**UNIVERSITY OF GÄVLE**

**FACULTY OF HEALTH AND OCCUPATIONAL STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK**

Inclusive Education And The Challenges Faced By Children With Special
Needs In Cameroon

Perspectives of Social Worker and Teacher

Success .E. Agbonlenomen
And
Amos Faith Becky

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Supervisor: Annemi Skerfving

Examiner: Mark Holter

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to find out how special needs children are being included in the educational settings in Cameroon and the challenges they face and to understand the perspectives of both Social workers and teachers on an inclusive educational system.

The theory used in this study was the ecological system theory. The theory explains how special needs children are being included in mainstream schools. This study used a qualitative descriptive design to describe teachers' and social workers' perceptions and their role within inclusive education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three teachers and three social workers via Zoom (an online meeting platform). The results were analyzed using themes.

The findings from this study indicated that teachers and social workers feel they have different roles and responsibilities in the education of children with special needs. The study also revealed that challenges with finance, lack of manpower, and government complacency in budgeting and implementing policies were part of the impediments to inclusive education in Cameroon.

From the research findings, there is a huge deficit in inclusive education in Cameroon; there is still systematic seclusion of physically challenged children from obtaining quality education due to environmental, financial, structural, and political deficiencies, concerted effort must be put in place to ensure education for all is achieved.


*Keywords:* *Special needs children, inclusive education, Teachers, Mainstream education, and Social Workers.*

## FOREWORD

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**Success .E. Agbonlenomen and Amos FaithBecky**

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**CHAPTER ONE**

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of children with special needs is a significant challenge for schools and society as a whole; it is not enough to simply include the child in activities within or outside the classroom; but they must be engaged in all activities equally and without discrimination. According to the World Bank report (2012), many children with impairments do not have access to special education; this makes them absent from schools and they are not considered in government planning. Children from underprivileged backgrounds, such as those with physical disabilities and those living in extreme poverty are frequently given additional attention in inclusive special education. The UNESCO education profile report (2021) notes that despite some progress, it remains extremely challenging to enroll children with disabilities in regular schools. Instead, these children are often enrolled in special schools that are managed by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and private stakeholders.

Cameroon has no universally accepted concept of inclusive education, according to Cameroonian law (Laws No. 2010/003 and 2005/006), children with special educational needs face severe academic challenges due to disability or other disadvantages. Children who live in remote areas far from schools and displaced, underprivileged, and poor populations are included in this category. We are no strangers to the stigma attached to disabled persons all over the globe, especially children in developing nations like Cameroon even though it has been reiterated in several forums that every child has the right to quality education including children with disabilities. The United Nations (2006) further stressed that inclusive education is a fundamental human right for every child with a disability. An inclusive education system accommodates all students irrespective of their disability, abilities, or requirements, and at all levels: pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational, and life-long learning.

According to the United Nations (2006), article 12 states that every child has the right to freely express their views and opinions on issues concerning them, depending on their maturity, and ability to understand, and placing students with disabilities in mainstream educational institutions without adaptation and requiring the student to fit in is a kind of tokenism. There are several

reasons why inclusive policies of the United Nations are not holistic with certain situations in some developing countries because children who live in remote areas far from schools, those displaced, underprivileged, and poor don't fall into the category of the definition of disabled persons according to United Nationals (2006) this make the leadership of most developing countries is complacent in taking into account financial and environmental disabilities that exist not by biological means but by environmental, financial, geographical, political instability and also due to lack of awareness of disabilities Micklewright (2002).

## 1.1 Education System in Cameroon

The educational system in Cameroon is complex, this complexity is reflected in the national educational policy that specifies the methods for instruction and learning to be French and English language in contrast to most nations (Sokaleh, 2009). These two languages (French and English) are widely spoken because of Cameroon's dual colonial history, with France serving as the country's first colonial ruler before being ruled by the United Kingdom from 1916 to 1960 (Ministry of Education, 2013). Lorenco (2009) posits that most of Cameroon's population (83%) speaks French, while only 17% speaks English; eight of the country's ten regions are predominantly French-speaking. Cameroon possesses over 250 languages, of which 55 are Afro-Asiatic, 2 are Nilo-Saharan, 4 are Ubungian, 169 are Niger-Congo, and 26 are Bantu derivatives, despite the official status of English and French (Sokaleh, 2009). As seen above, Cameroon's educational system is bi-lingual, with one-half following the Anglo-Saxon model and the other half following the French model. In Cameroon, the first stage of schooling for children between the age of 6 years is not mandated by law. Ministry of Education (2013) stated that due to bilingualism, the French term for pre-school is *L'ecole maternelle,* while the English term is "nursery school."

Children in Cameroon must attend primary school, unlike nursery schools. The government, religious organizations, and private citizens all contribute to primary education and all students must take the School Leaving Certificate exam upon completion of primary school before moving on to secondary schooling. The Technical, Vocational, and Professional Examinations also allow students to enter a wide range of professions (Ministry of Education, 2013).

In comparison to both religious and private institutions, the tuition costs at the secondary level in Cameroon are significantly lower for students attending government secondary schools. And when students are 11-18 years old and are in their final year of secondary school, they continue their education with the French language for another seven years. Koté (2000) highlights that there are two cycles, and each cycle consists of two phases, the first of which lasts four years and the second of which lasts three years the students take the *Brevete D'etude* (BEPC) exam at the end of the first cycle and the Probatoire and Baccalauréat exams at the end of the second cycle, which together represents the highest level of education in France. On the other hand, Anglophone secondary education takes about five years from ages 11- 16, and at the end of the year, the students take an exam known as the General Certificate of Education, which is the exam most Students use in testing their knowledge before enrolling for the advanced level examination.

## 1.2 Special Needs Education in Cameroon

The Cameroonian educational system does not currently provide adequate support for the education of children with disabilities. Koté (2000) posits that Cameroon's slow adoption of special education can be traced back partly to the country's deeply ingrained ideas and attitudes concerning disability. According to Tukov (2009), in the early days of Cameroonian society, one of the main sources of income was teaching children with special needs how to speak the local language and use the local currency in their daily lives. The upbringing of children with disabilities in Cameroon has long been influenced by the cultural norms of the country's many ethnic groups. Disabled children faced near-total exclusion from educational and occupational opportunities in some spheres (Tukov,2008). Disabled children were relegated necessitating the deprivation of exceptional care.

Disabilities in children were considered when Western missionaries brought religion and began to recruit other children alongside the disabled children in mission schools and classes Tukov (2008). According to the Ministry of Education (2013), one of the most pressing issues facing Cameroon's educational system is how to integrate students with special needs into regular classrooms. Inclusion, in its broadest sense, encompasses concerns such as racial and gender equality, economic fairness, and the protection of human rights. In 1975 before the Ministry of social affairs was established, most disabled children received formal education in privately operated special

schools (Tukov, 2008). However, before this, the Cameroon government did not provide any significant educational support for children with special needs. A branch of the Ministry of Public Health was responsible for the children's safety and well-being (Tukov, 2008). Most disabled children had the misconception that disability was an illness that could not always be cured (Parens & Asch, 2003). There is a shortage of qualified teachers and social workers, as well as a dearth of resources and specialized learning tools for the student Billingsley (2004). Despite increased research into the development of inclusive education and awareness of the various types of disability, inclusive education cannot be achieved without the assistance of social workers, particularly in Africa and, more specifically, Cameroon.

## 1.3 Inclusive Education in Cameroon

Smith (1988) stated that it is possible to influence a person's outlook in either a positive or negative direction by altering the activity's structure, the experience being planned, or both. Disabled children are often expected to modify their behavior and adapt to their surroundings so that they can participate in "typical" activities. The original goal of inclusive education, which has its roots in special education, was to provide for the needs of students with disabilities who had been historically denied access to formal education or who were otherwise marginalized in the classroom. According to Shey (2003), Cameroon participated in the discussions that culminated in the adoption of the Salamanca Declaration of 1994, which urged governments to establish legislation and policies aimed at ensuring the complete enrollment of children with special needs in mainstream schools and classrooms, unless there exist compelling justifications for alternative arrangements. However, (Koté, 2000) stated that in the past, children with disabilities in Cameroon were not required to attend school since their education was considered a waste of time and they were stigmatized as cursed or outcasts and most parents believed that children who had disabilities had no use going to School because of the false belief that a physically impaired person also had a mentally impaired personality. Okombo (1994) stated that those lucky enough to attend school faced prejudice from most teachers and peers, hence preventing them from learning to their full potential.

Following the passage of the 1983 law and its 1990 application tests, the government has acted a few times to promote the education of kids with disabilities in ordinary classrooms Tukov (2008),

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and also after the World Conference Education for All that took place in 1990, the Cameroonian government under the Ministry of National Education made primary school education free and mandatory for all children in Cameroon regardless of their ability to pay (UNESCO, 1991). Recent developments in the field of education have highlighted the significance of "inclusive education practices," which aim to foster a sense of belonging for all students by appreciating and respecting their diversity and facilitating their full participation in classroom activities.

