

Reshaping Perspectives: Addressing Bullying and Social Stigma at Dakpema Mainstream School in the Tamale Metropolis

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Abstract

Bullying of learners with special needs within inclusive educational environments has gained significant attention in recent years due to its detrimental impact on the overall well-being and academic performance of this vulnerable population. This study sought to address the intricacies of bullying and Social Stigma of learners with special educational needs (SEN) at Dakpema Mainstream School in the Tamale Metropolis. The research employed a mixed-method approach, the research investigated the occurrence, underlying factors, consequences, and mitigation interventions associated with bullying. Eighty-five (85) participants, including Students (n=70), Regular Classroom Teachers (n=9), Special Unit Teachers (n=3), and Heads of Streams (n=3), were involved in the study through a combination of simple random and purposive sampling techniques. The quantitative facet of the study employed a questionnaire to gather data from the respondents. Quantitative data was analyzed using the SPSS (Version 23) descriptive analysis tool to elucidate statistical patterns, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between reduced academic achievements and instances of bullying. The qualitative segment of the research employed interviews and focus group discussions to delve into the nuanced experiences and perceptions of students and educators. Through the data analysis, the study identified various contributing factors to bullying, including social exclusion, lack of understanding, profound emotional and academic consequences faced by students with special needs as a result of bullying, and the absence of effective communication channels. The findings also shed light on the multifaceted nature of this issue and offer insights into the challenges faced by students with special needs within inclusive educational frameworks. These insights provide valuable guidance for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational ecosystem.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Students, Disabilities, Bullying, Stigma, Mainstreaming

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Inclusive education has gained global recognition for promoting equal opportunities and social integration for students with special needs. The Salamanca Declaration of 1994 ordered that all manner of learners at risk of having snags at school resulting from their disability be duly represented (UNESCO 1994, 2020). The philosophy of inclusive teaching is built on the equality of educational opportunities for all learners. According to Carter & Abawi (2018), inclusive education aims to remove all forms of discrimination barriers by incorporating students with special educational needs into a typical learning setting. It strives to meet the needs of all learners regardless of culture, language, gender, talents, gifts, or background.

It is crucial therefore to incorporate disabled children into this new international policy agenda. All children of school-going age deserve access to inclusive education. This has the potential to revolutionize the culture, policy, and practice in all educational settings. Inclusive schools attempt to meet the diverse needs of individual students and are dedicated to eliminating barriers that hinder this goal (Ainscow, 2020). In essence, inclusion makes sure that all students with

special education needs participate in the general education curriculum and are enrolled in age-appropriate classes daily (Idol, 2006:4).

Bullying within inclusive school settings has emerged as a persistent concern, impeding the realization of a regular school for all. Bullying is characterized by repeated aggressive behaviours intended to harm, intimidate, or control others. Learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) may have obstacles when it comes to reporting instances of bullying, including challenges in communication or concerns about potential reprisals. Inclusive or mainstream schools must provide a secure and encouraging atmosphere to ensure that all children are at ease when reporting instances of bullying. Mitchell & Sunderland (2020) emphasized the critical need of making suitable adjustments to the curriculum for inclusive education, by creating a unified curriculum that is inclusive and accessible to all learners, including the downtrodden. Special educational needs arise when a curriculum is not inclusive for all students. The educational experiences should encompass activities suitable for the child's age, and tailored to their developmental stage, and the implementation of multi-level teaching strategies.

In the past two decades, significant improvements have been made to the Ghanaian educational system to accommodate students with unique educational needs. Power is usually not shared equally among all learners; the aggressor wields more power than the victim within the peer group. There are usually some specific traits associated with bullying; deliberate actions undertaken by bullies, repeated incidents of intimidation, and absolute power vested in the aggressor over the victim (Olweus, 2013).

