

Capacity Development for Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education in Ghana's Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Effective implementation of Ghana's policy on inclusive education in higher education institutions demands capacity building for the educators to understand diversity and differentiate teaching to accommodate the learning needs of students living with disability. This study investigated how inclusive education is practiced in one university in Ghana by exploring the level of educators' awareness of Ghana's policy on inclusive education and how the educators understand the policy and are interpreting the policy in the lecture halls. The study adopted the quantitative-qualitative research design to solicit data via self-administered questionnaire and interview from a purposive sample of 37 (32 males, 5 females) lecturers in four academic departments of the University that were implementing inclusive education. It emerged from the study that not all the educators were fully aware of the content of Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy. In addition, they also understood the policy differently. The educators generally interpreted disability in terms of the social and medical models of disability found in the literature. To synchronize the notion of disability among the educators and to enable them to appreciate the need for differentiated instruction in inclusive education demands effective capacity development. This could promote university lecturers adopting effective strategies to address the learning needs of students with disability in higher education.

Keywords: Educators, Inclusive Education, Higher Education, Ghana

Introduction

In recent times, there has been an increasing number in the population of diverse students with special needs and disability that are admitted into higher educational institutions in Ghana, resulting in the need to cater for their diverse learning needs. Research indicates that the needs of these students are not being properly catered for (Tafirei, Makaye & Mapetere, 2013), a gap which inclusive education is meant to address. To address the challenges associated with meeting the needs of diverse learners in the mainstream education system, the Government of Ghana (GoG), acting through the Ministry of Education (MoE), has developed and launched a National Inclusive Education (IE) Policy in 2016 to effectively promote the practice of inclusion across the country's educational system. More importantly, the policy serves as a framework that guides educators to use practices that welcome and contain the diversity of all students and enable them to succeed in mainstream schools. This policy is regarded as timely given that it affords all learners the opportunity to develop their potentials irrespective of their background and specific learning needs (Funaki & Primary, 2015).

Nonetheless, the reality is different and these policies and practices vary considerably. As buttressed by Mbelu (2011), the policy regarding inclusive education is an example characteristic of the seeming disjoint between policy on paper and difficulty in its implementation. Sadly, just like many sub-Saharan countries, some learners with special educational needs in Ghana are still segregated in specialised institutions (Education Sector Performance, 2013); and even where they are placed in mainstream settings at all, they have been placed with inadequate resources and support systems (Morley & Croft, 2011).

This runs contrary to the international practice of inclusive education where it is —increasingly understood more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners (UNESCO, 2009, p. 4).

Research Objectives

The overarching object of this study was to investigate how inclusive education is understood and practised in one public university in Ghana, thus the study was guided by the following objectives:

- a) Explore the level of educators' awareness of Ghana's policy on inclusive education.
- b) Establish how the educators understand the policy and are interpreting the policy in the lecture halls.

Statement of the Problem

Despite numerous efforts by successive governments toward the promotion of quality inclusive education for all citizens of school going age, Ghana's case of effective implementation of inclusive education, still remains a challenge. Consequently, students with special needs (SWSNs) participate a lot less in meaningful education, they frequently leave school with few or no skills and more likely to be unemployed, and at a greater risk of social exclusion (Budginaitė, Siarova, Sternadel, Mackonytė & Spurga, 2016).

Moreso, the begging questions of how educators construe the policy and practice of inclusive education and whether they are adequately informed to cater for the diverse population of students continue to dominate scholarly research (Ackah-Jnr, 2016; Short & Martin, 2005). Empirical research shows that educators' understanding and actions of the policy and practice of inclusion in the regular classrooms is key to promoting increased opportunities for attainment, reduction in barriers, and meeting the increasing diverse educational needs especially in higher educational institutions (Budginaitė et al., 2016).

A cursory review of literature (Addae-Mensah, 2000; Morley & Croft, 2011; UNESCO, 2011) on Ghana's educational system reveals that, although there have been significant efforts in widening access and participation of SWSNs, particularly at the basic as well as secondary levels of education, such is not the case in the institutions of higher learning. Sadly, there exists paucity of empirical studies into issues regarding the implementation of inclusive education at the higher level of education, particularly within the context of higher institutions of learning in Ghana (CRPD; United Nations, 2006 as cited in Morley & Croft, 2011). As Allan (2008) succinctly intimates, there seems to be profound uncertainty within schools with respect to the creation of —inclusive environments and about how to teach inclusively. (p. 10). To this effect, the OECD (1999) opines that a mixture of endless resistance to change by humans and the lack of political will are mainly accountable for this uncertainty.

