The teacher should be learning: In-service professional development and learning of teachers implementing inclusive education in early childhood education settings

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Calls for teacher quality are a lively issue in education systems and schools. This paper explores in-service professional development and learning of teachers implementing inclusive education in early childhood settings. Teachers and headteachers of early childhood settings were interviewed in the context of their daily work and practice. Qualitative results from participants showed teachers engage in 'in-and out-of-school' formal and informal professional development activities to enhance their readiness, efficacy, competence, and preparedness for inclusive education. Professional development is seen as an important conduit to improving teachers' learning and motivation for practice, although its effectiveness is affected by the interplay of teacher, school, and system challenges. The study's recommendations include motivating teachers, revitalising formal professional development programs and their provision, and supporting teachers' informal learning activities so that both modes of learning can synergistically contribute to advancing teachers' knowledge, skills, and disposition for inclusive education.

Keywords: Teachers, in-service professional development, learning, agency, inclusive education, early childhood settings, challenges

Introduction

(Re)ignited calls for enhanced teacher quality for effective teaching and learning of young children are a lively globalised issue. In education systems and schools and society, this recognition, among others, follows the increased interest in the idea of making education more inclusive and equitable (Ainscow, 2020), so that all children can benefit from the educational, social, political or economic incentives Inclusive Education (IE) practice provides (Ackah-Jnr, 2020). While IE is a complex concept, it is defined as a never-ending process aimed at increasing the participation, belonging and engagement of all children in school programs and settings (Ainscow, 2020; Cologon, 2014). It embraces human diversity, and requires ongoing commitment from teachers to make it succeed (Cologon, 2014). According to Ackah-Jnr (2020), IE is "all about the least [*and purposeful*] *things* teachers do in classrooms that give hope and meaning to [*all young*] learners…and [*essentially*] the opportunity and space not only to learn and socialise with others but for their voices to be heard" (pp. 171-172) and for them to also play meaningful and engaging roles. For teachers to lead this 'aura and flavour' of IE in early childhood settings and schools, they need to be learning, growing, or developing. Ainscow (2020) identifies that there should be an emphasis on system and whole-school approaches to support teachers in developing such inclusive practices.

The professional development (PD) of teachers is important for improving their learning, motivation, and practice or attitude, and is a key factor that impacts IE (Ackah-Jnr, 2016; Sharma, 2018). Defined as how teachers learn to learn and how they apply their knowledge in practice (Postholm, 2012), PD is fundamental to successful IE. PD that is focused on the dimensions of inclusive and global program quality, according to Buysse, Winton, and Rous (2009), represents a crucial avenue for enhancing the effectiveness of early childhood teachers for educating all children, including those with disability and special educational needs. Teachers thus need to update their knowledge and skills and to apply

information about meeting the needs of diverse children in IE classrooms (Graham & Scott, 2016). Effective PD is integral to quality IE teaching and learning, offering teachers opportunities to continually fine-tune and improve their teaching skills (Gasbarro, 2008).

In the last two decades, a spirited effort has been directed to enhance teacher PD—preparedness, readiness, and efficacy, especially for IE. Teacher education programs and policies globally have subsequently witnessed 'progressive' reform and restructuring to meet the demand for quality and effective teachers. Widely reported is the centrality of teachers, their PD and learning, to effective IE (Ackah-Jnr, 2016; Bartolo, Bjorck-Akesson, Gine, & Kyriazopoulou, 2016; Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Forlin & Sin, 2017; Graham & Scott, 2016; MoE, 2015, 2017; Sharma, 2018). Teacher preparedness and PD are crucial to overcoming resistance and resistivity to IE (Ackah-Jnr, 2016). Therefore, the ideation that teachers can be supported to maintain ongoing scholarship and capacity to provide responsive inclusive education should be a critical thematic focus of the 21st-century knowledge-based education world.

Ghana provides a unique context to study IE in early childhood settings and schools. Its current societal, political, and ideological changes, or policies and philosophies such as Education Strategic Plan 2012-2020 (MoE, 2012) and IE policy (MoE, 2015) support education for all. Due to renewed commitment to IE, teachers are expected to be skilled, knowledgeable, and competent to include all children in Ghanaian schools. As part of the international education community subscribed to advancing and sustaining inclusive and equitable quality education, a globalised best practice and aspirational goal (Ackah-Jnr, 2020), Ghana sanctions high-quality teachers as the heartbeat of this journey:

> the development of a well-informed and trained [teacher] human resource cadre [is key to] the quality delivery of IE [in early childhood settings and schools] throughout Ghana (MoE, 2015, p. 7).

