Curricular Systems and Enrolment of Learners with Disabilities in the Public Vocational Training Centres of the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT: This study is based on the observation that the participation of learners living with a disability in the Vocational Training Centres of the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training in Cameroon is very low, in contrast to the private centers run by the same ministry, despite the commitment of the Cameroonian government to make schools more inclusive and equitable for all. The aim of the study is to determine, through the perception of administrative staff and trainers, whether the low enrolment observed among these learners can be linked to the possible inadequacy of inclusive measures implemented in the curricula of these schools. To this end, 02 hypotheses were formulated concerning the infrastructures and teaching and learning materials on the one hand, and the quality of the training and professional practices of the trainers on the other. Thanks to the highlights resulting from the descriptive analysis of the quantitative data collected from 46 trainers and 14 learners living with a disability, as well as the positive results of Pearson's correlation test (p < 0.05), some possible solutions are recommended to stimulate the inclusion of these learners.

KEYWORDS: enrolment, disability inclusion, curricular systems, perception.

INTRODUCTION

Data from the World Bank (2020) indicate that youth unemployment rate (population aged 15-24) in Cameroon is at 5.8% since 2018. However, the phenomenon does not affect all social categories to the same degree. According to the International Labour Organisation (2017), people living with a disability "constitute a marginalised group in the labour market in all countries of the world: they are much more likely to be unemployed, underemployed or economically inactive than able-bodied people." (ILO, 2017, p.01). And for good reason, both ILO Cameroon (2019) and ILO (2017) unequivocally point to their difficulties in accessing training, as well as the generally low quality of training when it is available (ILO, 2017, pp.01-04; ILO Cameroon, 2019, p.36). In fact, statistics on enrolment (understood here as application for enrolment, enrolment, social adhesion, serene and successful schooling) of this category of learners in the public initial vocational training schools of the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (which is primarily responsible for this area of education) reveal a particularly low level of participation. In fact, a survey conducted in 05 of the 08 functional Centres (Centres de Formation Professionnelle Rapide des Employés de Bureau dits CFPR-EB of Yaoundé and Garoua, Centre de Formation Professionnelle aux Métiers Industriels dit CF-MI of Pitoa and Centres de Formation Professionnelle d'Excellence dits CFPE of Douala and of Sangmélima) showed that during the 2016-2017 training year, there were no learners with a disability out of a total of 312 learners. The following year, and the year after that, there were 01 out of around 360 learners. Finally, in 2019-2020, there were 02 out of a total of more than 550 learners. A total of 04 for 1609 learners, giving an average enrolment rate of 0.24% (Source: data collected from the heads of the centres concerned). If we refer to the ILO (2017), for whom people living with a disability represent 15% of the world's population, it becomes clear that the participation of learners living with a disability in MINEFOP's public VET centres is extremely marginal, especially in view of the gap with their participation in the private VET centres run by the same Ministry. For example, the same survey revealed an average participation rate of 5.59% at the private Catholic Centre located at a stone's throw from the public VET centres surveyed in the North Region. Due to this phenomenon of systematic avoidance, this study takes shape as an attempt to remove a part of the veil on the reasons that specifically curb the enthusiasm that these young people wishing to undergo initial vocational training might have had for the MINEFOP's public VET centres. This concern is all the more pressing given that, following on logically from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Preamble to the 1996 Constitution, the Education Sector Strategy Paper, Law N°2010/002 on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities and Law N°2018/010 on the organisation of vocational
training in Cameroon, the 2018 Decree laying down the terms of application of the Law on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities states in Article 04 that: “The State promotes inclusive education and vocational training for people with disabilities through: Introduction to appropriate communication methods allowing them to access normal schooling and vocational training programs, the development of standards in school, university and vocational training programs for teachers to learn sign language and braille, the development of traditional public institutions to facilitate access for pupils and students with disabilities in classrooms, the provision of specialized teachers and trainers in public schools and universities that receive pupils and students with disabilities; the assignment of qualified personnel in private special education institutions; initial and continuing training of specialized staff in the supervision of disabled people, the provision of pupils and students with disabilities with educational materials appropriate to the nature of the disability.’”

