



Inclusive Education Resource Centers in Bamenda, NW Cameroon: Contributions to the Implementation of Inclusive Special Education

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Abstract: Inclusive education, especially inclusive special education, exists to bridge the educational inequity gaps that exist between persons without disability and those with disabilities of various kinds and to promote respect for the educational rights of persons with disabilities. One of the most reliable means by which inclusive education achieves this is through Inclusive Education Resource Centers (IERCs). Without these IERCs, implementation of inclusive education cannot be effective. The purpose of this study was to examine activities carried out by IERCs in Bamenda, and how these activities influence the implementation of inclusive education. A cross sectional survey including 236 respondents purposely selected from three inclusive schools and three IERCs was used. Questionnaires and interviews were used as data collection instruments. A total of 219 IERC beneficiaries (learners with disabilities and their teachers) responded to the Questionnaires while 7 resource persons (IERC coordinators, sign language teachers, brailists and special education teachers) participated in the Key Informant Interviews. Purposive sampling was equally used to select the inclusive schools and the IERCs. The data collected was analysed using the descriptive analytic technique for the quantitative data and the thematic analytic technique for the qualitative data. Meanwhile, the linear regression analysis was used to test hypotheses against the 0.05% level of significance. From the findings, 78.1% of respondents agreed that IERCs in Bamenda carry out many significant activities that effectively promote inclusive education and that define access to these IERCs. Also only 53.3% of the respondents agreed that IERC resources were sufficient while just 30% of the respondents agreed that the available resources in IERCs had the quality required for effective inclusive education implementation. Activities of IERCs that were identified as promoting the success of inclusive education implementation included: guidance and counselling services; provision of material, technical and human resources to support teaching and learning; capacity building in sign language skills, brailing skills and other inclusive-relevant skills; collaborative teaching between regular teachers and special needs specialists; awareness raising in inclusive education and rights of persons with disabilities, and referrals. In testing the hypotheses, the regression analysis revealed that the activities of IERCs played significant roles in implementing inclusive education. It was thus recommended that more IERCs should be established, should be financially supported, and that these IERCs should be made an integral part of every inclusive school.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Inclusive Special Education, Resource Centers, Persons with Disabilities, Implementation.

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Introduction

Inclusive Education the world over has come to be recognized as one of the significant ways through which equity among human persons and education for all can be collectively attained. Inclusive special education in particular ensures not only that persons with disabilities are able to receive affordable education of good quality in a readily accessible manner to build their human potentials and enhance the attainment of their dreams but also that they are able to gain knowledge and skills in an integrated context that fosters their acceptance, understanding, sense of belonging and respect among their non-impaired peers. Successful inclusion is a critical trajectory towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable development goals. The education policy in Cameroon recognizes and guarantees the right of persons with disabilities to admission into regular schools; it demands that provision be made for specialized staff and appropriate didactic materials to serve the needs of these persons in schools (Lukong & Jaja, 2016). The education policy in Cameroon also provides for equal learning opportunities to all persons regardless of their individual differences (Ngalim, 2019). Successful implementation of inclusive education requires the provision of reasonable accommodation and support measures required by persons with disabilities as well taking appropriate measures to employ specialized teachers and train professionals on inclusive education practices at all levels of education (UNICEF, 2017).