The National Teachers' Standards further reinforces the goal of IE and mandate that teachers are empowered continually to improve their learning and to engender effective learning among those learners that they teach (MoE, 2017). This means teachers need sustained improvement in their personal and professional learning to develop knowledge and skill architecture for enhanced IE. Ensuring teachers develop professional values and attitudes, professional knowledge, and professional practice to promote equity and inclusivity in Ghanaian early childhood and school settings are highly necessary and matters of concern (MoE, 2017).

Teachers who are well trained and have good initial and sustained in-service PD are one of the most important factors influencing the quality of IE in early childhood settings (Bartolo et al., 2016). Yet the PD many teachers require for leading the implementation and practice of IE in Ghanaian early childhood and school settings is usually inadequate (Ackah-Jnr, 2016; MoE, 2013, 2015). There is also a dearth of qualitative research examining teachers' PD realities or contexts for inclusive practice. Although a few studies have focused on pre-service training of teachers for IE, no study was found that considered both formal and informal PD for IE and the underlying challenges to their provision or organisation. Guided by an interpretive exploratory case study approach, this research offers insights into holistic IE PD by examining the research questions:

What forms of formal and informal PD do teachers have to implement IE?

What is the perceived importance of IE PD?

What challenges are associated with PD for IE?

Theoretical framing

The paper's main argument is that teachers learn for and about practice. The personal training and PD of teachers is important and this occurs through formal and informal learning activities (Ackah-Jnr, 2016; Forlin & Sin, 2017; Postholm, 2012; Sharma, 2018; Sheridan,

Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009) and in a variety of settings or modes. The pathways of PD, also learning contexts, are interrelated and teachers' engagement in them is internally or externally driven. Teachers' PD attempts to increase their knowledge base, understanding, skill repertoire, attitudinal and perceptual orientation, disposition, and motivation for practice. The PD of teachers is thus linked to effective IE practice.

The PD of teachers implementing IE consists of a series of formal and informal learning, activities and programs (Ackah-Jnr, 2016). Formal PD involves the delivery of planned activities or processes, which occurs in and outside schools. It entails learning experiences, actions, and practices that promote the education, training, and development opportunities for inclusive early childhood teachers. Research shows formal PD includes specific coursework (Sheehy, Rix, Nind, & Simmons, 2004; West & Pirtle, 2014), post-graduate studies (Graham & Scott, 2016), workshops and conferences (Mitchell & Hegde, 2007; Sheridan et al., 2009), on-the-job training or mentoring (Forlin & Sin, 2017; Gasbarro, 2008; Nutbrown & Clough, 2006; Sheridan et al., 2009) and on-site school support services (Forlin & Sin, 2017). To ensure holistic IE for teachers, PD activities should include the practices of mentoring, in-class coaching, peer observation, outcome-sharing and learning exposure (Forlin & Sin, 2017).

Previous research identifies informal PD for IE to include avenues that enable teachers to develop the professional motivation for self-directed learning and agency (Soodak et al., 2002) or to engage in reflective practice (Postholm, 2012). In informal PD teachers usually engage in learning activities and programs that they perceive can improve their understanding and knowledge of practice, self-efficacy, or competence. Informal PD activities also occur in a variety of forms, including teacher interactions and collaboration, peer learning networks, conversations and knowledge exchanges within and across schools, but such agentive activities are mainly driven by teachers' intrinsic motivation (Soodak et al., 2002).

Professional development and learning for IE or to teach are increasingly becoming complex and challenging. Research shows teacher education, both pre-service and in-service programs, is beset with similar challenges and complexity of training and developing motivated teachers (Forlin & Sin, 2017; Sharma, 2018). It is frequently reported that both pre- and in-service teachers are underprepared for IE (Forlin & Sin, 2017; Opoku, Rayner, Pedersen, & Cuskelly, 2019; Sharma, 2018). It is imperative to transform teachers' PD by identifying and creating conditions that enable learning, individually and collectively, for IE. Doing so may enhance teachers' preparedness, efficacy and confidence, and the overall motivation for them to lead productive changes and practice in schools.

There is, importantly, a synergistic interrelationship between pre-service training and in-service PD for IE. Research evidence indicates pre-service training is fundamental to in-service PD, with both serving as the major channels for developing and deepening teachers' knowledge, skills, values or disposition for IE (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Winton & McCollum, 2008). Pre-service training acts a springboard for augmenting in-service PD. Therefore, effective and sustainable IE will require good complementation of pre-service training and in-service PD of teachers. This study focuses on the in-service PD of teachers implementing IE in early childhood settings.

Methods

The case study inquiry approach adopted for this study fostered the gathering of contextually rich information from early childhood and school settings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018; Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2013). The method is suitable for unearthing human experience or behaviour in natural settings. It also illuminates a particular situation, enabling the researcher to get an in-depth understanding of it (Yin, 2013). As a qualitative methodology, a case study is used to elicit information about participants'

experiences, meanings, and perspectives of in-service IE PD for teachers.

