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Inclusive Early Childhood Education: Focal Points from Research Evidence in Ghana

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Abstract:

The study is a qualitative research of a case study approach. Using interview as instrument the study sought to determine the extent to which an inclusive early childhood education centre; UNIPRA has succeeded in the attainment of the stipulations of Ghana's Inclusive education policy. In this direction, four early childhood educators working at the centre responded to questions on four thematic areas: measures taken by the centre towards inclusive early childhood education, benefits in their estimation associated with inclusive early childhood education, challenges that characterize the implementation of inclusive early childhood education, and suggestions provided to address challenges associated with inclusive early childhood education. Findings of this study revealed that some steps had been taken by the centre pursuant to inclusive education program. Also, destigmatization of persons with special needs, learning in a corporative environment, and ability of persons with special needs to learn the norms and practices of mainstream societies were some of the identified benefits emanating from the study relative to inclusive education. Among some of the challenges identified by participants regarding inclusive early childhood education practice were lack of parental involvement, limited trained personnel, and lack of resources. Perspectives of participants in the area of advancing inclusive early childhood education in Ghana and also caped as recommendations of this study included; training of staff and personnel involved in inclusive education, demonstration of commitment on the part of the different stakeholders in the area of inclusive education, as well as the provision of the necessary resources accompanying inclusive education in Ghana.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, early childhood education, missing link, special needs*

1. Introduction

In the year 2002, a presidential commission on educational reforms in Ghana headed by Professor Jophus Anamuah-Mensah presented a report on the reformation of Ghana's educational program. Part of the recommendations presented by the commission was the inclusion of early childhood education into mainstream Basic education. Early childhood education, since the adoption of the presidential education review commission's report, has been the entry point (Kindergarten 1) of Basic education in Ghana. Undoubtedly, Ghana has demonstrated commitment to the provision of early childhood education for all children within the early childhood bracket as captured in Ghana's free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) concept, and the Education Strategic Plan of 2003-2015. Indeed, the Education Strategic Plan states; that the Ministry of Education and Sports is required to provide education for those with physical and mental impairments, orphans, and those who are slow or fast learners, by including them, wherever possible, within the mainstream formal education system or, only when considered necessary, within special units or schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, Ghana, 2003). This policy ushered in a paradigm shift from special education as practiced in Ghana to inclusive education. About more than a decade (when the program was piloted), the question as to how this policy has succeeded in the implementation of inclusiveness within the Ghanaian educational setup with specific reference to early childhood education needs investigation, and this is exactly what this study sought to do.

Historically, Ghana has practiced parallel systems of education. One being mainstream formal schooling and one described as special schools for learners with special needs. It is on record that special education in Ghana dates back to 1936 which culminated in the establishment of the Akropong-Akuapim school for the deaf in 1946 (Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015). In Ghana, children with special needs do have access to early childhood education and efforts are made to incorporate such children into main stream formal education as captured in the education strategic plan stated above. In fact, Ghana's inclusive education (IE) policy does emphasize the need to provide inclusive education for all persons with mild and severe special educational needs at all levels of the Ghanaian educational setup, starting from kindergarten through tertiary to adult education. The overarching goal of this policy is the repackaging of the Ghanaian educational program represented in curriculum reform, processes of teaching and learning, professional

development of teachers, as well as the provision of teaching and learning materials to cater for all categories of learners whether able or with special needs. The catch phrase within this exercise is the restructuring of existing schools to accommodate those with special needs without compromising the quality of teaching and learning. Thus, inclusive education as captured in the IE policy of Ghana sought to redefine education delivery to respond and cater for learners with diverse needs within the framework of Education for All.

As to how the above intentions are realised, this study used the University of Education, Winneba, Practice School (UNIPRA); an inclusive early childhood education centre as a case study. University of Education, Winneba is a public tertiary institution (in Ghana) that offers programs in education-related fields. The University has a number of model schools in early childhood education. Among them is UNIPRA located at the South campus of the University which serves as the only public institution in the Winneba municipality offering inclusive education with emphasis on hearing impairment. Inclusive education at UNIPRA dates back to 2003 (Gadagbui, 2008). UNIPRA South campus consists of two early childhood education centres; one for mainstream early childhood education, and the other specifically for inclusive education. The latter served as the setting for this study. The UNIPRA inclusive early childhood education centre consists of two classes: Kindergarten (KG) 1, with a pupil population of 34 and four hearing impaired (38 pupils total), with KG 2 consisting of 30 pupils with a pupil with mild mental retardation (31 pupils in total).

