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Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education in Sierra Leone

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Walden University

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Christian Sesay

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2018

Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education in Sierra Leone

by

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MSc, University of Texas at Arlington, 2010

BBA, University of Texas at Arlington, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2018

Abstract

The Salamanca Accord advocating the implementation of inclusive education for learners with special needs was signed in 1994, as well as the Convention of the Right of Person's with Disabilities in 2006. Yet, Sierra Leone faces challenges to implement fully inclusive education in schools. The purpose of this mixed-method study was to examine teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in mainstream classrooms. The conceptual framework for this study was premised on Azden's theory of planned-behavior, which maintains that attitude and behaviors are products of experiences acquired. Using a Spearman rho correlations and descriptive statistics to analyze the data, gender, age, educational background, and teaching experience were examined to determine if they had any significant relationship with attitudes of teachers towards inclusion in Sierra Leone. In this mixed-method study, 100 teachers in Sierra Leone completed the Attitudes toward Inclusion in Africa Scale, and 10 teachers took part in a one-on-one interview. According to study findings, there was no significant relationship between the independent variables (gender, age, educational background, and teaching experience) and the dependent variables (attitudes towards inclusion). Despite the absence of a significant relationship, the participants revealed an in-depth understanding of the negative attitude of teachers toward inclusive education in Sierra Leone. Findings may encourage positive social change by providing information that may be used by the Ministry of Education to develop a comprehensive inclusion model with the help of teachers. This study could be used to help create a platform for teachers' training that will ensure a positive attitude towards inclusive education in the country.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to every child with disability in Sierra Leone and around the world. I sincerely pray and hope that findings in this study can contribute positively to the smooth implementation of inclusive education everywhere.

Acknowledgment

I would like to give thanks to the Almighty for giving me the strength, wisdom, and character of purpose to begin and complete this work. The journey was not always smooth, but with Almighty God by my side, nothing could have gone utterly wrong.

Thanks to the Chairperson of this committee, Dr. C. Jonah Eleweke, for his outstanding guidance and wise counseling. I couldn't put my finger on what it was, but this is what I know, that crossing your path was divine. You came into my life for a special purpose. And it was for no other reason but to accomplish a dream that will make a difference in the lives of those students in the beautiful nation of Sierra Leone.

And to my co-chair, Dr. Kathy Dimino, you are simply amazing. Thank you for all that you have truly done to lighten my burdens as I go through this project. To Dr. Kathleen Montgomery and Dr. Sarah Matthey, whose guiding hands and attention to details helped me reach this point, I want to simply say thank you.

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Last but by no means the least, thanks to my precious girls. To Ndey, who is entering university this fall, go and continue this journey not only for yourself but for humanity as well. To Eli, thank you for holding the fort quietly. When everyone is noisy around, you are there - still and calm. And to little Christina who calls me "Mr. Busy

Bee” because no time is enough for her to goof around the house with daddy, I can assure you now that after this project, there will be enough time to reclaim your lost adventure.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Background of the Problem

Accessible, high-quality education for students with disabilities in Sierra Leone is presently gaining local attention. International support for the provision of equitable education for every child is critical to the success of inclusive education (Abu-heran, Abukharan, Domingo, & Perez-Garcia, 2014). The declaration of the Salamanca Accord in Spain United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2013) and the increasing significance of other international declarations such as Article 24(1) of the Convention for the Rights of Person's with Disabilities (UNICEF, 2013) regarding children with disabilities have fueled the growing advocacy for inclusion practices around the world (Fraser, 2014). Many countries have recognized inclusion for students with disabilities as a practical way of achieving education for all students (Fraser, 2014; Sentenac et al., 2013).

Despite growing international supports for inclusion of students in schools, the implementation of inclusive education in Sierra Leone continues to face challenges for parents, educators, and other stakeholders (Fraser, 2014). There are several reasons for the marginalization of children with disabilities from education services (Amr, Al-Natour, Al-Abdallat, & Alkhamra, 2016). Sierra Leone hinges on the laws and policies governing inclusive education in the country, which still lag behind international guidelines and declarations concerning inclusive education. A director of the special education department at the University of Makeni, which is the only institution providing basic training for special education teachers in Sierra Leone, noted that the absence of

legislation and a policy framework enabling the implementation of inclusion is not the only challenge facing inclusive education in Sierra Leone (M. Weeney, personal communication, July 6, 2015). The lack of materials and infrastructural support, adequate government funding, and teacher input regarding inclusion in their classrooms are other factors impeding the implementation of inclusion (Amr et al., 2016).

A study about teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education in Sierra Leone can add to the existing literature regarding inclusion in the country. It might promote an awareness regarding the educational needs of children with disabilities. Understanding the perceptions of teachers can provide better insights into the problem of inclusive education, which might enable the government to improve inclusionary practices in schools. Teachers are essential to implementing inclusionary practices in mainstream classrooms (Shari & Vranda, 2016; Sharma & Nuttal, 2016). Therefore, it is critical to understand teachers' views of the challenges and realities of inclusion, as well as their expectations for a smooth implementation process (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014). There will be detailed discussion of the problem in Section 2.

Problem Statement

Inclusion has been on the international education reform agenda for many years (Bornman & Donohue, 2013; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2013; Sharma & Nuttal, 2016). International meetings on educational reforms, such as the World Conference on Education for All, helped make the case for education of all children and by extension, children with disabilities (UNICEF, 2013). In the Salamanca Accord, 92 governments and 25 organizations reaffirmed their commitments to provide education for all by

recognizing the need to provide equal education within the mainstream for students with disabilities (UNICEF, 2013). In 2017, the 10th session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention for the Rights of Person's with Disabilities (CRPD) was convened, and it reaffirmed the commitment of member nations, of which Sierra Leone is a party to, to provide equity and accessibility in education for all students.

In Sierra Leone, about 25% of all children aged 2 to 9 years have at least one type of disability (African Child Policy Forum [ACPF], 2011) and one in every 10 children in the world has some form of disability. The civil unrest, which began in April 1992 and lasted for over a decade, resulted in increasing the plight of children with disabilities in the country. Presently, Sierra Leone is home to one of the largest groups of disabled children in the world (ACPF, 2011). Society has either marginalized or excluded students with disabilities from the education system, and the few students who are enrolled in schools do not have access to quality and free education compared to nondisabled children. The United Nations Integrated Peace Building Office in Sierra Leone indicated that approximately 76% of special needs children in the country are out of school (UNIPSIL, 2012) Consequently, international efforts at providing quality education for every child, regardless of ability, led in Sierra Leone to the passage of the Persons with Disability Act (2011). Ratifications and essential legislative steps towards inclusion (UNICEF, 2013) were meant to ensure that every child in the country had equal access to education. However, approximately three out of every four children with disabilities are out of school, and the remaining quarter who are registered in schools do not have similar access to high quality instruction as their abled peers (UNICEF, 2015)

Sierra Leone is yet to include every child in the education sector as stipulated in the Salamanca Statement. Legislative instruments alone cannot guarantee a well-implemented inclusive educational system. Advocates for children with disabilities to gain equal access to education relative to the opportunities accorded to children without disabilities see equal access as a characteristic of any just society (UNICEF, 2013, 2015). Although some governments, activists, and educators are gradually moving toward inclusive education, providing high quality, accessible education for every child within the same classroom setting (Ntuli & Traore, 2013), this paradigm shift has not yet occurred in Sierra Leone.

There is a gap between government policy and implementation of inclusive education in many developing countries (UNESCO, 2014). The disparity between government-initiated policies and the realization of inclusive education exists in many developing countries. Sierra Leone is not alone in this matter. Despite international and local efforts to provide high quality, accessible education for all children (UNICEF, 2013, 2015), the lack of information on teachers' perceptions regarding the issue and their willingness to participate in the inclusion process in Sierra Leone has posed significant challenges. Teachers in the country continue to provide instruction to the majority of special needs children in self-contained, special education schools. Consequently, they are not directly making any contribution towards the inclusion process.

In Sierra Leone, there are few empirical studies on the perceptions of teachers toward inclusion in a comprehensive manner across schools in the country. In India,

Sharma and Nuttal (2016) found that teachers need to be involved in the implementation of inclusive education; otherwise, the sustainability of the inclusion model can face challenges. O. Bah noted that the lack of teachers' input in the inclusive education discourse in Sierra Leone is one of the reasons for the nonexistence of inclusive education in the country (personal communication, June 28, 2014). Given the role of teachers in inclusive classrooms, it is critical to investigate their perceptions towards inclusion in order to implement it successfully as the lack of knowledge furthers the impact of excluding children with disabilities from mainstream classrooms.

There are several implications relating to the absence of a meaningful inclusive education structure in Sierra Leone. One of these implications of excluding children with disabilities is the likelihood of not having opportunities for a better future (M. Weeney, personal communication, July 6, 2015). In a country in which persons with disabilities are already facing high unemployment rates and economic and financial hardships, those with disabilities are at risk of further social decline (O. Bah, personal communication, June 29, 2014).

Many countries have struggled to implement inclusive practices in schools partly because teachers, who are the leaders in education, do not have the required trainings (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018; Sharma & Nuttal, 2016). The Ministry of Education in Sierra Leone has experienced similar challenges in implementing inclusive education for special needs children in general education classrooms. Traditionally, schools provide educational services for this population in either self-contained institutions for students with similar disabilities or general education schools. Generally, teachers do not have the

required training to deal with children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, nor do they have the understanding of what inclusionary practices entails (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018; Sharma & Nuttal, 2016). Moreover, teachers find the provision of proper services to students with disabilities a complex challenge in the implementation of inclusive education for students (Abu-Heran et al., 2014).

Teachers throughout the country provide instruction to approximately 1,000,000 students in hundreds of schools (O. Bah, personal communication, June 29, 2014). In public schools, a large percentage of the student population receives instruction in general education classrooms. However, a small number with disabilities is identified, primarily because of visible manifestations. Despite the presence of such students, the infrastructure and other support services to assist them are for the most part unavailable (O. Bah, personal communication, June 29, 2014).

Students with disabilities, especially those with learning disabilities, are usually left undiagnosed in the country, and the absence of proper diagnostic services to evaluate students with disabilities reflects the obstacles to inclusion in Sierra Leone (M. Mansaray, personal communication, December 20, 2017). The absence of appropriate services for such children in the system, moreover, impacts their school performance adversely. The lack of equitable, quality education for special needs students decreases their quality of life as adults (M. Mansaray, personal communication, December 20, 2017).

Teachers' perceptions of and lack of knowledge about inclusion are also a problem for its establishment in schools (Hunter-Johnson & Newton, 2014). Although the theory of inclusionary practices is grounded in the belief of providing equal, accessible

education for all, teachers find it difficult to provide a successful foundation for students with disabilities in their general education classrooms (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). To improve inclusionary practices in classrooms, governments and other education stakeholders have intensified efforts to improve teachers' skills and knowledge required to handle the growing demands of students' needs in inclusive classrooms. Some teachers have also expressed negative attitudes toward the education of students with disabilities in the same classroom as their abled peers (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018).

Scholars have also pointed to negative attitudes on the part of mainstream teachers as a constraint in the implementation of inclusive education (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018; Shari & Vranda, 2016). For students with special needs to be successful in general education classrooms, teachers must demonstrate a willingness to provide them with appropriate instruction and be committed to their success (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018; Shari & Vranda, 2016). The attitudes and perceptions of teachers influence the academic success of students with disabilities.

This study may contribute to the body of knowledge in Sierra Leone by investigating teachers' perceptions regarding inclusive education in the country. It may also provide meaningful foundation for the government of Sierra Leone and other stakeholders to implement a national inclusion program in the country. Of particular interest in this research is an examination of how teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms relates to their academic background, teaching experience, gender, and age. A detailed discussion

of inclusive education in Sierra Leone and some of the challenges is included in the literature review section.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I use a mixed method because it has the potential to address some of the complex questions that might arise in this study I also focused on the quantitative section and used the qualitative section to validate findings in the quantitative section. By combining these two methodologies in a study, they complemented and strengthened each other (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The sequential explanatory design, which was used to examine teachers' perceptions regarding inclusive education in their classrooms, was the most appropriate design to examine one level of a multilevel system thoroughly (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The sequential explanatory design begins with the collection and analysis of quantitative data in the first phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), and I proceeded to collect and analyze the qualitative data in Phase 2. Phase 1 was comprised of a two-part survey. Part 1 of the survey included four demographic questions, and Part 2 included 36 Likert-scale questions. I collected the quantitative data using an adapted version of the Attitudes Toward Inclusion in Africa Scale (ATIAS) Inclusion Survey (Agbenyega, 2007), which is a Likert scale survey with closed-ended questions and teachers' demographic information questions as its features. The author of the ATIAS instrument granted me full permission to use the survey as it is or modify to my research needs (See letter of permission in Appendix B, and the modified survey is outlined in Appendix C). According to Fink (2006), surveys can be best for measuring individual perceptions.

I also collected qualitative data using one-on-one interviews (See Appendix D for the qualitative interview and possible probing questions). Ten teachers were interviewed from 10 schools (five primary and five secondary school teachers) in Freetown, Sierra Leone. There were six open-ended questions, which are similar to the themes covered in the survey instrument and four possible follow-up questions.

The purpose of the qualitative section of a study is to confirm or add nuances to the findings from the survey (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I focused on one-on-one teacher interviews, with each interview lasting approximately 40 minutes. At the end of each interview, I transcribed the interview using the recordings and notes taken during the session. Through the use of qualitative interviews, researchers are able to determine participants' feelings and interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Questions in the interview had some similarities to questions in the quantitative survey. I used correlation to determine the relationship between the independent variables (educational background, teaching experience, gender, and age) and the dependent variables (training and development, societal attitudes, parental involvement, government support, and classroom behavior-domains as defined by subscales on the ATIAS survey).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The implementation of inclusive education in Sierra Leone has been challenging for the government of Sierra Leone and educational stakeholders in the country. The perceptions and attitudes of teachers may relate to their behaviors towards students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. As argued by Odongo and Davidson (2016), there is a direct correlation between teachers' attitudes and the application of inclusionary

practices.

The challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive education in Sierra Leone's public schools may negatively impact students' academic outcomes. Several researchers (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018; Brausteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014; Shari & Vranda, 2016) have explored the factors limiting the implementation of inclusion in schools. In the case of Sierra Leone, however, it has not been determined what the perceptions and attitudes of teachers are towards inclusive education.

In this study, I examined the relationship between the independent variables (educational background, teaching experience, gender, and age) and the dependent variables (training and development, societal attitudes, parental involvement, government support, legislative assistance, and classroom behavior). I focused on answering one key question: What are the perceptions and attitudes of teachers in Sierra Leone towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms as it relates to training and development, societal attitudes, parental involvement, government support, and classroom behavior? Specifically, I focused on four quantitative research questions and their hypotheses and six qualitative questions:

1. To what extent does advanced academic background relate to perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities?

H_01 : Advanced academic background does not have any statistically significant relationship with teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities.

H_a1 : Advanced academic background will have a statistically significant

relationship with teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

2. To what extent does gender relate to perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities?

H₀₂: Gender does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

H_{a2}: Gender will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

3. To what extent does teaching experience relate to perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms?

H₀₃: Teaching experience does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

H_{a3}: Teaching experience will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

4. To what extent does age relate to perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities?

H₀₄: Age does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

H_{a4}: Age will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

Participant interviews for the qualitative approach in the study helped me to gain information about the perceptions and attitudes of teachers in Sierra Leone regarding

mainstreaming of students with disabilities in general education classrooms and to validate responses from the quantitative section of this study. In the qualitative phase, the interview portion, guided by the following six questions, further contributed to understanding the perceptions of teachers regarding inclusive education.

