Concerns of Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) in implementing inclusive education in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana

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Abstract

The study investigated the challenges faced by Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) in implementing inclusive education in basic schools within the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. A descriptive survey design was employed, and census sampling was used to select 74 SERTs who participated in the study. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation. The study identified several concerns among SERTs, including large class sizes and overcrowded classrooms, a lack of training, insufficient appreciation for their work, limited resources and funding, a shortage of special education professionals, resistance to inclusive education due to its perceived impact on learners without special needs, professional isolation, and insufficient time for planning activities. As a result, it was recommended that authorities intensify publicity on inclusive education. Additionally, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Special Education Division, should provide SERTs with the necessary materials, offer refresher courses to update their skills in managing learners with special educational needs, and thereby enhance the implementation of inclusive education.

Keywords: attitude, concerns, inclusive education, SERTs, SENCOs, special educational needs

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education lacks a universally agreed-upon definition, a point highlighted by Roger Slee in his book *The Irregular School: Exclusion, Schooling, and Inclusive Education* (Slee, 2011). Bates et al. (2015) similarly note that "there is, as yet, no consensus about what inclusive education is or how it should be implemented in schools" (p. 1929). The absence of a unified definition can be attributed to several factors, reflecting the diversity of research perspectives on the topic. For instance, Loreman et al. (2014) suggest that one key reason is the lack of a standardized definition approved by relevant international organizations. Conversely, Jahnukainen (2015) argues that the confusion stems from the overlapping and inconsistent use of terms such as "integration," "mainstreaming," and "placement," which vary across countries and educational systems. This inconsistency in terminology complicates efforts to establish a shared understanding of what inclusive education entails.

Despite this lack of consensus, various factors and efforts have led to the development of numerous definitions of inclusive education that, while differing in specifics, share certain fundamental principles. These definitions generally aim to make inclusive education a practical and applied concept rather than one confined to theoretical discussions. For instance, Sahani and Patel (2023) see inclusive education as a learning environment that fosters the full personal, academic, and professional development of all learners, regardless of race, class, color, gender, disability, sexual orientation, learning styles, or language. It offers a unique approach to educating children with disabilities in regular schools, where the focus is not on correcting perceived deficits but on adapting the environment to accommodate different needs, viewing disability as a natural variation. In this model, there is less emphasis on making the child resemble a non-disabled child and more on celebrating differences. These differences are not only accepted and respected but also embraced, acknowledging that no two individuals are the same (Sahani & Patel, 2023).

Poon-McBrayer and Ping-man (2013) describe inclusive education as a process in which children with disabilities are integrated into regular school settings, where they can learn without facing discrimination. Similarly, Adams (2016) highlights the importance of ensuring the acceptance of all children, regardless of disability, while providing them with quality education. According to UNESCO (2020, p. 8), inclusive education is "securing and guaranteeing the right of all children to access, presence, participation, and success in their local regular school." This definition underscores the fundamental right of every child to be part of the regular education system, ensuring not only their physical presence but also their active engagement and success within the school environment.

Ainscow et al. (2006) expand on this by defining inclusive education as a process that reduces barriers to learning, promotes full participation, and enhances a school's ability to accommodate all students, regardless of their differences. Their definition focuses on removing obstacles that hinder learning and creating an environment that supports the diverse needs of every learner. The central theme in these definitions is that inclusive education aims to build an educational system that welcomes and supports all students, ensuring equal opportunities for success regardless of individual differences. This aligns with Loreman's (2009) identification of key characteristics that make inclusive education a distinct practice. These characteristics, which should be considered in any definition of inclusive education, include the following:

➢ All children have the right to enroll in the school closest to their home.

➢ Schools operate under a "zero-rejection policy," accepting and educating all students regardless of differences, ensuring that every student is welcomed and valued.

➢ Children learn in regular, mixed-ability classrooms alongside peers of the same age.

> ➢ All students follow similar study programs, with curricula that can be adapted or modified as necessary. Teaching methods are varied to meet the diverse needs of students without discrimination.

> ➢ All students fully participate in regular educational activities and school events, with a focus on celebrating and appreciating diversity in the classroom.

> ➢ Children are supported in building friendships and achieving social success with their peers.

> ➢ Adequate resources and training are provided to specialists, teachers, and stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of inclusive education.

The practice of inclusive education is grounded in the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and the right to education for all children, as outlined in various international frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [CRPD] (United Nations, 2006) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015). Specifically, the goal four of the SDGs calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The target 4.5 calls for the elimination of gender disparities and inequities in education, highlighting the need to ensure access to education for persons with disabilities. This could be achieved in Target 4.a that calls for the upgrading of educational facilities so that they are child-and disability-sensitive and to promote inclusive learning environments (United Nations, 2015).

