

Instructional Leadership Practices and the Effectiveness of Inclusive Education in GES Basic Schools: The Role of Vision Setting, Teacher Support, Classroom Supervision and Resource Coordination

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on instructional leadership practices and the effectiveness of inclusive education in GES basic schools in Ghana especially in the areas of vision setting, teacher support, classroom supervision and resource coordination. The discussion is informed by a review of policy briefs, international reports and empirical studies that have been published from 2021 to 2025. The findings indicate that inclusive education in Ghana is still a policy that is not fully implemented in practice, primarily due to the lack of trained teachers, learning materials, accessible infrastructure and leadership support in many schools. Recent research also indicates that basic school headteachers in Ghana are not necessarily trained in leadership and that they are expected to perform a variety of leadership functions including mobilizing resources, leading teaching, facilitating staff development and ensuring that learners with diverse needs are accommodated in regular classrooms. The paper suggests that inclusive education is more effective when headteachers articulate policy into a shared vision for the school, provide regular opportunities for teachers to learn, monitor classroom practice in a positive way and fairly and transparently coordinate the use of available resources. It concludes that instructional leadership is not a decorative addition to inclusive education. In the Ghanaian basic school context, it is one of the main conditions for turning inclusion from a written policy into an everyday school reality.

Keywords: Effective Inclusive Education, Vision Setting, Teacher Supports, Classroom Supervision, Resource Coordination, Instructional Leadership Practices, Inclusive Basic Education.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is one of the most significant directions being applied in the current Ghanaian basic education, which calls for the education of all children including children with disabilities and other learning differences, in the same school and not separated from their peers. This concept has received increased policy focus in recent years in Ghana, but has not been uniformly implemented in basic schools. UNICEF's 2025 Education Budget Brief indicates that in Ghana, almost 1.2 million children are out of school and that poverty, disability and geography are significant factors that contribute to exclusion. The same brief also reveals that the draft Inclusive Education Policy was updated in 2024 and was still under consideration by Cabinet, thereby suggesting that the policy environment is dynamic, but not yet finalized (UNICEF Ghana, 2025).

It is not only policy statements that make inclusive education effective, however, it also relies on what is going on in schools, particularly the leadership of headteachers. The recent literature on basic education in Ghana

reveals that headteachers are expected to mobilize resources, manage the school community and guide teaching and learning, but many of them are not formally trained as headteachers before they are appointed to the position (Dare et al., 2025). This gap is significant because inclusive policy can be in place however, without purposeful school leadership, it can result in teachers feeling uncertain, classrooms becoming unadapted and learners with diverse needs not well supported. In the real world, inclusive education is successful when school leaders establish a clear direction, provide support for teachers, closely monitor instruction and ensure that resources are structured to meet the needs of the learners.

This paper therefore examines instructional leadership practices and their relationship with inclusive education effectiveness in GES basic schools. It concentrates on four practices that are especially significant in everyday school life. To begin with, vision setting gives inclusion a clear purpose and prevents it from becoming a vague slogan. Secondly, teacher support helps educators build confidence and competence. Thirdly, classroom supervision enables leaders to see how teaching and learning is progressing, provide feedback and enhance teaching. Last but not the least, resource coordination means that the human, material and community resources available are utilized in a manner that is truly inclusive. Together, these practices illustrate the importance of leadership in the quality and fairness of basic education.

Conceptual and theoretical framing

Instructional leadership refers to leadership that places teaching and learning at the centre of school work. In an inclusive setting, instructional leadership goes beyond monitoring curriculum coverage or examination performance. It also includes creating a school climate where different learners can participate with dignity, where teachers can adapt instruction and where barriers to access are reduced rather than ignored. UNESCO's recent work on leadership in education emphasizes that effective school leaders support inclusion by aligning resources with learner needs, promoting professional learning for teachers and building collaborative school cultures in which teachers and support staff work together rather than in isolation (UNESCO, 2024).