Two sets of interview protocols with the same interview questions, designed in a semi-structured format, were used to collect data (see Appendix). Interviews were conducted individually with teachers and headteachers at school sites (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2013). The interviews were digitally recorded to allow the researcher time to immerse in the data and reflect carefully on meanings embedded in them. Transcripts generated from the interviews were merged and analysed thematically to identify key issues relating to the research questions. Data extracts were carefully selected, organised, and reviewed, or interpreted to ensure justifiable conclusions.

This study was granted ethical approval as low-risk research. It adhered to ethical procedures guiding the conduct of responsible and quality research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Cohen et al., 2018). The interdependent elements of informed consent: competence, comprehension, voluntarism, and full information foregrounded the research process (Cohen et al., 2018). Data analysis involved critical reflection and self-awareness. Results are presented as intersubjective interpretations of the researcher and the researched, using both objective and subjective perspectives, and are articulated with appropriate literature on IE. This research is thus conducted responsibly and ethically.

Participating schools, teachers and headteachers

Four early childhood learning centres and schools, selected from the Metropolitan capital of the Central Region of Ghana, participated in this study. All headteachers and teachers in the schools demonstrated self-determination, willingness, and motivation to engage in the study, but 20 participants, including four headteachers and 16 teachers were chosen. Four teachers were selected from each early childhood setting or school. The early childhood centres represent unique ecological contexts and cultures for IE and teacher practice and were located in different education districts. Uniquely, the early childhood settings were mostly led

by female headteachers who had rich teaching experience of between 8 to 33 years. Many

teachers had a Bachelor of Education degree. The schools and participants are given

pseudonyms. School 1, a private model co-educational setting, had two headteachers (one for

the 6-stream kindergarten section, KG 1-2, and one for the 6-stream primary section, P1-6), but

the head of the KG section participated in this study. School 3 and 4 had two streams of KG

and primary classes, while School 2 was a single stream inclusive pilot centre as shown in

Table 1.

Table 1.

Profile of participating early childhood and primary schools

School	Type	Designation	Headship
School 1	Private co-educational	Regular model school	Female Head
School 2	Public co-educational	Inclusive pilot school	Female Head
School 3	Private co-educational	Regular school	Female Head
School 4	Public single-sex educational	Regular school	Female Head

Findings

Formal professional development for IE

Training workshops and seminars

All the participants said training workshops and seminars constituted the prominent and

important forms of formal PD programs the GES, NGOs and other agencies organised for in-

service teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills or preparedness or build capacity for IE.

Formal PD was mainly one-shot, one-day program or at best week-long, which occurred at

different sites and locations, including resource centres, individual schools and at cluster-based

schools or other approved sites. The following extracts depict the nature of IE PD programs and the sites in which these occurred.

> We have training programs for the IE from the government [GES] and seminars. It was organised for all schools for about 2 days. At this school we have our own training which is led by the head or some teachers. (Teacher 1 School-1)

> IE training is done by the Government [GES] or some NGOs... People from the national office may lead but sometimes university lecturers…That's the main training unless you decide to further at the university. (Teacher 1 School-4)

> We have workshops from GES. One was a week when the policy was brought. Resource persons train teachers during school-based training. (Headteacher 3)

Significantly, the GES organised training programs in collaboration with international development partners for teachers or the programs were sponsored. Participants' extracts showed the training programs are facilitated by a mix of trainers, including resource persons, university lecturers, and education officials, or at times headteachers or lead teachers at the school level. But these programs were characterised as occasional, periodic, or infrequent and not intensive regarding the scope and duration:

> We normally have training at the teachers' resource centre. We in private schools don't have much specific training but occasionally the GES invites us when there is training on new policies like the IE. It's not much… (Teacher 4 School-3)

> Sometimes the training doesn't focus on things [or needs of] teachers have problems when teaching children disability. It's general…If I have child with behaviour issues, my training should not be the same... (Teacher 4 School-4)

Although all teachers are involved in IE, it was noticed that public school teachers had more PD opportunities to improve their knowledge or competencies to include children with

disability than compared to those in private schools. This shows that some teachers may not have adequate training, which could be the basis for the resistance to IE practice.

University courses and inclusive practicum and support

Participation in university programs and courses constituted another major form of formal PD that support teachers' development of skills, knowledge, or competencies for IE. Some teachers undertook a 2, 3 or 4-year university program as part of their PD usually after their initial teacher training at the colleges of education, universities, or other institutions. Some teachers indicated these programs introduced them to 'more' IE and related courses that enhance their pedagogical leadership. Teachers enrolled either in full or part-time basis in on-campus face-to-face, sandwich or distance programs, which support their IE teaching:

> I enrolled for a university degree and did a bit of special education and related courses on IE. We have sandwich courses too. (Teacher 4 School-1)

> I learnt about children with disability at the university, so I have some ideas about IE. I am doing distance [education] program. (Teacher 1 School-2)

> After [training] college, I went to university, we had some exposure to IE from the courses or practicum on children with disability. (Teacher 1 School-4).

