders in organising ongoing, practical, and hands-on IE PD programmes for Ghanaian basic schoolteachers.

Keywords: *Special education needs, inclusive education, professional development, teacher agency, Ghana*

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Introduction

In the late 1970s, educators began to perceive “special education’ (SE) as fostering segregation and marginalisation rather than embracing diversity. In contrast, many scholars advocated for the term “inclusive education” (IE) because it conveyed a

commitment to equality and responsiveness to the social and academic needs of all students, particularly those in marginalised groups. This discourse played a pivotal role in steering the educational landscape towards a necessary shift, prompting efforts to make schools more inclusive (Pather, 2019). The influence of international charters that Ghana has endorsed prompted the country to pursue full inclusion in its educational sector, resulting in the adoption of an Inclusive Education (IE) policy and its subsequent implementation. This suggests that public basic schools in Ghana are to implement IE in classrooms. In 2015, the Ministry of Education of Ghana introduced a policy document on IE with an implementation plan guiding the inclusion of students with special education needs into mainstream schools across the country (MOE, 2015a). The policy document defined inclusion as “ensuring access and learning for all children: especially those disadvantaged from linguistic, ethnic, gender, geographic or religious minority, from an economically impoverished background as well as children with special needs including those with disabilities” (MOE, 2015a, p. 5).

Inclusive education, as an initiative, was a push to realise the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4, focusing on quality education for the country (UN, 2021). Ghana has witnessed glimpses of inclusive education across different periods. Its history can be traced back to the era of special education before independence, continued through independence and Ghana’s educational reforms, and persists in the current movement towards full inclusion (Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015). The evolution of inclusive education in Ghana has marked a significant shift for individuals with special education needs (SEN). From living with individuals with mental illness to receiving vocational training, then attending designated special schools, and ultimately being integrated into mainstream schools, this trajectory reflects a noteworthy transformation in addressing diverse educational needs (Agbenyega & Deku, 2011; Avoke, 2001). Given that teachers play a significant role in achieving diverse educational goals, their professional development (PD) is pivotal to attaining these goals, including the IE goals.

Teacher education in Ghana has focused on various modes of initial teacher preparation to ensure that teachers are provided with the requisite skills to be able to deal with issues of IE in classrooms. Currently, the new Bachelor of Education curriculum for all basic schoolteachers in forty-six colleges of education with five public universities promotes the teaching of inclusion, equity, and diversity of all student teachers as part of their pedagogic knowledge (Ankomah, Asamoah, & Owiredu, 2020). Teachers graduating from initial teacher preparation programmes will also benefit from PD programmes for IE to be able to meet the needs of students with special education needs in classrooms (El Afi, 2019). However, there is a paucity of literature that explores the topics that teachers have been exposed to during their IE PD programmes and the benefits they derived from that training. Instead, much of the literature has focused on capacity development in IE for higher education teachers, competencies teachers think are needful for IE and perspectives of teachers regarding

IE (Dake, Opoku-Asare, & Obosu, 2018; Deku & Vanderpuye, 2017; Kuyini, Yeboah, Das, Alhassan, & Mangope, 2016; Mensah & Jonathan, 2016). Research on PD for inclusive education has also focused on the way IE is practised in Ghanaian schools (Mills, 2019) and the benefits of PD for IE for students and mainly on the challenges of the PD for IE in Ghana (Abonyi, Yeboah, & Luguterah, 2020). Therefore, the current study seeks to explore the topics teachers have been engaged in and the benefits of IE PD programmes for basic schoolteachers.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

1. What IE topics did basic schoolteachers learn during their IE PD programmes?
2. What are the benefits of these IE PD programmes for basic schoolteachers in Ghana?

Literature Review

The genesis of the concept of “inclusive education” can be traced back to research in the 1960s that raised concerns about the effectiveness of Special Education (SE) (Florian, 2014). Mărgărițoiu (2018) defines inclusive education as a concept that moulds education systems to accommodate the diversity of students and deliver quality education. Haug (2017) advocates for a broader understanding of inclusive education, urging a departure from the narrow perspective that associates it solely with students with disabilities—a viewpoint cautioned against by Pather (2019). Haug (2017) expands the definition of inclusion, emphasising that it extends beyond a narrow, pathological focus on students with disabilities. In this broader outlook, inclusion becomes synonymous with the right to education for all students, anchored in principles such as “participation, democratisation, benefit, equal access, quality, equity, and justice” (p. 206).

