

Research Article

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Beyond the Politics of Inclusion: The Policy Environment and the Fate of Children with Disability in the Ghanaian Educational System

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Abstract

The 1992 constitution of Ghana and other national legislative instruments guarantee and promote free compulsory universal basic education for all Ghanaian children irrespective of their background. This has been the practice for many years. Even though these policies have chalked some successes, especially regarding school attendance and gender parity, there still remains some level of uncertainty as to whether all Ghanaian children, especially those with disabilities, benefit from these policies. Using secondary information available, the paper provides an overview of the existing legislative instruments that seek to promote the adoption of inclusive education policy in Ghana. Evidence from the literature reveals that there are restrictions within the current policy provisions which make inclusive education not possible for children living with disabilities. The paper concludes and recommends that there should be some modifications or new developments of inclusive education to enable the system to accommodate the diverse educational needs of children with disabilities.

Keywords: Policy, Inclusive Education, children, disability

1. Introduction

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) are the world's largest minority group estimated to be about 10% of the global population, with about 80% of that number living in developing countries such as Ghana (United Nations, 2011). Historically, efforts in Ghana at providing education for children with disabilities were generally made through segregated special schools, isolated from mainstream educational institutions. The desire and strategy to create a comprehensive educational system in Ghana can be traced as far back as 1951 under the Accelerated Development Plan which caused basic education to be free and compulsory for every school child (Akyeampong, 2010). Under the education Act (87) 1961, this blue print was passed to become a law (Thompson, 2008 and Achanso, 2010). The new law aimed at expanding access to education to all and bridging the educational gap for the marginalised in the Ghanaian society. In a bid to manage an educational system where children with disabilities are excluded from education, successive governments and their buildout partners have continually focused on enlarging entry for disadvantaged groups to deal with the issues of educational exclusion in Ghana.

The nation has endorsed various worldwide standards and statements on the privilege to education which impacted most of the legitimate structures of the country with regard to education which is inclusive of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education For All (EFA) goals, UNESCO Convention against discrimination in Education (1960), UN Conventions on Privilege of youngsters, UN Convention on Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD), and many other international policy prescriptions, which have been absorbed into national laws. The primary target for most of these conventions has partly been to increase the livelihood of persons with disabilities by

advancing their privileges to diverse services that lead to ensuring full and equal citizenship (Ghana Education Service, 2004; Ghansah, 2011; Thurman, 2003). Ghana, being a signatory to most of these international conventions, passed the national Disability Policy Document in 2000, and the Disability Act in 2006, signifying in-state attempts to reduce or eliminate stigmatisation and discrimination against persons with disabilities and to enhance their wellbeing in the society. Thus, the overall objective of the policy is to ensure that the rights of all persons with disability are protected to ensure that they are able to participate in mainstream society.

Moreover, the special Education Division (SPED) of the Ghana Education Service has the mandate to increase access to quality education and train children with disabilities to enhance their human capital formation to become worthy on the labour market, get income and have independent life. The Ghana Education Strategy Plan (Volume one) further state that mainstream schools should absorb children with less-severe special educational needs by 2015 (ESP, 2004). There is an educational policy document which emphasise the need to ensure the inclusion of all learners, particularly learners with special educational needs. These suggest that Ghana has made strides to observe and follow the underlying principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD). All these policies are important and meritorious steps towards enlarging educational opportunity for persons with disabilities. However, enactment of these policies has become a constant challenge.

This paper investigates the policy situation and the practice of inclusive education for children with disability in Ghana. In an attempt to complete this task, the paper purposively selected and reviewed some specific legal frameworks. The paper is divided into three sections. First, the policy environment and practice of inclusive education are discussed. In the second part of the paper, the implication of the policy to the practice of inclusive education is explained. The concluding part suggests ways to enhance the practice of inclusive education in Ghana.

2. Key Policy Environment

In Ghana, there are policy directives such as the Education Strategy Plan (Volume one), Education Strategy Plan 2010 -2020 (Volume two) and many others to include children with disability, especially non-severe special-education-needs children in mainstream schools by 2015. The country's commitments to social inclusion are mostly incorporated in the national constitution and other national legislative instruments that seek to promote the adoption of an inclusive education policy. These include the following in Table 1 below.

