

Perceptions and experiences of persons with disabilities on access to education in buea municipality, cameroon

Abstract

Introduction: Access to education is limited to most persons with disabilities, especially in Africa and Asia despite efforts being made by governments and NGOs working towards the removal of barriers to its accessibility. The study examined the experiences of persons with disabilities in their effort to safeguard their right to education.

Method: The study adopted qualitative method of data collection to gather information from three disability groups (hearing, visual and physically impaired) who were engaged in a three different focus group discussions.

Finding: The study found that access to education is limited to persons with disabilities as they have few opportunities to further their education. Education an essential service that would help empower persons with disabilities has become a preserve for those from families with sound financial background.

Conclusion: It is therefore recommended that the government takes the lead and makes conscious effort to make education accessible to persons with disabilities in Cameroon.

Keywords: persons with disabilities, education, accessibility, cameroon, family, perception

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Opoku MP,¹ Mprah WK,¹ Saka BN,² Badu E,¹ Joslin Dogbe¹

¹Centre for Disability Rehabilitation Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi-Ghana

²Pan African University, Institute of Governance, Humanities and Social Science, Soa-Yaounde, Cameroon

Correspondence: Joslin Dogbe, Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation Studies, School of Medical Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital, P.O. Box, Kumasi, Ghana, Tel 233-244271701, Email slimdogbe@gmail.com

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Introduction

In this competitive world, one must possess appropriate skills and good knowledge for one to survive. Access to quality education is the means through which individuals can acquire the required skills and knowledge to cope with the complexities of the world.^{1,2} Hence, the importance of education to the development of the individuals and the country as a whole cannot be doubted. Educated citizens are alert and highly knowledgeable of current issues in their country, and can contribute meaningfully to towards its development. In terms of health, education helps people to make informed decisions about their health and to take good care of themselves and their families.¹ For example; according to³ educated women are able to and more likely to seek prenatal care, assisted childbirth as well as post-natal care, than uneducated women, thus, reducing the rate of child and maternal mortality. Thus, education empowers and creates opportunity for people to be aware of their rights and to exercise those rights.³

Despite the importance of education and efforts being made to increase enrolment, persons with disabilities have generally limited access to education in many parts of the world, especially in Africa and Asia.⁴ For example, the United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF,⁵ indicated that there were 200million children with disabilities worldwide, out of which 67million were out of school as of 2005. The situation could be more serious for countries in Africa. For instance, World Health Organization⁶ indicated that only 0.3% out of 690,000 primary aged children with disabilities in Ethiopia was in school in 1997, In Rwanda, just 300 out of 10,000 deaf children were enrolled in school in 2001 and in Burkina Faso; only 10% of deaf children between 7 and 12years were in school as at 2006. In Lesotho, Singal, (2009) found that only 17% of the 30,000 children with disabilities were in basic schools in 1998. Although data on the

educational outcome of persons with disabilities in Cameroon are hard to obtain, the little available indicated that access to education for children persons with disabilities is very limited. For example, the International Centre for Evidence in Disability (2014) found that children with disabilities in the North West Region of Cameroon were 20 times more likely to be out of school compared to others without disabilities.

Many barriers prevent access to education for children with disabilities. Lack of books, unsuitable teaching methods, lack of well trained teachers, lack of schools and long distance walk to school, and high cost of school materials including books, pens, pencil, and text books have been identified as factors limiting access to enrolment and causing school dropouts among children with disabilities.⁶⁻¹¹ mentioned that physical access to school buildings is an essential requirement to make education accessible to children with disabilities. However, this condition is often ignored as most educational facilities are constructed without taking into account the concerns and needs of persons with disabilities. For example, narrow doors, inappropriate seating arrangements, rugged terrain, inaccessible toilet facilities, and lack of ramps are barriers that obstruct access to education for children who are physically and visually impaired.^{6,11} The perception of teachers that children with disabilities can only be educated in special schools has similarly been cited as a serious barrier to access to education for children with disabilities.¹²

The limited access to education for children with disabilities has made it difficult for persons with disabilities to acquire the basic skills required to compete with their counterparts without disabilities for employment in most sectors of the economy and this contributed greatly to the high rates of unemployment and poverty among them.¹³ It has become a matter of concern to international organizations and

donor agencies that have been encouraging governments to prioritize education for children with disabilities. For example, Article 17 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights,¹⁴ mentioned the need for every individual to have access to education. Similarly, UN Decade of Disabled Persons,¹⁵ prioritized education and training of persons with disabilities in order to create equal opportunities for all persons in every society (UN, 1982). Also, Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities urges governments to improve access to education for children with disabilities.¹⁶

