

Ensuring Inclusive Educational Leadership Practices: A Study of Support Services Delivery to Children with Special Needs in Ghana

Anthony Afful-Broni & Nathan Ankutse
University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

Abstract

The success or otherwise of effectively educating children with special needs depends on the quality of the support services which the Ghana Education Service is mandated to provide. This study focuses on the main factors that are militating against the effective and efficient support services delivery to children with special education needs in the Volta Region of Ghana. The study investigated the various types of support services being rendered, the quality of the human resource and the adequacy of material resources. A total of 60 respondents were involved in the study. The main instrument used was a set of questionnaires designed and validated by the researchers. Data collated and analyzed showed that only three out of the ten services were being delivered and though the Ghana Education Service had experienced and competent personnel, it was plagued with the non-availability of material resources. Recommendations as to how to improve the situation through inclusive educational leadership which maximizes the various agencies as well as government policies were given.

Keywords: Inclusive educational leadership, special needs education in Ghana.

Introduction

As a developing nation, Ghana believes in education as a tool for national growth and development. Thus, it has ratified many international conventions and declarations on Education including Education for All (1990) and World Education Forum (2000). Also, the Ministry of Education has put in Ghanaians at all levels to enable them acquire skills that will assist them to develop their potentials so as to be productive and promote socio-economic growth and national development. The Education Strategic Plan aims at arresting falling standards and improving upon equity, access and participation, quality teaching and learning, and supporting the holistic development of children, including those with special needs.

Special Education Needs children are those who have deviations in their sensory and or physical abilities. As a result, they find it extremely difficult to make gains using the existing curriculum, pedagogy and environmental set ups for their total development. There is therefore a great disparity between their inherent potentials and achievement. Having a child of this nature puts much psychological, emotional, physical and economic strain on the child, the immediate family, teachers and the nation as a whole. Reaching over to them to unearth their potentials and make them useful and productive citizens of society, there is the need to use special teaching techniques, modified curricula and a least restrictive environment for their development. This is the core business of Special Needs Education.

For Special Needs Education to make its desired impact, it has to be supported by some important social services. This is where the work of the support service providers in education becomes indispensable and needs to be given a thorough look. Support service delivery in Education revolves extensively around effective and efficient Special Education Officers who go round places to locate children with special needs. They also educate parents on assessment, referrals, medication and educational placements. In Ghana, the service seems to be overwhelmed with problems. Negative attitudes of those in authority culminating into parsimony, lack of materials and equipment militate against the smooth-service delivery. A closer look at the problems of the service in the Volta Region is the focus of this study. It is aimed at finding out the main militating factors against effective service delivery to children with disability.

Statement of the Problem

It is generally agreed that the Special Needs Education Support personnel, hitherto called peripatetic and itinerant officers, as well as officers at the Assessment Centres have been at their maximum best of delivery. It was confirmed that each district has at least one special education officer, eager to render services to the disabled. Nonetheless, the impact of their service delivery was scarcely felt by society. Support services, given or available to parents of special needs children enable them to cope with the incidence of disability in the family. This helps them to increase productivity individually and severally in whatever sphere of life they may find themselves. The availability of these services helps to improve the academic and social achievements of the school-going child with disability. Despite, the afore-mentioned benefits, it appears the personnel of the District Directorates of the Ghana Education Service (GES) are not aware of the different support services to be

delivered within their districts, and the benefits thereof. Secondly, some of the officers appointed to serve on this schedule seem not to have the requisite experience and competence skills.

Finally, it appears there is little or no financial and logistical provision for this support service delivery. The aforementioned are assumptions and are under how they relate to Special Needs Education delivery. Within the Volta Region, however, there has been no empirical study to explore the state of Support Service delivery for Special Needs Education and those issues necessitated the conduct of the study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent are the Districts Directorates aware of the type of Special Needs Education support services rendered by the staff?
2. What experience and competency do special education officers have for effective service delivery?
3. What are the logistical and financial resources provided in support services delivery in the region?