It was noted that many teachers participated in sandwich courses, which involves intensive on-campus, certificate, diploma, degree, or master's programs organised by different universities and other accredited institutions during the vacation or outside the formal teaching calendar of teachers for a period ranging from 2-4 months. These courses are needs-driven and are traditionally organised via face-to-face teaching and learning approaches.

Essentially, teachers at School 1 had 'many' ongoing 'specialised' PD and support in the form of semesterly assignment of teacher trainees to undertake IE practicum at their early childhood setting. Through a partner university, pre-and in-service teachers engaged in

collaborative learning, the sharing of knowledge and generation of ideas for IE teaching. This arrangement was perceived to contribute to the efficacy and preparedness of teachers, and in describing this process, one male teacher commented:

> Teachers pursuing bachelor's come on IE practicum every term and are assigned to various classes. We learn together, share ideas about how best to include all children. It's a good experience or work by the university. (Teacher 3 School-1)

Teachers at School 1 benefitted from further training support from the university:

> At this centre we benefit from lecturers at the university in teaching children with disability and other occasion training. (Teacher 1 School-1)

> The child development centre supports us in teaching children with challenges and problems at the school…they help with assessment. (Teacher 4 School-1)

Extracts from teachers in School 1 revealed that schools that partner with universities can offer diverse and ongoing PD programs and opportunities teachers practising inclusivity.

Agentive activities

While all teachers engaged in formal PD in one form, many others also engaged in self-directed learning or agentive activities to enhance their skills and knowledge or readiness for IE. Agentive activities were found to be important forms of informal PD that contribute to and enhance the learning and teaching experience of teachers. Teachers' agentivity was based on the idea that teachers on their volition need to learn to improve practice, so they sometimes "go on expeditions trailing—to unravel certain things" to support IE. In describing the import of self-directed learning, one teacher stated: "when teachers learn things themselves and see how they work; it makes it easier for them to do it well practically" (Teacher 1 School-2). Based on this extract, agency and learning can be instrumental to enhancing teacher proficiency and skillset for practice.

According to Teacher 2 School-2, informal professional learning that occurred through collaborative and supportive processes in schools enabled their practice. Other teachers spoke frequently about collaborating with 'lead' or experienced teachers in the same class level or school to brainstorm ideas and approaches that support the teaching and learning of children with disability at the ECE settings. The collegiality or closeness of teachers was identified as a key to initiating collaborative interactions and partnerships among teachers. Teacher 2 School-1 said, her "buddy teacher"—a lead teacher of in-service training programs at the ECE level— was reachable or willing to help, so it fosters frequent and easy discussion of issues on IE when the need arises. In the estimation of female Teacher 2 School-2, teachers engaged in collaborative learning based on the view that all teachers have a collective responsibility to ensure successful IE:

> teachers work and learn together to acquire knowledge and skills…. all teachers are doing their best to ensure IE succeeds. At the school we join hands to find solutions because one teacher can't do…and we learn.

Headteacher 3 noted that teachers engaged in self-directed learning or agentive activities because teachers should learn to keep abreast of new trends in the field. So, it is incumbent on teachers to learn about their practice, individually or collectively, and to stay current to improve IE, nonetheless this warranted heightened teacher motivation:

> The teacher should always be learning something on his own or with others [teachers]. Teachers need to be on top to answer questions about this inclusion. So, if all teachers have the desire, they can do some little studies here and there or seek help from experts… (Headteacher 3)

Similarly, one female teacher said agency occurs in the form of basic research and internet surfing for academic materials and literature on inclusive practices. These activities were found

to expose teachers to new learning for practice or new practice developments. Self-directed learning is a call for a teacher to break forth, challenge oneself, or know more:

> ...learn about what I do. If you don't have [enough] knowledge about IECE, you challenge yourself. You do some research at the library or the internet to get some information that helps you do what you are doing well. It helps you to learn new ways to improve inclusive teaching every day. (Teacher 2 School-4)

Importance of professional development for IE

Many participants mentioned further importance of IE PD. They identified PD as a process or mechanism that fosters the renewal, refreshment, or empowerment of teachers, ensuring they are abreast of new practice developments in IE. Others found that PD improves teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes or motivation. As best captured in this extract, PD is perceived to improve teachers' currency and preparedness for professional work and practice:

> We have workshops. We have forgotten certain things, so training refreshes us and teachers. We have helpful courses which make us more abreast of time and see what is happening. When there is new development, we have workshops to enlighten us on what is prevailing in the system. We have workshops to update ourselves and improve our professional work. (Headteacher 4)

From the extract, participants believed effective PD can extend teachers' understanding of practice, enabling them to develop new ideas about practices to promote teaching and learning. Another headteacher added, IE PD essentially is all about teachers developing or being equipped with the 'right' attitude, disposition, or mindset for enhanced practice.