To delineate PD, Mensah and Jonathan (2016) refer to it as “ongoing learning opportunities available to teachers and other education personnel to enhance individual’s skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics” (p. 29). Diverse PD approaches are available, encompassing teachers’ engagement in action research, job shadowing, self-directed study, participation in courses (both on-site and off-site), involvement in peer networks, personal membership in groups tailored to individual work, participation in work-based projects, engagement in appraisals, and even personal reflection (Creemers, Kyriakides, & Antoniou, 2013). Additionally, self-initiated activities like private reading are regarded as informal PD (Craft, 2000). Svendsen (2020) emphasises that effective teacher professional development (TPD) is continuous, content-based, and closely aligned with practice. It also encourages the

formation of professional learning communities, collaborative networks, and trusted professional relations, which are characterised by the optimal timing and conducive environments for development.

Topics taught at IE PD Programmes

Aligned with the themes addressed in IE PD programmes, Kivirand et al. (2021) conducted a study involving 27 teachers organized into four school teams. These teachers underwent a training session aimed at equipping them to design and implement an in-service training course on IE in Estonia. Post-training, the teachers, interviewed for feedback, expressed the vital importance of the covered topics. These discussions revolved around various aspects, including the legal framework supporting IE, the learning environment, available resources, staff professionalism, collaboration among school personnel, parents, authorities, and students, as well as quality assurance. Notably, the training's hands-on nature instilled confidence in the teachers, empowering them to effectively implement Inclusive Education practices within their respective schools.

Similarly, Srivastava, Boer and Pijl (2015) surveyed 79 regular primary schoolteachers from Jaipur, India, on their knowledge and attitudes of four types of special education needs (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, dyslexia, intellectual disorders and Autism Spectrum Disorder) after a training programme. Participants were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. The experimental group was pre-tested and given a 4-day training on these special education needs. The researchers discovered that teachers in the experimental group experienced an enhancement in their knowledge and strategies for addressing the listed SEN issues. Moreover, they expressed that the acquired information was deemed valuable and anticipated to have a positive impact on their inclusive classroom practices.

Regarding research on the benefits of PD for teachers in Ghana, Mensah and Jonathan (2016) conducted a study involving 93 Ghanaian basic schoolteachers. Their findings revealed that PD programmes significantly enhanced teachers' knowledge, skills, competencies, and efficacy within the classroom. Moreover, the impact of PD was directly observable in classroom practices, including classroom preparation, classroom design for students, classroom management, and the assessment of students' learning, as reported by the majority of the sampled teachers.

Literature, however, on the topics teachers are engaged in and the benefits of IE PD programmes basic schoolteachers in Ghana have participated in is very scanty. The format of professional development provided to basic schoolteachers who pioneered the inclusive education programme before its adoption remains undocumented and under-researched. Hence, this paper explores what topics teachers received training on to be able to implement IE in classrooms and the benefits teachers gained from these

these IE PD programmes, as explained below.

Benefits of IE PD Programmes

Specifically, for studies that focus on IE in Ireland, King, Ní Bhroin, and Prunty's (2018) study investigated teachers' professional learning in the individual education plan (IEP) process. Their findings revealed that, after the PD programme, teachers had varying changes to their educational practice. Teachers were able to set clear goals for their students, and these goals guided them in addressing the needs of their students. The confidence of teachers who participated in the study increased as they reported that they were able to integrate IEPs into the whole school planning. In this study, teachers reported that they benefited from the PD approach because it was more practical and related to their job settings. Similarly, Carew et al. (2019) study found that teachers' self-efficacy increased after the PD programme. Similarly, El Afi (2019) conducted a study on the effect of PD on teachers' performance considering their lesson planning, classroom management, teaching methods, cooperation, and teaching tools with 15 participants using semi-structured interviews. The study revealed that PD had a significant impact on the knowledge of teachers' lesson planning, teaching methods, tools, classroom management, and cooperation among teachers.

