

The Theory of planned behaviour as a framework for predicting and implementing effective inclusive practices

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study conducted in Ghana using a framework based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) for predicting effective teaching practices in inclusive classrooms from educator attitudes, knowledge, and principal's expectations.

Regression and Discriminant Function analyses of survey and observation data showed that in the context of the Theory of Planned Behaviour attitudes toward inclusion (attitude element) and knowledge of inclusion (perceived behavioural control element) predicted effective teaching.

The paper argues that The Theory of Planned Behaviour can be useful for examining the relationships between the critical variables impacting on inclusion, and for establishing realistic approaches to implementing effective inclusive classroom practices.

Introduction

The promulgation and implementation of inclusive education policies and programs across different political-socio-cultural and educational contexts during the past decade has heralded the urgent search for factors and strategies engendering successful inclusive classroom practices. The research focus and literature have explored many school and educator related factors that either hinder or enhance inclusion. While some have demonstrated that contextual realities of schools such as their policies, organisation and routines, and resources (Ainscow, 1999; Booth, et al., 2000; OECD, 1995, 1997) are critical to successful practice, others (Avramidis, et al., 2000; Cook, 2001; Cornoldi, et al., 1998; Desai, 1995; Leyser, et al., 1994; Praisner, 2003; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Shimman, 1990; Soodak, et al., 1998) have shown that educator factors such as attitudes, knowledge and skills, and student factors, such as type and severity of disabilities, are equally important in defining the chances of success in school practices.

Further, research indicates that the capacities of educators to demonstrate behaviors that engender successful practices in classrooms are indispensable to the success of the entire enterprise (Lipsky & Gartner, 1998, Cook, 2001, Shuma and Vaughn, 1995; Ainscow). This conclusion hinges on the notion that educator behaviour is the requisite vehicle for putting to use all of the philosophies and strategies that are required in any one school context. Indeed, without a human vehicle, the structural, organizational and resource provisions are of little or no use. In spite of this, some research reports have raised concerns about the capacity of teachers to demonstrate appropriate teaching behaviors/practices central to meeting the needs of students with disabilities in regular classrooms. For example, Baker and Zigmond (1990, 1995), Schumm, et al. (1995) and Scott, et al. (1998), reported that teachers have often used more undifferentiated large-group instruction with few adaptations to meet the needs of included students, due to limited or no knowledge of inclusive education strategies (Schumm & Vaughn; 1995; Tomlinson, et al., 1997).

What is clear is that few studies have explored the relationships between the school contextual and teacher variables on the one hand, and the teaching behaviors/practices of teachers on the other. In fact, teacher attitude is known to be a consistent factor determining the success or failure of inclusion, and when it comes to the link between behaviour and attitudes in inclusion implementation, these authors argue that it is more important to explore and understand the relationships between teachers' behaviours in classrooms and the critical variables known to impact on inclusive education implementation.

Nonetheless, the available research appears not to have adequately focused on or taken a comprehensive view of teacher-behaviour in a way that encompasses the critical variables of attitudes, knowledge and policy expectations, which agreeably drive the inclusive education agenda (Avramidis, et al., 2000; Cornoldi, et al., 1998; Desai, 1995; Praisner, 2003; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Sharma, 2001).

This paper will argue, on the bases of a study in Ghana and the earlier work of Kalivoda, (1991), Lumpe et al (1998) and Stanovich & Jordan (1998) that such a comprehensive view of teacher-behaviour can be provided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985), as it can be useful in examining the relationships between the critical variables impacting on inclusion implementation. It argues further that the theory is also useful in guiding the establishment of realistic approaches to implementing effective inclusive classroom practices.

Study Context and Aims

In the spirit of the policy statement emanating from the 1994 Salamanca conference on inclusive education, the Government of Ghana launched two programs (The Community-Based Rehabilitation Program and the Inclusive Education Program) to reform the system of service delivery and educational provision for students with disabilities. As with many other inclusive programs in developed and developing countries, contextual, educator and student factors are critical to any success. (Desai, 1995; Friend & Bursuck, 1996, 2002; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). Undoubtedly, these elements (attitudes, knowledge, teaching practices, and principals' expectations) have the potential to significantly impact on the implementation of the inclusive education program in Ghana as has happened in other countries.

The aims of this study were to determine whether the predictor variables of educators' attitudes toward including students with disabilities in regular classrooms and educators' knowledge of inclusive education practices were significantly related to effective inclusive school practices. Additionally, the study sought to explore whether the type of expectations principals brought to bear on teachers influenced their teaching in inclusive classrooms.

