

# Towards Inclusive Excellence: Examining the Struggles for Special Education Integration in Senior High Schools

Raphael Denteh<sup>1</sup>, Michael Mensah Gyasi<sup>1\*</sup>, Amankwa Thomas<sup>2</sup>, Frank Wisdom Kwasi Kloh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> St. Joseph's College of Education, Bechem

<sup>2</sup> St. Ambrose College of Education, Dormaa Kwamu

\*Corresponding Author

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## ABSTRACT

Students with special needs are subject to different challenges due to their disabilities. Some of these students have complex individual needs such challenges may be derived from school climate or interaction with people. Based on this, the study investigated the social, economic, and emotional challenges faced by the heads of Senior High School (SHS) in the inclusion of students with special needs in the Ahafo Region. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population consisted of all the heads of department and headmasters in each public Senior High School in Ahafo Region. A census sampling technique was used in selecting all 48 heads. A questionnaire was employed as a data collection instrument. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation and presented in tables, and bar charts. The study discovered that social ( $M=3.03$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ) and emotional ( $M=3.37$ ,  $SD=1.187$ ) are the major challenges that impede the effective implementation of inclusive education. It was recommended that the government of Ghana should devote enough funds to inclusive schools through the budget of the Ministry of Education. Adequate funds could help build an adaptable environment and restructure the available materials to enhance the learning activities of students with special needs.

**Keywords:** Inclusion, Special education needs, Students challenges, Senior High Schools

## INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a pivotal instrument for societal transformation and the progress of nations, representing an inalienable right that every individual should enjoy (Catherine & Mkulu, 2022; Altan, 2020). It acts as a primary gauge for a country's economic and social advancement (Altan, 2020). While Ghana aspires to ensure quality education for all, it faces challenges posed by the perceived learning difficulties experienced by students with special needs, impeding the realization of education for all (Raghupathi & Raghupathi, 2020).

The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana explicitly declares, "All persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities, and with a view to achieving the full realization of that right, basic education shall be free, compulsory, and available to all" (Government of Ghana, 1992). This constitutional mandate demands that all students be granted equal opportunities to access education in Ghana.

Students with special educational needs encompass a diverse range of requirements, including physical and mental health conditions necessitating specialized interventions, services, or support (Benitez & Carugno, 2023). Raising a child with special needs presents distinct challenges for parents (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). Addressing the needs of these students effectively involves a collaborative approach encompassing professionals, parents, and students whenever possible (American Foundation for the Blind, 2013). They require specialized services, materials in suitable formats (including braille), and adapted technology to ensure

equitable access to both core and specialized curricula, enabling them to compete effectively with their peers in school and society (American Foundation for the Blind, 2013). Notably, students with special needs encounter unique challenges resulting from their disabilities, which may arise from the school environment or interactions with others (Uchemadu, 2013). UNICEF (2020) highlights various types of disabilities, such as hearing impairment, visual impairment, intellectual disability, learning disability, and giftedness.

Inclusive education, as a guiding principle, underscores the imperative of granting every individual the right and opportunity to access education. It entails the full integration of students with diverse abilities into all facets of learning within the school environment, ensuring accessibility for all (Molina et al., 2021). Inclusive education aims to enhance academic and social interactions among students, effectively dismantling discriminatory barriers (Molina et al., 2021). The government of Ghana has endeavoured to mainstream students with special needs into regular education, striving to overcome the need for separate facilities for those identified as special (Benitez & Carugno, 2023).

Asiedu (2017) highlights that inclusive education in Ghana harbours several critical goals, including the removal of barriers to access and participation, ultimately fostering academic success and training. However, the full realisation of these aspirations faces significant challenges. These challenges span economic, social, and emotional dimensions. A central social and emotional concern for all students with special needs revolves around the risk of their disabilities becoming handicaps, often leading them to isolate themselves from broader society. Economically, the government confronts limitations in providing the necessary resources to support individuals with special needs. Furthermore, these students experience emotional hardships as they grapple with the stigma imposed by society (Onukwufor & Uchechi, 2017).

