

Inclusive Education in Ho Ghana Is It A Reality or Mirage to Persons Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders?

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Abstract: As Ghana ratifies the inclusive educational policy, persons living with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) still struggle to have place in the formal educational mainstream setting in Ho, Ghana part of one of the regions in the country-Ghana

The Ghanaian Inclusive Education (IE) Policy document also talks about Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This seeks to promote conducive school environment that promotes quality education for all learners, in an inclusive educational settings. For the purpose of this write-up, Inclusive education is making education accessible to all learners by adapting the school curriculum to meet differing needs of all learners no matter their origin, creed sex, and disability and ethnic background. Also making the school environment and infrastructure friendly to support teaching and learning of all learners.

This research is a case study which is used to find out how meaningful persons or children living with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are included in inclusive schools in Ho, Ghana. The researchers also seek to find out the knowledge base of teachers or facilitators about ASD who facilitates teaching and learning in their various schools in Ho Ghana.

Inclusive Education IE policy document of Ghana was looked at, documents, books and articles related to this topic were reviewed as well.

Pseudonym will be used to represent real name- because of ethical issues regarding writing of research papers. The story of the boy- Ris is contrary to the IE policy as he struggles to find a school that supports his educational needs. This story of Ris has become so pivotal to this research and forms part of the case study for this write up.

The work is organized under various themes and explained under these thematic areas. Tables are used to show respondents and the various categories under which they fall. The responses of the respondents were also analyzed according to the various responses given and analyzed according to the understanding of the researchers.

Keywords: (IE) Inclusive Education, (SEN) Special Educational Needs, (ASD) Autism Spectrum Disorders, (CFS) Child Friendly Schools, (MOE) Ministry of Education Pseudonym (Not real name), (UDL) Universal Design for Learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive form of education is spreading across nations in the world with positive ideologies (Offei, 2006). This process has the aim of combining the regular form of educational processes and strategies with the type of education which involves learners with special needs as full and participating members of the whole school community (Ferguson, 1998).

According to Opong (2003) inclusive education is structuring of the school curriculum to make it equally accessible to students with special needs. He further remarks that, inclusive education sees to it that the school community, the school climate and the school plant are adapted to meet the needs of both regular and special educational needs (SEN) pupils. Therefore, inclusive education is the act of bringing together of children with and without special educational needs in the regular school with the idea of achieving academic goals through equal access to the school curriculum in the environment. This type of education is found in the principles of human right, good education and good social values

1.1 Autism

Autism is pervasive developmental conditions that normally affect individuals normally at birth which is usually characterised by deficits in social relationships and normal communication patterns and restricted behaviour patterns which is referred to as triad of impairments Anthony (2010) cited (Wing & Gould, 1979). The severity of impairment varies from individual to individual. According to the American Psychiatric Association diagnostic Statistical Manual DSM-V the domains of impairment will now be limited to two instead of three (3) Wing et al (2010).

Basically, autism usually affects certain basic aspects of life in the individual such as propensity to understand others, relate with others, how they feel and how to communicate with others and the ability to process and make meaningful sense of emotions (Iovannone et al 2003, Jordan, 1997, 2005).

These are excerpts from the former UN Secretary- General messages during world autism day (April, 2) 2014, He said autism is not limited to a single region or a country; it requires

a global action. He reiterated that, autism is developmental disability which is lifelong therefore, our work should not be limited to early identification and treatment but it should include therapies, educational plans and other steps that move us towards sustained lifelong engagements.

1.2 Stigma and labelling

Labelling of disability in Ghana is done mainly around the medical model. Little knowledge about issues concerning SEN has made it possible for many communities and people to read so many meanings and prejudice in to it. In some communities, even people thought certain types of disabilities are curable therefore; they will try all forms remedies most often, by sending individual to prayer camps and healing centres. If these attempts fail to yield the desired results then inhumane treatments are the next forms of alternative.

Recently, there was a news article on joy fm one of the local news stations outlining how a young Ghanaian girl who was diagnosed with autism and was locked up in a room where she engaged in head banging and other forms of injurious activities. Family members usually passed food through the window to her anytime she wants to eat. She was totally secluded and stigmatized by her own family just because they are of the belief that she might be possessed with demons which might be coming from the river (Joy news 2013) this is just one in many example of the trend in Ghana.

