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The Need for a Policy in Ghanaian Polytechnic Education to Cater for Students with Disability

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Abstract:

This paper advocates for installation of institutional policy on education of persons with disabilities in Polytechnics in Ghana. The passage of disability bill into law in 2006 makes it mandatory for all learning institutions including Polytechnic to make its education accessible to persons with disability. However, polytechnics in Ghana have done little if any, to this effect. The aim of Polytechnics education basically, is to train career-focused graduates to be self-employed and contribute their quota to the nation's economy. It is therefore a right and not a privilege for persons with disabilities to be admitted into polytechnics programmes. This will ensure effective integration of disable youth into the labour market. To effectively carry out the study, descriptive observational study was used. Lecturers and students of Polytechnics in Ghana form the population for the study. The research instruments include unstructured interview and personal observation. Findings are that, polytechnics in Ghana have no institutional policy for disables. Little has been done to make the polytechnic environment accessible to the disables, as well as lack of records on professionals in the field of special education. As recommendations, Polytechnics should have institutional policy for educating disables to equip them with employable skills. Existing facilities should be made user friendly. Finally, professionals in special education should be employed as lecturers in polytechnics.

Keywords: Institutional policy, advocates, polytechnic education, disability.

1. Introduction

Education is the process of nourishing or rearing of a child or young person. It is a systematic instruction or training given to the youths in preparation for the work of life, Olowa (1999) In Ghana, education policies do not and have never discriminated against any section of the community and all persons are entitled to equal educational opportunities under the law. This provision is in tenet with the 1992 constitution which gives further impetus to the provision of education as a basic right for all Ghanaians. Education is central to development. It empowers people and strengthens nations. It is a powerful equalizer, opening doors to all to lift themselves out of poverty. It is critical to the world's attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Moreover, education promotes economic growth, national productivity and innovation, and values of democracy and social cohesion (The World Bank, 2010). Polytechnic education has an aim which is in line with the aims of education in general.

In Ghana, Polytechnic education is a tertiary level of education charged with the responsibility of training technicians and technologists as a middle level manpower to meet industrial needs. The essence was to help bridge the gap between lower and high level manpower categories in our industries, commerce, public and civil service for calculated development agenda. This education was also meant to absorb those who could not go through the normal traditional education so as to reduce dropout rate after second cycle studies. Its aims at training career-focused graduates with practical orientation, to be self-employed and also contribute to the human resource capacity in Ghana (Afeti 2003: Agodzo2005).

Polytechnic education all over the world is seen as another form of tertiary education which provides highly skilled manpower needed in the development of the country. Products from most polytechnics are found in industries and the service sectors of Ghana and they are usually identified by their excellent skills applied in their various professions. Some polytechnics offer basic and professional studies and other science disciplines. Most government policy documents identify polytechnics as Institutions which provide non-university professional higher education in a multi-field environment. Polytechnics were upgraded to tertiary status in 1993. Polytechnic institutions were created to provide career-focused education and skills training to students. The objectives of Polytechnic institutions as stated in PNDC Law 321 are; - To provide full time courses in the field of manufacturing, commerce, science,

technology, applied sciences; applied arts and such other areas as may be determined by the authority responsible for higher education. - To encourage study in technical subjects at tertiary level and - Provide opportunity for development, research and publication of research findings. These objectives were reinforced by the white paper on the report of the Education Reform Review Committee, 2004 which indicates that, "Government will continue to equip the polytechnics to make them offer tertiary education in their own right, to emphasis practical skills that are needed to run the productive economy and build a nation". Government further underscores the importance of hands-on experience and undertakes to resource polytechnics to enable them offer degree programmes. Polytechnics aim at training career-focused graduates with practical orientation, who may be self-employed and also contribute to the human resource capacity in Ghana. It is a right and not a privilege for disable persons with knowledge in Vocational /Technical skills to be admitted into polytechnics programmes. This will eventually ensure the integration of disable youth into the labour market to contribute their quota.