Cameroon has made a lot of strides in special education since 1975 when Ministry of Social Welfare was tasked to oversee the education of persons with disabilities. The special education was given further boost with the passage of Law No.83/13 in 1983 which mentioned that persons with disabilities will receive education in specialized classes, integration in ordinary schools and training in specialized institutions.^{17,18} However, Arrah & Swain,¹⁹ found that there were only 10 specialized institutions in Cameroon in which only two are owned by the government. UNESCO (1995) mentioned that there is no administrative structure in place to manage special education in Cameroon. Also, little is known about the challenges persons with disabilities encounter in the educational system in Cameroon. It is important that studies are conducted to engage persons with disabilities in order for them to share their experiences in relation to access to education. This explored the experiences of persons with disabilities in the educational in Cameroon. Specially, the study documented the obstacles persons with disabilities encounter accessing education in Buea Municipality. The aim was to understand their challenges and to make them visible for action.

Materials and methods

Study design and type

The study adopted qualitative method to collect data on the extent to which persons with disabilities participate in education in Cameroon and the barriers they encounter when exercising this right. Since issues concerning persons with disabilities are complex and best explained through personal narratives it is important that opportunity is given to participants in the study to freely express their views on how their disabilities interacted with social, cultural and economic factors that limit their access to education.

Study area

This study was conducted in Buea, which is a Municipal council area and presently the Headquarters of the South West Region of Cameroon. Buea has an estimated population of above 200,000 inhabitants made up of mainly Bakweris. The municipality also shares boundaries with other major towns, such as the City of Limbe to the South West, Tiko municipality to the South East, Muyuka municipality to the East and Idenau district to the West. The life expectancy in the area is 50 years and literacy rate was between 60% and 75%.

Sample and sampling technique

The population for study consisted of persons who are visually, physically, and hearing impaired living in the Buea Municipality in the South West of Cameroon. All the three groups are well-organized and have associations in the study area so it was easy to work with them. Participants for the study were recruited through purposive sampling technique. Since the study intended to assess the experiences of persons with disabilities on access to education in Buea Municipality,

it was proper to focus on persons who have adequate understanding of the research objectives and could adequately explain issues affecting education of persons with disabilities in the study area. The researchers liaised with leaders of the three disability groups who helped to identify 12 people from each disability group, capable of providing satisfactory answers to the interview questions. According to Tynan & Drayton,²⁰ focus group discussion with a maximum of 12 participants is ideal as it allows for easy interaction and decent moderation. All the 36 participants took part in a brief "training" which involved explaining the purpose of the study, the informed consent process and their rights and possible risks as participants in the study. All the 36 consented to be part of the study after the "training" and were made to sign the informed consent forms.

Method of data collection

Three different group discussions were organized, one group discussion with each disability group. A semi-structured focus group guide covering the following issues was used to moderate the discussions: access to school, family support, perception about disabilities and barriers limiting access to education. As much as possible, all participants were given the chance to speak during the discussions. In order to ensure equal participation, ground rules were set and read out to all the participants. Participants were told to respect the views of others, and raise their hands when they wanted to contribute. The discussions were audio recorded with permission from participants. Participants mostly spoke in Pidgin English which is the main language spoken by people in Buea. The hearing impaired participants used sign language and an interpreter translated by voicing their sign into a voice recorder.

Data management and analysis

The audio-recorded responses of each of the discussions were transcribed verbatim and separately by the researchers. Each of the two researchers listened to each audio recording several times before transcribing. The researchers read through the transcripts to correct any errors, ensure that transcriptions were done accurately and to be familiar with the responses. The researchers then developed a coding system based on the research questions, and this was used to mark out themes and ideas relevant to the research questions. The coding system involves the use of colours and alphabets to represent research questions and discussion groups respectively. There were three research questions and each was assigned a colour. Alphabets were used to differentiate themes from the three discussion groups. It means that each research question was assigned a colour and an alphabet that was assigned to the group. The researchers met and discussed the emerging themes, and based on the codes, similar themes from the three group discussions were grouped together. The major themes that emerged during the discussions included: perceptions about education for persons with disabilities, availability of facilities and barriers to accessibility. Relevant quotes from each of the groups were identified and linked to their respective themes.