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study will be significant for international social work as it can contribute to the well-being of Children with special educational needs, including those with disabilities that attend mainstream schools. Vulnerable members of society and social workers play a crucial role in raising awareness of special needs education and ensuring the United Nations and UNESCO education requirements are met by countries of the world. The advocacy efforts of international social workers can be instrumental in advancing inclusive education, as they work towards the establishment of policies and practices that facilitate equitable access to education for all students. Inclusive education practitioners have the capacity to collaborate with families, communities, and educational institutions to cultivate consciousness and comprehension of the advantages of inclusive education, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning milieu.

This thesis will focus on the challenges of children with disabilities and special needs in obtaining quality education in developing countries using Cameron as a case study; the findings of this research will be made public and used to influence policies in Cameroon and other developing countries in attaining an all-inclusive education for children with special needs.

## 1.5 Structure of the Study

The plan for this research is to have six sections. The first chapter provides an overview of the study, discussing its context, issue statement, goals, definition of key terms, and study significance. The study's methodology, including its research strategy, data-gathering procedures, and analysis of results, will be presented in Chapter 2. In Chapter Three, the authors of this research will look at the history of research on Inclusive education and the difficulties faced by children with special needs in Cameroon. In Chapter 4 we will discuss the theoretical framework of this thesis, In Chapter 5, the authors will offer the findings structured around our research questions. In the final

chapter, we will discuss our findings and compare it with other previous research work on this topic; we will give our recommendations, the limitations of this study, and what further research work can be done.

## 1.6 Definition of Concepts and Terms

**Persons with Disabilities (PWDs):** According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), defines disabilities as ongoing physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, when combined with other factors, may prevent them from fully and effectively participating in society on an equal basis with others. (Combrinck, 2008), highlighted that those with physical disabilities, such as vision or hearing impairments, chronic disease, mental health, communication disorders, intellectual disabilities, genetic illnesses, deformity, and aging or developmental delays, are considered disabled.

**Mainstreaming:** When a child is developmentally and emotionally ready, they can join their peers in a regular classroom. The term "mainstreaming" is used to describe the practice of integrating a special education student into a regular classroom settings (Lindsay, 2007).

**Inclusive education:** The concept of inclusive education is not an easy term to define. (UNESCO 2005) defined inclusive education as a process of recognizing and catering to the unique requirements of each student by broadening their access to and engagement with educational opportunities, cultural experiences, and social networks. It requires a firm belief that it is the duty of the government system to educate all children, as well as changes and modifications to the curriculum's content, methods, structures, and strategies, and an inclusive vision that includes all children of the appropriate age range.

**Special Needs Education**: This term means that a child needs special educational help because of more trouble learning than most children of their age, or because there is a disability that makes it hard to use the educational resources that are usually available to children of that age (Smith 1998).

**Teachers' Perceptions:** This refers to the mental picture or set of beliefs that educators hold about the nature of their work and their students who require special educational needs, these perceptions are formed even before they engage with the students (Avramidis et al.,2000).

**School Social Work:** Kemp (2013) states that school social work is a field within the social work profession that provides social service to students, parents, and institutions of higher education in areas where psychological and social obstacles exist in the classroom setting.

**Exclusion**: Occurs when students who have any sort of disability are not allowed to benefit from the educational system of a country (United Nations, 2006).

**Segregation**: Occurs when students with disabilities receive their education in settings that are distinct from those utilized by students who do not have disabilities, and these settings are kept apart from one another (United Nations, 2006).

**Inclusion**: Occurs when all students are provided with equal access to high-quality education through schools that modify their physical layouts, pedagogical approaches, curricula, and other aspects of their institutional culture, policy, and practice. Inclusion does not mean just putting children with disabilities into regular classrooms without making any adjustments for them (United Nations 2006).

## 1.7 Aim

The aim of the study is to find out how special needs children are being included in the educational settings in Cameroon and the challenges they face and to understand the perspectives of both Social workers and teachers on an inclusive educational system.

## 1.8 Research questions

1. What challenges do children with special needs face in inclusive education?
2. What roles do social workers and teachers play in inclusive education?
3. How is the inclusive education policy implemented in schools?
4. What challenges do social workers and teachers face in managing children with special needs?

# CHAPTER TWO

## 2.0 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Numerous studies on inclusive education have been conducted by various researchers. In this section, the authors will look at the various conclusions drawn from research on students with special needs and general education. These previous studies are relevant to our topic because social workers play vital roles such as facilitating, advocating, collaborating, offering emotional assistance, or counseling.

The study done by (Tani & Nformi, 2016) on inclusive education in Cameroon, focused on the learning environment of students with physical disabilities in the southwest region of Cameroon. Their study findings were obtained through an interactive process of data collection and analysis involving both qualitative and quantitative methods. After the interviews and questionnaires were conducted the researchers discovered that friends of the disabled students did not always bring study materials to the students promptly. They also frequently made inaccurate notes, forcing them to compare notes from several sources, which was a taxing process. This was disclosed by the student's focus group talks. The results of the study also revealed, that in all the chosen schools, accessibility to lecture halls was hampered by high steps for students using wheelchairs or crutches to navigate through. Partially sidewalk construction also prevented an easy ride for a student using a wheelchair when moving from one class to another. The results of the study showed how important it was to provide sufficient and frequent transportation for students with special needs, moving between home and school zones.

In a qualitative study conducted by (Javakhishvili, 2012), educators reported that the difficulties associated with inclusion were made worse by a lack of support and resources coming from outside sources.  In a similar vein, (Mburashelih, 2010) conducted a qualitative study in which teachers expressed the belief that inclusion lacked enough funding and was a politically motivated project aimed at boosting financial efficiency rather than fulfilling the requirements of the learner.

Van and Wilson (2018) did a qualitative study using a descriptive design, to investigate and describe the views that school social workers have regarding the role that they play in inclusive education, the findings showed that the participants believe they have several roles and duties in schools, such as providing help to students through individual treatment and group work, offering emotional support to students, empowering educators, and developing proactive programs. The participants remarked that one of their responsibilities is to coordinate their efforts to provide the most beneficial assistance possible to the child with those of other experts. Additionally (Abosi 2000) conducted a study examining the integration of children with special needs into mainstream classrooms, the results suggest that the implementation of adaptive teaching techniques, such as explicit instruction, cooperative learning, and social skills training, can improve the academic achievements of children. (Tukov, 2008) conducted a qualitative study in Buea, Cameroon, which examined the involvement of teachers and parents in supporting children with special needs in two typical secondary schools, The results of this study suggest that there is a range of perspectives among teachers regarding their comprehension of inclusive education. While some teachers were knowledgeable about the concept, others were not. Additionally, due to the absence of teaching assistants, regular teachers must adjust their teaching pace and allocate more time to assist students with special needs.

Some researchers have investigated how teachers may best accomplish the aims of inclusive education by encouraging students with special needs to share their perspectives and concerns. Nevertheless, most educators lack the proper preparation to successfully collaborate with students who have special needs this is because their primary focus is to provide school lessons. On the other hand, professional social workers are indispensable because of the crucial role they play in ensuring the emotional well-being of society's most marginalized members, especially disabled children. The study done by (Burton & Goodman, 2011), the result showed that teachers and other professionals who work with students who have special education needs may share common goals or perspectives on inclusive education. Going further they highlighted that, in the event of a student with special education needs who is unsuccessful in school, for example, a school social worker may investigate the root cause of the failure, while the teacher concentrates on the poor performance.

Enow and Wemba (2019) also did a study on Inclusive education in Cameroon and the challenges and prospects. The research was based on a mixed method and from the findings, it was revealed that 15 (75%) of the teachers didn't have training in inclusive education, and 12 (60%) of the teachers out of the 15 who have not received inclusive training, admitted that they struggle with resolving conflicts in the classroom.

Galvin (2005) conducted a study on 92 participants from four nations, using the grounded theory method, to determine how the public interacts with those who are impaired. His research showed that people with impairments were less likely to get physical love and were more likely to be judged as ugly and unworthy of romantic commitment. These beliefs originated in the widespread stigma, that persons with disabilities face in everyday life. The research also showed that disabled people were rarely included in community events. Edwardraj, et al., (2010) also conducted a qualitative study on how people in Vellore, South India, view those who have intellectual disabilities. The study's data came from interviews with educators, community health workers, and moms of children with intellectual special needs. The cultural and religious outlooks on people with impairments were major foci of the research. The findings indicated that institutionalized discrimination and religious dogma were to blame for spreading harmful misconceptions about people with disabilities. The research also found that many disability paradigms exist influenced by religious and social considerations. The persistence of these beliefs in Cameroon is evidenced by (Swango's, 2003) report, which indicates that certain members of the Cameroonian population continue to attribute disability to witchcraft and hold the view that individuals with disabilities are unable to make meaningful contributions to societal progress. In addition, (Swango, 2003), noted that it is a common belief that children born with disabilities are possessed by spirits. As a result, spiritual exorcisms are performed on these children, which can lead to their death from pneumonia as they are often left in the cold at a vulnerable age.

