



THE STATE OF SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN GHANA: PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATORS IN ASHANTI AND BRONG AHAFO REGIONS OF GHANA

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Abstract

Special education is aimed at providing a wide range of services to enable children who need special assistance, logistics and teaching methods to participate in the educational system. Special schools perform these functions by providing children with disabilities the support they need to participate in teaching and learning. This study investigated the state of special schools in Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions of Ghana. The aim was to assess conditions in the schools, from the perspectives of special educators, to ascertain if the schools were performing the functions for which they have established. An in-depth interview was conducted with 20 participants, made up of special education officials at the national head office, district special education coordinators, headmasters and teachers of special schools. The results from the study suggest that special schools in the two regions were ill-resourced and were turning out students with low academic and vocational achievements. These findings are discussed in relation to the purpose of special education and the commitment of government to provide quality education for children with disabilities.

Keywords: Children with disabilities, general education, special education, Ghana.

Introduction

Several studies have explored the perception of educators on special education and a common theme in most of the studies is that special education provides the most appropriate form of education for children with disabilities (Gadagbui, 2008; Kiyuba & Tuku, 2014; Miles, 2000). Advocates believe that it will be more beneficial if children with disabilities are handled by specialized teachers, using specially designed curriculum and instructions tailored to meet their unique needs and abilities (Akyeampong et al, 2007; Hayford, 2013; Oliff, 2004; Swain, Sally & Colin 2003).

Some proponents of special education argued that segregating children with disabilities from other children and providing them with services tailored to meet their needs will be more beneficial to them and other children who do not need additional services (Mickelson, 2002; Obi & Mensah, 2005). In other words, it is believed that the needs of children with disabilities are best met when they are placed in separate classrooms (Gilmore, Campbell & Cuskelly, 2003). Studies have found that many teachers in general education lack adequate training and knowledge to handle children with disabilities in general classrooms. There is also a perception that children with disabilities are difficult and stressful to handle. Consequently, some teachers feel unprepared to handle children with disabilities in inclusive setting (Mamah, 2006; Yekple & Avoke; 2006). For example, studies by Agbenyega (2003) and Yekple & Avoke (2006) have found that many general education teachers in Ghana have expressed concern about their ability teach children with disabilities and have thus argued that general education is unsuitable for such children.



Furthermore, there are concerns that special needs students are likely to reduce standards of education in general education system and so they should be segregated from other students (Mamah, 2006). Some educators are concerned that including children with disabilities in general education will lower standards in two ways. Firstly, their own academic standard will be affected adversely and their presence in the classroom will also negatively affect the progress of other students (Bunch, 2007). Mamah (2006) mentioned that in many countries such as Ghana, mainstream schools are under increasing pressure to raise academic standards. These schools are therefore reluctant to admit pupils whose presence, it is thought, would have negative impact on the overall profile of results.

Current trends in the educational system in Ghana support the above assertion. At the end of the Basic Education Certificate and Senior High School examinations, the results are analyzed and a “league table” indicating the performance of each education district is prepared. As a result, school heads, and even district directors of education are concerned about the examination results of their schools and districts respectively. They are therefore not willing to compromise their standards by admitting students with special needs because of the notion that they are likely to lower standards (Avoke, 2004).

Special schools have therefore become integral part of the special education programme, providing the most conducive environment to enhance teaching and learning for children who, for a wide range of reasons, may require extra support and adaptive pedagogy to participate in class (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2011). It should be noted that until the introduction of inclusive education in about a decade ago, most children with disabilities in Ghana are placed in special schools, probably because of some or all of the above reasons. This study therefore seeks to assess special educators’ perception of the performance of special schools in two regions in Ghana.

Special Education in Ghana

As described above, the dual system of education, where children without disabilities attend mainstream schools while those with disabilities attend segregate residential schools is still being practiced in Ghana. And as with general education, special education in Ghana was started by the Christian Missionaries, and later took over by the government of Ghana (Kyere, 2009). The main targets of special education in Ghana are children who have visual impairment, hearing impairment and intellectual and behavioral disabilities (Akinkugbe, 2013; Kyere, 2009).