With the advent of Covid-19 and in recent times, digitalization has become the norm. People live their lives in the digital space; the majority surfing the internet; and interacting with people the world over. This bullying canker is now majorly prominent online (cyberbullying), with people living with disabilities the highly hit social group. Cyberbullying can manifest in ways such as spreading rumors online, sharing private information without consent, posting hurtful comments or messages, creating fake profiles to impersonate someone, and sharing embarrassing photos or videos. Ortega Ruiz *et al.*, (2012) posit that engaging in cyberbullying involves intentionally and repeatedly harming others through various online platforms like social media, email and messaging.

Cyberbullying can lead to significant negative impacts on the mental health and overall well-being of those targeted, especially the marginalized. They usually will feel anxious, and depressed, have low self-worth, and in severe instances, thoughts of or actions related to suicide. According to Pengpid & Peltzer, (2019), as cited by Barragán Martín, *et al.*, (2021), the prevalence of cyberbullying among adolescents varies depending on the factors evaluated. Its appearance is linked to such traits as low self-esteem; low affective and cognitive empathy; social and psychological maladjustments; states of depression, anxiety, and anger; low academic performance and school absenteeism.

Cyberbullying is widespread, with many students reporting being targeted at some point during their academic journey. Online platforms can make individuals feel anonymous and distant, leading them to behave in ways they wouldn't in person. Schools and educational institutions are essential in tackling and averting cyberbullying. This involves establishing clear policies and guidelines on online conduct, educating students on responsible technology use, promoting a culture of empathy and respect, and offering assistance and resources for both victims and perpetrators.

Ghana's government passed an inclusive education policy that outlines the strategic direction the government will take to educate all students with special needs. This policy expands on provisions found in the 1992 Constitution, the National Development Agenda, the Education Strategic Plan, and international commitments to fulfil national and global objectives for establishing a setting conducive to meeting Ghana's varied educational needs. The issue has become the priority of a government that emphasizes the obligation of special teachers, regular teachers, and school

heads, and structures the protection of learners from bullying.

This article investigates the occurrence, underlying factors, consequences, and potential interventions related to bullying among schoolchildren requiring distinct support in the mainstream setting. More calls intended for safeguards against child abuse have been made in recent years, and many schools have adopted “zero-tolerance measures” to protect students. As a result, anti-bullying education efforts are spreading more widely, but some societies are still fixated on the old times of rampant school intimidation without recourse to any austerity measure against bullying.

Bullying of students with disabilities at school is not a new or unusual occurrence. For years, young people and their families have shared their stories and the impact they’ve had, including attempts at and ideas for suicide. Therefore there is the need to identify and conduct situational analysis of the bullying situation and countervailing strategies adopted in the school under study.

Objectives of the Study:

1. Explore the perceived causes of bullying in mainstream Dakpema Schools in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana
2. Ascertain how bullying impacts the academic and social lives of learners with special education needs in mainstream Dakpema Schools in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana
3. Propose pragmatic strategies in dealing with the excesses of bullying in mainstream Dakpema Schools in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana

Research Questions:

1. What are the perceived causes of bullying in mainstream Dakpema Schools in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana?
2. What is the impact of bullying on the academic and social lives of learners with special education needs in mainstream Dakpema Schools in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana?
3. What stringent pragmatic strategies can be adopted in dealing with the excesses of bullying in mainstream Dakpema Schools in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its ability to help identify the gaps in the educational system that allow bullying to flourish in our mainstream schools. It also offers recommendations for better inclusive educational practices and better learning outcomes for children with special needs who are bullied.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Research Design

To facilitate a wide range of facts within the survey, this paper used a mixed-method approach. According to Manzoor, A. (2020), mixed methods research is an approach that advocates for the utilization of various research techniques to address research concerns. It promotes a culture of employing a diverse range of research methods among researchers. Mixed methods research is characterized by methodological heterogeneity, leading to broader viewpoints compared to mono-method approaches. Mixed methods involve combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a



more comprehensive knowledge of study challenges and complicated phenomena compared to using either approach independently.

Regarding the overall goals of breadth and depth of understanding and validation, researchers use aspects of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, and inference techniques) in mixed methods research (Johnson and Schoonenboom: 2017). A researcher is determined to acquire a wider range of research skills because mixed methods research combines and mixes qualitative and quantitative procedures (Mertens *et al.*, 2016). Primary data was sourced from teachers, students, and heads of units in the Dakpema School. Secondary data in the form of literature was also critically perused, compared, and analyzed to situate them within the context of Ghanaian inclusive schools.