In order to effectively address the unique educational needs of students with special needs within regular schools, it becomes imperative to implement modifications in assessment procedures, adopt creative placement practices, and establish individualised educational programmes tailored to the specific requirements of these students (Ofori, 2018). Without these essential services, students with special needs risk exclusion from many learning activities. Pertaining to Articles 6 and 7 of the Disability Act (Act 715) of Ghana, there is an expectation that existing educational facilities providing public services should be restructured to ensure accessibility for disabled individuals, thereby creating equal opportunities for students with disabilities in society. However, a decade after the initiation of the pilot study related to this act, the original intent of the law is yet to be realised in the pilot schools, with inadequate physical accessibility still being experienced (Amos-Abanyie et al., 2012).

A notable issue is the deficiency of appropriate materials and facilities in Ghanaian institutions that would enable special needs students to effectively compete with their peers in both educational and societal contexts. Educational facilities, including washrooms, canteens, and playgrounds, often lack accessibility for individuals with disabilities, necessitating assistance from friends and teachers (Ofori, 2018). Furthermore, a prevalent negative perception among many teachers is that inclusive education generates additional work, potentially hindering its implementation. This underscores the crucial importance of sensitizing both citizens and institutions to the concept of inclusive education to ensure its successful adoption within the country.

Education For All (EFA) (2005) reported that an estimated 113 million students with disabilities face denial of entry into regular education, with a disproportionately high dropout rate due to unmet learning needs. Additionally, the prevalent perception that inclusive education demands substantial tasks and material resources, especially within the context of existing economic challenges, raises questions about its feasibility as an attainable objective.

Despite the emphasis on inclusive education, many Senior High Schools in Ghana continue to struggle with effectively integrating students with special needs into mainstream classrooms, resulting in inadequate support and poor academic outcomes for these students. This study sought to investigate the barriers and challenges that hinder successful integration of Learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) into mainstream classrooms in Senior High Schools in the Tano South municipality in the Ahafo Region of Ghana. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are some of the social challenges that impede the integration of SEN learners into mainstream classrooms in Ghanaian SHS?
2. What are some of the Economic challenges that impede the integration of SEN learners into mainstream classrooms in Ghanaian SHS?
3. What are some of the emotional challenges that impede the integration of SEN learners into mainstream classrooms in Ghanaian SHS?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Education, as emphasized by the OECD (2022), is an ongoing process of behavioural development that extends beyond the confines of school environments. Its scope encompasses physical and mental growth, preparing individuals to make meaningful contributions to society (OECD, 2022; Isola, 2019). In Ghana, a series of educational reforms have been introduced over the years with the primary objective of ensuring access, equity, and the delivery of high-quality education (Asiedu, 2017). The global education landscape has seen a significant paradigm shift with inclusion emerging as a paramount concept, emphasizing the importance of accommodating students with diverse needs (Sharma, 2015).

Inclusive education, a pivotal component of this shift, involves the integration of students with special needs into mainstream schools, provided that the requisite facilities and support systems are in place to ensure equitable access and the delivery of quality education. This approach necessitates fostering positive attitudes towards inclusive education, establishing inclusive education policies, and implementing comprehensive programmes to benefit all individuals.

As articulated by Obeng-Asamoah (2016), the essence of inclusion lies in the principle that students with special needs have the right to experience the full spectrum of school life, complete with necessary adaptations and support, alongside their peers without special needs who are receiving a general education. Before the adoption of inclusive education as a national policy in Ghana, the country had a historical backdrop in special education, dating back to 1936 when laws addressing education for students with special needs were enacted. Consequently, institutions such as special schools for the visually impaired and the hearing-impaired were established in 1946 (Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015). In essence, inclusive education's core tenet is the belief that every individual, including those with disabilities, is entitled to the right and opportunity to access education.