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this research was to find out whether the District/Regional Directorates were aware of the different types of Special Needs Education support services delivered in their districts. In addition, it sought to find out if Special Education Officers had the required qualification, experience and competence and finally, if there was adequate financial and logistic support for the support services delivery system. This study aimed at sensitizing the Ghana Education Service Divisional Directorate of Special Needs Education to re-evaluate the administrative operations of the Special Needs Education Support Service at the district and regional levels to ensure effective and efficient delivery to the disabled. It is also aimed at giving the Regional Co-ordinators of Special Needs Education a greater focus in their service delivery within the various regions under their jurisdiction.

Furthermore, the study has the potential to helping the District Directorates to become sensitive to the importance of Support Services delivery to the physically challenged, eschew marginalization and help provide the necessary inputs in the form of logistics. It is hoped that the study will increase the interest in the support service providers to identify resources that are available to them and plan for their full utilization. It will further assist the support service providers to readily determine their level of efficiency and improve upon it, or make up if there are any deficiencies. The study will bring to light areas where the support service providers are falling short, and seek support from other stake holders in the form of advice, logistics or capacity building. Even though this study is confined to the Special Needs Education in the fifteen Educational Districts of the Volta Region of Ghana, it is believed that useful leadership lessons can be drawn for other parts of the nation. It also aims at examining support services rendered to the disabled through the Ghana Education Service only, and not any other Government or Non-Governmental body or organization.

Review of Related Literature

Special needs education is the type characterized by interventional arrangements and procedures, given to exceptional children to enable them achieve the same educational ends as other children. These interventional arrangements and procedures include the provision of access to the curriculum through medication of a. communication and structural barriers for sensory and physically challenged children, b. curricula for children with limited ability and c. ensuring an appropriate emotional environment for disturbed children (Derry, 1993).

This requires specially trained personnel who acquire their skills after long periods of training. It also uses special teaching materials, equipment and methods of teaching. Furthermore, effective special needs education requires team work from various specialists, and has a feature of individuality for the children (Opong, 2003). Special education are those who deviate from the accepted average in physical, mental, emotional or social characteristics to such an extent that they require special educational services in order to develop to their maximum capacity. This deviation could either be positive or negative. However, special needs education is not different from regular education but a continuum of the same process taken taking place at different levels and rates (Derry, 1993).

According to Ocloo, Morttey and Boison (2005), Supportive or Related Services are the services that assist to provide for the medical, educational, recreational and job placement needs of persons with disability. Types of Support Services needed by parents of special needs children include Parental Training, Infant Stimulation Centres, Respite Care, Counselling, Group Homes, Financial Aids, Case Management, Hospital Support and Baby-Sitting Programmes. According to Mandel and Fiscus (1981), parents are trained to become change agents for remediation, for preventing of problems and for helping their children develop to their maximum potential. Infant stimulation centres are also designed to provide both stimulating educational environment as well as physical management for multi disabled children. In the centres, all forms of learning materials such as push-and-pull toys, stacking toys, large wheel toys are provided. The centres should be

appropriately managed to provide the needed experience for infants and children particularly slow developers and learners, the visually impaired, the physically impaired among others (Ikpaya, 1987).

On Respite Care Service, Heward and Orlansky (1988) stated that this programme is the temporary care of disabled individuals for the purpose of providing relief to the parent and guardian. The respite care is conducted in the family's home or at a new respite facility. The availability of this service could give respite to parents as they could afford to leave their child in the respite care family or home and go for vacation, short training or work. Respite care home could assist parents experiencing divorce as a result of a handicapped child and those with poor health. They can also help children orphaned by the death of one parent particularly the mother.