Table 1: National Constitution and other national legislative instruments that seek to promote the adoption of inclusive education policy

Name	Туре	Description	How PWDs Benefit
The Constitution of Ghana, 1992, Article 25(a).	Legislation	Everyone shall be entitled to equal educational opportunities and amenities and in order to attain complete awareness of this privilege basic schooling shall be free, mandatory and accessible to all.	the benefit of PWDs from prejudice and offensive treatment (Article 29) and authorises the law makers to
The Children's Act of Ghana (Act 560).		It protects the rights of children in Ghana.	It encourages the government to help children to develop their physical, mental and social wellbeing
The National Disability Policy (2000).	,	It guarantees protection of the privileges of persons with disabilities. The strategy is to a large extent acknowledge UN's Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for PWDs (UN,1993).	acceptance, education, housing and employment (MoESW, 2000).

Name	Туре	Description	How PWDs Benefit
The Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2003-2015 of the Government of Ghana.	Policy	It echoes the Government of Ghana's commitment to Education For All.	It states that by the year 2015, children with less severe disabilities should be provided inclusive environments in all schools within Ghana (Republic of Ghana, 2003a, 2003b).
Special Educational Needs Policy Framework (2005).	Policy	Established on key strategies designed in the ESP, this policy envisions the achievement of an inclusive education system.	It tackles the problems of inequality, exclusion, and imbalance that comprise obstacles to educating students with disabilities (Ghana Education Service Special Education Division, GES SPED, 2005).
Ghana Disability Act (715), 2006.	Legislation	This Act fulfils Ghanaian constitutional requirements and absorbs recommendations from ratified human rights conventions.	It gives room for the development of special education schools for children with severe special needs education. Caregivers and parents are supposed to register and enrol such children in schools based on their degree of their disability. Nonetheless, obstacles to impede their enrol into school should be prevented.
The Education Act (778) of 2007	Legislation	The focus is on the development of an academic system planned to churn out responsible individuals with the necessary competence, attitude and behaviours to become useful, functional and productive citizens for the overall expansion and promotion of democracy and development of the nation.	
Inclusive Education Document (2016).	Policy	The main goal of the policy is to meet the educational needs of all children within the framework of Universal Design for Learning and Child Friendly School environment.	

The above national legal frameworks suggest that children with disability should not be exempted from or discriminated against as far as education is concerned. For instance, Article 25 (1a) of the Constitution of Ghana highlights the right to basic education for all, including PWDs, and it declares that equal opportunities and facilities shall be enjoyed by all persons with the intention of reaching full realisation of the this right. Basic education must be free, mandatory, available and accessible to all.

It is worthy to note that the United Nations (1989) convention on the rights of the child informed the aforementioned provision in the constitution of Ghana. For example, Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) specifies that children with disabilities should have access to healthcare and rehabilitation services, education, training, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner that is possible for the child to attain an all-inclusive societal assimilation and personal growth, including his/her cultural and spiritual growth. Significantly, the Disability Act intended to deal with discrimination against PWDs and, thereby, safeguarding their rights against different forms of maltreatment (Disability Act, 2006). For example, Disability Act (2006) Section 4 considers the ill-treatment and discrimination against individuals with disabilities illegal. Additionally, the Act stipulates that no one should be treated differently from other persons as a result of his/her disability. It also observes that disgrace and ill-treatment against individuals with disability must be avoided.

Despite the seemingly conducive regulatory environment created by the non-discrimination policies and laws discussed above, there is the argument that legal frameworks do not provide

enough clarity to inclusive practices (Lamptey et al. 2015). Also, in practice, the plight of children with disabilities remains unchanged partly as a result of lack of tangible programs to transform the policy intentions into desirable outcomes. Poor implementation and enforcement of the policies and laws passed to ensure the inclusion of these children in mainstream educational institutions are also factors (Mantey, 2015).