The fact that PD has an impact on teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes was also asserted by Opartkiattikul et al. (2016), who explored the outcome of a professional development programme in Functional Behavioural Assessment (FBA). The assessment was designed to assist teachers in recognising the connection between behavioural problems and environmental factors contributing to those behaviours. Consequently, the aim is to enable teachers to provide accurate interventions to address behavioural problems among students in Thai inclusive classrooms. The researchers found that the teachers gained new knowledge and positive attitudes in dealing with students who had behavioural problems. The teachers also reduced their inimical approaches in dealing with students with behavioural problems.

Knight and Wiseman's (2009) summary of 18 studies that explored PD for teachers of diverse students revealed the impact PD has on teaching diverse students, including increased teachers' awareness of the differences among students. However, their application of the interventions they were taught was limited since teachers perceived the specific content of the multicultural education PD as irrelevant. Despite this, teachers acknowledged that multicultural education PD could enhance student self-esteem and foster cordiality among students. Expanding on the topics covered in IE PD programmes, Ilik and Sari (2017) conducted a study that specifically focused on an experiment involving two groups of teachers randomly assigned to an IE PD programme. The experimental group underwent training on IEP. Their results showed that teachers in the experimental group, who received IEP development interventions,

felt more competent in developing, implementing, and maintaining IEPs compared to their counterparts in the control group. Additionally, teachers in the experimental group highlighted the positive impact of collaboration among themselves, stating that it facilitated the ease of IEPs development, implementation, and progress monitoring for students with SEN.

Methodology

A case study design was adopted to investigate the IE topics that basic schoolteachers have engaged with at PD sessions and how the teachers benefited from such PD sessions. A qualitative approach was employed since it provides the researchers with rich, thick data and descriptions of the IE PD topics that schoolteachers received training on and how they benefitted from the IE PD (Yin, 2017). The case study design was also selected due to its rigour in focusing on one case and delving deep into understanding how basic schoolteachers are equipped to practice inclusive education in their classrooms and how the various professional development programmes they have attended have been beneficial to them (Yin, 2017).

A semi-structured interview guide was developed for conducting interviews with twenty-two basic schoolteachers from four clusters of schools in the Ga East Education Directorate, located in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. The choice of these four schools was deliberate, as they were part of the education directorate that initiated the piloting of inclusive education in Ghana back in 2016. Consequently, teachers in these schools have received PD to assist them in implementing IE. Additionally, the selection of these schools took into consideration the ease of accessibility for the researchers during the COVID-19 era. These public basic schools cover a comprehensive range of classes, including early childhood, kindergarten, primary, and junior high schools.

The twenty-two teachers were selected for the study based on three criteria: first, they were currently teaching in the Ga East Education Directorate; second, they had undergone various IE PD programmes before the implementation of IE in their schools; and third, they were actively supporting or had previously supported students with SEN in their classrooms (MOE, 2015b). The twenty-two teachers' sample comprised 16 females and six males. This gender disparity arose from the fact that not all teachers met the study's criteria. Additionally, the onset of COVID-19 restricted the authors from recruiting additional teacher participants from each of the four schools, leading to an imbalance in the number of male and female participants. Data were collected through telephone interviews due to the necessity for researchers and participants to adhere to the COVID-19 safety protocols. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and explicit permission was obtained from participants to record interviews. The oral data were transcribed, and the analysis followed a six-stage thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During data analysis, researchers familiarised themselves with the data, generated initial codes, and organised the codes

into themes. These themes were then reviewed and renamed to guide the findings report writing phase (Braun & Clarke, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

The study sought approval from the Ethics Committee for Humanities of the University of Ghana with an approval number (ECH 099/19-20) to conduct research. Informed consent was sought from all participants before the interviews were carried out (Cohen et al., 2018). Participants received an online copy of the informed consent, requiring them to append their digital signatures or initials to the document and return them to the researchers. They were also assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of the information they provided (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Moreover, participants were explicitly informed about the voluntary nature of their participation in the study, including their freedom to withdraw from the interview sessions at any point and their right to decline answering questions that made them uncomfortable (Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2005; Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Credibility and Trustworthiness