Population and Sampling

The population of a study consists of all the units on which the findings of research can be applied. In other words, population is a set of all the units which possess variable characteristics under study and for which findings of the research can be generalized. The research adopted a Simple Random Sampling technique in the selection of students, and classroom teachers in the regular streams of learning in the Dakpema Schools without disabilities. Purposive Sampling was done to select the Special Classroom Teachers and heads of the various streams within the Dakpema Schools in Tamale.

<i>Regular Classroom Teachers (RCT)</i>	= (9)
<i>Teachers in the Special Units (TSU)</i>	= (3)
<i>Heads of Streams of the School (HSS)</i>	= (3)
<i>Students</i>	= (70)
<i>Total</i>	$= 9+3+3 +70$ $= 85 \text{ Participants}$

Data Sources

Diverse areas and data sources were contacted to ascertain a beneficial and comprehensive opinion of others in this same or similar area of study. The researcher conducted a thorough interview of teachers and heads of streams in the Dakpema Schools, a review of bullying reports, conference proceedings, and academic papers tackling bullying and its attendant effects.

Data Analysis

The study employed a mixed method approach, that enabled researchers to utilize the advantages of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, resulting in deeper insights and a more thorough comprehension of the research subject. The approach allowed for triangulation, and comparison of findings from qualitative and quantitative analyses to validate or corroborate results. Findings were analyzed using tables generated through the use of SPSS (Version 23). Qualitative data sourced were also analyzed thematically capturing transcription and, in some cases, verbatim responses. The selection criteria and analysis process were improved through feedback and conversations with specialists in the field of special education, ensuring that a variety of viewpoints were included.

Ethical Considerations

In undertaking this study, ethical deliberations were made. The work of the original authors was duly acknowledged and cited. Consent was acquired from respondents before the researcher administered questionnaires and engaged them

in interviews. In using any copyrighted materials such as figures, tables, or passages from publications, proper citations were made. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and that the data gathered is intended solely to be used for the study.

Research Challenges

The study recognized the shortfalls, such as delay and timing for the administration and retrieval of questionnaire and interview materials. Another major limitation of the study was the unavailability of adequate and appropriate literature on particular topics, the possibility of bias in the choice of publications, and the generalizability of the findings.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS OF RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

Given the significance of gathering biodata from respondents in this type of study, specific traits were requested from the participants. Fifteen teachers, including stream heads, participated in the study. Four (27%) of the participants were females, while eleven (73%) were males. Among the 15 teachers, 3 taught in the special units at Dakpema School in Tamale, while the other 12 taught in the inclusive mainstream classes. Additionally, two out of three stream headteachers were males, with only one being a female. Please see Table 1 below for the data.

Table 1: Sex of Teacher Respondents

TEACHERS		
Name	Frequency	Percentage
Female	4	27
Male	11	73
TOTAL	15	100

Source: Field Data, 2023

The researchers also focused on the total number of participants included in the study and the differences in gender. According to the study, 25 (36%) of the students who took part were females, while 45 (64%) were males. It is evident from the data that most of the participants were male. Take a look at Table2 below:

Table 2: Sex of Participating Students

STUDENTS		
Name	Frequency	Percentage
Male	N=45	64%
Female	N=25	36%
TOTAL	F=70	T=100

Source: Field Data, 2023

Educational Background of Teacher Respondents

Displayed in the table are the educational backgrounds of 15 respondents. Based on the findings, 11 participants (73.0%) hold first degrees, while 4 respondents (27.0%) have diploma qualifications. No educator possessed a master's or doctoral degree. Every respondent is qualified and holds the required teaching credentials in teacher education.

Table 3: Educational Background of Teacher Respondents

Name	Frequency	Percentage
Diploma	4	27.0
First Degree	11	73.0
<i>Masters</i>	-	-
PhD	-	-
TOTAL	15	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2023

Analysis and Discussion of Objective One:

Explore the perceived causes of bullying in mainstream Dakpema Schools in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana.