As part of this investigation, we chose to carry out an investigation in some of these centres in order to assess the effectiveness of 02 of the 04 major measures indicated in the ILO (2017) Guidance Note, the international reference document on the inclusion of disability in TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training), and then to make a link with the state of enrolment of these learners. This involves the quality of learning materials and infrastructure, as well as the quality of training and professional practices of training staff. Our premise is as follows: the nature of the curricular arrangements in MINEFOP's public VET centres contributes significantly to the low enrolment of learners with disabilities in these training schools. Specifically, we think that there is a significant correlation between the quality of learning materials and infrastructure and the low enrolment of learners living with a disability on the one hand, and a significant correlation between the quality of training and professional practices of training staff and the low enrolment of these learners on the other.

From a theoretical point of view, this premise fits into 02 logics: that of Bandura's sense of self-efficacy (1994), later reformulated in 2003 as the socio-cognitive or dynamic interactionist theory of human behaviour, and that of Rotter's Locus of Control (1954, 1966). The first theory holds that the initiation, direction and persistence of behaviour are primarily motivated by interactions between social influences and the individual. This implies that a subject's activity and behaviour cannot be understood outside of a specific context. They are explained by the combination of factors internal to the individual, consisting of events experienced emotionally, cognitively and biologically, and the individual's perception of them, with the environment to influence behaviour (Carré, 2004). In this case, the avoidance of MINEFOP's public VET centres by learners living with a disability is to some extent the result of possible interactions between 3 poles: on the one hand, the school environment made up of the properties of the social and organisational environment, the constraints it imposes, the stimuli it offers and the reactions it provokes, then the personality of the individual in relation to his or her disability, and finally observable behaviour. The second theory, that of Rotter's "Locus of Control" (1954, 1966), holds that human behaviour is strongly conditioned by the individual's tendency to believe that he or she can or cannot control his or her environment and the course of events; in particular the externally inclined individual, for whom "success in an examination or vocational training depends much less on the individual concerned and much more on the circumstances" (Popa, 2001, para.56). In the same vein, the more an institution's system is adapted to the specific needs of learners, the more likely they are to enrol and stay. The less the system meets their specific needs, the less motivated they are to join and succeed.

Having said that, a number of subjects have been carried out on the subject of inclusion in schools, focusing in particular on satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the adapted facilities and services offered in schools, and the feeling of usefulness towards them. In France, the results of a study conducted by Pacaud (2016) among 19 learners living with a disability indicate that the extension of time during exams, the existence of a specific room and note-taking software, and access to course notes in advance are the most appreciated. In addition, La Grenade and Trépanier (2017) concluded from a study of the role of teachers in the inclusion of students with disabilities at college that the existence of a legal framework affirming equal access for all is not enough. The effectiveness of inclusion in the school environment depends on the teacher's willingness "to respect the right to be different even in his or her own practice" (La Grenade and Trépanier, 2017, p.6). In her work aimed at establishing whether the principle of equal opportunities underlying inclusive education policy in sub-Saharan Africa was mere rhetoric or a practical reality, Melha (2011) observed, with regard to technical and vocational training specifically: poor adaptation to learners living with a disability because of its rigidity, the absence of additional support to facilitate school integration, the recurrence of repetition or dropping out. On the subject of the impact of the quality of the school environment in the Cameroonian context on the school experience of learners living with a disability, Tchokote (2019) has highlighted the malaise at school of these learners caused by the difficulty of access to school infrastructure because of their disability (Tchokoté, 2019, p.11). In short, the existing literature supports the idea that the low enrolment of learners living with a disability in MINEFOP's public VET centres could be linked to shortcomings in the provision of services for learners living with a disability.
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METHODOLOGY
A quantitative study was conducted from April to May 2021 in 03 Vocational Training Centers (VETCs) representative of MINEFOP public initial training schools in Cameroon. These were: the Centre de Formation Professionnel (CFP) Rapide des Employés de Bureau in Garoua, the CFP des Métiers industriels in Pitoa and the CFP d'Excellence in Douala.

