

## CHALLENGES IN PRACTICING INCLUSIVE PHYSICAL EDUCATION: THE CASE OF GHANA NATIONAL COLLEGE OF CAPE COAST

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### ABSTRACT

*Every child has the right to education. This right gives them the opportunity to engage in any form of learning irrespective of social status, physical appearance and any other condition or disability. Yet, students with special needs are marginalized or excluded from physical education lessons. The intent of this study was to find out challenges some public school physical education teachers face in involving students with special needs in their classrooms. In this case study, 12 participants were interviewed and observed. Findings showed that special need students are excluded from physical education lessons. Special need students felt it was not safe to use the same equipment in physical education practical lessons with colleagues without disabilities. Physical education teachers stated that the lack of professional knowledge in their academic preparation has made it difficult to fully involve special need students in their practical lessons. In addition, funds to purchase special equipment for special need students are a major challenge. These coupled with large class size and unsafe school environment threatens the progress of inclusive physical education.*

**Keywords:** Inclusive physical education, special need students, student aide.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching brings about behaviour change in students or pupils (Krathwohl, 2002). Therefore, every teacher including physical education teachers must have good content knowledge in all aspects of the subject to bring about good behaviour change in all students including those with disabilities. Unfortunately, many professional physical education teachers are ill-prepared to provide individualized, appropriate physical education programmes for students with disabilities (Block, 2007). Disability represents interaction between features of a person's being and the systems of the society in which he or she lives (WHO, 2011a, 2011b). It is a restricted capability to perform particular activities or an inability to perform some or all of the tasks of daily life. Disability is an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (ADAA Act, 2008). Thus, a disabled person is one who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on her or his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

There are three main types of disabilities; neurological impairment, orthopaedic (musculoskeletal) disabilities, and traumatic injuries. Neurological disabilities are chronic debilitating conditions or congenital impairments of the central nervous system. They include amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's disease, poliomyelitis and post-polio syndrome, spinal bifida, hearing impairment, visual impairment, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders. Orthopaedic conditions are

deformities, diseases and injuries of the bones and joints. Some of these include arthritis, arthrogryposis, congenital hip dislocation, coxa plana, osteogenesis imperfecta, amputation, osteomyelitis, spondylolysis and spondylolisthesis. Traumatic Brain Injury or Conditions is another type of disability. It occurs when a sudden trauma causes damage to the brain and results in damage to muscles, ligaments, tendons or the nervous system. The damage can be focal (confined to one area of the brain) or diffused (involving more than one area of the brain). It can be acquired through accidents and during birth. Examples are cerebral palsy, epilepsy, mental retardation and other spinal cord injuries (Winnick, 2005).

Physical disabilities are impairments that affect the use of the muscles, bones and joints (Auxter, Pyfer, & Huettig, 2001). It pertains to total or partial loss of a person's bodily functions (walking, gross motor skills) and total or partial loss of a part of the body (persons with amputation). Physical disabilities include cerebral palsy, orthopaedic impairment, and visual impairment, hearing impairment, amputation, arthritis and muscular dystrophy. The presence of these impairments inhibits a person's movement and control leading to one's inability to perform as their colleagues without disabilities.

Many people with disabilities and sensory impairments have been excluded from mainstream education and socio economic activities (Humphries, & Gordon, 1992). This exclusion has some time led to abusive social practices such as confinement and stigmatization. People with disabilities are among the most marginalized groups in the world. They have poorer health outcomes, lower education achievements, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities (WHO, 2011a). Disable persons have been denied equitable participation opportunities including education and sport, mostly due to negative psychosocial factors such as negative attitudes, prejudices, stereotypes, and stigmas (Bartak, & Fry, 2004). However, these persons require special services which must be offered by qualified and skilled professionals to respond to their unique needs, to unearth their talents and make them feel belonging to society.