> Training helps teachers to have the right attitude to work…It's when they don't have training that they react…with continuous training teachers can do their best ... are prepared to work with all children. (Headteacher 2)

Challenges to professional development

School, system, and teacher challenges were reported to influence PD for IE:

incompetent trainers, unconducive training site, theoretical and non-customised training, and lack of motivation.

Incompetent trainers—when you go for training and the facilitator isn't competent…

Using incompetent trainers was identified as a key systemic challenge. Many trainers who facilitated formal PD workshops, seminars and other programs were found not to be well-grounded in IE theory and practice issues. Participants felt knowledgeable trainers should lead or handle IE training programs. Some teachers lamented the 'culture of practice' of using trainers lacking the competency, practical knowledge and experience for IE training workshops and seminars and training in general and critiqued the Ghana Education Service/Ministry of Education and other organising bodies. While this is not unique to IE, Teacher 1 School-1, like many other teachers, said that the recurring practice of superintending PD with less knowledgeable trainers is concerning or detrimental since it does not support effective learning and understanding of new practices:

> sometimes when you go for workshops, you see that many trainers don't have much insights of the subject e.g. IE but are *facilitating* the training. The trainers aren't in classrooms, so they don't see what we see. When you go to workshops and the trainers aren't competent you feel…We go to workshops for solutions or to learn new things. Trainers need to be competent and conversant with IE.

Other teachers said some trainers for formal PD programs engaged in a 'reading feast or expedition', characterised by the regurgitation of the *same* information from prepared materials or notes. This practice was usually devoid of additional practical insights that can enhance teachers' understanding and knowledge of inclusive practice issues.

> Many PD for IE or in other areas is [j]ust about *the 'trainers' reading* handouts to us; the person doesn't give extra insights or practical examples, so you wonder how this trainer can help you learn new things? (Teacher 3 School-1)

> Some resource persons are good but many lack insights about IE, so they just
> [read] give us the [s]ame things in the prepared notes… (Teacher 4 School-4)

Some participants claimed such incompetent trainers do not support the co-construction and application of knowledge and skills or identification of practical ways to dealing with challenges, so that practice is demotivating and frustrating or can deter future attendance of workshops. As workshops appear to be the most used training format to reinforce new insights and skills, most participants wanted practitioners, researchers or academics with appropriate understanding and knowledge of IE for training and developing teachers.

Inappropriate training site with inflexible training approaches

The site or location for PD was often found to be inappropriate or unconducive. Many teachers claimed some training sites lacked material resources to support practical activities. Others were seen to be either too small for group activities or uninviting and uncomfortable. On the inappropriateness of the training sites, Teacher 1 School-2 stated,

> sometimes workshops occur at places that are not comfortable; many of them
> lack the [materials] that can support the training… Even the air and others…

Relatedly, some participants complained about the single-site approach and mode of delivering PD, especially by the GES. They found this monotonous, or did not involve multiple training approaches and sites, so many teachers preferred blended PD programs they perceived convenient, flexible, and suitable. These excerpts highlight this challenge:

> Training is sometimes one-way, only at the resource centre or schools. We can
> have distance or sandwich programs…or a good location (Teacher 2 School-4)

> Many forms of training can do. Internet connectivity at the school will help and
> face-to-face workshops. We can learn at our own time… (Teacher 3 School-1)

Theoretical training—more theory, little practical training

Another system-level challenge was the perceived theoretical orientation of PD provided at the universities and colleges of education as well as those offered by the GES and related agencies. There were little practical PD programs with limited opportunities for acquiring first-hand information and experiences in real settings. Ironically, some participants wondered why IE training that required practice-opportunities were not held at natural settings e.g. inclusive settings so that it can promote immediate knowledge and skill transfer or application. The critical question was: How can teachers see what they need to do in action if PD programs are theoretical? It was commonly argued that knowing what to do in actual practice is essential; hence the lack of practical IE PD limits experiential learning. One headteacher articulated the challenge of theory-driven IE PD:

> Teachers go through lots of theory, but in the end teachers and headteachers are expected to practicalise what they learn from training and professional development programs. So, they need more practical training for IE. The teaching practice or experience on IE is too little. (Headteacher 1)

Generalised training… not specific to our needs and occasional

Beyond the perceived theoretical-focused PD, many participants also noted that formal PD programs were often generalised training, and not specific to the IE needs of most teachers. Hence, such IE programs lacked customisation or contextualisation. According to some participants, many teachers did not receive differentiated or authentic PD that caters for unique classroom problems or everyday IE practice. One female Teacher 4 School-4 noticed that IE training courses were not extensive in scope and focus to enable 'deep' learning or understanding of issues.

