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Barriers to inclusion of children with disabilities in inclusive schools in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the types of barriers impeding the participation of pupils with special needs in schools practicing inclusive education in Wiamoase Educational Circuit in the Sekyere South District in Ashanti Region of Ghana. The aim of the study was to identify shortfalls in support services for pupils with special needs and find ways of mitigating challenges they encounter. A qualitative method, using in-depth interviews and observation was used to collect data from 25 participants, made up of the district special education coordinator, resource teachers, head teachers, and classroom teachers. Findings from the study indicated that support or pupils with special needs in the general schools was inadequate. Efforts should, therefore, be made to increase the supply of resources to the schools, and also, step up public awareness on education for children with disabilities.

Keywords: Inclusion, Schools, Disability, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

The Persons with Disability Act (PWDA) 715 of Ghana (2006)[1] defines a person with disability as "an individual with a physical, mental or sensory impairment including a visual, hearing or speech functional disability which gives rise to physical, cultural or social barriers that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of that individual." This perspective of disability, as found in many official documents is completely at variance with the traditional notion of disability which sees disability as a curse, punishment for sins committed by persons with disabilities or their family members or the result of witchcraft, magic or sorcery.[2-4]

Recent changes in Ghana's socio-political landscape, largely caused by the shift from military rule to civilian rule , which took place in 1992, has increased civil activism for equal rights for people with disabilities. The 1992 Constitution, for instance, explicitly gives legitimacy to rights-based activism and the protection of the fundamental human rights for all citizens.[5] PWDA[1] in 2006 also provided protection for persons with disabilities against all forms of exploitation and discrimination. In spite of the changes taking place in recent years, persons with disabilities are still stigmatized, lack access to many social and economic opportunities, and are not permitted to hold many important positions of status.

While labels such as "persons with disabilities" and "disabled persons" are often used interchangeable, the former is preferred by the Ghana Federation of Disability Organizations (GFD), which is the umbrella organization for persons with disabilities in Ghana for no apparent reason(s). However, the use of "persons with disabilities" in this paper has nothing to do with the Ghanaian preference; we have no preference for either label. Also, whereas "deaf people/persons" is preferred by the deaf population, "hearing impaired" is commonly used by the general population, including those in academia and health professional because they claim the latter concept is more generic than the former. For the same reason, some blind people now prefer to be called "persons with visual impairment."

Education for persons with disabilities

Education is important for all children, including those with disabilities, in that it has a tendency of creating opportunities for individuals to engage in productive ventures.[6, 7] It is, therefore, imperative to support children with disabilities to attain higher education in order to develop their full potentials and to prepare them to function in all aspects of life.

However, to make education accessible and meaningful to children, especially those with special needs, it is essential to provide them all resources which are needed to enable them to participate effectively in the educational system. According to the UNESCO[9] support services ensure that all children benefit from the education system.

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There are a range of resources requiredby children with special educational needs in the general educational system. Some of the resources needed by such children include physical therapy, counseling and psychotherapy, modified learning environments, assistive learning devices, behavioral modificationtraining, resource rooms, and individualized instructions.[10-12] Children with special needs may also rely on support from class teachers and resource teachers to cope in the general classroom.Teacher preparation and training, should therefore, be given considerable attention so that teachers willdevelop positive attitudes towards inclusive education.[13] Lack of adequate resources such as tools and equipment, trained specialists and funds can make it difficult to educate children with disabilities. For example, it could affect key practices in inclusion such as assessment of children for appropriate support.[14, 15]

Structure of Education in Ghana

General Education

Currently, Ghana operates a 6-3-3-4 educational system, which has nine years of free compulsory basic education for all children of school age. The structure starts at age six and represents three years of primary education, three years of Junior High School (JHS), three years of Senior High School (SHS), and four years of university education. At the end of the first nine years of basic education, all pupil stakethe Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), which determines the type of educational path pupils will pursue in future. Pupils who want to further their formal ducation have the option of attending SHS, technical schools orvocational schools.