In the educational set up, most schools practice inclusion. Inclusion is the practice of educating all students, including students with disabilities in regular education and regular classes (Stainback, Stainback, & Forest, 2000). Inclusion does not mean dumping students with disabilities into mainstream without proper support (Winnick, 2005). But, inclusion involves providing all students with appropriate educational programmes geared to their abilities and needs with support and assistance as needed to ensure success. The idea of providing support in the form of adapted equipment, specialized instruction and personnel is critical within the inclusion model (Stainback, & Stainback, & Forest, 2000). Inclusive physical education brings considerable benefits to all students, teachers and the local community as all students especially those with disabilities, learn to communicate and interact with others and develop cognitive and motor skills. Thus, inclusive physical education exposes children with developmental disabilities to a more stimulating environment and peer-involving models and increases their chances of getting accepted fully by peers. In addition, it raises the children's self-respect and social skills (Block, 2013).

Several theories have been proposed to study inclusive education. This research was built around Albert Bandura's social learning theory which states that learning, both cognitive and behavioural, takes place through observation, modelling and imitation of others (Bandura, 1971). The main characteristics of the social learning theory are the centrality of observational learning, a causal model that involves an environment-person-behaviour system, cognitive contributions, and self-efficacy and agency (Bandura, 1962). Thus, academic and behaviour modelling takes place through verbal instruction, live modelling by a person, and symbolic modelling through attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Students pay attention in class when they observe new skills demonstrated by classmates. They later reproduce these skills by imitating and modelling

the skill to reflect theirs. These skills are made perfect when students are motivated to perform them.

In Ghana, it is common to see students with disabilities not involved in physical education practical lessons. However, the human rights law on education says that all children have equal rights to education (Rieser, 2008). These rights give them the opportunity to engage in any form of learning (whether theory or practical) irrespective of their social status, gender, physical appearance and any other condition or disability. Students with disability have the right to participate and benefit from physical education lessons as their colleagues without disabilities. This is affirmed in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, the Labour Act 2003 and Persons with Disability Act 2006 (Osman, William, Atta-Ankomah, & Mboje, 2008). Physical education as an integral part of the general education promotes the development of holistic individuals (Kretchmer, 2005). This makes physical education vital in the development of individuals, especially adolescents, including those with disabilities. Physical education provides guided experiences that promote development of physical fitness, motor abilities, foster sports and leisure activity participation, improve understanding of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, self-confidence and self-worth (Grosse, 2009). Regardless of these benefits, students with disabilities are usually neglected during physical education practical lessons in inclusive schools. Perhaps, most inclusive physical education teachers have little or no training at all during initial teacher education with regard to the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream education (Depauw, & Karp, 1994; French, Keele, & Silliman-French, 1997). Besides, both pre-service and in-service courses that address the skills and the attitudes of teachers towards students with disabilities are deemed insufficient by many teachers (Bartak, & Fry, 2004). In addition, lack of equipment and support personnel also create a lot of challenges for inclusive physical education teachers (Auxter, Pyfer, & Huettig, 2001). These concerns coupled with inadequate teacher aide, time and curriculum support in the form of modified materials as highlighted by other researchers (Avrimidis, & Norwich, 2002; Westwood, & Graham, 2003) precipitated the need to explore challenges physical education teachers face in inclusive physical education lessons in Ghana. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges of inclusive physical education in Ghana National College of Cape Coast.

## **2. METHODS AND MATERIALS**

### **2.1 Research Design**

A qualitative case study design was used to collect data on the challenges of teachers and students in inclusive physical education as they occur in the natural setting (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Patton, 2003). This research approach allowed us to make a detailed exploration of the topic being studied. It also helped us to make meaning from the attitude physical education teachers put up towards students with disabilities (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2005).

### **2.2 Study Setting**

Ghana National College in Cape Coast was established by the first president of Ghana, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah to admit drop out boys who were involved in a riot from St. Augustine's College, Mfantshipim School and Adisadel College. It was also established to cater for children who did not have the opportunity to be enrolled in school due to financial constraints. Based on these reasons Dr. Kwame Nkrumah named the school, Ghana National College; a school for all. Ghana National College of Cape Coast started with a student population of five and three teachers. The current population of the school is about 2,700 students. Inclusive education was introduced

in the 2011/2012 academic year by Mr. E. K. T. Osam, the then Headmaster of the school. The school is situated on a hill surrounded by valleys and steep roads. At the time of data collection, there were four visually impaired students.