3. Research Methods

The paper purposively selected and reviewed some specific legal frameworks. Purposive sampling was more appropriate for this work as it allowed a sampling of literature relevant to the phenomenon under study. As a result, information from the literature that fulfilled the inclusion criterion set for getting information for the study was reviewed. The inclusion criteria includes papers that emphases on the education for children and particularly the education of children with disabilities with disabilities. Four legislations and four national policies related to education of persons with disability in Ghana were reviewed. Sources of the information used for writing the paper are mainly scientific data bases and scientific journals. A Systematic and comprehensive search was used to locate published information on the study. Databases used electronically for searching for information for the paper were mainly JSTOR, Wiley online library, Taylor and Francis, Google Scholar, Oxford Journals, Science Direct, Sage Journals online and websites of relevant organisations. Key words used in these searches are inclusive education, disability, policy, legislation, challenges, development, Africa, and Ghana. Out of the total of 64 articles and journals used, 15 of the results were ignored after scanning through their topics and abstracts. The remaining 49 of the information was reviewed to determine whether they met the inclusive criteria of which 16 did not meet the inclusion criteria. Thirty-three articles were finally chosen for the review paper but upon further appraisal, 9 articles seemed to have very different criterion which did not meet the inclusion criterion set. Only 24 documents which, eventually, met the inclusion criterion were appraised. The paper based its discussion on Ghana as a case from an African country. The papers reviewed indicate that there are national legislative instruments that seek to promote the adoption of an inclusive education policy as shown in Table 1: The national legal framework suggest that children with disabilities should not be exempted or discriminated against as far as education is concerned.

4. Discussions

4.1 Policy implications and practice of inclusive education

Education happens to be a macro level issue which cannot be successful without the proper implementation of appropriate policies (Mantey, 2015). There have been discussions over the years about the process of generating a disability policy in Ghana. This means that issues relating to disability is a matter of concern in Ghana. In 2006, the Act was passed in parliament. The development of the Act and other policies is a significant accomplishment to protect and support persons with disabilities because only few countries in Africa have developed these policies (Mantey, 2015). In Ghana, both educational sector and Special Education Needs (SEN) reviews indicate that there is no specific policy that clearly states a philosophy on disability to guide practice (Asamani, 2000; Avoke, 2002; Casely-Hayford, 2002; Akyeamong et al., 2007; GOG, 2007; MOESS, 2008). Consequently, various educational reforms as well as the FCUBE which has provided the drive for education in Ghana from 1996 to the 2000s, failed to provide any clear targets for Special Education Needs. Thus, the reforms did not mention disability at all, and this eventually influenced funding to the sector (Akyeampong et al.; Casely-Hayford, 2002; GOG, 2005; MOSESS, 2008). On the other hand, some scholars such as Agbenyega (2002), Avoke (2002), conducted research in the area of special education from 2000 to 2007 and indicate that, to large extent, there are some provisions for people living with disabilities. But according to these scholars, these provisions are insufficient and inappropriate in tackling the educational needs of children with disability.

Because inclusive education needs system policy to work, Ghana has taking some measures in providing opportunities to deal with the situation of persons living with disability. The passage of the Disability Act (715) is an example with areas addressing educational opportunities for PWDs. Moreover, the 2016 inclusive education policy document gives recognition to the different learning needs of various categories of children. The policy is conceptualised in terms of Universal Design for learning (UDL) and child-friendly schools. The UDL is intended to make learning accessible to more learners in inclusion programs and the child-friendly schools hopes to bring all the excluded in society to school.

Available statistics show that the Special Education Division of the Ministry of Education has a policy on inclusive education which places children with non-severe disabilities in the mainstream public schools. The number of pupils special educational needs enrolled in mainstream basic schools recorded in 2012/2013 totalled 16,596 (MoE 2013). Additionally, there are some conventional institutions that basically provide education at the second and post second cycles for persons with disability (Education Strategic Policy, 2003-2015). Besides these schools, inclusive education should be practised by all schools within Ghana as stipulated by the 1992 constitution of Ghana. There are a number of goals listed by the education strategy such as increasing access to and participation in education and training and providing equity in education.