In spite of the potential of inclusive education in general and inclusive special education in particular to bridge the social and economic and equity gaps that exist between persons with disabilities and those without disabilities, the successful implementation of inclusive education is often impeded by cultural, social, economic and structural barriers. These challenges include the negative stereotyping of disabilities and the accompanying stigmatization of persons with disabilities; the negative attitudes of educational stakeholders towards learners with special educational needs and inclusive education practices; poverty; poor, inaccessible and inadequate infrastructures; unsuitable curriculum content; lack of focus on inclusive education skills in the curriculum of teacher training institutions; acute inadequacy of trained special needs education staff; lack of community support for persons with disabilities leading to their isolation and inability to develop a sense of belonging; esteem crises among persons with disabilities; lack of teaching learning materials or support services and poor policy implementation of inclusive education (Cockburn et al., 2017; Fonyuy, 2018; Mbibeh, 2013; Merlyne, 2020; Ngalim, 2019; Tanyi, 2016; Tchombe et al., 2012). Some education stakeholders in the Country are taking up the challenge to address some of these barriers through establishing operational Inclusive Education Resource Centers (IERCs) with the aim of providing technical support and skills development necessary for successful inclusion. This paper examines the contributions that existing IERCs in Bamenda, NW Cameroon, are making to the successful implementation of inclusive special education.

Literature Review

Inclusive education is one of the major innovations that have taken place in education beginning in the last half of the 20th century. It is a philosophy and approach that seeks to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, are provided with

equitable opportunities to learn together in the same classroom. The concept of inclusive education is grounded in the belief that every student has the right to access quality education in a supportive and inclusive environment (United Nations, 2006). Inclusive education goes beyond mere physical inclusion and aims to create a culture of respect, acceptance, and belonging for all learners (Booth, 2000).

According to UNESCO (2009), inclusive education is based on the principles of equity, quality, and non-discrimination. It involves the full participation and achievement of all students, including those with disabilities, learning difficulties, or other special needs, in regular education settings. Inclusive education recognizes and values the diversity of learners and promotes the development of inclusive practices that cater to the individual needs and strengths of each student (Forlin, 2013).

Inclusive education is not just about integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms but also about restructuring educational systems to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). It requires collaboration among educators, families, and communities to create supportive learning environments that foster the academic, social, and emotional development of all students (Florian, 2014). Thus, in a nutshell, inclusive education emphasizes the importance of embracing diversity, promoting equality, and creating inclusive learning environments that enable all students to reach their full potential.

In spite of its importance, particularly in enabling schools to create inclusive cultures that celebrate differences, promote social cohesion, and empower all learners to succeed, inclusive education of persons with disabilities faces several barriers to its effective implementation. These barriers include: negative cultural stereotypes of disability and persons with disabilities, poverty, ignorance about the rights of persons with disabilities and lack of will/commitment on the part of parents and care givers to invest in the education of persons with disabilities (Banlanjo, 2022); poor attitudes of educational stakeholders towards learners with special educational needs and inclusive education practices, poor infrastructures, unsuitable curriculum content, poor training of teachers for inclusive education, lack of teaching learning materials or support services and poor policy implementation of inclusive education (Cockburn et al., 2017; Fonyuy, 2018; Mbibeh, 2013; Merlyne, 2020; Ngalim, 2019; Tanyi, 2016; Tchombe et al., 2012). One of the key ways by which these barriers can be addressed effectively and sustainably is through the establishment and functional activities of Inclusive Education Resource Centers (IERCs)

IERCs are institutions with support systems created for the purpose of providing assistance or support services to inclusive schools and to all learners especially LSENs, parents, teachers, the community, the government and other parties involved in the implementation of inclusive education (Pradipta et al., 2020). They are “pedagogical centers equipped with specific materials and assistive devices as well as staffed with professionals to give support to LSENs, teachers and neighboring schools (Ministry of Education MoE, 2012b, p.10).” This latter definition highlights what IERCs are, the role they are expected to play, the purpose for which they are created and what they constitute of. IERCs are of utmost importance in the implementation of inclusive education given the

need for specialized material and human resources which are absent in most of the schools (Siska et al., 2019; Lapham & Papikyan, 2012). These resource centers carry out various activities and programs geared towards improving access, participation and quality of education for all (Gedfie & Negassa, 2019). Since IERCs exist to reinforce the implementation and sustainability of inclusive special education (Pradipta et al., 2020), integrating them into the functional structure of mainstream schools helps to reform the school culture, policy and practices.

