



Towards an exclusive curriculum for pupils with disabilities in regular schools in Ghana

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Abstract

In order to achieve successful inclusion of pupils with disabilities in regular schools, there is the need for the adaptation of the school curriculum. The understanding is that teachers are supposed to be aware of this diversity of children in the classroom and make provisions to satisfy the needs of these children with special needs. This study, however, has observed that, at Yilo Krobo district that, since 2009/2010 academic year, these requirements are mostly not available in regular schools where pupils with disabilities find themselves. The curriculum to which these children are exposed to is purposefully developed for the "normal" children with no adaptations and modifications to meet the needs of the children living with disability. This study adopted a cross-sectional design. A sample of 90 participants from 13 primary schools was selected using a simple random sampling technique. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics to calculate frequencies and their corresponding percentage value. Findings from the study were: a high proportion of the respondents (50.1%) stated that, the content of the curriculum is not adapted to suit pupils with disabilities in regular schools. Based on the findings it was recommended that in-service training workshops should be organised for teachers to adapt the curriculum so as to enable pupils with disabilities participate in the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: adaptations, disability, curriculum, inclusion, assessment, regular schools

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Public Interest Statement

An all exclusive curriculum has been a debate across Ghanaian learning institutions to include the needs for learners living with disabilities. This study, however, advocates for possible adaptations that teachers can make to the curriculum to suit learners with disabilities.

Introduction

Education is a right to every individual in Ghana irrespective of the tribe, religion, race, ability and disability; one must have access to formal education. According to constitution of the Republic of Ghana:

all persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities and with a view of achieving the full realization of that right, Basic education shall be free compulsory education and available to all.

In line with this, pupils with disabilities were educated in institutions referred to as special schools. These special schools were established to address the unique needs of children with disabilities. Because of this objective as well as societal perception about children with disabilities, special schools have worked alongside regular schools and were mostly called segregated schools. These schools do not give opportunities to pupils with disabilities to relate with the non-disable peers in order to acquire age appropriate behaviours and skills to socialize. Besides, segregated schools for pupils with disabilities can be a form of discrimination against them as they may perceive segregation as a situation where they are not equal to their peers in the regular schools. (Ocloo, Hayford, Agbeke, Gadagbui, Avoke, Boison, and Essel, 2002).

The Ministry of Education's (MOE), Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2003-2015, and its extension from 2010-2020 is to achieve 100% inclusion of children with non-severe special educational needs into mainstream schools by 2020. The inclusive education plan identifies under policy objectives the provision of equitable educational opportunity (EA7) which states that; children with disabilities should be integrated in mainstream schools by 2020 "and the prioritization of the disadvantaged in the society (EA9) which also requires that; an inclusive education system be achieved by 2020, including boys and girls with disabilities integrated into mainstream schools". As part of the Millennium Development Goals, all children with disabilities should receive quality inclusive education with appropriate support to ensure that each of them reaches the highest potential by 2015 (Wolfensohn 2000, cited in Gyimah, 2009). Also the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004), along with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), have shifted focus on improved academic outcomes as well as access to the general curriculum for all students. With this focus comes an increased pressure for accountability in the education of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Lingo, Barton-Arwood, & Jolivette, 2011).

According to Avoke (2004), inclusive education is the adaptation of the school curriculum to make it equally accessible to students with special needs. This means that, the school curriculum must suite both students with and without disabilities.

Literature Review

Curriculum Adaptations for Pupils with Disabilities in Regular Schools

Achieving successful inclusive education depends on the regular classroom teachers' ability to adapt the teaching when students have difficulty acquiring skills and information. The curriculum must be adapted to meet the needs of all students no matter their state of ability. Curriculum adaptations refer to the modifications of the various components of the curriculum to enables pupils learn effectively. These components include; the content area and instructional strategies. According to Rose and Meyer, (2002) and Wehmeyer, Lance, Bashinski (2002), curriculum adaptations refer to efforts to modify the way in which content is represented or presented or in which the student engages with and responds to the curriculum. Adaptations deals with modification of the curriculum therefore it can be said that, curriculum modification involves change to a range of educational components in a curriculum, such as content knowledge, the method of instruction, and student's learning outcomes, through the alteration of materials and programs (Comfort, 1990; King-Sears, 2001; MacMackin & Elaine, 1997).