### **2.3 Participants**

The participants for this study comprised of four professional physical education teachers with first degrees. Two of them had done a semester course in Adapted Physical Education while the other two had not. However, none of them had experience teaching students with disability until they were posted to the school. Four visually impaired special education students and four students without disabilities who assist the visually impaired students were also part of this study. In all, a total of twelve participants were involved in this study.

### **2.4 Instrument**

Data was collected using structured interview guide and observations. Audio tapes were used to record the conversations that occurred during the interviews to enhance accurate transcription of information (Hodge et al, 2000). All the interview questions were developed from the literature.

**2.4.1 Teachers' Interview Guide:** A structured interview guide was used to collect data on the physical education teachers. The first part sought demographic information on the teachers' age, gender, teaching experience, grade level, class size and number of students with disabilities. The second part focused on the physical education teacher's professional knowledge, number of years of teaching, their attitude towards the students with disability, availability of teaching aides in relation to the number of students with disabilities, amount of time allotted for physical education lessons and their beliefs about inclusion.

**2.4.2 Students' Interview Guide:** The students' interview guide covered demographic information such as age, level (form), gender and type of disability. The second part covered the student's family history of disability, their participation in physical education lessons and other school programs, availability of special equipment, challenges, and their relationship with other students with disabilities, those without disabilities and the community as well and finally, their feelings as members of their classes.

**2.4.3 Observations:** All physical education classes were observed. Each class was made up of 45 students including students with disabilities. Some of the skills taught were push pass in soccer for form one and chest pass in handball for form two. Observation data focused on instructional and behavioural interactions between the teachers and students with disabilities, between students with disabilities and students without disabilities and among students with disabilities. Notes were also taken on the content of the lessons and critical incidence that occurred during lessons. There were no special teaching/learning materials and no special assistant for the teachers. Each lesson lasted for 45 minutes.

### **2.5 Data Collection Procedure**

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the research protocol. Permission was sought from the Head of Ghana National College before collecting data. All participants completed informed consent form. The informed consent form clearly outlined the purpose of the study, significance of the study, the mode of collecting data, gender, age and signature of the participant. Students with

disability thump print to serve as a proof that they gave their consent. Participants were assured that all information they provide would be treated confidential.

The physical education teachers' interview questions were given to them a week ahead of time to allow them reflect on their knowledge, experiences, challenges and beliefs regarding inclusion. Data was collected during physical education lessons and at participants' recess time. Audio tapes were used to record the interviews and observations were also conducted on the physical education practical lessons. The interview with each participant lasted for thirty minutes. The data collection process took a period of two weeks.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Data Processing and Analysis**

Interview data were transcribed verbatim and coded to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Audio tapes were listened to while reading through the written transcription to check for accuracy and to make necessary corrections. Data was reduced, gleaned and put into categories according to patterns. Recurring themes that emerged from the categories were used to analyse the data (Marriam, 1998). Content analysis was used to analyse the observation data (Asmussen, & Creswell, 1995). This enabled us obtain information on the type of interaction that occurred between physical education teachers and students with disabilities, students without disabilities and among students with disabilities.

#### **Recurring Themes from Physical Education Teachers**

The teachers' responded positively to inclusive education. They were positively disposed to inclusion as an educational philosophy which would help to bridge the gap between students with disabilities and those without disabilities, thus reducing their exclusion from school and community activities. Due to this, all the four physical education teachers expressed willingness to practice inclusive education because they believe it would help students with disabilities to acquire social skills, live normal lives and fit well in society. For example, one of the physical education teachers expressed that inclusive education will eliminate stigmatization and discrimination against students with disability. He added that this will make them feel accepted and loved by society. This assertion is in accord with Slavin (2009) finding that cooperative learning promotes social interaction among students. Thus, the teachers in this study are willing to practice inclusive education because they believe it will help students with disabilities acquire social skills.

