

Towards Inclusive Education in Ghana

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INTRODUCTION

In many communities in the world today obstacles including barriers exist which alienate persons with disabilities. These hindrances also hamper the development of persons with disabilities thereby creating difficulties for their peaceful existence or in some cases denying them of their basic human rights and freedoms.

At the 1990 Jomtien World Conference, in Thailand, the goals for “Education for All” were set and it was proclaimed that every person-child, youth and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities which would meet their basic learning needs. Ever since that conference, UNESCO, along with other UN agencies and a number of international and national non-governmental organizations have been working towards these goals.

The inclusion of persons with barriers to learning and development in ordinary schools and classrooms is part of a global human rights movement. In 1994, at the UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain the idea of inclusive education was given a more vivid focus and understanding. The conference was mainly to consider the right of every child to basic education.

The marginalization and exclusion of learners from an educational system was addressed at the Dakar World Education Forum in April 2000 and it was captured in the statement, “The Key challenge is to ensure that a broad vision of Education for all as an

inclusive concept is reflected in national government and funding agency policies. Education for all must take account of the need of the poor and the most disadvantaged young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health and those with special needs”.

The education of persons with disability in Ghana has a very interesting history. The disabled were basically seen as liabilities in their families and communities.

This in effect meant that no provisions were made for their balanced growth and development. Most of these individuals were killed or over protected, misdiagnosed and under-educated such that they led a life that was segregated and debased (Ocloo,2003).

Formal education in Ghana was generally started by the missionaries and the first schools were established by the benevolence of philanthropists and missionaries. In 1962, the Henderson committee recommended that all special schools should be taken over by the Ministry of Education and in 1968, a resolution was adopted by the conference of Teachers of the Disabled demanding that a separate directorate should be created for special schools in the country.

In Ghana today, the country recognizes the numerous international conventions and declarations and therefore aims at promoting and protecting the human rights of the individual citizens. Again, the national constitution of 1992 is replete with these rights.

In spite of these provisions, the majority of persons with disabilities do not enjoy fundamental human rights. The entitlement to these rights is frustrated and denied by various forms of discrimination, inclusion and exclusion arising from socio-economic, political, cultural and religious considerations that continue to justify inequalities and marginalise people with disabilities on the basis of physiological differences.

In Ghana, the regulations governing general education are deemed to apply to children and young persons with special educational needs. General education is governed by the Education Act of 1961. In 1962, the Education Amendment Act empowered the Ministry of Education to establish a Special Education Division within the Ghana Education Service to handle issues and affairs of persons with special needs. The 1969 Education Ordinance introduced Continuation schools to cater for students with needs. The 1967 Education Review Committee Report recommended that those who could not do well in school should end up at the Junior Secondary School level and continue with vocational training skills. The Dzobo Committee Report of 1972 mentioned the educational needs of both the slow learners and the gifted. Mandates binding parents to send their children to school no matter their performance could be seen in the Ghana's

constitution and in the Education Reform of 1987 which led to the concept of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE).

The National Disability Policy of June, 2000 in its vision admitted that the 1992 constitution and the vision 2020 document advocated for the integration of persons with disabilities into mainstream of the economy. The government is to seek regulatory measures to promote the enabling environment for the total integration of persons with disabilities into society. The policy seeks to present Government strategies for mobilizing and integrating persons with disabilities into the mainstream of the socio-economic life of the communities in which they live; and by so doing, ensure that PWDs contribute to achieving the national vision of poverty reduction and improvement of their living conditions.

It is also worth to note that the disability document acknowledged that about 53% of women with disability are with no education compared with 37.3% of males with disability. Even when PWDs manage to enter the formal education system they hardly manage through primary education. About 17.5% of PWDs had primary education compared to 25% of total population. This situation is appalling indeed because illiteracy and ignorance among the disabled population is too high to countenance as a developing nation which needs acceleration in human resource development. This condition could be blamed on lack of advocacy and lobbying on part of organizations and pressure groups.

In South Africa for instance, the collective efforts of the Disability Movement in 1997 resulted in the adoption of a white paper acknowledging the human rights of disabled persons. This was a major step for disabled persons in South Africa; however, the need for advocacy and lobbying continue to exist. The recommendations must be translated into reality. For example, in ensuring that all visually impaired students have access to adequate educational materials, the South African National Council for the Blind has set up an Advocacy and Government Relations Desk to build contacts with Governments Organisations, other disabling groups and businesses in order to ensure that the rights and interests of persons with disabilities are brought forward.