With counseling services, approaches to parents of special needs children have traditionally been oriented towards helping them resolve a variety of emotional conflicts that are, by implication, more or less adaptive and neurotic. Suran and Rizzo (1979) posited that professional personnel often make patronizing assumptions that parents of special child inevitably require assistance in accepting and living with their child because they are unaware of their unconscious conflicts and deep seated resentment. Children of such parents may be taken away from them after counseling to group homes for temporal or permanent bases depending on the particular coping problem of the family. This is much preferable than allowing the special child with such parents who may end up eliminating him/her under any guise (Obi, 2004). Once families find needed services, the financial burdens disabilities also means added expenses which may include respite or child care, medical procedures or therapies, therapeutic or assistive equipment or supplies and special diet or medication.

Wood and Lazzari (1997) stated that there is the need for the government to make provision for some financial aids to such parents. This aid can be given annually, or biannually as the case may be. Besides government, philanthropists and Non-governmental organizations (NGO's) could identify families with special needs children and given them assistance. Case Management service on the other hand is usually provided by one person who is professionally trained to assist in identifying the needs of parents, finding available services, maintaining records and monitoring the services provided to ensure that they meet the requirements of the family (Obi, 2004). On Hospital Support Services, Wood and Lazzari (1997) stated that many parents or more severely handicapped children or those with certain genetic or physical disabilities will learn of their child's handicap at the hospitals shortly after delivery. Although early childhood special educators have traditionally had minimal influence over hospital practices, more hospitals are now concerned about the quality of the early parent-child relationship, particularly in the case of the high-risk child, and are beginning to change practices. The early childhood special educator can serve as an advocate for improved hospital support and give advice on child and parent care practices.

Methodology

The research design used in this study was a descriptive survey. This design was employed because the study was concerned with the investigation of a large population through a representative sample. (Creswell, 2005) The design was also considered most appropriate since the study sought to investigate the possible relationships that may exist between administrative practices in the Ghana Education Service (G.E.S.) and effective support service delivery to children with disability in the Volta Region. The target population for the study was all Ghana Education Service support service providers to the Disabled in the Volta Region. These included District Special Education Officers (hitherto called Peripatetic officers), Itinerant Teachers, Assessment Officers, District Directors of Education, District Accountants and Budget Officers.

A total of 65 subjects participated in the research. These consisted 15 District Special Education Officers including Itinerant and Assessment Officers, 10 District Directors of Education, 10 District Accountants or Budget Offices, 15 Administrative Staff of District Officers, and 15 Head Teachers in public Basic Schools. The respondents were purposively chosen to represent the category of officers in the Ghana Education Service who contribute to the rendering of support services to children with special needs. A self-constructed 38-item questionnaire was used to gather data for the study. Questionnaires were distributed by the researchers to the respondents. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents to avoid needless misconceptions and solicit their co-operation. For this reason, majority of the questionnaires were responded and returned to the researchers the same day. Few, mostly for the District Directors of Education were later sent by post. In all, the questionnaire return rate was 84.6%. Simple percentages were used to analyze the data for the research questions.

Results

In answer to the question that inquired about the level of awareness among district directorates about the types of special needs education support services rendered by their staff, respondents had a high level of awareness. Services that were identified were Counselling programme (65%), Early Identification (73%) and Case Management Services (64%). Those reported as not available included Respite Care (100%), Group Homes

(100%), Baby-Sitting Services (100%) and Financial Aid (96.4%). The rest of these services – Parental Training Service (25%), Infant Stimulation Centres (22%) and Hospital Support Service (25%) could be said to be partially rendered in the region.

On the question exploring what experience and competence Special Education Officers have for effective service delivery, 42% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 44% agreed that the Special Education Officers possessed the necessary skills specified while 13% and 1% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. It implied that a total of 86% of respondents agreed that the Special Education Officers had the necessary skills to render their services while a total of 14% disagreed. The results indicated that the best skills which Special Education Officers possessed were high level of mastery on disability issues (96%) and extra patience (93%). Innovativeness and resourcefulness (73%) were the least skills they possessed.