IERCs contain three categories of resources namely human resources, material or technical resources and support services. Human resources in IERCs include itinerant teachers, educational psychologists, braille trainers, sign language interpreters, speech therapists, physiotherapists, school nurses, interpreters, mobility trainers, regular school teachers capable of practicing inclusive pedagogy and school directors equipped with basic knowledge and skills in understanding the different needs of learners, top education ranking officials, the local community and NGOs (FME, 2015). Material and technical resources in an IERC include slate, stylus, mobility canes, hearing aids, sign language dictionaries, sign language charts, wheel chairs, walkers, crutches, ramps, accessible toilets, kits, picture exchange communication system, textbooks, tables, chairs, shelves, drawers, writing boards, stationaries for making training materials, ICT tools as well as printers, scanners and photo copiers (FME, 2015). As for support services, common support services in an IERC include the provision of necessary teaching expertise to ensure the active learning of all learners, provision of medical needs as well as guidance and counselling sessions to all learners, training and re-training of teachers, lending of assistive devices, assisting in identification of needs, conducting assessments, giving referrals to learners with special educational needs and networking or partnering with educational stake holders involved in the implementation of inclusive education (FME, 2015).

From the above considerations, if IERCs are well equipped and functional, they provide a significant means through which barriers to inclusive education can be broken down and the implementation of inclusive education successfully enhanced. Unfortunately, existing IERCs in many low income countries, especially where inclusive education is still at a struggling phase, IERCs are critically lacking capacity and face of number of other challenges. For instance, IERC are for the most part completely lacking or absent in schools, making the implementation of inclusive education a challenging task (Ngalim, 2019; Mbibeh, 2018). Pather (2013) holds that where they exist, what is considered as an IERC in some schools championing educational inclusion is a mere resource room equipped with some special materials and an itinerant teacher. Moreover, he observes that there is still a lack of integration between the activities of schools and IERCs owing to the fact that some schools continue to perceive the functions of the IERCs as different from those of the school such that there is no formal and systematic connection between activities that are carried out in IERCs and classroom activities in schools. Gedfie and Negassa (2019) emphasize this existing dichotomy between the school and IERCs by describing IERCs as structures sharing a building space with mainstream schools to support the learning of children with diverse needs, a description which betrays the

perception of IERCs as mere structural additions to schools and not essential or integral components of the school as such.

These considerations strongly corroborate Banlanjo (2022) who found IERCs were acutely lacking as only a very insignificant percentage of schools had resource centers even if they were not adequately equipped. The study also found that special needs teachers working in IERC enjoyed little or poor collaboration from teachers of mainstream classrooms and that curricula planning in mainstream schools gave very little consideration and priority to special needs teachers working with special needs learners in mainstream classrooms. As a result, the productive exchange that should exist between mainstream classroom teachers and inclusive special education experts in IERCs is jeopardized. Ideally, IERCs personnel employ their expertise to build the capacity of mainstream classroom teachers, enabling the learners to benefit from these services. Banlanjo (2022) equally found that IERCs were poorly equipped in relation to existing needs of special needs learners as the available resources in the IERC tended to meet the needs of only a particular category of special needs pupils and students.

Against these exclusivist and discriminatory tendencies, FME (2015) argued for a more inclusive, all-embracing conception of IERCs, a conception that broadens the limits of IERCs from the resource room to include the entire school. In this conception, the IERC is no longer viewed as an addendum to the school but is an integral component of the school's structural constitution. Both Banlanjo (2022) and Pradipta et al. (2020) are in agreement in recommending that in order to ensure effective inclusive schools, the establishment and adequate capacitation of IERCs should be made a *conditio sine qua non* for allowing inclusive schools to set up and run. While this is already an educational policy trajectory in some low income African countries such as Ethiopia, it is yet to be a reality in others such as Cameroon where the agents of inclusive education and IERCs are largely non-state actors.