Qualitative Research Questions

RQ1: What are the perceptions of teachers in Sierra Leone regarding the benefits and disadvantages of inclusive education in general education classrooms?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions of communities in Sierra Leone regarding children with disabilities?

RQ3: What roles do government policies and legislation play towards the implementation of inclusive education of students with disabilities?

RQ4: What type of professional development training do teachers perceive as necessary in providing high quality instruction for children with disabilities in the classroom?

RQ5: What kind of support do teachers perceive as necessary to implement inclusive education in Sierra Leone?

RQ6: What constraints do teachers perceive as challenges to implementing inclusive education for students with disabilities in the classroom?

Section 3 will include further discussion of the methodology.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for children with disabilities in general education classrooms in

Sierra Leone. Because teachers are a component of inclusive education, there is a need to examine teachers' perceptions concerning inclusive education (Hunter-Johnson & Newton, 2014; Nonis, Chong, Moore, Tang, & Koh, 2016). Of particular interest in this research was an examination of the relationship between teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms and teachers' academic background, teaching experience, gender, and age.

In this mixed-method research, I used a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews to examine teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in Sierra Leone. The teachers' demographic variables in this study were educational background, gender, teaching experience, and age. The survey's subscales included cultural perceptions of teachers regarding disabilities, training and development of teachers, perceptions of classroom behavior, parental involvement, and government support towards inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

The results from this research may contribute to the existing body of literature, which may influence the government of Sierra Leone's effort to implement inclusive education in the country. Understanding the relationship between teachers' demographic variables and teachers' perceptions regarding inclusive education in Sierra Leone may inform the approach of government and other education stakeholders toward the implementation of inclusive education. Sharma, Earle, Loreman, and Forlin (2012) noted that teachers' perceptions impact both the academic climate that teachers provide for their students and their instructional responsibilities to every student in the classroom. I examined what teachers think regarding inclusive education in Sierra Leone. Without an

in-depth understanding of what the teachers' perceptions are towards inclusive education, the government of Sierra Leone may not have the necessary support and knowledge to address all of the challenges and constraints surrounding children with disabilities in an inclusive environment.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and attitudes of teachers toward providing inclusive education for children with disabilities in general education classrooms in Sierra Leone using the planned behavior theory of Aizen (2005). A case for interpreting the perceptions of teachers as they relate to teachers' behaviors in inclusion classrooms is supported within the framework of Ajzen's planned behavior theory. Ajzen noted that attitude serves as a concept in psychology and that planned behavior theory indicates a relationship between behavior and intentions. Deciding on what conduct to exhibit is known as behavioral intention (Hodge & Elliott, 2013), which requires procedures to affect any plan of action.

Of particular importance in the theory of planned behavior is attitude. Within this theoretical framework, teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education can be a form of belief that may influence their behaviors. According to the theory of planned behavior, attitudes reflect a person's perceptions—negative or positive—towards a particular behavior (Wu, 2015). From a planned behavior perspective, behaviors toward inclusive education of teachers in Sierra Leone stem from their perceptions and beliefs about children with disabilities and the support provided towards inclusion by the government. Ajzen (2005) described attitude as a disposition that is influenced and triggered by

experience, which may control either positively or negatively an individual's response to events and occurrences.

The theory of planned behavior is grounded in three components, which determines intention (Hodge & Elliott, 2013). One of the three variables of planned behavior theory is what Ajzen (2005) referred to as an attitude toward behavior. Acarli and Kasap (2014) defined attitude as a disposition of behavior that is either good or bad. It functions as an offshoot of behavioral beliefs and the kind of responses that accompany those beliefs (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The other two variables are subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. A subjective norm points to societal pressure to act, and a perceived behavioral control refers to the level of ease in performing the behavior (Acarli & Kasap, 2014; Damron-Martinez, Presley, & Zhang, 2013; Tagoe & Abakah, 2014). Ajzen argued that perceptions lay at the foundation of either a positive or negative attitude toward a behavior. Based on this study, some explanation has been derived as to why progress in the implementation of inclusive education in Sierra Leone seems to be slow.

According to the theory of planned behavior, teachers' attitudes influence their behaviors in inclusion classrooms. Odongo and Davidson (2016) contended that the perceptions of teachers will transform into positives if the necessary resources and other forms of support mechanisms are put in place to help. Odongo and Davidson indicated that teachers tend to have better attitude towards children with special needs in general education classrooms, especially if the resources and needs of these children are met. Odongo and Davidson explained how critical teachers' perceptions are and how those perceptions may lead to the successful implementation of inclusive education.

In support of the theory of planned behavior, Costley (2013) found that the relationship between teachers' attitudes and the type of behavior exhibited in inclusion classrooms are significantly correlated. Teachers' perceptions about children with disabilities may control their attitudes towards implementation of inclusive education. Donohue and Bornman (2015) explained that there is a positive correlation between teachers' beliefs and their behaviors. In another sense, teachers' perceptions help determine their behaviors in the classroom.

Factors influencing teachers' behaviors in the classroom may include self-efficacy (Donohue & Bornman, 2015), feelings about collaboration (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2013), advanced professional trainings (Fraser, 2014), and cultural perceptions (Donohue & Bornman, 2015). Ajzen (2005) maintained that, according to the theory of planned behavior, the behaviors exhibited by teachers in inclusive education classrooms are connected to the motivational determinant intention. Intention in the case of inclusive education is triggered by the perceptions of a particular behavior. In order to understand Sierra Leonean teachers' behaviors towards inclusive education, an understanding of the relationship between attitudes and behaviors, and how the former can influence the latter in an inclusive classroom, becomes critical. Costley, 2013 maintained that the connections between attitudes and behaviors is premised on influence

According to Hodge and Bennett (2017), the theory of planned behavior is appropriate to examine motivational determinants. The planned-behavior theory maintains that for every behavior, there is a corresponding intention (Acarli & Kasap, 2014; Tagoe & Abakah, 2014). This approach will offer an understanding of how

teachers' perceptions of and experiences with special education may influence their behaviors in the classroom.

However, the theory of planned behavior is not without its own limitations. One of the challenges of the theory of planned behavior is the assumption of the acquisition of the required opportunities and resources to make a person successful. In the case of the implementation of inclusive education in Sierra Leone, one of the challenges the country faces is the marked absence of the needed resources for a successful program.

Operational Definitions

The terms defined below are provided to further knowledge and understanding of the terms used in the research.

Inclusion: The program in which students with disabilities fully participate in all the same educational opportunities, celebrate differences, support learning, and respond to individual needs. (United Nations [UN], 2017).

Inclusive classroom: An educational setting in which students with disabilities receive education alongside their nondisabled peers (UN, 2017).

Inclusive education: The right of all students to gain equal access to high quality education, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. This education recognizes and values students' differences and promotes environments for families and students to take part in making decisions that affect their academic output (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013).

Special education: Instruction aimed at effectively providing education to children with special needs (UN, 2017).

Assumptions

The assumptions for this study involves the following: Firstly, I assumed that a significant number of teachers attending the Center for the Promotion of Inclusive Education's (CPIE) workshop on special education in Sierra Leone are primary and secondary teachers who will participate voluntarily and will provide their candid responses to survey and interview questions. Secondly, it was also assumed that teachers will participate in the research with moral integrity. Thirdly, it was assumed that public school teachers are complying with the international call, which is supported by the government of Sierra Leone, to integrate children with disabilities into general education classrooms in schools. Finally, it was assumed that teachers selected for the study will understand the research's purpose and will answer questions with credibility and integrity.

Scope and Limitations

In this study, there were 100 participating teachers from 75 schools in Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone. About 75 teachers completed the survey instrument on the same day after a workshop organized by the CPIE for teachers on special education. The remaining 25 teachers returned their completed surveys 2 days after they were distributed. In addition to the survey participants, I also interviewed 10 teachers (five primary and five secondary teachers) in Sierra Leone to determine their perceptions regarding inclusive education for special needs students in Sierra Leone.

There were several limitations in this study. One limitation was that generalization of the findings is limited due to the small sample of 100 teachers collected from one

geographical location (Freetown, Sierra Leone). However, the effects of limitations may be minimized by the uniformity of administrative structure and provision of education resources in the entire country. Examining teachers' perceptions about inclusive education in one geographical location of the country can be used as a case study for the country. Flyvberg (2006) stated that a theme about a particular topic could be developed using a case study. Therefore, generalization can be achieved when the Ministry of Education in Sierra Leone is presented with analyses of the findings like those that I will report in the study.

The second limitation in this study was my role as a researcher in my native land. Although, the study was conducted after the workshop and had no connection to the Center for the Promotion of Inclusive Education and I emphasized that participation in the study was not mandatory, few teachers whom I had known volunteered to participate in the study. This may cause them to either respond candidly or be more guarded depending on their feelings. However, I minimized this limitation through the strict adherence to the non-mandatory principles of this research.

Delimitations

The scope and delimitations of this study were limited to teachers' perceptions and attitudes concerning inclusion, as well as the level of their required professional training in inclusive education classrooms. I delimited this study to include only teachers who teach in public schools in Freetown, the biggest urban city in Sierra Leone. Participating teachers completed the questionnaire regarding their perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education of students with disabilities.

In the case of the interview phase in the study, I selected through a ballot the names of 10 teachers to interview out of the remaining teachers who did not get the opportunity to fill out the questionnaires during the workshop organized by CPIE for teachers in Freetown. The period for conducting the surveys and related interviews was 2 weeks. The sample size was limited to 100 teachers for the survey and 10 teachers for the interview.

Significance of the Study

I examined teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward students with special needs in inclusive learning environments. Teachers in Sierra Leone—in both general and special education—are not receiving appropriate professional development or guidance to deliver high quality instruction to students with disabilities (M. Weeney, personal communication, July 6, 2015). O. Bah (personal communication, June 29, 2014) disclosed that in the most recent workshop organized in Sierra Leone, teachers expressed dissatisfaction over the lack of adequate training from the government to enable them to provide effective instruction for all students in their classrooms. The success of inclusive education programs depends on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in the classrooms (M. Mansaray, personal communication, December 20, 2017). Beyond that requirement, teachers must become skilled in working in inclusive classrooms to provide high quality, efficient instruction to students with disabilities in all classrooms (Costley, 2013)

This study will provide data on teachers' perceptions relating to the problems confronting teachers in implementing successful inclusionary practices in public schools, and the findings from this study are available for use in the formulation of future policies affecting inclusive education in Sierra Leone. Research questions, which were addressed

in this study, may also lead to positive social change for educators who are willing to implement best inclusionary practices in classrooms. Odongo and Davidson (2016) found that the influence of teachers is a driving force for meaningful, inclusive practices all over the world.

The conclusions from this research will encourage the government of Sierra Leone to make available training opportunities needed for teachers in special education and other related services for children with disabilities, and they may assist the Ministry of Education's on-going effort in Sierra Leone to implement inclusive education effectively in the country. Sharma¹ and Sokal (2016) postulated that teachers' perceptions and beliefs should be a priority in the implementation of inclusive education. The results from this study may have implications for the creation of professional development opportunities in schools across the country because teachers are invaluable to the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Educational stakeholders might understand the needs and challenges of children with disabilities in a society like Sierra Leone, as well as how to address these concerns with a sense of moral and ethical responsibility. Effective training and development of teachers should be a goal for all, in which teachers are made to understand their ethical and moral obligations as they serve children with disabilities in their classrooms. Bringing alternate views that amplify the needs for providing high quality instruction for children with disabilities may bring a positive social change for Sierra Leone's community of educators. Every child deserves an equal opportunity to access a high quality education, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. This aspect of the research

can have a positive impact on the society in Sierra Leone. Reporting the results of this study to the Ministry of Education could be one of the means of facilitating the successful implementation of inclusive education in the country.

Summary

This research was intended to obtain insight into teachers' current perceptions of inclusive education in Sierra Leone in light of the Salamanca Declaration. The Declaration proclaimed that every child has a right to education and must receive an acceptable level of opportunity for academic success. Since the Salamanca Declaration, more than 2 decades ago, teachers have faced challenges to implementing its recommendations in classrooms in Sierra Leone. The inability to implement inclusive education in the country deviates from the Salamanca Declaration by depriving students with disabilities of their inalienable right to equitable and accessible education.

Scholars have shown a direct relationship between teachers' attitudes and perceptions and the implementation of inclusion in schools. In this study, some of the variables that may relate to teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education were explored. An understanding of some of these factors is essential for mapping out better strategies for the implementation of inclusive education in Sierra Leone.

In Section 1, the problem statement, rationale, and purpose of study were presented. Section 2 entails a review of the literature that includes (a) a historical overview of education in Sierra Leone, (b) the state of inclusive education in Sierra Leone, (c) teacher perceptions and attitudes regarding inclusion, and (d) other factors in inclusive education.

In Section 3, I discuss the methodology for this study and outline the quantitative and qualitative design, number of participants in the study, method of data collection, and procedures of analysis. I provide in Section 4 the results of the study, and then discuss the study, draw conclusions, and make recommendations based on the findings in Section 5.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to examine similar studies on the perceptions of teachers regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms and the influence of other variables in establishing positive perceptions toward inclusive education. During my search, I did not find one article exclusively on inclusive education in Sierra Leone despite the growing significance of inclusive education. Approximately four articles were found on people with general disability in Sierra Leone, but none of the articles included an examination of teachers' attitudes. The content of this literature review includes materials relating to the history of education in Sierra Leone. I used the literature to examine the evidence of the problems of inclusive education in Sierra Leone by exploring the challenges in providing inclusive education in the country. Next, I examine the literature about the current state of inclusive education in Sierra Leone. Then, I consider studies on teacher attitudes and perceptions in order to ascertain the impact their attitudes have on students' outcomes. I address the following topics in this literature review: (a) Ajzen's attitudinal theory, (b) cultural perceptions and attitudes toward disabilities, (c) teachers' attitudes and efficacy, (d) impact of professional development training on attitudes, (e) collaboration in schools, (f) parental involvement, (g) peer acceptance, (h) benefits of inclusive education, and (i) limitations to inclusive education.

Literature Search Strategy

In this study, I used the following databases: ProQuest (ProQuest Central and Dissertations & Theses), EBSCO (Academic Search Premier), and ERIC in the search for relevant materials. In this research, several interviews, articles from the United Nations, dissertations from Walden University, and government archives were used. Walden University Online library held materials on various articles relevant to the study of inclusive education and teachers' perceptions and attitudes. I used several key words including *perceptions and inclusion, inclusive education, general education, teachers' attitudes, and children with disabilities*. I limited the scope of literature review to articles published from 2005 to 2015. However, the majority of articles selected were peer-reviewed and published between 2011 and 2015.

Historical Problems of Education in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone, a materially less developed country in Africa, lies along the Atlantic Ocean bordering the Republics of Liberia and Guinea (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2014). The population is currently estimated at 6 million with English as the official language CIA (2014). Schools, colleges, and places of work, therefore, use English as their primary means of instruction and communication.

For over 50 years, the education system in Sierra Leone has had to contend with several challenges. Through these years, children with disabilities have suffered from a lack of access to public education. Prior to independence from Great Britain in 1961, Sierra Leone was divided between the Colony and the Protectorate, with almost four-fifths of the population in the Colony enjoying some form of education versus the 94% in

the Protectorate who were illiterate (Pai, 2013). In order to address this educational imbalance between the Colony and the Protectorate, the “White Paper on Education in Sierra Leone” was published in 1958 (Pai, 2013). It had as one of its main goals the “establishment of a free universal compulsory education” system (Sierra Leone Government, 1958, p. 1). One of the main focuses of this publication was to assure that a critical mass of men and women in the country would be able to read and write by doubling the enrollment rates for all students (Pai, 2013). The government successfully achieved the goal in secondary schools. Abdullah (1998) claimed that secondary school enrolment jumped from around 17,000 students in 1969 to 97,000 students by 1990. The immediate goal of absorbing primary school graduates into secondary schools also saw the proliferation of many government-owned high schools around the country (Pai, 2013). However, the introduction of free universal compulsory education in Sierra Leone did not provide help to students with disabilities in the country. Because the government found it sufficiently challenging to provide free education to mainstream students, children with special needs were not considered a priority, and their needs not taken into account.