STUDY POPULATION
The target population is made up of 02 groups: supervisory staff (46) and learners living with a disability identified during the 2020-2021 training year (14). The choice was made to position the staff as the main population and the learners as a sort of "control" group. There are 02 reasons for this choice: firstly, these adults are the main observers, interlocutors and daily witnesses of learners' lives at school; secondly, unlike the latter, they are in a position to provide the information needed to evaluate inclusion in the training curriculum. The significant increase in the number of target learners compared with previous years comes as a surprise. It can be partly explained by the incubation of 06 learners in 02 training centres by an NGO as part of a project to improve access to economic and employment opportunities for people living with disabilities in the North Region of Cameroon, as well as the class-by-class census of these learners during the preliminary survey.

Two self-administered questionnaires, almost identical apart from the section relating to the training and professional practices of trainers, were sent to staff and learners. Each questionnaire consisted of 3 sections (A - C). Section A included items relating to the availability of assistive furniture: for motor skills (wheelchair), posture (adjustable school table, sliding and adjustable chair), vision (video projector, remote magnifier, specific software, Braille keyboard, adapted peripherals, specific software), hearing (dictaphone, specific software), and ramps, halls, sanitary facilities. Section B included items relating to the training of trainers in inclusive teaching and assessment methods, taking account of disability in communication and teaching methods, appropriate methods for assessing learners' progress, etc. Finally, section C included items relating to enrolment, such as recruitment demand, attendance, drop-out frequency, know-how, general performance and learners' degree of social support for school. The data collection technique was the systematic participation of all subjects, whether in the questionnaire addressed to staff or to learners.

This study was ethically approved by the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Yaoundé I, and we received an authorisation to conduct the study from the administrative managers of the various Centres.

RESULTS
We defined some principles for interpreting the results, basing on the 5-point Likert scale. An average of 2.5 is the happy medium. The closer to 0, the more positive the assessment; the closer to 5, the more negative the perception of the extent to which the needs of learners with disabilities are taken into account in the facilities.

- The availability of inclusive infrastructures and materials
  This section presents the perception of inclusion in infrastructures and materials according to administrative staff and trainers.

| Table 1: Descriptive statistics on infrastructure and teaching materials according to staff |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| N valid (listwise)                           | Minimum | Maximum | Average  | Standard deviation |
| VII : teaching material and infrastructures  | 46      | 1.00     | 5.00     | 3.2391          | .91451          |

As far as the staff are concerned, the verdict tends to be one of non-compliance with inclusion standards, since 54.96% of responses were in disagreement and very much in disagreement. The inclusive equipment and infrastructure most lacking in these schools were: hearing aids (65.16% disagreed and very much disagreed), motor aids and posture aids (63.03% disagreed and very much disagreed each), adapted sanitary facilities (58.69% disagreed and very much disagreed) and ramps to facilitate mobility (58.68% agreed and disagreed). On the other hand, they would have enough furniture to aid vision (54.34% agree and very much agree), and sufficiently enlarged lobbies (60.86% agree and very much agree). The participant who gave the most positive assessment of the teaching infrastructure and materials obtained an average score of 1.00. By contrast, the participant who gave the most negative assessment was closer to the extreme, with an average score of 4.88. The overall average of 3.23 indicates that, on the whole, the administrative staff and trainers feel that the infrastructure and teaching materials of the VETCs in which they work are not sufficiently adapted to the specific needs of learners living with a disability.
As for the "control group", the learners living with a disability, it revealed a positive overall average score of 2.14, i.e. a difference of 1.09 between the 02 groups. This surprisingly shows that learners rated the infrastructure and equipment better than staff. This could be justified by the fact that perceptions can lead to divergent assessments of the same facts. The fact remains, however, that on the one hand we have a fairly positive view on the part of the beneficiaries of the service and on the other a considerably negative view on the part of their supervisors.