An informal observation and personal conversation with some educators in the University of Education, Winneba, shows that in spite of the promulgation of the national policy for inclusive education, educators felt under-supported at certain levels to facilitate teaching and learning processes meaningfully in the University. Additionally, personal communications with some educators revealed that professional development programmes are insufficient for them to understand and cater for students with special educational needs in their regular classrooms. In the opinion of Kuester (2000), the centrality of educators' understanding of policy and practice towards the implementation of inclusive education cannot be underestimated. When there is an acceptance of inclusive education policy among educators, there is the likelihood that it will influence their ownership of the policy, and as a result, their commitment to its implementation (Thorpe & Shafiul Azam, 2010).

In the light of the aforementioned issues, this study sought to investigate how inclusive education is practised in one university in Ghana by exploring the level of educators' awareness of Ghana's policy on inclusive education, how the educators understand the policy and are interpreting the policy in the lecture halls.

Literature Review

Underpinning Ethos of Inclusion

Bailey (1998) refers to inclusion as the situation where both regular students and students with special needs access the same educational programme, under the same roof and in same regular schools, where all are accepted and individual differences respected. By the tenets of inclusion, mainstream schools are expected to better acknowledge and make appropriate accommodations toward the evolving demographics of the teaching and learning classroom and the school community. The aim is to enable the involvement of all learners in the social and academic aspects of the general education system, where there is respect for diversity.

Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou (2010) point out the varying understandings ascribed to inclusion which inevitably attract multiple responses to the questions of —whom and for what purpose? and questions of what inclusion is meant for? Armstrong et al. (2010, p. 31) hypothesise three different conceptions to inclusion as follows:

- a) Inclusion is about all students with disabilities participating in all aspects of the school life within the regular school to provide them with access to the same educational experiences as other students and full citizenship in an inclusive society.
- b) Inclusion refers to students with disabilities and special education needs and their increased participation within the education system, with the aim of providing an education that responds to their individual needs and preparing them for life after school.
- c) Inclusion refers to all students actively participating in schools that are organised in such ways that all students are valued and which constantly problematise notions of inclusion and exclusion and of different ways of being.

Although the first concept of inclusion is limited in terms of recognising only students with disabilities, it affirms the need for a paradigm shift in the fundamentals of the education system (Armstrong et al., 2010). Equally, the second concept, even though it is limited in reference to targeting particular categories of learners, it does not call for such drastic modifications in the policy and practice of the prevailing education system (Gunnþórsdóttir, 2014). According to Armstrong et al. (2010), the second conception corresponds with most education policies. On the other hand, the third concept of inclusion broadly involves all students, where it is understood as an on-going process of interactions between the notions of inclusion and exclusion —where individual differences are the normal criterial (Armstrong et al., 2010, pp. 31–32).

The Concept of Disability

What constitutes —disability has till date been a hotly debated concept with no single, clear and acceptable definition. Thus, 'disability' is understood within the context of the society in question. In other words, defining disability is often not so clear (Vouyoukas, Tzouriadou, Anagnostopoulou, & Michalopoulou, 2017) as each country and sometimes different people in the same country have their own definitions of disabilities (Sewalem, 2007). These contestations and contextualization are not unexpected due to the diversity of persons with disabilities and their own contexts.

Literature pertinent to disability studies reveal some reasons for not having a working definition of disability. Murungi (2013) conjectures that, one of the reasons is because disability is an —evolving concept (p.19). Another reason is that, factors such as history, society and culture and how these relate to various aspects of the lives of people influence the formation, perception and understanding

of disability (Barnes, 1994; Barton, 1996; Ambati, 2012). These contestations make it difficult to adopt a universal definition that adequately encapsulates all the aspects of disability.

Furthermore, the basic understanding of disability is very often the World Health Organization (1980) definition for —disability‖ which derives from the perspective of medical science and refers to any form of restriction on an individual’s ability to perform a task in a way or within the threshold deemed as —normal for a human being‖ (p.28). The National Inclusive Education Policy Framework (2016) of Ghana also portrays ‘disability’ as a continuous process which emanates from the interface among persons with disability and barriers caused by attitudes and the environment which pose challenges to persons with disabilities (PWDs) and special educational needs (SENs) to meaningfully participate in society as equally as everybody. Clearly, this shows a dual approach (sociocultural) view on disability as captured in the policy.

It is important therefore to adopt the World Health Organization’s (WHO, 2001) International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) definition, which states that:

Disability is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.