> The theory is too much at colleges and universities… the teaching practice is too short during our training. We have general or few courses in inclusive education, but they were not deep…how much can teachers learn or understand…?

For 17 participants, PD programs were provided occasionally. As Headteacher 2 stressed further, the programs treated inclusivity in passing or with little emphasis, although teachers and headteachers are tasked to ensure the inclusion of all children:

> Teachers and headteachers have seminars or workshops, or in-service training periodically. In fact, for the workshops I have attended, there was nothing like today you are going for training on IE. But once a while, the trainers may chip in something and the need to embrace the idea of IE and all children in our midst. It's left to the headteacher to find out more about the practice.

Lack of motivation—we aren't motivated enough to go for training… some teachers are unwilling to learn

Many participants found the lack of motivation as a major challenge that generally affects teachers' engagement in PD. As a systemic challenge, lack of motivation is worsened by the perceived non-recognition of training workshops attended or university courses pursued as part of the input for teachers' promotion in recent years. One female teacher expressed how the lack of motivation influenced PD of teachers:

> How do you expect teachers to attend training programs if they are complaining? Even the motivation to develop further is not there. Those days any training counted towards your promotion… Some teachers have gone for masters, but the [GES] doesn't consider that. (Teacher 1 School-2)

Others felt the lack of motivation led to teacher passivity and non-reception to IE PD. For one headteacher, lack of motivation makes teachers to be indifferent to attend training programs or participate in further learning programs. In some cases, some headteachers felt teachers attended workshops because circulars enjoin them to do so, but in reality, many are unwilling,

unhappy or appear being 'forced' to do so. Like others, headteacher 3 submitted that this lack of motivation also impacts how teachers applied knowledge, skills and competencies acquired from PD in practice. She said,

> We aren't motivated to go for further training. IE requires motivated teachers
> who are trained or willing to learn. Sometimes teachers go for GES training,
> but they are there because circulars were sent around. Some aren't happy…they
> come back and don't apply what is learnt well. (Headteacher 3)

Surprisingly, though PD is perceived valuable in the context of IE, because of lack of motivation some participants opposed the training of all teachers. Rather they felt IE PD should be solely reserved for those interested in IE or "have the heart" for children with disability. The argument was that some teachers did not teach children with disability, so system-wide training of teachers was a misplaced priority. Teacher 1 School-3 asserted,

> inclusive training should be a course offered or given to only those teachers
> who have interest in or heart for IE; it should [n]ot be for all teachers.

The preference for 'selective' training against holistic IE training, signals an unfavourable posturing, and further indicates that IE practice issues are still considered the preserve or concern of *some teachers*. It may be convenient to say without equivocation that teachers with such attitudinal orientation or mindset are more likely to be ambivalent or see IE as other people's responsibility; hence they may remain unconcerned about attending to the learning experiences and needs of children with disability. They can resist IE or the affordances to PD aimed at enhancing teachers' efficacy and preparedness. However, the lack of motivation could be internally driven, or a case of teacher unwillingness to learn:

> If you don't have the will to teach such children, you think PD isn't good.
> Some teachers feel others will come in e.g. resource persons or specialist… the
> teacher doesn't see the need to know more… (Teacher 2 School-4)

Discussion

This interpretative exploratory case study adds to the research scholarship on PD by highlighting the learning activities or contexts of teachers implementing IE. Findings indicate teachers engage in formal and informal PD to enhance their preparedness and efficacy. Different teacher, school and system challenges were identified as impacting effective IE PD, which can derail the perceived importance and benefits of such programs. Three key conclusion pointers are drawn: effective PD is highly important for IE; teachers engage in both formal and informal PD and learning activities; and there are teacher, school, and system challenges, which are discussed in the following sections:

Effective PD is highly important

Results show that sustained and effective PD is important for IE practice and teachers' work, without which teaching all children in early childhood settings can be challenging. Especially against the backdrop of limited pre-service teacher training for IE, reported internationally and nationally (Ackah-Jnr, 2016; Forlin & Sin, 2017; Graham & Scott, 2016; Mangope & Mukhopadhyay, 2015; Sharma, 2018), ongoing PD is considered a key avenue to developing and deepening teachers' knowledge, skill set and understanding, to attaining increased level of confidence and competence, or to compensate their perceived inadequacies. It means participants realised PD is a lubricant for oiling the IE human resource machinery. Findings further show that to meet the challenges in today's diverse classrooms, teachers need PD that boosts their pedagogical leadership. By this, developing the heart-head-hand dimensions of teachers (Sharma, 2018) or all-round teachers through PD becomes invaluable.

