An Assessment of Inclusive Educational Practices in the Higher Teacher Training College Bambili, University of Bamenda in Cameroon

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Abstract: *The issue of education for all has occupied a crucial slot from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among the multiple strategies proposed is the emphasis on inclusivity. This imperative in the Cameroon context has had various implications, one of which is tailoring teacher training to adjust to the dynamics of inclusive education. It is on the basis of this consideration that this paper was designed to examine the extent to which inclusive teaching methods and assessments are used in the training of teachers in the Higher Teacher Training College (HTTC) of the University of Bamenda. The study made used of a concurrent research method. Convenient and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 150 students and 15 lecturers respectively from the 15 departments of the school. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and two interview guides. After analyzing the data using descriptive and inferential statistics, the findings revealed that most lecturers use diverse teaching methods which moderately facilitate the learning of most students. It was also realized that assessment practices in HTTC are relatively inclusive in terms of items and nature with some reasonable accommodations put in place to assist the visually impaired learners. Although lecturers of HTTC practice inclusive education, it was realized that some students with disabilities especially those with visual impairments faced some challenges one of which was getting access to notes and other course materials especially in courses where the soft versions were not provided. Based on these findings, it is evidence that inclusive education is fairly practice and there is need for more professional development opportunities to improve on the situation.*

Keywords: *Assessment, Inclusive education, Lecturers, Inclusive teaching methods.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of Inclusive Education (IE) was gradually initiated in 1948 with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights whereby in the field of education, Article 26 of the Declaration stated the right of every citizen to an appropriate education regardless of gender, race, color and religion (United Nation, 2015). According to Waitalloer & Kozleski (2013), inclusive education is a global phenomenon that arose as a response to the exclusion of people with different color, race, socio-economic background or being disabled. It seeks to ensure that learners with varied needs and preferences are provided equal opportunities in accessing learning resources, services and experiences (Florian & Linklater, 2010). Bui et al 2010; Alquraini & Gut, 2012 indicate that IE is when all students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighborhood to receive high quality instruction, interventions, and supports that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum. Full inclusion from the perspective of Nelson et al (2007) means schools should provide high quality, individualized instructions, with well-prepared teachers, suitable and varied teaching materials, and appropriate schedules to support the idea that all students are capable of success. This shows that for inclusive education to be successful teachers must be trained and other physical facilities made available in the school setting. It is important to note that inclusive education is a child's right, not a privilege. According to (Hong, 2015), an increasing number of students with disabilities are attending institutions of higher education and there is the need for the teaching-learning practices to accommodate all these learners. Inclusive education is based on certain key features and characteristics such as age-appropriate placement and students being able to attend their local school.

According to Berlach & Chambers (2011) with inclusive education there should be availability of opportunity for all learners, acceptance of disability and / or disadvantage learners without bias, prejudice, and inequality. Researchers like Ainscow, Dyson, Goldrick, & West, (2011) indicate that the task of inclusion is to identify and remove barriers linked to participation in education. Introducing this system of education calls for training of teachers with appropriate skills to adapt to these exigencies.

For inclusive education to be effective teachers must use inclusive teaching methods and assessment strategies. Zama & Endeley (2023), indicate that one of the most important measures of assuring IE is to use pedagogic strategies like cooperative learning activities that favours collaboration and the use of various instructional methods like lectures, discussions, simulations that target the full range of learning styles in the classroom. Shey (2008) also emphasis that IE calls for specialized staff to be recruited to serve the needs of children with disabilities in regular schools, and also the provision of appropriate pedagogic material. Florian et al, (2011) also opined that inclusive pedagogic approach offers an important alternative to the specialist knowledge and skill required to teach inclusive classrooms. Farid (2014), argues that teaching methods affect academic achievements of children with special needs in IE since teaching method is one of the determinant factors of better academic performance of children. Mpya (2007) states that inclusion is a system which is about supporting all learners through the development and use of good teaching strategies that will be of benefit to all learners. According to Ashman & Conway (2006), explicit instruction which entails breaking down skills and concepts into small, manageable steps and teaching these steps to students in a clear, systematic way should be encourage in inclusive classrooms especially to support learners with disabilities and slow learners. They also indicate that some of the key components of explicit teaching methods like modeling, guided and independent practices should be used in enhancing IE. This indicates a need to vary teaching methods in a lesson in order to enhance the learning process of all learners. Acker & Moody, (2011) state that teachers should use assistive technology such as computer software or assistive devices, to support students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms because it allows students with visual impairments or dyslexia to access written material and also assist those with writing difficulties or speech impairments.