Method

This study utilized the mixed method cross-sectional survey with questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews as methods of data collection. The sample for the study comprised 210 students and pupils with disabilities together with 9 of their teachers, and 17 resource persons from three selected resource centers. This gave a total sample size of 236 participants. The student and pupils respondents were selected from primary, secondary and tertiary inclusive education pilot schools. The selection of the sample for the study was entirely purposive. Structured questionnaires were used collect data from students while semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data from teachers and personnel of the IERCs. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Qualitative data were analysed using the technique of thematic analysis with findings grouped under umbrella terms and key themes.

Results

Findings from the study indicated that IERCs in Bamenda were engaged in several activities geared towards promoting effective implementation of inclusive education. The table below summarizes these activities.

Activities of IERCs in Bamenda

Measure of activities	Perception	Frequency	Percent	Cum. %
Involvement of IERC beneficiaries in resource center activities	Strongly Agree	35	24.0	24.0
	Agree	79	54.1	78.1
	Disagree	24	16.4	94.5
	Strongly Disagree	6	4.1	98.6
	Missing	2	1.4	100.0
Provision of counseling and guidance services to IERC beneficiaries	Strongly Agree	35	24.0	24.0
	Agree	91	62.3	86.3
	Disagree	12	8.2	94.5
	Strongly Disagree	6	4.1	98.6
	Missing	2	1.4	100.0
Provision of material and human resources to support teaching and learning	Strongly Agree	52	35.6	35.6
	Agree	70	47.9	83.6
	Disagree	15	10.3	93.8
	Strongly Disagree	9	6.2	100.0
Conduction of trainings in sign language, brail skills and other inclusive education practices	Strongly Agree	43	29.5	29.5
	Agree	66	45.2	74.7
	Disagree	20	13.7	88.4
	Strongly Disagree	15	10.3	98.6
	Missing	2	1.4	100.0
Practice of team teaching between resource persons and regular school teachers	Strongly Agree	32	21.9	21.9
	Agree	66	45.2	67.1
	Disagree	30	20.5	87.7
	Strongly Disagree	16	11.0	98.6
	Missing	2	1.4	100.0
Organisation of awareness raising campaigns in the communities	Strongly Agree	39	26.7	26.7
	Agree	81	55.5	82.2
	Disagree	18	12.3	94.5
	Strongly Disagree	8	5.5	100.0
Refers LSEns to and receives referrals from health units	Strongly Agree	30	20.5	20.5
	Agree	87	59.6	80.1
	Disagree	22	15.1	95.2
	Strongly Disagree	7	4.8	100.0
Activities are consistent throughout the school year	Strongly Agree	40	27.4	27.4
	Agree	89	61.0	88.4
	Disagree	13	8.9	97.3
	Strongly Disagree	4	2.7	100.0
Activities are sufficient and effective	Strongly Agree	16	11.0	11.0
	Agree	68	46.6	57.5
	Disagree	47	32.2	89.7
	Strongly Disagree	11	7.5	97.3
	Missing	4	2.7	100.0

Findings revealed that activities carried out by the IERCs are participatory. Accordingly, 24% of respondents strongly agreed that they have been involved in the activities organized by the IERCs, while 54.1% agreed, indicating that learners with disabilities who did not get involved with IERC activities were the significant majority.

Results also indicated that 24% of the sample agreed that the activities of IERCs in Bamenda involve the provision of guidance and counselling on issues pertaining to inclusive education practices, while 62.3% strongly agreed. This gave a cumulative 86.3% agreement rate. Commenting on the guidance and counselling role of the IERCs, one of the resource center personnel, an assistant coordinator of the SIEP resource center had this to say:

“Parents of learners with disabilities often come to this centre whenever they have issues in assisting their children to study at home. We give them advice and guide them on the best methods they can use to assist these children. Also, some parents of children without disabilities go to the head teacher of the school proposing that their children should not be mixed up with children with disabilities in classrooms. In other cases, learners without disabilities complain that special attention is being given to children with disabilities in their classrooms but not to them as well. So in cases like these we advise, guide and counsel these persons on the importance of studying cordially with each other without any negative perceptions towards one another. With this guidance and counselling that we render to these persons, a conducive and friendly environment is being created for learning in the school”.