The variables selected for this study (educators' attitudes toward including students with disabilities, educators' knowledge of inclusive education practices, and principals' expectations) when seen in the context of Ajzen's (1985) Theory of Planned Behaviour, collectively represented the determinants of behavioural intention. the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985), which is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) asserts that behavioural intention is determined by three factors -*attitude towards a target behaviour, subjective norm (expectations of peers), and perceived behavioural control (knowledge)*.

Implementing effective inclusive practices involves a set of behaviours/activities and interactions on the part of several professionals, including principals and teachers, in order to

provide school and classroom modifications for students with special needs. These behaviours/activities and interactions will be influenced by educators' attitudes toward inclusive education, their knowledge of the nature and requirements for inclusive education practices and subjective norms (principals' expectations).

A number of studies (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Lumpe, et al., 1998; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998; Thousand & Burchard, 1990) employing The Theory of Reasoned Action and The Theory of Planned Behaviour in a variety of educational settings have given credence to the applicability of the theories in predicting relationships between the different variables. The literature in this regard has explored varying relationships between these key variables in educational settings. For example, Eagly and Chaiken (1993), Kalivoda (1991), Lumpe, et al.

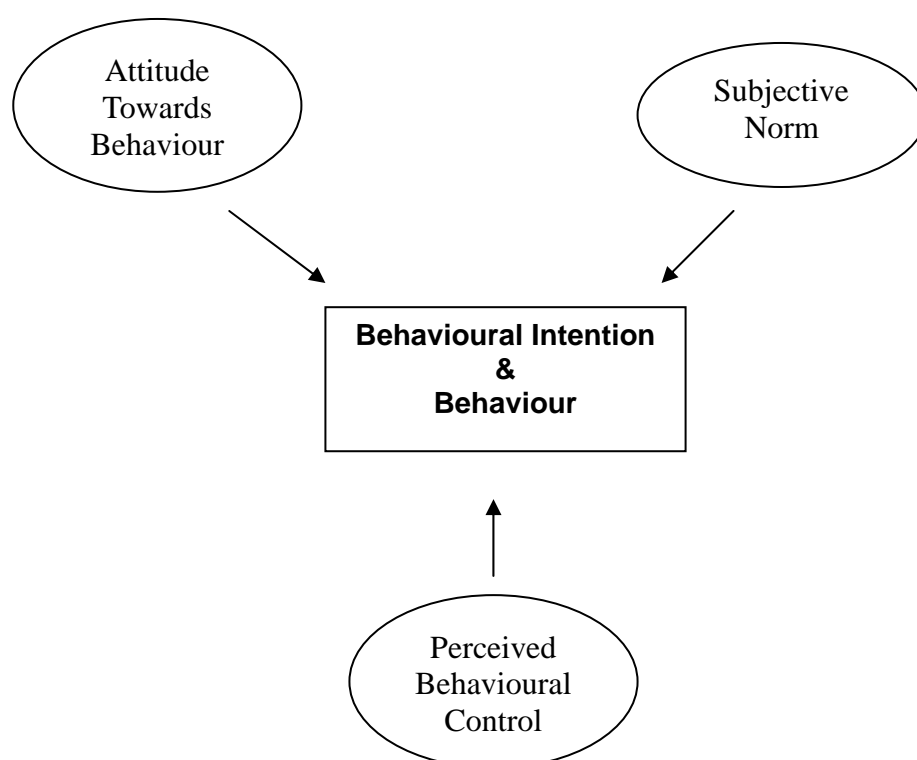


Figure 1: The Relationships between the Variables in the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

(1998) and Thousand and Burchard, (1990) found that attitude and perceived behavioural control were predictive of teachers' intentions to implement inclusive activities. On the other hand, Stanovich and Jordan (1994), Jordan, Stanovich and Roach (1997) and Stanovich and Jordan (1998), found that effective teaching behaviours were consistently predicted by subjective norms and attitudes toward behaviour.

Further, findings from others studies suggest that the type and quality of teacher-student interactions are influenced by the relationship between educators' attitudes toward inclusion and their knowledge of inclusion (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Brophy & Good, 1974; Cook, 2001; Cook et al., 2000; Van Reusen, et al., 2001).

Since effective instruction in inclusive settings requires continuous changes in the modes, frequency and quality of interaction between teachers and students, teacher knowledge of and attitudes toward some types of students can exert a significant influence on their behaviours in

inclusive settings. Thus, subject to the interplay between these key variables, many students with disabilities are likely to receive extra instructional attention, or unlikely to receive appropriate educational interactions and opportunities in inclusive classrooms (Cook, 2001).