All four physical education teachers expressed that they have heard about inclusive education. But two of them said they have not done any academic course in relation to it, thus do not have any professional knowledge in it. For example, one of the physical education teachers said "I heard of inclusive education but I did not take it as a course". However, the other two did a semester course in inclusive education during their undergraduate studies at the university. Notwithstanding, all the physical education teachers expressed insufficient knowledge in this area of education as they felt that they were not fully prepared to teach students with disability. It was also revealed that since the introduction of the program in the school four years ago, there has not been any in-service training organized for them. For example, "I have not received any in-service training since the program began" said one of the physical education teachers. Therefore, the teachers felt that they were not professionally prepared to teach students with disability since they do not have any experience in the area. Consequently, they do not modify their lessons and activities to include students with disability. These are consistent with Depaw and Karp (1994) findings that most inclusive physical education teachers have little or no training at all during their



undergraduate studies with regards to the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream education.

Another theme deduced from the study was lack of experience by the teachers. All the four physical education teachers expressed that they lack experience in teaching students with disabilities. They said they have not had the opportunity of teaching students with disability before coming to this school. Thus, many teachers put up negative attitudes towards students with disabilities because they do not have any experience to accommodate them in their classes. van Reusen, Shoho and Barker (2001) reported that physical education teachers' attitude towards inclusion has a relation to the levels of special education training received and experienced in working with students with disabilities. Knowledge and experience play a major role in teaching and learning. The more you practice a skill, the more you become acquainted with it. Thus, teachers who had the opportunity of teaching students with disability would exhibit positive characteristics with regards to their methodology and knowledge in teaching. Hence, the lack of knowledge and experience affects effective teaching and learning especially in inclusive physical education classroom.

The teachers complained that they lack special equipment for students with disability. In fact, they expressed that it was not safe to use the same equipment with the sighted students considering the fact that their students with disability have visual impairment. This has led to the students with disability not being able to participate in practical physical education lessons and other sporting activities for the fear of getting hurt. Due to this, one of the physical education teachers expressed that the students with disability are more or less segregated in practical physical education lessons, and this defeats the main idea of inclusive education. This finding is not different from that of Avrimidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000) and Westwood and Graham (2003) who indicated that inadequate teaching/learning materials impedes the benefits of inclusive education to students with disability during physical education practical lessons. Thus, teachers need greater access to differentiated resources to teach effectively in inclusive classroom.

Unfriendly school environment and infrastructure was another challenge raised by the physical education teachers. Majority of the teachers expressed that the school environment and buildings do not support inclusion. They said, the rough nature of the roads and the absence of walkways make it difficult for the sighted when descending and ascending let alone these students who cannot see. In addition, the steep terrain to the school field is an obstacle. Besides, when it rains, the field becomes soggy and slippery posing safety threats to students with disabilities. Other objects like stones and sticks also pose challenges to these students. Research shows that the physical fabric and school environment are a problem in embracing inclusion (Drudy, & Kinsella, 2009). In addition, poor construction plans of school buildings coupled with steep land scape and bad road network do not support successful inclusive education as it hinders free movement in and around school environment.

The distance from the classroom block to the school field where physical education lessons are held is far. This creates another issue because it takes some time from the lesson and this affects the amount of time allotted for teaching. According to one of the physical education teachers, sighted students use about eight minutes to walk to the field, how much more the visually impaired. This is in accord with Friend and Burck (2006) findings that the preparation for physical education lessons and the movement of students from the classroom to the school field all take a lot of time. They added that in the case of inclusive education, much time is required to adapt activities to cater for the students with disabilities and also design some activities for students without disabilities.

Lack of support personnel to assist students with disabilities during lessons was another challenge expressed by all four physical education teachers. They said there are no support personnel to assist them during lessons. Special Need Assistants are specially trained personnel

who assist students with disabilities around the school and during physical education lessons. The absence of these personnel has however compelled their sighted colleagues to take up this responsibility. This affects special need assistant students because they miss a lot in class as they come in late for physical education practical lessons and also settle late for the next lesson. Houston-Wilson, Dunn, van der Mars and McCubbin (1997) indicated that the importance of support in the form of personnel such as volunteers, teacher aides, peer tutors and education specialists cannot be underestimated as it promotes successful inclusion. Hodge, Murata and Kozub (2002) also asserted that most teachers use students without disabilities as peer partners to assist their classmates with disabilities in class activities. However, research proves that, this finding is positive because it shows an increase in social interaction for students with disabilities and also makes them feel accepted and loved by their colleagues and others. In addition, serving as a peer support results in higher levels of engagement for students without disabilities because they acquire leadership skills.