The rationale behind inclusionary practices in schools is to address diverse needs of every student regardless of their conditions. Bornman and Donohue (2013) argued that inclusive education is intended to respond to the differing needs of every child. Sierra Leone did not address issues of disability with the kind of attention that defines equity and fairness prior to 1950. Children and other persons with disabilities continued to undergo societal discrimination in many facets of life, which continues to this day

(Bornman & Donohue, 2013). As a result, disadvantaged children are denied the opportunity to reach their maximum potential (UNIPSIL, 2012). Denying children with disabilities the educational support they need has had disastrous consequences, in some cases causing them to beg for their survival in the streets (UNIPSIL, 2012).

In 1951 Western Christian missionaries founded the Sierra Leone Blind Welfare Society to help the blind and visually impaired community (Kamara, 2009). Ten years later, Captain Leonard Cheshire founded the Cheshire Home Foundation (Kamara, 2009). Like the Sierra Leone Blind Welfare Society, the Foundation catered to the welfare of physically disabled children. During these early periods in the country's educational history, Western missionaries focused only on disabilities that were visible.

After independence in 1961, the government's educational policy continued with a system similar to the system the British had established. Despite changes in personnel, all curriculum content and educational policies remained the same (O. Bah, personal communication, June 29, 2014). As a result, children with disabilities continued to face the challenges of marginalization. Although the British had set a high academic standard during their colonial rule, progressive citizens wished that the incoming government of Sir Milton Margai (First Prime Minister of Sierra Leone) had made some changes in the academic structure that would have better served the growing needs of the local population and society (Pai, 2013).

From 1964 to 1991, the government introduced a series of policies aimed at bolstering previous efforts in education. In 1964, for instance, the national development program in education recommended the extension of the goal of achieving universal

education by another 10 years (O. Bah, personal communication, July 29, 2014). In 1992, the National Patriotic Redemption Council (NPRC), a military regime that had overthrown the democratically elected government of President Joseph Momoh, instituted the new 6-3-3-4-education system in the country (Lebbie, 2012). Like the universal education system proposed before independence, the reforms instituted by the military government were triggered by the demands of the people. Nevertheless, these changes did not adequately address the challenges of students with disabilities.

In 1991, a civil war ensued between the government and the Revolutionary United Fighters (Abdullah, 1998; Betancourt et al., 2008). The Sierra Leonean civil war unleashed atrocities on the people of Sierra Leone (Abdullah, 1998). One of the reasons often cited for the civil war was the dissatisfaction of certain groups regarding what they perceived as the wrong direction the country was heading towards (Betancourt et al., 2008). During the war, the number of children with disabilities increased even as the communities in which they lived continued to marginalize them (ACPF, 2011; UNIPSIL, 2012). The UN estimated that about 75% of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone were unable to find sustainable ways to continue their education because of an increase in school dropout caused by continued societal prejudices (as cited in ACPF, 2011).

Evidence of the Challenges of Inclusive Education in Sierra Leone

Discussion of inclusive education has gained global momentum (Bornman & Donohue, 2013; Raphael & Allard, 2013). In Sierra Leone, however, the shift towards inclusiveness in education has not impacted institutions of public learning (ACPF, 2011; UNIPSIL, 2012). Inadequate school materials and an inability to offer accessible and

effective instruction for students with disabilities remain challenges to successful implementation of inclusion. The UNIPSIL (2012) noted that Sierra Leone has shown effort in the implementation of the Salamanca Accord, especially in the areas of creating legal reforms and putting administrative structures in place for inclusive education. Several laudable achievements included the introduction of the Persons with Disabilities Act (2011) and the establishment of an Office of the Commissioner for Disabled Persons in Sierra Leone. Even with these signs of progress, the country trails behind other nations throughout the world in ensuring equal and accessible education for children with disabilities in schools

Despite promises of landmark legislation, there are challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education in Sierra Leone continue (UNIPSIL, 2012). Schools—both special and regular—do not have the necessary resources to provide for children with disabilities (UNICEF, 2013). The schools operating exclusively for students with disabilities do not have the equipment and resources to adequately meet their needs (UNICEF, 2015). Besides insufficient material resources in these schools, there is a lack of qualified personnel to provide quality education for children with disabilities (UNIPSIL, 2012).

Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusive Education

Global views pertaining to the provision of education for children with disabilities have been shaped over the years by local and international legislation and national policies. Abu-heran et al. (2014) indicated that although one-third of the participants agreed that there is a lack of support and resources for teachers, about 42% believed that

inclusive education would not succeed in the Bethlehem school district. Shari and Vranda (2016) found that resistance among teachers to accept students with disabilities in their classrooms was high. Shari and Vranda revealed that due to the absence of necessary components, inclusion will remain an unachievable idea. The display of negative tendencies toward children with special needs integrated in general education classrooms have encouraged researchers to examine the reasons spurring the negativity (Shari & Vranda, 2016). Shari and Vranda concluded that when every member in the school environment (teachers, students and parents) are involved in school activities, the value and acceptance of diversity in the school culture increases. Several other countries (ie., Jordan, South Africa, and Kenya) have taken steps to include children with disabilities in the mainstream educational program (Odongo & Davidson, 2016; Shari & Vranda, 2016).

Although inclusive education in Sierra Leone has not gained similar momentum as in Western and other African countries, one component that can foster a more effective implementation of inclusion in Sierra Leone is understanding the perceptions of the teachers who have the responsibility to provide instruction in inclusive environments. Teacher' views and attitudes relating to inclusion are just as important as material and policy support in implementing inclusion successfully (Shari & Vranda, 2016). A teacher will show a high level of commitment to his or her beliefs and values about students in a classroom. Odongo and Davidson (2016) posited that educators in any country are the driving force behind inclusive education. Hunter-Johnson and Newton (2014) maintained that the voices and opinions of teachers are critical on issues regarding inclusion because teachers are vital to the implementation in their classrooms. The successful

implementation of inclusion depends on teachers' beliefs and attitudes.

Attitudes toward students with disabilities play a part in their assimilation in regular classrooms. Just as positive teachers' attitudes foster an easier integration of students with disabilities, the same is true for the attitudes of regularly abled students (Umesh & Laura, 2016). When students in the general education body demonstrate positive attitudes towards students with disabilities, it creates a positive and welcoming environment for all (De Laat et al., 2013). An unfriendly and negative attitude from teachers or nondisabled students towards those with disabilities can create a destructive environment resulting in further problems (Thaver & Lim, 2012). With classroom educators bearing the primary responsibility for the accommodation of students with special needs, information on their attitudes would be invaluable in designing professional development programs for them to support inclusionary practices and in implementing officially mandated inclusive strategies. Teachers who have had multiple special education trainings have been shown to demonstrate mainly positive attitudes towards inclusion (Umesh & Laura, 2016).

Bar (2016) noted that although majority of scholars claim that teachers are generally positive regarding inclusion of students with disabilities, there are other researchers who have taken positions against inclusion. Kullmann, Textore, Berard, and Schitow (2014) maintained that teachers view the concept of inclusion, favorably, which is supported by the analysis from Heyl and Seifried (2014). Nevertheless, Bar found that teachers do tend to have negative perceptions towards inclusion. Although teachers would want to see fairness and equitable distribution of education, teachers still view children with disabilities as different, and not well prepared to teach them.

Cultural Perceptions and Attitude Toward Disability

Many scholars have examined teachers' views on children with disabilities (Donohue & Bornman, 2013). World Bank (2013) pointed to societal attitudes as a factor hampering the education of children with disabilities in the country. Donohue and Bornman (2013) maintained that the traditional or cultural beliefs of a community are one of the many variables that affect the opportunities available to students with special needs. It is critical to understand how the perceptions of teachers toward inclusion influence their behaviors in the classroom (Costley, 2013). Prejudices and stereotypical behavior towards this community continue to be endemic in the society (UNICEF, 2013). UNICEF (2015) confirmed that in developing countries like Sierra Leone, disability is perceived as the work of evil forces. In Sierra Leone, UNICEF (2013) showed that stigmatization of and discrimination toward children with disabilities continue to be an issue in the country.

The UNICEF (2015) and UNICEF (2013) found that different perceptions about children with disabilities existed in different cultural enclaves within African society. The UNICEF (2015) and UNICEF (2013) also maintained that negative attitudes toward students with disabilities stem from stereotypical perceptions and not factual evidence. Donohue and Bornman (2013) found that the marginalization of children with disabilities reflected prejudice in the society. Braunsteiner and Mariano-Lapidus (2014) maintained that exclusion of children with disabilities from mainstream education stifles students' maximum potential to excel at school.

Drame and Kamphoff (2014) noted that some African communities marginalized children with disabilities and their parents. The challenges for children with disabilities within Sierra Leone and West Africa continue to pose a threat to a just life for children with disabilities (Drame & Kamphoff, 2014). In Senegal, Drame and Kamphoff observed that stereotyping children with disabilities does not end with the family but is also a common practice in the society. As a result, this negative communal stigma regarding the ability and performance of children with disabilities has impeded access to increased social acceptance and positive self-esteem. In Senegal, parents are afraid for the general wellbeing of their children and are left with little option but to keep them away from public schools and other gatherings (Drame & Kamphoff, 2014). Kumar (2013) also found that some parents prefer to keep their abled children at home to beg for the family's living instead of allowing them to sit in the same class as children with disabilities.

Cultural beliefs of non acceptance of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone continue to shape the society's perceptions about children with disabilities. According to Article 4 of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the responsibilities of signatories, includes promoting and guaranteeing that the human rights of all persons with disabilities, are respected without any form of discrimination or prejudice (United Nations, UN, 2017). Disabilities within the African culture are seen as the result of a curse (Kumar, 2013). The UN (2017) noted that acts of negativity against children with disabilities were the norm rather than the exception. Such negative cultural perceptions were at variance with the parameters set for inclusive educational reforms in some of

these communities. Stone-MacDonald and Butera (2013) added that when a society is unwilling to break with age-old cultural values, expectations, and interpretations, the idea of implementing inclusive education with fidelity would be difficult to achieve. In contrast, the World Bank (2013) reported indicated that the world has seen some changes over the last decade, particular from those who have worked with children with disabilities in their classrooms.

Attitudes and Professional Efficacy

The United Nations (2017) found that regardless of the legislative calls for inclusive education, it was imperative for teachers' attitudes to align positively towards the intent of implementing inclusive classrooms. Teachers must take the lead to embrace diversity in their classrooms. Costley (2013) maintained that because the responsibility for implementation is mostly in the hands of the teachers, it was essential to discover their opinions on inclusive education.

In accordance with the framework of Ajzen's (year) planned behavior theory, it is possible that teachers could exhibit positive behaviors in the classroom when they are already predisposed to positive perceptions towards children with disabilities. In order to develop a positive predisposition towards children with disabilities, certain strategies should be put in place. Blackman, Conrad, and Brown (2012) argued that one of those strategies for ensuring positive teachers' attitudes regarding inclusive education is professional development training. I stopped reviewing here due to time constraints. Please go through the rest of your section and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Section 3.

Humphrey and Symes (2013) maintained that teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards students with disabilities are invariably connected to inclusive education outcomes. Boyle, Topping, & Jindal-Snape (2013) also found that after teachers received training in inclusive education, their attitudes toward it became more positive while their concerns decreased. The inverse relationship between attitudes and concerns meanwhile demonstrates the need for professional development in this regard for all teachers (Boyle, Topping, & Jindal-Snape, 2013). To summarize, there is research evidence to show that a positive teacher attitude is a strong indicator for the success of inclusive education (Umesh & Sokal, 2016)

In other studies, researchers examined the effect of professional teacher development on the academic achievement of students with disabilities in general-education classrooms. Humphrey and Symes (2013) found that educators in management positions within inclusive education environments tend to have a higher efficacy for children with disabilities relative to subject area teachers. This finding suggests that the nature and job description of an educator can also influence efficacy for inclusion. In a study conducted in Finland, China and South Africa, Malinen et al. (2013) also confirmed that experiences acquired teaching children with disabilities is a predictor for efficacy in inclusion. These studies support Umesh and Sokal (2016) assertion that there is a positive correlation between the knowledge and self-confidence of teachers. Malinen et al. (2013) believed that experiences gained by teachers should be key parts of professional development programs. The inclusion of these kinds of experiences as part of teachers' course work in training programs can improve teachers' efficacy (Forlin et al., 2014)

However, in similar studies, teachers continued to exhibit frustration about their ability to instruct children with disabilities in an inclusive setting (Costley, 2013; Ntuli & Traore 2013). Forlin & Cooper (2013) found that in order to accomplish effective teaching in a general-education classroom, teachers had to be well prepared. In examining three efficacy variables, Sharma and Sokal (2013) found that pre-service teacher education in two countries-Canada and Australia affected the variables and their relationships differently. In support of Ntuli and Traore (2013), it was necessary for teachers to get the right set of skills to teach effectively in an inclusion setting. Smith and Odongo and Davidson (2016) in their study on the state of disability in Kenya, another African country whose socio-economic realities is in many ways similar to Sierra Leone noted that for inclusion to be successful, educators should possess the knowledge and training to achieve the primary task of improving the academic instruction of students with disabilities.

The Impact of Professional Development on Teachers' Behavior

The lack of properly trained special education teachers is viewed as one of the constraints of inclusive education in Sierra Leone. The absence of professional development of teachers often serves as a limitation for the successful application of inclusiveness in schools (Killoran , Woronko & Zaretsky, 2013). Understanding the critical importance of teachers' training and how it impacts efficacy in an inclusion setting is imperative for the Ministry of Education in Sierra Leone and other education stakeholders. Adequate teacher training is absolutely vital to provide high-quality

education for all students regardless of their abilities (Killoran et al., 2013). In 2012, the University of Makeni was established in the Northern Province in Sierra Leone to help address some of the shortages of trained teachers in special education through the provision of special-education curriculum as a separate track (M. Weeney, personal communication, July 6, 2015). However, Sierra Leone still lags behind in the implementation of its inclusive policy.

In order for inclusion to be implemented with success, educators must ensure the adaptation of instruction to diverse students' needs (Fraser, 2014). The provision of a tertiary institution with a focus on inclusive education was a good place to start in the country. Several studies on inclusive education highlighted the need for professional development for teachers working with students in inclusive environments (Fraser, 2014; Hunter-Johnson, Newton, & Cambridge-Johnson, 2014). Costello and Boyle (2013) observed that providing pre-service professional development led to positive teacher attitudes toward inclusion. These researchers concluded that training pre-service teachers about inclusion would help guarantee successful inclusive education. When teachers were trained on issues regarding inclusive education prior to entering the classrooms, it was found to impact their professional efficacy in the classroom (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018). In support of this research,

Hunter-Johnson, Newton, and Cambridge-Johnson (2014) conducted a study to examine teachers' perceptions toward students with disabilities in the Bahamas. They found that positive teacher attitude was found to be by far one of the most important factors in successful inclusive education. In their research, 10 teachers were participants,

and one of the key findings of the study revealed that although nine out of 10 teachers had negative perceptions of inclusive education, this was primarily due to factors such as lack of development training, insufficient resources, poor infrastructure, and other challenging circumstances under which they were expected to deliver instructional services for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. In agreement to the above researchers, Pancsofar and Petroff, (2013) also argued that professional development for teachers in inclusion builds up teachers efficacy and confidence.