1.1. Institutional Policies of Polytechnics in Ghana

The proposed Polytechnic bill under consideration in parliament is more or less silent on the disability bill. The propose bill is divided into five parts and has the object to revise the law relating to polytechnics and to make changes consequential to the Polytechnic Law, 1992 government (PNDC Law 321) as a constitutional requirement. The bill seeks to empower Polytechnic Councils to support the government education reform efforts and also solve the problems, which constrain polytechnic education and its contribution to the development of the country. It also allows for the establishment of external relationships between the polytechnics and civil society, industry, employers, other institutions of higher learning and the government. The Bill proposes the establishment of and objects of polytechnics, Academic Board, Organisation of a polytechnic, administration of a polytechnic as well as financial and miscellaneous provisions. The significant change from the existing Polytechnic Law is the provision for affiliation to universities to enable polytechnics to award degrees along the Higher National Diploma (HND) to meet the current needs of employers and also bridge the gap between graduates from the polytechnics and those from the universities. Regarding bills on disability, Takoradi Polytechnic is on record as having assisted in the training of a deaf and dumb student in furniture engineering in 2005, and admitted another deaf and dumb student in 2010 to pursue HND in Hotel, Catering and Institutional Management (HCIM). The institution would naturally capitalize on this feat to mount additional programmes for the physically-challenged. Consequently, Takoradi Polytechnic has decided to focus on raising the profile of minorities in the next phase of its development, with a possible establishment of a resource centre to cater for the needs of physically-challenged persons, aspiring to earn technician certificates from the Polytechnic.

1.2. Some Existing Facilities in the Polytechnics Which Students and Lecturers Frequent

1. Lecture halls
2. Libraries
3. Workshops for practical
4. Studios
5. Washrooms
6. Halls of residence
7. Playing fields /recreational centres
8. Canteen/ cafeteria
9. Auditorium
10. Polytechnic clinic
11. Car parks

1.3. Categories of Persons with Disabilities

There are various categories of persons with disabilities. Among these are the visual impairment, auditory impairment, physical disorders, gifted / talented children, mental retardation/intellectual disability and behavior/emotional disorders. For the purpose of this study we shall restrict ourselves to only the first five categories;

- Visual impairment: An impairment which is concerned with losses in vision/sight. The loss can be partial or total. For these reason not all visually impaired people live in total darkness.
- Auditory impairment: This is a condition of partial or complete perception of sounds. Lewis and Doorlag (1995) have explained that children with hearing impairment may either be deaf or hard of hearing.
- Physical Disorders: This refers to the inability of a person to effectively use his/her body e.g. inability of a child to use his two legs because his is lame. The physically handicap include those with various physical deformities such as lameness, amputated limbs, hunch backs and scoliosis (a disease which causes the curvature of the spine).
- Gifted / Talented: This refers to the possession of superior general intelligent as indicated by high I.Q. scores, and achievement compared to the average achievement and performance of others in the population (Ogdue et al, 1987).
- Mental Retardation/Intellectual Disability: Refers to substantial limitation in present functioning. It is characterized by significant sub-average intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with related limitation in two or more of the applicable adaptive skill (Smith, 1993).

The categories of persons with disabilities discussed above are of different levels in terms of the support they need to function effectively in education and work of life. It is only when the support they required to function are not available that they became

handicap. In Ghana persons with disabilities are educated and equipped with vocational and technical skills in both first and second circle institutions.

Imrie (2004), however, sees disability as falling into two main models: the medical and social models. While the former focuses on the medical condition of a person, the latter conceptualizes disability as an interaction between individual limitations and the environment, focusing more on barriers created by society (Nhlapo, 2006). The social model emphasizes the removal of societal barriers that exclude people with disabilities, including environmental, institutional and attitudinal barriers. Uslu (2008), contends that a person becomes disabled by the barriers they face, not by their impairment. He continues that, "the policies, practices and values of built-environment professionals and disabled people's own reticence about articulating their needs then combine with self-limiting behaviour to ensure that this unjust situation remains unchallenged.