Inclusive education was introduced in the 2003/2004 academic year, with 60 schools selected for a pilot program across 11 districts in the Central, Eastern, and Greater Accra regions (Gadagbui, 2008; Agbenyega & Deku, 2011). In the Greater Accra region, notable districts included Ada, Amasaman, and several metropolitan schools. By 2011, the program expanded from 60 to 429 schools in 46 districts across all 10 regions of the country. As of the 2012/2013 academic year, a total of 16,596 children with disabilities were enrolled in inclusive schools (MoE, 2013). This marked significant progress in enrolling children with disabilities, demonstrating improvement in the integration of such students into regular schools. The Inclusive Education Policy of 2015 and the Disability Act of 2006 are major milestones in this regard, emphasizing the need for an education system that accommodates all learners, including those with special educational needs (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2015). After the pilot, Ghana went full inclusion where all institutions were expected to admit learners with disabilities without any form of discriminations into regular school settings. One can say the Greater Accra region has played critical role in the implementation of inclusive education right from the pilot till today. However, it appears there are more to be done where attitudes of teachers, parents, learners without disabilities, funding, inadequate human and material resources continue to be a concern to SERTs (Butakor et al., 2020; Agbenyega 2007; Agbenyega & Deku 2011; Gyimah 2010; Okai 2021).

Compared to countries like the UK, the journey toward inclusive education in Ghana has been more gradual. In the UK, this journey began with the Education Act of 1944, which included provisions for educating children with disabilities. However, the most significant progress was made with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) of 2001 and the Children and Families Act of 2014. These laws mandate that all students, regardless of disability, be accommodated in mainstream schools whenever possible, with necessary adjustments made to ensure equal access to education (Department for Education, 2015). The UK's approach to inclusive education is highly structured, focusing on the development of Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) for students with special needs (Riddell, 2016). These legally binding plans ensure that schools and local authorities provide the required support and resources (Riddell et al., 2016). Moreover, the UK benefits from comprehensive teacher training in inclusive practices and access to a wide range of assistive technologies for students with disabilities. Nevertheless, challenges such as financial constraints and bureaucratic delays in the development and approval of EHCPs persist (Norwich & Black, 2015).

The implementation of inclusive education in the UK is more advanced than in the Greater Accra region of Ghana, largely due to stronger legal frameworks, better-resourced schools, and more comprehensive teacher training programs. Although both regions adhere to international guidelines, such as the United Nations

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), the UK has been more successful in operationalizing these guidelines through legally mandated support systems like EHCPs (Riddell et al., 2016). In both contexts, the roles of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in the UK and Ghana and Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) in Ghana are pivotal to the successful implementation of inclusive education policies.

Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) are educators responsible for ensuring that every child with special educational needs receives the necessary support to reach their full educational potential within a given school. In the Ghanaian context, SERTs differ from Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), as seen in some other countries. While SENCOs play similar roles, SERTs are assigned to specific schools and circuits to support learners with special needs and disabilities, whereas SENCOs are stationed in District or Municipal education offices to support all learners with special educational needs and coordinate the activities of SERTs. SERTs play a critical role in the success of inclusive education by providing specialized support and resources to learners with special educational needs and assisting general education teachers in adapting their teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of all learners (Okai, 2021). They advocate for parents and learners with special needs, ensuring that they have access to the curriculum and maximize their educational experience. SERTs also conduct periodic assessments to identify learners suspected of having special needs and make necessary referrals for further evaluation, diagnosis and educational placement. Their role in creating and monitoring Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) is invaluable (Okai, 2021). Additionally, SERTs provide education and training for general education teachers and parents on how to effectively teach and manage learners with special needs (Okai, 2021).

Despite their pivotal role, SERTs often face concerns that, if unaddressed, can hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education. Though many studies have been conducted on inclusive education, most of them tended to focus more on the views of students, teachers, and parents, often placing less emphasis on the perspectives of SERTs (Gyimah 2010; Butakor et al., 2020). SERTs' perspectives offer valuable insights into the practical challenges of inclusive education and highlight areas requiring targeted interventions and policy adjustments. Understanding these concerns is crucial for identifying gaps in the implementation of inclusive practices.