This WHO definition can be seen as distinct and interconnected, as it specifies that disability occurs when there are limitations to an individual’s ways of thinking, moving, and interacting due to barriers in the physical space of societal structures. In other words, disability can be referred to as a defect in some part of the human body or some health related issue. In a similar vein, Mitra (2006) conjectures disability as the inability to perform normal tasks instead of social oppression as earlier assumed by some proponents. In relation to Mitra’s (2006) ideas, The Americans with Disability Act (ADA, 2013) has explained disability as a legal term which refers to —a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity, a record of such impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment‖ (<https://adata.org/glossary-terms>).

To the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disability (1993), the term —disability‖ encapsulates a wide array of varying restrictions related to functioning occurring in any human population. They add that such impairments, conditions or illnesses can either assume a temporary or permanent nature which can take several forms such as medical conditions, mobility/orthopaedic impairments, intellectual disabilities or sensory impairments.

To further enrich the review, the ensuing sub-topic draws the distinction concerning the two traditional views on disability, namely the medical and social models of disability; the latter being the hallmark and basis of inclusive education.

The Medical and Social Models of thinking about Disability

Different models or theories have emerged from literature about disability. The phenomenon of inclusive education can also be viewed from several lenses. Shea and Bauer (1994) have put forward several theories that include the biophysical, behavioural and psycho-educational perspectives on disability. Nevertheless, the most commonly used models that have emerged from discussions relative to disability and inclusive education are the medical and social perspectives. It is appropriate to explain these theories of disability in order to gain a better understanding of its relevance in relation to the concept of inclusion and inclusive education.

The Medical Model of Disability

The medical model of disability, also referred to as the individual model (Barnes & Mercer, 2010), psycho-medical paradigm (Mitchell, 2010), or the traditional model (Moore, 2002), sees disabled people as the problem and for that matter, are seen and believed to be faulty. As such, they have to be retrofitted in order to match existing conditions of society; otherwise, they are placed in specialised institutions or secluded at home to address their fundamental needs (McManus, 2008).

In other words, the medical model of disability assumes that disability is the product of the physiological conditions that is within the individual, which can impede his or her basic routine performance and the general quality of life. In line with the medical view of disability, people perceive the impairment or limited capacity and health status of the individual as the problem to be resolved. Consequently, people fail to divert their minds to social issues of preconceptions and the inaccessibility faced by persons with impairment (Officer & Groce, 2009). Ackerman et al. (2002 as cited in Mitchell, 2010) note that, the medical model enjoins students with special needs to receive a medical diagnosis across identifiable domains of their psychological, physical or both impairments so that they are identified for training and education on the basis of strengths as well as their weaknesses. In this regard, a student or person with impairment is a learner who is unable to perform some task(s) as a result of some biological limitations or deformities (Williams, 2001).

For instructional purposes, this would mean that such students are grouped together based on similarities of diagnosis and their functional levels. Consequently, such students will have to adapt to the system to cope; but when the adaptation proves impossible, they should be segregated in special schools or homes, where their most pressing needs are addressed (Understanding Models of Disability, 2016).

In sociology, the conflict-perspective to the medical view of disability has also been provided. Ambati (2012) asserts that, the medical view of disability recognised the coming into force of the medical profession, with the control of government in the provision of healthcare and allied services. Subsequently, the conditions of PLWDs were disproportionately affected with the exponential increase in the number of medical professionals (Barnes & Mercer, 2003).

Criticisms of the medical model by proponents of disability rights and inclusive education, who assume the social model stance, consider this model as the basis for the inadvertent social dereliction of persons living with disabilities. Additionally, whereas resources could be used in the area of promoting practices that are academically and socially inclusive, there is rather excessive misdirection of resources in the direction of a purely medical nature. Again, Engelbrecht and Green (2007) posit that students who are diagnosed of having —special educational needs are accordingly categorised and segregated in specialised settings, barring them from attaining academic and social skills. In line with the medical view, Engelbrecht and Green further elaborate the perception that persons living with disabilities are —abnormal, seeking medical or specialists' attention. Naicker (1999 as cited in Asaram, 2014) adds that the traditional model evokes a pathological label, where it is generally perceived that the system is faultless and any failure within the system or society is caused by the individual with disability. In the same context, it is assumed that barriers are inherent within the learner with disability that must be addressed with the learner.