From the study of Waterfield & West (2006), inclusive assessment should benefit all learners but should not lose sight of the main requirement which is to aid learning and demonstrate the acquisition of the module or course learning outcomes. According to Mancil (2008), teachers should use differentiated assessment methods that meet the needs of individual students by providing alternative assessment formats such as oral presentations, written essays, or multimedia projects which gives learners different options to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. He also indicates that accommodation such as extra time or assistive technologies be provided to students with disabilities during assessment. Morina (2017) goes further to indicate that many students drop out of universities because of the exclusive assessment practices which constitute a problem especially to students with disabilities. He therefore proposes that inclusive pedagogic policies and strategies be designed to encourage students to stay in the university and complete their degree courses successfully.

From the foregoing extant literature, IE largely centers on providing quality and equal learning opportunities to all learners. Inclusivity in the teaching-learning process entails diverse aspects like the physical structures, the curriculum, instructional methods and materials, and assessment practices. All educational stakeholders especially teachers are expected to ensure that inclusive learning is implemented to the latter. In the Cameroon context secondary school teachers are trained in colleges where they are expected to practice inclusivity in teaching. Therefore there is need to find out whether those who train the teachers consider and practice inclusivity in their teaching. The purpose of this research is to find out the extent to which lecturers in the Higher Teacher Training Colleges (HTTC) of the University of Bamenda use inclusive teaching methods and assessment strategies in training student teachers. This investigation is premised on two research questions.

Research questions

1. To what extent do lecturers of HTTC use inclusive methods of teaching?

2. To what extent is the assessment process of students in HTTC inclusive?

2. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This study made use of the concurrent research design. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from both students and lecturers in parallel. The Higher Teacher Training College was purposively chosen among other schools and faculties of the University of Bamenda on the basis that it is a training school for secondary school teachers and basic education trainers who are expected to implement inclusive practices in the field. The target population consisted of Second Cycle students. The accessible population comprised of 190 students of level 500 from all the departments and 98 permanent teaching staff of the school.

A convenient sampling technique was used to select the 150 respondents while a purposive sampling technique was used to select the 15 lecturers from 15 Departments. The intention was to collect qualitative data from them and a large number could be very difficult to analyze the interview since all the items were all open ended.

The instruments used to collect data were questionnaire and interview for students and an interview guide for lecturers. The questionnaire comprised of closed ended items and it was divided into two sections. Section one focused on teaching methods while section two was on assessment. The interview for students consist of two opened items to find out their views on the extent to which inclusive education in relation to teaching methods and assessment practices are implemented. The interview guide for teachers focused on the teaching and assessment methods they have been using and to find out their perspective on teaching in an inclusive classroom. Before administering the instruments, Face and Content validity were tested.

The copies of the questionnaire were self-administered to the students during the period of one of the general courses taken by Fourth students of HTTC. It took a period of forty minutes since all the respondents were in the same hall. Ten students were also conveniently selected from the same group that filled the questionnaire to take part in the online interview. As far as the lecturers were concerned, 10 of them were interviewed online while 5 were interviewed in their departmental offices.

Findings

The findings s are presented in tables

Research question 1: To what extent do teachers of HTTC use inclusive methods of teaching?

Table1. *Inclusive methods of teaching used in HTTC Bambili*

Test item	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Combination of teaching method	SA	54	36.0	36.0	36.0
	A	90	60.0	60.0	96.0
	SD	6	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	**150**	**100.0**	**100.0**	
Learners involvement	SA	42	28.0	28.0	28.0
	A	108	72.0	72.0	100.0
	Total	**150**	**100.0**	**100.0**	
Encourage participation of all learners in all teaching-learning activities	SA	102	68.0	68.0	68.0
	A	30	20.0	20.0	88.0
	D	12	8.0	8.0	96.0
	SD	6	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	**150**	**100.0**	**100.0**	
Questions during lessons presentation are directed to every learner	SA	84	56.0	56.0	56.0
	A	48	32.0	32.0	88.0
	D	6	4.0	4.0	92.0
	SD	12	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	**150**	**100.0**	**100.0**	
Lessons distributed for presentation are done according to mixed abilities	SA	42	28.0	28.0	28.0
	A	66	44.0	44.0	72.0
	D	6	4.0	4.0	76.0
	SD	36	24.0	24.0	100.0