In Ghana, several studies have been conducted to examine teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with special educational needs. Researchers such as Agbenyega and Deku (2011), Gyimah (2010), and Kuyini and Desai (2007) have highlighted that many learners with special educational needs benefit less from inclusive education due to factors such as a lack of specialized teaching skills and materials, teachers' negative attitudes, limited knowledge of inclusion among school authorities, insufficient regular training sessions for teachers, the inflexible nature of school programs, and a lack of support from school principals. However, there is limited research on the concerns of Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) regarding inclusive practices in basic schools in Ghana. Addressing these concerns in a timely manner can positively influence attitudes and perceptions toward inclusive education. This study aims to explore the concerns of SERTs in implementing inclusive practices in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, shedding light on the challenges they face and the support they need to enhance the educational experiences of learners with special educational needs.

Statement of the Problem - The success of implementing inclusive education is influenced by many factors, with the attitudes and concerns of SERTs, teachers, administrators, and students being key among them. Numerous studies have extensively discussed the attitudes of teachers, administrators, mentees, parents, and peers without disabilities toward the implementation of inclusive education (Amaniampong et al., 2020; Butakor et al., 2020). Other research has explored the concerns of regular teachers regarding inclusive education both in Ghana and internationally (Knowler & Done, 2021; Jury et al., 2023; Agbenyega, 2007; Warnes et al., 2022). However, only a few studies have focused on the concerns of SERTs and SENCOs in the practice of inclusive education. For example, Mihajlovic's (2020) study in Finland examined the concerns of special educators, but in Ghana, the emphasis has been more on the concerns, attitudes, and perceptions of regular teachers, mentees, peers with or without disabilities, and parents toward inclusive education. Studies on SENCOs include those by Hawkins (2023),

Fitzgerald and Radford (2017 & 2020), and Smith (2022). In the context of this study and the practice of inclusive education in Ghana, SERTs differ from SENCOs and may not share the same concerns, making this study particularly important. My interactions with a cross-section of SERTs regarding the implementation of inclusive education revealed mixed reactions. While some regular teachers and administrators positively embrace the policy and provide various forms of support to SERTs in their duties, others are resistant and display attitudes that frustrate SERTs and learners with special educational needs. Understanding the concerns of all stakeholders, including SERTs, is crucial for addressing the gaps in the implementation of inclusive education, highlighting the need for this study.

Research Question

> What concerns and challenges do SERTs face in implementing inclusive education in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana?

2. Concerns of SERTs in Implementing Inclusive Education

Teachers' concerns have been quickly identified as a major hindrance to the full implementation of inclusive education. However, limited attention has been given to the concerns of SERTs. For the purposes of this study, concerns refer to the skepticism associated with one's response to new situations or changing demands (Yan & Deng, 2019). It can also encompass the belief that a specific course of action or event will not unfold as expected. Concerns are negatively correlated with teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. The greater the concerns teachers have about inclusive education, the less committed they are to its implementation, and the less likely they are to adopt inclusive teaching practices (Miesera et al., 2019).

One of the concerns extensively discussed in the literature is the attitude of teachers toward the implementation of inclusive education. This attitude can have either a positive or negative impact, depending on teachers' perceptions. For example, Sharma and Chow (2008) and Ball and Green (2014) noted that certain school administrators exhibited negative attitudes towards inclusion. In contrast, other research, such as that by Ira (2015), and Muega (2016) indicated that administrators' attitudes were more neutral, neither strongly positive nor negative, concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools. Negative attitudes from teachers and school administrators often result in less inclusive placements for learners with special educational needs in regular schools, primarily due to a lack of adequate training and experience in special education and inclusion practices (Ball & Green, 2014). Similarly, in a qualitative study, Mihajlovic (2020) explored special educators' perceptions of their roles in inclusive education in Finland, using four participants. The findings revealed that some participants identified the attitudes of class and subject teachers toward learners with special educational needs, along with a lack of resources, as major challenges to the implementation of inclusive education. The absence of resources, such as classroom support, has also been identified as a barrier to inclusive teaching practices.

Sucuoğlu et al. (2013) conducted a study on preschool teachers in Turkey, revealing that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education were influenced by inadequate training. This finding aligns with the research of Beacham and Rouse (2012) and Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), which established a link between teachers' knowledge, special needs education training, and their behavior and practices in inclusive classrooms. Bih (2022), in a study on regular teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in the northwest region of Cameroon, identified inadequate training as a major barrier to the effective implementation of inclusive education. Teachers reported that they did not feel adequately trained to address the diverse needs of learners with special educational needs, attributing this to the introductory level of inclusive education training included in their programs. These trainings failed to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and techniques for successful inclusive classroom practices. Similarly, Nketsia et al. (2016) found that inadequate teacher preparation was a significant barrier to inclusive education, based on their research on teacher educators' views in Ghana.