1.3 Ghana's policy on disability

Ghana as a nation in the past had rather disturbing policies with reference to people with disabilities. According to (Anthony, 2010) citing Annor (2002) contend that about 5% of the entire citizens of Ghana have disability, however, the intensity of prejudice and stigma attached to it, contributed to the little reports about the prevalence rate in Ghana. The National Disability Policy of June 2000 is one of the outstanding legislative documents which advocated unambiguous rights for people with disability. This was specifically to the call of UN standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for individuals with special needs (UN 1993). It stated that, these individuals have the right to education, transportation, community acceptance, housing and employment (Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare 2000).

Although the 1992 constitution of Ghana of has made unequivocal protection for individuals with special needs from discrimination and abusive treatment very little has really been done on the ground with regards to various policies and legislative instruments stated above. For instance in some developing countries which Ghana is not excluded persons with special needs form an indigent marginalized group couple with inadequate access to public health, education and other important social services (gfdgh.org).

Unfortunately in Ghana, individuals with disabilities are usually seen as a drain to national economy and their families

as well. This phenomenon has contributed immensely to the poverty status of individuals with special needs.

Advocacy groups of the Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Ghana are also deprived in terms of resources; aggravating the already volatile situation of these individuals. A new era of hope emerged for PWDs in Ghana, when persons with disabilities bill was passed into act in June 2006 in the Ghanaian parliament. This legislative instrument specified the constitutional requirement comprising 12 statutory objectives mandating how the various sectors in the economy should respond to the needs of individuals with disability.

Some of its core objectives are focused on educating citizenry of Ghana on the rights and responsibilities of society towards PWDs and to generate and propagate salient information on issues of disability, to create the necessary platform for full participation of individuals with disability in national development and to ensure equal opportunity for PWDs to education and training at all levels (gfdgh.org).

1.4 Implementation of inclusion education in Ghana

The overriding agenda of realizing and breaking blockades to educational goals and accessibility and making it equal to all types of children, youth and adult alike was proclaimed by several international bodies in various famous global declarations on education for all learners. Namely; the world Declaration on Education for All held in Jomtien in Thailand in the 1990 and the following one was on Special Needs Education (SEN): Access and Quality in Salamanca, Spain in June 1994 as highlighted above were giant strides towards Inclusive education Avoke, (2005).

The Salamanca world conference was actually attended by 300 delegates from 92 governments and 25 international organizations. Ghana is one of the signatories to the world wide inclusive policies such as; Universal Declaration of Human rights Convection against Discrimination in education, therefore it behooves on Ghana to implement it (Avoke, 2005).

1.5 Ghana's inclusive educational policy

Ghana finally on the day four (4) of May 2015 launched its Inclusive Educational (IE) policy which explains the Strategic plans of the Government for the education of every children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Addo, 2016). The policy is reviewable subject to national and international best practices in every five years.

The topmost goal of the (IE) policy is to redefine and reorganize the implementation and management and educational services to react to the differing needs of all learners within the principle of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Child Friendly Schools (CFS) concept (Inclusive Education Policy, Ministry of Education, 2015).

II. INCLUSION

Inclusion in this light of discussion is realized as making equal opportunities, including learning for everybody most importantly: those from ethnic minority groups, PWDs, children or people having SEN, economic disadvantage groups. The integral point of IE policy of Ghana is to make education and the learning environment accessible and adaptable to all types of learners in mainstream inclusive environment. Taking into account learner diversity and the conducive nature of the learning environment (IE Policy of Ghana Education Service 2015).

2.1 Curriculum

IE globally is a human right issues which Ghana is of no exception therefore, the IE policy of Ghana welcomes that, every aspect of the curricular including teaching pedagogy, mode of assessment parental and learner involvement in most decision making. While the curriculum adapt to the learning styles of all learners. Paramount of these are; individual differences should be taking into account when a facilitator or teacher is giving a task.

2.3 Special schools

Special schools are always in restricted or segregated settings of which certain schools of thought believe individual attention could be given to learners and mostly class sizes are not large which some countries still practice upon the request of parents. Nevertheless, other views world over believe because of IE practices which is accepted globally, it's an infringement on the right of the learner.

2.4 State of play in Ghana

As Ghana is practicing its IE policy which was outdoor in 2015, has strategies that outlined the purpose of special schools. Special schools will now serve the purpose as viable resource centres to help inclusive mainstream schools and special unit schools with profound SEN learners of which most of them will serve as vibrant assessment centres (IE policy of Ghana Education Service, 2015).

2.5 The challenges of a parent getting school for her son living with autism

Ris (not real name) was diagnosed with autism in England, U.K before the parents who were student as of that time, decided to relocate to Ghana their home country Ho.