One way to appreciate this relationship is to consider inclusive education as a technical and moral project. In terms of the technical requirements, schools must have accessible classrooms, suitable teaching practices, supportive assessment and trained staff. Morally, schools must have a commitment to fairness, belonging and participation. There is a relationship between the two dimensions. A school can be inclusive but if headteachers are not able to articulate a clear vision or if teachers are not supported to teach diverse learners, then the claim is weak. This view is supported by literature from Ghana. Opoku-Nkoom and Ackah-Jnr (2023) found that implementation in primary schools is shaped by inclusive culture, environment and practice which means that leadership is not an external factor but part of the implementation process itself.

This paper also draws on a practical leadership perspective that sees headteachers as agents who convert policy into routine school action. Ghanaian basic school leadership research shows a long history of inconsistent preparation for headteachers and uneven leadership practices across schools (Dare et al., 2025). This means school effectiveness cannot be assumed simply because a policy exists. It must be developed step by step through leadership choices that shape teaching and learning and the allocation of limited resources. From this perspective, instructional leadership is the link between policy intent and classroom action.

Inclusive education in GES basic schools

In the basic school system of GES, inclusive education is most meaningful when the learner in the kindergarten, primary and junior high school can learn in the ordinary classroom without being excluded by disability, poverty, language background or other factors. There is recent evidence from Ghana that the system is still facing challenges of teacher preparedness and of classroom support (Naami & Mort, 2023). Naami and Mort (2023), writing on teacher preparedness for inclusive education in Ghana found out that teacher trainees were not sufficiently equipped by their training to meet the needs of learners with diverse learning needs. This is significant because basic school inclusion depends heavily on what teachers know and what they believe they can do.

The second issue is related to support structures at the school level. Opoku-Nkoom and Ackah-Jnr (2023) found out that the level of inclusive implementation in primary schools in Ghana is influenced by the level of inclusive culture and environment in the schools. That is, just having learners with special needs in the classroom is not sufficient. The school must also be structured so as to allow participation. This encompasses peer acceptance, available spaces, flexible teaching and leadership that expects inclusion to be a part of the core of teaching and learning.

Including the wider national picture and context is also relevant here. UNICEF Ghana (2025) emphasizes that, in order to get closer to Sustainable Development Goal 4, funding for basic education and inclusive education must be strengthened. The report is clear that gaps in participation and learning cannot be addressed through policy alone, however, schools require leaders who can handle what they have carefully, promote what they need and be focused on the learner and not the administrative routine alone. It is in this context that instructional leadership becomes decisive.

Vision setting as the foundation of inclusive schooling

The first and likely most significant instructional leadership practice for inclusion is vision setting. A school's vision communicates the school's values to staff, learners and parents. Inclusive vision is clear that all children belong, difference is normal and that no learner is ruled out as being incapable of learning. If there is no vision, inclusive education can be understood as simply putting a learner in the classroom and not engaging with the work of participation.

In practice, the headteacher starts the vision setting process. The headteacher needs to convey the message that inclusion is not a favour but a fundamental requirement of good education. According to Fuah Hayford and Asare (2025), headteachers in Ghana play a key role in the implementation of inclusive policy in their schools by setting the vision, building the culture, developing capacities, mobilizing resources and engaging in community. This is significant because it puts the school leader at the heart of change, rather than on the periphery. A robust vision guides the school's approach to discipline, grouping, peer relationships and assessment without subtly perpetuating exclusion.

Setting a vision also helps to minimize resistance. In some classrooms, inclusive education may be perceived as an extra workload for some teachers, particularly in large classes and with limited teaching resources. That mindset can be changed over time with a clear vision that is consistently communicated in staff meetings, lesson review sessions and school improvement planning. It enables teachers to view inclusion as a component of school mission and not as an external programme that is forced down their throats. Setting a vision is not a one-off talk but a continuous leadership practice which influences teachers' interpretation of their work.

Teacher support and professional learning

Teacher support is key to the effectiveness of inclusive education as teachers are the ones who make policy a reality in the classroom. Inclusive education is superficial if it is lacking in confidence, knowledge and encouragement. This is clearly seen in Ghana. According to Naami and Mort (2023), teacher preparation for inclusive education in Ghana is still inadequate while a recent review by Dare et al. (2025) indicates that formal headteacher leadership training is also limited. These two gaps reinforce one another in that, the school leader must also be able to provide support for teachers.