As Sheridan et al. (2009) argue, effective PD sustains high-quality professional practices by enhancing systems and individuals to engage in activities that are self-sustaining and growth-producing. Overall, the study results show the affordances of PD in building

teachers' personal and professional capacity—renewing, refreshing, or empowering them—act as pull factors to instigate teachers to engage in IE learning activities to support their daily practice. As one female teacher reiterated, "with good PD programs, the desire [motivation] of teachers to teach [all] children increase". Therefore, the perceived importance associated to PD may propel teachers to take necessary steps to extend their knowledge and skills for practice.

Teachers engage in both formal and informal learning

Both formal and informal PD programs serve as key learning contexts for IE. Results affirm previous research that traditionally teachers engage mainly in formal PD programs such as workshops and seminars or university courses for IE (Forlin & Sin, 2017; Graham & Scott, 2016; Sheehy et al., 2004; West & Pirtle, 2014). However, self-directed learning or agentive activities are emerging as additional learning contexts. Engagement in both formal and informal PD can be construed as a 'holistic' approach to deepening teachers' knowledge, skill-base and preparedness or learning. Hence, informal PD need to be facilitated or supported to enable teachers to enjoy its affordances as a critical form of PD, and that both forms of PD complement each other as a strong foundation for successful IE. Results reinforce previous research and policy in Ghana and internationally that teachers require multiple PD opportunities to implement IE (Ackah-Jnr, 2016; Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Forlin & Sin, 2017; Mangope & Mukhopadhyay, 2015; MoE, 2012; Sharma, 2018).

Effective in-service PD, for Forlin and Sin (2017), enables teachers to be skilful to meet current and future needs and challenges of IE. Through PD, teachers reflect on their beliefs, values and attitudes, and their relationships with their daily practice (Carrington et al., 2013). How teachers reflect on their practice is important for planning their future teaching (Postholm, 2012), enabling them to create appropriate learning experiences for children. Since formal PD was deemed insufficient, enhanced informal PD or self-directed learning or exercise of agency can be an effective means for teachers to develop knowledge and skill repertoires or resilience

for IE. Informal PD according to Soodak et al. (2002), is key to teacher empowerment, so if many teachers take responsibility to enhance their preparedness or skill architecture, they can support the diverse needs of young children.

There are teacher, school, and system challenges to IE PD

Obviously, a trilogy of interrelated teacher, school, and system challenges impacts PD. The interplay of the challenges can affect practice, and school and system effectiveness or attainment of IE goals. Postholm (2012) similarly found individual and organisational (school and system) factors impact teachers' PD and learning. Because teachers are the forerunners of IE, the perceived challenges, if not overcome, can stagnate their efforts and capacity to leading productive changes and practice in inclusive schools. As training workshops or seminars constitute a grand mode of PD and are often based on a cascading approach— "training the trainer to train", the GES and other agencies' use of incompetent trainers for such programs should be avoided in order not to derail their effectiveness, attractiveness or appeal to teachers. Researchers (Ackah-Jnr, 2016; Postholm, 2012) emphasise PD programs need teacher educators or trainers who are knowledgeable of practice. Trainers with solid understanding of IE theory and practice can improve the content of training programs as well as strategies, competencies, skills, and knowledge of teachers, or provide the necessary leadership for facilitating training.

Motivation is a key ingredient in PD (Ackah-Jnr, 2018; Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005; Postholm, 2012), hence teachers' lack of motivation affects their participation in PD—non-recognition of PD for promotion, and absence of incentives such as conducive training sites and flexible approaches. As self-directed learning is intrinsically driven, having supportive school and system conditions is critical to enhancing this. If teachers are to learn and change practice, researchers (Ackah-Jnr, 2016, 2018; Barrett, 2014; Postholm, 2012) claim

schools need to be effectively resourced and that teachers are motivated (Ackah-Jnr, 2018; Knowles et al., 2005). Access to internet connectivity, for example, can ensure teachers use academic and social media platforms to learn or share information with the professional colleagues. School leaders can thus provide more PD opportunities or incentivise teachers to engage in informal PD.

Further, the theoretical-oriented and one-shot, all-for-one PD programs with little customisation add to the challenges. Training not connected to practice or lacks focus on specific contextual issues may not help teachers to understand the nuances of IE as "schools in which teachers work are the best arena for them to learn" and develop (Postholm, 2012, p. 425). Graham and Scott (2016) argue similarly that "ongoing professional learning is usefully grounded in the teacher's context" (p. 4) of practice. Therefore, a relook at strengthening the effectiveness and conduct of school-based specific PD programs is warranted. While some teachers had 'many' PD support through a partner university, the provision of one-off PD for teachers, with limited duration are inadequate to reinforce the development of knowledge, attitudes, values, or disposition. Teachers must always learn or have opportunities to deepen their knowing; hence, the school and system challenges to PD need to be overcome.