Research Hypotheses

This study hypothesised that the more knowledge educators have about inclusion and the more positive their attitudes are toward including students with disabilities in their schools, the more effective their schools inclusive practices are likely to be. Additionally, teachers are likely to perform behaviours associated with effective teaching in inclusive classrooms when principals have high expectations of them.

Independent Variables

Dependent Variable

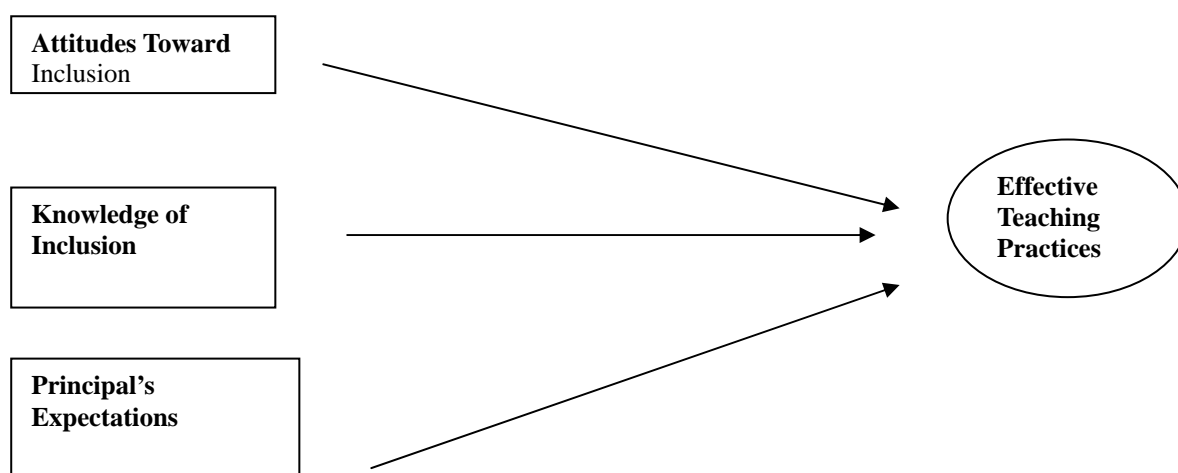


Figure 2: Study Model

Hypothesis 1: Teachers' attitude and teachers' knowledge will both be predictive of effective teaching practices, (over and above principals' expectations).

Hypothesis 2: Teachers who hold positive attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms are more likely to perform teacher behaviours congruent with inclusive classroom practices.

Hypothesis 3: Teachers who have more knowledge about inclusive education are more likely to display teaching behaviours congruent with inclusive classroom practices.

Hypothesis 4: Teachers are likely to perform behaviours associated with effective teaching in inclusive classrooms when their principals have high expectations of them.

Method

Data was gathered from a sample of principals and teachers in 20 rural and urban primary schools in Ghana. Multi-stage cluster sampling procedures were employed to select two districts from two designated zones (North and South) and 20 schools from the two selected districts. A total of 128 respondents including 20 school principals and 108 classroom teachers

participated in the study. The study employed surveys and participant observation, which involved the use of Four (4) sets of survey questionnaires and an observation checklist. The instruments included a:

1. Background Information Questionnaire
2. The Attitude Towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES)
3. Knowledge of Inclusive Education Scale (KIES).
4. Principals' Expectations Scale (PES) and
5. The Effective Teaching Practices Checklist (ETPC).

The Attitude Towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES)

The Attitude Towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES) was developed by Wilczenski (1992, 1995) to measure attitudes toward inclusive education on the four dimensions of academic, physical, social and behavioural aspects and needs of students with disabilities. The reliability analysis during its initial validation by Wilczenski showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.92, while the reliability analysis for the ATIES measure in this study showed a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .73.

Knowledge of Inclusive Education Scale (KIES)

This instrument was developed by the present authors for the purpose of measuring principals' and teachers' knowledge of inclusive education in Ghana, on the basis that knowledge of inclusion increases teachers' ability to provide classroom modifications for students with diverse needs (De Bettencourt, 1999; Leyser, et al., 1994; Schumm & Vaughn, 1995). The reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.88.

Principals' Expectations Scale (PES)

This instrument was developed to measure principals' expectations of teachers in the performance of inclusive activities/behaviours in schools. The scale was called Principals' Expectations Scale (PES). It was based on the assumption that expectations of teachers in the implementation of inclusive reforms are sets of behaviours that are accepted as group (school-staff) norms for inclusion.

In the context of the theoretical framework used for this study (the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Ajzen, 1985), these group norms represent the subjective norm element. The subjective norm is the third element of The Theory of Planned Behaviour, and is described as group expectations of the individual to perform behaviour. The reliability analysis of the PES showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.81.