1.4. The Plight of Persons with Disabilities

Disabled people in Africa are among the poorest of the poor as a consequence of their exclusion from school, health care, work, and other societal benefits (Exodus Guild, 2010). People with disabilities in Ghana are often regarded as unproductive and incapable of contributing in a positive way to society, and rather seen as constituting an economic burden on the family and the society at large, which leaves them in a vicious cycle of poverty. Disabled persons are often only weakly represented in civil society and Ghana is one of these countries. According to Ozcebe and Baser (2008), a tenth of the world's population is afflicted with various forms of disabilities out of which 500 million are physically disabled. This implies that, at least, two million out of the estimated population of 24 million Ghanaians are disabled in one form or the other.

The picture becomes bleaker, if one considers the fact that we are all disabled at one time or the other in our lives. For instance, a child, a pregnant woman, an injured person, an elderly person, a parent with a pram, etc., are all disabled in one way or the other. There are very few people who remain able-bodied and healthy all their lives. It is, therefore, important that all learning institutions including the Polytechnic put structures in place to make education accessible to all persons. The needs of the disabled are as important as the needs of the physically-abled majority. For this reason, planning and designing for the majority should take into account the requirements of PWDs (Uslu, 2008). Wyde, *et al.* (1994) reports that, as many as 9 out of 10 of individuals may be architecturally disabled in some way or other at some time in their lives.

Otmani, *et al.*, 2009; Imrie and Kumar, (1998) have discovered that the built environment, which is generally not disable-friendly, discriminates against PWDs, by excluding them from social life. As Baris, *et al.* (2009) describe it, Today, the disabled people face many kinds of discriminations, posing difficulties and disadvantages of different sizes as it was also the case

in the past, and barriers, such as bad designs, insufficient knowledge or discriminatory behaviours, caused disabled people's exclusion from social life. When the problems of the disabled are considered, the built environment can be shown as the most outstanding symbol of disabled people's exclusion from social life. Higher education can play a complex and contradictory role in both reproducing and challenging social privilege. It can contribute to elite formation by reinforcing the capital of those already in possession of social privilege. It can also lead to social mobility and identity transformation for disadvantaged groups.

1.5. Policies concerning Education of Persons with Disability in Ghana

The process of developing a policy on disability has been long and tedious. Cabinet passed the policy and the National Disability Policy Document and was printed in December 2000. The bill was finally passed by parliament in June 2006. The latest available statistics (2001/2002) shows that there are 24 public institutions in Ghana dealing with special education, which cater for approximately 5,000 students. In addition, there exist six (6) institutions that basically are main-stream in their administrative placement and offer education on a second-cycle and post second-cycle level. These institutions' relevance to PWDs mostly relates to education towards visually impaired students. The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) amends the DDA 1995 and includes the introduction of a new Disability Equality Duty '(DED) which came into force in December 2006 placing a legal requirement on public institutions, including universities, to be proactive in ensuring that disabled people are treated fairly and equally and that the opportunities available to disabled students and their achievements are equal to those of their non-disabled peers. The specific responsibilities of the DED require all public bodies to draw up Disability equality schemes 'on a three yearly basis and actively involve local disabled people, disabled staff and students in the process, thus reinforcing the consultation and empowerment of disabled people agenda (Vickerman and Blundell, 2010; Zepke, Leach, and Prebble, 2006). Globally, widening participation of disabled people in higher education has been supported by the introduction of anti-discriminatory legislation, treaties and policy frameworks. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006) is an international treaty that identifies the rights of disabled people as well as the obligations on States parties to the Convention to promote, protect and ensure those rights.