There is no separate policy governing the operation of special education in Ghana; the policy on general education caters for special education (UNESCO, 1995). Activities in special education are therefore closely related to those in general education—special schools follow the general education curricular, with slight modifications to address the needs of specific categories of children with disabilities. Also, there is a separate division of the Ghana Education Service—Special Education Division (SPED)—responsible for implementing policies on special education and overseeing the running of special schools (Ministry of Education, 2013). SPED is therefore one of the agencies under the Ministry of Education and receives funding from the central government. However, SPED receives a very small percentage of the total funds allocated to the sector in a fiscal year. For example, in 2010, SPED received 0.7% of the total funds allocated to the education sector; in 2011, the division received 0.5% and in 2012, it received 0.4% (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Besides the academic programmes, it is required that all special schools established vocational departments (Kyere, 2009). However, there are some variations in the content and duration of the



programmes being offered in the special schools to cater for the needs of the different categories of disability. For instance, blind students are supposed to learn typing, as part of their basic education, while deaf schools place a great deal of emphasis on vocational training. Moreover, deaf students spend more years in school at both the basic and secondary levels, one extra year at each level, than hearing students (Kyeremeh, 2009). For children with intellectual disabilities, the focus is primarily to provide “a variety of activities which the mentally handicapped should undertake so that their residual potentialities can be identified and developed into skills for future life [sic]” (UNESCO, 1995, p.8). Since special education does not target children with physical disabilities, they are supposed to attend mainstream schools. All children seeking admission into special schools are supposed to undergo a rigorous screening process to determine their suitability before admission. However, lack of expertise and inadequate assessment centers are challenges to effective assessment and placement (Agbenyega, 2003).

In terms of teacher training, a course in special education has been introduced in the initial colleges of education to enable pre-service teachers to acquire some knowledge and skills on children with special needs. In-service courses are also being offered to teachers who have no training in special education, and resource teachers are being provided to support teachers in the classroom (UNESCO 1995). However, it is doubtful if the content of the course is enough to adequately prepare teachers to handle pupils with special needs. Studies in Ghana have shown that many of the teachers lacked the skills to manage children with disabilities in the classroom (Agbenyega, 2003; Obi & Mensah, 2005).

Although a lot of efforts are being made to improve access to education for children with disabilities, it is unclear if special schools in Ghana are performing their functions effectively. A report by the Ministry of Education (2013) suggests that there seemed to be a reduction in the number of children enrolled in special schools in Ghana. For example, enrolment during the 2006/7 academic year was 6,432 pupils but it was reduced to 5,560 at the end of the 2012/13 academic year (Ministry of Education, 2013). Although there is lack of definitive data on the academic performance of children attending special schools, a cursory assessment of the number of students with disabilities attending tertiary institutions suggests that all is not well with special education. According to Opoku et al (2015), officials at SPED have confirmed that the academic performance of children in the special schools was far worse than their counterparts in general education. This study investigated the state of special schools, from the perspective of special educators, in two regions in Ghana. The aim was to determine whether special schools were effectively performing functions for which they have been established. The following research questions were explored: 1) what is special school educators in Ashanti and Brong Ahafo Regions’ perception of the resources available to children with disabilities in special schools in the two regions? 2) what is special educators’ perception about the performance of children with disabilities in special schools in the two regions

Materials and Methods

Study design

The study was an exploratory study which used qualitative data collection method (interviews) to elicit information from participants on the state of special schools in the two regions. Qualitative method suited this approach because it allowed in-depth exploration of the subject under investigation. Baxter & Jack (2008) argued that interviews give study participants the chance to respond to questions freely without limitations. Since the study investigated the state of special schools from the perspective of the



participants, it required flexibility in interviewing participants to gain insights into their viewpoints, and qualitative method offered this opportunity.

Study participants and sampling technique

In all, 20 participants: four officials from the national head office of SPED (the Deputy Director of SPED, the officer in-charge of Deaf schools, and the Head of schools for the Intellectually Disabled and Blind schools), four headmasters recruited from the four special schools in Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions. The special schools were Garden City Special School for the Intellectually Disabled and Ashanti School for the Deaf in Ashanti Region, and Shalom Special School for the Intellectually Disabled and Bechem School of Deaf in Brong Ahafo region. Also, eight teachers, two each from the four special schools were selected with the help of headmasters to participate in the study. In addition, four district special education coordinators attached to the four districts where the special schools were located were included part in the study.