Ethical considerations

The researchers sought approval from the Disabled Peoples' Organizations (DPOs) in Buea before the data were collected. Also, a written informed consent, translated from English to pidgin, was used to seek consent from all the participants. All participants signed the informed consent before they participated in the study.

Results

Demographic characteristics of participants

Of the 36 participants, majority; 20(55.6%) were females and 16 (44.4%) were males. Table I summarizes the rest of the demographic

characteristics of participants. A little over one-third (38.9%) were between 21 to 30 years while 8.3% were above 50years; the mean age was 30.2years. On employment, more than 40% were unemployed and nearly 50% had no formal education (Table 1).⁵

Table I Demographic Characteristics of participant

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
≤ 20	8	22.2
21-30	14	38.9
31-40	6	16.7
41-50	5	13.9
>50	3	8.3
Mean	30.2	
Education		
No formal Education	17	47.2
Primary	8	22.2
Vocational	11	30.6
Employment		
Government/Civil servant	3	8.3
Trading	5	13.9
Farming	2	5.6
Apprenticeship	7	19.4
None	15	41.7
Other	4	11.1

Themes of discussion

Themes explored during the focus group discussions included: perception about education of persons with disabilities, availability of facilities and barriers to accessibility. As the demographic information indicated, participants had very low educational attainment; none had university education and very few had education up to primary level. During the group discussions, participants explained the causes of their low educational attainment. This are discussed below:

Barriers to education

Lack of family support: Several participants mentioned that their family members were not supportive of their efforts to access education. Participants identified so many reasons why families could not support them. One of the main reasons identified by the participants was poverty. Due to poverty, parents could not educate all their children, but since educating children with disabilities is often not a priority, they are not supported. Two participants commented as follows:

Several participants were of the view that the economic conditions of their families did not allow them to support their education. Several participants mentioned that their families were not able to support them when it comes to purchasing of learning/didactic materials such as books, uniforms, sandals and other assistive devices that would have supported them to learn.

I went to school but stopped early because my parents were poor. I ended in primary 4. I was always not having anything for learning. I felt so neglected and no one was willing to give me money to buy books. I had no uniform and went to school bare footed all the time physically impaired.

I ended in form 2. My parents had so many responsibilities because we were many. There wasn't any money for me to go to school. I would have loved to continue but lack of money prevented me from going back to school. I know they tried .Physically impaired

My father gave birth to more than 10 children and I am the only one who was disabled. He told me he can't educate all of us since the others can study further than me. I was left home while all my other siblings were taken to school visually impaired.

Disabled are neglected in families and as you are aware education is not free. There are certain things that we might need for school but families are not ready to support us. My family treated me the same way so I had to stop and stay home. It is painful wanting to go to school while there is no one to support you .Physically impaired.

In the absence of support from families, some had to rely on philanthropists, such as, churches and individuals for support, but due to the cost involved, most of the philanthropists could not support them to complete their education.

There were people here who tried to support me to go to school because I was a good student. But they stopped paying my fees and giving me money for school. They were not my family so I have no problem or nothing against them and I know they wanted to help me but maybe they also had other responsibilities .Physically impaired.

Some whites came and they put us in private schools but all of a sudden the money was not coming again. For two years we didn't hear from them so the owner of the school sacked us from the school for non-payment of fees. I can't explain what happened but they left us along the way hearing impaired.

I was in the catholic school some time ago. They were not taking any money from us. Our families only gave us money for food and few things. My family was not supporting me and the church couldn't give me free education and feed me. The church told me to go home and bring my family but I didn't go back again hearing impaired.

Several participants discussed that their families did not have much income to support their education. Since the government has not provided facilities for persons with disabilities, private businessmen are providing education to them at a higher cost. This has made it difficult for persons with disabilities from poor homes to have access to education. Some participants discussed as follows:

My parents raised some money for me to go to school but I came back after one year. The fees are so expensive and we were to buy so many things to study. So my father told me he is tired and it was true. The school is so expensive visually impaired.

I went to school for the prospectors but didn't go there again. It is too much and they shouldn't expect those of us from poor families to be in such schools. They are collecting so much money from us and I don't have that kind of family who will give me that money hearing impaired.

Disability as a barrier: Responses from some of the participants seem to suggest that their disabilities made it impossible for them to enroll in school. According to participants, their families did not support their education on the onset of their disabilities. Families prefer to educate children without disabilities since persons with disabilities are looked down upon in many societies. Some participants shared their experiences as follows.²¹

My disability didn't allow me to go to school. I was born like this and normally the disabled are not taken to school so not much effort was made to send me to school. It is not only me. There are others who also tell me that they were not taken to school because of their disability visually impaired.