Furthermore, findings from the study revealed that IERCs in Bamenda provide material resources, as well as specialists in special needs education to assist in the teaching and learning of persons with disabilities, as indicated by 83% of the respondents who attested to this. This was supported by qualitative findings from interviews. According to the sign language teacher at the SIEP resource centre, the IERC plays the central role in providing special education needs experts like sign language teachers, brailists and special education teachers. She stated that “the resource centre manages the personnel; it provides technical support to the personnel, and gives technical counselling to the different school administrators on how to manage the resource center.” One of the participants who was the coordinator of the RIERC, a resource center situated in a public secondary school in Bamenda, revealed that enormous efforts are being invested to see to it that learners with disabilities have their needs provided. She said:

“I intend to make the teaching-learning process conducive for learners with disabilities. During the teaching learning process, these set of learners need assistance most especially those with visual impairments. And so I come in to Braille their notes, braille their exam questions, and also transcribe their exams papers for the teachers to be able to mark. Since these students are unable to see our normal print diagrams, I also raise tactile diagrams for them to be able to understand some specific topics so that there is equity in the teaching methods and techniques used to teach them alongside their sighted peers who can

understand their own diagrams by viewing them in print forms. I teach them the computer and train them on how to use the computer software in boasting their academic performances. You know, students with visual impairments need to know the computer. And so with the computers here in the resource center, special programs have been installed specifically for these students with visual impairments. These softwares include the JAWS and the NVDA. I teach them how to use these computer software programs to enhance their learning process in school and improve on their academic performances”.

In addition, according to quantitative findings from the study, 29.5% of the population strongly agreed that IERCs usually organize training workshops, while 45.2% agreed; hence a cumulative 74.7% of respondents agreed that IERC carry out capacity building for learners with disabilities and other educational stakeholders. Qualitative findings from interviews indicate that activities of IERCs involve building capacities for their beneficiaries, which go beyond classroom acquired knowledge. Trainings are organized by the IERCs to equip learners, teachers, parents and any other interested persons in the society with skills such as sign language, braille skills, inclusive teaching methods and strategies and other inclusive education practices, to ensure quality education for all. This has improved the capacities of many stakeholders with respect to the provision of the specific needs of persons with disabilities in educational settings. According to a coordinator of an IERC in one of the public secondary schools in Bamenda:

“There are some teachers that I can say for a fact that for the past years that they have been in collaboration with this IERC, have at least been able to know some basics in Braille and sign language, most specially the sign language, even though I am not a sign language teacher, but I coordinate every other activity in the IERC. There are equally students without disabilities who are now able to communicate using sign language because of the inclusion of students with hearing or speech impairment in their classes. In effect, when the sign language interpreter is not present, the students are able to assist their peers with speech impairment to understand what is being taught in class. These students have been able to learn this skill thanks to the practice of team teaching between the sign language teacher and the regular classroom teachers. So this is a big success that we have recorded”.

The findings from the study further revealed that collaborative teaching is one of the activities carried out by IERCs in Bamenda. According to the sign language teacher of RIERC, special needs experts in the resource centers collaborate with regular classroom teachers in mainstream classrooms to ensure effective delivery of lessons to learning with disabilities. He said:

“I interpret to the students with hearing impairment while the classroom teacher is teaching. Prior to the lessons, i work with the classroom teachers to understand the content of the lessons and familiarize myself with the vocabulary used in the lessons. When the classroom lessons are over, I take the students to the resource rooms during their free time to further explain the lessons to

them. Whenever these students present issues about the lesson which I cannot explain well, I channel it to the classroom teacher for clarification. This is how we work together to ensure that students with disabilities participate in learning”