## 3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework refers to a pre-existing collection of principles, assumptions, and concepts that serve as the basis for comprehending a specific phenomenon or issue (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). This method enables the arrangement and configuration of significant variables and associations that pertain to the research inquiry or issue under investigation. Taking into consideration the purpose of this study, the concept of including children with special needs in the educational system is one that incorporates equity, equality, human rights, and social justice (UNESCO, 1994). In this study, the authors employed Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of system theory to explain the relationship between a person's disability and their immediate surroundings. This theory allowed the authors to better comprehend the positive and negative effects of it and also grasp how society is constructed. Bronfenbrenner described five main systems: microsystem; mesosystem; exosystem; macrosystem and chronosystem; in this study, the authors only applied four of the ecological system, which is the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

### 3.1 Ecological system theory

The Ecological Systems theory provides a framework for understanding human development by analyzing the interdependent relationships between individuals and their environment, and how these relationships influence psychological development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner stated that the process of human development is a result of the interplay between the maturing human organism and its surroundings. The developing individual is perceived as adaptable within the social context of their environment. The theoretical framework posits that an individual's development is influenced by the various interactions that take place between them and their surroundings, encompassing their familial, communal, societal, and cultural contexts.

According to this theory, the interactions between these systems can have significant impacts on an individual's development, and researchers and practitioners should consider the complex interplay of these systems when trying to understand and support individuals and families.

### 3.1.1 Micro-system

The term "microsystem" is used to describe the sphere of influence that a person's immediate surroundings fall under; Bronfenbrenner (1979), defined the microsystem as "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced over time by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics (p. 22)".

The microsystem exemplifies the unique qualities that are associated with children with special needs (disabilities). According to Samuel et al., (2014), the child's social behavior will be influenced by the age at which the disorder was identified. A child born with a disability, for instance, will not experience social isolation as long as other children are accepting of their differences. A child who develops a disability later in life, on the other hand, may find it difficult to make friends because doing so would require accepting the condition. An additional factor that can affect a child's social development is the family's socioeconomic status because a child that comes from a privileged background may have access to tools that will facilitate their education.

### 3.1.2  Meso system

The Meso system, within the context of special needs education, pertains to the intermediary level of the ecological model that exerts an impact on the educational experiences of children with special needs. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined the mesosystem simply as "a system of microsystems (p.40.)". This stage encompasses the interplay and interdependence of microsystems, such as educational institutions and families, with broader societal structures, including cultural norms, policies, and legal frameworks. Crawford (2020) highlighted that the mesosystem is formed by the interaction between the school and home environment.

At the meso level, diverse professionals and organizations assume a crucial function in facilitating the education of children with special needs these may include teachers in special education, school social workers, guidance counselors, and principals. Crawford (2020) stated that the school provides an example of this, in which the classroom, students in the class, and teacher create a

microsystem for an individual student. However, Tangunyi (2018) gave an example stating that, if the students have had prior experience with children with impairments, they will be more likely to welcome the new student with open arms. Going further he also stated that disability severity should also be considered that a severely deaf child will have a different effect on the classroom dynamic than children with a modest or moderate hearing loss, children with Down syndrome have a wide range of IQs (intelligence quotients) and frequently experience comorbidities including heart abnormalities Tangunyi (2018). Also, it is important to remember that several variables may influence people's perceptions of special needs children. Reasons that teachers and students who have grown up in homes with unfavorable attitudes toward disability may still have such opinions as adults since the perceptions of disability in the community are initially formed at the family level. It's a good thing that information is power because when individuals gain an understanding of these impairments, they start to develop more favorable attitudes towards disabilities, which reduces discrimination. Therefore, the mesosystem is a crucial component in establishing an inclusive educational setting that caters to the distinct requirements of every student with disabilities.

### 3.1.3 Exo system

According to Brofenbrenner (1979) in ecological systems theory, the term "exosystem" is used to refer to the external settings that have a non-direct impact on a person's development. The exosystem includes the social contexts that have an indirect effect on the mainstream classroom, and this in turn influences the mesosystem.

According to Teater (2019), a person's immediate environment is shaped by the exo-system, which consists of many social institutions. An example of this involves the policies of a parent's workplace, which fall under the (exosystem) and can have an impact on their behavior as a parent within the (microsystem, in turn, affect, the development of the child. Also, the quality of education a child receives in the classroom (microsystem) can be indirectly influenced by government policies (exosystem), thereby affecting the development though the child has no direct contact with the exosystem, it does affect him or her. However, Sloane (1991) stated that to begin with, the media's portrayal of children with special needs will affect the educational system. Because when a child with special needs is stereotyped, it is difficult for the parents or external guardians to integrate into the community. Secondly, Cross et al., (2004) highlighted that how these families

deal with the impairment will be profoundly impacted by the health, education, and social welfare programs that are made accessible to them. When considering Cameroonian households with special needs children, this becomes evident. Severely disabled children often don't go to school, receive poor medical care, and don't get financial aid. Therefore, understanding the exosystem and its influence on an individual's growth is a crucial aspect in domains such as education and social work. This knowledge can aid professionals in recognizing and resolving the elements that may be affecting an individual's development indirectly.

### 3.1.4 Macrosystem

Macrosystem describes the attitudes, beliefs, values, and ideologies that are part of the social institutions of the specific society and have an impact on how a child with a disability will behave ( Bronfenbrenner, 1979). To begin, the family unit will be significantly altered by the dominant cultural norms of the child's environment. Tangunyi (2018) stated that positive views toward persons with disabilities are considerably more likely to exist in a culture that emphasizes humanitarian principles than in one that emphasizes materialism. However, a family's living situation, including the kind of society in which they participate, will also affect many facets of the family's day-to-day life. According to Kotè (2000), he stated that the societal responses to a disabled child will be shaped by the values of the cultural group to which the child belongs for example, a Cameroonian culture has the myth that the presence of a disabled child in a family is due to the practice of witchcraft by one or more members of the household. On the other hand, families coping mechanisms in the case of a disabled family member, can be influenced by their religious convictions; most Cameroonian families that are having a hard time accepting their child's disability, because they see it as a punishment for sin if the family saw the child's disability as a gift from God, they would be much more accepting of the situation.

## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

According to (Osei-Bryson & Ngwenyama 2011), a methodology is a systematic approach to solving a research hypothesis; furthermore, it was also defined as a science that studies how research should be conducted. Research methodology is essentially the procedures by which researchers go about their business of describing, understanding, and predicting occurrences (Goundar 2012). In addition, it is the study of techniques for acquiring knowledge with the specific goal to provide a research work plan (Goundar 2012). There are three types of methodology according to (Rubin and Babbie 2010): Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed methods. (Yilmaz 2013) defined Qualitative research methodology as a study that attempts to use prescription and induction to give meaning to people´s worldview perspective through the study of a trend, occurrences, or conditions in their natural environment. Quantitative research according to (Creswell 1994) is a research method that utilizes data gotten from numbers to describe specific phenomena. The use of a mathematical model is applied to give meaning to these numerical data. Furthermore, (Gay & Eurasian 2000) gave a broader definition of quantitative research: they defined it as an experimentation model to explain the intricacies of a social or biological phenomenon. However, some research critics like (Terrell 2012; Östlund et al 2011; Creswell et al 2006) have exposed the loopholes of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and have tried to formulate a third force paradigm; the Mixed method that combines both quantitative and qualitative methodologies concurrently in carrying out research. In this thesis, the authors will apply a qualitative data-gathering method in carrying out this study,

In the following section, further insight into the methods applied will be described to make the pattern of data collection and evaluation more transparent, this will also detail the sources used and the procedures employed in conducting the interviews, the analytic methodology, and procedures used by the authors to decipher the interviews. The last section of this methodology will explain the importance and ethical consideration of this study.

## 4.1 Research Design

In order to conduct this study, it was imperative to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the viewpoints held by social workers and educators regarding the concept of inclusive education within the Cameroonian context. The authors choose to use an empirical study with a qualitative research paradigm because it enabled us to gain an in-depth understanding of our topic. (Patton 2015) posits that the goal of qualitative research is to discover the meaning behind people's actions even if they make no logical sense. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and an interview guide covering the main interests of the study was used. As ( Kvale & Brikman 2009) highlighted semi-structured interviews allow the interviewee and the authors to talk freely without getting off-topic.

## 4.2 Procedure

The first thing that was done for this thesis was to carry out a preliminary search of the relevant literature following the proposal. What the authors hope to accomplish with this exploratory search of the literature according to (Green et al., 2006; DePoy & Gitlin 1993) is to look up published works to examine how many of them match the goals and objectives of the research.

The authors searched for relevant information using the databases DiVA, Discovery, Oxford Journals, and SAGE. The keywords that were used are, "children with special needs," "disability," and "inclusive education." These websites could provide additional resources for learning about inclusive education and the difficulties experienced by children with special needs.