We were so many children and my father decided to keep me home and send the rest to school. They wanted to see if they could heal me so a lot of attention was focused there than taking me to school. I was grown up before my parents realized I have to live the rest of my life with my disability. It was too late to go back to school hearing impaired.

I was born with disability so my parents did not make much effort to take me to school. They didn't send me to school. It is not only me. There are others who also tell me that they were not taken to school because of their disability visually impaired.

The above comments could also mean that either families did not support them because of their disabilities or it was difficult for children with disabilities to go to school because of the inaccessible school environment.

Attitude of community: Attitude of community members towards educating children with disabilities was also an issue that was discussed extensively. Participants indicated that people had negative attitude towards educating children with disabilities because of the perception that they are incapable of making any positive impact on the society.

My parents were ready to support my education but people in the community discouraged them. They said it is a waste of money to educate disabled person so they listened to people and stopped me from going to school physically impaired.

At times when we would be in school and people from the community would come to pay us a visit to see how deaf people are learning. They think we can't study so they come to our school to see us. I feel bad when they tell us that is why they have come. We are humans who can study and work like anyone hearing impaired.

I don't go home during vacation because when I go home people in the community discourage me and I'm tired of hearing it. They keep asking what I'm doing at school. They surprise me a lot. Others even wonder how I live neither to talk about going to school. This is a cultural issue hearing impaired.

So even if family members were ready to provide education for their children with disabilities, pressure from neighbors could prevent them from doing so.

Distance to school: Distance to school was another major factor that hindered access to education for children with disabilities in the study area. Some participants explained that they dropped out of school because they could not walk to school and the daily transportation cost to and from school was too much for their families to bear.

I used to walk to school but when I became disabled I wanted to see if I can manage but I was always getting to school late and not being able to

follow lessons. There wasn't much effort and that explains why I had to be out of school .Physically impaired.

I was in the village and coming to school in town. My father couldn't continue to support me every day with transport fare and other school needs. I was not the only child so I was stopped from coming .Physically impaired.

The school I was attending was a bit far and I had to pick a taxi before I get there. My parents were determined to push me but I stopped going when my father died. My mother had to use the little she gets from trading to cater for us and my other siblings who could walk to the school .Physically impaired.

Lack of Educational Facilities: Participants were further engaged to discuss the availability of educational facilities for children with disabilities. The discussions revealed that there were no public schools in the Municipality to educate children with disabilities. Some of the participants alleged that public schools do not accept children with disabilities.

When you go to the schools in the community they tell you it is not meant for persons with disabilities and turn you away. That is how we have been treated in this country. Now if you don't have money, you have to stay home hearing impaired.

Thank God the Catholic Church accepted me in their school. The schools in the community didn't want to accept me. I can talk but I can't I hear and my father was trying to put me in a school around but they refused to admit me hearing impaired.

I know the schools in the community don't want disables. Some parents informed me about it so I followed up to the school and they told me they can't teach disables. I don't know what to tell them since they don't have money to send their children to private schools physically impaired.

The only schools that accepted children with disabilities are private schools established by individuals or missionaries (Catholic). Some of the participants shared their views in the following narrations:

There is no government school for deaf in this region. The government has not established one school to educate disables. I don't know of any government school in this community that is for disabled. The government is not interested in our education that is why no school has been built for us hearing impaired.

The government has not been providing education for disables in this country. Private schools are the only options available for us which not all people can afford. If your parents have the means then they will push you to go visually impaired.

We are all in catholic schools where we have been taught how to read and write. There are no public schools for us in this town. The church feeds us and provides us with few things that we need for school. We are very few in the school since the church can't cater for many people hearing impaired.

Several responses from the participants suggest that it would be hard for persons with disabilities to gain admission in any university in Cameroon because there are no facilities to accommodate students with disabilities.

No university will give me admission to come and study after I sit for final exams. I don't know where I will go. That is the system in Cameroon and I'm praying that leaders in this country try and address the issue. There are many deaf persons in this country and I don't understand why colleges don't want to admit us hearing impaired.

The catholic will employ us as priests and that is my only hope for now. No one can continue because the system doesn't favor us. We look up to the church to help us become priests or give us jobs here to teach other deaf children who are brought here to study. We can't progress further hearing impaired.

I tried entering one of the universities but they told me they don't have people there to teach me so I wasn't given admission. I came back to the school but the church couldn't employ me since they don't receive support from anywhere. I left and now I'm only selling few things in front of my house. I want to continue and study but the system is not in our favour hearing impaired.