Special Education in Ghana

Currently, the special education programmein Ghana focuses on the visually impaired, hearing impaired, and the intellectually disabled and it is managed by the Special Education Division of the Ghana Education Services.[16,17]With the exception of schools for the intellectually disabled that focus mainly on providing vocational training and life skills for students, special schools prepare thechildren for higher education. As a result, special schools in Ghana have the same structure as general education and use the same curricular as general education, but with minimal modification to suit specific categories of disability.[18] For example, deaf students stay one year longer at both the JHS and SHS levels than hearing students. Also, apart from the academic programmes, most of the special schools run vocational programmes to equip the students with skills to enable them to be employable after completion. It is also worthy to note that since special schools are built to accommodate only children who are either deaf, visually impaired or intellectually disabled, children who have physical disabilities cannot access these schools.

Inclusive education in Ghana

Inclusive education in Ghana started in 2003-4 academic year on pilot basis, aimed at, "…ensuring access and learning for all children from varied background. It is aimed at providing education that is responsive to the needs of all learners and ensuring that learners are able to participate in the community in which they live."[19]

Among the principles guiding the inclusive education is the adaption of the educational system, including the curriculum, teaching and learning materials, school culture and environments to suit the learning needs of all children. This implies that all existing educational institutions will need radical transformation to accommodate all children.

Before the introduction of inclusive education in Ghana, some children with disabilities were enrolled in general schools, a practice, known as integration. Under this model, students with disabilities attending general schools adapted to the environment rather than the schools adapting to suit their needs.[20] The integrated approach is gradually fading out in Ghana with the introduction of inclusive education.

Since the inception of the pilot inclusive education more than 10 years ago, a number of children with special educational needs have been educated in selected mainstream schools, in spite of the fact that many of the schools are not designed to accommodate their needs. However, little is known about what challenges these children encounter and how they are supported. This study investigated the types of barriers pupils with special needs who enrolled in mainstream schools in the study area encounter. The study proposes the following questions: (1) what are the needs of pupils with special needs in these schools? (2) What support services are available to them? (3) What barriers do children with special needs encounter in these schools? and (4) what can be done to improve access to education for children with special needs in these schools?

METHODS

Research design

This is an exploratory study [21] which adopted qualitative data collection methods. Since not much has been documented on the issue being investigated and the researchers intend to delve into the subjective experiences of the participants, qualitative method was adopted for the study. Using qualitative methods allowed an in-depth exploration of the types of support services available to children with special needs, and their suitability and adequacy.

Profile of the study site

The Ashanti Region is located in southern Ghana. Considered the third largest of 10 administrative regions, it occupies a total land surface of 24,389 km^2. In terms of population, however, it is the most populated region, with a population of 1,983,194 in 2010.[22] The region is divided into 27 districts, including Sekyere South District, which is one of the three districts selected to pilot inclusive education programme. The District has been demarcated into eight educational circuits; an educational circuit represents a cluster of schools within an area.

The area under study, Wiamoase circuit, is the largest circuit in the district. It has a total of 13 primary schools, and seven Junior High Schools. Although, there is no accurate information on the number of children with special needs, it is estimated that more than 150 special needs childrenare in mainstream schools

in the circuit.These pupils require special support and resources in order to effectively participate in educational activities in the schools.

Participants

The study population was multi-level participants made up of 10 head teachers (seven males and three females) from the 10 schools selected to practice inclusive education in the study area, 4 resource teachers (three males and one female) attached to the selected inclusive schools, a district special education coordinator (male) and 10 general classroom teachers (five males and five females) total 25 participants were interviewed.

Selection of participants was done in two stages. The first stage involved the use of purposive sampling to select people who were directly involved in the implementation of the programme in the district then randomly selected one teacher from each of the schools (Table 1). By using these sampling techniques, we maximized the utility of the data by minimizing input from participants who may have little or no knowledge on the subject matter.