It can be inferred from the discussion that inherent in the medical model usually, is the perception that, the impairment/disability has to be focused on. As a result, less credence is accorded the needs of the disabled individual learner. In other words, premium is placed on reliance, and supported by disability-related stereotypes that attract feelings of pity and patronizing attitudes or fear; stemming from the notion that deficits are inherent within an individual student. In educational practice, some educators and researchers have underscored the inherent educational problems in the use of the medical model (Booth, Swamm, Masterton & Pots, 2002; Mayuba, 2008 as cited in Asaram, 2014). Firstly, procedures for assessment have the tendency to label learners with disabilities as needing extra support for learning which has negative impact on the expectations of teachers and parents as well as the self-concept of the learners. In effect, the categorization and assessment techniques are considered unfair, which leads to disparities in the population of learners with disabilities.

Furthermore, the specialist educators' presence in the regular classroom emboldens general educators to shed off their duties of educating learners with disabilities to others (Booth, Swamm, Masterton & Pots, 2002; Mayuba, 2008 as cited in Asaram, 2014).

The Social Model of Disability

In contrast to the medical model of disability, the social model (also known as the 'socio-political paradigm'), emanated as a result of the inability of the medical model to give detailed description of their individual involvements with disability or facilitate the development of a highly inclusive coexistence. Garland-Thomson (1997) postulates that the social model defies the 'normality-paradigm' by first acknowledging the impairment exists, but it should not be perceived as an abnormality. Impliedly, disability is an entirely socio-political issue in the sense that it supports the view of emphasising equal rights of all citizens to fully participate in the society. In this regard, the social model focuses on structural inequalities at the macro-social level, which is being reproduced at the institutional level (Christensen, 1996; Clark, et al., 1995; Skidmore, 2002). This social model defines disability on the basis of people's reaction to physical or medical conditions they deem unfit to cope with the social structures (LaRocco & Wilken, 2013).

It can be seen from Table 1.0 that, disability as viewed from the perspective of the social model is the result of how society is structured, instead of one's disability. To put this another way, persons may have impairment, but disability is created by the society (Cumming & Dickson, 2013). The social model of disability therefore acknowledges that while the problems associated with the physical body, as grounded in the medical model could be best managed within the domains of medicine, the broad concerns should be directed towards societal disablements. Similarly, Dahamani (2014) observes that in the social model, disability is viewed as a consequence of societal incapacitation imposed on the person with special needs. Such societal barriers are the cause of disability (Mole, 2008; Oliver, 1998; Barnes & Mercer, 1996).

An interesting angle the social model assumes is the human rights approach to disability. For instance, Lane (1995) recognises the deaf person as 'Deaf', instead of 'disabled'. They are members of a linguistic minority who use sign language and are fully functioning members of their deaf community with a deaf identity (Munoz-Baell & Ruiz, 2000). Hence, the deaf is not perceived as needing treatment or rehabilitation, but rather every opportunity is afforded him/her to have access to and learn sign language. Therefore, this model does not put responsibilities for change on those who are excluded by barriers within the environment, but rather on the people who control the external environment (Johnson & Fox, 2003). This suggests that in the absence of barriers, persons living with disabilities (PLWDs) can live independently in a society of equality, with choice and control over their own lives, and be defined by what they can offer rather than by what they cannot do.

The discussion shows that the social model of disability acknowledges disability to mean a relationship between an individual with disability and his or her environment and not as an inherent limitation of functioning. However, the social model has its criticisms (Kavale & Mostert, 2003; Heward, 2003; Sasso, 2001 & Kauffman, 1999) for being 'an unscientific approach to special education' (Mitchell, 2010, p. 25). Consequently, Reddy (2011) sees the social model as a constricted perspective of impairment because it mainly considers the problems of sensory and physical impairment and under-represents other categories of impairment such as learning difficulties and mental health.

Methodology

The qualitative-quantitative research methods (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) was employed with the case study approach for this study to investigate the phenomenon of inclusion as understood by educators and practised in the University of Education, Winneba. The case study approach, according to Passer (2014, p.169) entails —an in-depth analysis of an individual, social unit, or event. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) add that the case study is a systematic process of —looking at a case or phenomenon in its real life context, usually employing many types of data, including subjective and objective data (p.254). Compelling data was elicited by administering an educator questionnaire complemented with in-depth interviews, to examine the understanding and views of educators across four academic departments drawn from three faculties, all located at the North campus of the University of Education, Winneba-Ghana. The focus was to gauge educators' level of awareness on the national inclusive education policy, how the policy is construed and document their subjective views relative to their role as key stakeholders at the implementation level. An accessible population of 37 educators (32 males, 5 females), purposefully sampled from the Departments of Art Education, Social Studies Education, Graphic Design and Special Education amply responded to the questionnaire. The response rate was 60%. A 5-point summated ratings scale was used to find out the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with the pre-set statements that touched on educators' understanding and awareness of policy and practice of inclusive education. As indicated in the questionnaire (refer to Table 2.0), nine items/statements were posed based on the phenomenon of inclusion in the University of Education, Winneba.

