

Access to Education for Persons with Disabilities in Ghana: A Review [†]

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Abstract: This paper examines the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in formal education through the lens of existing literature. In Ghana, special education for disabled children began in 1936, and a school for the blind opened in 1946 in Akropong-Akwapim. The review revealed that interventions targeting inclusive education in Ghana are disjointed and sporadic. It was also discovered that the developmental plans of successive administrations have ignored the needs of vulnerable children, particularly children with impairments. As a result, the report suggests that educational stakeholders consider including the needs of disabled children into standard educational planning and provisioning.

Keywords: inclusive education; persons with disabilities; sustainable development



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1. Introduction

According to estimates, children with disabilities account for around one-seventh of all children who are out of school [1] (p. 7). Disabled children are unable to obtain an education due to a variety of issues such as coming from a very poor family, being female, or having a specific condition [2,3] (pp. 69–79), (p. 3). Statistics in Ghana show that almost 623,500 children of primary school age are still not registered and one out of every four children in the kindergarten age group (four to five years old) is not enrolled in pre-school [4]. According to the 2010 population and housing census, 20% of children with physical disabilities do not attend school [4]. In addition, four out of ten PWDs aged three and above have received no formal education, while 17.4% have completed basic school [4].

When children with disabilities are denied access to education, it marks the start of their social isolation and marginalization. Children with impairments are denied suitable career opportunities later in life due to their lower level of skills.

They are also unable to participate in society and make a meaningful contribution, making it much more difficult for them to contribute to developmental interventions and efforts.

In recent years, the focus has moved to removing educational hurdles for all students by promoting Inclusive Education [3] (p. 4). This has brought attention to the role of education in fostering social justice for all individuals, particularly the disabled [5] (pp. 1–15). Although there are many meanings of Inclusive Education, all agree that it entails reorganizing regular schools and/or classrooms to meet the demands of a diverse array of youth in societies [6] (pp. 152–164). Inclusive Education is described by the Ghana Education Act (Act 778, 2008) as a value system that guides educational institutions in such

a way that all patrons have equal opportunities. The only way to bring people with disabilities out of poverty, vulnerability, and exclusion is to provide them with a high-quality, all-encompassing, and unbiased education.

To fulfil this purpose, the international community has adopted human rights frameworks aimed at ensuring that children with disabilities receive a high-quality education in a welcoming atmosphere. The 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) intends to develop Inclusive Education as a critical mechanism for ensuring that children with disabilities have access to school [7,8] (pp. 205–227), (pp. 16–18).

People with Disabilities have the right to education under Article 24 of the CRPD. This can be accomplished by ensuring that all People with Disabilities have equal access to an "inclusive education system at all levels," as well as reasonable accommodations and individual support services to help them complete their education [9] (pp. 1–59).

2. History of Inclusive Education

The Salamanca Framework (1994), which encouraged governments to accommodate all children, regardless of their circumstances or disabilities, by ending the segregation of differently abled children, marked a watershed moment in the debate over Inclusive Education (p. 4). The concept emphasized that a child's learning ability might be affected by a variety of factors such as ethnicity, poor language articulation, and poverty; consequently, Inclusive Education is essential to ensure that all children are accommodated in the education system. [10] (pp. 746–761).

The Salamanca framework expanded the conversation about education to investigate how the system was built up as well as the barriers that stopped children from receiving an education [3]. (p. 5). Inclusive Education led to two key elements as a result of the Salamanca framework: a transition away from the assumption that children's educational needs are determined by medically diagnosed diseases or disabilities, and how to reform conventional educational systems to create a barrier-free learning environment [10] (pp. 746–761). It also supported the idea that disabilities do not always imply specific learning needs, and that children with disabilities face the same range of learning challenges as children without them.

Furthermore, children with similar disabilities do not always have the same educational needs, calling into question the classification of all disabled children as having special educational needs and the unnecessary division of them into specialised schools [3] (p. 5).

Another development aim known as Education For All (EFA) evolved as a set of moves aiming to transform special education into what is now known as Inclusive Education.

The World Summit on Education for All gave birth to the Millennium Development Goal of universal education by 2015 [11] (p. 7).

As a result, SDG 4 on education aims to provide all people with access to high-quality education while also encouraging lifelong learning [12] (p. 6). Despite the fact that UNESCO championed these two educational goals, further research shows that many EFA projects have failed to satisfy the needs of vulnerable children, notably those with impairments [5] (pp. 1–15). Despite their apparent similarity, the EFA and Inclusive Education agendas have continued to operate in tandem (p. 5). As a result of this predicament, many emerging countries have experienced substantial educational setbacks.