The sampling technique used for selecting the participants is purposive. This implies that participants were recruited based on certain characteristics they possessed. These are their involvement in educating children with special needs and being knowledgeable of conditions of educational facilities for children with disabilities in Ashanti or Brong Ahafo regions. The technique enabled the researchers to select participants who gave satisfactory answers to the interview questions.

The researchers obtained an introductory letter, which explained the purpose of the study, from Centre for Disability Rehabilitation Studies. The letter was submitted to the Director of SPED at the national head office in Accra, who informed the various unit heads of SPED. A letter from SPED was then sent to all the heads of special schools and district special education coordinators in both regions informing them about the study and eliciting their co-operation. Separate meetings were held with the headmasters, district special education coordinators, resource teachers and dates were scheduled for the interviews.

Out of the total number of participants, majority (70%) were males. In terms of their ranks as professionals in the Ghana Education Service (GES), Principal Superintendents were the most (30%) among the participants whereas the least was the rank of Assistant Director I and Deputy Director (5%). In relation to working experience, 30% had work between 1 and 5 years compared to 10% who had worked between 21 and 25 years. The mean number of years a participant had worked was 11. On qualification, 35% of the participants were holders of Diploma certificates while only 10% had Master's. Table 1 below provides a summary of the ranking system in GES while Table 2 presents a summary of the demographic characteristic of participants.