Many studies highlight inadequate resources and facilities as significant barriers to the effective practice of inclusive education globally (Goldan & Schwab, 2020; Jury et al., 2023; Nketsia et al., 2016). Teachers often

express concerns about the difficulties they face in preparing and accessing materials for learners with special needs, acknowledging that these resources are crucial for education (Kuyini & Mangope, 2011; Gokalp & Demirok, 2021). Jury et al. (2023) identify the lack of resources as the primary concern for teachers implementing inclusive education. Key resources of concern include human resources, material resources, spatial resources, training, and funding (Jury et al., 2023). The absence of resource rooms, teaching materials, and assistive technology further hinders the implementation of inclusive education and is a significant concern for teachers (Bih, 2022).

SERTs also face challenges with time constraints for consultation and cooperation, unclear job roles, and excessive workloads when addressing the needs of learners with special educational needs in inclusive settings (Mihajlovic, 2020). The demand for support often exceeds the capacity of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), who struggle to manage behavioral issues, academic needs, and communication with teaching staff, parents, and local authorities within the limited time available. Harper (2017) also notes that a lack of time for collaborative lesson planning with class or subject teachers is an issue. Other studies, such as those by Curran (2021) and Smith (2012), observe that teachers in inclusive settings dedicate more time to learning new approaches and skills, demonstrating greater commitment to creative methods for meeting students' needs. However, teachers worry that focusing on learners with special educational needs might lead to less time available for learners without special educational needs (Amaniampong et al., 2020; Evins, 2015).

The ever-growing class sizes in schools also hinder the practice of inclusive education, as teachers find it challenging to focus on the needs of learners with special educational needs (Kuyini & Mangope, 2011). As class sizes increase, it becomes more difficult for teachers to manage instructional arrangements that cater to the diverse learning needs of all learners. Hunter-Johnson and Newton (2014) conducted a survey on the perceptions of primary school teachers towards inclusion in the Bahamian context and identified large class sizes as one of the many factors inhibiting inclusive education. Similarly, Ballhysa and Flagler (2011) investigated teachers' attitudes toward learners with special educational needs in Albania, finding that while teachers were willing to work with special needs learners in inclusive classrooms, their efforts were hampered by a lack of training and overcrowded classrooms.

Large class sizes also contribute to the increased workload of teachers, as the number of learners with special educational needs continues to grow each year. Warnes et al. (2022) highlight the significant pressure on teachers due to these increased workloads. Teaching learners with special educational needs is seen as a major factor contributing to excessive working hours, and a source of stress and anxiety for teachers. Agbenyega's (2007) study in the Accra Metropolis of Ghana, which examined teachers' attitudes in selected inclusive schools, noted that the inclusion of learners with special needs increased teachers' workloads, making it difficult for them to complete instructional syllabuses. Special education is considered one of the most demanding professions within the field of education (Brunsting et al., 2014; Feng & Sass, 2013; Pepe & Addimando, 2013). The high stress levels among special education teachers often lead to greater job dissatisfaction compared to teachers in regular schools (Platsidou, 2010). Amaniampong et al. (2020), in a study on mentees' attitudes towards learners with special needs at Oda Wesley Methodist Primary School, reported high levels of stress among teachers working with these students. Resources and workload were identified as the most significant concerns for teachers in inclusive schools, which greatly influence their attitudes toward inclusive education (Kart & Kart, 2021; Krämer et al., 2021).

The importance of a supportive administration as a key factor for successful inclusive education cannot be overstated. Administrative support provides a strong foundation and a shared vision, empowering teachers to confidently implement new strategies to accommodate their learners while exhibiting higher levels of self-efficacy compared to those in environments lacking such support. Ahmmed et al. (2013) conducted a survey in Bangladesh to assess teachers' intentions regarding the inclusion of learners with special educational needs, finding that when teachers perceive adequate administrative support, they are more likely to include learners with special educational needs in their classrooms. Similarly, MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013), in their study in Scotland on administrators' attitudes and willingness toward inclusive teaching, emphasized that school principals play a critical role in communicating the school's expectations and culture, providing support and training, and fostering self-efficacy,

all of which influence teachers' attitudes and behaviors in teaching learners with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties in inclusive classrooms.