To bolster the trustworthiness of the findings, member-checking, rich, thick descriptions, and audit trails were incorporated. The researchers implemented member-checking by sending the transcribed interview scripts back to participants, allowing them to review and confirm that the transcriptions accurately reflected their thoughts (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). To ensure a comprehensive representation of participants' voices, researchers offered detailed, thick descriptions that included quotes from the interviews. The research setting, population and sample were thoroughly discussed to allow for potential replication of the study (Anney, 2015; Brantlinger et al., 2005). Finally, audit trails were meticulously maintained, documenting every part of the research to facilitate future replication (Treharne & Riggs, 2015).

Findings

This section presents the findings of this study. The section first discusses what IE topics teachers have learned in their IE PD programmes, and then the second part outlines the benefits of what teachers have learned from these programmes. Participants shared their views on the topics they received at the IE PD programme. These are outlined below.

Topics Teachers Learned in Their IE PD Programmes

Sensitisation on Inclusive Education policy and practices

Many participants agreed that the IE PD programmes introduced them to IE policies and practices. Participant 13, who had students with learning difficulties, visual, and hearing impairments, iterated that the workshop had given information about IE practices and policy, as quoted below:

The workshop was about government policy, special educational needs, and learner diversity. They talked about how to monitor students with SEN, how to assess them, and how to make referrals to the appropriate quarters so that if we, teachers are handicapped, professionals can help us handle them properly.

Participant 4, who talked about gaining more information about IE practices and policy, further hinted that “students with special needs ... need our love. We have to be patient with them. I remember they mentioned [that] those with the hearing impairment, there is a device for the ear”.

Similarly, Participant 20 reported that “they told us that in case you have such children, not segregate them but include them into the regular programme ... the school’s programme”.

Participant 14 commented that “we talked [about] stigmatisation, how to handle [the] stigmatisation around it...”. These remarks demonstrate that all participants were given enough sensitisation about IE policy and practices.

Identification of students with SEN

The IE PD programmes that participants participated in focused on guiding basic schoolteachers to identify students with SEN in their classrooms and to be able to differentiate their classroom assessments to facilitate learning. The identification of students with SEN was apparent in a comment from Participant 15:

One of the things we talked about was how to identify [students with SEN]. For example, when you are teaching, and SEN students are saying, sir, I cannot hear. I cannot hear. I did not get you. You must begin to think that there might be a problem...either he has a hearing problem, or the child says he cannot see, or sometimes you even see the person blinking his eye from looking at the board. Then, he will be turning, and you can tell whether he has an eye problem. Then, the teacher can change the student’s sitting position.

Strategies for teaching students with SEN in the classroom and school

Strategies for managing students with SEN in the classroom emerged as another topic that basic schoolteachers were exposed to in IE PD programmes. For example, Participant 14 remarked that ‘we use what we call differentiated [teaching and learning] ...at the core for designing materials for learners in the classroom...so when you differentiate exercises, differentiate new knowledge, new materials to be taught...’ Also, participant 18, talking about strategies learned, said that,

We were told that when we assign [task] ... their [task] should be different. If they cannot work together with the typical students, we should assign them different tasks, maybe physical activities like walking or vocational, playing

with toys and drawing or something. If they cannot do the academic work, you should assign them a different task.

School heads, teachers, and SPED coordinator partnership to support students with SEN

All twenty-two participants concurred that they were taught how the constituents of the school could collaborate to support inclusive practices. A partnership among the SPED Coordinator, school heads and teachers was evident in a comment from Participant 9,

We were told we should partner with the SPED Coordinator to invite parents of students with disability and special education needs whenever we want to develop an Individualised Education Plan for students.

Similarly, Participant 12 said that,

Teachers were advised to invite SPED Coordinators to have one-on-one interaction with students with special education needs. The facilitators taught us that, as teachers, we should collaborate with the SPED Coordinator, parents, and heads of our schools whenever there is the need to refer a student to the assessment centre for assessment and diagnosis. Then, when they bring the report, we can all support the student.