In Uganda, Uganda National Association of the Blind (UNAB) seeks influence at all levels to ensure that the activities benefit all visually impaired persons in the organization. At the national level, issues of education of the blind are presented to the Ministry of Education and at the District level UNAB is pushing for schools to accept visually impaired children and to provide the necessary related support materials and training for inclusive education.

Learner Perspectives

With inclusive education in Ghana, educators must realize that different types of disabilities may result in different learner characteristics and needs, and the preceding argument for a generic service viewpoint is not intended to negate the importance of understanding student and client abilities and limitations. An awareness of learner characteristics and needs is always necessary in programming or planning for inclusive education.

Disabilities can be viewed from two perspectives: categorical diagnosis of specific disabilities, which result in the assignment of diagnostic labels and non-categorical analysis of functional characteristics, which identifies ability level and instructional needs. Through categorical diagnosis, a traditional perspective of persons with disabilities is provided, which focuses on the etiology of cognitive, behavioural and physical impairments. This type of diagnostic information has been used most frequently in determining treatment and placement decisions.

Non-categorical analysis of functional characteristics, on the other hand, is not concerned with causality, as is the more medically oriented diagnostic model, but rather considers how disabilities affect the intellectual and behavioural functioning of individuals. Degree of impairment across intellectual and behavioural functioning areas is analyzed, along with the assessment of specific skills, leading to the development of individualized educational goals and instructional programming.

The major benefit of the functional approach lies in its focus on individual ability levels and learner needs. Through this approach instructional programming may be tied to actual learner needs in selected performance areas resulting in measurable behavioural gains useful for placement in an inclusive school environment. (Gollay, 1981).

This is not to say that other professionals will agree with this approach. Many still question the utility of the non-categorical approach, claiming that the reduction in labeling and diagnostic and prescriptive potential were yet to be realized (Summers, 1981). There are also a number of implementation concerns related to this approach because of the lack of clarity that arises when diagnostic definitions are not available. In spite of these concerns, however a non-categorical functional model of disability is advocated because of the generic nature of inclusive education. (Kiernan, Smith, & Ostrowsky, 1986). For this approach to succeed there is the need for relevant related services. Hartley and Lehman (1986) relate support service to instruction in terms of learning styles, instructional training methods, modifications and adaptations potentially needed by persons with disabilities. Identifying individual learning styles and appropriate instructional methods involves consideration of the visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning modes relative to various instructional methods such as printed materials,

verbal lecture materials, workbook sheets, audio-visual materials; and demonstrations using vocational tools and concrete materials.

In addition, the provision of support services should include modifications and adaptations that make instructional or materials most effective for persons with disabilities in inclusive schools.

Modifications and adaptation may include:

- regular materials in braille;
- large print versions of regular materials;
- an interpreter for deaf students;
- a note taker;
- a peer tutor
- a person who serves as a reader;
- captioned film and television;
- and over head transparencies;
- charts and visual materials;
- taped versions of written materials (Alfest, Hartley & Rocco, 1995).

In order to implement the policy of inclusive education in Ghana, Educational practitioners, non-governmental organizations, government and other stakeholders must continuously remind themselves that inclusion education is about acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support. They must respect that all learners are different in some way and have different learning needs which are equally valued and an ordinary part of our human experience. It is expedient to change our attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, curricula and the environment to meet the needs of all learners. It is also prudent to recognize that the inclusion of learners with special needs into mainstream classes is part of a universal human rights movement. The onus is on every country to create opportunities for all learners to learn and succeed.

Educational Provisions and Inclusive Practice in Ghana

Special Education Services in Ghana are delivered by specialized teachers and aim at providing disabled school age children with academic skills, enabling them to read, write and continue their education in accord with their needs and abilities. Special Education include early detection services which are essential to the admission of children into special education programmes (i.e. diagnosis by medical professionals for children as having mainly mental, physical or sensory impairments).

There are no categorized services for other groups of persons with complex disabilities and for those in remote areas especially disabled girls. Further, vocational training

services are also associated with special education services in Ghana but they are limited in scope and scale.