Bih (2022) reported a lack of administrative support in areas such as providing equipped resource rooms, making infrastructure modifications and adaptations, and offering financial support for training. Iryayo et al. (2018) presented similar findings, noting that the implementation of inclusive education is often unsatisfactory due to insufficient administrative support. Pedaste et al. (2021), in a study on school leaders' attitudes toward inclusive education in Estonia, found that while these leaders had slightly positive attitudes towards the vision and practice of inclusive education, they held extremely negative views regarding the adequacy of support. This suggests that many school leaders exhibit negative attitudes towards inclusive education, with the availability and adequacy of support being significant limitations in the implementation process. Participants in the study reported not having enough resources to effectively support the education of learners with special educational needs in an inclusive educational setting. Whether it was insufficient time to plan and prepare with a special education teacher, a lack of assistants for learners with special educational needs, or inadequate support in applying research-based teaching techniques, the overall sentiment was that they were not provided with enough assistance to meet the educational needs of the learners in inclusive education environment.

Prather-Jones (2011) conducted a qualitative investigation to explore why special education teachers leave their jobs. The primary reasons cited were a lack of administrative support, overwhelming caseloads, the demands of Individual Education Program (IEP) paperwork, professional isolation, insufficient resources provided by administrators to support the education of learners with special needs, the diverse needs of students, and a lack of appreciation from coworkers and administrators for their hard work. Special educators often experience professional isolation due to the nature of their work, which leads regular teachers to view them as less important or as not true colleagues, thereby stigmatizing them for working with learners with special educational needs (Prather-Jones, 2011). Regular teachers, who typically manage larger numbers of learners and focus on content rather than specific skills, often perceive special educators, who work with fewer learners, as having easier and less demanding jobs. In many cases, the work of special educators is considered less important. However, studies by Hadjikakou and Mnasonos (2012), Irvine et al. (2010), and Woodcock and Hardy (2019) reported that principals generally hold favorable views of inclusion. Anecdotal reports from some SERTs suggest that they are sometimes used as substitutes for regular teachers when they are absent, which prevents SERTs from fulfilling their duties as expected.

Aktan (2021), in a study aimed at understanding teachers' opinions on inclusive education interventions in Turkey, identified several concerns that impact the effective implementation of inclusive education. These concerns include a lack of social awareness and professional qualifications for inclusive education, insufficient support services, the feeling of being alone in interventions, inadequate support from relevant parties, and deficiencies in the physical infrastructure of schools. These factors contribute to teachers' negative attitudes and opinions towards inclusive education. The study suggests that cooperation between all parties involved in inclusive education is lacking in practice, posing a serious threat to the success of such interventions. This finding aligns with Obeng's (2007) study on teachers' perceptions of educating special needs learners in regular classrooms, which revealed that teachers were constrained by the absence of teaching materials such as braille and large print, inaccessible and congested classrooms, and the lack of paraprofessionals to support the implementation of inclusive education.

Smith (2022), in a study on the experiences of new primary school Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) using concept-drawing and personal narratives, reported several concerns raised by SENCOs in the course of their duties. Among these concerns were the low priority given to special educational needs within schools, a general lack of understanding of special educational needs by headteachers and leadership teams, poor communication between headteachers and SENCOs, and the failure of headteachers and school managers/bursars to share information related to special educational needs funding. Other concerns included a lack of time, resources, and administrative support, with many SENCOs feeling that every aspect of their work was constantly monitored

and assessed. The excessive workload led to well-being issues, and there were limited opportunities for SENCOs to act independently as true leaders. Suc et al. (2016), in a study on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in Slovenia, reported that some teachers viewed the inclusive setting as a burden that would be difficult to manage. The reasons cited included frustration over the lack of progress among learners with special needs and feeling overwhelmed by the behavioral problems of these students, which disrupted the educational process for other learners in the class.

Fitzgerald and Radford (2017, 2020) also reported concerns from SENCOs regarding their professional development, which tended to be ad hoc. They advocated for more formalization of the SENCO role at the policy level to empower SENCOs to lead within inclusive educational settings. Similarly, Göransson et al. (2017) identified SENCOs' struggles to define and delineate their tasks and mission as a significant concern in their practice of inclusive education. SENCOs also expressed concerns about their inconsistent involvement in strategic planning and the failure of schools to prioritize the needs of students with special educational needs, which hinders the effective implementation of inclusive education.

