

PARENTAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY IN SELECTED BASIC SCHOOLS IN CAPE COAST

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Abstract

This paper sought to examine parental attitude towards the education of children with intellectual disability in selected Basic Schools in Cape Coast. A descriptive survey design was employed for the study. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to illicit qualitative responses from 15 parents of children with intellectual disability. The study focused on children with mild to moderate intellectual difficulty. The children were selected through simple random and purposive means and then through snowballing; the parents were reached and interviewed. From the study, majority of parents were convinced that their children could not benefit from formal education within the regular school system, but obliged to send them to school, so as to share the taxing responsibility of looking after such children, with the teachers. Besides, parents complained of not having access to the right support for their children. It was recommended that the Special Education Division of the Ministry of Education should provide material support to these special needs children, including how parents could access available rehabilitation centres for their children. Also, the Ghana Education Service should organize workshops for parents and teachers, to educate both parties on how to collaborate to educate children with intellectual disability.

Key Words: *attitudes, intellectual disability, education, basic schools*

Introduction

Background

The “Ghana Education Strategic Plan (ESP) has a strategic plan to provide education to the excluded ... by including them, wherever possible within the mainstream formal system or, only when considered necessary, within special units or schools (Education Sector Report, 2015)”.

In Ghana there are 14 government schools for children with intellectual disability, with an enrolment of 1262 (ESP, 2015). However the population of children with intellectual disability was 24,658,823, pegged at 15.2 of the population of Ghana; out of which 5,299,884 never attended school. The report revealed that majority of persons with no formal education in Ghana was those with intellectual disability (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). Botts and Owusu (2013) in a study of the state of inclusive education revealed that most children with intellectual and developmental disabilities were most often not in school, as they did not have access to education.

The Government of Ghana has made some efforts towards the education of children with disabilities. Various policies have been implemented to ensure that the rights of children with disability are guaranteed, especially the right to education. Inclusive education was implemented on pilot basis, till the year 2015, when the inclusive education act was passed. Inclusive education meant that every person who attended an educational institution was entitled to equal access to learning, achievement and pursuit of excellence in every aspect of education that transcends the idea of physical location. The Education Act of 2008 and 2015 of Ghana indicate that every District Assembly must ensure that schools deliver education to children with special needs. The policy therefore explains that all persons with special needs needed to have access to equal opportunities for learning irrespective of whether it was in a special or regular school.

The Education Acts also enjoined parents to take advantage of inclusive education facilities to send their children with special needs to an appropriate educational facility. Despite these efforts, education of children with disabilities, including children with intellectual disabilities have undergone several challenges. Parental attitudes and involvement have been cited as one of the numerous factors that influence the education of children. Intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour. These limitations affect the personal and educational life of the children. Many of these children as well, tend to face behavioural challenges. Catering for such children mostly poses strenuous financial, emotional and social burdens on parents (Badu, 2016). The burden and cost of supplying the necessary educational and rehabilitation support for these learners mostly fall on their parents. A study by Anthony (2009) indicates that most societies including parents and the education system, view children with intellectual disability as useless and therefore educating them is a waste of resources.

Anthony (2009) further revealed that the education of children with intellectual disability was mostly curtailed as a result of negative societal beliefs about disability, lack of resources to support the education of most children with intellectual disability. Moreso is the lack of commitment of successive governments to implement policies that support the education of children with disabilities including those with intellectual disabilities. The study therefore seeks to find out about parental attitudes concerning the education of children with intellectual disability in selected basic schools in Cape Coast in the Central Region of Ghana.

It is envisaged that the outcome of the study will conscientise parents of the children with intellectual disability about the need for them to get more committed to supporting the education of their wards. Parental involvement in the education of their wards with such special needs will illicit dedication to duty on the part of care givers and teachers towards these children. Through the publication of this piece of research work, policy makers such as the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service would become aware of parental attitude towards the education of children with intellectual disability. These policy makers would then be compelled to aid parents and schools with the right support for the education of such children.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to find out about parental attitude towards the education of children with intellectual disability in selected Basic Schools in Cape Coast

Objectives

This study found out about:

1. Concerns of parents about the education of children with intellectual disability in selected Basic Schools in Cape Coast
2. Parental support towards the education of children with intellectual disability in selected Basic Schools in Cape Coast

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the concerns of parents about the education of children with intellectual disability in selected Basic Schools in Cape Coast
2. How do parents support the education of children with intellectual disability in selected Basic Schools in Cape Coast?

Delimitations

The study was confined to children with intellectual disability in fifteen selected basic schools in Cape Coast. It covered Basic one to nine. It was focused on the concerns expressed by parents regarding the education of their wards with disability.