## 4.3 Sample design

A sample size of 6 participants (3 Social workers and 3 teachers) were interviewed in a semi-structured format. The research site is called Timely Performance Care Center Yaoundé, which is the capital of Cameroon; this site is used by the Government of Cameroon to provide education and support to disabled school children. (Patton, 2015) stated that it is possible to conduct qualitative research by conducting in-depth, open-ended interviews or by observing a phenomenon firsthand. The approach of purposive sampling and snowball method was utilized to choose participants from various schools because the target group is slim and one of the authors had contact at the school who helped the authors with other participants. With the help of purposive sampling, the authors could collect information from people who have specific and useful insight

about the education of children with special needs. (Rubin & Babbie, 2010) posit that purposive sampling refers to the process of choosing a sample of study participants based on predetermined criteria. The study has collected significant insights from individuals with experience and knowledge to provide information on the research study. The authors contacted all the individuals by phone calls and email.

## 4.4 Data Collection

The authors conducted interviews with two different types of professionals; three social workers and three teachers, through semi-structured interviews in which the questions were structured and framed as open-ended questions related to the research topic. This allowed the interviewees to provide responses that go beyond the scope of the researcher's question yet were significant to the study. Unlike fully structured interviews, semi-structured interviews according to (Rubin & Babbie, 2010), allows the participants to comment on their experiences and perspectives while still answering a set of preset questions, their replies will lead to more inquiry, in the form of follow-up questions, allowing them to provide more context and detail on the study. Another purpose for choosing semi-structured interviews was to provide the participants with the opportunity to communicate freely about the challenges that children with special need face in an inclusive educational setting. Robson (2002) stated that if a researcher allows the participants to speak freely and openly about the subject of the study, the authors will be able to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic.

In order to find teachers willing to be interviewed, the authors made use of the snowball method. According to (May, 2011), he stated that it is possible that if a researcher makes initial contact with a member of the community, that person will then introduce the researcher to other members of that population. One of the authors of this thesis is originally from Cameroon, she got in touch with the principal through the official email of the institution where the teachers will be interviewed and presented our request, and then the principal informed the teachers about our desire to conduct a study and they consented to our request and for the principal to provide us with their contact details. We contacted the teachers, scheduled a convenient date and time, and presented the questions that will be asked to enable them to get prepared. The teachers' interviews were conducted in a setting familiar to them, and the duration of the interview lasted from 20 to 35 minutes.

To choose respondents who are trustworthy and have valid results as well as to ensure that the data gathered has value, the researchers utilized a purposive sampling method when picking the social workers for the interview (Grinnell, 2001). Likewise, the social workers' interviews would last between 25 to 30 minutes.

To guarantee that all relevant details are documented, the interview was recorded utilizing Zoom's audio features. This was done after receiving informed consent from all participants. After the interviews were over, the authors transcribe them and analyzed the data using qualitative methods. By sticking to this protocol, the authors were guaranteed that the interviews would be successful without a hitch and the data acquired were of high quality and relevant to the research. The data were collected from the 10th to 20th of April 2023 and the authors conducted the interviews in English.

## 4.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis is essential to study, and a lack of careful analysis will always lead to the failure of research investigations, which are meant to be honorable. To effectively analyze the data obtained from interviews, it is recommended to utilize the inductive thematization method to maintain the essence of the interviewees' perspectives. The authors employed a thematic analysis approach to the interviews with the purpose of addressing the research objectives (Patton, 2015).

According to (Hayes, 2000), the process of thematizing in the inductive thematic analysis involves identifying themes after data collection. This approach helped the authors to identify the patterns and themes in the data, discuss the findings and gain an in-depth understanding of the study.

## 4.6 Essay Credibility

The concept of credibility pertains to the degree of reliability and plausibility of the results of a research study, as posited by (D'Cruz & Jones, 2013). In the context of qualitative research, the establishment of credibility can be achieved through the process of seeking assurance from participants with regard to the accurate portrayal of their respective realities. The approach of communicative validation was utilized in order to augment the credibility of this study. The term "communicative validation" pertains to a technique wherein the interviewer practices reflective listening throughout the interview process to confirm the results (Patton, 2015).

### 4.6.1 Reliability

 (Denscombe 2009), states that for a study to be considered reliable, it must contain elements that are both consistent and trustworthy. To make the study trustworthy two methods were utilized which are Zoom.  The authors asked the same questions severely using semantics to test the reliability of the statements made by the interviewees. The answers provided by the responders were evaluated for consistency. The authors' choices of research questions were driven by the methods used. According to (Rubin & Barbie, 2010) the goal of social work research is to equip social workers with the theoretical and methodological tools they need to address real-world issues. Research in the field of social work is driven by a desire to equip practitioners with the knowledge they need to improve people's lives and strengthen communities when formulating the research question.

### 4.6.2 Validity

Validity refers to the actual design and content of the approach used to gather the data necessary to answer the research question (D'Cruze & Johnson, 2004). To ensure internal validity, the authors checked to make sure that interviewees understand the questions and that the authors understand their responses. The authors ensured validity in the context of the study on inclusive education and the difficulties experienced by children with special needs by being forthright with respondents regarding the study's goal, aims, and planned use of the data collected. Participants were allowed to give informed consent if they knew exactly what they were agreeing to. The authors made sure the sources they use were credible and of good quality for the study. This includes employing records that have only recently been released in the 21st century, which

indicates that the authors took a great effort in picking the most relevant and current sources. Correct citation of these sources is crucial for two reasons: it provides evidence of the sources utilized and it allows readers to judge the quality of the evidence presented, both of which contribute to the study's credibility.

### 4.6.3 Generalizations

The extent to which your study's findings can be used in other situations is known as its generalizability. When the findings of a study can be applied to most situations and people, we say that the study has high generalizability. This study consists of six interviews, so, it is nearly impossible to apply generalizations to this study; however, by drawing on similar studies from the past, the authors can make an analytical generalization that will strengthen the study's findings.

### 4.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account from the outset of the research process. In any scientific research, it is important to always have ethical considerations when conducting research, it is important to make sure that the participants and authorities are consulted, informed, and given the proper permission. (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) assert that ethical considerations encompass safeguarding the anonymity of participants, obtaining their informed consent, and reflecting on factors that are specific to the situation. Obtaining informed consent from study participants is a crucial aspect of ethical research, as it ensures that participants are aware of the voluntary nature of their involvement in the study (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Furthermore, the document of informed consent stipulated that the involvement in the research was voluntary and that the subjects retained the prerogative to discontinue their participation in the study at any juncture (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The study also implemented measures to ensure confidentiality. Gustafsson & Petersson (2006) asserts that it is imperative to implement all necessary measures to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of participants' personal data and to mitigate any potential adverse effects on their physical or mental health during the course of the study. The aforementioned outcome was attained through the implementation of measures to ensure the anonymity of the participants' personal information during the course of the discussion. The handling of interview data was conducted with due care and confidentiality, and the responses of individual participants were presented in a

manner that ensured their anonymity (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). All participants were assured that their confidentiality would be protected and that all recordings and transcripts would be destroyed once the study was complete. They were also informed that their interviews would be recorded.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5.0 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The findings and theme were presented in two forms. Each theme is further broken down into sub-themes to adequately represent the participants' points of view.

### 5.1 The Different Themes

Following the completion of the interviews, the transcripts were subjected to thematic coding based on the themes raised by the interviewees. The implementation of themes provided a framework for organizing the gathered data, thereby facilitating its analysis. The collected data were subjected to comparative analysis with prior research to enhance comprehension of inclusive education and the challenges faced by children with special needs.

Below is a result showing how the interviewees were coded:

Interviewee [1] is a teacher at Yaoundé School

Interviewee [2] is a school social worker.

Interviewee [3] is a school social worker.

Interviewee [4] is the principal of Yaoundé school.

Interviewee [5] is a social worker.

Interviewee [6] is a teacher at Yaoundé School

### 5.1.1 The View School Teachers Have About Inclusive Education Practices

The researchers employed a series of inquiries to investigate the informants' comprehension of inclusive education methodologies. The following questions were utilized, and the responses were documented as presented underneath.

### 5.1.2 Theme one: Views on Inclusive Education Practice

Under this theme, we asked our respondents to provide any insight they have on inclusive education practices.

Interviewee [1] stated:

> *"It is one where children with or without disabilities are placed in the same classroom and everyone's needs are met, so everyone feels loved and included."*

[1] Acknowledges the school's policy of admitting children with disabilities and highlights the principal's consistent adherence to this practice. However, [6] asserted that a significant number of teachers possess inadequate teaching experience and resources to cater to the needs of these students.

Interviewee [4] stated that:

*"Inclusive education practices are a type of education that aims to meet the policy of "Universal Education," which says that all children, no matter what kind of disability they have, should be able to get a good education in a less restrictive setting, like a school."*

Additionally, [4] recognizes that the students with disabilities present in his classroom receive support from both educators and their peers and expresses uncertainty regarding whether this is a common practice in other educational institutions.