Up until 1994, Ghana lacked policies specifically governing the organization of inclusive education. It was the Salamanca Statement of that year that prompted countries, including Ghana, to start formulating policies for the planning and implementation of inclusive education (Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015). This milestone aligns with the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, which firmly enshrines education as a fundamental human right for all Ghanaians (Agbenyega, 2007). The Constitution stipulates, "The Government shall, within two years after Parliament first meets after the coming into force of this Constitution, draw up a programme for implementation within the following ten years, for the provision of free, compulsory, and universal basic education" (Article 38, Section 2). This constitutional provision underscores the government's commitment to ensuring access to quality education for all citizens, reinforcing the principles of inclusive education in Ghana.

In recent years, inclusive education has emerged as a widely embraced educational model, both in Ghana and across the globe. This paradigm shift recognises the importance of accommodating diverse learning needs within mainstream educational settings (Obeng-Asamoah, 2016). However, the successful execution of inclusive education critically depends on the attitudes and actions of school principals and other personnel involved in shaping the school's culture (Naami & Mort, 2023; Nyaaba et al. 2021). Despite the professed support for inclusion among teachers, studies by Agyire-Tettey et al. (2019) have revealed a significant disparity between their stated beliefs and their actual practices. Many teachers harbour the view that students with disabilities are better served in segregated classrooms, particularly those with more complex needs (Agyire-Tettey et al., 2019). This discrepancy underscores a fundamental challenge in the implementation of inclusive education.

Moreover, the lack of adequate support and resources, coupled with prevailing negative attitudes toward disability within Ghanaian schools, exacerbates the complexity surrounding inclusive education (Ofori, 2018). Discrimination against students with special needs further compounds these challenges, as highlighted by Obeng-Asamoah (2016). Such discriminatory practices not only hinder the educational experience of students with disabilities but also foster a sense of alienation and discouragement among them. Physical barriers within school environments pose additional obstacles to inclusive education, as identified by Pandey and Pandey (2017). These barriers, ranging from inaccessible buildings to inadequate facilities, impede the free movement of physically challenged students and hinder their participation in the learning process. Furthermore, students with special needs encounter a multitude of barriers and hazards across psycho-social, emotional, and physical dimensions, as pointed out by Nyaaba et al. (2021). These challenges underscore the formidable task faced by governments, school administrators, and students with disabilities in realizing the vision of inclusive education. Addressing these complex issues require a concerted effort to promote awareness, foster positive attitudes, and provide the necessary support and resources to create truly inclusive learning environments.

Studies conducted in various countries outside of Ghana have shed light on the challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive education for students with special needs. Shanjuvigasini et al. (2022) identified several key issues and obstacles hindering the successful adoption of inclusive education practices. These challenges include a lack of transportation facilities for students with disabilities, negative attitudes among both general education and Special Education teachers, inadequate training for educators, unfavourable attitudes of peers toward students with disabilities, insufficient resources allocated for inclusive education, and large class sizes. Similarly, the study by Johnstone et al. (2020) highlighted the persistent challenge of providing the necessary facilities to support the educational journey of students with special needs. This includes issues related to the availability of appropriate equipment, teacher training, funding, and legal and administrative constraints, all of which pose significant barriers to the advancement of special education initiatives. Onukwufor and Uchechi (2017) emphasized the role of economic factors in impeding the effective implementation of inclusive education, particularly for students with visual impairment. They pointed to inadequate funding for inclusive schools, a shortage of personnel trained to support students with special needs, insufficient training for staff, and a lack of funding for essential technological materials as key hindrances.

The findings highlight the diverse array of challenges, spanning social, economic, and emotional realms, confronting inclusive education efforts worldwide. Overcoming these hurdles necessitate holistic approaches encompassing financial backing, training for personnel, infrastructure enhancement, and policy revisions. These measures collectively aim to foster an environment conducive to the integration and achievement of students with special needs.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. This is because the study aimed at giving an accurate description of the situation of the inclusion of students with special needs. This design was appropriate since the researcher aimed to collect data on the challenges affecting Senior High Schools (SHS) in inclusive education. For the study, the population consisted of all heads of departments, and headmasters at the public Senior High Schools in Ahafo Region of Ghana. The target population consisted of 48 identified heads of department and headmasters at five selected senior high schools in the Ahafo Region. These heads were selected and used because they have been involved in the education and management of students with special needs for a long time and as such have gathered enough experience, awareness, and insight through their teaching of students with special needs.