Using interviews, the study served as a fact-finding exercise geared towards determining the extent to which UNIPRA's early childhood education program has been re-packaged to address the stipulations of Ghana's IE policy. Hence, the problem that the study sought to address specifically was the extent to which UNIPRA has achieved the desired objectives in the direction of inclusive early childhood education, and the lessons learnt from their experiences. The significance of this study is the anticipation of the adoption of the UNIPRA experiences by other early childhood centres interested in the advancement of inclusive early childhood educational practices at their respective centres.

2. History of Inclusive Education in Ghana

Ghana has demonstrated and continues to show commitment to the provision of equitable access to education for all persons of school going age regardless of their socio-cultural or ethnic backgrounds. This commitment is evidenced through a number of legislations enacted nationally, and Ghana being signatory to a number of international conventions in the protection and advancement of the rights of persons with special needs. Nationally, the 1992 Constitution of Ghana makes provision for free education to all children at the Basic level. In addition, legislations such as the Disability Act, 2006 and the Education Act, 2008, have all sought to ensure the protection of the rights of persons with special needs. Again, Ghana is signatory to a number of international conventions in the advancement of the needs of persons with disabilities. For example, Ghana is signatory to the Education for All Initiative, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Salamanca Accord, as well as the Dakar Framework for Action. The Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2009) for instance, is argued to have paved the way for inclusive education being the catalyst for addressing the challenges of exclusion and marginalization of persons with disabilities into mainstream education. Pursuant to attaining the objectives of inclusive education, a number of initiatives have been put in place by the people of Ghana. Among these include the Education Strategic Plan (2003-2015), Education Strategic Plan (2010-2020), and a Draft Policy on inclusive education (2003).

Ghana's Draft Policy on inclusive education set some specific targets aimed to be achieved within a certain timeframe (Gadagui, 2008). Gadagui opines, that the policy set to attain the following:

- Provision of training for all teachers in special education needs schools;
- Redesign infrastructure to accommodate pupils and students with special needs in schools;
- Organize sensitization workshops for parents and children with special needs;
- Incorporate training in special education needs in all teacher training college courses;
- Establish special education assessment centres in all districts [Ministry of Education, Science and Sports/Ghana Education Service, 2003-2015 (Gadagui, 2008)].

It is worthy of mention, that the target for the realization of the above initiatives and also the overall attainment of inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities into mainstream schools was to be achieved by 2015. UNIPRA being one of the schools that was piloted for this project therefore becomes a reliable case study to determine how the targets have been achieved.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Definition of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is variedly defined but there is consensus that it centres on the inclusion of learners regardless of their background in mainstream education. For example, Ainscow and Moss (2002) define inclusion as the process of increasing the presence and participation of all learners in schools devoid of exclusion and marginalization. For the authors inclusion is a manifestation of a conscious effort to involve children at risk in mainstream schools. For Tomlinson (1996), inclusion is not just about placing students with disabilities in mainstream schools, instead it is a recognition that children have special needs, hence, the training of teachers to be able to facilitate the learning of all children despite their backgrounds and needs.

The above position is shared by Evans (1998), who is of the view that inclusive education transcends the practice of moving children with special needs to fit into normal school settings to providing supplemental support to such children to be able to meet their developmental needs. In describing inclusive education, Salend (2001) indicates that it is a philosophical orientation that brings

students, families and community members together for the sole aim of creating acceptance, belonging, and a sense of community. Clearly, these descriptions present inclusive education as a concept of integrating learners with special needs into regular classrooms settings devoid of whether they meet traditional curricular standards.