Currently, there are few organized special education programmes in the country. These include schools for the visually impaired, the hearing impaired, mentally handicapped and a number of rehabilitation centres for training adult disabled persons. By estimate a little over 4,200 children with disabilities are in an educational programme of a sort out of over 60,000 that need services. What is worrying is that most of these children are in segregated schools designated for specified disabilities.

In Ghana today, the trendy issue for persons with disabilities in terms of education is what is called “mainstreaming”. This is very close to the concept of inclusive education which is being advocated to provide for every child to learn and succeed in the least restrictive environment. Really, the importance of this practice is enormous as pointed out by academicians, psychologists, educationists and other researchers. Low, (1983) observed that the general case for inclusive education has two main aspects. The first is expressive or symbolic in character. Unnecessary segregation from the community represents derogation from full humanity and citizenship. Secondly, inclusive education also has an instrumental function: separate socialization breeds attitudes of prejudice, and integration particularly at the formative stage of development can do much to sweep away the barriers of ignorance and misunderstanding that keep the handicapped and non-handicapped apart and ultimately lead to discrimination, dependency and inability to cope. The ultimate aim of inclusive education therefore, is to create an environment in which all children will live together harmoniously and learn together so as to actualize their potentials.

Gaylord, Ross and Peck, (1985) indicated in their studies that integrating special children into regular schools positively changes attitudes not only of the non-handicapped children but even of the special children as well. Brinker and Thorpe (1984) have also said that the frequency and quality of interaction between special and ‘normal’ children is actually improved by integration or inclusive education. Indeed, a number of researchers have highlighted the fact that opportunity to attend integrated school goes a long way in influencing the post-school adjustment of the disabled.

While we preach what is ideal, what is happening on the ground in the country still paints a very gloomy picture. Ghana still practices the segregated and institutionalized approach to the provision of special education services.

This situation prevents many children with special needs from entering schools in the least restrictive environments of the rural areas. In 1995, the Division of Special Education reported that only 2500 persons with disabilities were being provided with basic education and that thousands of children were on the waiting list for admission.

Also, a research carried out by the Department of Social Welfare on Management and Service Delivery on Community Based Rehabilitation revealed that as much as 60% of children identified as living with disabilities between the ages of 6 and 18 were not in school because of restrictions in placement opportunities.

The recently completed National Policy on Disability has emphasized the rights for all person with disabilities for inclusive education. The policy recommended the set up of educational programmes in order to address preventative and family health care, early detection and assessment of impairments, family programmes to teach parents about the child's impairment and appropriate home care, and pre-school opportunities, both in urban and rural areas.

During the last fifteen years, there has been a progressive development in training of professionals dealing with Special Education. The present situation in which all teacher trainees in Ghana offer at least three credit hour course in Special Education at the Pre-University and the tertiary level is encouraging.

Despite these developments, many obstacles remain. Three main issues would seem to be particularly important as limitations to special education teacher training in Ghana. The first relates to current approaches employed to deal with special education issues particularly viewed from the perspective of a social model advocated by meaningful practitioners. It is a common knowledge that the individualistic medical approach is said to have exacted professional control over disabled persons and maintained their dependency and passivity. The second limitation concerns the content of training i.e. complicated statistics and psychometric information; A third limitation to special education in Ghana is the relevance of training to broader policy issues and social change in order words to what extent training contribute to the emancipation of persons with disabilities through advocacy and lobbying activities.

It is at this point that special education should be addressed in Ghana from a different perspective such as the social view of critique of exclusion and discrimination. In this alternative paradigm, emphasis should be placed on facilitating the development of the clientele approach where users of services are involved in the whole business of services provision. This goes in line with a right perspective in special education would emphasize empowerment, participation and social change.

Conclusion

Special Education Services in Ghana are largely provided in urban areas and district capitals whereas the greater number of persons who need these services are found in the rural areas. Service providers are mainly professionals who teach in the special segregated schools with only a few in mainstream regular classrooms. There is the need

for public education in order to foster general acceptance of persons with disabilities in public schools with requisite specialized support.

In order to strengthen the practice of advocacy on disability issues, there is the need to empower organizations of disabled people to lead the way by using legal procedures to force government to extend services to all areas of the country. The lack of effective organizations of persons with disabilities coupled with inadequate provision of information and policies impede the effective practice of inclusive education in many parts of the country. In order to expand the scope for an effective implementation of disability policy ideas must be tailored towards the social model of disability.

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