Participant 21 commented that,

The organisers taught us that the school head also has a responsibility to liaise with the SPED coordinator to talk to parents about the needs of their children and try to get them to cooperate with the teachers to support the students. In some cases, too, the school head provides materials that students might not have to the students so they can be in class to learn.

Benefits of IE PD programmes for basic schoolteachers

In interviews, teachers identified four main benefits of the IE PD programmes they participated in. These include the ability to identify students with SEN, gain knowledge about strategies for differentiated teaching, foster acceptance of students with SEN within the school community, and increase teacher agency and initiative to support students with SEN. Additionally, a sub-theme emerged, highlighting the benefit of acquiring strategies for collaborating with school heads and SPED teachers.

Ability to identify students with SEN

Participants reported that as a result of the training, they have become highly vigilant in their classrooms and can now identify students facing challenges. Teachers commented that when students encounter difficulties or struggle to complete specific tasks, they shift their focus to understand the root cause of the challenges rather than

resorting to punishments. This proactive approach allows them to address potential underlying issues affecting students' performance. For instance, Participant 14, working with a student with mild visual impairment, reported that

In the classroom ... when I am teaching, and I see that a student is straining the eyes, I call the student to come and sit in front...So, I [check] their exercise books, and I see that they sometimes miswrite some words... I ask such students to sit in front. However, for some students, when they sit at the front, you have to take them to the back because...when they sit in front, text on the whiteboard appears blurry to them.

Knowledge about teaching and learning strategies to support students with SEN

Participants also talked about how the various IE PD programmes equipped them with strategies to be able to support students with SEN in their classrooms. This was obvious in a statement from Participant 5:

Sometimes...I may even ask the child, out of the five questions, you answer questions one and two and the way the child is able to attempt the first two questions knowing his background helps me because right now, it is about looking at how accurate he can try to come up not just how fast he is.

Similarly, participant 13 commented that,

In my class... a certain boy, any time that I give him homework for him to do, he brings it back, so I was just wondering how to help this child so one day, I sat beside him, monitoring him, and I saw that... the child has this problem...then after that, I paired him with those who are good for them to assist him and now he is able to write.

Acceptance of SEN students by the school community

Most interviewees agreed that the IE PD programmes they attended helped them to accept students with SEN and to advocate for their inclusion into the mainstream. For example, Participant 15, when talking about how she used the approaches taught in the IE PD to encourage acceptance of a student with SEN in her classroom, said:

I had to prepare the minds of the children in the classroom. I am going to have a new student in the classroom. He looks different from you. Therefore, when you see the person, you should not laugh at the person. When you do that, you are not going to let the person feel comfortable in the class. I make the students understand that disability is not the student's fault. We have to respect and support them.

Increased teacher agency and initiative to support students with SEN

Participants reported that the IE PD programmes they attended increased their willingness and initiative to support students with SEN. Increased teacher agency and initiative to support students with SEN were evident in a comment from Participant 14, “the one that had mild visual impairment... I suggested the parents should take the child to that assessment centre”. Equally, participant 17, with two students with visual impairments in her basic 6 class, reported that,

I remember we took a child to a [Special Needs Assessment Centre]. The child could not hear properly. I remember the mother was to buy medicine for 50 cedis, but the mother did not have the money. Therefore, we have to solicit funds from the teachers ... to buy the medicine for the child.

Teachers, as a result of the IE PD, have found ways to take initiatives to support students with SEN in their classrooms.

Acquired skills in partnering with parents, school heads and SPED Coordinator

Participants reported acquiring skills in partnering with school heads and SPED Coordinators to support students with SEN. Participant 5 described this benefit as,

After participating in the IE PD programmes, I gained confidence in engaging the SPED Coordinator, head teacher, and parents to support parents of children with SEN ... Later, the SPED Coordinator helped me to manage those children ... When I engaged with the SPED Coordinator, the coordinator served as a liaison between the school and the parents and solicited the attention of the parents for students who have SEN. Through a partnership with the SPED Coordinator, we solicited funds from philanthropists to purchase spectacles and hearing aids for some students.