In a similar study conducted to examine the attitudes and readiness of general education teachers, Sukbunpant, Arthur-Kelly, and Dempsey (2013) studied a group of 528 preschool teachers in Northern Thailand and found that these teachers were not effective in an inclusion setting consequently leading to a drop in their confidence to teach children with physical disabilities, down syndrome and autism. The researchers noted that teachers were unable to practice effective inclusion due to their lack of training. Usually, teachers unwillingness ranged from lack of professional development trainings to lack of adequate time in addressing the demands of every student in the class. (Galovic, Brojcin, & Glumbic, 2014)

These researchers thus concluded that it was extremely important for governments and educational institutions to take a more robust approach to developing teachers appropriately and provide vital resources before they stepped into inclusive classrooms. Ahsan & Sharma (2018) examined the role of pre-service teachers in Bangladesh and maintained that teachers' behaviors in classrooms are a direct reflection of their attitudes towards children with disabilities. Ahsan and Sharma (2018) also found that trained

teachers had a significant positive impact on students' outcomes in inclusive education classrooms. Pre-service teacher perceptions as revealed in the study suggest that the completion of a special education course improves on their attitude towards inclusion (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018). Teachers needed constant training and reinforcement to make a difference in the effectiveness of their instruction as it related to inclusive education classrooms. Bendová, Čecháčková, & Šádková (2014) reported that teachers' fear of teaching children with disabilities are generally sparked by self-awareness of their abilities and lack of adequate training.

Several international studies (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018; Varcoe & Boyle, 2013) have strengthened the rationale behind the idea that teachers should receive excellent training in colleges on special education because it will significantly increase their confidence to deal with an inclusive classroom. In other studies conducted on professional development of teachers regarding inclusion of special needs students in mainstream classrooms, Galovic, Brojc and Glumbic (2014) found that educators in their research maintained neutral responses towards children with special needs in their inclusion rooms. The researchers noted despite the fact that children with disabilities experience contentment in separate special school environments, they may show disagreeable behaviors such as feeling of disappointment and denial by others in the class (Galovic et al., 2014). Also, Galovic et al's., (2014) perceived that teachers inadequacies meant that they could not succeed teaching children with disabilities in an inclusive setting.

However, deCastro, Paiva and Figueiredo (2013) maintained that teachers tend to improvise school curriculums and pedagogical practices because they lack the required

trainings. In another study, Alves and Duarte (2014) supported the practice of pedagogic modifications by unprepared teachers. They reported that children with disabilities begin to feel excluded when teachers fail to cater to their learning needs. Therefore, it is important to adapt when they are unprepared and find themselves in inclusion classrooms.

Collaboration on Inclusion in Schools

Several studies have reported the need for collaboration among educators to implement inclusive education successfully (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2013; Hernandez, 2013). Providing education in mainstream classrooms naturally demands teamwork on the part of all teachers, both those in special and in general education (Sargeant & Berkner, 2015). Inclusion is based on the placement and instruction of students with special needs alongside their abled peers in general-education classrooms. The effect of this situational arrangement is that more and more schools are beginning to understand the necessity for collaboration between special-education teachers and general-education teachers (Heward, 2013). In a study conducted for 200 primary school teachers in Bangalore South from 16 schools, Shari and Vranda (2016) found that teacher collaboration is critical in assisting students with disabilities. They serve as the role models for students. The fact that teachers are first in line to work with student with disabilities, their perceptions are critical to provide support and the needed intervention. In a study on this topic, Hamilton-Jones and Vail (2014) found it was imperative for administrators and special and general education teachers to work closely to address some of the challenges of inclusion. A supportive administration provides a possibility

for the enhancement of positive attitudes towards inclusion. This study also noted that one of the implications of educators' collaboration to provide education services for students with disabilities is an improved student outcome.

In a study on effective collaboration, Mauerberg-deCastro et al., (2013) found that it was virtually impossible for any one teacher to be knowledgeable in every content area. However, they argued that teachers could leverage skills and knowledge when working together to improve the academic performance of every student in an inclusion class. Empowering of teachers with skills and advanced knowledge regarding inclusive education during professional development equips them with the necessary knowledge and skills in their classrooms, thereby resulting in improved student performance (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). Research studies on teacher collaboration are of major significance for developing countries like Sierra Leone, which are struggling to implement inclusive education (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2013).

Parental Involvement

For inclusion to succeed, parental involvement becomes a critical component. In a study conducted to investigate the role of parents in educating their children in inclusive classrooms at Omani schools as perceived by teachers, Shourbagi (2017) found that despite efforts made by teachers to increase parental involvement in the inclusion classrooms, their efforts are typically challenged by other parental constraints such as time, schedules and education. Teachers who keeps the communication lines opened to parents believed that it enables parents to be deeply involved in the learning affairs of their children (Sargeant & Berkner, 2015). Understanding parental involvement and

views regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms is important, because parents' concerns or acceptance can be a barometer for testing the behaviors of their children in inclusive classrooms (Afolabi, 2014). The response from parents regarding students with disabilities generally varies from acceptance of inclusion to total rejection of the practice (Alborno & Gaad, 2014). Afolabi (2012) also noted that parents of children with disabilities did not believe that having their children in inclusive classrooms would make any significant impact in their children's future. In another study conducted by Alborno and Gaad (2014) to review the framework of inclusion in the United Arab Emirates, they found that concerns regarding the possibility of negative attitudes towards children with disabilities in school are worrisome for parents.

Despite the apprehension of some parents, Alborno and Gaad (2014) found that parents were generally positive regarding the impact of inclusion in general education classrooms. A critical turning point for children with disabilities is when parents are involved as part of the school's team and are able to comprehend fully stereotypical attitudes towards children with disabilities within the family unit, in schools, and the community at large (Sargeant & Berkner 2015, Shourbagi, 2017)

Benefits of Inclusive Education

The global shift toward inclusive education has come about as a result of its role in promoting equitable and accessible education for all students regardless of their abilities or disabilities (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2013). The main goal of inclusion is to provide education for children with disabilities alongside children without disabilities

(Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014). What is achievable through this form of inclusionary learning arrangement is to foster mutual respect and appreciation of individual and cultural differences (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014). The Ministry of Education in Sierra Leone began the process of integration for students with disabilities in schools many years ago. However, the most difficult challenge for the Ministry is the attainment of a full-inclusion program for students in all general-education classrooms in Sierra Leone. In environments where inclusion has been implemented such as in developed countries, it has resulted in students and teachers receiving several benefits such as increased self-awareness and respect for diversity.

In a study conducted by Sargeant and Berkner (2015), result indicated that many teachers believed that when students learn together, they begin to exhibit tolerance and empathy towards one another's learning styles and patterns. The process of inclusion requires a progressive approach, which seeks to better the overall educational climate for students with disabilities. Braunsteiner and Mariano-Lapidus (2014) noted that besides the relevance of inclusion in schools, educating children with disabilities alongside their abled colleagues in the same environment has a positive nexus to future participation of students outside of the schooling environment. Achieving this goal helps to prepare children with special needs with some of the necessities required for them to live a productive life in the future. A general education classroom mirrors the society in which children with disabilities will have to spend the rest of their lives interacting. Sargeant and Berkner (2015) maintained that the benefits associated with a diverse learning climate include the following: (a) all students get the opportunity to interact with all other

children, (b) inclusive education facilitates the social and academic development of students with disabilities, (c) increases self-esteem in students with disabilities, and (d) it rejects stigma. Inclusive classrooms facilitate diversity in the classroom, foster a culture of respect for one another, develop self-esteem, support friendships, and improve academics. In inclusive-education classrooms, according to this research, everyone seemed to benefit in the academic environment.

In their study to examine students' and teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, Sargeant and Berkner (2015) identified the social advantages associated with inclusion as one of its most rewarding benefits. Teachers, parents, and students all agreed that implementing inclusion in general-education classrooms resulted in an improved social climate for everyone (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014). Other researchers found that an inclusive classroom provided an opportunity for general-education students to learn in an environment that embraces, appreciates, and respects diversity (Obiakor et al. 2012).

Despite the strong perceptions among teachers on the advantages of inclusive education for children with disabilities, some teachers are of the opinion that it will not succeed in the absence of essential supports and resources. Using a purposeful sampling method to investigate Ghanaian early childhood teachers' perceptions about inclusive education, Ntuli and Traore (2013) collected qualitative data for their study from 10 teachers using a semi-structured interview approach, which lasted between 45 and 120 minutes. Findings indicated that even though teachers favor inclusive education, their skepticism is strengthened by the lack of certain appropriate materials, support, and

necessary development training for teachers.

In a descriptive comparative case study conducted for approximately 8 months in Senegal concerning teachers' attitudes towards children with disabilities, Drame and Kamphoff (2014) noted that the success of inclusive education partly depends on the provision of necessary materials and teachers' development programs. The researchers further maintained that there ought to be an intentional paradigm shift from a pedagogy approach focusing on students (Drame & Kamphoff, 2014)

Limitations of Inclusive Education

The implications for positive teacher attitudes toward the instruction of students with disabilities are significant. However, the benefits relating to inclusive education have their own challenges. Several other studies pointed to the limitations of inclusive education (Odongo & Davidson, 2016;). Blanton, Pugach and Boveda (2014), noted that unless educational reforms in inclusive education called for joint collaboration between special education and general education, there would always be a problem during the implementation phase.

Another study conducted to develop a scale to measure the perceptions of pre-service teachers toward inclusive education, Odongo and Davidson (2016) found that one of teachers' biggest concerns was the unavailability of resources to support inclusive education. In a similar study conducted by, the study examined the perceptions of 571 Australian teachers who have worked with students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The authors also found that no matter how good the inclusion policy seems

to be, if it is not in complete alignment to the perceptions and input of teachers, success will be far from accomplishment. These findings seem to support the present status quo of inclusive education in Sierra Leone. The study identified the lack of basic supports, in both materials and infrastructure, as one of the difficulties associated with achieving inclusive education in Sierra Leone.

Section 3: Methodology

Introduction

In this section, I discuss the study methodology that I used to collect data from participating teachers in Sierra Leone. The purpose of this study was to (a) examine the perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education for children with disabilities in Sierra Leone, and (b) to gather the opinions of teachers relating to the practice of inclusive education in Sierra Leone. One particular interest in this research was to examine the relationship between teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms and teachers' academic background, teaching experience, gender, and age.

During the study, 100 participants from schools in Freetown, Sierra Leone, took part in the survey, and 10 participants were interviewed for this study. It is unknown whether teachers would have had previous experience teaching students with severe disabilities in their general education classrooms. I used a sequential explanatory method to examine the relationship between educational background, teaching experience, gender, age, and teachers' perceptions toward inclusive education for students with disabilities in Sierra Leone. The sequential, explanatory design would allow for examination of relationships between several teachers' demographic variables and survey subscales (Creswell, 2014).

This sequential, explanatory, mixed-method design was divided into two phases, one for the quantitative and the other for the qualitative phase. Mixed-method approaches

are common in education. One of the reasons for its popularity is that it combines the qualitative and quantitative approaches and provides support for robust implications (Creswell, 2014; McKim, 2015).

In the quantitative phase of this study, descriptive statistics and correlation were used to examine whether statistically significant relationships existed between academic background, teaching experience, gender, age and the perceptions of teachers relating to the inclusion of students in mainstream classrooms. In the qualitative phase, I conducted semi structured interviews involving 10 participants. The main research question for this study was the following: What are the perceptions and attitudes of teachers toward inclusive education in Sierra Leone?

I begin this section with an explanation of the design that was used in the study. The section also comprises the following: (a) research, (b) research questions, (c) population and sample for the study, (d) instrumentation and materials, (e) collection and analysis of data, and (f) participants' role in the study and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Approach

In this study, I used a mixed-methods design to examine the relationship between gender, age, educational background, and teaching experience and teachers' perceptions toward inclusive education for students with disabilities in Sierra Leone. Mixed-method research, generally used to examine context, possesses the strengths of both the quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2014; Guetterman, 2015). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2017) noted that although the mixed-method approach is not a new research procedure, its importance has caught the attention of the research world.

The use of a sequential explanatory research design for this study may provide an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards children with disabilities in the classroom. A sequential explanatory study helps in providing thorough understanding of people's perceptions (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell, 2014). The sequential explanatory research design is noted as one of the most common design sequences (Christensen, 2014), and it results in data from surveys supported by in-depth, open-ended questions (Creswell, 2014).

Unlike the expository sequence design, the explanatory sequence design ensures that data are collected using a two-phase approach beginning from the quantitative and ending with the qualitative phase (Creswell, 2014). Focus was primarily placed on the quantitative phase, while the qualitative phase provided support for claims made based on the quantitative data. In the explanatory sequence research design, it is easier to use the qualitative phase to follow up on some outliers in the quantitative data (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell, 2014). Similarly, use of the sequential explanatory design helps to explain findings in the quantitative section of a research (Creswell, 2014).

In this study, the survey method was selected to collect data from 100 teachers through convenience sampling in Sierra Leone; it was a challenging exercise in terms of resources and time allotted to interview each teacher. Creswell and Creswell (2017) maintained that surveys can be used to measure perceptions in a large sample. Creswell and Creswell argued that using surveys and interview questions efficiently collects data relating to the study question. The survey included questions on teachers' perceptions relating to students' behaviors, professional development, society's involvement,

government and parental involvements, and support. I examined if relationships existed between the teachers' demographic variables of educational background, training, age, and gender and teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education.

In the study, I modified the ATIAS survey instrument, which was developed by Agbenyega (2007). In order to review the modified version for content validity, I selected three teachers who were experienced in special education to review all necessary changes based on the recommendations of those whom I selected to review the modified ATIAS survey instrument. I further reviewed data collected from the quantitative phase and entered in SPSS for accuracy. The results from the survey instrument were used to compute and discuss the mean, median, and standard deviation for items classified under the five subscales: training and development, inclusion, classroom behavior, parental involvement, societal attitudes, and government support.

In the qualitative section of this research, I used the NVivo 12 software program for analysis in areas where the quantitative phase did not provide in-depth information on teachers' perceptions toward children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The qualitative approach provided further clarification and understanding concerning the phenomenon of inclusion in Sierra Leone's public classrooms. Data from semi structured interviews were collected from participating teachers using preset questions that I had outlined (Appendix D). I audio recorded the interviews and transcribed them immediately. Interview transcripts were emailed to participants for verification and validity.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The implementation of inclusive education has been challenging for the government of Sierra Leone. The perceptions and attitudes of teachers may relate to their behaviors towards students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. As argued by Brausteiner and Mariano-Lapidus (2014), there is a direct correlation between teachers' attitudes and the application of inclusionary practices.

The challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive education in Sierra Leone's public schools may negatively impact students' academic outcomes. Brausteiner and Mariano-Lapidus (2014) explored the factors limiting the implementation of inclusion in schools. In the case of Sierra Leone, however, the perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education have not been studied.

In an attempt to understand teachers' perceptions towards inclusion, I examined the existence of statistically significant relationships between teachers' demographic variables and survey subscales including cultural perceptions of children with disabilities, training and development, classroom behavior, parental involvement, and government support. Outcomes in this study may present knowledge that will help the Ministry of Education in Sierra Leone to develop a solution to a problem. I focused on answering one key question: What are the differences in perceptions and attitudes of teachers in Sierra Leone towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms demonstrated by teacher's academic background, age, gender, and teaching experience. Specifically, the following questions guide this sequential explanatory study:

1. To what extent does advanced academic background relate to perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities?

H₀₁: Advanced academic background does not have any statistically significant relationship with teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities.