Factors Causing Bullying in Dakpema Schools in Tamale

Empirical evidence suggests that students with special needs were more likely than their peers without special needs to be the target of bullying. This study indicates that rates of bullying were notably elevated within inclusive classrooms, especially in the study school. The reasons for the upsurge are treated below;

Table 4: Causative Agents of Bullying in Dakpema Schools in Tamale

The numbers used in the table below depict the following: (1=Agree, 2= Neutral, 3= Disagree).

Item	1: Agree= f (%)	2: Neutral= f (%)	3: Disagree= f (%)	Total= (%)
Negative influence from Peers causes bullying in inclusive schools	58= (83%)	9= (13%)	3= (4%)	70= (100%)
Lack of empathy and awareness among students leads to bullying of learners with disabilities	66= (94%)	4= (6%)	-	70= (100%)
<i>Attitudinal biases towards disabilities can cause bullying in schools</i>	70= (100%)	-	-	70= (100%)
<i>Inadequate teacher training in addressing bullying within diverse classrooms is a recipe for bullying behaviour</i>	22= (31%)	7= (10%)	41= (59%)	70= (100%)
Lack of enforcement of anti-bullying policies in schools instigate bullying against learners with special needs	55= (79%)	6= (9%)	9= (15%)	70= (100%)
Prejudice and stereotypes translate into discriminatory attitudes	66= (94%)	2= (3%)	2= (3%)	70= (100%)



Source: Field Data, 2023

Understanding the factors contributing to bullying in inclusive settings is pivotal for developing effective intervention strategies. Research has identified a myriad of influences, including a lack of awareness and empathy among students, attitudinal biases towards disabilities, peer pressure, and inadequate teacher training in addressing bullying within diverse classrooms.

From the study, it is revealed that eighty-three (83) percent representing 58 of pupils agree that bullying occurs in inclusive schools because of the bad impact on their classmates. This group believes that students were more likely to become bullies through the influence of colleagues who were engaged in the act. Sometimes a whole group gangs up against a student with a disability, subjecting them to all manner of cruel experiences.

This also shows how peer pressure shapes the bullying culture in inclusive schools. Students who agreed with this assertion indicated that peer dynamics played a significant role in bullying behavior, which was widely acknowledged. In a study carried out by Sekol and Farrington (2016), bullies have experienced bullying in the past more often than non-bullies, as a result, they tended to intimidate others as they were in their previous school life. This research has significant ramifications for anti-bullying initiatives in inclusive schools. Peer-led anti-bullying initiatives, peer support groups, and peer mentorship are a few possible tactics that might be used in this situation.

The emphasis remains on how important it is for teachers and school authorities to understand the dynamics among their students' peers and take action against any negative peer influences that can encourage bullying behaviour, and encourage a school climate that values inclusivity, empathy, and respect.

Again, when respondents were asked whether bullying of students with disabilities was caused by students' lack of empathy and knowledge, it was discovered that the majority constituting 94% of students agreed with that assertion. The significant influence that empathy and understanding played in creating a welcoming and inclusive school environment especially for students with disabilities was highlighted by the high percentage of respondent endorsement. Mahama *et al.* (2022), suggest that additional competent educators must be hired, repetitively given in-service training and kept on board because it is essential to any educational plan's success.

The majority of students who agreed that a lack of empathy and understanding contributes to the bullying of students with disabilities emphasize the necessity of taking proactive steps to develop a school climate that encourages empathy, understanding, and inclusivity to solve this problem and bring about massive student achievement. According to the results of a related study, bullying happens when teachers or learners lacking special support don't realize the consequences of what they're doing. Because of this, bullying practices like mocking are still seen as commonplace and classified as jokes (Marlina, D. N. S: 2019).

In another instance, seventy (70) pupils agreed with the assertion that bullying in schools might result from attitudes that were prejudiced against people with disabilities.