Interviewee [4] stated that:

*"Inclusive education is to ensure that all children can take part in and benefit from the educational opportunities provided by a school, classroom, program, or activity."*

Based on the findings of the conducted interviews, it can be inferred that teachers hold diverse perspectives regarding the concept of inclusion and the provision of equitable learning opportunities for all students, despite the absence of adequate resources and instructional materials to effectively execute the policy as prescribed by governing bodies.

### 5.1.3 Theme two: Challenges Faced by Children with special needs education.

Under this theme the interviewees were asked about the challenges children with special needs faced in inclusive schools in Cameroon, the participants mentioned that, when it comes to education, children with special needs confront a variety of difficulties. The theme covers three sub-themes that came up during the interview. The sub-themes were discrimination, funding, and accessibility.

### Discrimination

All the interviewees gave their insights about discrimination in various ways. [1] Mentioned that most of these children face discrimination, notwithstanding the endeavors to advance inclusive education, and gave an example of negative attitudes as one of the ways special needs children are being discriminated against, stating that:

 *"…other children and parents may hold these views; negative attitudes can marginalize special needs students, making them feel excluded from the school community."*

[4] Posited that children, who are not physically challenged, sometimes call children with special needs names, based on their disabilities to humiliate them:

*"…Normal children, both within and outside of school, may show bias toward those with special needs, exacerbating the issue of peer acceptance."*

[6] Told the authors during the interview that most of the children with special needs have low self-esteem because they were excluded from some extracurricular activities:

 *"...children with special needs are sometimes not included in social events and extracurricular activities. Teams, clubs, and educational excursions all fit under this discussion category."*

### Funding

According to the interviewees, certain educational institutions or localities may encounter limitations, in terms of available resources or financial provisions to furnish sufficient assistance for children with exceptional requirements. In addition [1] states that Insufficient access to specialized equipment, therapies, or educational programs may impede the child's advancement.

The participants all stated that families with children who have special needs may encounter economic limitations when attempting to obtain suitable educational and supportive resources for their children. In addition [4] aired that

*"The provision of sufficient resources is instrumental in fostering the professional growth and development of educators."*

### Accessibility

The participants highlighted that it is an established reality that a student who has a disability is unable to acquire knowledge in an inclusive classroom setting if they are unable to gain access to the classrooms. By this, [6] and [1] highlighted that low-income nations like Cameroon face financial constraints that hinder their ability to allocate sufficient funds towards enhancing school infrastructure to cater to the needs of children with disabilities.

These findings show that, special needs children were restricted in various ways from accessing mainstream schools. To tackle these concerns, a collaborative endeavor is necessary to foster consciousness, comprehension, and inclusivity toward every student, irrespective of their capabilities. Educational institutions must aid guarantee the complete engagement of all pupils in both academic and non-academic pursuits.

### 5.1.4 Theme Three: The Challenges and Role of Teachers in an Inclusive School

This theme aims to shed light on the diverse range of special needs that students exhibit in the school the study was conducted. Additionally, it elucidates the challenges and roles that teachers play in fostering an inclusive learning environment. The theme covers four sub-themes that came up during the interviews: identification, appropriate strategies, and motivations, lastly, lack of supportive devices, and insufficient teaching.

### Identifications

The participants were asked about the type of challenges they faced and the roles they played with special needs children in an inclusive school the participants all mentioned that exceptional consideration must be given to the behavioral needs of children with exceptional educational needs. In addition, they stated that overseeing a class full of special needs children is both a difficult and rewarding task. [4] Aired that most times it is difficult for teachers to identify the kind of disabilities the special needs children have because most of them lack training in special needs education. According to [1] who taught the pupils at the elementary level is responsible for educating visually impaired students within their classroom. [1] Endeavored to foster comprehension among others, emphasizing that disability does not equate to incapacity. Rather than relying on accommodations and preferential treatment, children with special needs should persevere and strive to assimilate into society through diligent effort. The participant facilitates

and ensures that every student achieves optimal satisfaction in any classroom activity through mediation. Additionally, [6] asserts that the teacher must:

*" …. always try to see if they are doing well, because children who have visual impairments, including those with low vision or total blindness, require additional time to complete academic tasks. Sufficient time is required for learners to acquire information in a significant manner, and to subsequently assimilate and implement the acquired knowledge and skills."*

[4] Mentioned that the identification of children with special needs is a crucial responsibility of an inclusive teacher in diverse classrooms, and since it is important to learn more about the needs of the students, teachers should speak with their guardians or parents. In addition [4] highlights that speaking with parents can also be challenging at times due to the lack of experience among teachers interacting with parents of children with special needs. [6] Also mentioned is that identification of these special needs is a foundation for changing the narrative that will assist teachers to develop and personalize instruction plans and make other suitable adjustments needed in handling children with special needs.

[4] In his words stated that:

*"I work with students that have a range of special needs every day. Getting out what they need is quite challenging."*

It is shown in the statement of [4] that teaching children with special needs is challenging because it is imperative to consider everyone's unique requirements. [1] Mentions that fair treatment must be given to everyone. In addition [6] stated that:

*"The preparation of instructional materials poses a significant challenge for me, due to budgetary constraints and the burden of workload imposed on educators. The diverse needs of our students necessitate the creation of various activities tailored to their unique requirements. Undoubtedly, instructing pupils with diverse learning requirements presents a significant challenge."*

Based on the findings, educators must possess a comprehensive comprehension of the fundamental core components. This is necessary to effectively incorporate them into the process of devising, executing, and evaluating inclusive pedagogical practices. Additionally, teachers must be able to provide adequate support to learners with varying educational requirements in these domains. Enhancing minimum core competencies empowers special education teachers to deliberate on optimal approaches for instructing and fostering the skill development of students with exceptionalities.

### Appropriate Strategies and Motivations

The authors asked the interviewees about the strategies that were employed and what they felt motivated the special needs children. [1] Mentioned that the anticipation of achieving successful learning outcomes and leading a decent life thereafter is seen as a great motivation. [4] and [6] mentioned that additional variables, such as cognitive ability, prior experience, and personal inclination, also exert a significant influence.

As per the interview, motivation is posited as a propelling factor that incites action toward the attainment of a goal, as expressed by the interviewees in the course of the interview.

*"When teaching children with special needs, the available teaching strategies are constrained compared to those employed in regular classes, which are relatively straightforward to implement. In addition, motivating learners with disabilities can prove to be a challenging task."*

According to the assertion made in reference [1], the motivation of the learner is commonly considered a crucial factor in achieving successful learning outcomes.

The process of learning and knowledge acquisition is not troublesome, but according to the interviewees, the inclusion of techniques in the instruction of students with impairments is.

[1] The statement was supported by the response given by [4] stating that:

*"Teaching special education is a rewarding experience for me. When it comes to teaching strategies, being a special education teacher doesn't mean you should think about it; instead, you should use the appropriate methods when you are really in the classroom. I've run into issues with it, and I only have a few teaching strategies for dealing with special education students."*

Therefore, schools catering to students with special needs must serve as an environment where pupils are equipped with the necessary skills to learn and effectively adopt learning strategies. The statements, by [1] and [4], signify a progression in the education of individuals despite their disabilities in learning.

### Lack Of Supportive Devices and Insufficient Teaching

The participants identified the absence of assistive technologies as a challenge for them in teaching in inclusive classrooms. [1] aired that,

*"..It would be advantageous to offer diverse instructional materials, such as hearing aids, screen readers, and voice recognition software to cater to the unique educational requirements of children with special needs."*

However, [1] asserted that the absence of these devices in the school setting posed a challenge to the educational process for students with special needs. In addition, [6] mentioned that schools must be adequately furnished with amenities so that they can meet the requirements of students with a variety of impairments. In addition [6] mentioned that they are not being supported by the parents, government, and school management.

### 5.2 Theme One: The Views of Social Workers on Inclusive Education

The concept of inclusive education entails the provision of educational opportunities to all learners, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, within the classroom setting. This theme describes the views the social workers we interviewed have toward inclusive education.

[2] States that:

*"Social workers embrace inclusive education's tenets and see it as a critical tool for advancing social justice and equity in the classroom."*

[3] Mentions that:

*"I view inclusive education as a means of tackling approaches to each student's specific set of circumstances, including their academic and socio-emotional needs, as well as their particular talents and areas of interest."*

In addition [3] mentioned that the task may require the utilization of diverse pedagogical approaches and instructional aids, offering personalized assistance and adaptations, and cultivating favorable rapport among pupils, educators, and other constituents of the academic institution.

[5] Stated that:

*"Inclusive education highlights the importance of tackling structural and systemic obstacles to inclusion for instance prejudiced attitudes, policies, or practices that restrict the involvement of specific student demographics."*

To spread the existing knowledge on what inclusive education in social work entails, the promotion of social justice and equity in education is deemed to be contingent upon the implementation of inclusive education and is regarded as a crucial component. The individuals involved in this endeavor are dedicated to collaborating with schools and communities to establish inclusive learning environments that cater to the requirements and proficiencies of all students.