Teacher support should have both professional and emotional aspects. As professionals, headteachers can plan lessons collaboratively, coach each other and have brief in-house training and reflection sessions on learner challenges. Emotionally, they can create a school environment where teachers are not afraid to admit uncertainty and seek assistance. UNESCO's leadership efforts highlight the importance of school leaders in promoting inclusive education through professional development for teachers and fostering communication and problem-solving skills among the school community (UNESCO, 2024). This is important because inclusive teaching is

not about perfection, however, it is about adaptation as teachers frequently require support in differentiated tasks, seating arrangements in the classroom, learning aids and simple tracking of learner progress.

Recent evidence from Ghana also shows that instructional leadership has measurable effects on teacher development. Amponsah and Mensah (2024) found out that headteachers' instructional leadership practices significantly predicted teachers' continuous professional development in Ghanaian public basic schools. That finding is useful here because it suggests that leadership does not support learning only indirectly, but also shapes and determines whether teachers keep growing professionally. In an inclusive school, that growth is especially important since learner needs are varied and the classroom cannot be served well by rigid methods.

Teacher support becomes most effective when it is regular rather than occasional. One-off workshops are not likely to have a lasting impact on classroom behavior, however, the more teachers receive supervision and coaching, the more they benefit likewise the smaller and more realistic the improvement goals, the more they benefit. Furthermore, the more they receive recognition for effort rather than just for failures, the more they benefit. Inclusive education is a challenging task, hence, teacher support is therefore a component of instructional leadership and not a welfare activity and headteachers must therefore treat it as such.

Classroom supervision and feedback

Classroom supervision is another key instructional leadership practice because it allows the headteacher to see how inclusion is actually working in lessons. Supervision should not be reduced to fault-finding or surprise inspections. In inclusive education, supervision is most useful when it is developmental. It occurs when the leader watches the lesson, makes observations of the teacher's responses to differences in learners and provides feedback to the teacher that will help him/her improve. UNICEF Innocenti's 2024 review on education implementation in Africa notes that effective school leadership by headteachers supports quality pedagogy through classroom observations and teacher collaboration and by serving as role models for attendance and time management (UNICEF Innocenti, 2024).

This is especially true in GES basic schools where time for teaching is scarce and classes are diverse. Feedback from the supervisor can assist teachers to enhance pacing, use of examples, grouping of learners and questioning strategies. It can also show if learners who require additional support are not being catered for or if the classroom procedures enable all learners to be included. A supervision process that is connected to inclusion can bring issues to light before they become entrenched as patterns of exclusion.

Supervision is also important as inclusive education can fail quietly. A school can claim that it has learners with disabilities on roll, but in fact they are sitting passively, receiving little attention and making little progress. This gap can be bridged through regular supervisory visits, lesson conferencing and follow-up support. This is one of the reasons that the literature is increasingly referring to leadership for inclusion as a pedagogical rather than an administrative problem (UNESCO, 2024).

The best supervision is respectful and collaborative. It should not take away teachers' confidence, particularly when teachers are already feeling underprepared. Rather, it should make teachers aware of what went well, what didn't go so well and what they could do differently in the next lesson. Supervision is not a threat to learning but a learning opportunity in a well-led inclusive school.

Resource coordination and equitable support

The fourth leadership practice that is discussed in this paper is resource coordination. Goodwill alone is not enough for inclusive education as it requires books, visual aids, accessible furniture, sufficient classrooms, referral systems, community support and in some instances, assistive devices or adapted learning materials. How headteachers organize what they have in Ghana can make a difference as resources are often scarce. The UNICEF Ghana budget brief 2025 is clear that inclusive education needs to be better financed and that funding decisions should be based on equitable learning outcomes and not just on access in terms of formal education.

Resource coordination is not just about securing additional resources but also about ensuring that resources are coordinated. Furthermore it also deals with equitably and effectively distributing what already exists. A headteacher who has an understanding of inclusion will make a concerted effort to ensure that learners with diverse needs are not continually denied access to attention due to the demands of the day to day running of the school. In Ghana, inclusive school leadership is described by Fuah Hayford and Asare (2025) as one of the key roles of school leaders, as they have to negotiate with district offices, parent bodies, communities and partners for support.