Under Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) ratifying States are charged with ensuring an inclusive education system at all levels partly by providing appropriate staff development. In terms of its content, the Convention represents a significant change: it establishes disability not only as a social welfare matter but as part of human rights law. States that ratify it are legally bound to implement the provision of the Convention. At the time of writing this report, there had been 145 signatories and 87 ratifications. Ghana and Tanzania had both signed, and Tanzania has ratified the CRPD. Tertiary institutions now need to predict disabled students' needs and modify application, registration and administration procedures. Teaching and learning is also supposed to consider difference and diversity. Barnes (2007) is pessimistic about the extent to which equality practices are mainstreamed and embedded in organizations. He argued that, while higher education institutions now have dedicated disability

services, resources and units, the rhetoric of support is rarely matched by the reality of provision. Other researchers have found that while there have been potent moral and legal arguments to widen participation and promote equality of opportunities, legislation and penalties for non-compliance seem to have been more effective than moral arguments about exclusion (Burke, 2006. Deem *et al.*, 2005).

The participation of disabled students in higher education is often discussed in terms of physical access and the shape and design of the built environment (Chard and Couch, 1998; Chataika, 2010). An inclusive environment needs to take a holistic or universal approach to diversity, and not simply provide adjustments for separate groups. A sensitively, universally designed estate can help make buildings and facilities accessible for all organizational members without relying on assistance. The Education Strategy lists among a number of goals inclusive education, including the need for “equitable educational opportunities and claims that all children with “non-severe special education needs” will be incorporated into mainstream schools by 2015. But then, this is not the situation in the polytechnics. Persons with disability who graduate from special schools and second cycle institutions with training in technical and vocational skills could be admitted in the polytechnics, to add value to themselves and their products but this is rare probably due to lack of institutional policy for the disable, rigid intake requirement or inaccessible environment These have necessitated this study, hence advocate for an institutional policy on persons with disability in the polytechnics. This will eventually ensure the integration of disable youth into the labour market to contribute their quota The disable could form part of the human resource of the nation when train.

2. Methodology

The study is based on a qualitative research approach and makes use of a descriptive observational study design for data collection and analysis. Purposive sampling technique was used to gather data from the accessible population for the presentation and analysis of findings to draw conclusions and make recommendations. Observation and unstructured interviews were the main instruments used for data collection. The population for this study was made up of administrative staffs, lecturers and disabled students selected from three polytechnics in Ghana, namely: Accra Polytechnic, Kumasi Polytechnic and Takoradi Polytechnic all in different regions in Ghana. This is because all Ghanaian Polytechnic Institutions follow the same educational philosophies with few ethnical changes in each region. The Administrative staffs, Lecturers and disabled Students which formed the accessible population were sampled from these institutions so as to obtain relevant information pertaining to the need for a policy in Ghanaian polytechnic education to cater for students with disability. These institutions were chosen as fair representation of the Ghanaian Polytechnics. The purposive sampling technique was employed to sample (130) respondents. The data obtained from the primary and secondary sources were analyzed and presented descriptively and graphically in the form of pictures and tables for better understanding. The purposive sampling technique helped in the selection of respondents who provided relevant and factual information for discussion as seen in Table 1.

Institutions	Status	Frequency	Percentages
Takoradi Polytechnic	Lecturers	20	15.4
	Disabled Students	10	7.7
	Administrative staff	20	15.4
Kumasi Polytechnic	Lecturers	20	15.4
	Disabled Students	10	7.7
	Administrative staff	20	15.4
Accra Polytechnic	Lecturers	10	7.7
	Disabled Students	10	7.7
	Administrative staff	10	7.7
TOTAL		130	100

Table 1: Categorization of the population for the study

3. Results and Discussion

The vision of the study is to advocate for the operation of institutional policy in Ghanaian Polytechnics for educating persons with disabilities. People with disabilities in Ghana are often regarded as unproductive and incapable of contributing in a positive way to society, and rather seen as constituting an economic burden on the family and the society at large, which leaves them in a vicious cycle of poverty. Polytechnic education which aims at training career focused graduates is needed to equip persons with disability with employable skills to alleviate them from these negative perceptions. Hence, there is no policy documents by the polytechnics in Ghana to admit students with disabilities. The polytechnic environments are also not user friendly to people with disability. The research team personally observed the environments of Kumasi Polytechnic, Accra Polytechnic and Takoradi Polytechnic to ascertain their accessibilities to people with disability. The results are presented and discussed in the following section of the paper.