He is the verbal type exhibiting some of the characteristic traits of verbal autism child such as repetitive speech, sensory issues; in form of sensory overload, fragmented perception, hyper or hyper sensitivity and intermittency of sensation. He has his own obsessions biting the back of his hands when he is overwhelmed. He loves climbing trees in the garden and using his trampoline as well.

Prior to their relocating to Ghana, Ho specifically, Ris was taking for several therapies from several professionals. But in Ho, Ghana, many people at first hand never understood the

autism condition including his own extended families which made the mother more confused.

III. AUTISM AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS IN HO GHANA

Several schools in Ho were not willing to admit the child living ASD in all the mainstream schools admission was sought for him. Which was an assertion that most of them lack the classroom management skills to handle a learner with ASD. Because it is not household condition in Ghana-this does not mean the condition is not in Ghana but there are only few pediatricians who are trained outside the country to do diagnoses.

It could also be inadequate staff and infrastructure constraint and how to teach learners with ASD in their various classrooms. Few practitioners, who had the opportunity to study overseas, have extensive knowledge as how to use different pedagogical skills to meaningfully include persons living with ASD in inclusive mainstream classrooms.

This was evident in open ended questionnaires administered to staff, professionals and some teachers. It was obvious that some lack the technique as how to teach persons living with ASD and some do not have any knowledge about the ASD at all.

On the contrary, most of the schools who are private, are congregated in the capital city Accra but not in Ho and most the staff are hands-on trained with few professionals who do assessment before placement.

This revelation supports Reed and Monda-Amaya cited by Mamah (2006; pp 299-305) who opined that, teachers themselves are of the view that their teacher preparation programs are not so adequate to enable them to teach pupils with SEN unless they take additional preparatory courses.

These will be discussed in details with table illustration at the methodology column below.

3.1 Methodology

3.2 Research method

Research involved personal experiences of the participants, qualitative methods were adopted to gather and select data. According to Punch (1998), qualitative research focuses on events, situations and people's thoughts in their natural settings. It gives much importance to their ideas and their life experiences. It creates a close relationship between the researcher and the participant and its purpose is to gather all possible and in-depth details on the topic. Qualitative researchers' intention is to go as deep as possible in their research and find answers to their questions as seen through the eyes of people they investigate (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Qualitative research uses flexible methods, such as semi-structured interviews and mainly consists of open-ended questions. The relationship between the researcher and the interviewee is closer than in quantitative research. This gives the participants a chance to elaborately respond to the

questions and not just give simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers (Gillham, 2000). To conduct a qualitative research it is important to be in constant and deep contact with the ‘object’ and the situations are studied. Situations include those that have to do with the everyday life of individuals, groups, societies and organizations.

Walsh (1996) argues that qualitative research is the most appropriate method for investigating complex topics and for understanding the functioning of and change in family environment. McMillan and Schumacher (1989) suggest that qualitative research directly addresses and answers the ‘how’ and ‘when’, giving the participants – as they are the primary source of information – the chance to share their understanding, perceptions, experiences and ideas on a specific topic. Qualitative analysis has two basic characteristics: the first one is that the researcher is the means for the conduction of the research, and the second one is that its main purpose is to investigate some aspects and views of the social system that it studies (Denscombe, 2003). Qualitative research, together with its methods, tries to explain experiences, feelings, emotions, behaviours and values. It creates a close relationship between the conductor and the participants and gives them the opportunity to tell their stories in detail and with no qualms or further considerations. Furthermore, their responses influence not only the research question, but also the design of the interview including the questions the researcher will ask next (Denscombe, 2003).

The quantitative methodology would be impersonal and unsuitable for the purpose of this study, as its aim is to select data and information that are mainly based on numerical results (Punch, 1998).

According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), “sampling is the process of drawing a sample selected from a larger group (the population) in order to study their characteristics’ (p.222)”. The basic sample for this study are teachers, parents of ASD, undergraduate students studying education and a person living in Ho community. The idea was to find a needed and willing group of participants who are estimated to have an in-depth knowledge of the topic of the current research and could offer valuable contributions. The selected groups were of a diverse nature in terms of cultural and ethnic criteria.