Koga and Hall (2004) also define curriculum modification as modified contents, instructions, and or learning outcomes for diverse student needs. They further explained that, curriculum modification is not limited to instructional modification or content modification but includes a continuum of a wide range of modified educational components. From the above, adapting the curriculum involves differentiating instruction to provide learners with a variety of ways to process information and demonstrate what they have learned, in order to "match" the way in which each learner learns most effectively. Armstrong (2000) also describes curriculum adaptations in four primary categories:

- Curricular content
- Instructional strategies
- Instructional materials
- Assessment practices

Adaptations of the Content of the Curriculum for Pupils with Disabilities in Regular Schools

The adaptations of the content of the curriculum according to Armstrong (2000) involves varying what is taught, that is, the complexity and nature of the content presented during the course of a unit of study. This type of curriculum adaptation results in an adjustment of the cognitive demand of a learning task for particular learners. Armstrong (2000) explains that, adjustment of the cognitive demand in a lesson typically involves an adaptation to the attention, thinking, and or memory requirements associated with particular content. He further explains that, in partnership with hierarchical questioning techniques, this approach can result in a larger number of students meaningfully participating in a lesson drawn from the general curriculum. Reisburg (1990) lists examples of the modifications of content, such as simplifying concepts or reading levels, teaching different sets of knowledge and skills needed by students, and setting up specific objectives. Reisburg (1990) explains that objectives are the foundation upon which you can build lessons and assessments that you can prove meet your overall lesson goals. Objectives guide the content materials and the teaching methods. They are designed to increase an individual's knowledge. This includes knowledge

or information, recall, comprehension or conceptual understanding, the ability to apply knowledge, the ability to analyze a situation, the ability to synthesize information from a given situation, the ability to evaluate a given situation and the ability to create something new.

Armstrong also explains that, adapting the content of the curriculum might involve applications as straightforward as reducing the number of vocabulary words assigned to an individual child, having a learner complete only the odd-numbered problems on a mathematics assignment, holding a learner responsible for learning three facts about one animal, instead of two facts about each of five different species, or affording learners the choice of taking a spelling pre-test to opt out of spelling for a particular week. Individualized adaptations of content can also be achieved by restructured concept-based teaching.

King-Sears (2001) suggests that, a variation of this type of lesson can be providing learners with special needs fewer or less work and points out that reducing the amount of tasks seen in an accommodated instruction should be differentiated from that provided in adapted instruction. From the above, adaptation of curriculum may include a slight change or modification in conceptual difficulties that is later introduced to the learners. King-Sears (2001) suggests that though there are modifications in the concept of the curriculum, adaptation must take place within the same learning contents and must be put in place when teachers have come to a conclusion that a special needs learner is able to learn the same content knowledge as others.

Methodology

The design used for the study was a cross-sectional design since the research is a survey research. According to Bryman (2005), a cross sectional design entails the collection of data on more than one case and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative and quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables which are then examined to detect patterns of associations. The researcher used the survey design because surveys are useful in describing the characteristics of a large population. It is highly accurate and relatively inexpensive since it is mostly self-conducted. This design also has the advantage of providing data relatively quick, that is, you do not have to wait for years before you have your data and can begin to analyze and draw conclusions (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). Nevertheless, cross sectional design has some weaknesses such as; one needs special skills in question design and analysis. Also, it may be difficult for participants to recall the information given and may also not tell the truth about a controversial question (Davis, 2005). The population of interest for the research includes primary school teachers in the Yilo Krobo District of Ghana. There are thirty- nine primary schools in the district. The sample size for the study was drawn from thirty-nine (39) schools in the Yilo Krobo District in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Out of the thirty-nine (39) schools, the researcher selected a third (1/3) which is thirteen (13) schools. All the teachers and head teachers were involved in the study. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used a quantitative data collection method. Quantitative data collection methods rely on random sampling and structured data collection instruments that fit diverse experiences into predetermined response categories and they produce results that are easy to summarize, compare, and generalize (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The data collection techniques focus on gathering hard data in the form of numbers to enable evidence to be presented in quantitative form (Neuman, 2003).