Participant 12, in talking about collaboration, also reported that,

I invited the SPED Coordinator to come and have a look at the student and give a referral for the student to go to the assessment centre. When the assessment report was ready, the SPED Coordinator explained the report to me and gave me guidelines on how to support the student.

Discussion

This study explored the Inclusive Education topics covered in professional development sessions attended by basic schoolteachers and the resulting benefits. Teachers affirmed that the PD programmes they participated in addressed Ghana’s Inclusive Education (IE) policy, aligning with the in-service design proposed by Kivirand, Leijen, Lepp, and Tammemaie (2021). The findings revealed that, beyond

familiarising teachers with the IE policy, the sessions also emphasised the inclusion of students with SEN in regular classrooms, thereby discouraging segregation or stigmatisation by the mainstream community. These IE principles align with the perspectives advocated by Florian (2014) and Haug (2017) for inclusive schools. Participants were also educated on the ideals of IE and the essential qualities for effective implementation in their classrooms, including empathy, acceptance, and respect for learner diversity.

The study's findings showed that IE PD sessions equipped basic schoolteachers with strategies to identify students with SEN. These strategies involve employing inquiry methods and vigilant observation to detect changes in student behaviour. Additionally, teachers were introduced to recognising signs associated with various disabilities, including hearing impairment, visual impairment, and behavioural issues. These findings align with the research by Srivastava, Boer, and Pijl (2015), which found that PD programmes were effective in assisting teachers to identify students with SEN in their classrooms.

Teachers engaged in another IE PD programme focusing on strategies for managing students with SEN. They acquired these management skills through workshops, where they received information on addressing educational challenges while working with students. Schleicher (2014) supports this, stating that PD programmes for IE in Finland also prioritised equipping teachers with the necessary strategies for challenges that may arise in inclusive classrooms. The study's findings align with Schleicher's (2014) and Srivastava, Boer, and Pijl's (2015) assertions, indicating that PD for IE equips schoolteachers to address SEN issues in their classrooms. Teachers reported receiving guidance on assigning classroom tasks and setting expectations for various students. Notably, regarding the PD workshop for the New Curriculum Standards in 2019, participants highlighted the activity-based nature of the new curriculum, emphasising diverse assessment approaches to suit students' needs and demonstrate their understanding of taught concepts. This finding resonates with Mensah and Jonathan's (2016) suggestion that PD for IE should encompass the assessment and behaviour management of students with SEN. Some participants also noted being instructed on monitoring the attendance of students with SEN and reporting anomalies that may arise in their schools, thereby aligning with the comprehensive nature of IE PD.

Collaboration among school constituents to support students with SEN aligns with Svendsen's (2020) study, emphasising that effective TPD encourages collaboration and learning communities among teachers. While some teachers felt the support was insufficient or non-existent in some cases, they still recognized the role and presence of SPED teachers. Teachers acknowledged the presence of SPED teachers in their

schools who offered occasional support in handling students with SEN in their classrooms. While some teachers felt the support was insufficient or non-existent in some cases, they still recognised the role and presence of the SPED teachers. Participants also mentioned receiving support from school heads, encompassing monitoring students with SEN, emotional support, encouragement, and occasional financial assistance to acquire resources for students with SEN. However, some teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of support from their school heads. This recognition of the need to collaborate with school constituents, including school heads, teachers, and SPED Coordinators, aligns with previous studies emphasising job-embedded PD. This type of PD involves resource persons providing on-the-job training, assessing procedures, monitoring, and evaluating action plans to enhance inclusive practices in teaching and learning (Strieker et al., 2012).

Regarding the benefits of the IE PD programmes for basic schoolteachers, participants shared a transformative shift in their approach. Previously, they might have ignored or wrongly punished students with SEN in their classrooms. However, participation in IE PD sessions prompted a change, making teachers more vigilant and initiating conversations with students about the specific SEN. These findings align with existing research, indicating that IE PD, focusing on identifying students with SEN in classrooms, can contribute to a positive shift in teachers' attitudes. Instead of displaying hostility, teachers become more aware of their students' differences, adapting new strategies to support those with SEN in their classrooms (Creemers, Kyriades & Antoniou, 2013; Opartkiattikul et al., 2016; Knight & Wiseman, 2009).