	Total	**150**	**100.0**	**100.0**	
Teachers encourage collaborative learning	SA	90	60.0	60.0	60.0
	A	42	28.0	28.0	88.0
	D	6	4.0	4.0	92.0
	SD	12	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	**150**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

The results on table 1 shows that majority (96.0%) of the respondents accepted that teachers of HTTC make use of a combination of teaching methods. All the respondents indicated that teachers ensure learners involvement in most lessons. Furthermore, an over whelming majority of students (88.0%) were of the opinion that learners are given the opportunity to participate in lesson presentation. From the frequency of the respondents, it was realised that most of them (88.0%) accepted the fact that teachers direct their questions to every student in class. Also, when asked whether lessons are distributed for presentation based on mixed abilities, majority of them (72.0%) accepted. Most (88.0%) of the respondents indicated that teachers encourage collaborative learning in the classroom between all learners.

Inclusive Assessment Process in HTTC

Research Question 2: To what extent is the assessment process of students in HTTC inclusive?

Table6. *Inclusive assessment process in HTTC*

Test item		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
All the students are involved in group presentation	SA	72	48.0	48.0	48.0
	A	66	44.0	44.0	92.0
	D	6	4.0	4.0	96.0
	SD	6	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	**150**	**100.0**	**100.0**	
The time allocated for test and exams favour all the students	SA	18	12.0	12.0	12.0
	A	56	37.3	37.3	49.3
	D	52	34.7	34.7	84.0
	SD	24	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	**150**	**100.0**	**100.0**	
Examination questions are brailed for the visually impaired learners	D	90	52.0	52.0	84.0
	SD	60	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	**150**	**100.0**	**100.0**	
Lecturers used diverse methods in assessing students	SA	48	32.0	32.0	32.0
	A	84	56.0	56.0	88.0
	D	12	8.0	8.0	96.0
	SD	6	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	**150**	**100.0**	**100.0**	
Learners are assigned to carry out assignments (team work) at based on diverse abilities	SA	48	32.0	32.0	32.0
	A	66	44.0	44.0	76.0
	D	24	16.0	16.0	92.0
	SD	12	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	**150**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

The results on table 2 indicate that majority (92.0%) of the respondents accepted that lecturers endeavour to involve all the students in group presentation which is an aspect of continuous assessment. When asked whether time allocated for end of semester examinations takes into consideration students' diverse abilities, almost half (49.3%) of the learners accepted while slightly above half (50.7%) indicated the contrary. Concerning the brailing of examination questions, all (100.0%) the respondents indicated that the questions are never brailed. On the issue of diverse assessment strategies, majority (88.0%) of respondents were of the view most lecturers use diverse strategies. Concerning team work,

a greater number (76.0%) of respondents accepted that learners are given task to do at home in diverse abilities while (24.0%) shared a contrary opinion.

In order to collect qualitative data, an open- ended question was asked to find out the extent to which inclusive teaching methods and assessments are used in HTTC. The students indicated that it is moderately (60%) practiced especially in relation to teaching. Some of them mentioned that majority of the lecturers use diverse teaching methods and some make notes in hard and soft copies. They also indicated that some lecturers encourage collaborative learning as they assign learners with mixed abilities to work in teams. Some of the responses they gave are as follows :

Case 1

In relation to teaching methods, lecturers take into consideration that students do have different learning styles. This accounts for variations in teaching methods like lecture, discussion methods to cater for auditory learners, group work, and cooperative learning for visual and kinesthetic learners. They also give us notes in hard and soft copies. During exams the visually impaired are put in a room and the questions are dictated to them.

Case 2

Some lecturers go a long way to bring diverse learners together in a group for an exercise. These learners come together, share their ideas and opinions on a particular subject matter. This is one way of practicing inclusion.

