

Facilitating Inclusive Education in Ghana Through Art Education

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Abstract

The focus on the education of persons with special educational needs all over the world is shifting from special and segregated education to an inclusive education. This is to ensure equal access to education for all children. However, the goal of providing quality inclusive education in Ghana would remain elusive so long as the concept of inclusion is not linked to broader dimensions on curricular modifications and pedagogy for effective participation of all children in the learning experiences provided in the classrooms. The aim of this study is to facilitate inclusion through art education. This exploratory research utilised a semi-structured interview, extensive classroom observation, documentary review, and practical activities to gather data. The population for the study included head teachers, teachers and pupils in four schools which were targeted to have embarked on inclusive education in the Effutu Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana by the Special Education Division (SpED) of the Ministry of Education in 2003. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the 24 subjects for the study. The study revealed that Art could be used as catalyse in the implementation of Inclusive Education (IE) and also young people without disabilities became advocates of the rights of persons with disabilities for inclusive settings. It is recommended that teachers of art would benefit from in-service training that specifically addresses art education for students with special needs in inclusive settings.

Keywords: art education, arts, inclusive education, special education

1. Introduction

Throughout the world, countries are making efforts to educate their citizenry by providing education that supports their economies. Education is seen by governments as tool that fosters social change, national development, and often as a means of upward movement by individuals on the social ladder. The result of this is the reduction of the gap between sections of the society. In pursuance of this, Ghana's attempt to develop the potentialities of all children in the educational system including those with special educational needs dates back to the early 1960s soon after the attainment of independence. The Education Act of 1961 provided for free and compulsory education for all children. The country was among the first countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has an objective to fully implement inclusive education by 2015, by providing "equitable educational opportunities by integrating all children with non-severe specialised educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools and full enrolments of hard-to-reach and out of school children by 2015" (Yekple & Avoke, 2006 p.16).

Though the current trends in special education practices in relation to the provision of educational facilities focus on inclusion, there is no clear consensus about definition of inclusion (Okyere & Adams, 2003). Katz & Miranda (2002) believe any length of period during any school day that a child with disability spends in a regular classroom which may range from one subject period to a full day's school work is inclusive. In the view of Mock and Kauffman (2002), inclusion means placing all students with disabilities full-time in the regular classrooms. Inclusion refers to the full-time placement of children with mild, moderate and severe disabilities in regular classrooms (Fine, 2000). Inclusion of all pupils in the mainstream schools is part of an international agenda which calls for the full inclusion of all pupils with disabilities, into all aspects of life (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). The intent of Inclusive education (IE) policy is to address and to respond equitably and appropriately to the diverse needs of all children irrespective of disability, gender, ethnicity or other disadvantages (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Booth & Ainscow, 1998).

Inclusive education undoubtedly, provides the best setting for students with special needs to optimise gains from education. Notwithstanding, there are several special segregated schools in Ghana for students with disabilities. Even though the attempt is to cater for the special needs of such students, there are quite a number of children who have no access to education due to the limited number of the segregated schools. These are indications that segregated practices have not helped to solve the needs of people living with disabilities in accessing quality education. Inclusive education is based on the right of all learners and to ensure that all have access to a quality education that meets their basic learning needs and enriches lives. Focusing particularly on vulnerable and marginalized groups, it seeks to develop the full potential of every individual. The ultimate goal therefore of inclusive education is to end all forms of discrimination and foster social cohesion (UNESCO, 2003).

Ghana's attempts to achieve inclusion can be derailed due to a lot of inherent challenges outlined by Gadagbui (2008). Guay (1994, p.44) gathered that "all art teachers must be prepared to teach students in integrated classes and to respond to the social, instructional, and curricular needs of students with a broad range of abilities". Teacher preparation curriculum does not adequately prepare student-teacher to confront the

challenges ahead of them. Teachers, therefore, become discomfort in managing students with mixed abilities. In Keifer-Boyd & Kraft's (2003, p.48) study, they concluded that "such discomfort may result from lack of opportunities in pre-service preparation for teachers to gain confidence and proactive strategies for teaching art to differently-abled learners". It is imperative to realign the teacher preparation curriculum of colleges of education and other universities that train teachers to the expectation of the job market.

Inclusive education has the edge of providing benefits to both students with special needs as well as students without special needs (Ryndak & Alper, 1996). Due to its merits in inclusive educations, its speedy implementation can be facilitated through art education. Art education owes much to the philosophies of John Dewey and Viktor Lowenfeld. Their ideas and aspirations still hold merit within the current practice, though there has been a shift in practice, towards a more discipline-based approach. In particular, Dewey believed that the school setting gave students the liberty to progress, make decisions, and overcome obstacles (Bates, 2000). Today, postmodern principles and concepts are gaining attention in the contemporary art classroom furthering the freedom of discovery for students.