The Effective Teaching Practices Checklist (ETPC)

The Effective Teaching Practices Checklist embodied a collection of teaching behaviours identified in the literature as practices that result in better student participation and learning in inclusive classrooms. According to Mitchell and CSER (2000), the notion of effective teaching is premised on the assumption that certain teaching behaviours are more likely than others to lead to certain desired student outcomes, and exert positive effects on student achievement (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000). The items generated for the checklist were interventionist in outlook, similar to The UNESCO Resource Pack (1993), which promotes an interventionist or organisational paradigm philosophy of special needs education (Ainscow, 1994, 1999; Clark, et al., 1995; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998).

The 28 items of the checklist consisted of 10 items related to Class Management, 11 items related to Lesson Planning /Presentation, and 7 items related to Adaptive Instruction. The reliability analyses showed Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.64, 0.62, and 0.78 for the subscales of Class Management practices, Lesson Planning/Presentation practices, and Adaptive Instruction practices respectively.

Data Collection

All respondents completed the Personal and Background Information Questionnaire, Attitude Towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES), and Knowledge of Inclusive Education Scale (KIES). Principals also completed the Principals' Expectations Scale (PES). A total of 128 questionnaires were returned.

Within the group of teachers already surveyed in each school, two teachers were randomly selected for observation of their classroom teaching sessions. The observed teachers in each school were selected from lists of teachers of classes in which students with disabilities were included. A total of 37 teachers were observed in the 20 schools.

Data Analysis

The data analysis to determine the research hypotheses involved the use of Multiple Regression Analysis and Discriminant Function Analysis.

The hypothesis that teachers' attitudes and teachers' knowledge will both be predictive of effective teaching practices, over and above principals' expectations, was examined by employing a multiple regression analysis, involving the variables of attitude (ATIES), knowledge (KIES), and principals' expectations (PES) as independent variables, and effective teaching practices (ETPC) as the dependent variable.

The independent variables of attitude, knowledge and principals' expectations were correlated with each other to find out if there was an overall relationship between the scores on the three measures, because 'regression will be best when each independent variable is strongly correlated with the dependent variable but uncorrelated with the other independent variables' (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001, p.116). The results showed no significant correlation between the three variables.

All the observed teachers had individual scores on the variables of Attitudes (ATIES), Knowledge (KIES) and Effective Teaching Practices (ETPC), but only principals responded to the measure of Principals' Expectations (PES). In order to include the influence of The Principals' Expectations (PES) measure (which was administered to only principals) in the analysis, the principals' scores on the PES were added as another variable taking the same value for each of the teachers in any one school.

To be certain of testing the effect of principals' expectations if it occurred, the PES variable was entered first, then the ATIES and KIES factors in each step-wise regression analysis with teachers' scores on the Class Management, Lesson Presentation and Adaptive Instruction practices.

Results

The result showed that the set of PES, ATIES and KIES factors did not have the power to predict Class Management and Lesson Presentation practices. However, some aspect of

attitudes and knowledge (ATIES and KIES factors) predicted adaptive instruction.

The other results of the multiple correlation analysis showed that teachers with more positive attitudes and knowledge of inclusion performed more teaching behaviours/practices congruent with effective teaching in inclusive classrooms, and provided further support to the conclusion that these two variables influenced effective teaching. Principals' expectations, however, did not influence teachers' instructional behaviour in the classrooms. The Discriminant Function analysis also indicated that principals who claimed more knowledge of inclusion on the administrative factor were making more provisions for inclusion in their schools

Discussion

The most significant finding of the study was that within the context of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, attitudes toward inclusion (the attitudinal element) and knowledge of inclusive education (the perceived behavioural control element) were predictive of effective teaching in inclusive classrooms. The principals' expectation of teachers (the subjective norm element) was not a significant influence on effective teaching. This finding of the study that a dimension of both attitude and knowledge (representing the attitudinal and perceived behavioural control elements of the Theory of Planned Behaviour) were predictive of effective teaching adds to the few other research studies in this area.

This study's finding is similar to that of Lumpe, et al. (1998), who found that attitude and perceived behavioural control predicted the use cooperative learning in science instruction. However, it departs from the findings of Stanovich and Jordan (1994), Jordan, et al. (1997) and Stanovich and Jordan (1998), which found effective teaching to be predicted by both attitudes and subjective norms.

Stanovich's and Jordan's (1998) conclusion motivated by the strong connection that they had found between the principal variable (subjective school norm) and effective teaching practices that school culture may affect the instruction offered by teachers in heterogeneous classrooms was not supported by the results of this study.