Table 1: Number of teachers handling children with special needs in the inclusive school

Schools	No.	%
Dinn Islamic Primary A	3	9.6
Dinn Islamic Primary B	2	6.4
Presbyterian Primary	3	9.6
Presbyterian Primary Junior High School	4	12.9
Seventh Day Adventist Primary A	4	12.9
Seventh Day Adventist Primary B	3	9.6
Saviour D/A Primary	2	6.4
Saviour D/A Junior High School	3	9.6
Salvation Army Primary	4	12.9
Salvation Army Junior High School	3	9.6
Total	**31**	**100**

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographics	No. (n=25)	%
Sex		
Male	16	64
Female	9	36
Rank		
Principal Superintendent	11	44
Senior Superintendent I	6	24
Senior Superintendent II	8	32
Qualification		
Master's Degree	2	8
Bachelor Degree	12	48
Diploma	11	44
Years of Teaching		
1-5	15	60
6-10	6	24
11-15	4	16

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

There were 11 (44%) participants who had attained the rank of Principal Superintendent, which is the highest rank among the participants; the lowest rank was Senior Superintendent II (32%). These participants had master's degree (8%), bachelor's degree (48%) and diploma (44%). A majority of the participants (60%) had worked between 1 and 5years, while just 16% had worked between 11 and 15 years. The demographic characteristics of participants are summarized in Table 2.

Data collection

The data were collected between November 2013 and February 2014, a period of three months in two main phases; the interviews were first done and then observations followed interviews.

The interviews were conducted in three phases – district special education coordinator was first interviewed, followed by the resource teachers, and then the head teachers and classroom teachers.Interviews were conducted on one-on-one basis using two differentsemi-structured interview guides: one for the district special education coordinator and resource teachers, and the other for the head teachers and classroom teachers.

The choice of interviews was based on its flexibility as it allowed the researchers to modify questions as and when required. Furthermore, interviews created avenues for face-to-face interactions between the researchers and participants making it easy to enlist their cooperation and clarifying questions and responses which were not clear to bothparticipants and researchers respectively. Participants were asked questions on the number of children with special needs in the schools, the needs of the children in general schools, types of resources available, barriers to inclusion, teaching strategies and challenges teachers face in teaching children with special needs. The interviews were conducted in English language because all the participants were fluent in the English language. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission.

Observation

The second phase of the data collection was the observations, which were conducted in all the31 classrooms that had children with special needs.We observedteachers and pupils during teaching and learning activities in the classroom, for one hour, using an observation guide designed by the researchers for approximately. Activities observed included instructional strategies, classroom management techniques as well as the use of teaching and learning materials. We also observed the children as they interacted with the school environment. Observation provided supplementary information on the condition of physical facilities in the school and served as a means of verifying the statement made by informants during interview schedules. Although a guide was used, we tried as much as possible to be less intrusive. The researchersare all professional teachers who have supervised teacher trainees on teaching practice and so have experience in conducting classroom observations.

Data analysis

All the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researchers; each interview with a participant was listened to several times and transcribed separately by each researcher. To ensure accuracy in the transcription, we compared our transcripts and differences in the transcription reconciled.

After transcribing all the interviews, we read through each transcript several times and identified concepts and statements that are related to the main objective of the study. The concepts and statements were coded numerically; concepts and statements that were similar were given the same alphabetical code. Based on these codes, we organized all concepts and statements that have similar meanings from all the transcripts into themes. Two main themes emerged: needs of children with special needs in the schools and barriers to inclusive education. The latter theme was further broken down into foursubthemes – lack of resources, negative attitudes, inappropriate teaching techniques, and inadequate and unfriendly physical facilities. Important quotes from the transcripts that are related to the themes were used to support their respective themes. The themes and sub-themes formed the sub-sections of the final report. No computer software was used in the data analyses. Data from the observations were also analyzed thematically. Notes taken during the observation were read through by the researchers and themes developed using the same strategy adopted to analyze the interviews. The main themes which emerged from the observations were the nature of resources and facilities in the schools and teaching strategies by teachers. This approach to data analysis is consistent with [22]approach to content analysis.

Ethical consideration

Ethical clearance was obtained from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology's Institutional Review Board before the fieldwork. The researchers respected the rights of the respondents and ensured that informed consent was completed before carrying out any interview. All field data were kept confidential, and at the end of each day of data collection, the recorded interviews were kept under lock by the principal investigator, which was accessible to only the researchers.