Hawkins (2023), drawing on responses from 142 SENCOs in the UK, reports a striking increase in both workload and administrative tasks among SENCOs. A significant 66.43% of respondents noted a maximum increase in workload, while 62.86% indicated a similar surge in administrative responsibilities. This trend highlights broader challenges in the educational sector, underscoring the need for strategies to manage these growing demands effectively. The emotional toll on SENCOs is also apparent, with 41.43% experiencing extreme levels of stress and 46.43% reporting severe emotional exhaustion. Prolonged unresolved concerns can foster attitudes that negatively impact the implementation of inclusive education.

This study is grounded in Social Judgment Theory (SJT), a framework that examines human judgment. According to SJT, individuals assess new ideas—such as inclusive education policies—by comparing them with their existing views to determine where they fall on their personal attitude scale (Griffin, 2012). SJT involves the subconscious sorting of ideas that occurs immediately upon perception, focusing on the internal processes of a person's judgment in relation to a communicated message (O'Keefe, 2016). Concerns of SERTs if not given attention may cause them develop conceptions and attitude on the inclusive education policy and its practices.

3. Methods

Research Design - The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This approach is effective for explaining the characteristics of phenomena, as well as the views, attitudes, preferences, and perceptions of individuals. Descriptive research is particularly useful because it focuses on current events or issues, collecting data that helps to thoroughly outline the situation (Fox & Bayat, 2007). A descriptive survey provides a numerical description of how events unfold over time, capturing the attitudes or views of a population by examining a sample of that population (Orodho, 2009). This design was chosen for its suitability in exploring the attitudes of administrators and regular teachers towards special educators.

Population - Population refers to the entire group of individuals or objects that share a distinct, observable characteristic relevant to the study. In other words, the group possesses common traits, and each member can be identified as having these characteristics. According to Robson and McCartan (2016), the population is essentially the list of objects from which the survey sample is drawn. For this study, the population consisted of all special education resource teachers in the Greater Accra region.

Sample and Sampling Procedures - Sample size refers to the number of members, individuals, or cases selected from the entire population to be directly included in a study. In this study, the sample size consisted of 74 special education resource teachers working in inclusive basic schools in the Greater Accra Region. This means that special educators teaching in special schools were not included as respondents. A census sampling method was employed to select the participants. In census sampling, researchers attempt to gather information from every member of the population. This approach was chosen due to the small number of participants and because they

were the only individuals capable of providing information relevant to the study (Gay, et al., 2012). The homogeneous sample was selected because all participants shared the same traits.

Instruments for Data Collection - The study used a questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of 13 items designed to measure the concerns of Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) regarding the implementation of inclusive education. The response format was a 4-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" to "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree." The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.80.

Ethical Considerations - The researcher sought permission from the Regional Director of Education and the Regional Special Education Coordinator to conduct the study. This aligns with Creswell's (2014) recommendation that recognition should be given to the site where research takes place. According to Creswell, showing respect for the research site involves obtaining permission before conducting a study. While seeking permission is important, some argue that giving prior notice may cause participants to withhold crucial information. However, obtaining permission helps prepare participants to respond to the questions posed. Additionally, seeking consent helps minimize the inconvenience participants may experience during the study (Robson & McCartan, 2016). After receiving approval from the Regional Director of Education and the Special Education Coordinator, the details of the study and the questionnaire were explained to the Special SERTs selected for the study. The consent of the SERTs was obtained through written communication before administering the questionnaire. Participants were assured that their involvement would remain confidential and that their participation was entirely voluntary.

Procedures for Data Collection - Once permission was granted, the researcher scheduled a day for administering the instrument with the respondents. Given the scattered locations of the SERTs across the region, the items were uploaded to a Google link and shared on a WhatsApp platform for the respondents. The researcher personally conducted the data collection process. Respondents were given one week to complete the questionnaire, with follow-up reminders issued to those who had not yet submitted their responses, ensuring that feedback was received from all participants.

Procedures for Data Analysis - Basic features of the data were summarized using descriptive statistics in this study. They provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures, focusing on describing what the data shows. Since the study was not intended to establish differences or correlations, other types of statistics were not applicable. The data were presented using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) version 25. While SPSS offers various statistical methods, including bivariate, descriptive, and predictive statistics for numerical outcomes and group identification, the study focused solely on descriptive statistics. This choice was driven by the nature of the study and its research questions.