The findings point to the pressing need for educational programs that encouraged students' knowledge, empathy, and comprehension of disability. It also shows how crucial it is to cultivate an inclusive and respectful culture among the school community.

Educators and legislators can create specialized interventions to address attitudinal biases and foster a more serene and supportive climate for students with special needs by realizing the role that these biases play in bullying.

This study also emphasizes how important it is to support diversity and inclusion in the classroom and extracurricular

activities. It shows how crucial it is to establish an atmosphere in schools that values inclusivity, empathy, and understanding for all learners to achieve optimally in the school.

The researcher also sought to find out whether the lack of adequate training of teachers culminates in their inability to effectively deal with the ramifications of bullying in the Dakpema school. Twenty-two (22) respondents agreed that there was insufficient instruction on how to deal with bullying in diverse classrooms. This suggests that in the school under investigation, a small percentage of students believe this to be a contributing factor to bullying. This perception's effect on the study raises the possibility that students were unaware of how crucial training was in dealing with bullying in diverse classrooms.

It also emphasizes how important it is for teachers and students alike to receive more education and training on this subject to develop a more thorough understanding of the elements that lead to bullying. About 59% of respondents disagree that a deficiency in teacher preparation regarding handling bullying in diverse classrooms is a contributing factor to bullying.

This suggests that a sizable portion of the student body did not hold the belief that bullying in diverse classrooms was primarily caused by underqualified teachers. The research of Opoku *et al.* (2021) examined pre-service teachers' perspectives on inclusive education and looked into the impacts of several demographic factors, including age, gender, contact experiences, and knowledge. When it comes to teachers' attitudes toward students with disabilities, women tend to be more accepting than men (Schwab; 2018). This depends on how well teachers are conversant with inclusive education policies and have interacted with students with disabilities in the past.

This study also revealed a whopping 79% of respondents agreeing that students bully one another because school anti-bullying policies were not enforced. This high level of agreement depicts how crucial it is to implement anti-bullying procedures in schools to stop and deal with bullying.

It is therefore incumbent on school authorities to act quickly to enforce their anti-bullying policies. The school must develop a school culture that values and accords top priority to each student's safety and well-being, bringing onboard all stakeholders; teachers, parents and learners. The implementation of anti-bullying policies in schools can effectively communicate to students that bullying behaviour is not acceptable, thereby fostering a more positive and courteous learning environment.

A key finding in the study was also the fact that 94% of participants agreed that prejudice and stereotypes led to discriminatory and bullying attitudes toward students with disabilities. This popular acclamation showcases the need for focused interventions to address this issue and the widespread effects of unfavorable attitudes and beliefs toward people with disabilities in the school setting. There is therefore a pressing need for educational programs that encourage students' awareness, empathy, and comprehension of disabilities.

Educational managers must create specialized interventions to check these biases and foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for students with disabilities by acknowledging the role that prejudice and stereotypes play in bullying towards students with disabilities.

It is also important to support diversity and inclusion in the classroom and extracurricular activities. It demands an all-encompassing approach to education that stresses the importance of empathy, respect, and understanding for people with disabilities in addition to academic learning.

During the interviews with respondents, they were questioned about their perceived causes of bullying in the Dakpema Schools, some of them had this to say;

Respondent A:

From experience, inclusive education is a good thing to do, because it brings all learners together. I believe many factors cause bullying among learners; one of them is a lack of empathy among learners towards the disabled. They do not pity the conditions of these learners; they see them as weak and less human, so they maltreat them at all times when the teachers are not watching.

Respondent B:

In this school, I feel peer pressure is a major factor causing the bullying of disabled learners by their colleagues without disability. Because it has become common among young learners, students tend to copy what their friends do to these disabled classmates, till it becomes their habit as well.

Because many people do not understand the ordeal of students requiring special support, they tend to administer wrongful services to these groups of learners. Instead of schools making bullying unattractive, they rather leave the canker to fester, leaving victims with the traumas of bullying.

Analysis and Discussions of Objective Two:

Ascertain how bullying impacts the academic and social lives of learners with special education needs in mainstream Dakpema Schools in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana

Impacts of bullying on the social and academic lives of students with Special Needs

Bullying has far-reaching consequences on the psychological, emotional, and academic well-being of students with special needs.