Notwithstanding the Disability Act and the other legal provisions to protect the educational rights of persons with disabilities, it tuns out that children living with disabilities are denied access to education. Especially those with intellectual disabilities experience various forms of stigmatisation and discrimination in society which leads to unequal opportunities to success in primary education as well as in other levels of education. Consequently, these groups of children are excluded from mainstream education, but other arrangement are made such as the provision of special education schools to meet their educational needs. Besides, the education strategic plan indicates that, children with less severe special education needs should be placed in mainstream school by 2015. This is ambitious and challenging due to the fact that children with disability experience several difficulties as a result of some critical obstacles facing Ghana's educational sector. These obstacles include, but are not limited to, lack of funding for teaching and learning materials, lack of personnel with necessary skills (special education teachers), and many more. In terms of special educators, research by Kuyni & Desai (2007), Mamah, Deku, Darling & Avoke (2011), Mangope & Obeng (2007) and Ocloo & Subbeya (2008) establish that the basic barrier to teaching students with disability is inadequate training of teachers. Also, Arrah & Swain (2014); Mprah et al. (2016); Opoku et al. (2015; 2016) note that the barrier that impedes the practice of inclusive education is inadequate teaching and learning resources. Consequently, Ghana is making efforts to involve persons living with disabilities in the education services provided but there seems to be less evidence of inclusion. Given the reality facing children with disabilities such as architectural barriers, inflexible curriculum, etc., it appears that the policy implementation might lead to discrimination against and exclusion of children with disabilities in the Ghanajan society. This area requires priority in the implementation of the disability policy and programs to improve upon the situation of persons with disabilities.

Despite good intentions, in Ghana, the manner in which education is arranged contributes to labelling, stigmatisation and discrimination. For example, the Government of Ghana identifies public prejudicial attitudes towards persons with disabilities needs, architectural building in schools, insufficient assessment facilities, rigid curriculum and ineffective or insufficient pre/post planning in special education needs for mainstream teachers as some of the barriers that lead to discrimination against persons with special needs school attendance (Republic of Ghana, 2004). Mainstream education has relegated children with disabilities to the background and focused more on children without disabilities. However, focus should be on the various classifications of disability and the provisions of friendly and conducive learning environments as well as diverse learning opportunities for all children. As noted by Avramidis (2002), the plan, design and development of inclusive education policies should not be seen and understood as the sum of initiative and attempt in favour of specific groups.

A critical look at the Ghana Disability Act suggests that it become obligatory for government to incorporate sections of the disability law which are meant to make schooling accessible to children

living with disabilities. For instance, section three (3) emphasises the education of PWDs. This section sought to task parents or guardian to enrol their children with disability in school in that refusal to enrol their child(ren) is an offence. Also, the state has a responsibility to provide the necessary facilities and equipment to enable PWDs benefit from school. Again, the state shall provide the necessary facilities and equipment to enable PWDs benefit from school. Furthermore, the Act also states that no PWD shall be refused admission into school because of their disability. Any school that acts contrary to this provision commits an offence.

Interpreting the statements in section 3 of the Disability Act, it can be said that the state, parents and teachers have a role to play. Particularly teachers have a role by accepting children with disability to the classroom without prejudice and having the confidence that such children can equally excel as their counterparts who are not disabled. The Ghana Education Service (GES) implements educational policies for the state through various regional and district/municipal offices of the primary and secondary school levels and eventually for teachers in the classroom. Thus, the role of the Ghanaian teacher in educational policy implementation is in cooperation with other stakeholders to enhance the inclusion of PWDs in mainstream education. According to Avramidis and Norwich (2000), teachers' perception of inclusive education will not only determine their acceptance of inclusive educational policies but will also influence their dedication to the implementation of such programs. The outcomes of public attitudes, customs and practices which discriminate against children with disabilities, to a greater extent, lead to several of these children dropping out of school.

It must be noted that, regardless of all the legal frameworks including the disability Act (715) which stipulates clearly that education should be accessible to all children irrespective of their background, the condition is still the same. This is because most children with disabilities are being denied access to the regular schools. Even though the laws have substantially lessened some types of barriers and violations, other forms of barriers, including low levels of education and incomes of parents as well as low self-esteem among children with disabilities due to stigmatisation persist. These barriers have resulted in a continuously low enrolment of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, and even in special schools. This situation, in addition to other obstacles, blurs the possibility that the country can achieve Universal Basic Education. The plight of children with disability is compounded by the number who drop out and, therefore, cannot complete basic education due to hostile classroom postures adopted by teachers towards PWDs and taunting from colleague pupils without disabilities and other employees. Often, those who are able to persist through schooling become successful and, in most cases, distinguish themselves in their fields of work. Nonetheless, a great majority of them suffer discrimination at their workplaces, and some employers are unwilling to engage PWDs partly because they may have to provide them with special needs such as braille computers, among other things. It is indeed disturbing that many years after the Salamanca Conference in 1994 and the passage of the Ghana Disability Law in 2006, there are few attempts in formulating separate policies and programs to protect the educational rights of children with disabilities.