### 5.2.1 Theme Two: Social Workers' Responsibilities and Roles Within the Framework of Inclusive Education

Participants were asked to think about the responsibilities and roles that come with becoming a school social worker in an inclusive school. This theme covers three sub-themes, which the authors noticed during the interview. The sub-themes include support to special needs children at an individual and group level, support to special needs children having barriers to education,

### Support to Special Needs Children at An Individual and Group Level

The participants perceive themselves as having a supportive function within the inclusive educational system, encompassing assistance to students both on an individual basis and in the context of group activities. [5] Asserted that:

*"The primary responsibilities that I undertake daily pertain to casework and individual therapy sessions that I conduct with students."*

In addition to what [5] mentioned, [3] states that:

*"I facilitate group therapy sessions aimed at enhancing the holistic welfare of our children, fostering mindfulness, and equipping learners with valuable skills."*

**Support to Special Needs Children Having Emotional Barriers to Education**

When asked how children with special needs can be given support when they experience barriers to education. The interviewee's mentioned that they offer assistance to students who encounter emotional barriers to education. According to [2]:

*"…I provide a welcoming and encouraging learning environment because it makes the students feel more at ease and assured in their capacity to study."*

In addition [2] highlighted that this may entail developing trusting relationships with students, establishing a secure and respectful learning environment, and giving students chances to develop their social and emotional competencies. [5] Noted that:

*"The key to overcoming emotional hurdles to learning is getting to the bottom of what's triggering them in the first place. As part of this process, school social workers help students pinpoint the causes and origins of negative feelings."*

Based on the findings, to effectively assist learners who encounter emotional obstacles to learning, it is essential to establish robust learner-educator relationships, cultivate a constructive and encouraging learning milieu, and offer avenues for introspection and personalized instruction. According to (Compton et al., 2005), one aspect of providing emotional support to learners involves demonstrating compassion and understanding towards their individuals and facilitating discussions about their emotions in a secure environment.

### 5.2.2 Theme Three: Challenges Social workers face in inclusive education.

When asked if they faced challenges when working within inclusive education, the participants all mentioned that they face various challenges. [5] mentioned that,

*"..Social workers may encounter a dearth of resources, such as financial backing, temporal constraints, and teachers, which may impede their capacity to furnish sufficient assistance to students with disabilities."*

[3] aired that,

*"... A significant number of social workers may possess inadequate training and knowledge to provide optimal assistance to students with disabilities in inclusive educational settings."*

In addition, the participant reported encountering obstacles in the realm of attitudes and beliefs, specifically about the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools. According to the participants, the challenges were largely attributed to negative attitudes and beliefs held by educators, parents, and other stakeholders. In addition, the par, participants mentioned that the aforementioned attitudes may pose hindrances to the facilitation of productive collaboration and the provision of assistance to students with disabilities. However, [2] stated that,

*".. Societies and most families still believe that most children with special needs are possessed with witchcraft and nothing good will come from them so they believe sending them to school is a waste of time and resources."*

### 5.2.3 Theme Four: Contributing to Inclusive Education in Schools

When asked how they contributed to inclusive education schools, the participants exhibited a strong sense of commitment toward their potential to make a meaningful impact within inclusive education. Their assertions are grounded on the premise that their unique skill set and their position as the primary point of contact within the school enable them to effect change within inclusive education. This theme covers three sub-themes, which are 'skills,' 'contribution in school at the first point of assessment,' and 'models used to assist the special needs children within their specific needs and problem.'

### Skills That Contribute to Inclusive Schools

The interviewees were asked how their skills contributed to inclusive schools, the participants all highlighted that they have specific skills that contribute to schools for example, advocating, communication and collaboration, assessment, and evaluation. In addition, the participants

asserted that the involvement of social work in skill-building endeavors can serve to empower children, while also assisting children and their families, as well as teachers, in fostering optimal development of the child.

This approach can ultimately cause a sense of belonging in the child. Fischer et al., (2007) agree that social workers employed in educational institutions possess distinct competencies that can be effectively utilized within the school setting.

## Contribution in School at the First Point of Assessment

The participants expressed the view that school social work serves as the initial step in evaluating the issues faced by a child within the school setting. In addition, they stated that the initial stage of evaluating students, who may be experiencing academic, social, or emotional difficulties, can benefit significantly from the involvement of school social workers. This underscores the crucial role that school social workers can play in schools. [3] mentioned that,

*"The social worker can serve as a crucial starting point in addressing student needs, as they play a pivotal role in assessing and identifying areas where immediate interventions can make a significant impact."*

According to (Fischer et al., 2007), school social workers must aid the school in conducting routine evaluations of a child's social and emotional well-being. In addition, (Sederholm, 2003) asserted that school social workers possess privileged information that enables them to take prompt action and make a significant impact.

## Models Used to Assist Special Needs Children within Their Specific Needs and Problems

In this theme the participants were asked about the models they used to assist children with special needs, [2] stated that:

*"… The systems theory is useful to me because of the interdependence of various systems.*

According to [2] the problem-solving model is frequently utilized, due to its ability to aid children in navigating the problem-solving process. Furthermore, according to reference [5], school social workers utilize the strengths perspective when providing services, the strength perspective is "quick and effective" and is the one I typically utilize [5].

[3] Stated that:

*"Individuals possess their own distinct model and theoretical framework about their respective work environment."*

In addition [3] posits that the developmental model holds significant importance as it enables the practitioner to determine the current stage of their client's development. Additionally, the psychosocial model is utilized to identify the obstacles to learning and the unique requirements of the individual. According to (Fischer et al., 2007), it is imperative for social workers in school settings to possess a comprehensive understanding of diverse models and employ a developmental approach to comprehend the individual identity and the specific stage of life they are in. In addition, (Fischer et al., 2007) asserted that school social workers also need to know how the child is doing emotionally and socially. Therefore, it is evident that school social workers employ a variety of models to provide optimal support to children, rather than relying on a singular approach.

## 5.3 Analysis

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a valuable framework for comprehending the intricate interplay of various factors that impact the educational and developmental outcomes of children in Cameroon. The present theory posits that the process of human development is influenced by a set of interrelated and nested systems, which encompass the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The various systems in place hold significant influence over the experiences and opportunities afforded to special needs children, and it is imperative to consider them when devising inclusive educational initiatives. In this section, the authors discussed how the subsequent sections provided a more comprehensive analysis of the implementation of each ecological subsystem in the context of inclusive education in Cameroon.

*Microsystems:* At the microsystem level, the developmental outcomes of children are influenced by their proximal surroundings, which encompass their familial, educational, and communal contexts. In Cameroon, a considerable number of children encounter notable obstacles in obtaining high-quality education because of poverty, restricted resources, and cultural convictions. The result of the study showed that, in the context of educational institutions, inadequate infrastructure posed a significant hindrance to the implementation of inclusive education in Cameroon. Within

the microsystem, the authors noticed that numerous indices have been presented suggesting that adverse attitudes pose a barrier to achieving inclusive education in Cameroon. The study's results indicate that disability is still being conceptualized through conventional frameworks which associate disability with witchcraft, incest, and adultery. Furthermore, there persists a perception that disability equates to incapacity. However, the authors concluded that the success or failure of inclusive education can be significantly influenced by the microsystem, which is the closest social environment to the child. In addition, it is imperative for inclusive education programs to tackle the structural impediments and aid families and communities to guarantee that every child has equal access to education.

*Meso system:* The mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework encompasses the interconnections between the microsystems that the child with special needs is engaged with. The interplay between various systems can significantly influence the well-being of a child, particularly one with special needs. In the event of inadequate communication between parents or a lack of collaboration with an external personal assistant, a child's involvement in familial contexts may be negatively impacted. In the study the authors observed that most teachers lacked the knowledge in communicating with the parent on the other hand, the social workers were able to collaborate with the parents. The authors were able to identify how barriers in one subsystem affected the other. We were able to recognize that despite the limitations the teachers had in collaborating with the parents, the mesosystem was crucial within inclusive educational settings because collaborative efforts among community members, social workers, and government in addressing educational challenges result in more effective problem-solving and decision-making outcomes. Moreover, providing teachers with adequate assistance will enable them to comprehensively incorporate children with disabilities into mainstream education without bias or isolation, thereby advancing inclusive education.

*Exosystem:* Although the themes that emerged here had nothing to do with the learner's immediate surroundings, they nonetheless had an impact on their inclusion in the educational process. The influence of this layer on the meso and microsystem is essential in putting effective inclusive education methods into practice. The authors found out that one of the benefits of the exosystem was the importance of training and a proper knowledge base. However, it wasn't so within the

context of Cameroon as most of the participants lacked training in implementing knowledge towards inclusive education. The authors also observed that it was difficult for the participants to identify the needs of the children and this made it difficult in recommending strategies to help the students succeed. Therefore, it will be necessary to adjust policies and processes to enable participants to work successfully with other professionals.