The effectiveness of inclusion in the training of trainers and their teaching practices

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on inclusion in the training and teaching practices of trainers, according to staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VI2 : teaching material and infrastructures</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>2.5316</td>
<td>.57046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N valid (listwise)</td>
<td>46</td>
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Source: Field data (2021)

During their initial training (School of Education): 60.86% of participants said that they had had modules on inclusive teaching methods during their course, while 34.78% had not. 67.38% admitted having been given information on inclusive assessment methods, while 26.62% had not. During in-service training (pedagogical days): 63.04% said that topics on inclusive teaching methods were included in the themes of the pedagogical days, while 17.39% said the opposite and 19.56% were neutral. 52.16% admitted having been discussed on inclusive evaluation methods, 21.73% disagreed and 26.08% were unsure. In their day-to-day teaching practices, 65.20% of staff felt that they adopt/are capable of adopting inclusive methods of assessing learners’ progress, while 15.20% did not. 49.9% thought they were adapting/able to adapt assessment tests appropriately, while 26.73% did not. Furthermore, 48.99% said they knew some first aid to give to learners living with a disability in the event of a problem, while 32.60% did not. Finally, 60.86% thought they were capable of taking on the role of school tutor effectively, 19.55% did not. The overall average for the variable produced a slightly negative result of 2.531. We note in passing that the staff agree that the VETCs meet more inclusive standards in terms of the quality of the training and teaching practices of the trainers than in terms of the learning materials and infrastructure.

Learners, for their part, have a much better perception of the services they receive than the service providers themselves. Their average score was 1.8, which is satisfactory.

Degree of enrolment of learners living with a disability according to staff

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on the level of enrolment of learners living with a disability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average enrolment of target learners</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>2.6766</td>
<td>.56000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N valid (listwise)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Source: Field data (2021)

This average of 2.676 indicates a very slight shortfall in enrolment. 58.68% of staff consider the demand for recruitment of learners living with a disability to be very regular or regular. As for their attendance, 67.38% perceived it as very regular or regular. As for their know-how, since we are fully immersed in vocational training, 54.68% judged it to be satisfactory or very satisfactory. Only 23.09% of respondents felt that enrolment was low. On the other hand, when the subject of dropping out of school was raised, 34.77% of participants felt that it happened rarely or very rarely, 47.81% felt that it happened frequently or very frequently, and 17.39% were neutral. The overall average score for the enrolment of learners by the staff who supervise them is 2.676, a negative score, although only slightly.

As for the learners, the overall average score of 1.5 indicates that they feel strongly represented and fulfilled in these training structures. The difference between the scores of the 02 groups does not fail to attract attention. It was 1.176.

Correlation between the availability of inclusive materials and infrastructure and enrolment

To test the validity of research hypothesis 1, i.e. that there is a significant correlation between the quality of learning materials and infrastructure and the enrolment of learners living with a disability, a Pearson correlation test was conducted. The table below shows the results.
A correlation was found between the quality of learning materials and infrastructure and the enrolment status of learners with disabilities, $r = -0.344$, $p < 0.05$. There is a significant correlation of 0.01 between the quality of learning materials and infrastructure and the enrolment of learners living with a disability. Research hypothesis 01 is validated. This significant correlation prompts a regression test to predict the effect of modifying the quality of learning materials and infrastructure on enrolment. The resulting significant regression equation is $F(1,44) = 5.901$, $p < 0.019$, with $R^2 = 0.118$. A change in learning materials and infrastructure would therefore lead to an 11.8% change in enrolment.

**Correlation between inclusive training and teaching practices and enrolment**

With regard to the validity of research hypothesis 02, i.e. that there is a significant correlation between the quality of trainers' training and teaching practices and the enrolment of learners living with a disability, a Pearson correlation test was also carried out. The table below shows the results.

A correlation was established between the quality of the trainers' training and teaching practices and the enrolment status of learners living with a disability, $r = -0.337$, $p <0.05$. There was a significant correlation of 0.02 between the training and professional practices of trainers and the enrolment of learners living with a disability in these training schools. Research hypothesis 02 is validated.

The regression test induced by this result produces a significant regression equation $(F(1,44) = 5.625$, $p < 0.022$, with an $R^2= 0.113$. Changes in teaching materials and infrastructure would lead to an 11.3% change in enrolment.

**DISCUSSION**

The question at the heart of this research was to find out to what extent the specific needs of learners living with a disability are taken into account in the curricula of MINEFOP’s public VET centres in terms of infrastructure, materials and quality of training and the professional practices of trainers, in order to make a correlation with the low enrolment observed in the field during previous training years.