In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, researchers sought the answer to a specific research question listed below

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3.3 Data display

Qualitative analysis usually offers much information and data in comparison with quantitative analysis, which is focused on numerical data. Therefore, it is necessary to display the data in a more understandable and ‘tidy’ manner which, subsequently, will lead to the next phase: drawing and producing justified conclusions. There are different ways of

displaying the data. Graphs, charts or chronological boards are few of them. For the current study, the researchers decided to use table. With explanations which adds liveliness to the research and gives a clear view of the data (Punch, 1998).

3.4 Drawing and verifying conclusions

The third approach cannot exist without the previous two approaches. The main purpose of reducing and displaying the data is to end up with conclusions smoothly and easily, and give an overall view of the data (Punch, 1998).

3.5 Method of data collection

IV. INTERVIEWS

Since this is an ethically sensitive topic, personal interviews were considered the most appropriate tool for the study. Interviews were used to increase the diversity of the study participants: face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with open ended questionnaires and observation were employed. These interviews were conducted after attaining consent from the participants. Most participants were contacted via word of mouth, emails, telephone calls and time was schedule for the meeting place of the interviews which was then approved of.

Although, the above data collection methods were used by researchers, they also made use of policy documents, books and articles around the chosen topic to enable them have a better understanding of what really is happening and the impact of their research work.

4.1 The table below indicates how respondents were interviewed in each category:

Respondents	Number of respondents
Teachers/facilitator working in inclusive schools	Thirteen (13)
Parents of children living with ASD	Two (2)
Undergraduate students studying education	Two (2)
A person living in the community in Ho	One (1)

4.2 Analysis of responses above

From the table above, out of thirteen (13) teachers or facilitators, three (3) of them said they have fair knowledge about the ASD, so they should be included in mainstream educational system Five (5) of them said they do not have knowledge about persons living with ASD so they do not know the teaching approaches they will use for them so they think inclusive education might not be appropriate for them. Nevertheless, even if they should be included in the mainstream school setting, they think they do not have the right infrastructure and the logistic to teach them effectively.

Five (5) of the teachers or facilitators, said although they do not know curriculum adaptation technique of ASD learners, they should be admitted in the inclusive classrooms, they will be able to manage them.

The two (2) parents of children living with ASD are of the view that they should be in inclusive schools because it is their fundamental human rights.

The two (2) undergraduate students studying education said although they studying education, thus not their area of specialization but they have fair Knowledge of ASD so they should be part of the inclusive educational system.

One (1) person living in the community said despite the stigma associated with SEN conditions in the community, they should be educated in inclusive school settings

4.3 Summary of key findings

The following highlight some major findings from the work:

Considering the issues of teacher training and preparedness, the government has made several inroads and a lot of effort in introducing preparatory courses at various colleges of education. For example introduction of special educational needs for all teacher trainees at various colleges of education in Ghana.

It was also revealed from the literature that, teachers themselves are of the notion that, their teacher preparation is not adequate enough to facilitate inclusive teaching in their perspective classrooms. The literature and the interview also brought to light that most teachers have minimal knowledge and understanding issues of ASD which has influence on their attitude.

It is evident from the research that, Ghana's IE policy is laudable but there should be more stakeholder engagement to provide logistic that will enhance teaching and learning of persons with SEN most especially learners with ASD to encourage learner diversity.

From the research, it is obvious Ghana is making positive strides in its IE issues; a lot need to be done in areas of advocacy, sensitization and education in local communities to reduce stigmatisation and discrimination.

There should be periodic training workshop for in-service teachers to equip them about curriculum adaptation for learner diversity.

4.4 Directions of future research

It was only in some schools in Ho municipality in Ghana where the main case study research was done. Future researchers should also focus on other regions of Ghana about IE and aspirations of persons living with ASD.

Future research should also be directed to transition from school to work of persons living with ASD. Because eventually, Persons living with ASD will become adults and independent therefore, should be research geared towards this area to see how possible it could be.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Inclusive education is a human right issues globally of which Ho, Ghana is of no exception.

Sensitization, advocacy and education about issues of SEN and disabilities should be intensified to stop or reduce prejudice, stigmatization and discrimination against persons with ASD and other SEN conditions.

SEN introductory courses at colleges of education in Ghana should be amplified to better prepare pre-service teachers about the different types SEN learners they will be teaching in their inclusive classrooms when they graduate into teachers or facilitators.

More in-service workshops should be given to in-service teachers about current trends in teaching learners with ASD.

Curricular and learning environment should be adapted to accommodate learners with ASD. Programmes that are geared towards transition from school to work for persons with ASD should also be taken to into account.

There should be broader stakeholder engagement to make education of persons living with ASD a reality.

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