In the case of Viktor Lowenfeld, he was attentive to the entire child including his or her cognitive, expressive, physical, and artistic capabilities (Bates, 2000). Between art education and art therapy, it is sometimes difficult to determine the stand of Lowenfeld. Lowenfeld attempt "was to try to rescue the children by supporting them through an art process which breathes richness and a sense of well-being back into their lives" (Henley, 1992, p.15). Whether an art education/therapy, the most important concern to inclusive educators is the power of art to aid social cohesion and acceptance of belongingness in the classroom. Art educators are in a unique position because the visual arts have the ability to connect with all students in spite of developmental limitations (Wiebe-Zederayko & Ward, 1999).

Danko-McGee and Slutsky (2003) argued that art should be placed at the forefront on the curriculum. Arts education favours and supports various teaching techniques and strategies to accommodate each learner's unique way of accessing curriculum, processing information, and demonstrating their understanding. Art education curriculum could, therefore, be used to help facilitate the process of inclusive education in Ghana. The arts promote learning through activities that concurrently encourage educational and social development of learners (Mason & Steedly, 2006). In Anderson's (1994) submission, four categories of benefit for students with disabilities taking visual arts were outlined: "art as a vehicle for learning academic concepts; art as a reinforcer of social skills; art as a means of enhancing positive self and body concepts; and art as a means of inclusion/integration of children with disabilities" (pp.102-103). Wright (2003) also stressed that 'the arts provides a powerful mechanism for developing such capacities because they reach the deepest, richest, most abstract aspects of our existence' (p.10).

This has a reflection on President Barack Obama's acknowledgement on the role that art education has played in making his country great when he submitted that:

To remain competitive in the global economy, America needs to reinvigorate the kind of creativity and innovation that has made this country great. To do so, we must nourish our children's creative skills. In addition to giving our children the science and math skills they need to compete in the new global context, we should also encourage the ability to think creatively that comes from a meaningful arts education (Obama, 2008).

The recognition of the role of art education in America's development in spite of its capacities in science implies that Ghana can take a cue from it so far as inclusive education is concerned. Published researches have shown the value of art for individuals with disabilities. Benefits such as increased self-image, self-expression, social inclusion, and peer bonding have been documented by Simonnet & Modrick (2010), Dickinson (2009), Boyes & Reid (2005), O'Connor & Dunmill (2005), Bamford (2004), O'Farrell & Meban (2003), and Whiterell (2000).

Art offers visual language as another form of communication for students. In addition to art concepts, knowledge from other disciplines can be enhanced through repetition and creative presentation. Art also has a therapeutic quality that can enhance attitudes and quality of life. It is imperative that art teachers, in Ghana, embrace the opportunities art presents to their students with exceptionalities. Differentiated Instruction (DI) provides an opportunity to plan a curriculum and instruction that honours each student's learning needs and maximises their learning capacity by meeting them where they are and assisting them in the learning process (Tomlinson, 1999; NCAC, 2002).

This study sought to expose the potential of young artists with disabilities in general education classes; facilitate inclusion through art education and; gain activists among young students to the cause of inclusion in Ghana.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study used a micro-approach to study how art education could be used to facilitate the inclusive education

in Ghana. The study therefore adopted exploratory study design with the focus on four basic schools selected from Winneba in the Central Region of Ghana. The researcher interviewed head teachers, teachers, and pupils and also made classroom observations of the day-to-day teaching and learning in the selected schools.

2.2 Participants

The participants for this study consisted of head teachers, teachers, and pupils of the selected basic schools in Winneba, Ghana. The purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the four basic schools in Winneba Township of the Effutu Municipality. The schools were two public schools and two private schools. Each category had one well-resourced school and the other, under-resourced school. In all, twenty-four (24) participants took part in the study.

2.3 Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedure

Classroom observations and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. A semi-structured interview was designed to collect qualitative data from the head teachers and teachers. The items in the interview were used to identify the challenges school heads face in implementing IE policy and to solicit strategies to address the identified challenges. The interview was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to “engage, understand and interpret the key feature of the life-worlds of the participants” and to uncover the “descriptions of specific situations and actions, rather than generalities” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2007, p. 355). The major items in the interview were derived from the research questions that guided the study. These were:

- How schools respond to the policy decision of including diverse learners in their schools?
- What head teachers and teachers perceive as necessary to lead to an inclusive education?
- What schools do to promote inclusive education for all children?
- What roles art education can play in facilitating inclusive education in Ghana?