3.1. Analytical Assessment of the Stair Ways Used in the Polytechnic Institutions Studied

Observable findings indicate that all the access or stair ways to lecture halls, libraries, administration blocks, hostels, places of convenience etc. used in the Polytechnic institutions studied are not user friendly to PLWD. They are made basically with stairs made of solid cemented blocks. The choices of design, type of stairs and layouts for different designs were also critically observed. It was evident that, the type of furniture and stairs used cannot be used by PLWD. No ramp ways or lift were provided by these institutions to

serve as a passage for PLWD to lecture halls, libraries, hostels and other important places within the institutions. The existing facilities cannot support and enhance movement and the teaching and learning process for PLWD. Personal observation of the studied campuses revealed that the facilities that are available in the polytechnics are not ideal for educating the disabled. A clear indication that the polytechnics care little about the disabled and doing little to improve their access to polytechnic education. Figures 1 to 6 shows some existing structures in the polytechnics under study.



Figures 1: walkways to lecture halls at Accra and Kumasi Polytechnic. (Field survey, 2014)



Figures 2: Stairways to Library at Accra and Takoradi Polytechnics. (Field survey, 2014)



Figure 3: Entrance to halls of residence Kumasi Polytechnic. (Field survey, 2014)



Figure 4: walkway to Administration block Koforidua Poly. (Field survey, 2014)

3.2. Respondents' Views on Significance of Institutional Policy of Polytechnics for Educating the Disabled

Responding to the questions on the importance of institutional policy of Polytechnics for educating the disabled, 17 out of the 20 respondents representing 85% of lecturers interviewed at Takoradi and Kumasi Polytechnic admitted that, polytechnics in Ghana have no existing policy that stipulates explicitly how persons with disability who happened to enter polytechnic education should be treated. Even though, the bill to convert all polytechnics into technical university has been passed and is to take off in September 2016. These lecturers were of the view that a country without a good educational policy for disabled and moral standing is far from reaching its developmental agenda, this confirms Afeti and Agodzo (2005) assertion that, nothing has been said about how to educate persons with disabilities in the polytechnics. The focus of polytechnics is on Laws to make affiliation to universities to enable them award degrees along the Higher National Diploma (HND) to meet the current needs of employers and also bridge the gap between graduates from the polytechnics and those from the universities. However, the idea of making the polytechnics education accessible to PLWD with regards to polytechnic policy on how to treat disabled /handled them in the polytechnic institutions are not considered, In spite of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006), an international treaty that identifies the rights of disabled people as well as the obligations on States parties to the Convention to promote, protect and ensure those rights

If the polytechnics have made significant change from the existing Polytechnic Law to be an affiliate to universities to award degrees along the Higher National Diploma (HND) in order to meet the current needs of employers and also bridge the gap between graduates from the polytechnics and those from the universities then, there is the need to consider seriously a policy existing in the polytechnic for PLWD. The reason is that, the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) amends the DDA 1995 and includes the introduction of a new Disability Equality Duty (DED) which came into force in December 2006 placing a legal requirement on public institutions, including universities, to be proactive in ensuring that disabled people are treated fairly and equally and that the opportunities available to disabled students and their achievements are equal to those of their non-disabled peers.