4. Results

Percentage and Mean distribution of items Regarding Participants Level of Agreement

Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
The learners SERTs work with place much stress on them	54(73.0)	20(27.0)	-	-	3.73	.447
SRTs are professionally isolated from most of the school's activities	12(16.2)	46(62.2)	12(16.2)	4(5.4)	2.89	.732
There are inadequate SRTs to support learners with special educational needs	74(100)	-	-	-	4.00	-
Teachers and administrators limited knowledge about my job affect my practice	12(16.2)	30(40.5)	20(27.0)	12(16.2)	2.57	.952
The rise in the number of learners with special educational needs brings anxiety and stress	40(54.1)	34(45.9)	-	-	3.54	.502
Limited appreciation for the work of SERTs	10(13.5)	38(51.4)	22(29.7)	4(5.4)	2.73	.764

SERTs are provided with materials and resources that support their work	-	-	28(37.8)	46(62.2)	1.38	.488
There is limited fund allotted to my school for implementing inclusive education	41(55.4)	33(44.6)	-	-	3.55	.500
I have limited time to plan educational programme for learners with special educational needs	26(35.1)	48(64.9)	-	-	3.35	.481
Teachers and administrators view resource work to affect high achieving learners performance	19(25.7)	55(74.3)	-	-	3.26	.440
I am engaged in additional work than the resource work I am expected to perform	29(39.2)	21(28.4)	12(16.2)	12(16.2)	2.91	1.10
I need professional development to keep me updated with the management of learners with special educational needs	70(94.6)	2(2.7)	2(2.7)	-	3.92	.361
Limited support from paraprofessionals impede my work	16(21.6)	58(78.4)	-	-	3.22	.414
Overcrowded classrooms affect my work	74(100)	-	-	-	4.00	-

The results examined the concerns of Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) regarding the implementation of inclusive education. Thirteen items were used to explore these concerns among 74 SERTs. The findings revealed that SERTs are significantly stressed by the need to meet the diverse needs of learners with special educational needs. Specifically, 54 respondents (73.0%) strongly agreed and 20 (27.0%) agreed with this concern, resulting in a mean score of 3.73. This percentage and mean score indicate that SERTs experience considerable stress in their work, likely due to the varied behaviors and learning needs they must address. This aligns with findings from Brunsting et al. (2014), Feng and Sass (2013), Pepe and Addimando (2013), and Hawkins (2023), who identified SERTs as experiencing higher levels of stress compared to regular school teachers, leading to greater job dissatisfaction. Emotional exhaustion among SERTs in implementing inclusive education was also noted.

The study further highlighted the isolation of SERTs as a concern in their practice of inclusive education in schools. About 58 respondents (78.4%) strongly agreed or agreed that they experience isolation in their role, while 16 (21.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Although this concern was notable, the variability in responses suggests that not all SERTs view isolation as a major issue in their practice. This finding corroborates Prather-Jones (2011), who identified lack of administrative support, large caseloads, the demands of IEP paperwork, and professional isolation as key concerns for SERTs. The professional isolation may stem from other teachers not recognizing SERTs as colleagues due to the distinct nature of their work compared to general practices in regular schools.

Another concern raised by SERTs is the inadequacy of professionals in the field of special education to support learners with special educational needs. All 74 respondents (100%) endorsed this concern, with a mean score of 4.0, indicating that they view the shortage of SERTs as a significant issue impacting their practice of inclusive education. The limited number of SERTs places considerable pressure on those available, leading to overwork and potentially affecting the quality of the services they provide.

The increasing number of learners with special educational needs contributes to anxiety and stress among SERTs. As school enrollments and the number of learners with special needs grow each year, teachers are faced with larger class sizes. A majority of SERTs—40 (54.1%)—strongly agreed that large class sizes are a major source of stress, while 34 (45.9%) agreed that this is a concern. The results clearly indicate that SERTs consider large class sizes a major factor influencing their practice of inclusive education. This finding aligns with Kuyini and Mangope (2011), who noted that SERTs struggle to coordinate instructional arrangements for learners with diverse learning needs in large classes. Johnson and Newton (2014) share similar concerns, as reported by Ballhysa and Flagler (2011), who found that overcrowded classrooms negatively impact SERTs' work.

Limited appreciation for SERTs' work is another issue. According to the results, 10 respondents (13.5%) strongly agreed, and 38 (51.4%) agreed that a lack of appreciation is a concern in the practice of inclusive education in basic schools. However, 22 respondents (29.7%) disagreed that limited appreciation is a pressing issue, while 4 (5.4%) strongly disagreed. The variability in responses indicates that nearly half of the respondents do not view a lack of appreciation as significantly affecting their work. The lack of appreciation by colleagues, which affects the enthusiasm of special educators, is supported by Platsidou (2010) and Prather-Jones (2011).