Aside the above characterization of inclusive education, there are some studies such as Ashman (2009) who postulated that inclusive education does centre on a sense of belonging as well as having the rights in having all the qualities to fit into a group. This view is held by Ballard (2003); MacArthur, Purdue, and Ballard (2003), who have also argued that inclusive education is concerned with providing appropriate responses to a broad array of learning needs for all children both in the formal and informal sectors. Kaur and Arora (2014) on their part opine, that for inclusive education to be realized, three factors must be reached: the physical presence of students with disabilities in mainstream schools, their full and active participation within the school life, and their achievement of the highest standards that enable them to develop new skills (p.59). In all, these descriptions present inclusive education as one that hinges on integration.

3.2. The Case for Inclusive Education

The case for inclusive education abounds. The World Declaration for Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, (1990), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) have been emphatic on the importance of early childhood education for all children including those with special needs. Studies such as those by MacArthur, et al (2003), and Purdue (2004) have argued that inclusive education is in line with the realization of the rights of every child. Again, studies by Ainscow and Moss (2002), Ballard (2003), Mortimore (2011) have all described inclusive education as one of social justice, equity, equality, and a humanness issue. These studies do present inclusive education as a concept that fulfils the rights of pupils with special needs. In spite of these prescriptions, for others such as Wing (2007) there is the need for children with special needs to be separated from others. Wing stresses, that children with special needs require their own space, and they learn better that way. This argument is reinforced by concerns of families as revealed in a study by Diamond, Hestenes, and O'Connor, (1994) about the ability of Early Childhood programs to meet the needs of children who are developing typically as well as those with developmental delays. These concerns notwithstanding, there is an overwhelming support for inclusive education. Indeed, Article 53 of the Salamanca Framework for Action specifically calls for programs at the pre-school level to recognise the principle of inclusion and develop a comprehensive way by combining pre-school activities and early childhood health care.

3.3. Challenges Associated with Inclusive Education

Among the challenges associated with inclusive education as revealed in the literature were lack of resources in implementing inclusive education programs, lack of training on the part of educators, and the labelling of some learners as disabled. Commenting on arguments made in support of non-practice of inclusive education at the early childhood level, McLeskey and Waldron (2011) observe that the lack of resources and training for early childhood centres has been the fundamental argument and justification used as a basis for opposing moves towards inclusiveness at that level. Kochnar, West, and Taymans (2000) argue that many general educators are fearful, and feel unprepared to handle students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Limited resources especially in the area of training of teachers to handle learners with special needs, has always been an issue of concern for advocates of inclusive education. This challenge is reiterated in the concern raised by Kearney and Kane (2006) who make the argument that many classroom teachers are interested and willing to ensure the achievement of all learners regardless of their background but these teachers do lack the knowledge and support relative to adapting curriculum to suit the abilities of these diverse learners. Still on the limitation of teacher expertise in inclusive education, O'Brien (2001) makes the case for the need to train more teachers capable of being able to cater for all children including those with special needs.

Aside lack of resources and teacher training, McCartney (2008) makes the case that viewing children as "disabled" or "special" in themselves feeds to the restrictions and barriers that hinders the effective participation of those described as such (special needs) in the learning process. Hence, McCartney calls for teacher education programs that are designed to educate teachers and specialists to be consistent with the aspirations of advancing inclusiveness in the classroom.

3.4. Experiences of Some Nations

Experiences of inclusive education in two countries; India, and the United Kingdom (UK) relative to happenings in Ghana were reviewed in the literature. At India, Kaur and Aurora (2014) argue that India has had an inclusive education policy for some time but majority of children with special needs do not receive such education. The authors argue that the reason for such situation is the lack of affordability and awareness on the kind of educational choices available for most children, and they do stress that India has reached a tipping point where it is not educationally and morally acceptable for children to be separated from those with special needs.

The Indian experience is different from what pertains in the United Kingdom as revealed in a study by Lieber, Capell, Sandall, Wolfberg, Horn, and Beckman, (1998). In this study, Lieber, et al attest to how collaborative relationships among parents and teachers in a UK setting led to an autistic child who enrolled in a pre-school managed well in a mainstream early childhood setting due to the positive attitude of teachers and parents. These two experiences; India, and the United Kingdom though limited in scope are relevant to the Ghanaian experience because they do affirm the need for commitment on the part of stakeholders for inclusive education to become a reality.