RESULTS

Need of children with special needs

Findings from the study indicated that many of the schools in the circuit had children with various forms of disabilities, who needed different kinds of support services to enable them to participate effectively in the general educational system. All participants in the study were unanimous on this issue, and made a strong case for the provisions of adequate support services for the children. For example, three participants (a classroom teacher, a head teacher and a resource teacher) stated that the children neededto be given individual attention in the classroom, counseling, medical attention, and enough space to move around and write. These special support services, according to the participants, are needed for the children to cope

with conditions in the general classroom and to facilitate teaching and learning. Another resource teacher expressed his opinion on the issue:

They [children with special needs] need specific resources such as human resources, material resources and equipment and infrastructural modification. For example, the mentally disabled children, they must be provided with games such as mathematical games which will help them keep them alert always. Visually impaired children too need equipment which will enable them to move along with the sighted students in the classrooms.

As indicated by the participants, the availability of support services is vital for the implementation of inclusion and so the absence of these resources may lead to the neglect of the differential learning needs of children with special needs.

Barriers to inclusions

Lack of resources

As indicated above, all participants agreed that children with special needs required special supports services to facilitate their participation in the general schools, because it would be difficult for them to cope in the "normal" classroom teaching without resources. Providing them with special support services will facilitate their participation and unearth their talents.

However, there seemed to be disagreements among the participants regarding the availability of support services for children with special needs in the schools. While some of the participants claimed that the schools lacked resources, including resource teachers, responses from some participants seemed to suggest the opposite. For example, the special education coordinator and a head teacher respectively shared their views on the lack of resources in the schools and how this was affecting the inclusion of children with special needs in the general schools.

An inclusive school must have human resources support, materials and equipment. All these three must be in place to make education for children with special needs possible. The human resources are made up of parents, teachers and resource teachers. Only the human resources are available. The other resources are woefully inadequate. The materials and equipment are not forthcoming. You ask and the only response is there is no money.

There is no single school in this district having resources to help children with special needs. We are yet to receive any assistance from resource teachers or the district special education coordinator. We don't get any support from resource teachers or the district special education coordinator.

However, the following quotes from two head teachers appear to contradict the above assertions.

Normally, resource teachers do come around at times. They help with the identification of the children who are having special needs. They make recommendation on how such children should be catered and contact the parents to discuss problems their children are having.

The resource teachers do organize workshops for us to know how we could handle the children with disabilities. He comes

around and figures out some of the special needs of children in the classroom and discusses with the teachers. Sometimes, he organizes in-service training for the teachers. I think it is once a year.

The disagreement among participants regarding the performance of resource teachers in the schools suggests that the resource teachers might not be adequate and seemed to be overstretched, thereby, making it difficult for the few to reach some schools within the circuit.

Personal observations in the schools indicated that support services from professionals in special needs education such as school nurses, psychologists, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, social workers, and student assistants were not available. These observations were consistent with responses from the participants who claimed there were no support services for the children. Moreover, there was inadequate supply of teaching and learning materials (TLMs), including the prescribed textbooks in many of the schools. All the schools lacked early childhood education materials for the early childhood stage, and there were no cupboards to store the few teaching and learning materials in most of the schools.

The lack of resources was hampering assessment of children to determine their condition before admission. Responses from the participants suggested that no formal assessments were conducted before admission; the schools devised their own mechanisms to determine the condition of the children and the types of support services they needed. Almost all the participants agreed that the "classroom situation" was the only means through which they detected the condition of the children. For instance, a resource teacher said that, *"the teacher uses his or her knowledge in special education to do the assessment. Some of them judge by how they look at them [children with special needs] in the course of teaching to tell whether that child is a special need child."*

It is, however, worthy to mention that there were guidance and counseling coordinators in all the schools. The guidance and counseling coordinators were teachers who are appointed to provide guidance and counseling for all the pupils. The counselors were not responsible for only children with special needs, but attend to general issues or problems confronting all pupils in the schools. Participants of the present studyacknowledged the importance of guidance and counseling coordinators in educating children with special needs in the general setting. For example, one classroom teacher said that the guidance and counseling coordinator assisted children with special needs by taking them through some counseling while another teacher claimed that "it is only guidance and counseling which is effective" indicating the usefulness of the guidance and counseling for children with special needs.