Descriptive analysis of themes based on the educator questionnaire was carried out and presented in the form of tables with percentages, frequencies, means and median. Additionally, the points of reference were formulated on the basis of the calculated means to make meaning of the educator questionnaire and were set as follows: *Very High Response* (5.00), *High Response* (4.00 - 4.99), *Moderate Response* (3.00 – 3.99), *Low Response* (2.00 – 2.99) and lastly (1.00 – 1.99) for *Lowest Response*. This was done in order to record trends of how the pre-set variables were distributed. Personal in-depth interviews were also conducted with 15 educator respondents who agreed to be interviewed to further delve deeply into selected responses that attracted interest, and as such required their subjective views. This helped in validating and enriching the data elicited from the survey instrument.

The analysis and discussion of findings based on the questionnaire data as summarised in Table 1 (refer to appendix) and the in-depth interviews is presented in the subsequent sections.

Analysis and Discussions

Educators' awareness and understanding of the policy and practice of inclusive education

From Table 2.0, educator participants' level of agreement or disagreement with the pre-set statements/items that relate to the policy and practice of inclusive education is presented.

To begin with, respondents were asked about their awareness regarding Ghana's inclusive education policy. In response to the first question posed, majority of respondents accounting for about 67.6% were in strong agreement with this statement, 5.4% agree while another 21.6% were neutral in their response. Those respondents who disagreed constitute 5.4%, whereas none of the respondents strongly disagreed. Overall, a mean score of (m=4.35) was recorded for this item, indicating a very high positive agreement from respondents. It was especially encouraging to note that, most of the respondents were aware of the existence of a national policy. However, beyond their awareness it was prudent to probe into their levels of familiarity with the content of the policy.

Consequently, further investigations through interviews with respondents revealed that although educators were aware of the policy, majority of them suggested that they became aware about the policy through news items in electronic and print media, seminars, personal studies, from colleagues or during teaching and learning.

One respondent corroborated this assertion:

Yes, we have a policy for inclusive education nationwide; you know they announced the policy in the 2015/2016 academic year. It was all over radio, TV (television) and some of my colleagues discussed it... So, we have the policy that governs the practices of inclusive education in Ghana (*personal communication, March 2017*).

This finding is however, at variance with a study conducted by Moh (2013) in selected Libyan universities that showed that less than 20% of respondents were aware about the existence of an inclusive education national policy.

Next, the survey addressed the issue relating to whether the university has clearly articulated goals and policies for inclusive education. The questionnaire data revealed that, educators largely perceived the university as having clear directives on inclusive education, where 83.5% were in agreement with the item 2 of the questionnaire. A mean score of 4.23 was recorded for this item, indicating a high response agreement by respondents. A typical indicator for determining whether the university has clear policies and goals was finding out whether the admissions process in the university guarantees access to students with special needs. Responses from the survey showed that the majority of respondents, translating into about 75.7%, upheld the view that the university virtually guarantees complete access to admission for students with special needs and disabilities. The overall trend regarding the university's admission processes paints a positive picture from the viewpoints of respondents, hence, this statement recorded a high positive response (mean=4.38).

It is important that, those in the frontline of policy implementation of inclusive education understand the provisions therein so that they can be effective in the implementation process. Data in respect of respondents' understanding of the dictates of the national policy to give all students the opportunity to be educated in all educational institutions across all levels shows that, all the respondents (100%) understand the policy as one which calls for equal opportunities to all students across all levels. An overall mean score of 4.89 was recorded for this item, indicative of a high response agreement. Additionally, the interview data, which probed further educators' understanding and awareness of inclusive education attracted quite varied responses. It was revealed that, respondents have appreciable levels of knowledge in inclusive education. While majority of respondents provided more positive responses, a few also had limited understanding and awareness of inclusive education. When respondents were asked what inclusive education meant to them, and what the national policy stipulates, most of them clearly articulated the concept of inclusive education and some of the policy objectives.

The subsequent narrative captures the responses of some interviewees' understanding of inclusive education and their knowledge of the national policy:

Inclusive education gives the right to persons with special needs including those with disabilities to be educated in the regular system ...the policy has four (4) objectives; ...adapting the educational system and other structures so it can facilitate the inclusion of those with special-needs and disabilities... development of the human resource base... (*personal communication, March 2017*).