To collect the data, the researcher organised a number of practical sessions in each of the basic schools. Each session included 4 pupils from each selected schools over a period of ten weeks, on the basis of one session per week. The total number of sessions was ten.

2.4 Analysis plan

The audio recorded interviews were transcribed to analyze the responses of the participants. To enhance internal validity (Creswell, 2008), the transcribed data was shared with the participants and necessary changes were made according to their suggestions. “General inductive analysis approach” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238) was followed to analyze the interview data. This analysis approach has five steps including: 1) preparation of raw data files (data cleaning), 2) close reading of text, 3) creation of categories, 4) overlapping coding and un-coded text, and 5) continuing revision and refinement of category system (Thomas, 2006). Besides, the coding process prescribed by Creswell (2002) was followed to develop the themes. There are five steps in coding process for inductive analysis which included: a) Initial reading of text data, b) identify specific text segments related to objectives, c) label the segments of text to create categories, d) reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories, and e) create a model incorporating most important categories (Creswell, 2002, p. 266).

To ensure reliability of the data collected, the researcher compared the completed themes and discussed discrepancies with the respondents until agreement was reached among them. Seven themes emerged related to challenges in implementing IE that included: local authority, the pupils, academic and professional qualification of teachers, pedagogical practices, teaching and learning resource, and physical school environment and art practices. Four themes emerged from the analysis related to strategies to address the challenges that included: local authority, making resource available, repositioning the teacher and valuing diversity.

Data gathered through the observations in the classroom were collapsed and analysed along the patterns and themes emerged from the interview data to provide insights into classroom-level teaching and learning.

3. Results and Discussions of Findings

The problems associated with inclusive education in Ghana are: all teachers have not been trained to cater for SEN of all students; there are inadequate provision of materials and infrastructural base to support inclusive learning; the curriculum is not designed for inclusion education; and the class enrolment does not support differentiated instruction (DI) approach to learning.

3.1 Challenges hindering the implementing of inclusive education in Ghana.

Lack of authority: School heads identified and criticized the centrally controlled process that does not allow the involvement of teachers and school community members in policy development and decision-making. School heads found it unrealistic that decisions made in Accra, the capital city of Ghana, must be implemented in schools all over Ghana. The head teachers do not have any authority to employ teachers as that power lies with

the District Education Offices. Their role is to inform the District Education Office (DEO) about the class size and number of teachers in their school so that the DEO can report to the higher officials about appointing more teachers.

Access and challenges facing pupils: Data analysis revealed that children who have some form of impairments were either prevented or discouraged to come to school by their own parents. The parents believed that their children apart from being victims of teasing and bullying by their peers, could also expose the family to ridicule. One head teacher described the very non-acceptance of some parents about the inclusion of children with disabilities in the school. He commented the way,

“Some parents sometimes complain that due to the inclusion of disabled children, their children may also be disabled” [Source: A comment from a head teacher of school two].

Teachers: Some teachers’ opinions in the schools revealed that they opposed IE. Whiles some assigned overload (it requires about twice the effort in teaching a child with SEN) as a reason for their opposition, other stated that it would be better to keep pupils with SEN separated to receive better care in their designated special schools.

The interview reviewed that the training for the teachers in managing pupils with SEN is not sufficient. Professional development related to teaching in inclusive classrooms as well as on the philosophy of IE was believed to be an effective means of helping teachers to managing diverse learners in ways that would lessen their workload. However, some teachers commented this way:

Each of us [teachers] should have training that would help us to identify students with disabilities and we need to follow such process to support their learning and currently, the process we follow is basically our commonsense. [Source: Field data from a head teacher of school one]

Pedagogical practices (method of teaching): Observations made on mode of lesson delivery in most cases in both private and public schools were the use of “question and answer methods” with the teachers always posing the questions and pupils supplying the answers. Pupils in public schools lacked the vocabulary to express themselves very well in the English language and so they hardly asked questions compared to their counterparts in the private schools. TLMs were rarely used during lesson delivery especially in public schools.