In determining the sample size, all 48 heads of departments and headmasters at the various Senior High Schools in the Ahafo Region were used. Given the relatively small number of respondents, a census sampling technique was adopted to select all the 57 headmasters in the various Senior High Schools in Ahafo Region.

In census sampling, every element of the study population is considered. A questionnaire was employed as a data collection instrument. The questionnaire was a closed-ended type in the form of a Likert scale which



contained statements designed for the respondents on the challenges in the inclusion of students with special needs. The items of the questionnaire were built on social, economic, and emotional challenges that hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education for students with special needs. Response levels were anchored on five-point consecutive integers from Strongly Agreed (SA) = 5, Agreed (A) = 4, Uncertain (U) = 3, Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 2 and Disagreed (D) = 1.

To ensure validity of the instrument, the items in the questionnaires were designed to cover each variable in the research questions raised. The reliability scores were also calculated using Cronbach’s alpha, and yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.59. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, tables, and bar charts. Coded data on responses were fed into the computer-based programmed, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23.0 for display and analysis.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Challenges that Impede Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education

The challenges impeding effective implementation of inclusion education at the SHS in the Ahafo Region were categorised into three components i.e., social, economic, and emotional components. These three components faced by the heads of Senior High Schools (SHS) in the inclusion of special needs students are presented in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3.

#### *Social challenges that impede the effective implementation of inclusive education*

The respondents were asked to state the social challenges that impede the effective inclusion of students with special needs and to rank their level of agreement or disagreement along a number of constructs. The study used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”, in descending order. In addition, the Mean (X), and standard deviation (SD) were computed. Table 1 presents the result.

**Table 1: Responses on the social challenges in implementing inclusive education**

Social challenge	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Inefficiency of teachers to develop and use instructional materials for inclusion	3.92	1.028	1
Difficulties in physical access to school infrastructure	3.75	1.158	2
Large enrollment in the classroom	3.67	1.038	3
Improper curriculum adaptation	3.33	1.404	4
Negative attitude of the society towards students with special needs	2.23	1.115	5
Attitudes of administrators and policy planners toward inclusive education	2.21	1.336	6
Attitudes of teachers toward inclusive education	2.10	.831	7
<b>Average mean</b>	<b>3.03</b>	<b>1.13</b>	

Note:  $\leq 3.0 = \text{Disagreed}$   $\geq 3.0 = \text{Agreed}$

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The data in Table 1 indicate that the inefficiency of teachers to develop and use instructional materials for inclusion impedes the effective implementation of inclusive education for students with special needs. This statement had a mean score of 3.92 and a standard deviation of 1.028. Moreover, the respondents agreed that difficulties in physical access to school infrastructure impede the effective implementation of inclusive

education for students with special needs. This finding had a mean score of 3.75 and a standard deviation of 1.158. With a mean score of 3.67 and a standard deviation of 1.038, the respondents agreed that large enrolment in the classroom impedes the effective implementation of inclusive education for students with special needs. Furthermore, on the issue that improper curriculum adaptation impedes the effective implementation of inclusive education, the respondents agreed with the statement. This statement has a corresponding mean score of 3.33 and a standard deviation of 1.404.

However, the respondents disagreed that the negative attitude of society towards students with special needs impedes the effective implementation of inclusive education for students with special needs. This statement had a mean of 2.23 and a standard deviation of 1.115. Moreover, with a mean of 2.21 and a standard deviation of 1.335, the respondents disagree that the attitudes of administrators and policy planners toward inclusive education impede the effective implementation of inclusive education of students with special needs. Furthermore, with a mean score of 2.10 and a standard deviation of 0.831, the respondents disagreed with the attitudes of teachers toward inclusive education. These statements failed to meet the predetermined cut-off point of 3.0.

The overall mean indicates that there are social challenges that impede the effective implementation of inclusive education. The finding revealed that the inefficiency of teachers to develop and use instructional materials for inclusion, difficulties in physical access of school infrastructure, large enrollment in the classroom, and improper curriculum adaptation impede the effective implementation of inclusive education.