Table 1. Ranking in the Ghana Education Service

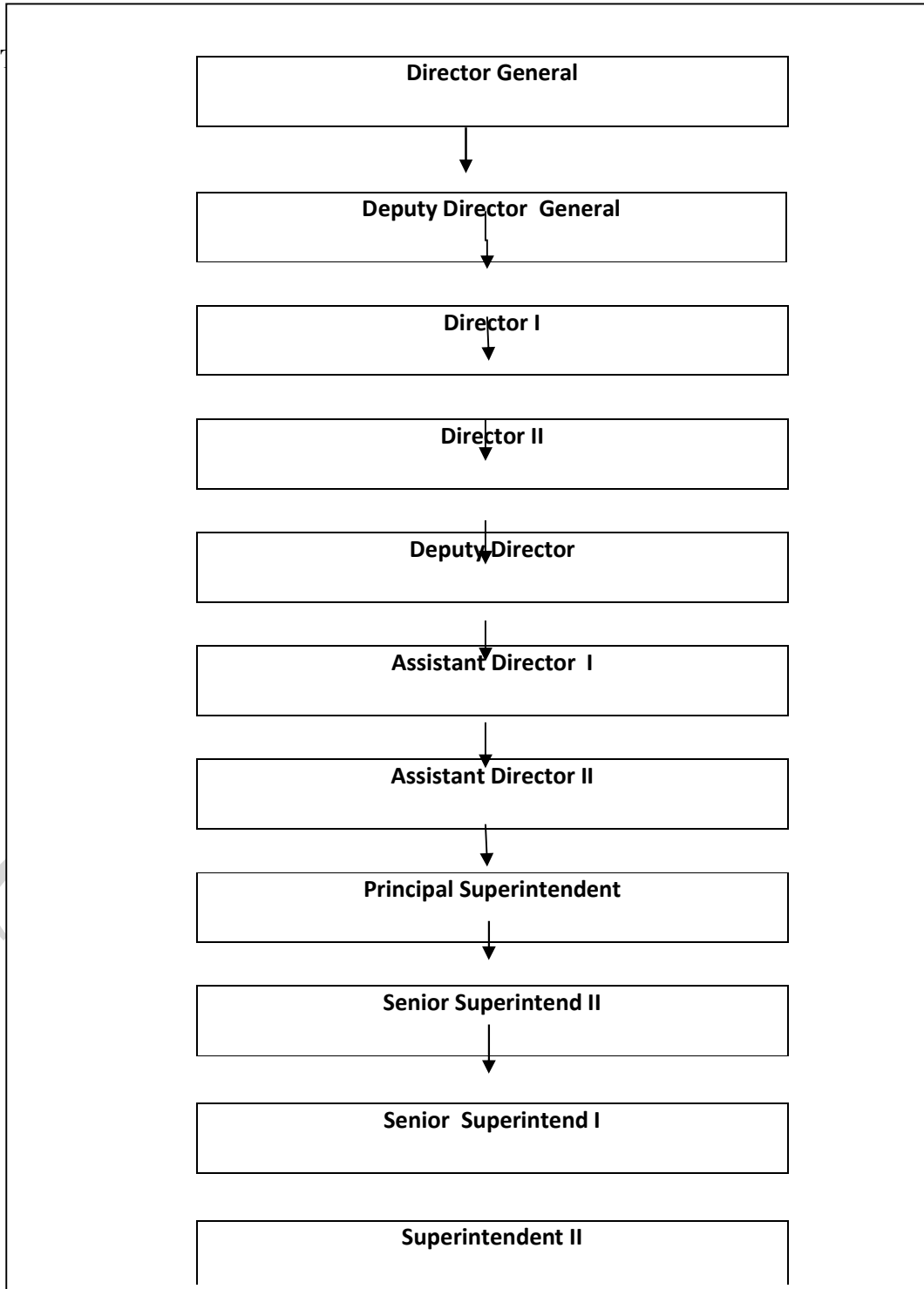




Table 2 Demographic characteristics of participants

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
- Male	14	70
- Female		
Total	6	30
	20	100
Rank		
- Deputy Director	1	5
- Assistant Director I		
- Assistant Director II	1	5
- Principal Superintendent		
- Senior Superintendent I	3	15
- Senior Superintendent II		
- Superintendent II	6	30
Total	4	20
	3	15
	2	10
	20	100
Qualification		
- Master's Degree	2	10
- Bachelor Degree		
- Diploma	11	55
Total	7	35
Working Experience		
	20	100
- 1-5 years		
- 6-10 years		
- 11-15 years		
- 16-20 years	5	25
- 21-25 years		



Total	4	20
Mean	6	30
	3	15
	2	10
	20	100
	11	

Method of data collection

The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with participants using a semi-structured interview guide based on the objectives of the study. Some of the issues discussed include participants' job description, resources available for the children, measures to encourage participation, supports from government and parents, accessibility of the schools, teacher training, source of funding and challenges teachers encountered in teaching children with disabilities (see Table 3 below). Apart from these main questions, there were sub-questions to probe the answers provided by the participants. With consent of the participants the interviews were audio-recorded. All participants spoke English which is the official language in Ghana. The interviews were conducted in offices of participants so that they would feel comfortable interacting with the researchers.

Table 3. Abridged interview guide for participants

Questions for Headmasters and Teachers	Questions for Special Education Official at National Head Office
Please tell me your name, your job description, and how long you have been working in your present position.	Please tell me your name, your job description, and how long you have been working in your present position
Please to what extent are the available educational facilities meet the needs of children with disabilities in Ghana?	Please to what extent are the available educational facilities meet the needs of children with disabilities in Ghana?
What measures have been put in place to encourage participation of children with disabilities in basic schools?	What measures have been put in place to encourage participation of children with disabilities in basic schools?
What is the role of government and parents in the education of children with disabilities?	What is the role of government and parents in the education of children with disabilities?



Does direct or indirect cost of education serve as a barrier to educating children with disabilities?	Does direct or indirect cost of education serve as a barrier to educating children with disabilities?
How crucial are teachers as well as teaching and learning materials in the education of children with disabilities?	How crucial are teachers as well as teaching and learning materials in the education of children with disabilities?
source of funding and challenges teachers encountered in teaching children with disabilities	What measure do you think should be put in place to enhance participation of children with disabilities in school?
Do you have any question or other remarks?	Do you have any question or other remarks?

Data management and analysis

The audio-recorded discussions were transcribed verbatim by the researchers. The researchers listened to each audio recording several times before transcribing to word format. Transcripts were compared to add missed information. A Microsoft word file was created for the final transcripts, which was saved and password-secured on a portable computer accessible to only the researchers. With the aid of Weft Qualitative Data Analysis software (Weft QDA), themes and sub-themes, based on the research questions were developed. Specific codes were assigned to recurring ideas related to each research questions, which later grouped together into categories to form themes. Quote relevant to the each theme from the transcripts were linked to their respective themes.