5. Conclusion

The issues discussed above show clearly that inadequate policies, programs, and lack of implementation impede efforts in changing the way the educational system responds to the needs of children with disabilities in Ghana. Thus, the unclear direction of policies in Ghana for sufficient and successful inclusive education confirms a considerable issue for practice of inclusive education. In spite of the global and domestic actions on inclusive education, there has been little effort to encourage and promote education for children with disability. Significantly, these international conventions and local legal frameworks should operate as the wheels on which these policies run to ensure universal access to quality education and to broaden the chances to help all children of diverse educational needs to participate meaningfully in socio-economic development. According to various scholars (see Avoke & Avoke, 2004; Desai & Kuyini, 2006, 2009; Ocloo & Subbey, 2008; Yarboi-Tetteh, 2008), although the Government of Ghana shows commitment to equity for all children through policy formulation, it can be argued that the educational system of

Ghana is basically whimsical and duplex in nature with good education policies on one side and bad implementation on the other. This means that government's commitment to the development of specific policies and programs to meet the needs of children with disabilities is insufficient or lacking. Consequently, policy reforms to help practice inclusive education are absent from the various schools. The commitment by government in the area of inclusive education has failed to meet the special educational needs of children with disabilities in the regular schools. Government political commitment in the area of inclusive education has failed to some extent to provide the special educational needs of children with disabilities in the mainstream schools. Politically, the provision of education as a welfare service has become a campaign theme and tool for politicians to win votes from people after which they modify or completely alter the existing policies to correspond with their campaign message. This creates uncertainty as regards the long-term outcomes of educational policies in the country. In effect, this halts the existing education policy due to successive governments' different priorities in education provision, and the unclear plan of action for education leads to inconsistency in policy implementation by politicians who are out of touch with classroom realities.

Indeed, there is a big gap between legislation and implementation because although the policies of education and the disability laws are rightly in place, in practice, implementation of these policies does not properly yield the desired results and reflect the importance of the law to persons with disabilities. For example, twelve years after the passage of the law, the legislative instruments that are required to put the law into practice have not been developed and as a result, persons with disability have become vulnerable and excluded. Although the disability Act (715), thoroughly advocate changes in the society to improve upon the standard of living of persons with disability, it does not, however, address clearly the specific challenges of the various categories of PWDs. Accordingly, the shortfalls in classification of PWDs give way to negligence and denial of distinct assistance and policy interventions for the different classifications of disability.

The reviewed policy documents in this paper shows that these legislations and policies are laudable and far-reaching. However, they are not achieving their desired objectives due to the fact that implementation of these policies depends on funds, available resources and change of attitudes. More so, it is difficult to determine how it benefits persons with disability regarding the various categories of disability and their specific needs.

6. Recommendation

In view of these discussions and conclusion, the underlisted recommendations have been made to tackle the gaps in the educational structure for successful and full implementation of inclusive education:

- It is very important to categorise children with disability under various types to enable policy practitioners to develop policies to address the different educational supports the different categories of children need.
- 2. It is worth noting that policies should not only be based on the provision of needs but also be informed by core values of rights-based approaches to policy formulation such as equity, opportunity and equality as this would push the Government of Ghana to dedicate itself to enhance efficient, effective, successful policies with regard to the privileges of children living with disability in Ghana.
- 3. There is the need for the Ghanaian government to commit itself to helping stakeholders responsible for disability issues in Ghana understand the contents of the Disability Act (715)
- There should be key modifications or new development of inclusive education to enable the educational system to accommodate the diverse educational needs of children with disability.
- The development of suitable legislative instruments is imperative for full implementation of the disability Act (715). Additionally, all-inclusive programmes and implementation plans to strengthen the practice of inclusive education should be developed.

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