Case 3

'*We have lecturers who do their best to use different methods in teaching, some give different types of assessment like group work, individual work and practical. To me these are aspects of inclusive education although some students may still feel left out.*

On the other hand some students indicated that inclusive education is not practiced in HTTC because most lecturers do not make efforts to identify students with disability before they start teaching and some do not take into consideration individual needs during assessment. Some of their responses were:

Case 4

I can say with confidence that it is to a lesser extent practiced in HTTC, even though it's well stated on paper. I say so because lecturers have very little concern on the learning abilities and needs of students especially during lectures and assessment. Why do I say to a greater extent it is not practiced in HTTC? Let me quickly quote a scenario I witnessed: In a class where there was a visually impaired student, during a written test, the student was rather discriminated upon as the lecturer distributed scripts to all students, asked them to start writing and even forgot about the visually impaired student and when he was reminded, he sent the student to the front. The student sat in front till the end of the test before the lecturer called the Class Coordinator to dictate the questions for him to answer. At this point the lecturer asked him if he was sure there were people to interpret that their thing because he had never tried to find out.

Case 5

*I rate it on a scale of 100% I will say 80% not practiced. This is because when teachers come to class especially on the first day, they never try to find out if there are students with disabilities. They just introduce their lessons and start teaching. The only few that always try to ask are lecturers who take courses on inclusivity and that is usually done on the day he/she is to handle that topic in the course outline. After that there is no proper follow-up. This justifies that there is little inclusivity in HTTC. In addition, I do not think we have teachers who have specialized in interpreting brail writing. Might be HTTC has and I do not know. It becomes very challenging for teachers to mark the scripts of the visually impaired learners. No efforts are made to identify students with special needs...*From both quantitative and qualitative data collected from the students, there is an indication that inclusive education in terms of teaching methods and assessments is fairly practiced at HTTC. This suggests that much still need to be done.

It was necessary to also have lecturers view on the use of inclusive teaching methods and

strategies.

Responses from Lecturers

1. Do you feel comfortable teaching a class with learners with disabilities and those without disabilities ? Why?

Response	Themes	Groundings	Some Exemplary Quotations
No	Lack of training Time consuming	Majority	'Teaching students including those with disabilities requires training and I have never been trained on that. This makes it very difficult and uncomfortable for me to teach in a class where there are students with disabilities especially those who are blind and those who cannot hear. ' 'I cannot manage a student who is visually impaired because it entails a lot of physical and practical work and I was not trained for that". ' I don't feel free because some learners need special attention from experts who are specialized in the type of disability concerned like those of sign language 'I do not feel comfortable teaching learners with disabilities because it is time consuming.'
Yes	Training	Few	Yes, I have undergone many pedagogic seminars, workshops and observations on teaching students with mixed abilities, therefore I feel comfortable.' 'We teach learners with visual impairments just like every other learner". 'I feel comfortable because I am a trained educator in inclusive Education'

2. Which teaching methods do you often use in teaching your lessons

Most of the teachers indicated that they use lecture, lecture demonstration, lecture illustration, discussion methods, project-based methods and group presentations. Some indicate that they use a combination of methods depending on the lesson or topic they are teaching.

Some of their responses were:

'I mostly use demonstration because my department involves practical work'.

'At times I have to vary teaching methods in order to attend to the diverse needs of learners like lecture demonstration, discussion, and group presentation.'

'Today, teaching goes with the changing time and emphasis is learner centered which gives learners the opportunity to come out with their own ideas about everything.'

' I give both hard and soft copies of notes to the learners especially when I know that there are learners in my class with visual impairments'

'As a lecturer I use more of lecture demonstration and illustration in order to facilitate my teaching and also complete my course content within appropriate time.'

These responses indicate that some lecturers use a variety of teaching methods which to an extent enhance inclusive education while others limit themselves to teacher centered methods which may not take into consideration individual learning needs and might not elicit and enhance learners' participation.

How do you consider your students in setting exams, are the questions transcribed for visually impaired learners?

In terms of test items most of the lecturers indicated that they set the same items for all the learners to write under the same conditions though during end of semester examination the visually impaired learners write in a different hall and questions are dictated not brailed. Here are some excerpts from lecturers:

"All my students write the same examination in a single class under the same examination conditions. Questions are not transcribed. I learned there is a machine to transcribe questions in the University of Bamenda but I cannot tell why they are not using it".

'I have never been trained on how to handle learners with disabilities during assessment especially those who are blind. I set the same questions for all the learners. At the end of semester examination, the visually impaired learners write in a different classroom from other students in my class and questions are read to them.'