Ethical issues

Ethical clearance was obtained from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology's Committee on Human Research and Publication Ethics before the fieldwork was undertaken. The researchers respected the rights of the respondents and ensured that informed consent was completed before carrying out any interview. No gifts were given to the participants

Results

Academic achievement

In Ghana, students at the basic level are supposed to take part in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) before entry into secondary and technical schools. There was a general consensus that the performance of children in the special schools was very poor and this was attributed to lack of qualified teachers. Although officials from SPED, were aware that some of the teachers were not qualified



to handle children with disabilities, they said there was nothing they could do. Two officials at SPED commented:

For the past three years, the hearing impairment had 46% passed in 2011; 32% pass in 2012 and 30% passed in 2013. Whereas for the visually impaired, there were 78% passed in 2011; 47% pass in 2012 and 56% in 2013. The deaf students are not performing because most teachers don't know the sign language so it really affects their performance [SPED official 2, male]

We have to make use of the normal teachers in the system since there are not many of teachers who have the skills to teach in special schools. We know it is not right but the situation has made it necessary for us to use teachers without the skills to teach in special schools [SPED official 1, male].

Responses from some teachers and headmasters confirmed assertions by SPED officials that some of the teachers in the special schools lacked the skills to teach children with disabilities. For example, some of the teachers complained of the difficulties they faced teaching children with disabilities because they do not have the needed skills.

We lack the skills to teach and at times I want to explain things to them but I don't know how to use the sign language. I only learnt it from here (special school), I was never taught the sign language anywhere and so it is very difficult for me to teach them (deaf children) [Teacher 5, male].

I was posted to this school against my will. I didn't know what I was coming to do here because I have no special training to teach these children. I am still learning and trying my best to cope with how teaching is done [Teacher 2, male].

A headmaster from one of the special schools corroborated the above claims and commented that:

Most of the teachers here are general trained teachers who have no knowledge about special education. That is the kind of teachers posted here and I write to complain all the time but the same thing keeps happening each year [Headmaster 1, female]

Teachers are one of the most essential resources in any educational system, so without qualified teachers, the performance of children would be adversely affected.

Vocation training

Participants discussed the importance of vocational training to children with disabilities, which is one of the core functions of special schools in Ghana. There was general agreement that for children with disabilities to be independent and competitive on the labour market, they should be provided with appropriate vocational training. However, responses from some of the participants suggest the special schools were not providing the children with the appropriate skills. This appears to be due to lack of resources and the perception that children with disabilities are incapable of learning. Two headmasters of schools for the intellectually disabled remarked:



We have not been able to graduate any of the children. They will just be in the school and drop out at some point. We are not training them to take up job outside but only giving them basic life skills. We don't have teaching and learning materials. So we use whatever we can get around the environment [Headmaster 3, male].

We have them (children with disabilities) here so when they are fed up, then they will go home or drop out. Their retention memory is very low which can just absorb a few things. Always some people have to be on them keeping an eye on them. From here, it becomes discouraging to employ them. The problem is that, our children never graduate. They become fed up and drop out of the school [Headmaster 2, male].

It could be deduced from the above comments that even the heads of the special schools have low expectation of the children, and so, they were unlikely to provide the children with employable skills.

Provision of resources

Participants commented on the availability of learning materials and infrastructural development in the special schools. According to some of the participants, most of the schools did not have teaching and learning materials tailored to meet the learning needs of children with special needs. The teaching and learning materials for children in the special schools were the same as those being used in general education. The materials were also not supplied to the schools regularly. For example, an official of SPED admitted that materials were sent to schools “every two years because of the cost involved in purchasing the materials from abroad.” Two headmasters also remarked:

For the whole of the year, no registers, no notebook, no teaching materials have been supplied to us. So I ask the teachers to buy from their own pockets which will be refunded to them later on when the school gets funds from either the government or from philanthropists. It so sad but that is the reality of the situation. I can't do anything about it [Headmaster 4, female]. .