H_{a1}: Advanced academic background will have a statistically significant relationship with teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

2. To what extent does gender relate to perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities?

H₀₂: Gender does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

H_{a2}: Gender will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

3. To what extent does teaching experience relate to perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms?

H₀₃: Teaching experience does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

H_{a3}: Teaching experience will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

4. To what extent does age relate to perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities?

H₀₄: Age does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

H_{a4}: Age will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

In order to gain information on the perceptions and attitudes of teachers in Sierra Leone regarding mainstreaming of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, and to validate responses from the quantitative section of this study, the qualitative portion of the study included participant interviews. In the qualitative phase, the interview portion was guided by the following six questions, which may contribute to understanding the perceptions of teachers in regards to inclusive education:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of teachers in Sierra Leone regarding the benefits and disadvantages of inclusive education in general education classrooms?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions of communities in Sierra Leone regarding children with disabilities?

RQ3: What role does government policies and legislation play towards the implementation of inclusive education of students with disabilities?

RQ4: What type of professional development training do teachers perceive as necessary in providing high quality instruction for children with disabilities in the classroom?

RQ5: What kind of support do teachers perceive as necessary to implement inclusive education in Sierra Leone?

RQ6: What constraints do teachers perceive as challenges to implement inclusive education for students with disabilities in the classroom?

Setting and Sample

Data were collected for this study after the annual teachers' workshop organized by the CPIE in Sierra Leone. CPIE is a nongovernmental organization, which was founded 5 years ago to complement the government of Sierra Leone's effort in ensuring that the inclusion of children with disabilities in the country's general education classrooms is given the support it requires. The almost nonexistence of teacher training workshops in special education in the country will attract teachers' attendance. Teachers' development workshops might add to their knowledge on inclusive education. Two different groups of participants were selected to take part in the quantitative and qualitative stages of the study.

Quantitative Stage

The target participants for this study were teachers in the primary and secondary school levels in Sierra Leone. In order to obtain information for the quantitative phase, I used convenience sampling to target 100 teachers who participated in the study from the approximately 150 teachers who stayed voluntarily after a workshop that was held by the CPIE. Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo (2018) posited that convenience sampling is often used to select participants due to availability. The workshop location site where this study was introduced to participants was convenient and easily accessible.

Based on the population size, which was approximately 6 million people in Sierra Leone, and in order to increase confidence in this study, I found it critical to involve a

large number of participants (Ahn, Heo, & Zhang, 2014). The sample size was 100 for the survey portion of the study. The sample size $100 = Z^2 * (p) * (1-p) / c^2$, and the confidence interval was 95%. Therefore, $100 = (.95)^2 * (.05) * (1-.05) / .1^2$. For a sample size of 100 teachers, the margin of error was 10%. This means that if 80% of the participating teachers reported students benefitting from inclusive education, there would be a 95% probability that between 70 and 90% of the total population believed that students benefit from inclusive education. This web site <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm> was used to calculate the sample size, with an error margin of 10 %.

Based on the setting for the study, which was projected to have about 150 teachers presented during the introduction of the study, a 100 % return rate for the surveys was reached. In order to guide against participants who would have changed their minds to complete the exercise, I encouraged participants y not to participate if for any reason they might not be able to complete the survey once it had begun. I distributed 100 questionnaires to the first group of teachers who expressed interest by the show of hands to participate in the study. Each respondent received a packet containing a questionnaire and an additional cover letter explaining the purpose of the study. Each packet was also included with a consent form and explained the importance of consent to research participants. Participating teachers returned all survey materials in a sealed envelope. I collected about 75 survey documents on the same day, and the remaining surveys were sent 2 days later. The organization conducting the workshop served breakfast and lunch earlier in the day, and I provided nonalcoholic beverages as an incentive for all teachers,

whether they participated or not in lieu of other payment.

Qualitative Stage

For the qualitative sampling procedure, I used a purposeful sampling technique to select 10 participants for the interviews. Purposeful sampling is an ideal method of sampling to select participants for a study (Emmel, 2014). With the help of staff from CPIE, I selected the first 10 teachers who opted out from participating in the research survey but demonstrated willingness to participate in the interview portion of the study. Participating teachers were required to complete an informed consent form and agreed to participate in detailed interviews. All of the interviews for the study took place in the conference room of the CPIE head office in the rural district of Waterloo, a few miles outside of the capital city of Freetown. Each of the participants was reimbursed 10.000 Le (\$1.50) for transportation.

Context and Strategies

Two main sources for data collection were questionnaires (Appendix C) and interview questions (Appendix D). With the permission of the author of this instrument, I adapted the ATIAS that was designed by Agbenyega (2005) The main reason for the modification was to ensure that the survey was appropriate for the population and other socio economic circumstances in Sierra Leone. I selected this instrument because it was ideal for measuring individual factors within the African context in which the study took place. The internal reliability of the ATIAS scale was reported as an alpha coefficient of 0.84 for the total scale (Agbenyega, 2007). The instrument was developed to determine how factors within the instrument related to teachers' perceptions of and attitudes

towards inclusion in Sierra Leone.

The demographic information collected through Part 1 of the ATIAS survey included academic background, years of teaching experience, gender, and age. Data collected were used in the Spearman rho correlational analyses to determine if significant relationships existed between teachers' academic background, professional training, gender, and age and their perceptions and attitudes towards inclusive education in Sierra Leone. Prior to conducting the correlational analyses in the study, I collected and examined descriptive statistics including the mean, median, weighted scores, and standard deviations for all data.

In Part 2 of the ATIAS survey, there were 23 items that explored teachers' perceptions regarding inclusive education of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. As the score increased, the less positive teachers were towards inclusive education. The lower the score was, the higher the attitude of teachers. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (*strongly disagree*) to 1 (*strongly agree*) allowed teachers to select the best choice, which reflected their feelings at the time. I also measured the attitudes of teachers in all five subscales: (a) training and development (Questions 1-5), (b) classroom behavior (Questions 6-10), (c) societal attitudes (Questions 11-15), (d) parental involvement (Questions 16-18), and (f) government support (Questions 19-23). Four of the subscales comprised of five questions and one had three questions. I stopped reviewing here due to time constraints. Please go through the rest of your section and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Section 4.

- A low score in the training and development subscale indicated a positive attitude and thus teachers' readiness to embrace inclusion, assuming that they already have the required skill, to provide excellent instruction for students with disabilities. Conversely, a high score reflected teachers' negative perceptions and unpreparedness for teaching children with disabilities.

- Classroom behavior subscale included teachers' perceptions on how children with disabilities are likely to act in a mainstream classroom. Again, a low score on this subscale demonstrated positive attitudes on the part of teachers regarding the subscale variable and a higher score indicated a negative attitude.

- A low score on the societal attitude towards inclusive education revealed the extent to which teachers perceive society's provision and readiness to embrace children with disabilities. A high score indicated the urgency for implementing inclusive education programs and a low score demonstrated the lack of a need to implement such program

- In the case of the parental-involvement subscale, teachers' perceptions are examined relating to the roles of parents in the academic lives of children with disabilities. A high score suggested that teachers perceived parents to understand the issues surrounding children with disabilities and its critical importance in making decisions that impacts the quality of instruction children with disabilities receives.

- Finally, government support was used to measure teachers' perceptions of the levels of support, both material and moral terms from the government towards students with disabilities and inclusive education programs. A low score indicated lack of support

from the government and a high score on this subscale indicated positive attitudes in support of government support. This factor helped in understanding teachers' perceptions of the government towards inclusive education in the country.

Instrumentation

Participants were asked to respond to 23 items on a 5-point Likert scale from 5 (*strongly disagree*) to 1 (*strongly agree*). 23 items were divided into five subscales: Training and Development (questions 1-5); Classroom Behavior (questions 5-10); Societal Attitudes (questions 11-15); Parental Involvement and Support (questions 16-18), and Government Support (questions 19-23). Each of the subscales was used to determine teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education in Sierra Leone.

A panel of educators, comprised of a special education teacher, educational diagnostician, speech therapist, and a special education program director both in Sierra Leone and the United States, had the responsibility to review the modified version of the ATIAS instrument prior to the administration of the survey to ensure that the instrument reflects the current education realities in Sierra Leone.

In the qualitative phase of the study, questions were developed to address the issues covered in the survey subscales. Questions developed were open-ended and allowed for the gathering of information that were used to substantiate data collected in the survey. The same group of special education teachers' panel reviewed the qualitative questions prior to the research study to ascertain that they with the current socio-economic realities in Sierra Leone.

Treatment of Data

There were two parts to the research. Part I focused on participants' demographic information, which included four fundamental characteristics of each participant: gender, age, academic qualifications, and teaching experience. Descriptive statistics for the mean, median and weighted scores were used to further analyze the data. The second part of the survey included five subscales: training and development, classroom behavior, societal attitudes, parental involvement, and government support. Spearman rho correlational analysis was utilized with the demographics; gender, age, academic qualifications, and teaching experience to determine if there is a significant relationship between the demographic variables and perceptions toward inclusive education.

Use of the sequential explanatory design helped to connect findings from the survey and the interview through data triangulation (Creswell, 2014). In a mixed methods research study, one of the commonest approaches to data analysis is the triangulation method (Creswell & Creswell 2017). The sequential explanatory design involves a two-phase mixed methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This design began with gathering and analyzing the survey data, which was followed by similar collection and analyses of data from the interviews. Then, data from the interviews were used to verify and strengthen findings from the quantitative survey.

In the qualitative section of the study, there were six interview questions and four possible follow-up questions. These questions were related to the five subscales in the quantitative survey. The following themes were examined: training and development,

benefits of inclusion, parental involvement, societal attitudes, and recommendations for inclusion in the country. All interview questions were open-ended for deeper examination of the topic. In this section of the study, I considered different interview approaches as Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommended. When focus group interviews were studied, I noted that one of its unique benefits is that it supports the group in discussing their experiences (Krueger & Casey 2014). However, when I explored individual interviews, one obvious advantage I realized was that it allowed for an extensive questioning protocol, which in turn provided a deeper understanding of the interviewee's firsthand experience (Rose, Spinks & Canhoto, 2015) Therefore, because I had hoped to generate a thorough view of how and why teachers hold their perceptions of inclusive education in Sierra Leone, I chose to use the individual interview.

There are two major types of interview formats: (a) semi structured interview and (b) non-structured interview format. For the purpose of this research, I applied the semi-structured interview format, which Creswell & Creswell (2017) reported to be the most popular qualitative research interview format. The nature of the open-ended format provided a researcher with some flexibility to engage and extract from participants detailed information relating to the topic at hand through follow-up questions.

Reliability and Validity

In this study, a significant amount of attention to was given to reliability, validity, and ethical issues because researchers see the need for integrity in research studies (Konradsen, Kirkevold, & Olson, 2013). To determine the reliability scale of the modified ATIAS scale, I used Cronbach's alpha to estimate how well items in similar

constructs yielded similar results in the survey. Determining validity usually presents a researcher with significant problems. However, in order to establish validity and reliability, Steven G. Rogelberg (2015) asserted that neutrality and trustworthiness is very essential to maintain.

To establish validity in this study, several methods were used including triangulation and member checks. I provided participants with a copy of the transcribed notes from audio recordings through emails after transcription to enable them review and verify interview responses for accurate interpretation. Providing the opportunity for participants to check for interpretive accuracy ensures credibility. Participants' verification of answers, uniform response, and triangulation can test interview questions for reliability (Karim, 2013). Uniformity in responses among interview participants validated the interview instrument and the accuracy of responses (Stevenson & Mahmut, 2013). Based on Harvey's (2014) suggestions relating to the importance of member checks in increasing the trustworthiness of a study, I used member checking as part of the reliability process. Each participant received an email to verify the accuracies of his or her participations in the interview. Prior to the interview, it was important that I notify participants that transcripts will be sent to them and with reasons for sending the transcripts stated as well.

It was very important that threats to validity were considered in the conduct of this research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Threats to external validity may have arisen as a result of the extent to which I generalized the study to other parts of the country. There is a chance for participants to influence the research findings in this study. Also, those who

were selected to participate may not have similar academic backgrounds, training, knowledge of special education, and experiences.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures involved several steps. The primary means used to collect data was a questionnaire followed by one-on-one interviews with selected participants. I spent 7 days collecting data for the survey and interview phases in the study and convenience sampling method was used to distribute questionnaires, and 75% of the completed questionnaires were returned on the same day and the remaining returned few days later. Participation in the study were based on “first come, first willing to take part” basis. An assigned staff member of CPIE helped me to distribute survey instruments to the first 100 teachers who were willing to take part in the study. Also, I selected 10 volunteers for the interview phase of the study from those teachers who did not get the opportunity to take part in the survey.

The initial phase of data collection (quantitative) included an explanation of the purpose of the research, which was to examine teachers’ perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education in Sierra Leone. Within the same survey packet, I included a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study. Each participant was required to fill out a consent form in the survey package. Consent forms highlighted the rights of the participants. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, I instructed participants not to include information revealing their identities on any part in the survey instrument. Although consent forms were signed, participants completed this process separately from the survey instrument and returned separately in their own envelope.

The qualitative phase of the study was the one-on-one interviewing of 10 teachers for approximately 45 minutes each. The interview sessions took place at the CPIE conference room. Prior to the interview, it was important that I collected personal information, including phone numbers of all 10 interviewees to allow for ease of contact. Interviews began on the second day, giving participants flexibility in time to plan appropriately. As part of the agreement indicated in the consent form, one of my responsibilities as a researcher was to maintain the confidentiality of each of the interview participant's information. Interviews were open-ended to facilitate discussions, which furthered the collection of valuable information. During the interviews, I asked follow-up questions to encourage participants to explore their responses deeply (Rose, Spinks & Canhoto, 2015). The open-ended interview strategy facilitated an in-depth discourse and allowed participants to share their personal perspectives and experience (Rose, Spinks & Canhoto, 2015).

At the end of all the interviews, I transcribed and stored all responses and audio files in an external memory drive as a back-up storage. All materials were safely secured at my residence.. After transcribing the data, I encoded the responses using the Nvivo 11 software program to increase accuracies, which helped in securing qualitative data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2017).

Data Analysis

I used SPSS v23 to calculate and analyze all data collected from the quantitative instrument in the study using descriptive and inferential methods to determine the

relationships between teachers' demographic variables: teachers' academic background, gender, age, and training background and the perception and attitudes of teachers toward children with disabilities. In other to illustrate survey and survey subscale responses for the total sample, I used tables to illustrate the mean, median, and standard deviation for each of the teachers' demographic characteristics in the study. I also used Spearman rho to determine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between the demographic information and teachers' perceptions on four out of the five subscales: training and development of teachers, classroom behaviors, and society, and weighted scores to rank the variables.

The findings regarding these four assumptions showed what relationship existed between teachers' age, academic background, education experience, and gender and their perception towards teachers' training, classroom behaviors and management, and the perceptions regarding Sierra Leone's societal attitudes towards inclusion. Using Spearman rho correlation, a nonparametric tool, I measure the relationship between the demographic variables and teachers' perceptions and attitudes of inclusive education in Sierra Leone.

One major assumption of Spearman rho correlation maintained that all data must be at least ordinal and reports on the association of variables must also be related monotonically to the other variable (Corder & Foreman, 2014). In other to address this assumption, I had all data ranked using ordinal measurement and this allowed me to analyze relationships between the demographic variables and any of the five subscale variables on perceptions and attitudes. A positive correlation coefficient in this study

indicated that there was a positive relationship between demographic variables and the subscale variables tested and a negative correlation indicated otherwise (Corder & Foreman, 2014). In this study for instance, a positive correlation coefficient was to denote that the higher a teacher's academic background, the higher the score on perceptions and attitudes variables. While negative correlation coefficients were to express that a negative relationship (the lower the academic background, the lower the score on the perception and attitude variables). A correlation coefficient of 0 indicated that no relationship between the variables exists at all.