Lack of resources: Participants also shared their views on the availability of resources that support the needs of children with disabilities in the schools. Several participants mentioned that children with disabilities needed resources that are tailored to cater for their needs for them to cope with teaching and learning. However, participants alleged that resources were not available and this hindered their participation in education.

I can't see and I quite remember when I was in the community school, they used to give me the same text book given to others during reading so I will only be sitting down and listening without participating in class activities. There was nothing there that was meant for me visually impaired.

Our government supplies no teaching and learning materials to the schools for us and that explains why school authorities think that the place is not meant for us. They have not considered us yet. Although you may want to go to school but the opportunities are not there making visually impaired.

Some participants complained of lack of assistive devices to assist them to cope with teaching and learning. Due to the high cost of these materials they were unable to acquire them hence; they were unable to have access to the needed resources.

Braille is expensive and not all families can afford it. We are many managing few devices that are available for us in the school. It will be very good if I had my personal one because I could send it to the University when I complete but it will take a miracle for me to get one now visually impaired.

At times I have to wait for days before I get the chance to use the machine. It makes you slow and unable to follow lessons regularly. I have no problem at all if everyone gets one to use. We can't write and that is our means to do so. I have too many materials I have recorded but I have not been able to transcribe them due to the problem (Visually impaired).

It rains a lot in this town and I have to crawl to school. My father carries me and come for me when we close but I don't know how long he will continue to do this. If he is not around that means I can't go to school. Although the road is not good but I can manage and reach there when I get a wheelchair (Physical impairment).

Lack of qualified teachers

Participants in all the three groups agreed that teachers did not have the necessary skills to teach children with disabilities. This especially applies to the hearing impaired that needs teachers who can communicate fluently in the sign language. The lack of well trained teachers affected their academic performance, and contributed to the mass failure of children with disabilities.

The teachers are not able to communicate properly with us because they were not trained to teach deaf students. I have failed the O'level exams so many times because we can't express ourselves well in the English language due to how they teach us .Physically impaired.

The trained teachers in the school come and learn the sign language from us so it is difficult for them to express themselves well to us. We need trained teachers who know the sign language to come and teach us. Last year almost all students who sat for the final exams failed but they are good students. The problem is the teaching method hearing impaired.

The problem is that most of the teachers are not trained. They are our senior students who couldn't further their education who are in the school helping us. Life wouldn't be difficult if there are trained and qualified teachers teaching us hearing impaired.

The above narratives, indicated that a wide range of complex factors were responsible for the limited access to education for persons with disabilities in the study. It should be mentioned that these are perspectives from the participants which could not be verified.

Discussion

The study explored the challenges persons with disabilities in the Buea Municipality faced when accessing education. The findings from the study indicated that access to education in Cameroon was

limited to persons with disabilities due to numerous barriers. These findings are not unique to Cameroon. The findings are consistent with findings from previous studies indicating persons with disabilities encounter insurmountable barriers in the educational system and this has resulted in the high rate of illiteracy amongst them.^{6,11,12,22-24}

One of the main barriers restricting access to education for persons with disabilities in the study area is the negative perception of people towards them. One of the major reasons for procreation in African, and for that matter, Cameroon, is for the children to support their parents in their old age.¹⁸ However, there are misconceptions about the capabilities of persons with disabilities. That is, there is the perception that person with disabilities cannot be educated, and also unproductive, which implies they cannot support their parents in their old age.²⁵ Thus, parents are more likely to invest in the education of their children without disabilities than those with disabilities. This particularly applies to poor families who have limited resources and would have to make choices among the children. This low expectation of society about the capabilities of persons with disabilities is probably the major reason for community members discouraging parents from investing in the education of their children with disabilities. This finding corroborates with studies by Aliman & Baffoe.²⁶ These previous studies found that perceptions about disability influenced the decision of families as to whether to enroll their children or not in school. However, the attitude of people in the area towards educating children with disabilities is very strange. The level of ignorance about the education of children with disabilities seemed to be unprecedented. This might explain why the people are unperturbed with lack of facilities to educate persons with disabilities.