3. Evolution of Inclusive Education in Ghana

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah served as the Leader of Government Business throughout the final colonial period, and in 1951, he took over the State's administration. The Nkrumah government developed the "Education for All" policy in 1952, affirming the importance of education as a major tool for national growth. Dr. Nkrumah's first step was to implement the Accelerated Development Plan (ADP, 1951), which was instrumental in extending and improving Ghana's basic education. The goal of this initiative was to eliminate tuition fees and provide all children with a free basic education. During this time, approximately half a million children were enrolled in primary school. In 1957, the number of primary schools

rose from 3571 to 3713, while the number of middle schools rose from 1311 to 1394 in 1959 [13] (pp. 29–40). The Educational Act of 1961 created an indirect provision for children with special needs by making education free and obligatory for all children of school age. The Ghana Education Service's Special Education Division, for example, was founded in 1962 to meet and support the educational needs of Ghana's Persons with Disabilities. It is worth mentioning that the British had a major impact on the early provision of special education in Ghana [13] (pp. 29–40).

Ghana's special education conditions have gradually improved. The number of students with impairments enrolled in specialist schools increased by 40.5% (3361 to 4722) between 2001/2002 and 2005/2006 [14] (pp. 28–32). The Education of Children with Disabilities Act is linked to the 1961 Education Act, and the provision of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) is ensured in Ghana's 1992 constitution.

FCUBE is a policy aimed at ensuring equal access to education for all children. These programmes did away with the use of levies to collect funds for running expenses and instead provided meals to children in need.

During the pilot process in the academic year 2004/2005, the capitation grants programme offered C3.5 per female pupil and C2.5 per male pupil [13] (pp. 29–40). In addition, the government has taken steps to establish committees to examine vocational training policies for PWDs. The foundation of Inclusive Education (IE) in Ghana is primarily based on international and national educational legal frameworks. Inclusive Education is defined as an approach in which schools are structured to accommodate children with disabilities and other disadvantaged children in order to improve their right to equal education, inclusion, and participation in other societal affairs, according to the Education Strategy Plan (ESP) 2010–2020 [13] (pp. 29–40). While initiatives to implement Inclusive Education on a pilot basis have been made, there remain obstacles inhibiting its advancement in Ghana. "While trends are shifting toward more inclusive approaches, institutionalization of people with learning disabilities and other disabilities continues to be a common practice," writes Avoke [13] (pp. 29–40). Due to the enactment of Disability Act 715, people with special education needs will now be able to attend regular schools.

4. Methodological Approach

This article examines the scientific literature on all-inclusive education as a social welfare service for disabled children, taking into account existing hindrances to access. The review delves into the study's main topics, including stigmatization and prejudice, cultural values, policy and institutional failures. The article explores peer-reviewed papers and assessment reports found through internet searches (primarily Google scholar and online academic repositories). Many review articles on Inclusive Education have focused on these scientific literature sources. Both Wapling's review of Inclusive Education and children with disabilities in relation to the quality education for all in Low- and Middle-income countries [3] and Mantey's review of accessibility to Inclusive Education for children with disabilities in Ghana [15] used web-based searches to gather relevant information.

The literature was searched for information on the state of disabled people's access to school, the progress of Inclusive Education in Ghana, and the history of Inclusive Education in Ghana.

5. Review Results

This paper is purely a review study; as such literature on various issues hindering Inclusive Education is examined with the view of understanding the various narratives underpinning the full and effective implementation of Inclusive Education. This section presents a review and discussion of the various factors hindering the effective implementation of Inclusive Education.

5.1. Infrastructural Barriers Affecting the Implementation of Inclusive Education

To guarantee that children with disabilities have access to and benefit from school, it is necessary to remove the barriers that prevent them from fully participating. In Ghana, most schools are built without taking into account the requirements of impaired children. Narrow doorways, many floors with no ramps or lifts, and inaccessible washroom facilities are just a few of the obstacles disabled children are faced with [9] (pp. 1–59). This is especially critical for physically disabled youngsters. Special schools in metropolitan areas are among the few schools that meet the standards for accessibility for people with disabilities. This means that the majority of disabled children living in rural areas are unable to attend school due to transportation concerns.

It is also important to make sure that the manner of communication is appropriate for impaired youngsters. In terms of teaching and learning materials, most schools are under-resourced, and lack Braille, big print, visual, audio, and sign-language materials. This further marginalizes children with impairments in the educational process [9] (pp. 1–59).