### ***Economic Challenges that impede the effective implementation of inclusive education***

This section sought to establish economic challenges that hinder the implementation of inclusive of students with special needs. The study used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, in descending order. The mean (X), and standard deviation (SD) were computed. Table 2 presents the results.

**Table 2: Responses on economic challenges in implementing inclusive education**

<b>Economic challenges</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Unsatisfactory financial resources for classroom maintenance to meet students with special needs	3.56	1.090	1
Inadequate number of teachers for inclusive education	3.54	1.271	2
Lack of support from quasi or non-governmental or agencies	3.35	1.360	3
Inadequate funding to purchase the necessary technological materials	3.04	1.383	4
Inadequate funds for health services support	2.95	1.288	5
Inadequate funding of inclusive schools	2.71	1.352	6
Students unable to afford basic necessities	2.00	.799	7
Inadequate funds to get the curriculum materials	1.85	1.031	8
<b>Average score</b>	<b>2.87</b>	<b>1.196</b>	

Note:  $\leq 3.0 = \text{Disagreed}$   $\geq 3.0 = \text{Agreed}$

As depicted in Table 2, with a mean of 3.56 and a standard deviation of 1.090, the respondents agreed that unsatisfactory financial resources for classroom maintenance to meet students with special needs impede the inclusion of students with special needs. Moreover, the respondents agreed that the inadequate number of

teachers for inclusive education hinders the implementation of inclusion of students with special needs. This statement had a mean of 3.54 and a standard deviation of 1.271. Concerning whether lack of support from quasi or non-governmental or agencies hinders the implementation of inclusive education in Senior High Schools, the majority of the respondents agreed to that. This statement had a mean of 3.35 and a standard deviation of 1.360. On whether inadequate funding to purchase the necessary technological materials hinders the implementation of inclusive education, the respondents agreed with the statement. The findings depicted a mean score of 3.04 and a standard deviation of 1.383.

On the contrary, the respondents disagreed that inadequate funds for health services support impede the effective implementation of inclusive education of students with special needs. This statement had a mean of 2.94 and a standard deviation of 1.288. In addition, with a mean of 2.71 and a standard deviation of 1.352, the respondents disagreed that students' inadequate funding of inclusive schools impedes the effective implementation of inclusive education of students with special needs. Conversely, the respondents disagreed that Students unable to afford basic necessities impede the effective implementation of inclusive education of students with special needs. This statement had a mean score of 2.00 and a standard deviation of 0.799. However, the respondents disagreed with inadequate funds to get the curriculum materials. This statement had a mean of 1.85 and a standard deviation of 1.031. These statements failed to meet the cut-off point of 3.0.

The overall mean showed that economic challenges are not the major factors hindering the implementation of inclusive of students with special needs. The finding indicates that inadequate funds for health services support, inadequate funding of inclusive schools, students unable to afford basic necessities, and inadequate fund to get the curriculum materials are not challenge that impede the implementation of inclusive of students with special needs.

***Emotional challenges that impede the effective implementation of inclusive education***

This section provides data on the emotional challenges that hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education of students with special needs. The study used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, in descending order. The mean (X), and standard deviation (SD) are computed. Table 3 highlights data from the respondents.