Implications for further research

The study is limited to a few schools and participants, and areas for further examination are suggested. Interviews and other qualitative data sources such as documents and observations can be used to replicate this study. Surveys with larger samples could be used to explore other contextual factors affecting IE PD. Additional views from education officials and teacher educators could provide a broader picture of the nature of and constraints to PD. Specifically, investigating teacher agency or self-directed learning, as additional forms of PD to support teachers' professional work and practice, is proposed.

Recommendations

The inquiry shows effective PD is the fulcrum of any meaningful IE. This warrants that teachers are of high quality. One main recommendation is to provide sustained and responsive PD and opportunities for all teachers. In order to provide such PD some recommendations include:

1. The Ghana Education Service (GES) and Ministry of Education (MOE), in collaboration with universities and colleges of education continue to make IE PD and learning the epicentre of all teacher education programs.

2. The GES/MOE, a key determiner of teacher professional standards, and universities and other institutions of higher education sustain the efficacy of pre-service training and preparation to complement PD for teachers.

3. Teacher education programs should be continuously reformed to include specified and generalised inclusive courses, which are premised on broad understandings and changing thinking about IE.

4. The GES/MOE ensures in-service training programs are mainly informed by both the expectations of IECE policy and the contextual needs of teachers, and the use of knowledgeable trainers.

5. More emphasis be placed on practical-orientated training and PD and collaborative training to develop all-rounder teachers.

6. More importantly, the GES/MOE and ECE settings strengthen motivation and leadership to support teachers to engage continuously in self-directed learning and agentive activities. In-school and systemic conditions need to be created to support professional motivation for self-empowerment, agency, and development.

7. Schools forge continuing PD partnerships with higher education institutions that serve as centres for teacher professional experiences or practicum programs.

8.   Teachers, schools and GES/MOE recognises that contribution of teacher agency and self-directed learning, as an additional form of PD and that the necessary in-school and system conditions are created and fostered to enable teachers learn to support their professional work and practice.

9.   There is a need to address the teacher, school, and system challenge to IE PD.

10. Specifically, motivation needs to undergird the training and PD of teachers:

   a.   Heightened consideration of Wlodkowski's (2008) motivational factors in PD: (1) create an atmosphere that promotes a learning community where every teacher feels respected and connected (establishing inclusion); (2) help teachers see the relevance to their experience (applicability); (3) create challenging and engaging experiences that value teachers' viewpoints (enhancing meaning); and (4) help teachers recognise that they have been successful in their learning (confidence and asymmetry).

   b.   IE PD should be anchored in the six andragogical assumptions of Knowles et al. (2005) to improve teachers' learning: (1) the need to know why they need to learn something, (2) the learner's self-concept, (3) the role of the learners' prior or accumulated reservoir of experiences, (4) readiness to learn, (5) orientation to learning, and (6) *intrinsic* motivation.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that teachers require quality ongoing in-service PD in the move towards a more inclusive approach in early childhood settings. Although PD is highly essential for IE, teacher, school, and system challenges impact its effectiveness. It is imperative that the implementation of IE is founded on sustained teacher professional learning and teacher motivation, and that both formal and informal PD opportunities are fostered to mutually contribute to advancing teachers' preparedness and competencies for inclusive education.

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Appendix

Headteacher and Teacher Interview Protocol

Professional development for inclusive education in early childhood settings

Demographic Information

Collect data on the following demographics: school type, headship type, location, qualification of teachers and headteachers, and other relevant information.

Research and Interview questions

What forms of formal and informal PD do teachers have to implement IE?
1. What type of PD programs (e.g. university courses or school-based training) do teachers receive to provide IECE?
   a. What professional development do you obtain for IECE?
   b. What type of professional development do you need for IECE?
   c. Who and where should professional development be provided?

2. What PD activities do you personally engage in to support IE?
   a. Tell me what is involved in the form of PD activities
   b. Are these PD activities necessary/important for IE?
   c. In you view what things or conditions enable you to participate in such informal learning activities?

What is the perceived importance of inclusive education PD?
3. What is the perceived role of IE PD?
   a. From your experience, is formal, informal, or independent PD necessary for IE?
   b. Do you think PD in IE is important for all teachers? Why?

What challenges are associated with PD for IE?
4. What are the main barriers to PD for IE?
   a. What challenges do you face with PD? (content of training, trainers, location)
   b. What specific barriers to PD do you face?
   c. How do the challenges impact you and your inclusive work and practice?
   d. What factors affect the organisation of PD at the school and system level?

Use follow up questions to help participants clarify and expand their views or opinions.