Negative attitudes

Responses from the participants indicated that, colleagues, someteachers and parents exhibited negative attitudes towards children with special needs; often manifested in the form of abuse and insensitivity to the needs of the children. Some participants alleged that colleagues of childrenwith special

needs either teased or bullied them making schooling uncomfortable for them. For example, a resource teacher disclosed, *"One [child with special needs] dropped out from school and I followed up to his house to convince him back to school. I know he can perform [better] than even the normal children and my target was to guide him to complete at least Junior High School. He told me his colleagues teased him always so he won't come to school again. Because of that he is out of school and roaming about in the streets."*

A classroom teacher also described the experiences of children with special needs in the classroom, *"Their [children with disabilities] IQ level is very low so teaching them becomes very difficult. They are not good and are not able to answer questions in class. Anytime they try to talk, others laugh at them which make it difficult for them to participate in class activities. Because of their situation they normally feel shy to take part in class activities. One main challenge is that anytime they try to talk, their colleagues begin to tease them and this makes them feel shy to interact freely."*

Confirming the assertions by the two teachers, a head teacher stated, *"The other children do laugh at them [children with disabilities] in school. Some of the children use to call them names so due to that they don't want to associate with the normal children due to that some of them think coming to school is just a waste of time. They are not happy and are always crying or alone running away from the other children."*

Attitude of teachers towards children with disabilities has also been cited by some participants as affecting inclusion of children with special needs in the general schools. It was revealed by participants that some of the teachers were against educating children with special needs in the mainstream schools because they thought such children could only be educated in special schools. The following quote by a classroom teacher depicts the general attitude of teachers towards educating children with special needs in the general setting.

I don't think they should be educated at mainstream schools. The special schools are best for them. Here, they can only pass through the school without preparing them to take any exams.I think the best place for them is special schools so that they get enough teachers with the skills to teach them.

Also, the special education coordinator noted that "some of the teachers are beating and maltreating the children with special needs in their classroom. They want them to perform as any other child in the class." The negative attitude of teachers seems to be arising from inadequate knowledge and lack of competence on the part of these teachers in special needs education.

Furthermore, responses indicated that the perception of parents and general society towards the education of children with special needs was hindering their inclusion in the general schools. The special education coordinator, for instance, recounted that, *"There is a misconception that children with disabilities are cursed so educating them is unnecessary and hold the view that such children cannot rise up higher in the society."*

A resource teacher also stated that, "*Parents are doing very little because most of the parents feel their wards are disabled so sometimes they don't feel like sending them to school. Some parents see them to be useless and they see no reason to send them to school. When you compare the way they treat their children with disabilities and those without, there is a big difference.*"

With this attitude of teachers, parents and peers, it is obvious children with special needs were unlikely to receive the needed support and would, thus, find it difficult to succeedin the general setting.

Inappropriate teaching strategies

Some resource teachers blamed the teachers for adopting teaching strategies that were not helping the children. According to a resource teacher, "most teachers teach in abstract which do not help the course of the children. Some of the teachers think they know so when you [resource teacher] are having discussions with them, they don't pay much attention."

In addition, some participants observed that some teachers lacked knowledge and competence which made it difficult for some of them to use the appropriate teaching techniques.It also appears teachers were concerned that children with special needs would slow down teaching and make it impossible for them to complete their lesson plans, and, thus, lower the academic standards of other students.In fact, during the interview some of the teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with having children with special needs in their classes, as they thought it was adversely affecting teaching. Two teachers narrated their frustrations, "*Some of them when you write on the board, they can't see. They complained so I positioned them at different places and spent time with them. However, if you are a teacher and you give more attention to them, you won't be able to complete your syllabus and it will also affect other pupils in the classroom.*"

"*We teach them just as we teach the normal children. At times we only get extra time for them. Normally we ignore them in the learning and teaching process due to the fact that teaching is done based on the timetable. I normally realize the children with special needs were far behind but it is not my fault. It is the timetable. We teach according to the timetable so looking at their problem, it will be difficult to tell whether there has been improvement or not. If we are to teach and have time for them, we are not going to meet our objectives.*"

Classroom observation confirmed assertions by the participants that teachers were not using the appropriate teaching techniques and lacked knowledge and skills to handle special needs children. For example, some of the teachers did not use the few teaching and learning materials supplied by the Ghana Education Service and had difficulty adapting the textbooks to meet the needs of children with special needs.