Clearly, this narrative could be described as one that fairly reflects an understanding premised on the social model view of disability; which in contemporary times is the widely accepted international understanding of the practice of inclusive education.

In concurrence, another respondent, in an answer to what inclusive education meant stressed the need for a whole school-wide approach in practising inclusion coupled with the enormous responsibilities this approach demands from educators:

I understand inclusive education as having to do with acknowledging the exceptionalities and uniqueness of all students; and making efforts to meet their educational needs so that they all can participate meaningfully together under one roof of age-appropriate classrooms in the same school (*personal communication, March 2017*).

Contrarily, some educators who possessed limited knowledge in inclusive education reported rather less-positive responses as they suggested they were not abreast with the national policy, let alone expound what it sanctioned. One participant retorted as follows:

Seriously speaking, I have not heard about it. As I said, I know that something like that has been on-going but as to whether that policy has been passed, I have not heard about that one, let alone read to see what it demands of us as teachers (*personal communication, March 2017*).

Few assumptions equally emerged relative to misinterpretations ascribed to what inclusive education really connotes. A Head of Department from one of the sampled departments assumed that inclusive education was the same as integration. He asserted that:

It has to do with trying to integrate people with disabilities into the mainstream education, where they wouldn't have to be separated from different educational structures. (*personal communication, March 2017*).

It could be deduced from these extracts that the sampled educators understood inclusive education as an interventionist approach aimed at students with special-needs from exclusionary tendencies and the segregation they encounter as a result of being in school. From such comments it seems to be the case that the Head of Department was fairly aware and in agreement with the philosophy but was unable to clearly distinguish between integration and inclusion.

As noted by Forlin (2007), integration usually assumes that the deficit/medical model has to do with making the learner adapt to the educational system in order to participate and succeed. Learners are mostly educated during their formative years in specialised educational institutions (e.g. School for Blind/Deaf) but later included into a particular classroom when they were thought to be capable of fitting into it. Inclusive education on the other hand, is a flexible and open system that acknowledges the diversity of all learners and modifies the education structure in anticipation of learners' variability instead of the learner adapting to the structure so that all learners are provided with high quality education in age-appropriate classrooms (Forlin, 2007). Forlin further adds that the philosophy of inclusion should be intentionally entrenched throughout the overall structure and curriculum of the school rather than regarding it to be an extra responsibility added to or not being part of the school.

The emerging themes that have been identified from the data solicited from respondents in respect of making meaning of the policy and practice of inclusive education are found to be in consonance with research findings in current literature. Whilst some educators comprehensively explained the philosophy of inclusive education, others conceptualised inclusive education as integrating students with special-needs alongside the regular peers. The latter conception of inclusive education, according to Westwood (2013), is a narrow understanding of inclusive education.

Respondents' knowledge regarding the national inclusive education policy direction in respect of the financial issues was sought with the fifth item on the questionnaire. The survey showed a seeming agreement amongst stakeholders, where 78.4% (making up the majority) and 13.5% of respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively to financial issues as key component in the implementation of inclusive education. On the other hand, a total of 2.7% and 5.4% thought otherwise and accordingly disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. There were no respondents who took neutral stance(s). Overall, a mean score of 4.57 was recorded for this item, indicating a high response agreement.

This finding about respondents' views relative to the financial issues confirmed by the study of Gornitzka, Kogan, and Amaral (2005), which identified inadequate funding provided to institutions as one of the factors that affect the successful policy implementation of inclusion in higher education.

The sixth item had to do with the statement pertaining to the lack of teachers with specialised training and if it was considered as a very serious problem in the University vis-à-vis the practice of inclusive education. According to the data, a vast majority of about 89.2% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement, while 5.4% also agreed. Few respondents (5.4%) however, disagreed (See Table 1). An overall mean score of 4.78 was recorded for this item in reverse coding, which represents a high negative response. This finding particularly points to one of the critical issues in inclusive education, which has to do with the dire need for educators with specialised training. In a similar study, Donald and Hlongwane (1989) found that the majority of educators lacked the requisite training to effectively support the implementation of inclusive education.

Further to that, respondents were asked whether they thought inclusive education was more beneficial than detrimental. The survey revealed that the vast majority respondents (94.6%) were in agreement. However, 5.4% of the respondents neither disagreed nor agreed. Overall, a mean score of 4.78 was recorded for this item, indicating that respondents believed in the fact that, the positives of inclusive education far outweighs the challenges. Beliefs can be an important determining factor for educators' dispositions in the classroom (Bandura, 1997; Pajares 1992 as cited in Civitillo, Moor, & Vervloed, 2016). This means that, the respondents' beliefs in the positives of inclusive education can result in their positive behaviours towards students with special needs in regular classrooms.