5.2. Socio-Cultural Barriers Affecting the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Discriminatory attitudes and misconceptions about disability also make it difficult for People with Disabilities to participate in school on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers [9] (pp. 1–59). In many Ghanaian societies, disabled individuals are refused access to education because disabled children are considered as a disgrace to their family and should not be compelled to attend school [16] (pp. 7–8). The bullying and harassment of children with disabilities is common among their peers and teachers, lowering their self-esteem and potentially leading to school dropout. The situation for women and girls with disabilities in Ghana is worsened by societal biases against women [16] (pp. 7–8). According to Shevlin, Kenny, and McNeela [17] (pp. 159–169), students with disabilities are denied admittance to science-related courses in developed countries such as Ireland and China, based on the belief that a disabled student will ‘waste’ the degree due to his or her inability to work.

This only makes the situation worse for disabled people. Apprenticeships or work training that is available to disabled adolescents on the job market is highly challenging [16] (pp. 7–8).

5.3. Policy and Institutional Setbacks Affecting the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Another source of worry is the policy and institutional structure that governs educational management. In Ghana, there is no specific policy guiding the operation of special education; instead, special education is covered by the general education policy [18] (pp. 22–38). Special education activities are so closely linked to general education activities that special schools follow the general education curriculum with minimal changes to accommodate the needs of distinct groups of disabled children [18] (pp. 22–38).

In addition, the Ghana Education Service maintains a Special Education Division (SPED) that is responsible for implementing special education regulations and supervising the functioning of special schools. SPED is thus one of the ministries of education that receives funding from the federal government. SPED, on the other hand, only receives a small part of the total funds allocated to the sector each fiscal year. SPED, for example, received 0.7 % of educational revenues in 2010, 0.5% in 2011, and 0.4% in 2012 [18] (pp. 22–38). This is woefully inadequate to meet the learning demands of Ghanaian children with disabilities.

5.4. The Relationship between Educational Attainment and Employment Opportunities for PWDs

The relationship between educational attainment and the likelihood of better work chances has been studied and proven [19,20] (pp. 1–13), (pp. 1–11). According to Filmer [21] (pp. 141–163), each additional year of schooling lowered the chance of a disadvantaged person and his or her household falling into the poorest two quintiles by 2–5%.

Afoakwah and Dauda [22] (pp. 1–24) reported in a study on employment status and educational attainment among disabled Ghanaians that people with visual or physical

disabilities, as well as people with hearing impairments, had a statistically significant chance of receiving job offers if they had been through higher education.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Inclusive Education has been welcomed and recognised on a national and international level, and it is seen as a human rights issue. For school systems all across the world, inclusion is a major issue. Although there are many interpretations and definitions of an Inclusive Education, there is a common thread that runs through all of them. According to authors including Pearson [23] (pp. 25–32) and Beveridge [24] (pp. 1–62), a permanent understanding of Inclusive Education has not been established, which makes its implementation challenging. Overall, the literature demonstrates a lack of clarity and consensus on what constitutes Inclusive Education, as well as significant disagreements about how much of it is dedicated to children with disabilities [25] (pp. 1053–1071). Aside from the vagueness of the situation, it appears that the international community lacks support for the development of inclusive or special education for disabled children. This lack of a worldwide consensus likely makes it more difficult for governments to develop Inclusive Education systems capable of appropriately serving all pupils [20] (pp. 1–11).

Due to their absence from significant global programmes such as free primary education and Education For All, governments have found it increasingly difficult to devote the required resources to support poor children.

One element that could help ameliorate this scenario is encouraging the integration of the needs of children with disabilities into traditional educational planning and provisioning. It is desirable to include impaired children in traditional education programs, initiatives, funding, and donor support. In terms of planning, resource allocation, and supervision, the education of disabled children should not be separated from that of non-disabled children.

Small changes to the physical environment, such as classrooms, dining areas, play and sports areas, and WASH facilities, can make a big difference in how comfortable certain handicapped students feel in mainstream schools. This is one area where short-term resources should be directed towards to ensure that children can be physically accommodated and that teachers, classmates, and parents are properly educated. Because of unacceptable behaviors or inaccessible infrastructure, it is vital to ensure that pupils are not unfairly rejected or placed in special schools.

In order to make education accessible to Persons with Disabilities in Ghana, there is a long-term need for institutional reform and restructuring. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with other governmental and non-governmental groups, must develop a strategic plan to ensure that impaired children are enrolled in mainstream schools alongside their non-disabled counterparts.

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