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive survey design was employed for the study. In the opinion of Fraenkel and Wallen (2000), the purpose of descriptive research is to observe, describe and document aspects of a phenomenon as it naturally occurs. One purpose for the choice of a survey design was to generalise from a sample to a population so that inferences could be made about some characteristics, with regard to the concerns of parents about the education of children with intellectual disability in selected Basic Schools in Cape Coast.

Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to solicit responses from parents. Robson (1993) mentioned that when employing the semi-structured interviews, “the interviewers have their shopping list of topics and want to get response to them, but as a matter of tactics, they have greater freedom in the sequencing of questions in their exact wording; and in the amount of time and attention given to different topics”. A semi-structured interview for the parents was intended to elicit descriptive and in-depth data from participants, who in their own words, responded to questions posed by the interviewer (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

Population

The population for the study was twenty-one (21) parents of children with intellectual disabilities across the fifteen (15) selected schools in the Cape Coast Municipality.

Sample and sampling Technique

Fifteen (15) parents of children with disabilities were either randomly or purposively selected to constitute the sample for the study. The two sampling techniques were chosen because there was at least a child with mild to moderate intellectual disability in the selected schools for the study. In schools where more than one child with intellectual disability was found, a simple random

sampling technique was used to select the child, and for that matter, the parent. Where there was only one child with intellectual disability in a school, purposive sampling technique was employed to select the child, and by extension, the parent. The parents were then reached through snowballing.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data was made through the thematic approach. After interviewing the respondents, the interview recordings were transcribed. The whole interview was read first and classified into themes while notes were taken of the most striking aspects related to the purpose of the study. Content analysis was done whereby data were reduced by means of constructed themes. Themes were grouped together by comments that seemed to belong together. These themes were then used to generate contextually and practically appropriate recommendations in order to ultimately understand the concerns of parents about the education of children with intellectual disability in selected Basic Schools in Cape Coast.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

The results of the study were presented based on the research questions posed. The interviews are grouped into themes and are discussed below:

Research Question One

What are the concerns of parents about the education of children with intellectual disability in selected Basic Schools in Cape Coast?

From the responses of the parents, most children with intellectual disability did not have access to education, as teaching and learning was mostly not tailored to meet their learning needs. Most parents raised concerns that most teachers did not spend time teaching their children as compared to the typically developing peers of such children with intellectual difficulty. The responses given by the parents also revealed that some children with intellectual disability remained unidentified and undiagnosed; receiving late interventional support as a result. These lapses come from limited knowledge about issues pertaining to special education on the part of teachers.

However deductions can be made from some parents that, even though majority of their children did not have their academic needs being met, they preferred their children to be enrolled in the basic schools, as they go to interact with their typically developing peers. This boosted social inclusion of their children with intellectual disabilities.

One respondent revealed that,

“It’s a big problem; there is an entire special education division responsible for my child’s school. But he does not benefit from it. They are not able to help him. He is just in the school. They keep repeating him because he does not do well in class. But no effort is made to try to even teach him so he understands. It’s sad; his age mates are all ahead of him. If the Special Education Division of the Ghana Education Service could be equipped to even work with his school to ensure he is taught to his understanding, I would be grateful”.

Another respondent remarked,

“My daughter has been attending her school for good six years, she was not doing well but is in JHS one, cannot read or write, needs help in doing daily tasks, so I took the initiative to go and seek help for her privately. It was then I got to know she has this intellectual disability. I wept, because if I had known we could have helped her early. The school too did not detect anything. It means the school authorities are not even knowledgeable about children, including my child, so she has just been in school receiving no help all these years; can you imagine! The school should have known better”

One more parent noted:

“As for my daughter learning anything in school like reading, writing, and so on, I have given up. The teachers do not have time to teach her; they spend all their time with the other children. My child is only seen as useless. The only reason I let her go to school is because she gets to socialize with her peers who do not have any disability. So she gets to behave well and learn good skills from them”.

Clearly, the foregoing submissions made demonstrate the concerns of parents regarding the education of their wards with intellectual disability. The concerns expressed by parents centered on apathy on the part of teachers towards the learning needs of such children, indifferent attitude and lack of support from the special education agencies towards the education of children with intellectual disability and inadequacy of skill by the teachers to make such children out in their classrooms. Parents interviewed remarked that their wards were sent to

school just for them to socialize, even though they were convinced that their children might not benefit from the teaching and learning in the classrooms.

Research Question Two

How do parents support the education of children with intellectual disability in selected Basic Schools in Cape Coast?

From the interview responses, most of the parents revealed that the cost of providing education to include; paying of fees, cost of teaching materials, seeking for help from specialist like special educators, speech therapists for their children, mainly become their responsibility, even though they could not afford such services to their wards. As parents, they have no external support from government or non-governmental organisations.