The study explored the availability of materials and resources for SERTs in their practice of inclusive education. All respondents expressed concerns about not having the requisite materials and resources for their work. Specifically, 28 respondents (37.0%) disagreed, and 46 (62.2%) strongly disagreed that they had access to materials that would enhance their work. These findings align with Goldan and Schwab (2020), Jury et al. (2023), Nketsia et al. (2016), and Gokalp and Demirok (2021), which identified inadequate resources and facilities as major factors inhibiting the practice of inclusive education. SERTs face difficulties in preparing and sourcing materials to support learners with special needs.

The study also revealed that limited funding is a significant concern for inclusive education in Ghanaian schools. All respondents 41 (55.4%) strongly agreed and 33 (44.6%) agreed that limited funding affects their practice of inclusive education. Funds are essential for procuring resources and assistive technologies to support learners with special educational needs. However, basic inclusive schools receive no dedicated funding, making it challenging for SERTs to address students' needs. The Capitation Grant allocated to schools is often used for minor repairs and other needs rather than for supporting learners with special educational needs. This finding supports Jury et al. (2023), who identified inadequate human resources, material resources, spatial resources, and funding as major challenges in the practice of inclusive education.

SERTs also expressed concerns about having limited time to plan educational programs for learners with special needs. Specifically, 26 respondents (35.1%) strongly agreed, and 48 (64.9%) agreed that limited time affects their practice of inclusion. The constraints on SERTs' time are attributed to the heavy workload and other responsibilities associated with inclusive education. These findings are consistent with Mihajlovic (2020) and Harper (2017), who noted that SERTs face challenges related to time for consultation and planning with regular teachers in inclusive settings. Inadequate time is a significant concern that affects the implementation of inclusive education in regular schools.

Other concerns raised by SERTs regarding the practice of inclusive education in regular basic schools include the negative impact of teachers' and administrators' views on the performance of high-achieving learners. This was evident from the responses, with 19 (25.7%) strongly agreeing and 55 (74.3%) agreeing that inclusive education affects the performance of high-achieving learners. The perception of how inclusive education influences high-achieving learners can impact teachers' and administrators' attitudes towards the program and potentially affect their commitment of resources to its implementation.

The study also found that SERTs were engaged in additional duties beyond their core responsibilities of supporting learners with special educational needs. A majority of SERTs—29 (39.2%) and 21 (28.4%)—viewed these additional duties as concerns affecting their practice, while a smaller group—12 (16.2%)—did not see them as interfering with their work. These additional responsibilities include administrative tasks and serving as substitute teachers. Hawkins (2023) corroborates this, reporting an increase in workload and administrative tasks for SERTs in the UK, with 62.86% of respondents indicating that these increased responsibilities affect their work.

SERTs also expressed a need for continuous professional development to stay updated on managing learners with special educational needs. This need was evident from the responses, with 70 (94.6%) agreeing and 2 (2.7%) strongly agreeing that professional development is essential for enhancing their pedagogical skills and knowledge. Despite the entry requirement of a degree in special education in Ghana, ongoing professional development is crucial for managing the diverse needs of learners. This appreciation for professional development aligns with the findings of Kuyini and Desai (2007), Bih (2022), Gyimah (2010), and Sucuoglu et al. (2013), who have reported

that a lack of training impacts the implementation of inclusive education and have advocated for teacher training.

Finally, the study revealed that overcrowded classrooms are a significant concern for SERTs in the implementation of inclusive education. The increasing number of learners makes it challenging for SERTs to address their unique needs fully. This finding aligns with Ballhysa and Flagler (2011), who highlighted that a lack of necessary training and overcrowded classrooms negatively affect teachers' practices.

5. Conclusion

This study revealed that SERTs face numerous concerns that hinder their work in inclusive education practices. These concerns include large class sizes and overcrowded classrooms, inadequate training for SERTs, lack of appreciation for their work, limited resources and funding, a shortage of professionals in special education, resistance to inclusive education due to its perceived impact on the performance of students without special needs, professional isolation, and insufficient time for planning activities. Overall, the concerns of SERTs significantly impact their ability to effectively implement inclusive education in basic schools.

Recommendations - The study has identified several concerns that SERTs face in implementing inclusive education. To promote the effective implementation of inclusive education, it is crucial to address these concerns promptly to prevent the development of attitudes that could undermine the program. Therefore, the study recommends the following:

➢ There should be a campaign to increase awareness and understanding of inclusive education.

➢ The Ghana Education Service, through the Special Education Division, should intensify both pre-service and in-service training on inclusive education.

➢ The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Special Education Division, should seek additional funding and resources to support the implementation of inclusive education.

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