We are not getting the teaching and learning materials because the service grant is not coming. For now, there is no fund for that. They don't supply us any teaching and learning materials. Money for teaching and learning material comes from the service Grant and of late it has not been coming. The government used to give us money to purchase materials but it is not coming these days. The parents pay some money for us to purchase those materials needed. That is the only chance for us to get the school running [Headmaster 2, male].

In terms of infrastructural development, almost all participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the nature of infrastructure for the special schools. It was revealed that government did very little in terms providing infrastructure to the schools. Classrooms, dormitories and dining halls in the schools were built by philanthropists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Three participants observed:

If you see the attention they (government) give to normal children as in the provision of infrastructure, even if you go to senior high schools and see the sort of structures they are putting up... That is not the case here (special school). If you look at our dormitory here, it was built by an NGO. Government is yet to put up any dormitory for this school. All



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these classrooms were put up by the German government. The entire infrastructures here are from outsiders [Headmaster 3, male].

A volunteer who came to Ghana built the school facilities that are here. He single handedly built about 80% of the facilities with monies mobilized from his country. Every facility here was built by someone so it high time the government comes to build classrooms and dormitories for the children [Headmaster 1, female].

As a specialist, I would say Ghana as a country has not provided equal opportunity. A lot of things go into the teaching of children with disabilities which are not available in Ghana. Government is not doing much to help in relation to building classrooms and other things. Here, we have foreigners who are helping to put up classrooms and dormitories. They are the once we depend on but not the government [Teacher 2, male].

Due to inadequate infrastructural development, almost all the schools in the regions were overcrowded, making it hard for the schools to admit more children; congestion was a major problem facing school administrators and teachers in the special schools. An official of SPED noted that:

We are aware that most children with disabilities are out of school in Ghana because the special schools for children with intellectual are choked with a lot of children on the waiting list, making it difficult for most of them to be in school [SPED official 1, male].

The sentiment of the official was supported by headmasters and teachers in special schools. For instance, two headmasters claimed that:

When you come around this time, there won't be any place for them [children with disabilities] so we put them on the waiting list after going through the screening process. If the facility is able to accommodate all the children, then this is not the number you would have met. The boys are sleeping in one of the classrooms. In the evening, they will pack the tables and sleep then re-arrange in the morning for classes. We don't have enough classrooms, dormitory, offices and stores [Headmaster 1, female].

There are great numbers of children with disabilities in the streets or homes. If there is space, we will admit the children but the facilities are not enough. There are a lot on the waiting list which is about 400. Our dormitories were not made for too many children [Headmaster 4, female].

Teaching and learning have been affected as a result of the increasing number of children in the schools without a corresponding increase in infrastructure. Again, two headmasters explained:

We are supposed to have about eight children in each classroom but due to few classrooms that are available, the number of children in each classroom is between 14 and 25. The furniture in the classroom is not even meant for them but they are managing with it because we don't have any option at the moment [Headmaster 2, male].



We have problem with dormitories and classrooms. It will be difficult admitting more children. A maximum of fifteen children should have been in a classroom but every class has between 25 to 30 children. This is because we don't have enough classrooms [Headmaster 3, male]

Furthermore, some respondents complained about the inadequacy of funds as well as delays in releasing the funds to special schools by the central government. According to an official at SPED “support of government to special schools has always not been enough. Out of the budget for GES, SPED gets only 1% allocation” making it difficult to allocate enough funds to the special schools. All the headmasters of the schools, complained about inadequacy of the funds as well as delays in releasing the funds to the schools. The following quotes from three headmasters illustrate the extent of the problem:

Normally, it [funds] come very late. Even at the beginning of the term we delayed in re-opening because of lack of funds. The grant from the government is woefully inadequate. No money for administration, electricity and water bills. Now we have not received service grants for administration over 4 years now so everything is based on the feeding grant [Headmaster 3, male].

The money should come every term but of late, it is not coming. We opened the whole term and nothing has come. Last term they brought part of the money the school should have gotten. This term they have brought the portion that was left. This term's grant is yet to come and I don't know when they are going to bring it. We buy on credit. It has got to a time food sellers don't want to sell to us. We are just handicapped if the grants are not in. The school has been served a letter by Volta River Authority, (VRA) that if we do not come and settle their electricity bills, our lights will be disconnected. The bills have piled up and they have threatened to disconnect the lights [Headmaster 3, male].