In the case of the qualitative phase, I interviewed 10 participants using audio recordings and transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. In order to enhance the internal validity of this study, I shared the transcribed data with participants via emails immediately after completing the process to ensure that the data were accurately transcribed (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I later encoded the data using the Nvivo 11 software program, a qualitative analysis program, which is mostly used to manage and analyze qualitative data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2017). From the data collected, I made general statements about each survey item related to the sample. Descriptive summaries and analysis in research could translate data in the simplest form Creswell and Creswell (2017). This kind of statistics is noted as one of the most common data analysis methods in social science because of its flexibility within this discipline (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Analyzing individual themes highlighted a clear understanding of how various themes synchronize to form a whole. However, analysis of individual themes using

Nvivo 12 is not without disadvantages. It can be a daunting task to use NVivo software. To analyze the different themes in the study and show how they knitted together, I categorized and code participants' responses to interview questions using a thematic analysis. data from the interviews were compared to the outcomes in the quantitative survey. Once this phase was completed, I developed a coding system and categories of the data. I also examined themes such as benefits and barriers of inclusive education, training and development, government support and resources, general attitudes and recommendations for a sustainable inclusive education program in Sierra Leone. Finally, I limited these themes developed during the interviews to 6 in all.

Participants' Rights

Conducting this study will require that participating teachers understand the purpose of the research and their rights as participants to informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality and that their participation is voluntary. Creswell & Creswell (2017) argued that empowering participants with the purpose of the research would lay the foundation for the promotion of confidence. Therefore, I ensured that participating teachers in the study had the opportunity to consent to participate by filling out a consent form. Each of the participants responding to the survey received a cover letter assuring them of confidentiality and privacy. The role of researchers is to guarantee that they execute the process by upholding the ethical principles that underpin research, and also to confirm that the guidelines concerning scientific inquiry and treatment of research subjects are maintained. Prior to beginning this study, I received approval from Walden

University Institutional Research Board (IRB).

Role of the Researcher

As a doctoral student with 8 years of assisting inclusive education for children with disabilities in Sierra Leone and the United States, my role in the study was to facilitate the study. One of my main responsibilities as the researcher in this study was to ensure honesty, accountability, and transparency in every stage of the study. The accuracy of all research rests on the level of honesty, vigor, and skill that a researcher brings to the process (Midgley, Danaher & Baguley, 2014). During the interview phase, I observed, recorded, and listened with empathy to all participants. Midgley et al., (2014) noted that when researchers listen with empathy to participating interviewees, they gain powerful insights into and understanding of the phenomena being studied. Having resided out of Sierra Leone for over 20 years, there is likelihood that I knew one or more participants in the study, but regardless of that, my responsibility was to provide an accurate report of the findings and ensure ethical protection.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to obtain an understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of teachers in Sierra Leone regarding inclusive education in Sierra Leone. It is hoped that through this research there could be improvements in the implementation of inclusive education for all students in the country. Teachers and students without disabilities, and the society will have the opportunity to understand the importance of helping those students in the society who are challenged with disabilities. Though limited in some of their abilities, the latter are not limited in their potential to be valued members

of the community of children.

It is also hoped that this study can begin a discourse and promote understanding of the issues relating to the education of students with disabilities in Sierra Leone. This study can also remind policy makers about the ethical responsibilities to provide equitable and accessible education for children with disabilities, and to enhance their social interaction within the school community and society. When teachers' perceptions are given the proper attention and consideration, the implementation process of inclusion in schools all over the country should become smoother. In the next section, the results of the survey responses and the interviews will be provided.

Section 4: Analysis of the Data

Introduction

Section 4 provided the results of the data collection from the study in Sierra Leone examining teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for children with disabilities in general education classrooms in Sierra Leone.

Data Collection

Data collection was done within a 14-day period. The questionnaires and other forms were physically distributed to all 100 teachers at the end of a workshop that was held for teachers in Sierra Leone. The purpose of the study was explained to participants, and 75 teachers out of 100 teachers completed the surveys in the hall on the first day. The remaining 25 teachers agreed to drop their surveys in a designated secured box inside the office of the CPIE in Sierra Leone. Within 2 days, the remaining teachers brought their surveys to the office. The rate of return for the questionnaires completed was 100%.

The instrument used to conduct the study was a modified version of the ATIAS survey, which was developed by a panel of educators, comprised of a special education teacher, educational diagnostician, speech therapist, and a special education program director both in Sierra Leone and the United States. These experts reviewed the modified version of the ATIAS instrument prior to the administration of the survey to ensure that the instrument reflects the current education realities in Sierra Leone.

A questionnaire was used to survey a convenience sample size of about 100 teachers in Sierra Leone. In the two-part survey, Part 1 included the demographic responses from participants. Part 2 of the questionnaire elicited responses from

participants regarding their perceptions of inclusive education for children with disabilities in Sierra Leone. Participants responded to 23 items on a 5-point Likert scale from 5 (*strongly disagree*) to 1 (*strongly agree*). I divided the 23 items into five subscales: training and development (Questions 1-5), classroom behavior (Questions 5-10), societal attitudes (Questions 11-15), parental involvement and support (Questions 16-18), and government support (Questions 18-23). Each subscale ranged between 5 to 23 points. I used each of the subscales to determine the teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education in Sierra Leone.

Questions in the interview phase of the study addressed issues covered in the survey subscales. These questions were open-ended and allowed for the gathering of information to verify and strengthened responses collected in the survey, as suggested by Creswell (2014). The same group of special education teachers' panel reviewed the qualitative questions prior to the research study to ensure that the questions were aligned to the current socioeconomic realities in Sierra Leone.

In an attempt to understand teachers' perceptions towards inclusion, I examined the existence of statistically significant relationships between teachers' demographic variables and survey subscales including cultural perceptions of children with disabilities, training and development, classroom behavior, parental involvement, and government support. Outcomes in this study may present knowledge that will help guide the government of Sierra Leone to develop a solution to a problem. I focused on answering key question: What are the differences in perceptions and attitudes of teachers in Sierra Leone towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms

demonstrated by teacher's academic background, age, gender, and teaching experience.

Specifically, the following questions guided this sequential explanatory study:

1. To what extent does advanced academic background relate to perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities?

H₀₁: Advanced academic background does not have any statistically significant relationship with teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities.

H_{a1}: Advanced academic background will have a statistically significant relationship with teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

2. To what extent does gender relate to perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities?

H₀₂: Gender does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

H_{a2}: Gender will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

3. To what extent does teaching experience relate to perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms?

H₀₃: Teaching experience does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

H_{a3}: Teaching experience will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

4. To what extent does age relate to perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities?

H₀4: Age does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

H_a4: Age will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

In order to gain information on the perceptions and attitudes of teachers in Sierra Leone regarding mainstreaming of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, and to validate responses from the quantitative section of this study, the qualitative portion of the study included participant interviews. In the qualitative phase, the interview portion was guided by the following six questions, which may contribute to understanding the perceptions of teachers in regards to inclusive education:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of teachers in Sierra Leone regarding the benefits and disadvantages of inclusive education in general education classrooms?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions of communities in Sierra Leone regarding children with disabilities?

RQ3: What role does government policies and legislation play towards the implementation of inclusive education of students with disabilities?

RQ4: What type of professional development training do teachers perceive as necessary in providing high quality instruction for children with disabilities in the classroom?

RQ5: What kind of support do teachers perceive as necessary to implement

inclusive education in Sierra Leone?

RQ6: What constraints do teachers perceive as challenges to implement inclusive education for students with disabilities in the classroom?

Findings

In this section, I highlighted the results of the responses collected from the questionnaire and interviews. The demographic information of participants included the mean, median, and standard deviation and is displayed in Tables 1 through 4. Information in these data includes gender, age, teaching experience, and education background. In the quantitative phase of this study, SPSS v.23 was the statistical tool used to examine the data from Part 1 (demographic information) and Part 2 of the questionnaire, which examines the teachers' attitudes in five subscales: training and development, classroom behavior, parental involvement, and government support. Nvivo 12 was used to analyze the data collected from the one-and-one interviews.

Quantitative

Table 1 provides descriptive data about the gender of the participants. It shows that out of the 100 teachers who participated in the survey, 55 (55%) of them are males, while 44 (45%) are females. There were slightly more of male than female participants in the study.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of gender of participants

Gender	Mean	<i>N</i>	Std. deviation	Median
Male	3.0721	55	.48287	3.0556
Female	2.9446	45	.35808	2.9733
Total	3.0148	100	.43386	3.0056

Table 2 shows the frequency of participants according to age group. There were 11 participants (11%) who were younger than 25 years, 29 participants (29%) who fell in the category of 25-30 years of age, 28 participants (28%) who fell in the category of 35-45 years of age, 15 participants (25%) who fell in the category of 45-55 years of age, and seven participants (7%) who were older than 55 years of age.

Table 2: : Descriptive statistics of age of participants

Age of Participants	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Median
Below 25	2.7818	11	.26623	2.7467
25-35	3.0728	29	.48303	3.0600
35-45	2.9777	28	.51543	2.9356
45-55	3.0347	25	.34017	3.0578
55 Above	3.2178	7	.26194	3.1244
Total	3.0148	100	.43386	3.0056

Table 3 shows the educational background of the teachers, and I found that there were 32 teachers (32%) who held the teachers certificate, 40 teachers (40%) who held higher teachers certificate, 24 teachers (24%) who held bachelor's degree, and four teachers (4%) who held master's degree. The majority of the participants possessed teacher's certificates or higher teachers certificates, and most likely have attended one of the teaching colleges in the country.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of educational background of participant

Educational Background	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Median
Teachers certificate	2.9024	32	.34358	2.9389

Higher Teachers Certificate	3.0199	40	.40727	3.0144
Bachelors	3.1420	24	.52147	3.1078
Masters	3.0986	4	.69039	2.9667
Total	3.0148	100	.43386	3.0056

Table 4 shows the years of teaching experience. I found that there were 18 teachers (18%) who held 1-5 years of teaching experience, 21 teachers (21%) who held 6-10 years of teaching experience, 28 teachers (28%) who held 11 to 15 years of teaching experience, 18 teachers (18%) who held 16-20 years of teaching experience, and 15 teachers (15%) with 20+ years of experience.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of educational background of participant

Teaching Experience	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Median
1-5	3.0638	18	.42301	3.0378
6-10	3.1483	21	.38409	3.1067
11-15	2.8520	28	.51260	2.7567
16-20	2.9098	18	.37943	2.9367
+20	3.1988	15	.29696	3.1733
Total	3.0148	100	.43386	3.0056

Table 5 shows that the highest mean score of 17.8 was obtained for government involvement, and lowest mean score of 7.7 was obtained for parental involvement. Training and development had a mean score of 11.3, while classroom behavior and societal attitudes both had 17.4 and 16.1 respectively. In addition to this skewness values, I also revealed that data were not normally distributed for training and development. Thereby, parametric tests cannot be applied.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of the Five Instrument Scales

Instrument scales	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers' training	5	2.2599	1.01220
Classroom behavior	5	3.4770	.71426
Societal perception	5	3.2067	1.23090
Parental involvement	3	2.5739	.62451
Government support	5	3.5563	.72496

In Table 6, the question was ranked first, which implied that the majority of them strongly disagreed with the question; also I am specialized on teaching children with disabilities was ranked second, which implied that the majority disagreed with the question. Teachers have the instructional skills and educational background to effectively teach students with disabilities in the general education classroom was ranked third, which implied that people also disagreed with this question. Teachers and other staff are provided with training and development in order to prepare them to feel competent in teaching students with disabilities was ranked fifth, which meant that there many teachers who strongly agreed with this question was higher than other items on the scale.

Table 6: Weighted Score: Training and development

Variables	Weighted score	Mean	Rank
Teachers and other staff are provided with training and development in order to prepare them to feel competent in teaching students with disabilities.	237	2.37	2 nd
Teachers have the instructional skills and educational background to effectively teach students with disabilities in the general education classroom.	335	3.35	1 st
Teachers know how to collaborate in order for inclusion to be successful.	233	2.33	3 rd
We attend training workshops on inclusive education, once every year.	218	2.18	4 th
I am specialized on teaching children with disabilities.	217	2.17	5 th

In Table 7, when teachers were asked whether students with disabilities require more attention and assistance than the general education teacher can provide, a majority of them strongly disagreed with the question. Therefore, this item was ranked first. Also, when asked whether students with disabilities actively participate in classroom activities with all their peers was ranked second, which implied that the majority disagreed with the question, and students with disabilities demonstrate more behavioral problems than students without disabilities was ranked third, which implied that people also disagreed on the question. However, students with disabilities benefit from being included in their

general education classroom was ranked fifth, which meant that the majority strongly agreed with this question.

Table 7: Classroom Behavior

Variables	Weighted score	Mean	Rank
Students with disabilities actively participate in classroom activities with all their peers.	362	3.62	2 nd
Students with disabilities demonstrate more behavioral problems than students without disabilities.	300	3.00	4 th
Students with disabilities benefit from being included in their general education classroom.	351	3.51	3 rd
Students with disabilities require more attention and assistance than the general education teacher can provide.	404	4.04	1 st
Students with emotional and/or behavioral disabilities are able to actively participate in general education classroom learning activities	256	2.56	5 th

Based on the scores, Table 8 shows that the society was not well equipped to provide for the needs of children with disabilities and that is why it was ranked first. The majority of them strongly disagreed with the question. Also, inclusive special education is a new concept in Sierra Leone it was ranked second, which implied that the majority disagreed with the question. The teachers believed that the concept has been in existence. However, the society believed that a student with disability is a curse from God is ranked fifth, which implied that majority strongly agreed with this question.

Table 8: Societal attitudes

Variable	Weighted Score	Mean	Rank
The society believes that a student with disability is a curse from God.	273	2.73	2 nd
The society is not doing enough to provide for the needs of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone.	313	3.13	1 st
The society needs media sensitization on the importance of inclusive education.	195	1.95	5 th
The society is not well equipped to provide for the needs of children with disabilities.	270	2.70	3 rd
Inclusive special education is a new concept in Sierra Leone.	268	2.68	4 th

In Table 9, the question on whether parents' groups are established on campus was ranked first, which implied that the majority of them strongly disagreed with the question. Also, when teachers were asked about parents' involvement with their children at school, a majority of teachers disagreed. However, parents are excited about inclusive education of their children was ranked third, this means that majority agreed with this question

Table 9: Parental involvement and support

Variables	Weighted Score	Mean	Rank
Parents are deeply involved in the education of their children with disabilities.	255	2.55	2 nd
Parents' groups are established on campus.	174	1.74	3 rd
Parents are excited about inclusive education of their children.	347	3.47	1 st

According to table 10, government assists educators to implement the laws of special education is ranked 1st this implies majority of them strongly disagreed with the question, also Government have the resources to assist in inclusive education is ranked 2nd which implies majority disagreed with the question, and Government should encourage higher institutions of learning in training teachers in the field of special education is ranked 3rd, this implies that people also disagreed on the question. However, Government should do more in creating equal opportunity for children with disabilities is ranked 5th, this means that majority strongly agreed with this question.

Table 10: Government support

Variables	Weighted score	Mean	Rank
Government assists educators to implement the laws of special education.	355	3.55	3 rd
Teachers are concerned that support given to them by the government in teaching children with disabilities is limited.	387	3.87	1 st
Government have the resources to assist in inclusive education	254	2.54	5 th
Government should do more in creating equal opportunity for children with disabilities.	349	3.49	4 th
Government should encourage higher institutions of learning in training teachers in the field of special education.	375	3.75	2 nd

In table 12, Spearman rho correlational analysis was used to test four hypothesis procedures to examine the responses related to Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4. The dependent variable was the attitude score generated from the 23-question ATIAS survey. The

independent variables were Findings from these analyses indicated no significant relationships between the dependent variables and the independent variables (see Table 12).