Inadequate and unfriendly physical facilities

Observations by the researchers indicated that most the schools lacked facilities to accommodate children with special needs. Where they existed, they were in deplorable state. It was observed that classroom space in many of the classes in the schools was too small to accommodate the large student intake at primary level, and classroom congestion was visible in many schools; the class size was between 35 and 70 pupils. Some of the school buildings needed renovations to make them safe and child-friendly, particularly for children with physical disabilities. For example, the pavilions that were being used as classrooms were opened and had no ramps, and whenever it rained, it disrupted classes. Also, many of the classrooms had very poor ventilation and lighting system while some had inadequate and very old furniture with several children sharing one dual desk. At the Kindergarten level, for instance, pupils had no standard desks and some had to stand during writing and other class activities. None of the schools had a resource room with materials for pull out sessions, and none had a library or common reading rooms conducive to reading.Additionally, the terrain in all the schools was rough and without pavements. Sanitation and water facilities were either not available, inadequate or not disability-friendly. These findings are largely consistent with views expressed by some of the participants about inadequate resources in the schools.

Certainly, the condition in the schools impeded inclusion, most especially for children physical disabilities and those who need individual attention and support. Indeed, it was discovered that enrollment and retention of the children were being adversely affected. This was confirmed by the special education coordinator who said that although there were many children with special needs in the general schools in the district, "*most of them are out of school so we go to the communities to educate the people about the need to send such children to school because conditions in the schools are not conducive.*"

DISCUSSIONS

A basic assumption of inclusion is that resources and facilities, in the form of resource teachers, properly trained teachers, suitable seating arrangements, and resource rooms will be available to support children with special needs ingeneral classrooms. With these resources, it is assumed that children with special needs will find it easy to participate on equal basis as other children in general classroom. Findingsof the present study suggesting that most of the schools piloting the inclusive programme in the circuit lacked resources would therefore be a major setback to the successful implementation of inclusive educationin the circuit. In particular, findings which indicate that the schools did not have materials and equipment tailored for children with special needs clearly demonstrate the challenges children with special needs are going through participating in teaching and learning. Although, some of the classroom and resources teachers could be supporting the children, the supports may be unplanned, unstructured, and unlikely to be satisfactory, particularly because many of the teachers were not special educators and lacked knowledge on special needs education.

An essential process of inclusion is assessment of children to identify those in need for proper placement and support. However, the lack of resources was adversely affecting this

process. The use of observation to identify children with special needs has the tendency of overlooking some children with special needs and wrongly labeled others as children with special needs. These findings confirm studies conducted by Rodda[14] and Eleweke& Hayford[15] that lack of appropriate tools and equipment as well as well-trained specialists in mainstream schools was serious impediments in the assessment and identification ofchildren with special needs for necessary support.

Financial resources are needed to procure resources a for the day-to-day administration of schools.[24] The lack of financial resources, as the findings indicated, could most probably be a major reason for the in sufficient supply of resources to the schools. Consistent with this finding are studies by Ministry of Education. Special education services[25] and the Ocran[19] that many of these schools did not have adequate financial resources to acquire teaching and learning materials, and that the situation was affecting the ability of schools to meet the learning needs of children with special needs. Inadequate financial resources to schools, especially those that focus on children with disabilities is a longstanding issue in Ghana. For example, there are often delays in the release of feeding grants to special schools, which have often disrupted academic work; Indeed there are many instances of special schools re-opening late or closing down due to lack of funds. For example, the Confederation of Heads of Special schools (COHESS) in May 2014, complainedof insufficient financial support and infrastructural development in special schools, and also blamed the government of delaying the release of feeding grants to the schools.[26]