Then followed by item 8 (statements) as shown in Table 2.0, the survey addressed the item on whether the inclusion of students with special educational needs affects respondents' efforts in catering for the demands of their regular peers. A mix of responses was generated by this statement, where 45.9% claimed that inclusive education affects their capacity to meet the demands of the regular students in the classroom. Coincidentally, the same percentage of respondents (45.9%) thought that they were not challenged with the presence of special needs students in their classrooms. The sharp division in opinion regarding this item confirms the continuous debate about the merits and challenges of inclusive education. A mean score of 3.08 was recorded for this item, indicating moderate response or agreement.

The last item on the survey concerned the professional preparedness of participants to handle students with special educational needs. This statement attracted disagreement by 21.6% of respondents and 18.9% were in strong disagreement. Another 18.9% of respondents were neutral while the remaining, approximately over one-third and accounting for about 35.1%, was in strong agreement, whereas about 13.1% agreed with the statement. Overall, a mean score of 3.16 was recorded for this item, indicating a moderate response.

On the whole, findings from the sub-objective two (a) identified emerging themes that touched on respondents' knowledge regarding the policy and implementation of the concept of inclusive education. Responses elicited from this study revealed that a large proportion (67.6%) of the educator respondents held the claim of being aware of the existence of a national policy on inclusive education. Again, majority of the respondents agreed that there was the need to give all students the opportunity to be educated in all educational institutions across all levels (mean = 4.89). They also perceived that inclusive education was more beneficial rather than the impression that it was detrimental (mean = 4.78). This finding is particularly positive for the effective implementation of inclusive education, given the fact that educators' positive understanding of policy and practice of inclusion will affect their acceptance and ownership to effectively participate in its implementation.

Nonetheless, the study revealed some varying responses amongst interviewees from the in-depth interviews conducted to probe further issues related to educators' understanding and how they make meaning of the policy and practice of inclusive education. While some of the narratives suggested their framing of inclusion as that which was grounded within the medical model of disability, others indicated opposing views that were thought to be in line with views of the social model of disability.

These divergent views and understanding of the notion of inclusive education may be as a result of differences in how respondents conceptualise inclusive education in relation to their context (Vorapanya, 2008).

More importantly, respondents made certain revelations from the survey which was explored further. Respondents indicated that some of the challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive education were still rife in their departments and by extension the university. Notable amongst the issues raised are summed up, in no particular order, as follows:

- a) The financial issues of the university should be considered as major criterion in the practice of inclusive education.
- b) The lack of educators with specialised training is a serious problem that militates against the practice of inclusive education in the university.
- c) Educators felt professionally unprepared to handle students with special educational needs.
- d) Educators thought that, including students with special educational needs affect their efforts in addressing the academic workloads of their regular counterparts.

The findings have brought to light that a significant number of respondents, representing those in the majority, and accounting for 78.4%, strongly raised the issue of financial commitments and support as key to the implementation of inclusive education. This may be indicative of the seeming lack of support in terms of finances that militate against the smooth implementation of inclusive education in the university. Given that the Government does not provide extra financial support to enable universities that are implementing inclusion to provide the needed assistive technological tools to support inclusion, this finding provides the impetus government of Ghana to reconsider issues related to funding for implementing inclusion, particularly at the tertiary education level. The researchers are of view that while policy formulation at the macro-level is very relevant, the programme(s) cannot be effectively implemented at the micro-level without adequate financial support.

Similarly, the majority (89.2%) of the respondents pointed out the lack of specialised educators as one of the topmost issue that the university faces in their effort to ensure effective implementation of inclusive education. This finding reflects Moh's (2013) study which found that in Libya, most of the educators in the universities sampled lacked the requisite training to effectively support and facilitate the implementation of inclusive education. This suggests the need for instituting professional capacity development seminars and workshops to develop and hone the skills and knowledge of faculty members in order that they can better appreciate the significance of inclusive education and how to effectively facilitate its implementation. Furthermore, findings derived from the data gathered from this study points to the fact that the lack of requisite knowledge and skills on the part of educators engaged in implementing inclusive education results in feeling daunted, unsupported and frustrated, which can disrupt the facilitation of a congenial atmosphere for teaching and learning to occur. This is buttressed by Hall and Engelbrecht's (1999) view that educators' knowledge, skills and competences are very critical to successful implementation of inclusive education. Evidence from the study interviews also points to most faculty members in UEW being much concerned with the need for capacity building to ensure effective facilitation of inclusive education. The need for capacity building for effective facilitation of inclusive education was clearly articulated through comments made by some study respondents that corroborate the researchers' observation:

I think that they (the university administration) have to educate lecturers on some of these things. Because I know that some of the lecturers do not even know about this inclusive education thing... They are in the same class with regular students anyway, but we do not know what goes into that so I think the university must be able to educate lecturers on some of these things so that we can impart effectively (*personal communication, March 2017*).