4. Research Questions

- 1) What transformational measures have been taken by UNIPRA in the realization of inclusive early childhood education?
- 2) What benefits are associated with inclusive early childhood education based on perspectives of early childhood educators at UNIPRA?
- 3) What challenges are faced at UNIPRA in the implementation of inclusive early childhood education?
- 4) What suggestions are prescribed by early childhood educators at UNIPRA in the implementation of inclusive early childhood education?

5. Research Methodology

The study is a qualitative research of a case study approach. A case study as described by Gerring (2007) is one where a single case is selected for detailed study aimed at unravelling the activities and circumstances that pertain to the selected case relative to the problem under study. UNIPRA being an institution with experience in inclusive early childhood education was selected for the study. The centre was deemed appropriate because it is among schools that are engaged in inclusive early childhood education in Ghana, and also it is one of the very few schools that partook in the piloting of Ghana's inclusive early childhood education program.

Purposive sampling procedure was adopted for the research. This is because UNIPRA met all three criteria for qualification namely: partaking in the piloting of Ghana's inclusive education program, currently engages in inclusive education, and also an early childhood institution.

The instrument for data collection was semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The UNIPRA inclusive early childhood education centre as indicated previously consists of two Kindergarten classes. The centre is one of the different education programs of the UNIPRA school complex. The complex consists of an early childhood education centre, a Primary School (Class 1 – Class 6), and a Junior High School. The inclusive early childhood centre served as the setting for this study and as such participants were drawn specifically from that centre. Staff strength of the centre consisted of a Head teacher who doubles as the Head for the Primary and Junior High schools, two Early Childhood Educators, each for KG 1 and KG 2, and an Attendant assisting KG 1. Each of the Educators including the Head teacher has a background in early childhood education as well as Special Education. The Attendant has a Senior High School certificate with some training in Sign Language and was deaf and dumb.

Prior to the conduct of the study, a letter asking for permission was sent to the Head of the school. The arrangement was that the researcher interviews each of the two Early Childhood Educators, and the Head teacher separately. The Attendant was interviewed using an interpreter also on a different day. Interviews were done at least for one hour each for three days for the three Educators except the Attendant which lasted for just an hour in a day. The reason for the difference was that most of the responses relative to the questions asked were not different from those provided by the Educators. For the sake of anonymity, it was agreed that participants' names be concealed and instead identified by their positions in school. Hence, participants were identified as KG 1 Educator, KG 2 Educator, Head teacher, and Attendant

Interview questions were bothered on measures taken by UNIPRA regarding the advancement of inclusive education as contained in Ghana's IE policy. Responses were tape recorded by a research assistant pursuing a Master's Degree (MPHIL in Early Childhood Education) at the University of Education, Winneba. After the tape recordings, the findings were then transcribed by a transcriptions expert with the results categorized under the thematic areas that guided the research questions.

6. Results and Discussions

Four thematic issues emerged from the findings and were grouped under the following headings; transformational measures in inclusive education, benefits of inclusive early childhood education, challenges in the practice of inclusive early childhood education, and suggestions in advancing inclusive early childhood education.

6.1. Transformational Measures in Inclusive Education

The first research question of this study sought to determine what measures had been taken by UNIPRA in the area of advancing inclusive early childhood education at the centre. In this regard, responses centred on participants' perspectives of what constitutes inclusive education, measures taken relative to provision of inclusive early childhood education, training and recruitment of personnel, and modification of physical infrastructure and curricular to address the needs of learners with special needs.

Regarding what constitutes inclusive education, responses by participants were not very different from what the literature reviewed revealed. For example, the Head teacher described inclusive education as:

- What I know about inclusive education is putting children with disabilities under the same umbrella with those without disabilities so that those without any disabilities would provide assistance to the children with disabilities. With inclusive education, it is difficult for one to identify that this child is disabled or not. This school for example is specially for children with hearing impairments but when we put these children together with the normal peers it would be difficult for you to differentiate them.