The findings of the study showed that the government of Cameroon has done very little in terms of providing educational facilities for children with disabilities. It might be probably due to the general negative perception towards the education of persons with disabilities. Just as families would not spend on education of children with disabilities because they are perceived as unproductive and would not contribute to the sustenance of the family, government would also likely invest less in the education of people considered unproductive. It is not surprising that out of 10 special schools in Cameroon, only two are owned by the government. Thus, lack of schools that support the needs of children with disabilities in the area, despite the efforts being made to improve access to education in Cameroon, support this claim. It is possible that the government, with limited resources, would not invest in the education of a population that is perceived unproductive. The fact that there were no government special schools to cater for children with disabilities in the whole municipality, means that teachers in the general schools would lack skills to handle children with disabilities. School administrators in the general schools refusal to accept children with disabilities speak a lot on attitudes towards education for children with disabilities in Cameroon. Driedger²⁵ mentioned that general schools are not ready to accept children with disabilities due to the fact that school authorities think that the availability of the disabled will have a negative impact on the other children. Studies by Ocloo and Dogbe, Ridley and Bista and WHO^{6,10,22} indicated that governments in developing countries lacked the commitment to invest in the education of persons with disabilities.

The failure of government of Cameroon to provide facilities that will enable the participation of persons with disabilities in education has led to private businessmen establishing schools and rendering educational services at high cost. It means that persons with disabilities from weak financial background will not be able to

have access to education. Distance increase cost and put pressure on families especially poor ones. Special schools are only available in urban centers thus serving as a barrier for persons with disabilities that live out of such places to attend. Therefore, sending their children to school and bringing them back every day could be burdensome for parents and this could force them to stop educating their children if they already have others to care for. The findings of the study validates studies by DFID, Filmer, Ridley & Bista, Tuakli et al, and WHO^{6,10,27-29} who found that the higher costs associated with education makes it difficult for persons with disabilities to have access to education.

The few who make effort to access education are unable to have teaching and learning materials tailored to suit their needs. The lack of teaching and learning materials has been worsen by availability of teachers who do not have the skills to teach persons with disabilities in these schools. With these worrying developments, it was not surprising that mass failures were recorded by deaf students in their final exams. Their inability to get qualified teachers to teach them is compounded by lack of assistive devices to help support their education. The results of the study corroborates with studies by Fefoame, Ocloo & Dogbe, Save the Child and Tuakli et al.^{11,12,22,29} These studies found that the lack of qualified teachers in schools serves as a barrier limiting the participation of persons with disabilities in schools. It is possible that persons with disabilities will not be able to achieve their objectives should the current trend of events in schools persist.

Conclusion and recommendation

The study concluded that persons with disabilities in the Buea Municipality of Cameroon who participated in the study were mainly female and more than half of all participants had no formal education due to several socioeconomic factors that limited their opportunities to access education. Their perceived barriers and demoralizing experiences were related to lack of family support, disability as a barrier in itself, negative attitude of society to educating a disabled child, distance to school and un-favorable terrain, lack of educational infrastructure, learning facilities and human capacity equipped enough to teach in special schools. There was no paucity of the perception that government was not committed to support special education.

Persons with disabilities in Cameroon will be forever doomed and rendered dependent on society should the educational system not be transformed. Due to the importance of education in one's ability to compete effectively in the global economy and advancement, it is very necessary and urgent that the government takes the lead to transform the educational system of Cameroon in order for it to accommodate persons with disabilities, to equip them with requisite knowledge and skills to give leverage to their level of participation.³⁰

The findings of the study have implication for policy making on access to education for persons with disabilities in Cameroon. Lack of educational facilities that support the needs of children with disabilities is a major obstacle hindering access to education for children with disabilities in the study area. This finding points to the needs for more investment in special needs education. The government of Cameroon should therefore be more committed towards educating children with disabilities and provide the financial resources and the policy framework toward such an endeavor. Providing financial support in the form of scholarships to cover some of the expenses by the students may motivate parents, especially poor ones to enroll their children with disabilities in school. Since negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities seemed to be widespread in the area, just providing the infrastructure without attitudinal change, may not increase access

to education for children with disabilities. A vigorous educational campaign targeting all stakeholders in education should be pursued. As suggested by Baffoe,³¹ this could be done through mass media and popular sources of disseminating information. Additionally, there is a need for total restructuring of the educational system of Cameroon. This could be done by overhauling teacher training programmes to include courses on special needs education, and providing adequate financial and material support to such programmes. Similarly, the government should show commitment towards implementation of inclusive education in Cameroon and to provide the necessary material and financial support to make general education accessible to children with disabilities. According to Ocloo & Dogbe,²² such a policy will provide alternative means of providing more accessible education to children with disabilities than the traditional special school system.

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Conflicts of interest

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