Majority of the parents interviewed also revealed that their children did not have access to professionally trained special education teachers in the basic schools to support the educational needs of their children, as most teachers had limited skills in teaching the children with intellectual disability. It can therefore be deduced from the responses of the parents that most children with intellectual disabilities had little or no professional, financial, material support to enhance their education in the basic schools.

A respondent recounted;

“My child had been in his school for six good years, without any meaningful support. He has not been doing well. It took my own effort to take him to seek help from a clinical psychologist, get a private special education teacher and speech therapist to help my child. All these things I have to pay myself and it costs a lot of money. There is no support from government or any organization. So you see, if I do not look for money to provide all these things for my child then he will just be there in the school. This is because; he does not get any meaningful help from his own school”.

Another Parent revealed,

“I sent my child to several schools. Every school I send him, the only condition for which they admit my son is when I agree to bring an attendant who will teach him. So in practicality, the school only enrolls my child; nothing else. I have to go the extra mile to pay for an attendant who even teaches my child in school, because the teacher does not have time to spend teaching him when he is teaching the children without disability. The attendant is also not professionally trained.

But what can I do? There is no help from anywhere. I wish the government can assign special teachers to every school where there are children like mine, so that they can help them. The cost is too much”

A parent also submitted:

“I have been told by the headmistress in my son’s school that he needs a speech therapist and a special education teacher to give him extra classes, but I cannot afford it. So he just goes to the school, he does not learn anything, he does no class work or homework, the teachers have tried but they do not really know what to do with him. I know they are trying their best for him, but it is never like when he has actual specialist taking care of him”.

Even though parents mentioned from the responses that they offer material and expert support to their children, it can be inferred from the responses made by the parents that, they do not have enough resources to support their children. According to the responses of the parents, most of the basic schools lacked the resources to support the educational needs of the children and therefore raised the concern for the need for trained special educators to be assigned to the various schools to support parents and for that matter, their children with intellectual disability. Parents also raised concerns for financial support to be provided to them to enable them pay for the support services their children need towards their education.

Discussions

The study revealed various concerns of parents regarding the education of their children with intellectual disability in selected basic schools in Cape Coast. Key among them was the fact that teachers became indifferent towards their children, as they could not offer the level of support that the teachers needed. The fact however is that, children with special needs tend to experience neglect if teachers and Parents do not collaborate and share responsibility over such children. The role of parents is therefore indispensable in the education of their wards with intellectual difficulty. Erford, House, and Martin, (2003) remarked that understanding the concerns and perspectives of these parents is essential to working with them effectively as partners in their children's education. For instance, parents can provide useful information in assessment of functional skills often otherwise inaccessible to the professional (Mohsin, 2009). Parents as well remarked that they had to allow their children having special needs to go to school just to ensure their socialisation with their non-disabled peers, since they were not sure the environment could support their learning needs.

Regarding parental support for the education of their children with intellectual disability, parents mentioned that even though they offer a level of support to their wards in form of enrolling them in schools, providing them with food, shelter and school uniform, their support is limited as they do not have enough resources and external support to meet the needs of their children. Besides, parents complained about the cost of such resources, which bring untold financial hardships on their families. Parents have unique influence on their child's acquisition of new skills through their continual and powerful presence in their child's life. Supports and interventions enhancing parents' quality of life identified by research include behavioural intervention, taught positive coping skills, management of expressed emotion, access to social supports and knowledge and education about the diagnosis (Kilic, Gencdogan, Bag & Arican., 2013; Hastings & Brown., 2014).

Where resources of parents are not enough to support their children with intellectual disability, such parents tend to experience stress and despair in their effort to see their special needs children through education. For example, the lack of information, accessibility and availability of services or the lack of available services have been found to be the cause of stress and anxiety for parents (Kilic et al., 2013; Whiting, 2014). The unavailability of supports in early childhood results in parents taking on both educational and caring roles which increase stress, anxiety and depression (Kilic et al., 2013). This has implications for a variety of social, financial and emotional aspects of the parents' and families' lives (Caples & Sweeney, 2010; Souza & Boemer, 2003 as cited in Martins & Couto, 2014).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study it is recommended that the Ministry of Education should organize periodic sensitization and training programmes for teachers and parents on how to collaborate in supporting each other towards the education of the intellectually difficult. Besides, the Ministry should periodically provide material support to teachers and parents, to meet the teaching and learning needs of children with intellectual disability.

The study revealed that most schools lacked facilities and the services of required professionals to support the needs of the children. It is suggested that, the Ghana Education Service, assign resource teachers to include; psychiatrists, psychologists, the school nurse and occupational therapists specially trained in the area of intellectual disability to support the intellectually difficult children and their teachers in their respective schools.

Recommendations are also made for the Ghana Education Service to have resource rooms to be created for children with intellectual disability, with the necessary teaching and learning materials to aid in the educational development of the children

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