On the basis of the results obtained, we can say that yes, the low enrolment observed among learners living with a disability can be linked to some shortcomings in the curricular systems of the said VETCs; since for each of the 02 secondary hypotheses, the dependent and independent variables move significantly in the same direction.

This assertion is echoed in the introductory section of the PAPEN Report (March 2021, unpublished) on the accessibility of VET centres in the North Region. This report clearly identifies the inaccessibility of the infrastructure set up in these training structures as a kind of exclusion from the outset of learners living with a disability from this learning circuit. It corroborates not only the assessment of the infrastructure and teaching materials made by the staff of the 03 VETCs surveyed (54.98% negative assessment, 10.24% no opinion, 34.57% positive assessment), but also the significant correlation highlighted.
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The conclusions of Tchokote's qualitative study (2019) point in the same direction. This researcher provided empirical evidence that the well-being at school of adolescents with motor disabilities is significantly correlated with and conditioned by the quality of the physical school environment. In his testimonies, one of the 04 participants in her survey confirmed that shortcomings in the infrastructure further weaken the individual already weakened by his disability (Tchokote, 2019, p.12). The results of this survey show that the low enrolment of our learners is part of a context in which school materials and infrastructure are not considered to be very inclusive.

With regard to inclusion in teaching arrangements, the validation of research hypothesis 02 is fully in line with the position of La Grenade and Trépanier (2017) that the crux of educational inclusion lies in the training and day-to-day professional practices of teachers. Long before, with Mazereau (2009), they were already convinced that inclusive schools would fail if they were not implemented in such a way as to include support at the start of a career (p.22) and the support provided by specialist teachers in terms of classroom practices (p.23).

However, having applied the differential analysis to the regression test in order to get an idea of the variation that a change in each of the 02 independent variables could have on enrolment, a rate of 11% was found each time. This suggests that it would be hasty to attribute the low learner participation noted at the start of the study to the systems alone, even less so if they were limited to infrastructure, materials and the quality of the training and professional practices of the trainers. Moreover, among the measures said to be necessary for the inclusion of disability in TVET, ILO (2017) also highlights measures to support and encourage access, as well as schemes to help with vocational integration (ILO, 2017, p.2-9).

From a completely different perspective, we could also look at family contingencies (social situation, cultural background, parents' level of education, etc.) as a limiting or motivating factor, taking Le Laidier (2018) as an example. Although his study does not focus on TVET, we can already note that, when discussing the influences on the mode of schooling and the level achieved by individuals suffering from the same category of disorder, he points to inequalities due to the family context (p.34). Finally, like Sene (2020), some might even question the relevance of the basis for debates on the issue of inclusive education in Africa. According to this author, there is a problem with the relevance of the debate on the compliance of education systems in sub-Saharan French-speaking African countries with global guidelines on inclusive education (Sene, 2020, p.37). In his view, it should be borne in mind that we are in a part of the world where many households live below the poverty line. In such a context, is it realistic to hope for a de facto inclusive school just like in developed countries, when the primary needs that are still pressing leave virtually no room for other concerns (Sene, 2020, p.37).

CONCLUSION

This study revealed a fairly critical perception of the effectiveness of inclusive measures in the curricula of MINEFOP's public VET centres in terms of materials and infrastructure, training and professional practices of trainers, and a fairly low level of enrolment of learners living with a disability. When subjected to Pearson's correlation test, the data collected made it possible to establish that, yes, there is a fairly significant correlation between the dependent and independent variables. However, in view of the results of the regression tests, we can predict a positive variation in enrolment following possible improvements to the systems studied, but this would be fairly relative, hence the openness to exploring other possible explanations for the phenomenon of avoidance of MINEFOP's public VETCs by learners living with a disability. However, the fact remains that the first steps towards stimulating this enrolment will have to include the reinforcement/acquisition of inclusive learning materials and infrastructures, which are perceived as inadequate, as well as the optimisation of trainers' capacities for a more satisfactory self-assessment. Prior to this, the setting up within MINEFOP of a taskforce to reflect on "the levers for adapting global public policy guidelines on inclusive education" (Sene, 2020, p.37) to the context of the "global education crisis" (Sene, 2020, p.37) is a good way of ensuring that the public policy framework for inclusive education is in place.

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