The subjective norm (Principals' expectations) in this study was not a significant contributor to effective teaching. This is in spite of the fact that in Ghana, authority figures still have a formidable capacity to influence subordinates, and leadership styles are still quite autocratic. One would have expected the Ghanaian principals to influence teachers' instructional behaviours through their expectations of them to implement inclusion. This result does not, however, negate the role of principals' beliefs in determining school culture and practices, which has been documented by Leithwood, et al. (1992).

In this study the factors (related to the school principals), which resulted in the limited contribution of the subjective norm element were the moderate-low expectations that principals had of teachers in implementing inclusion, their (principals) limited knowledge of inclusive education and the dual roles of the majority of the principals as both teachers and principals. It is reasonable to expect that the limited knowledge in regard to inclusion would bring into question the capacity of principals to determine and realistically assess what is expected of teachers in order to provide effective inclusive practices in their classrooms.

The other possible factor that could have influenced principals' expectations of the teachers was the dual roles of the majority of the principals as both teachers and principals. Such conflicting roles meant that the principals were less likely to be inclined to imposing the required education policy expectations on themselves as teachers. It could be argued that if all

the principals were solely administrators (far removed from the reality of the classroom

demands) their expectations (given adequate knowledge of inclusion requirements) would have been different. There is a need to cultivate school norms and culture for inclusion communicated more forcefully as expectations, but caution needs to be exercised in imposing inclusion on teachers.

Implications

The findings of this study show that the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) can be useful in examining the relationships between the critical variables of attitudes, knowledge and other contextual variables (including resources) on one hand, and the practices of inclusion in schools and classrooms on the other. In fact, by examining these relationships through the development and use of data collecting instruments, which include student, teacher and contextual variables central to inclusion, it is possible to establish realistic and optimistic approaches to diagnosing and understanding the chances and/or problems for inclusion programs in each school. Further, such an examination of the relationships between the different variables that affect the success of inclusion is perhaps more relevant to designing effective practices than mere descriptions of the nature of the each of the variables. In this study the relative contribution of the key variables have been identified and give direction to policy and training need priorities.

The findings of this study were in line with the literature, which suggests that successful inclusion hinges on developing and sustaining positive attitudes, increasing educator knowledge of inclusion through professional development, and providing clear expectations of inclusion for educators. The critical question highlighted by the results of this study in relation to the long-term success of Ghana's inclusive education practice is 'How effective can a mandated implementation of inclusion be if teachers lack knowledge and skills, have to deal with large class-sizes and are inadequately supported by peripatetic support teachers (skilled in inclusive practices) in their attempts to meet the overwhelming demands of inclusion'?

Thus, the impact of other contextual variables including class-sizes on attitudes (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) and the implementation of adaptive instruction needs to be addressed. In Ghana the problem of large class-sizes is more likely to endure for a considerable period of time, as it would require enormous resources (which are lacking) and planning to reduce classes to sizes that would facilitate inclusion. These issues are relevant in constructing measures for the perceived behavioural control component of the Theory of Planned Behaviour framework.

The great variability in the expectations of teachers in the schools in regard to inclusion demonstrated the negative effects of the lack of clear and specific policy guidelines for schools. This situation calls into focus the issue of standards and accountability. The issue of standards heightens the importance of curriculum access in the educational equation, since outcomes for all students are important in any evaluation of success. It appears the issue of standards has not yet gained centre stage with regard to inclusion in Ghana, because the balance of attention still leans towards ensuring participation rather than both participation and outcomes. While there has been a preoccupation with participation, plans need to be laid that will come to include standard outcomes for students with disabilities.

Some have argued that if the same standards are created and clearly communicated to

educators and other stakeholders, then it will become feasible to work towards achieving the

same goals for all students. In line with this argument, the Ghanaian program requires standards-based systemic reform that aligns all facets of policy to support standards for all students. Consistently, any policy framework for Ghana needs to address the issues of curriculum, personnel development and professional training, student assessment, accountability, administration and the resources for the inclusive education program. These are critical to constructing measures for the subjective norm component of the Theory of Planned Behaviour framework at ministerial and school building levels in order to provide uniform expectations for school principals and teachers.

Conclusion

In the context of The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985), this study set out to examine the extent to which principals' and teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and principals' expectations influenced inclusive practices in Ghana.

It was found that attitudes and knowledge were predictive of effective teaching. However, the variable of principals' expectations had no effect on the practices of inclusion. The study showed that further development of positive attitudes and increased knowledge of inclusion will be predictive of the success of inclusive practices. Comprehensive measures for the different components of the Theory of Planned Behaviour Framework therefore could be constructed for different educational contexts to assess the relationships between critical variables central to the success of inclusion in any one location.

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