Table 11: Spearman Rho Results for Study Hypotheses

Hypot hesis	DV	IV	Spearman' s rho	Signific ance
H ₁	Inclusion Attitude	Advance Academic	.170	.091
H ₂	Inclusion Attitude	Gender	-.139	.167
H ₃	Inclusion Attitude	Teaching Experience	-.002	.983
H ₄	Inclusion Attitude	Age	1.000	-

Hypothesis 1

H₀₁: Advanced academic background does not have any statistically significant relationship with teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities.

H_{a1}: Advanced academic background will have a statistically significant relationship with teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

The results of this finding indicated in Table 7 that the Null in Hypothesis 1 could not be rejected. The Spearman rho correlation was calculated as .170, and did not derive a significance level of $p < .05$. Thus, I concluded not to reject the Null hypothesis for this sample of 100 teachers. Advanced academic background does not have any statistically significant relationship with teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of

students with disabilities. The findings of the analysis indicated a weak relationship between the independent and dependent variables for this sample of teachers.

Hypothesis 2

2. To what extent does gender relate to perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities?

H02: Gender does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

Ha2: Gender will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

Based on these findings, the spearman correlation coefficient is $-.139$ and this implied that there was a weak and negative relationship between the two variables. Also, the significant level of 0.167 implied that the value is not significant at 0.05 critical values, thus the stated hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 3

H03: Teaching experience does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

Ha3: Teaching experience will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

The results of this finding indicated in Table 7 shows that the Null Hypothesis 1 could not be rejected. The Spearman rho correlation was calculated as $.002$, and the significant level was $.983$, which did not derive a significance level of $p < .05$. Thus, I concluded to not reject the Null hypothesis that for this sample of 100 teachers. Teaching

experience does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities. The findings of the analysis indicated a weak relationship between the two variables for this sample of teachers.

Hypothesis 4

4. To what extent does age relate to perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities?

H₀₄: Age does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

H_{a4}: Age will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

The results of this finding indicated in Table 7 showed that the Null Hypothesis 4 could not be rejected. The Spearman rho correlation was calculated as .1, and did not derive a significance level of $p < .05$. Thus, I concluded not to reject the Null hypothesis that for this sample of 100 teachers. Age does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities. Like the previous three hypotheses, the findings of this analysis also indicated a weak relationship between the two variables for this sample of teachers.

Qualitative

Findings in the qualitative study were guided by six planned questions and four follow up questions, which may contribute to understanding the perceptions of teachers in regards to inclusive education: Responses to the interview questions were coded into six themes. These themes were similar to subscales in the quantitative survey. Despite

their similarities, findings differed a bit since individual perspective on a particular theme was different. The sixth theme was developed in order to accommodate other important findings or suggestions that might arise from the interview.

Demographic Data

I collected demographic data on all ten participants to provide background information. Participants were primary and secondary teachers, and each one of them have taught at least one or more students with disabilities during their teaching careers. Demographic information revealed that the collective experiences of teachers interviewed ranged from 1 to 9 years of teaching. It also showed that two teachers had a basic teaching certificate, four teachers had an advanced or higher teachers certificate, three teachers with a bachelor's degree, and one with a masters' degree. Data findings for these interview themes were derived from the responses to the following interview questions:

Qualitative Questions

RQ1: What are the perceptions of teachers in Sierra Leone regarding the benefits and disadvantages of inclusive education in general education classrooms?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions of communities in Sierra Leone regarding children with disabilities?

RQ3: What role does government policies and legislation play towards the implementation of inclusive education of students with disabilities?

RQ4: What type of professional development training do teachers perceive as necessary in providing high quality instruction for children with disabilities in the classroom?

RQ5: What kind of support do teachers perceive as necessary to implement inclusive education in Sierra Leone?

RQ6: What constraints do teachers perceive as challenges to implement inclusive education for students with disabilities in the classroom?

Theme 1: Benefits and challenges of Inclusion

Question 1 was intended to explore the attitudes and perceptions of teachers as it relates to the advantages and disadvantages provided when students with disabilities learn within the same environment as their abled peers. Many of the respondents believed that inclusion is advantageous to children with disabilities if only the society is sensitized against the expression of prejudices and negative thoughts towards children with disabilities in Sierra Leone.

As far as the question regarding challenges of inclusive education in Sierra Leone, majority of the respondents believed that each of the barriers is unique to students based on their circumstances. But overall, they pointed to insufficiency of materials, lack of conducive atmosphere and learning resources as major barriers of inclusive education. Besides the lack of material support, another teacher stated that it is difficult to implement inclusion in their classrooms due to the absence of teachers training opportunities.

Theme 2: Societal perceptions

Teachers' perceptions of communities in Sierra Leone regarding children with disabilities revealed that the country's traditional belief is at variance with the underlying medical conditions of children with disabilities. According to one of the respondents,

“Sierra Leone is lagging behind in the way we think concerning special needs children. We believe that somehow, parents of children with disabilities might have committed sin against God and consequently God is punishing them now through disabilities.”

One of the respondents claimed that many people still see children with disabilities as burdens and are therefore often disinclined to put up with their disabilities. Other participants held the notion that in certain rural communities around the country, inhabitants attribute children with disabilities as a curse from God. One of the participants said:

“Well, it depends on where the children find themselves. At some villages and towns, the society labels you as a curse or in other places, a witch. They see you as someone God has punished. Even in bigger cities, the feelings and perceptions are not often different. Men and women in these societies try to pretend and hide their feelings, but they see these children as a burden.”

Theme 3: Government Support and Policies

As it relates to questions about government support and policies, one participant admitted that despite the fact that the government had passed a law in 2011 regarding special needs children, and how to help alleviate their challenges and concerns, yet there were little signs if any, to show for it. 90% of participating teachers claimed not to have received or seen any significant support from the government. One of the participants went to claim that the absence of government support will hinder the smooth implementation of inclusion. Another participant commented that government should be

sincere in its effort to implement policies especially if they intend for them to be effective. She went on to say that if the government is not ready to implement its promises, maybe it should not propose any policy. Many of the blames for the failure of inclusion in Sierra Leone was leveled against the government by participation teachers.

Theme 4: Professional development

The professional development theme was similar to one of the subscales used in the quantitative study. The purpose for this question was to examine and compare responses from the quantitative data as well. Questions 4 sought out to identify the type of professional development training, which teachers perceived as necessary in the provision of quality instructions for children with disabilities in the classroom. Almost all of the ten participants believed that training of teachers to work in an inclusive environment was crucial. All ten participants indicated that professional development workshops and seminars were needed for inclusion to succeed. One participant had this to say:

“Based on my present level of education, I am not prepared to handle these children at all. I was trained to work with other children and not special needs children. So I don't believe that I have sufficient training.”

Another participant disclosed that professional training for teachers is not a frequent academic exercise in Sierra Leone, especially for teachers who will be working with children with disabilities. She went on to assert that:

“I don't think that training teachers in special needs is something that is common here. Teachers are almost never trained in general education fields how much

more in special needs”

Theme 5: Parental involvement

Regarding the role of parents towards the education of their children with disabilities, there were mixed feelings among participants. One participant confessed that majority of parents do not have the necessary experts in Sierra Leone to help their children effectively. If anything, they rely heavily on the schools and government to bring about the desired help and assistance. Many accusatory fingers were directed towards the government for not supporting parents of children with disabilities. Also, in a society in which there are significant claims of discrimination against children with disabilities, parents sometimes do not know exactly how to handle these negative societal pressure. One participant mentioned that some parents are non-existent in the lives of their children simply because of societal pressure.

Theme 6: Suggestions and recommendations

The last question in the interview had to do with participant’s suggestions and recommendations. One participant suggested that he would like to see that international donors and partners as well as the government of Sierra Leone focus on the plight of our children who are disabled. Another participant called on the government of Sierra Leone to embark on building more schools, train teachers and provide material supports for schools in Sierra Leone. One other participant claimed that it is the Ministry of Education, the institution responsible for the provision of education in Sierra Leone that can determine best practices from other countries and how similar practices can be implemented and applied in Sierra Leone.

Summary

Section 4 presented the findings from a modified version of the ATIAS survey. Data were collected from 100 participants to answer one key research question: What are the perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education in Sierra Leone? Analysis of data was done using Spearman rho to explore the relationship between the dependent variable (attitude score) and the independent variables (academic background, gender, age, and teaching experience). This test was specifically conducted for the data related to Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4.

There was no significant correlation found between the dependent variable (attitude score) and educational background. The findings for this sample reflected that the academic background of teachers have no significant effect on their attitudes toward the inclusion of students with severe disabilities. Participants with a bachelor's degree had a slightly more positive attitude towards children with disabilities with a median score of 3.10 and the respondents with teachers' certificate had the lowest attitude with a mean of 2.93. This difference was very insignificant as to relate it to any other factor.

Based on the findings from Hypothesis 2, there was no significant correlation found between the dependent variable (attitude score) and the independent variable (gender of participants). The findings for this sample reveal that gender of teachers has nothing to do with their attitudes towards inclusive education in Sierra Leone.

There was also no significant correlation found between the dependent variable (attitude score) and the independent variable (teaching experience) in Hypothesis 3. The findings for this sample reflected that teaching experience did not have a significant

effect on the teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with severe disabilities.

In Hypothesis 4, there was no significant correlation found between the dependent variable (attitude score) and the independent variable (age). The findings for this sample reflected that age did not have a significant effect on the teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with severe disabilities.

Section 5 reviews the findings of this study, draws conclusions, and makes recommendations where appropriate. The section includes an interpretation and analysis of the findings, what the social change implications are, and recommendations for action and further study.

Section 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this study, I examined the perceptions and attitudes of teachers in Sierra Leone towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms as it related to training and development, societal attitudes, parental involvement, government support, and classroom behavior in a small West African country of about 6 million people with an illiteracy rate of over 60%. In Section 5, I provided a summary of my findings, discuss the findings and conclusions, and offer recommendation based on the responses collected from both the questionnaire and interview sessions. The total participants for the quantitative phase were 100 teachers, and the one-and-one interview session had 10 participants. There are six sections in this section: (a) overview of the study, (b) interpretation of the findings, (c) implications for social change, (d) recommendations for action, (e) recommendations for further study, and (f) conclusions.

Overview of the Study

This mixed-method study was designed to examine the perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education in Sierra Leone. In this study, I examined the relationship between the independent variables (educational background, teaching experience, gender, and age) and the dependent variables (training and development, societal attitudes, parental involvement, government support, and classroom behavior), and focused on answering one key question: What are the perceptions and attitudes of teachers in Sierra Leone towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms as it relates to training and development, societal attitudes, parental

involvement, government support, and classroom behavior? Specifically, I focused on four quantitative research questions and their hypotheses and six qualitative questions:

1. To what extent does advanced academic background relate to perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities?

H₀₁: Advanced academic background does not have any statistically significant relationship with teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities.

H_{a1}: Advanced academic background will have a statistically significant relationship with teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

2. To what extent does gender relate to perceptions and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities?

H₀₂: Gender does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

H_{a2}: Gender will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

3. To what extent does teaching experience relate to perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms?

H₀₃: Teaching experience does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

H_{a3}: Teaching experience will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

4. To what extent does age relate to perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities?

H₀₄: Age does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

H_{a4}: Age will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities.

Descriptive statistics and the Spearman rho correlational analysis procedures were conducted to examine the data responses from 100 participants on the ATIAS instrument. Also, one-and-one interview sessions involving 10 teachers were conducted to help substantiate the findings from the survey.

In the findings for the study, I could not establish any significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables as I found that the academic background, gender, teaching experience, and age of participants did not determine the attitude and perception of teachers towards inclusive education in Sierra Leone. However, this research brought forward findings about inclusive education in Sierra Leone.

Interpretation of the Findings

I found that the sample of teachers interviewed had negative perceptions and attitude towards inclusive education of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone. I also found that teachers strongly believed that students were not benefitting from inclusive education in Sierra Leone due to the lack of professional trainings for teachers, poor parental involvement, societal attitudes towards children with disabilities, and limited to

nongovernment support.

Each of the research questions examining the relationship between the independent and dependent variables proved that there were no significant relationships between these variables. In the first research question, I examined the relationship between academic background and teachers' attitude towards inclusive education for children with disabilities in Sierra Leone, and I indicated that there was no significant relationship. The correlation coefficient was calculated as .170, which did not derive an anticipated alpha level of $p < .05$. The results of the analysis indicated a weak relationship between the two variables for this sample of teachers. The finding failed to support the hypothesis that advanced academic background will have a statistically significant relationship with teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities. It is possible that this finding was affected by the high rate of participants who had less than a bachelors' degree. I found that the relationship between the academic background and teachers' attitude and perceptions was also negative.

This study supported previous findings from Hunter-Johnson, Newton, and Cambridge-Johnson (2014), who found that nine out of 10 teachers had negative perceptions of inclusive education due to factors such as lack of development training, insufficient resources, poor infrastructure, and other challenging circumstances under which they were expected to deliver instructional services for students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. The reasons cited in Hunter-Johnson et al. were similar to those cited in the one-on-one interviews done in this study. A greater percentage of the respondents in the one-on-one interviews also confirmed the study in Hunter-Johnson et

al., which stressed that the absence of teachers' training, inadequate resources, and poor infrastructure inhibits the successful implementation.

Because 72% of the teachers in the sample did not have any higher college degree, this may have affected the result. It is also possible that the strength of this relationship would have been stronger if the study were to be conducted involving samples of participants with advanced college degrees. According to Kilanowski-Press, Foote, and Rinaldo (2010) and O'Rourke, Main, and Cooper (2007), advanced education for special education teachers is needed to support a successful inclusion classroom. Hsien et al. (2009) also stated that teachers who are prepared display positive attitudes and perceptions towards inclusion than their colleagues without advanced educational background. In this study, teachers who overwhelmingly reported lack of professional training, also reported their lack of readiness in inclusive classrooms.

Also, the absence of any meaningful professional development practices for teachers in the country regarding inclusive education for children with disabilities. is a hindrance to the implementation of inclusion. Participants in the study may have experienced trainings that were incomprehensive and insignificant. This finding supported other research that majority of teachers have maintained that trainings in special education should be adequate in meeting the expressed demands of teaching students with disabilities (Montgomery & Mirenda, 2014). In support of a rigid professional development for teachers maintaining that the lack of teachers' training has served as a significant challenge to inclusion Muccio, Kidd, White, & Burns, 2014) rationalized that teachers receiving excellent trainings, experiences significant increases

in their performance and confidence level in an inclusive setting.

In the second research question, and based on these findings, the spearman correlation coefficient was -0.139 . This result implied that there was a weak relationship between gender and teacher's attitude towards inclusive education. Also, the significant level of 0.167 implied that the value was not significant at 0.05 critical values, thus the assumption that gender will have a statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities was rejected. In Sierra Leone where this research was conducted, there is a widespread notion of gender imbalance regarding teaching and other careers in the country. The belief of gender bias may be attributed as one of the reasons for a 10% difference between male and female participants in the study. In this study, the male demographic makeup accounted for about 55%, while females constituted for about 45%. However, despite this slight variance, the analysis indicated a very weak relationship between gender and teachers' attitude and perception towards inclusive education in Sierra Leone.

The findings from my research supported what Forlin (2001) noted with the female teachers' median (2.94) less positive than the male teachers' median (3.07). Despite this slight variance, the overall result reported that the general education teachers in this sample had a negative attitude toward the inclusion of students with severe disabilities in the general education setting. The findings of my study agreed with Main and Hammond (2008), who surveyed both male and female pre-service teachers' attitudes immediately prior to a school experience practicum revealed that there was no significant relationship between gender and teachers' attitude.

Contrary to my findings, other researches have indicated otherwise. They have maintained that generally, female teachers tend to hold more positive attitudes towards children with disabilities than their male counterparts (Sharma, Shaukat & Furlonger, 2015). For instance, Sharma et al. (2015) discovered that female educators in Australia, Canada, Singapore, and Hong Kong have a more positive attitude towards students with disabilities than male educators. Woodcock also (2011) reported differences between male and female participants in their studies of pre-service teachers.