UNESCO (2024) also recently highlighted the importance of inclusive education coordinators and teams and the matching of resources to learner needs. This is crucial as no headteacher can do it on their own. Coordination involves developing responsibility throughout the school, based on subject teachers, special teachers (if available), school committees and parents. It also involves the use of school information to identify pupils who are at risk of not participating or dropping out and then focusing on them early. Where resource coordination is weak, inclusion often becomes symbolic. Schools may have policy statements and a few inclusive practices, but no consistent support to sustain them. Effective coordination therefore turns resources into pedagogical support. It links budgets, time, people and learning goals.

Main constraints facing instructional leadership for inclusion

The major limitations in GES basic schools are not hard to determine. The first is teacher preparation. Many teachers are not yet fully prepared for inclusive practice and headteachers are attempting to drive inclusion in an unequal capacity system (Naami & Mort, 2023). The second is in the area of leadership preparation. Dare et al. (2025) demonstrate that there is no formal training of leadership in Ghana prior to the recruitment of basic school headteachers. The third is the scarcity of resources, which impacts class size, materials, access and follow-up support. The fourth is the policy to implementation gap, which UNICEF Innocenti (2024) notes is a recurring challenge in the education systems in Africa.

These limitations can help to account for the apparent ease with which inclusion is represented in policy documents as compared to classrooms. A headteacher with the expectation of leading vision, supporting teachers, supervising teaching and managing resources may not have the authority, budget or training to be able to do this to the fullest. For that reason, improving inclusive education requires not only expecting more from headteachers, but also supporting them more seriously. The leadership position should be accompanied by preparation, mentoring and accountability.

Another serious challenge is community perception. Some parents and community members may still question whether learners with disability should be educated in mainstream schools. Others may also assume that inclusion lowers standards. In order to respond to such concerns, headteachers must have vision and communication skills. Careful and consistent explanation by the school leader can help to soften resistance. If that does not happen, misconceptions can become entrenched in the school culture and negatively impact participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To begin with, GES and the Ministry of Education should strengthen pre-service and in-service preparation for basic school headteachers on inclusive school leadership. The content should cover vision setting, coaching, supervision, school data use and resource mobilization. Leadership for inclusion should not be left to informal learning alone.

Secondly, each basic school should have a simple inclusive education action plan that is connected to the school vision. The plan should include the support to be provided to teachers, the method of classroom observation, the monitoring of learners with special needs and the most needed resources.

Furthermore, teacher support needs to be systematic. Headteachers should establish regular meetings for professional learning where teachers share their experiences of learner diversity, lesson adaptation and classroom management. District level support teams should assist schools with more challenging cases, if possible.

Supervision should also be developmental. Headteachers should observe lessons with a focus on inclusion, provide constructive feedback and follow up on agreed improvements. This is because supervision that produces fear is unlikely to improve practice.

Finally, resource coordination should be tied to equity. Schools serving learners with greater barriers should be given more targeted support. The current financing conversation in Ghana should therefore pay attention not only to total education spending but also to how fairly resources are distributed across schools and learner groups (UNICEF Ghana, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Instructional leadership plays a crucial role in the success of inclusive education in GES basic schools. An inclusive policy in a school can be in place and yet the headteacher may not be inclusive in his/her vision, support, supervision and coordination of classroom practice and resources in a thoughtful manner. Recent research in Ghana indicates that teacher preparedness is still uneven, formal headteacher training is inadequate and implementation is largely dependent on compliance and culture building practices of the headteacher. The evidence thus suggests that one way forward is for school leadership to be purposeful, knowledgeable and collaborative in inclusive education.

In the Ghanaian basic school setting, vision setting provides direction for inclusion, teacher support enhances competence, classroom supervision enhances pedagogy and resource coordination enables participation. These practices are important in making inclusive education a reality in the school. To make inclusion a reality, GES needs to invest not only in access but also in the instructional leadership capacity of those who lead schools everyday.

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