*Macrosystem:* The macro system pertains to the wider cultural and societal ideologies that influence perspectives on disability and education. The nation of Cameroon continues to grapple with a notable social stigma surrounding disability, which may result in families exhibiting reluctance to enroll their children with disabilities in educational institutions. In the study, it was seen that children with special needs were discriminated against and stereotyped which made them socially excluded from school activities also most parents believed that these children would not amount to anything in the future, and they felt it was of no use sending them to schools. Therefore, inclusive educational initiatives should prioritize the promotion of consciousness-raising and the questioning of such beliefs, while concurrently establishing secure and hospitable settings for all pupils.

# CHAPTER SIX

## 6.0 Discussions of results to the aim and previous research in themes

The study aimed to find how special needs children are being included in educational settings in Cameroon and the challenges they also face and to know the perspectives of both social workers and teachers. The results indicate that children with special needs still find it difficult in accessing mainstream schools because of the bad infrastructure of the schools. The responses gathered from our interviewees, the primary educational hurdles encountered by children with special needs about the inadequacy of educational resources, including proficient sign language instructors, Braille materials, and other essential educational tools.

Another key challenge was that most teachers in primary schools that offer universal education exhibit a deficiency in utilizing Braille. The perspectives of teachers and social workers regarding inclusive educational practices within the school setting were deemed crucial to this research work, as they were regarded as the initial steps toward the effective execution of inclusive education. The research demonstrated that teachers and social service professionals responsible for managing mainstream classrooms possess a range of perspectives regarding the execution of this policy. The study's participants reported varying roles and responsibilities within educational institutions, such as providing individual and group therapy to students, offering emotional support to learners, empowering educators, and creating proactive programs. In addition, the participants reported employing diverse theoretical frameworks within educational settings, with no exclusive reliance on the ecological systems theory.

The participants employ theoretical models such as the strengths perspective, which emphasizes positive factors in the child's environment, and the problem-solving model. The participants did not entirely disregard the utilization of the ecological systems model but used it in addition to the aforementioned models.

## 6.1 Views the Teachers and Social Workers Have About Inclusive Education Practices

The study revealed that teachers held both favorable and unfavorable perspectives regarding the integration of students with disabilities into regular classrooms. The study revealed that the primary factor contributing to unfavorable perspectives is predominantly rooted in an individual's beliefs. The study also revealed that there is a potential division within society regarding attitudes toward inclusion. The research findings indicate that inclusive education may not always be feasible and may be perceived as an inefficient allocation of resources, as special schools and units are deemed more appropriate for children with disabilities. Moreover, this research has demonstrated that despite the presence of unfavorable attitudes towards the integration of mainstreaming classes, teachers have identified beneficial aspects of the policy. Inclusive education has been found to have several benefits, including the eradication of societal stereotyping and discrimination. This is achieved through the promotion of acceptance among children toward their peers with disabilities. The study also revealed that the teachers possessed a degree of familiarity with inclusive pedagogical approaches this aligns with Tukov's (2008) findings which reported that some teachers were knowledgeable about the concept of inclusive education, and others were not. The teacher's knowledge is a crucial factor in implementing policies, as attempting to enforce policies without adequate understanding would be impractical.

Furthermore, the study shows that the school social workers demonstrated a proficient comprehension of inclusive education and their capacity to support children within its parameters. In the findings, it was seen that they viewed inclusive education as a means of tackling problems affecting special needs children. In addition, the study also revealed that they collaborate with schools and communities in implementing inclusive education policies which benefit the students.

## 6.2 Challenges Faced by Children with Special Needs Education

The study showed that children with special needs education faced various challenges in mainstream schools, despite the efforts to promote inclusive education. The findings indicate that students enrolled in special needs schools encounter significant obstacles in their routine social interactions with non-disabled peers. According to Olawale (2000), students with disabilities are susceptible to discriminatory practices because of their disabilities. However, the dissemination of information regarding disabilities within a classroom setting has the potential to dispel common misconceptions surrounding disabilities, thereby fostering a constructive learning environment.

The research findings indicate that students encounter challenges in attending educational institutions, due to the lack of accessibility features such as ramps, elevators, paved pathways, and lifts this finding is in correlation with that of (Tani & Nformi, 2016) the result revealed that students with special needs did not have access to classrooms because the lecture halls were hampered by high steps for students who used wheelchairs or crutches. This is particularly evident in cases where schools have not made architectural provisions for students with mobility impairments, thereby rendering such institutions inaccessible to them. It was indicated that special needs children also lacked trained teachers who know what inclusive education is and how to implement the basic skills. The research findings revealed that the curriculum was not adjusted to cater to the unique learning requirements of students with special needs, thereby impeding the desired outcome. The present findings align with those of (Javakhishvili, 2012), who reported that half of the participants exhibited an inadequate understanding of inclusive educational practices, thereby posing a significant obstacle to the effective execution of the policy. In addition, according to (Mburashelih's, 2010) research on the obstacles encountered by inclusive schools in Cameroon, despite the Ministry of Education's endeavors to implement inclusive education policies, the physical infrastructure has not yet been adapted to cater to the needs of children with disabilities. According to the findings of this study, insufficient resources including materials and financial planning for diversity, incomplete implementation of legal and policy frameworks, inadequate adaptation of curriculum and environmental factors, and other barriers, all contributes to the school's ineffective interaction and cooperation with partners.

The study also revealed that funding affected their access to specialized equipment, therapies, or educational programs. Families with children who have special needs may therefore face economic constraints in their pursuit of appropriate educational and supportive resources for their children. However, to tackle these concerns, a collaborative endeavor is necessary to foster consciousness, comprehension, and inclusivity toward every student, irrespective of their capabilities. Educational institutions must offer assistance to guarantee the complete engagement of all pupils in both academic and non-academic pursuits. The teachers must understand the specific need of physically challenged students and provide assistance appropriately. Additionally, it is crucial to acknowledge and eradicate any unfavorable attitudes towards these children with special needs.

## 6.3 Challenges and the Roles Played by Teachers and Social Workers

Previous research has shown that the ecosystem's subsystem may play a significant role in providing support to children who have disabilities, or learning difficulties, or come from disadvantaged backgrounds in regular or mainstream educational settings (Tukov, 2008). The most important thing they do is help children progress to the next level of comprehension and development by teaching them to think, study, and solve issues. However, (Friedrich &Mandl 2012) highlighted that considering that children have a certain area of interest, it is also challenging to impart fresh knowledge to them. According to (Vygotsky's, 1978) developmental theory, optimal teaching occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development, which refers to the range of skills and abilities that a child is capable of learning with guidance and support. The study also demonstrates how crucial a teacher's participation is in Cameroon's execution of its inclusive education strategy. Abosi (2000) conducted a study pertaining to the integration of children with special needs into mainstream classrooms, which is pertinent to the present investigation the findings revealed that implementing adaptive teaching techniques such as cooperative Lea and social skills training could improve the academic performance of the children.

Findings show that the responsibilities of teachers in inclusive learning environments have evolved from conventional duties to encompass the identification of pupils with disabilities within the classroom and the subsequent referral of such individuals for assessment. It was shown that identification took place when the children entered the classroom and exhibited indications of experiencing challenges in their learning as a result of a disability. The results of this study align with the observations made by (Swango, 2003), regarding the primary responsibility of teachers in inclusive classrooms, which involves identifying students with disabilities and taking appropriate measures to address any concerns.

The findings of the study also revealed that teaching special needs children is challenging for teachers because they are expected to know the unique requirements of each child. These findings also agree with that of (Enow & Wemba, 2019), the result revealed that 75% of the teachers who didn't have training in inclusive education admitted that they struggle with resolving the needs of the children. It became clear that the teachers did not have enough strategies to cope effectively with the special needs children, so they resorted to utilizing humor as a coping mechanism to

address the difficulties that come with instructing diverse classrooms, particularly in instances where they lacked adequate instructional techniques. Also, (Swango, 2003) noted that a significant proportion of educators who implemented inclusive education strategies employed humor as a pedagogical tool, particularly when confronted with the difficulties inherent in inclusive education.

Further, the study shows within educational institutions, social workers are tasked with various duties and obligations, such as providing learners with personalized therapy and group sessions, offering emotional assistance to learners, empowering teachers, and creating proactive initiatives. According to (Kemp,2013), one of the responsibilities of the school social worker is to provide counseling services and facilitate support groups. The study also shows that the social workers were also engaged in collaborative efforts with other professionals, to optimize their assistance towards the child. Upon examining the perspectives of social workers, regarding their roles in the context of inclusive education, it was revealed that they perceive themselves as having specific obligations. The aforementioned duties entailed providing personalized assistance to students and facilitating collaborative efforts aimed at fostering cognitive transformation and equipping learners with competencies.