The above perspective presents inclusive education as one where learners with special needs are assisted by those without special needs. The concept of togetherness notwithstanding differences in the needs of learners was revealing in the responses of the other participants. For example, regarding how teaching was conducted at an inclusive centre, the KG 1 Educator had this to say: *You have to use the same mode of teaching but modified. For instance, I teach and interpret (sign) at the same time which is another modified way of teaching. This means one teaches whiles doing everything.*

Regarding steps taken by the centre towards inclusiveness, it was revealed that some modifications had been made by the centre. These among others included the following:

- i. The mandate of the centre; provision of inclusive education for all learners at the early childhood level;
- ii. Recruitment of staff with Special Education background to teach at the centre;
- iii. Non- participation in subjects such as French and Ghanaian language (modification of curriculum);
- iv. Sensitization of the public on the need to bring their children to school even if they have special needs;
- v. Provision of some assistive aids by the Ghana Education Service for the purposes of advancing inclusive education at the centre, and
- vi. Availability of special assessment methods for learners with special needs.

Workshops and in-service training for staff and personnel of the centre according to participants were non-existent. These notwithstanding, it is convenient however, to conclude that by the mandate and practices of the UNIPRA Inclusive Early Childhood Education Centre, as well as the steps taken by that Centre, it can be described as an inclusive education program.

6.2. Benefits of Inclusive Early Childhood Education

There was an overwhelming endorsement of benefits associated with inclusive education by participants of this study. Such benefits according to participants spanned from the de-stigmatization of persons with special needs, efficiency in learning, especially for children with special needs, means of helping learners with special needs to behave in a socially accepted manner, and most especially inclusive education being an avenue for sign language learning. The response below by KG1 Educator points to some these benefits:

- Inclusive education in my view helps to re-orient those without disabilities especially their mentality of children with special needs. For instance, some people may think disability is a contagious disease but when they mingle with children with special needs they then get to think otherwise. Inclusive education educates children with special needs to know that even though they are handicapped in a way, they can still learn something. It also aids the hearing impaired to feel that they are also part of the community. They get the feeling of belongingness. Moreover, it helps them to socialize among others thereby befriending people, learning manners and ethics from these people unlike when you go to our traditional schools you could see them (hearing impaired) dragging their feet.

The UNIPRA Inclusive Education Centre in the eyes of the public was as an institution for sign language learning even though its mandate transcends that. This perspective was shared by the Head teacher:

- Most parents are really thrilled to see their kids learning the sign language. They are very happy to send their wards here. They have termed the sign language as “Missing Link”. Only few of them think that bringing their kids would bring problem to them especially with their kids learning but it is not like that. This school was started in a small room by one man named Professor Charnel. He came on a mission to this place and started this school. During those times people were eager to send their children here because of the mode of teaching.

Again, as part of the benefits accompanying inclusive education, it was also described as a program that did not only benefit children with special needs, but also children without such needs. It was viewed as a better educational option relative to normal schools. This perspective was shared by KG 2 Educator:

- Sign language benefits regular or normal children. They pick the signs up from the interpreter and use it to communicate with the hearing impaired and this makes them feel that the normal children are part of them. As compared to segregated schools, the main reason is that these children will come into the community with some well-behaved manners. When they (Special needs learners) are in the inclusive education settings, they learn norms, morals, values and ethics and most importantly they socialize with the normal children by learning to know the dos and don'ts of the community. This makes them know their way of living very well in the communities. When you go to the hearing-impaired schools, you will see children dragging their feet on the ground which they do not do here because they are cautioned to walk properly. I think the merits of an inclusive setting outweighs the demerits.

6.3. Challenges of Inclusive Education

Despite the number of benefits associated with inclusive education as enumerated by participants of this study, the challenges hindering the advancement of this form of education also emanating from participants' responses were enormous. Some of these challenges included but not limited to lack of teachers as revealed in the number of Educators at the Centre, large class sizes, lack of assistive devices, poor parental involvement and support, and lack of commitment on the part of policy makers, especially the Ghana Education Service in the promotion of inclusive education at the UNIPRA Early Childhood Centre. For instance, the Attendant bemoaned the large class sizes that had to be managed. A class size of more than 34 as in KG 1 with four special needs pupils was deemed inappropriate. This concern was reiterated by the Head teacher who argued that in an inclusive setting, teaching one pupil is equivalent to teaching 10 pupils, hence, with situations of 34 pupils and four pupils with special needs makes teaching and learning difficult.