Awareness raising on inclusive education was found to be one of the key activities of IERCs. A significant 82.2% of respondents reported that IERCs carry out sensitization activities geared at informing populations on what inclusive education is all about and its advantages. Based on qualitative information from interviews, it was found that such awareness raising campaigns provide a platform for the education of the population on the rights of persons with disabilities to quality education, which goes a long way to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education. In the words of a visually impaired student participant:

“The achievement I have observed in the IERC is that the centre is creating awareness, especially among our sighted peers. They do this via conferences. Conferences have been held, like the last conference that was held in CBC, organized by the SEEPD program and channelled to the University of Bamenda via the Director of Student Affairs, which the various students' presidents were present from the various schools and faculties. So awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities to quality education was raised. Also, there are social media forums that have been created, through which I think this awareness is still being preached. It somehow minimizes some barriers to inclusive education in the society as a whole and in the university in particular. I say this because at first, students without disabilities always looked at persons with disabilities as unnatural beings. This has now become something of the past as one can often see students with disabilities in the University carrying out school activities side-by-side their peers without any form of intimidation or discrimination on anyone. The IERC sensitizes people on disability etiquette, disability-related issues, like how to treat your fellow classmates who live with disabilities”.

The study equally found that IERCs were engaged in a bi-way referral activity, that is, referring persons with disabilities to appropriate and competent medical services and also receive referrals from medical units. From quantitative findings, 20.5% and 56.9% of respondents respectively agreed and strongly agreed (an average 37.8% of agreement rate) that children with special needs are referred to medical units by IERCs and from medical units to resource centers. One of the participants, a sign language teacher at SIEP Resource Centre corroborated this saying:

“The resource center works in close collaboration with the CBC health unit, sending and receiving health referrals for children with disabilities in the schools around the center. There are times when some of these learners find difficulties in participating in school activities because of threatening health issues associated with their disabilities. So in such cases where the situation is beyond our control, we tend to refer them to the CBC health unit which is just close by”.

The study utilized two parameters namely “Level of Consistency” and “Efficiency” to evaluate the activities carried out by IERCs. Level of consistency in the activities of IERCs referred to how regular, or how structured the activities of the IERCs were. According to the findings of the study, an average 88.4% of the population agreed and strongly agreed that programs towards the implementation of inclusive education by IERCs in Bamenda were consistent throughout the school year.

As concerns the efficiency and effectiveness of the activities of IERCs, 11% and 45.6% of the study sample respectively strongly agreed and agreed (a cumulative 56.6% agreement rate) that the activities of IERCs are sufficient and effective to support the accommodation of learners with disabilities in schools. The average score on this indicator suggests that IERCs in Bamenda still have a lot to do to improve on their effective functioning in order to boost the level of impact on the beneficiaries.

The null hypothesis “There is no significant effect of the activities of IERCs in Bamenda on the implementation of inclusive education” was verified using the Simple Linear Regression analysis with results as indicated on the table below:

Regression Results for the Effects of IERC Activities on the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Test value(t)	Sig.
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	23.263	4.921		4.727	.000
Participation in IERCs Activities	2.407	1.180	1.710	2.041	.043
Guidance and Counseling	.026	.116	1.018	3.222	.002
Provision of Material Resources and Special Educational Needs Experts	2.295	2.078	.120	1.705	.049
Capacity Building	2.273	1.162	1.616	2.956	.033
Team Teaching	.117	.114	.083	2.024	.308
Awareness raising	.025	.114	1.018	3.219	.002

Referrals	2.282	1.912	.112	2.194	.040
Consistency	6.187	2.445	2.287	2.530	.013
Efficiency	4.914	2.243	.209	2.191	.030
a. Dependent Variable: Implementation of inclusive education					