The money doesn't come regularly. For the past two years, it has been worse. We have only three weeks to go home but we have only been given a quarter of the grant. We buy on credit. For example we took rice from suppliers at the cost of GH¢86 early this year but we making additional payment of GH¢23 for each bag. Last week I gave the school GH¢100 to help feed the children today. We keep the children here and we suffer [Headmaster 1, female].

Since financial resources are essential to run the schools, inadequate funding would definitely affect the smooth administration of the schools. And since some of the officials at SPED also complained of the inadequacy of the funds, it suggests that the problem is serious.

Distance to School

Distance from school was another issue that was discussed extensively by the participants. Because the special schools are few and located in urban areas, children with disabilities residing in rural areas or far from where the schools are located, were finding it difficult to enroll. Some participants commented:

Special schools in Ghana are few so only few children can have access. I usually see most of them (children with disabilities) on the street but anytime I approach the parents to



take their children to school, they mention that the schools are far so they can't afford to take them there (District Special Education Coordinator 3, male)

I always feel sad when a child come from far to access education. These schools should have been everywhere but as a country we have not invested that much to assist children with disabilities. Not all parents can afford to travel such a long distant to get admission for their children and that explains the reason why most are home [Headmaster 4, female].

Providing transport for children staying nearby while those coming from far away are given accommodation in the schools would have alleviated the problem. However, the schools lacked the capacity to transport the children on daily basis because of lack of vehicles. Two headmasters shared their experience as follows:

The school is supposed to transport some of the children from nearby suburbs to the school to solve the problem but we don't have buses to do that. We mostly house those from afar and tell parents who stay around to find their own means of transport. They are not coming because the parents can't afford the daily transportation [Headmaster 1, female]

All our official vehicles have broken down and my car is now used for official work. I have to sacrifice to get the school running. The arrangement couldn't continue because there wasn't any money for fuel and the parents were not prepared to contribute for their children to be transported. We can't do that anymore and we will educate the few we can house on campus [Headmaster 4, female]

The location of schools has also made it impossible for parents to visit their children regularly. Parents visited the schools only at re-opening or during vacation, and would not even attend Parents-Teacher-Association meetings to discuss issues concerning the welfare of their children.

When you invite the parents, they won't come because they will complain about the distance. It is challenge for us as we need the parents closer so that they can assist us in managing the children but it is not happening according to how we want [Headmaster 3, male]

During vacation, some of the children still have to stay with us because their parents won't come for them. It is costly for them to travel such long distances and most of these parents are poor so the school keeps the children all the time [Teacher 4, female]

The children are happy and feel relaxed when they are visited regularly but here is a situation whereby a parent will never come here again until we call to tell them that we have vacated so they should come and take their children. Some don't have money for transport and we have to give them to take their children back home [Headmaster 1, female]

The above narratives, suggest that conditions in the special schools in the two regions were not ideal for children with disabilities, and this have been confirmed by officials at SPED.



Discussion

The ultimate aim of special education is to increase access to quality education for children with children disabilities by creating an environment that is conducive and responsive to their unique needs. This is based on the assumption that general education cannot accommodate children with disabilities because they have unique needs, which are not considered in general education (UNESCO, 2011). Consequently, schools designated as special should be adequately resourced with suitable support services and resources, and should employ customized instructional programmes that will address the needs of children with disabilities (UNESCO, 2011). However, findings from the study suggest that the special schools in the two regions lacked the capacity to handle children with disabilities. The schools lacked vital resources required to effectively handle children with disabilities; as a result, the learning needs of the children were not being met.

Recall that the special education and general education in Ghana use the same curricular. This requires that teachers in the special schools should be able to effectively adapt the curricular to make them disability-friendly. However, the lack of resources and well-trained teachers meant that teachers would find it extremely difficult to make the necessary adaptations. The ability of teachers to effectively help the children to participate in both classroom and extra-curricular activities would be limited, leading to low achievements in the children (Akyeampong et al, 2007; Gadagbui, 2005; Kiyuba & Tuku, 2014). The consequence is that the children are targeted and negatively labeled by the teachers. This observation supports findings by Agbenyega (2003) about teachers' reaction when they encountered challenges handling children with disabilities in the classroom. According to the author, teachers who lack of skills and were unable to cope with the challenges in the classrooms, become frustrated and verbally abuse the children. It is therefore not unexpected that children in the special schools were performing poorly in their final year examinations.