From the study, it is revealed that the impacts of school bullying encompass reduced self-esteem, increased anxiety, depression, withdrawal from social interactions, and diminished academic performance. The cumulative effects of bullying can hinder the overall development of students, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization and disengagement from education.

Bullying victims, according to Brank *et al.* (2012), are weak, shy, and anxious, and they perform poorly in school and try to avoid attending classes to avoid being maltreated. Discrimination experience results in subpar academic achievement, leading to the regular absence of victims from school.

It has been suggested by Rigby (2003), that peer oppression is strongly associated with high levels of psychological strain, negative physical health symptoms, and a comparatively low level of mental welfare and social modification. This impacts a child's mental health.

Respondent F:

Yeah, it is quite common. When kids with disabilities face bullying, they often respond by becoming more aggressive as a way to defend themselves. That is why some of them usually throw tantrums and sometimes become more violent.

Respondent E:

Absolutely! The psychological toll of bullying can get in the way of a child's concentration and academic success. It's sad to see how it can lead to lower school performance.

A viral video online showed a rather disturbing encounter of a child and the mother on February 21, 2020.

Because of his dwarfism, 9-year-old Quaden Bayles is teased at school. He soberly sits in the back of his mother's car, sobs uncontrollably, and tells the camera, "Give me a knife, I want to kill myself."

His mother posted the moving video to spread awareness of the harm that bullying causes.

She claimed in the video that her son had made a suicide attempt before.

She was heard saying in the video, "This is what bullying does." "Would you kindly educate your kids, families, and friends?"

This telecast saw the world pouring solidarity messages to the victim and many others opening up about their ordeals as a result of the viral video. Bullied victims especially students do not in most cases open up about their tribulations, they mostly keep the issue to themselves while the act keeps happening, waiting to ride on a public discussion of the problem to pour their anger and frustration.

The vulnerability of students with special needs can be attributed to factors such as communication difficulties, social isolation, and a lack of self-advocacy skills.

Many happenings even more dire depress bullied learners with disabilities. Abuse in school by colleagues when left to fester, has the potential of brewing suicide inclinations. Cynthia (2014) looked at how bullying affects students' academic performance in the short- and long-term. It was found that the relationship between bullying intensity and academic performance varied based on the academic achievement of the students.

This study examined the connection between bullying and learners' achievements in the Dakpema School in Tamale. The beleaguered juveniles perform worse academically in their final summative assessment, and the repercussions of bullying are dire if the act is more profound.

The study also exposed that people viewed physical bullying as the major kind of bullying. More often than females, males wanted to bully. Bullying harmed academic performance. Nadine (2014) assessed the negative impacts of bullying on students' capacity for academic success. It was discovered that bullied children being afraid of their safety, are unable to focus, which hurts their academic progress.

According to Glew *et al.* (2005), victimization hampers attentiveness and, as a result, academic accomplishments since sufferers lose interest in learning and see a decline in results because their concentration is diverted from academic work. The effects of bullying cannot be underestimated; it was also discovered that bullied students nurture the thoughts of taking their lives. This has happened in many other parts of the world.

Skapinakis *et al.* (2011) posited that bullies were less likely to disclose suicide ideation than victims. Bullies if not tamed by school authorities continue to enjoy this disgusting phenomenon at the detriment of the bullied ones.

Analysis and discussions of Objective three:

Propose pragmatic strategies in dealing with the excesses of bullying in mainstream Dakpema Schools in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana

Pragmatic Mitigation Interventions and Strategies to repudiate bullying of students with special needs

In addressing the bullying situation in schools, efforts must be tied to unique teaching duties, the requirement for socialization, regular peer participation programmes, and SSN mentorship programmes in inclusive schools. Efforts to address bullying in inclusive schools must be comprehensive, involving various stakeholders such as educators, parents, policymakers, and the students themselves.