The analysis on table above shows a significant effect of the activities of IERCs on inclusive education implementation, since all the significance levels are determined at less than 0.05. As such, the null hypothesis that there is no significant effect of the activities of IERCs on the implementation of inclusive education was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis adopted. All the independent variables also have a positive effect on the dependent variable as indicated by the positive t values all through.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that IERC activities are crucial for any efforts at effective implementation of inclusive education across basic, secondary and tertiary levels of education. The different resources as well as the diverse forms of activities that are carried out with these resources in the IERCs provide an efficient and sustainable means of addressing the barriers to inclusive education. The finding that IERCs promote collaborative teaching between regular classroom teachers and special needs teachers is in tandem with Banlanjo (2022) and Banlanjo, Ngalim and Elbers (2022) who found that special needs teachers such as sign language teachers and brail teachers frequently assist the regular teacher in the classroom in inclusive schools, enabling learners with special needs to understand the lesson being taught. Banlanjo (2022) found that IERCs also provide skills training to parents of learners with disabilities especially in brailing and signing to enable these parents follow up, supervise and monitor the learning of their children with special needs at home.

The finding that IERCs in Bamenda offer guidance and counselling services to parents of learners with disabilities, learners with disabilities and other educational stakeholders on issues related to inclusive educational practices was equally significant. This finding aligns with previous research that emphasizes the importance of providing comprehensive support to students with diverse learning needs in inclusive settings. According to a study by Avramidis and Norwich (2002), inclusive education resource centers play a crucial role in promoting positive outcomes for students with disabilities by offering a range of support services, including counselling, guidance, and academic assistance. Furthermore, a study by Forlin, Keen, and Barrett (2008) highlighted the significant impact of inclusive practices on students' social and emotional well-being. The provision of guidance and counselling services within inclusive education resource centers can contribute to creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel valued, respected, and empowered to achieve their full potential.

Inclusive education resource centers that offer guidance and counselling services align with the principles of inclusive education, which prioritize the individual needs and strengths of all students. The provision of personalized support and the promotion of a sense of belonging and acceptance enable IERCs to be capable of enhancing students' overall well-being and academic success.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The implementation of inclusive education in Cameroon is still at a very slow pace. This is owed to several factors. Firstly, the implementation of inclusive education in Cameroon is being championed by a few private civil society actors. In spite of having put in place policies and regulations that favour the implementation of inclusive education, the government has been slow to commit in terms of establishing inclusive pilot public schools, setting up resource centers and providing material and financial assistance to private sector actors who are engaged in implementing inclusion best practices. Secondly, implementing inclusive education is quite costly and without technical and financial assistance, private sector actors cannot rely on existing policies alone to make the desired difference. There is need for funding to improve the capacity and functional efficiency of existing resource centers in the country and to establish new ones (informed by needs assessments) to be able to meet existing needs. Furthermore, cultural barriers to the education of children with disabilities continue to thrive and provide real obstacles to the exercise of the educational rights of a significant number of learners with disabilities. The absence IERCs or lack of capacity in existing ones serves to reinforce the negative stereotype of a child with disabilities as an educational liability, as persons unfit for the project of formal learning in schools. These stereotypes and the reluctance they engender in parents and caregivers to commit to the education of children with various forms of impairments can be effectively deconstructed and even eliminated if the government in collaboration with civil society organizations and private sector education agents, work to ensure that there exist inclusive schools in every neighbourhood with fully equipped IERCs and that every child with a disability has unrestricted access to the services that these IERCs offer. Therefore, this study recommends that more IERCs should be created and that the IERC should be made an integral part of every inclusive school. In addition, the study recommends that having an IERC should be an indispensable requirement for authorizing new schools to be established and for existing schools to continue to function after a given timeframe. Lastly, the government should regulate that part of the subvention given to private sector education agents and agencies should go to setting up and strengthening IERC capacities and this should be strictly monitored to ensure strict conformity on the part of beneficiary agents.

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