Again, sitting arrangement in classrooms was also considered a challenge due to lack of space. One of the participants summed the whole policy of Inclusive Education as pertains to the UNIPRA Centre as one that lacks focus. The Educator described the situation as:

- As at now I can say that they (policy makers) have lost the focus on inclusive education. If we tell you, we are practicing inclusive education then I will say we are lying. What we do is one person doing everything, from teaching to note taking, to

signing, and recording. We even find it very difficult to do remedial lessons for pupils who do not catch up. This school was a model inclusive education school, but they (policy makers) did not pay attention and now we have lost the focus. It would be possible if they are committed and also provide us with the necessary training to become effective inclusive educators. You can ask yourself how many policy makers have step foot here; the answer is no one.

The above concern was reiterated by the Head teacher:

- One of the major challenges as you can see is staffing. We have these 34 children in KG1 with four hearing impaired. At times, you wished you had an interpreter. Apart from the class teacher doing the interpreting, teaching while interpreting is quite difficult so there is a need to get an interpreter separately, as well as note taker because they are not like the visually impaired who can take their notes through hearing. For them they cannot hear whatever you say, you may write and clean without they taking notice. You may also be signing and teaching at the same time, sometime you may forget yourself and may be signing more than talking or otherwise. This means some may benefit while others would not.

There were also concerns with parental involvement in the education of children with special needs. Some of these concerns can be seen in the response by KG 1 Educator:

- Most parents cannot talk when they bring their children to school. And the sign language at home is totally different from that in school which is the formal way. Additionally, some children come with other problems such as bed wetting, some cannot tell you when they want to visit nature's call and some also come with different eating habits so we need the parents' collaboration. Sometimes you will call them but they will not come. There are certain times you have to tell the parents what and how to take their wards through when they are in the house in other to assist us but they will not do it. When we call for meetings they never show up. Parents sometimes leave their children on the roadside for them to come to school themselves and that is the farthest they (parents) can go. And when they come you cannot send them back to the house. For instance, if you need money for a particular thing it would be very hard to turn the children back to their homes because how are they going to explain/interpret what you have said to their parents, how can they talk to them? And it becomes a challenge especially when they are growing.

6.4. Recommendations by Participants

A number of suggestions were provided by participants in the direction of how inclusive early childhood education can be improved at the UNIPRA centre. Most of these suggestions were directed towards the challenges spelt out by the participants of which included the need to do the following:

- 1) Recruitment of more staff as in Educators, Interpreters and Note Takers;
- 2) Provision of resources such as photocopier machines and projectors;
- 3) Parental involvement;
- 4) Provision of incentives for Inclusive Early Childhood Educators;
- 5) In-service training for Inclusive Early Childhood Educators;
- 6) Commitment on the part of Ghana and the Ghana Education Service for that matter towards inclusive education, and
- 7) Sensitization of the general public on the usefulness and benefits associated with inclusive education.

Some of the above recommendations were captured in a response by the Head teacher:

- Firstly, we need to employ more personnel. Secondly, we need to conduct more in-service training and workshops for these personnel. Thirdly, providing adequate/needed resources especially electricity, computers, CCTV, projectors and others to make them have audio-visual training and concrete learning. Additionally, provision of buses for each school as well as incentives for the teachers. We all close at 1:30pm and suppose I have a hearing impaired in my class who could not finish his or her lessons during the day and if I do not think there is a need to stay back and assist this child and the parents are insisting that this child should come home then I should have stayed in and help but where are the incentives? Maybe someone would pick me after school hours but if I decide to stay, then the person would leave me behind for me to pick a cab and at the end of the month I do not get anything to add up. The incentive is not there and this does not give us much motivation. Teachers are resourceful in putting a lot of things together but without any incentive no one would be willing to go further because at times it cost a lot of money. Paying more than what you gain is not advisable. Let me come back to the facilities again. When you go to KG1, that small room contains 38 children which is not supposed to be like that. No play grounds for the children. The learning in KG level has now become so structured that the children cannot have enough play areas hence, the facilities there are not conducive for inclusive education. Again, there is no electricity. Now we are having these laptops provided by government which has become useless because there is no electricity here. There comes a time during storytelling when I need to use my laptop and projector to project for the children. But when there is no electricity, how do I do it? I think we need to be serious if we really want to make inclusive education to work.