3.3. Respondents' View on Educational Facilities Required for Training Persons with Disabilities in the Polytechnic

In response to the question that enquires about the educational facilities required for training persons with disabilities in the polytechnics, 16 out of 20 respondents representing 80% from Accra and Takoradi Polytechnic agreed that, educating PLWD in the polytechnics will require some special facilities and modification in the learning environment. PLWD will need a conducive and user friendly environment which ranges from simple to complex depending on the nature of the disability. For instance, ramps to building, convenient entrance to building, walkers, clutches, wheel chairs, brail for the blind, hearing aids, book stand, resource room, rest room, audio computers, lectures with knowledge in special education (interpreters, psychologist, counselors, social worker, etc) just to list a few. Disabled students with muscular dystrophy and visual impairment will not be able to use lecture theatres and libraries and most of the existing facilities currently in the polytechnics if they are not modified for them. This is in line with the statement made by Olowa (1999) that, the policies, practices and values of built-environment, professionals, and disabled people's own reticence about articulating their needs then combine with self-limiting behavior to ensure that this unjust situation remains unchallenged. The needs of the disabled are as important as the needs of the physically-abled majority. For this reason, planning and designing for the majority should take into account the requirements of PLWDs.

3.4. Respondents Views on the Category of Persons with Disability That Can Be Admitted into Polytechnics Education

Responding to questions on the category of persons with disabilities to be admitted into Polytechnic education, 18 out of 20 respondents representing 90% from Accra and Takoradi Polytechnic agreed that, those whose conditions ranges from mild to severe should be admitted. However, in terms of polytechnic education not all the disabled can be admitted. For the purpose of this paper, the focus is on the physically challenged, the hearing impaired, the visually impaired, the slow learner and those with some form of health impairment. In Ghana, persons with disabilities are educated and equipped with vocational and technical skills in both first and second cycle institutions. Some tertiary institutions in Ghana like the University of Education, University of Cape Coast, University of Ghana, Akropong College of education etc. have structures in place to make education for PLWD comfortable. It is rather sad that polytechnic education whose major aim is to train craftsmen and equip them with employable skills rather have not seriously considered putting in

place structures for PLWD to be trained. If the polytechnic could operationalize the disability policy, majority of PLWD trained in various institutions could be enrolled into polytechnic education to further their education or trained to acquire skills to earn their living.

3.5. Respondents Views on the Benefits of Polytechnics Education to Persons with Disability

Responding to questions on the benefits of polytechnics education to persons with disability, 17 out of 20 respondents representing 85% from all the institutions studied, opined that educating PLWD will create self-employment, reduce PLWD beggars from the streets of Ghana and reduction in unemployment rate in Ghana. This will lead to sustainable entrepreneurs, as confirmed by the U.S. Department of labour that, thousands of people with disabilities have been successful as small business owners. The 1990 national census also revealed that people with disabilities have a higher rate of self-employment and small business experience (12.2 per cent) than people without disabilities (7.8 per cent).

4. Conclusion

The research draws the conclusion that Polytechnics in Ghana have no institutional policy on education of persons with disabilities. Little has been done to make the polytechnic environment friendly to the disabled, as well as lack of records on professionals in the field of special education. The Polytechnic education basically, is to train career-focused graduates to be self-employed and contribute their quota to the nation's economy. It is rather sad that polytechnic education whose major aim is to train craftsmen and equip them with employable skills rather discriminate against PLWD. If the polytechnic could operationalize the disability policy, majority of PLWD trained in various institutions could be enrolled into polytechnic education to further their education or train to acquire higher skills to improve their living conditions. Therefore, it is important for persons with disabilities to be admitted into polytechnic programmes to receive practical and self sustainable skills for self employments to reduce the unemployment rate in Ghana. The study therefore confirms that facilities in many polytechnics are not friendly to people with disability and should be improved to pave the way for PLWD to access polytechnic education. Inspectors of education should monitor the implementation of institutional policy for educating persons with disability with employable skills, and to make the environment accessible as well as employ professionals to lecture in the field of special education in polytechnics.

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