One other challenge shared by the physical education teachers was the large class size. All the teachers complained that they have class sizes of forty-five or more students. They said preparation for inclusive physical education lessons require adequate time to adapt activities to include students with disabilities. And, that combining it with the large class sizes make it difficult for them to organize, manage and teach effectively with the inclusion of students with disabilities. Large class size places a lot of stress on teachers because class control becomes difficult, hence reducing the quality and quantity of work to be covered (Agran, Alper, & Wehmeyer, 2002). The situation becomes even worse when teachers have to prepare specifically to include students with disabilities (Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1996; Sherill, 2004).

### **Recurring Themes from Students with Disabilities**

One of the major challenges raised by all four students with disabilities is the lack of special equipment for use in physical education practical classes. All four students with visual impairment expressed worry about this issue because they are not able to participate in physical education practical lessons. They stated that they use the same equipment with their sighted colleagues and this is not safe for them because they can get hurt. For instance, one of them said, "I don't want to get hurt by the equipment." He adds that, "since I came to the school, I have not participated in physical education practical lessons because I don't want to get hurt by the balls and other equipment". However, when I was at Akropong, I used to do many sports like soccer, loom, javelin, etc.". "Here, there is no special equipment for the blind; thus, I am not able to participate like when I was in my former school". And, "because I can't see the demonstrations, learning and participating in physical education practical lessons is difficult for me if not impossible. In 2015, Akinyi, Onyango and Aluko found that the lack of teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, talking calculators, braille machines, large prints and compact disc and other sport equipment makes inclusive education unsuccessful. The findings from these visually impaired students are not different.

"Our school environment is not friendly to us", said all four visually impaired students. The roads here are steep and rough and there are no walk ways. And, we are afraid one of us can fall and get hurt any day. As for our playing field, it gets soggy when it rains hence there is the fear of falling and getting hurt during physical education practical lessons. That notwithstanding, most of the classroom blocks are story buildings making climbing and descending the stairs difficult. It could be deduced that the physical fabric of buildings and school environments are a problem in embracing inclusion. Drudy and Kinsella (2009) concluded that poor construction plans of some school buildings coupled with steep land scape and bad road network do not support successful inclusive education.

Visually impaired students had mixed feelings about their participation in physical education practical lessons. Two of them said they do not like physical education practical lessons because they are afraid they will get hurt. "I don't take part in physical education because I don't feel safe". Contrary, one of them expressed interest in physical education practical lessons but his teacher does not involve him because of the lack of special equipment for him. He said, "My teacher does not involve me in physical education practical lessons though I go to the field; however, I walk around to exercise on my own". Another student stated that "I used to take part because I was with my colleagues who are blind and we used the same equipment and the balls". But now I don't take part in physical education because I don't feel safe. This split in visually impaired students' perceptions about their participation in physical education practical lessons is an indication that if appropriate and safe equipment and facilities are provided, they will participate in practical physical education lessons.

The lack of Special Need Assistants was another concern raised by the students with disabilities. They said they did not have any special person assigned to them to help them move around to perform their daily activities in the school. According to them, someone who will guide them to the classroom, dining hall and support them during physical education lessons will make their life easier. "I do not have any special person who assists me around, my friends have been helping me, they guide me to the school field, dormitory and school shop", one of the students stated. For these students with visual impairment, the lack of appropriate physical education equipment, coupled with the unsafe and unfriendly nature of the school environment as well as the lack of support and assistants to aid free movement is hindering their participating in physical education lessons.