'Personally when I am setting my examination I give the same instructions to all my students and same items for everyone, because I believe that it is objective to do it that way.

'I vary my assessment strategies, so that all my learners should have equal opportunity to perform well. I give team work, group presentation, written examination and class participation.'

'I try to take into consideration all my students, but I face difficulties handling visually impaired students because I cannot read brailed materials'

Looking at the responses from lecturers it is clear that some of them use inclusive teaching and assessment strategies that meet the needs of most learners while others do not. This indicates that they fairly practice inclusive education.

3. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicate that lecturers of HTTC fairly use inclusive teaching methods. This is done through diversification of methods which accommodates different learning needs of students. These findings are in congruence with Mpya (2007) who opined that inclusion is effective when teachers use a variety of teaching strategies to suit the needs of all learners. This also corroborates the findings of Zama & Endeley (2023) which indicate that one of the strategies for effective inclusion is the use of inclusive pedagogic approaches like varied teaching methods. It is therefore imperative for educators to use different methods of teaching especially learner-centered and activity/problem-based approaches to lead all the learners to actualize their full potential. Using diverse methods encourage active participation of majority of learners in all learning activities. This enhances academic performance which confirms the findings of Farid (2014) who indicates teaching methods affect academic achievements of children with special needs in inclusive education. Though the findings indicate that most lecturers diversify their teaching methods, it was realized that little attention was paid on identification of learners with disabilities. This to an extent hinders the process of inclusivity.

Looking at the aspect of assessment, the findings of this study revealed that most lecturers diversify their assessment strategies there by attending to a good number of learners. The different strategies they use include group presentation, test, assignments, practical and end of semester written examination. This corroborate with Mancil, (2008) who emphasize that teachers should use differentiated assessment methods in order to meet the needs of individual students. Although most lecturers in HTTC use diverse strategies to assess students, it was realized that some hardly took into consideration the needs of some students with disabilities especially those with visual impairments. This obviously has an effect on their performance and hinders the process of inclusion. Some lecturers indicated that they could not effectively handle students with disabilities because they had no training on inclusivity which goes against UNESCO (2028). For education for all to be successful teachers must be equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge to teach and assess diverse learning needs. Although some lecturers indicated to have issues assessing students with disabilities especially the visually impaired, it was realized that in order to accommodate these learners, during end of semester examinations there are put in a separate room with invigilators who dictate the questions for them and are also given extra time. This is a good step but there is need to consider brailing the questions so as to avoid the situation of reading faster than normal. In a situation where the invigilator has to dictate 40 multiple choice test items for a student to braille before writing, it becomes very tedious for both the student and invigilator and may hinder the process of assessment negatively.

4. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to assess the extent to which inclusive teaching methods and assessment strategies are applied in the Higher Teacher Training College (HTTC) Bambili, University of Bamenda. After collecting and analyzing the data, it was realized that Inclusive Education is moderately practiced

in HTTC. A good number of lecturers used diverse teaching methods that enhanced collaborative, participatory and problem solving learning which met the needs of most individual learners. It was also noticed that the assessment strategies which lecturers in HTTC used to a fair extent were inclusive. Students were assessed through class participation, group and individual assignments, presentations, written test and end of semester examinations. Although IE is moderately practiced in HTTC, it was realized that some lecturers hardly identified learners with disabilities during their lessons. Some indicated that they found it difficult to teach in an inclusive classroom because of inadequate knowledge and skills on inclusion. This therefore calls for the need to take adequate measures to create a professionally alert environment for all the students' teachers in the initial training to appropriate the culture as well as the methods and techniques of Inclusive Education. There is need for continuous professional development like workshops and seminars for lecturers to enhance their knowledge and skills on the implementation of inclusive teaching methods and assessment. Considering that upon graduation from HTTC, students are expected to implement these inclusive practices in their various schools, there is need to equip them with the awareness and aptitudes to meet the exigencies. The Higher Teacher Training College is a reference of educational training establishments where the pedagogic culture of inclusivity to pre-service teachers needs to be systematically implemented in spite of the challenges. This certainly would have a rippling effect on the school system when the teachers eventually graduate and begin service. In spite of the gains made, there is still much to be desired as far as the existing facilities are concerned to optimize the process of inclusive education.

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