Limited resources: When interviewed on support or resources for inclusive education, the school heads were concerned about the lack of financial support. Interview data analysis revealed that they were provided a limited stipend with no financial support for assistive devices. There was no funding for additional care for students with special needs and there were a general shortage of learning-teaching materials, (textbooks, teacher guides, exercise books, paper/slates, pencils/chalk, flash cards, chalk, and even counters) in schools. Heads perceived hunger as a cause that prevented children from being active and engaging in learning. Those schools that were on the School feeding programme, faced eminent treat of collapse since their subventions were not forthcoming hence their inability to pay the service providers.

Physical environment: Results from interview data revealed challenges relating to physical conditions of the school environment. The quality of teaching is further exacerbated by the physical conditions of the schools without appropriate modifications for students with special needs. The school buildings were not designed and built with pupils with physical disabilities.

School Population: The high teacher-pupils-ratio of 1:45, was not believed to be conducive to IE by most of the school heads. Heads strongly believed that the teachers could not adequately address individual needs of pupil under these conditions, and that the high teacher pupil ratio negatively impacted on the range of quality of teaching and learning activities teachers are able to do. Large classes were considered to be particularly disadvantageous to many pupils.

3.2 Strategies to facilitate inclusive education in Ghana.

Issues on decision-making: School heads in Ghana are largely responsible for implementing IE, however, they do not have the authority to devise or enact solutions to the challenges of this in their school communities. To achieve IE, heads pointed out that they were helpless in making decisions in a number of identified areas: recruitment of staff, resources mobilization, teaming up with other schools or local organisations, and getting members of the community to support the programmes of the schools’ activities.

Increased resources. School heads suggested the appointment of more teachers to reduce the high teacher pupil ratio thereby making teaching and learning more effective. Government was therefore to support teachers on distance learning pay their fees as a way of providing professional development opportunity to teachers on inclusive practice to ensure and provide inclusive friendly teaching and learning environment. School heads believed that an improved funding was necessary to enhance the school feeding programme to combat against hunger and malnourishment. In so doing, they believed, would ensure students stay at school throughout the day. There was a call by school heads to government to provide and increase assistive devices and appoint caregivers for the children with special needs.

3.3 *The role of Art Education in inclusive practice*

Observations from the art sessions in the schools revealed the pupils without disabilities maintained friendship with their partners with disabilities they were paired with throughout those art sessions. This can create a long lasting friendship among both those with disabilities on their peers without disabilities. Pupils without disabilities can become advocates of the rights of persons with disabilities for inclusive settings. Again Art teachers at the four schools encouraged and supported their pupils with and without disabilities to produce fantastic ideas about issues in their community.

Gardner (1983) elucidates the view that pupils possess diverse kinds of minds and cognitive strengths and therefore use varied practices to learn, remember, understand, and perform. This is best achieved through Art education which is seen as a medium that favours and supports teaching techniques and strategies that accommodate each learner's unique way of accessing curriculum, processing information, and demonstrating their understanding (Simonnet & Modrick, 2010). By creating pathways for all pupils to access the curriculum, Art education stimulates also their motivation and engagement in the learning process, raise their self-esteem, and consequently pupils attain higher achievement across the curriculum (Boyes & Reid 2005). In doing so, UNESCO believes that education systems will therefore be made accountable for delivering curricula that allow learners not only to acquire core knowledge but also to reach their fullest potential in terms of emotional and creative capacities (UNESCO 2005).

4. **Conclusion and recommendations.**

The findings of this study was consistent with previous research outcomes by Mullick, Deppeler & Sharma (2012), Caceres, Awan, Nabeel, Majeed, & Mindes (2010), Agbenyega (2007), Deng & Guo (2007), Giffard-Lindsay (2007), Huang (2007), Kuyini & Desai (2007), and Prinsloo (2001). The results revealed that in implementing IE as global agenda it requires empowered local authority, professional competency, increased resources, small class size and a school community that values diversity. Pupils with disabilities may require adaptive art materials and tools, as well, to ensure safety and creative independence. With the understanding that all pupils should be active in art classes, modifications may be simple or complex. Teachers should be willing to be innovative in problem solving and to research past practices and supports for pupils. Pre- service art teachers should be made aware of the available resources in regards to adaptive art materials and tools. Of course, these steps will be cost to the already budget deficits of any government but Art education has much to offer to provide a high quality social inclusion of learners but as long as Art education is considered less important and will be put on the back seat in our school system, we will leave many of our learners there as well (Hayes Jacob, 2009).

In pursuance for the promotion of successful inclusion education in Ghana, it is recommended that, the government and non-governmental organizations should all be involved in the provision of relevant educational resources especially in the arts and services necessary for effective training of individuals with disabilities. This is very necessary to make teachers work easier in their classrooms.

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