The general negative perception about disability and doubts about capabilities of persons with disabilities in Ghana do notencourage society to invest in persons with disabilities[3] and this might have influenced governments' attitude towards educating children with disabilities. While it is understandable that, as a developing country, adequately resourcing all schools to make them suitable for children with special needswill be impossible to achieve overnight, policy makers must ensure prudent management of the few resources available so that they could be equitably distributed for the general good of all persons, including children with special needs

Policy implications

The study has implications for policy making on educating children with differential learning needs. Given that most of the schools in the circuit lacked resources for children with special needs, there is the need to increase the supply of resources to the schools selected for the pilot inclusive programme. One way is for the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders such as Non-Governmental Organizations to pay more attention to the inclusive schools and support them with more resources. There should be adequate budgetary allocations for the inclusive schools so that more funds could be made available to provide resources, modify the school infrastructure, and organize workshops for head teachers and classroom teachers.

Since most of the inclusive schools were not built for children with special needs, extensive infrastructural modification is required to make them accessible and safe for pupils with disabilities. For example, there is the need to provide appropriate lighting and acoustic levels in the classrooms and adapt curriculumto meet the needs of all children. In addition, ramps, concrete surfaces, wide doors, and disability-friendly sanitary facilities are required to make the physical environment accessible to those who use wheelchairs and the visually impaired. These modifications will certainly require a huge financial outlay, which may cause foot-dragging among policy makers, but it is an investment worth undertaking. As indicated earlier, studies have shownthat the provision of adequate resources is necessary for inclusion to be successful.[10,12]

Moreover, since lack of resources was hindering assessment of children before admission, providing resources in the form of equipment and skilled personnel will improve upon assessment and facilitate placement of the children. One or two assessment and resource centres with relevant tools, materials and competent team of professionals can be set up in the circuitso that children could be given proper assessment and then placed in schools that support their needs. This will improve upon the screening of the children before placement and also ensure that children with special needs are identified early for appropriate intervention.

On the negative attitudes towards children with special needs, the Division of Special Education, working in conjunction with teacher training institutions such as University of Education, Winneba and University of Cape Coast, should provide teachers in inclusive schools with information sharing workshops and in-service training on current issues on disability and inclusive education to enhance their knowledge on disability issues. Such training should also incorporate techniques that will assist teachers on how to adapt and adjust instructions for teaching children with special educational needs. This will go a long way to broaden the knowledge base and sharpen the skills of teachers to welcome and celebrate diversity in their respective classrooms. The importance of teacher training and preparation towards inclusion has attracted considerable attention because of their positive influence on the attitude of teachers towards inclusion.[13]

Although teacher training colleges and institutions in Ghanaoffer special education,[27] have observed that the course content is inadequate to prepare teachers for inclusive education. The implication of this is that teachers may not be adequately prepared and equipped with the necessary skills before the introduction of inclusive education in Ghana. Therefore, the curriculum of Colleges of Education and other teacher training institutions should, as matter of urgency, be over hauled to include more courses on special needs education. Also, teacher trainees should be given opportunities to experience inclusive education and to interact with children with special needs, as such exposure has the potential to build positive perceptions among teachers and break attitudinal barriers.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the study suggest that children with differential learning needs were not getting adequate support to participate in the general schools. This was as a result of lack of appropriate resources in the schools creating problems for the implementation of inclusive education in the study area. The findings of the study are consistent with other findings on education of children with special educational needs in Ghana.

Although the study provides useful insights into the barriers to the implementation of inclusive education, focusing on just one district out the three districts practicing the pilot programme in the region is a major limitation.It is,however, possible that the situation would not be different from other circuits within the district. It is worthy to mention that since the introduction of the inclusive education programme in the district, there has not been any assessment to determine the programme. This study is thereforeprovides enough grounds for policy makers to commission more studies to ascertain how far the program has gone in addressing the educational needs of children with disabilities in the country.

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