Academic attainment is caused by positive interactive relationships in the educational setting, according to Konishi *et al.* (2010). When learners begin to mock and bully the vulnerable ones, their relationships become sour and not ideal for any good academic accomplishment.

Implementing targeted interventions, fostering a positive and inclusive school climate, and providing training for teachers to recognize and address bullying are crucial steps. Collaborative approaches that involve peer support, mentorship programs, and promoting empathy can also contribute to mitigating the occurrence of bullying.

According to Brank *et al.* (2012), bullying victims exhibit signs of weakness, shyness, and anxiety. They also struggle academically and try to avoid going to class to evade being the target of abuse. Experiences of victimization can lead to poor academic performance, which can then cause absenteeism.

Clear and enforceable anti-bullying policies, tailored to the specific needs of students with disabilities, are essential components of creating a safe and inclusive learning environment. Legislation that mandates inclusive education must also encompass provisions for preventing and addressing bullying among students with special needs.

Some of the respondents had this to say regarding measures to combat bullying in the Dakpema Schools;

Respondent G:

I believe very much that this school has to crack the whip on these bullies who intimidate their peers on campus. Stringent punishment should be given to anyone found to be a culprit of this nauseating act of intimidation.

Respondent H:

I had a reported case of bullying on a certain vulnerable student. I followed it up and the culprit was found. I then reported the case to a superior officer and the case died off afterwards. As time passed, the victim's demeanor showed he was still not ok. When I enquired, the victim told me that the school was ghost-hunting him every time he had to come to school. So, we have to orient our students on the need to not intimidate others, and develop the habit of empathy towards the vulnerable.

CONCLUSIONS

Bullying among students with special needs within inclusive schools presents an arduous barrier to achieving the aims of inclusive education. A collective effort involving educators, students, parents, policymakers, and researchers is imperative to tackle this issue effectively. By understanding the complexities of bullying and tailoring interventions to address the unique challenges faced by students with special needs, inclusive schools can become environments that foster not only academic growth but also social and emotional well-being for every student.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Certainly, the quest to address the issue of bullying among learners with special needs in inclusive schools in Dakpema Schools Tamale requires a multifaceted approach.

A lot of issues are discussed in the study, amongst which are the ravaging impacts of bullying of learners with special needs in an inclusive school in the Tamale Metropolis. It is therefore recommended that; for bullying to be eradicated from inclusive learning setups, schools must;

Implement Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Policies: Encourage the Ghanaian government and educational authorities in Tamale to develop and enforce comprehensive anti-bullying policies specifically tailored to the needs of learners with special needs. These policies should clearly define what constitutes bullying and outline the consequences of such behaviour.

Promote Sensitivity Training for Teachers and Students: Advocate for regular workshops and training sessions for teachers and students to enhance their understanding of the challenges faced by learners with special needs. This initiative can help foster empathy and create a more inclusive environment within the school community.

Establish Support Systems for Victims and Perpetrators: Propose the establishment of support system services, including mentorship training, and peer group support, among others, to offer psychological and emotional support to bullied individuals as well as those who are the bullies themselves. These systems should aim to rehabilitate offenders and empower victims to overcome the traumatic effects of bullying.

Encourage Parental Involvement and Awareness: Stress the importance of involving parents in the process of addressing bullying in schools. Encourage regular communication between parents and teachers to keep them informed about their child's well-being and any instances of bullying. Additionally, promote parental awareness programs to educate parents about the impact of bullying on learners with special needs.

Foster Inclusive Education Initiatives: Advocate for the integration of inclusive education initiatives that promote a culture of acceptance, respect, and understanding for all learners, regardless of their abilities. Promote the use of a variety of teaching techniques and materials that are tailored to the unique requirements of students with disabilities.

Collaborate with Community Organizations and NGOs: Encourage partnerships between schools, local community organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on disability rights and education. These collaborations can provide additional resources, expertise, and advocacy to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for learners with special needs.

When these recommendations are fully executed, they will ensure the well-being and success of learners with special needs in Tamale, Ghana.

While existing research provides valuable insights, there remains a need for further exploration of the intricacies surrounding bullying within inclusive schools.

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