In all, a summary of suggestions by participants of this study relative to an effective inclusive early childhood education program was the need for a demonstration of commitment by the different players in the inclusive early childhood educational enterprise especially in the area of resource availability.

7. Conclusion, Recommendations, and Suggestions

The goal that underpinned this study was a determination of the extent to which the University of Education, Winneba Practice School (UNIPRA) had succeeded in the realization of the stipulations of Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy (2003). This objective was informed by UNIPRA being a pilot centre thus a reference institution in pursuance of Ghana's inclusive education program. As previously indicated in this study the target year for full role out of Universal Inclusive Basic Education Program in Ghana was pegged at 2015. Hence, experiences in the area of inclusive education of UNIPRA in the area of what is done by the centre, benefits associated with that program, challenges the centre is confronted with, and suggestions proffered by individuals involved in the area of inclusive education becomes an important source of information in the agenda of Universal Inclusive Education, particularly in Ghana.

Conceptually, as revealed in the responses of Educators at the UNIPRA inclusive early childhood centre who doubled as participants of this study, there was evidence of inclusiveness in the education of children with special needs and those without such needs. The mandate, practices and perspectives of Educators at the study centre is in tune with what the literature stipulates; modification of existing centres to accommodate all sects of learners notwithstanding their backgrounds. However, the extent to which such modifications were done to promote effectiveness and efficiency in teaching and learning was what in the case of the UNIPRA experience as per responses of participants can be described as inadequate. Inclusive education as revealed in the literature reviewed in this study transcends policy formulation to commitment on the part of the various stakeholders involved in that enterprise. The Indian and United Kingdom experiences as discussed in the literature and also fitting into the findings of this study revealed that though inclusive education as a policy in the case of Ghana has been existent for quite some time, its benefits are short changed due to lack of resources and commitment on the part of the stakeholders involved. Hence, it is the conclusion of this study, that for inclusive education to be of success in Ghana, there is the need for partnership and corporation on the part of the different stakeholders as in the case of the UK experience discussed in the literature reviewed for this study.

The benefits of inclusive education as per the findings of this study definitely outweigh the demerits. The question, however is, how can a nation like Ghana which has demonstrated commitment in the advancement of inclusive education as evidenced in a policy framework (Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy, 2003) make it a reality? This study, even though limited in scope brings to the fore the experiences of a Centre that has been engaged in inclusive education and that lessons drawn from this single Centre though limited to the Centre could also inform work at similar institutions determined to pursue inclusive education programs.

As a result, it is the position of this study thus emanating from the findings of the study that inclusive education turns to lose its essence and becomes rhetoric when enough resources are not expended on such programs. And this means stakeholders will have to demonstrate commitment through engagement and collaboration especially in the area of information sharing and the provision of resources. Stakeholders especially the general public need to be educated on the benefits of inclusive education not only for children with special needs but also colleagues without such needs. This study undoubtedly contributes to such efforts.

Again, it is also the recommendation of this study that future research in the area of inclusive education should look at parental perspectives in the area of the effectiveness of inclusive education, strategies for advancing inclusive education, inclusive education at the higher education level, comparison of inclusive education in Ghana and other jurisdictions, and steps for financing inclusive education especially in third world or developing countries. It is evident that this study looks skewed in the direction of children with hearing impairment due to the mandate of the study area, but it still does not deviate from providing a snapshot of experiences of an inclusive early childhood education centre, and also has contributed to the conversation in the area of making universal inclusive education program in Ghana possible.

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