Data analysis

Data analysis is the phase of a study that includes classifying, coding, and tabulating information needed to perform quantitative or qualitative analyses according to the research design and appropriate to the data. Data analysis is a body of methods that help to describe facts, detect patterns, and develop explanations (Klass 2012). Being a descriptive study, descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. This involves the use of simple percentages and frequencies. This is supported by White (2000), who says that, descriptive statistics involves describing and displaying results in the form of tables and diagrams. To Sarantakos (2005) frequency and percentage tables present a quick visual overview and summary of research findings. A number of specific questions were formulated to allow investigation of the research problem. These questions were categorized into specific headings for easy analysis. Collected questionnaires from respondents were serially numbered 1 to 90 to facilitate identification.

Findings/Results

Adaptations of the Content of the Curriculum for Pupils with Disabilities in Regular Schools

Table 1 below shows the opinion of teachers in adapting the content area of the curriculum for pupils with disabilities in regular schools in Yilo Krobo District.

Table 1: Adaptations of the content of the curriculum for pupils with disabilities in regular schools

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	Response NS	D	SD	Total
	The curriculum is designed to suit all categories of pupils in my class	(0%)	9(10%)	3(3.3%)	33(36.7%)	45(50%)	90
	I adapt the lessons to meets the unique learning needs of pupils with disabilities in my class.	6(6.7%)	75(83.3%)	9(10%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	90
	Objectives I set are based on individual ability		10(11.1%)	14(15.6%)	54(60%)	0(0%)	90
	Expected objectives are stated and explained to pupils before lesson begins	1(1.1%)	14(15.6%)	27(30%)	45(50%)	3(3.3%)	90
	Total	19(5.3%)	108(30%)				360

Source: Field survey (2012)

The table 1 above shows the results from respondents on the adaptations of the content of the curriculum for pupils with disabilities in regular schools within Yilo Krobo District. The findings as shown in table 1 above show that, 10% of the respondents agreed that the curriculum is designed to suit all categories of pupils. However, 86.7% of the respondents disagreed while 3.3% of the respondents were not sure. Again, representing 90% of the respondents agreed that they adapt

their lessons to meet the unique learning needs of pupils with disabilities whereas 10% of the respondents were not sure, none disagreed. Also, 24.4% of the respondents agreed that they set their objectives based on individual ability, 60% of them disagreed while 15.6% of the respondents were not sure. Finally, as to whether the expected objectives are stated and explained to pupils before lesson begins, 16.7% of the respondents agreed, 53.3% disagreed while 30% of them were not sure. Findings from table 1 therefore show that, a high proportion of the respondents representing 50.1% disagreed that the content of the curriculum is adapted for pupils with disabilities in regular schools, 35.3% of them disagreed. While 14.7% were not sure.

Discussion

Adaptations in the content of the national curriculum

From table 1, responses from teachers indicate that, (86.7%) did not agree that the national curriculum has been designed to suit all categories of pupils in schools. According to Adentwi (2000), curriculum as a plan or programme of experiences which the learner encounters under the tutelage of the school. This implies that, curriculum entails all the learning experiences that a school provide whether in the classroom or outside the classroom to bring about desirable change in behaviours of pupils. It includes the syllabus, the time table, text books, teaching and learning materials, teaching methods and assessment of the academic and social performance. Designing a curriculum must not be rigid but must suit all categories of pupils in schools. This is in agreement with Mowes (2002) who stated that a flexible curriculum would allow for individual instructions and will take into account the different rates of learning.