The third questionnaire inquired the logistical resources provided in support services delivery, and as the table below shows, out of the seven (7) resources identified, 100% of the respondents strongly disagreed that 3 of the resources were provided in the region. These were Assistive and Adaptive devices, Multi-disciplinary assessment team and Budgetary allocations. This shows that out of the seven (7) resources listed, 5% agreed that resources were provided (S.A = 0.9% and A = 4.1%) while 95% disagreed that these resources were made available (D = 19% and S.D = 76%). Of the remaining 4 resources, 21 (5%) out of 385 responses from the respondents agreed that some sort of these resources were available, while 199 (95%) of the respondents disagreed. One the whole, resources were not available for Special Education Officers to fully work.

Table 1

Types of Resource	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1. Screening material	- (-)	10 (18%)	21 (38%)	24 (44%)
2. Means of transport	- (-)	1 (2%)	20 (36%)	34 (62%)
3. Assistive & adaptive devices	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	55 (100%)
4. Literature/reference documents	- (-)	5 (9%)	10 (18%)	40 (%)
5. Multi-disciplinary assessment team	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	55 (100%)
6. Assessment/Resource Centre	3 (5.4%)	2 (3.6%)	22 (40%)	28 (51%)
7. Budgetary allocations	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	55 (100%)
Total	3 (0.9%)	18 (4.1%)	73 (19%)	291 (76%)

On the question which sought to know the financial provisions made to support service delivery in the various districts, 100% of the respondents agreed that the districts always accessed the Government of Ghana budgetary allocations, which should provide for support services delivery, while 55% and 73% respectively agreed that the Department for International Development (DFID) and Internally Generated Fund (IGF) were also accessed respectively. Regarding financial support, 38% of the respondents strongly agreed that Special Needs Education delivery was supported financially, while 38% agreed. Nineteen percent disagreed that Special Needs Education was supported financially, whereas 5% strongly disagreed. From the above, majority (76%) of the respondents agreed that Special Needs Education was financially supported while 24% disagreed. Despite this state of financial provisions, all the respondents dismissed the idea that these were enough to cater for Special Needs Support Services.

As regards the disbursement of the accessed funds to cover special needs support services, only 36% of the respondents agreed that this was being done. The rest, (64%) were simply not in favour of this opinion. They were in agreement that the District Directorates had guidelines for the disbursement of these funds, but they were not being strictly followed. The results again showed that 51% of respondents agreed that District Directorates always received feedback on fund usage from Special Education Officers while 49% disagreed. On the issue of whether the Directorate always made a follow-up to ensure that funds were appropriately used, 69% disagreed and 31% agreed.

Summary of Findings

There is a high level of awareness of the types of support services being delivered to people with disability whether fully, partially or not delivered at all. Since majority of the respondents are key policy implementers of the Ghana Education Service, one wonders why such disparities. There is the need to reorient the policy implementers on the importance of these support services in the educational delivery process. As regards the experience and competency skills, findings indicated that all support service officers were rated very high in the 10 competence skill areas. This is contrary to the researchers' belief that the officers were lacking in competency skills, and hence unable to make the desired impact. The questionnaire which investigated the availability of resources needed for the support service provider to work with found that resources needed for the services delivery were not available. Ninety-five percent of the respondents disagreed that the ten groups of

resources listed were available in the region. The analyses indicated a strong correlation between resources available for Special Needs Support Service delivery and the services rendered by the schedule officers.

This study therefore reveals that no matter how skilled and competent the human resources of an organization may be, very little of the organisation's objectives could be achieved in the absence of material resources. It was found that some financial provisions were made by the government, non-governmental organizations and from internally generated funds. However, these funds were woefully inadequate, making the implementation and the achievement of policy objectives quite difficult.

Recommendations and Conclusions

In the Volta Region of Ghana, the service faces major problems, some of which are negative attitudes of those in authority, lack of means of transport, materials and equipment. The following suggestions are thus being made in the light of the fact that Ghana is moving towards Inclusive Education Programme and as such present and future governments should take a critical look at the cost of support services delivery and make it an integral part of the educational scheme. Indeed, education is expensive, and understandably so; governments the world over have often allocated large percentages of their budgets to education; and whereas sometimes even this is not enough, due to leakages in the system, it is being suggested that perhaps the process of decentralization should be made more concrete so that some of these fine programmes can be fully realized.