Another educator respondent shared a similar view:

...when we have issues with large class sizes and virtually no expert knowledge in this area. How do I intervene when the sign-language interpreter or brailist is not able to put my ideas across the way I wanted to? (*personal communication, March 2017*).

These findings align with Chiner and Cardona's (2012) study in which educators acknowledged the need for additional training in different areas. Thus, giving educators the needed training will help to mitigate, if not eradicate completely, any the negative perceptions and practices in the implementation of inclusive education.

The discussion establishes that, the educators sampled in University of Education largely understood the policy and practice of inclusive education; they also appreciated the daunting challenges associated with implementing inclusive education. In spite of their willingness to attain the objectives of inclusive education, they lacked the specialised professional training to develop the requisite skills posed the greatest challenge. This makes it difficult for them to effectively adopt inclusive education practices. In particular, there is consensus on the need for specialised training in the practices of inclusive education in order that they develop the capacity to effectively handle diversity issues as a result of having many students who require different levels of attention in their classrooms. Taking cognizance of these challenges and adequately addressing them would go a long way in facilitating the concerted efforts at making the ideals of inclusive education a reality in higher education in Ghana.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study established that educators' views and understandings regarding the concept of inclusive education were varied, but not markedly different from the understandings postulated in the literature. In addition, educators seemed to be aware of the existence of the national policy on inclusive education and the undergirding principles therein.

Overall, the study reveals that whilst almost 90% of the educators understood inclusive education on the basis of fundamental human rights/equity, others understood it from the viewpoints of effective practice where students with SENs access the general curriculum and resourcing perspective.

These different understandings notwithstanding, it is in line with both the social and medical models of disability. It is however imperative, to align these differences in understanding to promote harmonious implementation of inclusive education practice in the institution. The authors recommend that the University liaises with its Department of Special Education and the University of Cape Coast to organise professional development and refresher training programmes for all the faculty, particularly educators in the academic departments that are implementing inclusive education. This will equip them with the requisite knowledge that will demystify inclusive education, address their misconceptions on diversity, and hone their competences in addressing the learning needs of students with hearing, visual and physical impairments, as well as those with learning disabilities alongside the 'regular' students represented in the lecture halls. Making these programmes mandatory and frequent would sustain effective implementation of inclusive education in all departments of the University.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study must be replicated in all higher education institutions universities in Ghana to enable the Ministry of Education to gain a holistic insight into lecturers' awareness and understanding of Ghana's Inclusive Education policy and how they can be supported to differentiate teaching to benefit students in all academic departments.

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Appendix

Table 1: Summary of Educators' Understanding and Practice of Inclusive Education

Statements (Items)	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		M
	FQ	%	FQ	%	FQ	%	FQ	%	FQ	%	Mean
1 My country/Ministry of Education has a policy on inclusive education.	25	67.6	2	5.4	8	21.6	2	5.4	0	0	4.35
2 The university has clearly articulated goals and policies for inclusive education.	22	59.5	9	24.3	1	2.7	2	5.4	3	8.1	4.23
3 The admissions process guarantees access to the school for students with special needs.	20	54.1	13	35.1	3	8.1	0	0	1	2.7	4.38
4 Give all students opportunity to be educated in the educational institutions across all levels.	33	89.2	4	10.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	4.89
5 The financial issues of the university have to be the major criteria when considering the practice of inclusive education.	29	78.4	5	13.5	0	0	1	2.7	2	5.4	4.57
6 The most serious problem in the university in relation to the practice of inclusive education is lack of teachers with specialized training.	33	89.2	2	5.4	0	0	2	5.4	0	0	4.78
7 Inclusive education is more beneficial than it is detrimental.	31	83.8	4	10.8	2	5.4	0	0	0	0	4.78
8 Including students with special educational needs affects my capacity to meet the needs of other learners in the class.	12	32.4	5	13.5	3	8.1	8	21.6	9	24.3	3.08
9 I feel professionally prepared to work with students with special educational needs.	13	35.1	2	5.4	7	18.9	8	21.6	7	18.9	3.16

Source: Field Data, 2017