Again, from table 1, (90%) of teachers agreed that they adapt their lessons to meet the unique learning needs of pupils with disabilities. The finding shows that though the curriculum is not designed to suit pupils with disabilities, teachers take into considerations individual learning needs to enhance participation of all pupils. The regular teachers are capable of modifying or adapting the national curriculum to make it accessible to all learners in the inclusive classroom. According to Armstrong (2000) the adaptations of the content of the curriculum involves varying what is taught, that is, the complexity and nature of the content presented during the course of a unit of study. This type of curriculum adaptation results in an adjustment of the cognitive demand of a learning task for particular learners. Armstrong (2000) explains that, adjustment of the cognitive demand in a lesson typically involves an adaptation to the attention, thinking, and or memory requirements associated with particular content. For instance, reducing the number of vocabulary words assigned to an individual child, having a learner complete only the odd-numbered problems on a mathematics assignment, holding a learner responsible for learning three facts about one animal, instead of two facts about each of five different species; or affording learners the choice of taking a spelling pre-test to opt out of spelling for a particular week. Reisburg (1990) also lists examples of the modifications of content, such as simplifying concepts or reading levels, teaching different sets of knowledge and skills needed by students, and setting up specific objectives.

Armstrong (2000) further explains that, individualized adaptations of content of the curriculum can also be achieved by restructured concept-based teaching. He further explains that, in partnership with hierarchical questioning techniques, this approach can result in a larger number of students

meaningfully participating in a lesson drawn from the general curriculum. This is also supported by Okyere and Adams (2003) who stipulate that, in adapting the curriculum, teachers should reduce the complexity of tasks by breaking them into smaller teachable units. A high proportion of the teachers (60%) disagreed that objectives they set are based on individual abilities. Reisburg (1990) explained that objectives are the foundation upon which you can build lessons and assessments that you can prove meet your overall lesson goals. Objectives guide the content materials and the teaching methods. They are designed to increase an individual's knowledge. This includes knowledge or information, recall, comprehension or conceptual understanding, the ability to apply knowledge, the ability to analyze a situation, the ability to synthesize information from a given situation, the ability to evaluate a given situation and the ability to create something new. In order to promote the intellectual development of learners, individual abilities should be taken into consideration when setting objectives for the lesson. This will enable the teacher know the teaching methods, teaching and learning materials and the mode of assessment to use.

A little above half of the total respondents (53.3%) disagreed that they state and explain objectives to pupils before beginning lessons. This is supported by Wood, (1998) stating that, the teacher should be sure student fully understands purpose, procedures, and expected outcome of a lesson. Stating and explaining objectives or expected outcomes to pupils before starting a lesson will enable them know the direction of the lesson and understand the skills being taught and therefore be able to perform tasks given them. It keeps the pupils on focus even as a lesson unfolds.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings of the study that not all the components of the curriculum were adapted to include pupils with disabilities in regular schools. For instance, teachers were not able to adapt the content of the curriculum to enable pupils with disabilities participate actively during lesson delivery.

Recommendations

Curriculum developers should take into consideration the needs of pupils with disabilities when developing the national curriculum. In-service training should be organised for teachers to acquire the requisite skills in order to adapt the national curriculum to enable pupils with disabilities participate actively in the teaching and learning process. Assistive devices such as magnifiers, recorders among others should be provided to schools to help pupils with visual impairment benefit from the learning process.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

Yvonne Emefa Asempa is the lead author of this paper. The paper was an extraction from her thesis. Charles Redeemer Semordey a co-author helped with getting some literature to support this work. He also read through the work to make necessary suggestions and finally funded this work. Henry Yao Agbleze during the period of writing this work, supported with necessary literature and also co funded the work.

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