Previous studies have highlighted that TPD significantly influences teaching methods and classroom management strategies for supporting students with SEN and behavioural problems (El-Afi, 2019; Opartkiattikul et al., 2016). This current study aligns with these findings, specifically illustrating how inclusive PD sessions equipped teachers with strategies such as adjusting the seating arrangement for students with visual impairments, individualising teaching for those needing support, and providing emotional support for students with emotional and behavioural challenges.

The basic schoolteachers identified another notable benefit of IE PD programmes—the fostering of acceptance within the school community for students with SEN. The findings demonstrated a positive transformation in teachers' attitudes towards students with SEN, following their engagement in various IE PD programmes. These teachers no longer avoided or stigmatised students with SEN; instead, they actively discouraged other students from mocking their peers with SEN. Moreover, these teachers exhibited a willingness to provide support to students with SEN within their classrooms. This result echoes previous studies indicating that PD programmes for IE can significantly influence teachers' attitudes, fostering a positive and inclusive environment for students with SEN (Consuegra & Engels, 2016; Opartkiattikul et al., 2016).

Moreover, the positive attitude of teachers towards students with SEN extended beyond the school gates, positively impacting the wider community. Over time, community members became more accepting of students with SEN due to the influence of teachers who underwent PD programs and took the initiative to present students with SEN in a favourable light. This finding contributes to the existing body of research emphasising that professional learning equips teachers to act as change agents in their schools. Teachers, influenced by PD initiatives, become advocates for the needs of students with SEN, serving as role models for their peers and initiating transformative changes to support students with SEN (Haug, 2017; Knight & Wiseman, 2009).

According to King (2016) and Duek et al. (2020), PD for IE programmes contribute to an increase in teacher agency and initiative. This refers to the confidence and willingness of teachers to actively involve themselves in behaviours that support students with SEN. This study's findings align with these assertions, revealing that basic schoolteachers who participated in IE PD programmes demonstrated enhanced agency and initiative in supporting students with SEN within their classrooms. Teachers, as a result of IE PD initiatives, undertook various initiatives to assist students with SEN, including providing financial assistance, supplying low-tech assistive devices for students with SEN, and assisting parents of students with SEN in accessing assessment centres for diagnosis. The study's results are consistent with broader research, indicating that participation in IE PD programmes motivates teachers to enrol in additional short courses, empowering them to administer first aid to SEN students and respond effectively to emergencies. These initiatives contribute to an overall increase in teacher self-efficacy, enhancing their ability to support students and promote inclusive practices within schools (Deluca, Groce, & Kett, 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlighted several key topics covered in IE PD programmes for basic schoolteachers. These topics encompass sensitisation on IE policy and practices, knowledge acquisition for identifying students with SEN, strategies for managing students with SEN, techniques for assessing and evaluating students with SEN, and the importance of fostering collaboration among SPED coordinators, teachers, and school heads to support students with SEN. The findings also revealed that participants were able to identify students with SEN in their classrooms, utilised strategies to support and manage students with SEN in their classrooms, developed a positive attitude towards students with SEN, which transcended to their students and the community in which the school situated, increase in teacher agency and initiative to support students with SEN in their classrooms. The results could serve as a basis for creating an evaluation tool for IE PD programmes to ascertain the effectiveness of IE PD programmes that focus on capacity building for both teachers and students on the use of technology to address the increasing barriers for children with disabilities to access education.

The study recommends that there is a need for continuous TPD on IE for basic schoolteachers in Ghana. The Ministry of Education in Ghana should create more avenues for continuing teachers' PD on IE issues in an effort to realise the country's complete ideals of IE in schools. There is a need for further research to focus on the topics teachers were engaged in and the benefits of PD for IE in both private and public basic schools, as well as secondary and higher institutions. This will give a deeper understanding of the benefits of PD on IE at all levels of education in the country. The study faced some challenges peculiar to the qualitative research approach. The study was limited to only four schools in Ga Education Directorate in Ghana, which may not be representative of all basic schools in the country. Hence, this study's findings cannot be generalised to other contexts.

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