**Table 3: Responses on emotional challenges in implementing inclusive education**

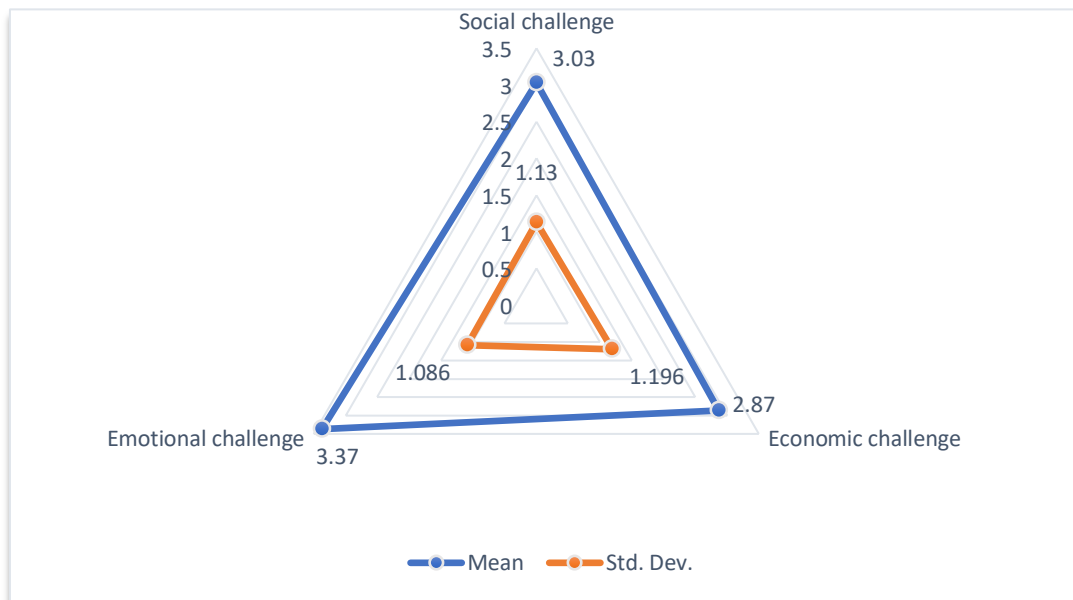
Emotional challenges	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Anxious feelings by some of the special needs students	3.56	1.185	1
Negative self-perceptions of students with special needs	3.52	1.173	2
Inadequate cooperation among teachers and students	3.40	1.250	3
Marginalization of students with special needs	3.35	1.246	4
Negative attitudes of normal peers toward special needs students	3.33	1.173	5
Loss of sense of belonging of special needs students	3.03	1.086	6
<b>Average score</b>	<b>3.37</b>	<b>1.187</b>	

Note:  $\leq 3.0 = Disagreed$   $\geq 3.0 = Agreed$

The response from the importance index ranking (Table 3) indicates that the highest-ranked emotional challenges that hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education are; anxious feelings by some of the special needs students. This statement had a mean of 3.56 and a standard deviation of 1.185 Also, Negative self-perceptions of students with special needs were the next emotional challenges that hindered effective implementation of inclusive education. This statement had a mean of 3.52 and a standard deviation of 1.173.

However, the respondents agreed that inadequate cooperation among teachers and students hinders the effective implementation of inclusive education. This statement had a mean of 3.40 and a standard deviation of 1.250. Again, with a mean score of 3.35 and a standard deviation of 1.246, the respondents agreed that the marginalization of students with special needs hinders the effective implementation of inclusive education. Conversely, the respondents agreed that negative attitudes of normal peers towards special needs students hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education. This statement had a mean of 3.03 and a standard deviation of 1.086. All these statements met the mean cut-off point of 3.0.

The overall mean shows that emotional challenges that impede the effective implementation of inclusive education. It appears from the study that anxious feelings by some of the special needs students, negative self-perceptions of students with special needs, inadequate cooperation among teachers and students, marginalization of students with special needs, negative attitudes of normal peers towards special need students, and loss of sense of belonging of special need student impede the effective implementation of inclusive education. Given the three components of the challenges faced by the heads of Senior High School (SHS) in the inclusion of special needs students, simple averages of each of the components were computed. Figure 1 presents the summary.