The issue of facilities and logistics should be carefully considered, and teachers should continue to be specially trained for this programme. In this regard, the University of Education, Winneba, which has spearheaded quite a number of programmes in Special Education ought to be given more financial support by the government to expand. It is further recommended that a budgetary line for Special Educational Needs should be created for compliance by the regional, municipal and district offices especially in support of the decentralization ongoing process. Also, private sector participation in the funding and provision of logistics in support service delivery to children with disability should be encouraged since special education for children is capital intensive. District Directors play important roles in education generally, and they are the backbone of any such programme. When they are strong, the job of the District Special Education Officer would be much easier. The researchers again suggest that Directors of Education as well as their Accountants eschew that habit of causing parsimony in support service delivery to children with disability. They ought to work with the principal that the purpose of educational institutions is not profit making but rather, the sincere provision of goods and services which contribute to observable levels of quality teaching and learning (Afful-Broni, 2004).

We are of the opinion that school leaders should be better empowered at the national, regional, district and local levels so that they can more effectively help to implement best practice in special education delivery. The ineffective and inefficient support services delivery within the Ghana Education service in the Volta Region is due to multifarious causes among which is the lack of material resources including insufficient financial provisions. As a result, support service providers are disillusioned and could make little impact. Special Needs Education Service delivery in the region was not effective, though it had the propensity to be efficient if the educational authorities provided the necessary logistic and financial necessities. The government of Ghana seems to be the major agent, who can improve the situation by implementing feasible and innovative policies to enhance and accelerate the adoption of inclusive education. In this regard, we also believe that the few NGOs who have so far supported should be encouraged to be of help, while efforts are made to invite others into the country for this important agenda.

Furthermore, there is the greater need to continue to address the creation of budgetary lines for Special Needs Education support, or seek a major donor funding for the programme for a period of about ten years, by which time, the People with Disability Act – Act 715 – would have come into full force. This will then set the pace for the various stakeholders to continue providing these support services. The various non-governmental organizations, faith based organizations and individual philanthropists could be well organized to support the cause for holistic education of children with special needs.

REFERENCES

- Afful-Broni, A. (2004). *Theory and Practice of Educational Leadership in Ghana*. Accra: TYPE Company Ltd.
- Arko-Boham, K. & Oduro, G. K. T. (2001). *An Introduction to Educational Planning and Finance in Ghana*. Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, University of Cape Coast. Lecture Notes. Unpublished.
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson
- Derry, E. S. (1993). *Foundations in Special Education for Ghana*. Lecture Notes. Winneba, U.C.E.W. (Unpublished).
- Heward, W. L. & Orlansky, M. O. (1988). *Exceptional Children, An Introductory Survey of Special Education*. Columbus: Merrill Publishing Company.

- Ikpaye, B. O. (1987). *Exceptional Children and Youth, Introduction to Special Education*. Caliber: June Last Print.
- Mandel, C. J. & Ficus, E. U. (1981). *Understanding Exceptional People*. Minnesota: West Publishing Company.
- Obi, F. B. (2004). *Effective Parenting of Children with Special Needs*. Accra: Asante & Hittsher Printing Press Ltd.
- Ocloo, M., Mottey, D., & Boison, C. (2005). *Comprehensive Study Notes on Special Education with Explanations & Sample Objective Questions*. Accra: Salt 'N' Light.
- Oppong, M. A. (2003).
- Suran, B. G. & Rizzo, J. V. (1979). *Special Children – An Integrative Approach*. U.S.A.: Scott, Forman and Company.
- Wood, J. W. & Lazzari, A. M. (1997). *Exceeding the Boundaries: Understanding Exceeding Lives*. U.S.A.: Harcour Brace Company.

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:
<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