### **Recurring Themes from Students without Disabilities**

Students without disabilities serve as Special Need Assistants to students with disabilities. The four students without disabilities expressed that they are happy to help guide their colleagues with disabilities to the field and around for other school programs;

"I guide them to the dining hall and to the school shop and to the classroom for prep in the evenings. Even though I enjoy doing that, I sometimes get to the field late and other times, we settle late for the next lesson. Also, waiting to help them around affects my time to learn. Other times, they are not able to capture salient points in class and while I bring them at par, I miss some concepts during the lessons". Even though this is a concern for students in this study who assist and learn together with their disabled colleagues, literature in this area says otherwise. For example, Waldron, Cole and Majd (2001) found that many students without disabilities make comparable or greater gains in academic outcomes such as math and reading when taught in inclusive settings as against traditional classrooms where no students with disabilities are included. This suggests that inclusive classrooms provide greater access to the general education curriculum that benefits all students. This finding is also in congruence with McGregor and Vogelsberg (1998) who asserted that inclusion does not compromise general education students' outcomes. Rather, peers including students without disabilities benefit from involvement and relationships with students with disabilities in inclusive settings as the presence of students with disabilities in general education classrooms leads to new learning opportunities for typical students.

Students without disabilities were concerned that their disabled colleagues do not participate in physical education practical lessons because they cannot see. To them, that is not fair for their disabled colleagues as they all have to participate in physical education practical lessons because it will make them healthier and live longer. This is also reflected in a statement made by couple of the Student Aides who stated that "Although we guide them to the field, they do not participate in the activities. For instance, they do not participate in physical education practical



lessons because they said they cannot perform the same activities with us using the same equipment”.

Observation of lessons in this study confirmed that students with disabilities do not participate in physical education practical lessons. Although Student Aides walk them from their classrooms to the school field, they do not take part in performing any of the activities. When students with disabilities get to the school field for physical education practical lessons, they are taken to their seats under a tree and wait till the lesson ends. They are again guided back to the classroom or the special education centre for the next lesson. There is limited interaction between students with disabilities during physical education practical lessons because they do not participate. The only time they interact is while they are sitting and waiting for the lesson to end. The same can be said in terms of interaction between students with disabilities and those without disabilities during physical education practical lessons. In fact, one of the students with disability revealed that they feel it is a waste of their time to walk from the classroom to the school field only to sit under trees and wait while their sighted colleagues participate in physical education practical lessons. Apparently, the physical education practical lesson is more of segregation in disguise. However, the idea of inclusive education is to bridge the gap between the students with disability and students without disabilities, and to give them equal opportunities in education regardless of their condition and social status. In view of this, it is obvious that these challenges hinder the successful implementation of inclusive physical education in Ghana National College of Cape Coast.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Inclusive education aims at building a universal educational system that promotes equal rights and opportunities for all persons regardless of their social status. Although inclusive education seemed to be practiced at Ghana National College of Cape Coast, it is evident from this research that a lot needs to be done with regards to the provision of special equipment and teaching aids to enhance its implementation and success. Funding is needed to purchase special equipment to teach students with disabilities as the physical education teachers did not have any special equipment for the visually impaired students to use. This together with the poor infrastructure and facilities resulted in the non-participation of students with disabilities in inclusive physical education practical lessons. In addition, it was established that teacher preparedness in terms of training and experience pose a great challenge to inclusive physical education. The fact cannot be denied that all the physical education teachers lacked adequate professional preparation and knowledge in inclusive education. Even those who took a semester course in the area testified that it only raised their awareness, introduced them to the area of study and expanded their repertoire, but rarely equipped them with high levels of knowledge, expertise and confidence to teach students with special needs in inclusive physical education classroom.

Based on the findings from this study, it is recommended that physical education teacher education programs in Ghana incorporate inclusive and adapted physical education in their curriculum to fully equip physical education teachers to teach students with special needs. Schools that operate on inclusive bases should be funded and resourced adequately to enhance their success. Regular in-service training is needed to update physical education teachers' knowledge on current trends in dealing with students with special needs. Further research is required to ascertain the challenges of inclusive physical education in other inclusive senior high schools in Ghana.

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