Similar to the previous first two research questions, the result of the findings from the third research question detailed that the spearman rho correlation was calculated as .002 with a significant level of .983. This means that the study did not derive a significance level of $p < .05$. Therefore, I concluded that out of a sample of 100 teachers, teaching experience does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities. The findings of my research are similar to that of Idol (2006) who found that there was no relationship between teacher experience and their attitude towards inclusion.

Dissimilar to the above researches revealing relationship between teachers' experiences and attitudes towards inclusion, Boyle et al. (2013) found that newly graduated teachers tend to have more positive attitude towards inclusive education than those with vast experience. Another study went on to claim that final year college students are more positive towards inclusion than first year students (Sosu, Mtika, & Colucci-Gray, 2010). One might expect experience teachers to be better equipped to deal

with inclusive education than inexperienced teachers, thus display a higher passion and positive attitude. The lack of inclusion support as viewed by experienced teachers might have been one of the reasons responsible for experienced teachers not to be positive about inclusion. Despite these findings, researchers might have to conduct more studies to explore the relationship between teaching experience and attitude towards inclusion.

In the last hypothesis, the results of this finding indicated in Table 7 that the null hypothesis 4 could not be rejected. The Spearman rho correlation was calculated as .1, and did not derive a significance level of $p < .05$. Thus, I concluded that age does not have any statistically significant relationship with perceptions and attitudes toward inclusive education for students with disabilities. Like the previous three hypotheses, the findings of this analysis also indicate a weak relationship between the two variables for this sample of teachers. Table 2 shows that 68% of participants were below the age of 45, while 32% were above 45 years old.

The survey questionnaire used in this study was a modified version of the ATIAS was designed to examine teachers' attitude towards inclusion. This instrument was adapted to fit into the demographics and culture of Sierra Leone. The modified ATIAS was used as a total score survey. Fink (2006) noted that researchers base a survey instrument on an existing validated one, it adds credibility and validity to the modified scale. The research was validated by a panel of three special education experts. The survey items were constructed to measure the teachers' attitudes in five subscales: Training, classroom behavior, societal perception, parental involvement and

governmental support. The median of training (2.25) whereas the classroom behavior median was (3.47) and societal perception was (3.20). Parental involvement had a median of (2.57), and government support had (3.55). All of these medians in each of the subscales revealed a negative attitude of teachers toward inclusive education in Sierra Leone. One of the strengths of this study was the presence of the one-and-one interviews which serve to provide a deeper understanding of the issues of inclusive education in Sierra Leone. Even though the survey might have limited participant responses, the interview helped to closed gap.

The data in the interview session revealed several things that early researchers have noted. For example, 100% of teachers interviewed confirmed Oswald and Swart (2011) suggestion that the dislike for children with disabilities is manifested through profound prejudice in every area within the African setting. Also, the findings were in total agreement with respondents in the questionnaire on whether the society views children with disability as a curse. With a mean score of 2.73, it ranked that item 2nd in the subscale. As a result of the perception of the society towards children with disabilities, society is not doing enough to help alleviate the plight of children with disabilities. Consequently, a mean of score of 3.33 on how well society does in helping these children showed a negative attitude.

Limitations of the Study

Researches have indicated that teachers' perception of and attitudes toward inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream is critical in the implementation of a

successful inclusive education policy. Knowing that inclusive education is premised on equality of and accessibility to mainstream education by children with disabilities, it is important that a bigger and more diverse sample is used in the study. This research was conducted in the main capital of Freetown and restricted to only public school teachers. Teachers from other locations might have their own perspective of inclusive education similar or different to those expressed in this study. Therefore, every aspect of the findings from this study cannot be generalized to the entire country.

One obvious limitation of this study is generalizing the findings of a small sample of 100 teachers from one geographical setting to the entire country. However, the effects of the limitations may be minimized by the uniformity and over centralization of education structure across the country. Examining teachers' perceptions about inclusive education in one geographical location of the country can be used as a case study for the country. Flyvberg (2006) stated that themes about particular topics could be developed using a case study. Therefore, generalization can be achieved when the Ministry of Education in Sierra Leone is presented with thorough analyses of the findings and interpretations like those that I have reported in this study.

My role as a researcher in Sierra Leone where I came from might pose as a limitation for this study. Although, participating teachers completed the survey under explicit announcement of a mandatory study, few teachers whom I had known participated in the study. This may have caused them to either respond candidly to questions, or be more guarded depending on what their feelings were at the time. Despite their responses, I do not believe that their responses were that significant as to have

severely impacted the results of this study. Furthermore, I minimized this limitation through the strict adherence to research rules.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this research was to examine the perception of and attitudes toward inclusive education for children with disabilities. The findings showed that there was no significant relationship between the independent variables (gender, age, educational background, and teaching experience) and the dependent variables (attitudes towards inclusion). Despite the absence of a strong significant relationship, the data from this study revealed an in-depth understanding of the perception and attitude of teachers toward inclusive education in Sierra Leone. The study also reported that teachers' overwhelming negative attitude towards inclusion are inherently due to myriads of interrelated factors.

Data responses from study might provide insightful knowledge about teachers' attitudes and perceptions of inclusion that key education policy-making stakeholders in Sierra Leone can use to improve on the provision of education for children with disabilities. These key areas were observed as follows: training, classroom behavior, societal perception, parental involvement, and government support. Understanding the diverse viewpoints of educators in Sierra Leone, and how their perceptions might help shaping the inclusion discourse in Sierra Leone can perhaps be seen as the beginning of the implementation of a successful inclusion program in the country. Revisiting and reviewing the current inclusion policy and its implementation agenda may be necessary in

the country.

Another area of significant concern, based on responses collected from study participants was the lack of meaningful training for teachers working with students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The underlying importance of adequate teachers' training programs in Sierra Leone cannot be underestimated to achieve a meaningful implementation of inclusion. Responses from the study were unanimous on the need for effective professional development programs in inclusion. About 80% of respondents believed that they do not have the required skills and knowledge to provide adequate instruction for children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Perhaps the government of Sierra Leone as well as administrators in colleges and universities in the country might want to revise curriculums used in their higher institutions of learning to provide training for teachers to better serve children with disabilities. Also, education providers in the country might want to provide regular workshops for continued teachers' professional development to keep them abreast with inclusion best practices. Many of the findings report that participants are willing to take leadership roles in inclusion if they are provided with the trainings and knowledge needed.

Data from teachers reported that one adverse effect of inclusion in the country is the negative societal belief held against children with disabilities. Because of a widespread societal stigma directed against children with disabilities, parents often tend to disassociate themselves from their children's education for fear of being labeled. Unfortunately, and because of the higher rate of illiteracy in Sierra Leone, parents are

unaware of the further damage and abuse that the non-involvement in their children's education in school exposes them to both at the hands of their teachers as well as their abled peers. According to few of the participants interviewed, parents are usually uninvolved due to poverty and societal stigma associated with children with disabilities. Recommended action to help mitigate some of the challenges encountered as a result of lack of parental involvement might be further studies in the area of parental involvement. This action of providing additional training for teachers may help to identify and put measures in place that can alleviate the problems responsible for parents' lack of involvement, and might even encourage parents to be active bodies in their children's education.

Finally, the government and other stakeholders helping with the provision of education throughout the country may want to focus on the provision of resources, which are necessary for the successful implementation of inclusion. According to responses provided in the survey, majority of participating teachers hinted at the government's inability to provide adequate resources for inclusion to succeed. Information regarding the governments challenge was validated in the one-and-one interview. In the study, an overwhelming majority of participants agreed that the government is not doing enough and would like to see it do more for inclusion. In view of this discovery, the government of Sierra Leone might want to re-examine school structures to ensure that children with disabilities have easy access to their classrooms.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several researches have shown that teachers perception of and attitudes toward inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream is a key component in implementing a successful inclusive education policy. Because inclusive education is concerned with addressing the education imbalance between children with disabilities and their abled peers, it is also imperative that more emphasis is leveraged on professional development and training of teachers to commit to the development of inclusion.

My proposals for future studies are explained in the following recommendations:

1. The sample size of 100 teachers was limited to only the capital city of Freetown. Therefore, researchers should conduct similar studies with a larger sample of teachers extending across the country. Further studies with a bigger sample size representative of the country with the purpose of making a valid generalized statement about inclusive education would benefit diverse group of teachers from different demographics.

2. Since this research has demonstrated the importance of teachers in the smooth implementation of inclusion, maybe a more comprehensive approach will be helpful to explore other key factors that might influence the encouragement of positive attitudes toward inclusive education. There is a serious need for a better understanding of what affects attitude and how these factors relate to one and other. Future research needs to focus on other possible subscales including, legal policy, school climate, and self-awareness.

3. The absence of publication materials on education in Sierra Leone restrains researches. This shortage presents challenges for researchers who might want to examine issues surrounding inclusive education of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone. It would be invaluable to conduct a research on teachers' beliefs and efficacy. Further studies could examine the perception of and attitude of principals and school administrators toward inclusion. Further research in the areas of the identification of variables that poses challenges and threats to the implementation of inclusive education in Sierra Leone.

Implications for Social Change

The introduction and passage of the Persons with Disability Act (2011) in Sierra Leone have resulted in debates that have important moral and legal implications for everyone in the society. Initially, the government's approach was to ensure that the introduction of the Person's with Disability Act guarantee that every child in the country gets equal access to education. Understanding the perception of teachers towards inclusive education has been a challenging exercise. Despite the fact that I used a small sample size of 100 teachers in Sierra Leone to conduct the study, it is an important scholarly contribution in the field of education because it explored the perceptions and attitudes of teachers toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in Sierra Leone. Bornman and Donohue (2015) noted that the views and attitudes of teachers regarding inclusion have similar impacts as the materials and policies needed to support the implementation. Studies on teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students in

mainstream classroom have been practically non-existent in Sierra Leone. This study contributes positively to social change in Africa, and Sierra Leone in particular through an attempt to understand the perceptions and attitudes of teachers toward inclusive education. This study collected vital information, which the government of Sierra Leone might use to support inclusion of children with disabilities in public schools.

One of the positive social changes that might be noticeable from this study is the empowerment of teachers to understand their roles as leaders in the implementation of inclusive education in Sierra Leone. Even though the result of this research indicated that many teachers do not believe in their knowledge to affect instructions for children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, it is also necessary to point out that the provision of adequate professional development and other appropriate trainings on inclusive best practices will narrow the gap.

The Ministry of Education in Sierra Leone might use findings from this study to initiate and guide the implementation of an effective inclusion model that will promote equitable and easy access for children with disabilities in Sierra Leone. Finally, school administrators could use findings from this study to guide and facilitate professional development programs that can build teachers' confidence level and help project a more positive attitude towards inclusion.

Conclusion

In the past, there have been series of international meetings on educational reforms held such as the World Conference on Education for All, organized by the United

Nations and the Dakar Framework for Action to argue for the inclusion of all children regardless of their abilities or disabilities (UNESCO, 2014). Results from these meetings ultimately pushed the government of Sierra Leone to legislate the Persons with Disability Act (2011). The government's approach was to ensure that every child in the country gets equal access to education. Despite all of these international and domestic efforts, recent studies conducted have indicated that about 75% of all children with disabilities are either out of school, or do not have similar access to high-quality instruction as their abled peers. The implication for this is that Sierra Leone is struggling to embrace fully the inclusion model, which guarantees and respect the equal partnership rights of every child in every learning environment (Bornman & Donohue, 2013). Legislative policies alone are not enough to close the widening gap between government policy and implementation of inclusive education (Bornman & Donohue, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' attitude towards inclusive education in general-education classrooms. Because earlier studies have suggested the importance of teachers in implementing inclusive education, there is a need to explore teachers' perceptions as they relate to inclusion (Hunter-Johnson & Newton, 2014). Of particular interest in this study was an examination of the relationship between teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms and teachers' academic background, teaching experience, gender, and age. This mixed method research used a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews to examine teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in Sierra Leone. The teachers' demographic variables in this study were educational background, gender, teaching

experience, and age. The survey's subscales include cultural perceptions of teachers regarding children with disabilities, training and development, classroom behavior, parental involvement, and government support for inclusion.

The study revealed that the general perception and attitude of teachers towards inclusive education in Sierra Leone were negative. Teachers have negative thoughts about government's ability to provide the resources needed for inclusion to succeed. The study also indicated that the relationship between professional development and teachers' readiness to implement inclusion in their classrooms were positive. The lesser training teachers say they have received, the lesser their confidence and knowledge to influence inclusion in their schools. Thus, even though teachers in both their responses to the questionnaire as well as one-to-one interviews were willing to embrace inclusion, yet they were absolute in their belief that they lacked the training, parental support and resources to provide an inclusive general education classroom that would meet the needs of students with severe disabilities.

From this study, it is imperative that the government of Sierra Leone should provide appropriate professional development training to support the provision of inclusion in mainstream classrooms. The benefits associated with the provision of education for children with disabilities alongside their abled peers is huge, and it is imperative that schools afford students with severe disabilities the opportunity to participate in the general education classroom. Teachers' leadership in the implementation of a successful inclusion program is critical, so government and schools must make purposeful

approaches to embrace their suggestions and recommendations to continue to provide equal but accessible education for all children with disabilities.

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Appendix A: Request for Permission to Utilize the ATIAS Survey

December 26, 2014

Dear Dr. Joseph Agbenyega:

I am a doctoral student from Walden

University writing my dissertation tentatively titled “Perceptions and attitudes towards inclusive education in Sierra Leone” under the direction of my dissertation committee chaired by Dr. Jonah Eleweke.

I would like your permission to reproduce The Attitude Towards Inclusion Scale in Africa (ATIAS) survey instrument in my research study. I would like to use and print your survey under the following conditions:

- I will use this survey only for my research study and will not sell or use it with any compensated or curriculum development activities.
- I will include the copyright statement on all copies of the instrument.
- I will send my research study and one copy of reports, articles, and the like that make use of these survey data promptly to your attention.

If these are acceptable terms and conditions, please indicate so by signing one copy of this letter and returning it to me either through postal mail, or e-mail:

christian.sesay@waldenu.edu

Sincerely,

Christian Sesay

Doctoral Candidate

Signature

Expected date of completion: June, 2018

Appendix B: Permission to Utilize and Modify ATIAS Survey

Hi Christian,
You have all the permission from me to use it. Just acknowledge it in your thesis.
Cheers.

Dr Joseph Seyram Agbenyega
Senior Lecturer (Early Childhood/Inclusive Education)
Course Leader (Master of Education EC & Master of Teaching EC)
Monash University
Peninsula Campus, Frankston

Hi Christian,
Yes. Feel free to modify to suit your study. Just acknowledge it in your thesis.
C
Dr Joseph Seyram Agbenyega
Senior Lecturer (Early Childhood/Inclusive Education)
Course Leader (Master of Education EC & Master of Teaching EC)
Monash University
Peninsula Campus, Frankston

Appendix D: Interview and Follow-up Questions

1. What do you think are the benefits and disadvantages of inclusion?
2. How prepared do you believe you are to meet the needs of students with disabilities if you have children with disabilities in your classroom?
3. What type of professional development training for teachers can help you provide high quality instruction for children with disabilities in the classroom?
4. What type of supports or barriers do you think you will encounter to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the classroom?
5. What is the societal perception of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone?
6. How are government and legal policies helping to promote inclusive education in Sierra Leone?

Follow-up Questions

1. Regarding the needs of students with disabilities, how are parents assisting their children?
2. How often are teachers' professional developments training relating to students with disabilities held in Sierra Leone?
3. Do you want to say anything else regarding inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms?
4. What suggestions do you have as to how to improve the inclusion of children with disabilities?