**Figure 1: Summary of challenges components**

As presented in Figure 1, the social challenges faced by the heads of Senior High School (SHS) in the inclusion of students with special needs had a mean score of 3.03 and a standard deviation of 1.13. Again, the economic challenges in the inclusion of students with special needs had a mean score of 2.87 and a standard deviation of 1.196. On the other hand, the emotional challenges in the inclusion of students with special needs had a mean score of 3.37 and a standard deviation of 1.086. This indicates that emotional challenges are the major problems faced by the heads of Senior High School (SHS) in the inclusion of students with special needs.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The analysis of the results highlights significant findings regarding the obstacles hindering the effective implementation of inclusive education for students with special needs. Social challenges emerged as pivotal barriers, with an aggregate mean of 3.03. Issues such as teachers' inefficiency in developing and utilizing instructional materials for inclusion, physical accessibility constraints within school infrastructure, large class sizes, and inadequate curriculum adaptation were prominent social factors hindering effective inclusive education in Senior High Schools in the Ahafo Region of Ghana. These findings resonate with the research of Pandey and Pandey (2017), who identified various social impediments including the absence of ICT tools and related competencies, parental attitudes, deficient policy planning and implementation, and other social factors



hindering both traditional students and those with special needs, significantly impeding the inclusion process. Similarly, Ofori's (2018) study echoed these sentiments by underscoring the widespread lack of support and prevailing negative attitudes towards disability within Ghanaian schools, contributing to the overarching confusion surrounding inclusion.

Examining economic challenges, the study revealed that while they are not major impediments, they still pose notable obstacles to the effective implementation of inclusive education for students with special needs, as indicated by an aggregate mean of 2.87. Factors such as unsatisfactory financial resources for classroom maintenance to accommodate students with special needs, an inadequate number of teachers for inclusive education, lack of support from quasi or non-governmental agencies, and insufficient funding to purchase necessary technological materials sometimes affect the efficacy of inclusive education. These findings align with Shanjuvigasini et al. (2022), who identified a lack of support and an inadequate number of teachers for inclusive education as key issues and obstacles hindering the successful adoption of inclusive education practices. This finding further corroborates the assertions of Onukwufor and Uchechi (2017), who emphasized that economic factors such as an inadequate number of teachers for inclusive education, insufficient funding for inclusive schools, and a lack of resources for essential technological materials are significant hindrances to the effective implementation of inclusion, particularly for students with visual impairments.

The study also uncovered significant emotional challenges that impede the effective implementation of inclusive education. These challenges encompass anxious feelings among some special needs students, negative self-perceptions of students with special needs, inadequate cooperation among teachers and students, marginalization of students with special needs, negative attitudes of their peers, and a loss of a sense of belonging among special needs students. These emotional factors collectively hinder the successful integration of inclusive education practices. This resonates with the findings of Pandey and Pandey (2017), who identified negative attitudes of normal peers, discrimination against students with special needs, and marginalization as emotional factors that hinder effective implementation. Additionally, the identification of discrimination against students with special needs as a significant obstacle aligns with the research conducted by Obeng-Asamoah (2016), who emphasized that discrimination leads to feelings of unacceptance among these students, ultimately discouraging their participation in inclusive education initiatives.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Inclusive education has assumed a pivotal role in the global education stage. The fundamental tenet of inclusive education is to ensure that every individual is granted the right and opportunity to receive an education. It was apparent that the heads of Senior High Schools (SHS) in the Ahafo Region face a myriad of challenges, encompassing social, economic, and emotional dimensions, in effectively implementing the inclusion of students with special needs.

Of these challenges, emotional obstacles emerged as the most significant impediments to the successful implementation of inclusive education. The study revealed that various emotional factors, including feelings of anxiety among some special needs students, negative self-perceptions within this group, inadequate cooperation among both teachers and students, the marginalization of special needs students, negative attitudes from their non-special needs peers, and a diminished sense of belonging among these students, collectively hinder the effective execution of inclusive education.

In light of these findings, several recommendations are put forth. Firstly, it is suggested that non-governmental organizations and philanthropists within the country step in to provide support to students with special needs, particularly in the provision of necessary tools and resources. Additionally, the government should establish and enforce comprehensive policies for inclusive education, ensuring their effective implementation to promote inclusivity. The Ministry of Education, along with other stakeholders, should work to foster awareness about the importance of displaying love, affection, and concern towards students with special needs.

Moreover, it is crucial to encourage students with special needs to embrace their conditions and focus on their positive attributes, promoting a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. In doing so, we can

move closer to realizing the ideals of inclusive education, where every individual has the opportunity to access quality education and thrive within an inclusive educational system.

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