The findings indicate that social workers bear a responsibility to equip teachers with pertinent knowledge and skills, as well as engage them in instructional programs. Lastly, the study also reveals that social workers assume the duty of providing emotional support to learners as a means of enhancing the education system's capacity to address the obstacles to learning that may be encountered.

## 6.4 Social Workers Contributing to Inclusive Education

According to the Department of Basic Education (2014), the utilization of the ecological systems theory is advocated by the Department of Basic Education to tackle hindrances to a child's education within their environment. The results show that, depending on the child's needs or the child's degree of functioning, school social workers employ a variety of theoretical models while providing services to children. Children are viewed as a subsystem in the school system that interacts with their peers, their families, and the wider society. Hence school social work services must be viewed from an ecological viewpoint, as suggested by (Constable & Flynne, 1982). However, the initial stage of evaluating students who may be experiencing academic, social, or

emotional difficulties can benefit significantly from the involvement of school social workers this underscores the crucial role that school social workers can play in schools.

Based on the results, it was observed that social workers play a significant role in schools due to their interpersonal abilities, which enable them to effectively interact with individuals. The research findings indicate that social workers perceive themselves as valuable assets in schools, particularly as the initial point of assessment due to their accessibility within the school setting. In addition, they possess an understanding of relevant policies for example the Children's Act 38 of 2005, which aids them in the provision of services. The results indicate that social workers possess a comprehensive understanding of distinct theoretical frameworks which they can effectively implement within educational institutions to promote the optimal development of the student. Several models were referenced in the interview, including the strengths-based approach, the problem-solving model, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The results demonstrated that the approach they employ while providing services is based on the requirements of the individual child and the nature of the issue being addressed. Before settling on a particular theoretical model to apply, they take a comprehensive look at the circumstance.

## 6.5 Discussion in relation to theory

The process of raising a child is replete with difficulties, particularly when it entails the assimilation of children with special needs into the mainstream educational system. The authors opted to utilize Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which comprises the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. This theoretical framework underscores the diverse environmental factors that impact a child's development, including the child's characteristics. One of the benefits of using the ecological system theory in our study is that it holds significant relevance within an inclusive educational context, as it duly acknowledges the cultural and socioeconomic background of the child, as well as their familial and environmental circumstances. However, by Understanding the multiple factors that influence students' development, one has to be conversant with how the subsystem plays different roles within inclusive educational systems. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, alterations in one system can produce a cascade of consequences across other systems, and addressing various levels of influence may be imperative for fostering favorable results. Enhancing the availability of community resources within the

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exosystem has the potential to facilitate the support of families within the microsystem. Consequently, this may result in improved academic achievements for students. The theoretical framework underscores the significance of fostering collaboration and communication among diverse systems. Within the framework of inclusive education, teachers, social workers, parents, and other experts must collaborate to facilitate the academic progress and holistic growth of students. This may entail the sharing of pertinent information regarding students' strengths and needs, the coordination of services and interventions, as well as the establishment of partnerships with community organisations.

In conclusion, applying ecological system theory to facilitate the integration of special needs children into mainstream schools in Cameroon was constrained by inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, a shortage of trained teachers, and cultural attitudes. To address these challenges, allocating additional resources towards inclusive education and providing specialised training to teachers in working with special needs children may be necessary.

### 6.6 Discussion of Methodology

The authors utilized qualitative research methodology for this study. The process entailed the careful selection of suitable methodologies and techniques for gathering, scrutinizing, and comprehending non-quantitative data. The selected methodology was chosen due to its focus on investigating and comprehending intricate social issues, such as the integration of special needs children into mainstream educational settings. For the purpose of our study, we opted to utilize purposive sampling and snowball sampling as the most suitable methods for our sampling approach.

Data was collected through the utilization of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted via Zoom utilizing an interview guide. The sessions were recorded and later transcribed into Microsoft Word format. Initially before the interviews, the authors of this research work thought that getting more participants was going to be difficult; hence our initial number of participants was four. However, we were able to get two more participants making it six in total. However, we encountered some challenges due to time differences and bad network connection also.

Collaborating in pairs has proven to be advantageous during both the interview and analysis phases. The allocation of responsibility during the interview process resulted in noteworthy discoveries that may have otherwise been disregarded. Throughout the course of composing and executing this investigation, the authors have proffered diverse viewpoints and supplemented one another's limitations and proficiencies. The authors express satisfaction with their chosen analytical approach, as the categorization of the collective data into themes not only simplified the analysis process but also stimulated insightful discussion.

## 6.7 Limitations of the Study

We experienced several challenges as we worked on the thesis, some of which included a lack of responses from our contact at the school, and limitations on conducting the interviews in English because most of the participants we saw said they are mostly fluent in French. However, we got those who can speak fluent English and this made the study easier for the authors. Additionally, most of the participants has limited time or a preference for the way that they communicate, both of which made it difficult to record. The authors had to make sure the issue was resolved by providing multiple means of communication to choose from. The intended research also focuses on attitudes, which means it will investigate the opinions, viewpoints, and perceptions of participants all of which may or may not be accurate representations of reality. There was a possibility that respondents will not provide honest responses and there will almost certainly be a few issues with the internet connection, all of which are going to be beyond the authors' control.

## 6.8  Recommendations

Drawing from the study's results, a range of recommendations can be proposed.

- Remedial training on inclusive education techniques should be made available to teachers in mainstream schools by the Ministry of Education. If teachers in mainstreaming schools have the tools, they need to effectively implement inclusive education policies, then students will benefit from higher-quality content delivery.
- The government should create more materials for use in classrooms that are accessible to all students. Books on sign language, graphic strips, videotapes of sign language classes,

charts, books for both students and instructors and much more are all needed to make inclusive classrooms more effective.

- The government should provide financial assistance to mainstream schools so that classroom rehabilitation and modifications can be made to meet the special requirements of children with special education needs. This will result in reducing environmental barriers in the schools that hinder the quality of learning for pupils with special needs. As a result, students with special needs will have fewer obstacles to learning because of the school's physical setting.

## 6.9 Further Research

Social work is an evolving profession hence the need for continuous research can never be overemphasized. The authors of this thesis suggest that research on the curriculum of teachers' training programs should be investigated to see if they meet updated requirements. Also, the policy makers such as the Ministry of Education in Cameroon should be under study, to clarify if they understand the lacunae that exist in the educational sector and their plans to get it resolved. Another suggestion for future research can be based on how teachers can be trained to acquire more knowledge on special needs children in mainstream schools. That would be useful as it will give insightful factors towards the improvement of these children.

## 6.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, the nature of inclusive education inherently acknowledges and values the diversity of the human population. The integration of children with special needs into general education curricula can yield social and academic advantages while avoiding the negative connotations associated with segregated or pull-out classrooms. Despite the efforts towards inclusion, there exist several challenges that impede its success. These challenges include insufficient availability of special educators to cater to the needs of students with disabilities, inadequate provision of materials and facilities, and insufficient funding from the government, among others.

Effective resolution of the issues at hand necessitates a collaborative effort from various stakeholders, including the government, educational administration, educators, the local community, and caregivers this concerted approach is imperative for the attainment of the desired outcome.

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## CONSENT FORM

**Bachelor of Science in Social Work. Specialization International Social Work**

**Thesis topic: Inclusive Education and the challenges faced by Children with special needs in Cameroon: perspectives of social workers and Teachers.**

INVESTIGATORS: SUCCESS .E.AGBONLENOMEN & AMOS FAITH BECKY

Email:   Peacepeace346@gmail.com                    Frucm@yahoo.com

SUPERVISOR: ANNEMI SKERVING.

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Success.E. Agbonlenomen and Amos Faith Becky at (Gävle University Sweden) as part of the curriculum of our Bachelor program in Social Work specializing in International Social Work, in the context of a final thesis course. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. A description and information about the study are provided here. You are free to ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study seeks to find how disabled children are being included in educational settings in Cameroon and the challenges they also face. It also aims to know the perspectives of both social workers and teachers.

PROCEDURES

Participation will involve an interview on a mutually agreed date and time. Being that it's not possible to have a physical meeting to interact due to the distance and place of domicile of one

of the researchers; the interview will take place via Zoom, phone, or WhatsApp call and will be recorded. The recording of the interview will be destroyed once the analysis is completed.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. We will not use your name in any of the information we get from this study or in any of the research reports. Information that can identify you individually will not be released to anyone outside the study.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

As this study is for students in their pursuit to make up a required credit unit, it is to be noted that participation is not remunerated.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.


_____

Printed Name of Subject


_____

Signature of Subject                                                                 Date

## APPENDIX 2

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What are your views towards inclusive education?
2. What are the challenges faced by special needs children in inclusive schools in Cameroon?
3. What type of challenges do you face as a teacher when teaching the children? And what kind of strategies were used?
4. What are your roles as a teacher towards these children?
5. Can you tell us your role and responsibility that comes with becoming a school social worker in an inclusive school?
6. How do you support these children when they experience barriers in education?
7. As a school social worker what challenges do you face when assisting these children?
8. What contributions have you made towards the improvement of inclusive education in your school?