The findings from the study also suggest that the special schools were not effectively performing one of their core objectives of providing training for the children. It is expected that if the children are unable to perform well academically, they should be able to acquire vocational skills to make them employable after school. However, the findings suggest that the children do not acquire skills needed on the labour market. Lack of resources and low expectation of the capabilities of the children by teachers are the major factors. This finding corroborates findings by Gadagbui (2008), Oliff (2004) and Porters (2001), who observed that special schools are yet to be beneficial to children with disabilities as the children are not given the necessary training to make them productive after completion. Similarly, Hayford (2013) and Kiyuba & Tuku (2014) mentioned that special schools do not have good programmes for children with disabilities, so the children are kept in the schools as long as the parents want.

Conditions in the special schools, as the findings revealed, point to lack of commitment on the part of government to support education for children with disabilities. This attitude of governments may be due to the huge financial resources required to manage schools for children with disabilities. The large financial outlay required to run special schools, coupled with limited resources in the country, meant that government may be unable to meet all the financial needs of special schools. The Education Sector Report of 2013 showed that SPED was receiving meager amount of funds allocated to the education sector over the years (Ministry of Education, 2013). Several authors have described special education as expensive, making it impossible for governments to adequately provide the needed financial assistance to the schools (Mickelson, 2002; Porters, 2001).



Another possible reason for the lukewarm attitude on the part of government towards special education is the general attitude of society towards educating children with disabilities. This finding is consistent with previous studies which indicated that education for children with disabilities has not been a priority of many governments (Gobah, 2014; Fefoame, 2008; Save the Child, 2008; Miles, 2000). Labeling and categorizing children in terms of abilities create problems for the children. According to Kiyuba & Tuku (2014), labeling creates an impression of lack and worthlessness, and this can affect the way education of children with disabilities is treated

Policy Implications

Although, the inclusive education policy, which is being implemented, may alleviate some of the challenges special schools are encountering, government should be more committed and give equal attention to special schools as it is being done for mainstream schools. Since expansion of the special schools will be difficult due to the huge financial outlay required vis-a-vis the current Ghana's -economic situation, the schools selected to practice inclusive education should be well-resource to admit more children with disabilities in order to reduce the pressure on the special schools.

Moreover, government should be a bit more committed and ensure that resources are allocated timely to special schools since inadequate resource is a major factor hampering the smooth operation of special schools. Also, there is the need to train more teachers who will be able to handle the needs of children with disabilities in schools. Since the course content of special education being offered in the colleges of education may not be adequate to prepare teachers to handle children with disabilities (Obi & Mensah, 2005), the curriculum of the colleges of education and other teacher training institutions should be reviewed to make them more relevant. Additionally, disabled persons organization should prioritized education and advocate for the implementation of the relevant provisions in the Persons with Disability Act 715 in order to ensure that discrimination against persons with disabilities is eliminated since it is one of the main causes limiting access to opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Conclusion

The study investigated the state of special schools in two regions in Ghana and found that the schools lacked the capacity to adequately prepare the children to be productive in future. Thus, although special education was introduced to address disparities in education between children with disabilities and those without disabilities, the findings of the study suggest that conditions in the schools may deepen inequalities in both regions because children with disabilities have limited access to quality education. In the nutshell, the state of special schools in the two regions defeats the central goal of special education to increase access to quality education for children with disabilities. It also, contradicts government's objective of making education accessible to all children in the country. The main limitation of the study was that data were collected from participants who were from two geographical areas. Therefore, their responses do not represent perception of special educators in Ghana. However, it is important to mention that the findings in the special schools in the two regions may not be peculiar to only these two regions—it may be the same for all special schools in the country. More studies are required in the other schools to provide a better understanding of the state of schools in Ghana. Also, the study focused on special school educators, and so, future studies should include perspectives of direct beneficiaries of special education—children with disabilities and their parents—to provide a holistic picture on the state of special education in Ghana.



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