

Review Article

Special Education in Ghana: Current Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the challenges and opportunities in implementing inclusive education for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Ghana. A systematic review approach was employed, analyzing a range of peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and reports published between 2019 and 2025. Crossref, EBSCO, PubMed, Cochrane, and ProQuest were among the databases searched to obtain data on challenges and opportunities. Thirteen mixed studies (qualitative and quantitative), 10 qualitative studies, and 2 policy documents were eventually found to meet the inclusion criteria. The study identifies significant barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and weak enforcement of the Persons with Disabilities Act (Act 715), which hinder access to quality education. Socio-cultural stigma and negative societal attitudes further marginalize PWDs, especially in rural areas. However, the study also highlights opportunities like policy support for inclusive education, the integration of assistive technologies, and community-based initiatives. The study recommends increased funding, stronger policy enforcement, expanded teacher training, and greater community-driven advocacy to improve educational and employment outcomes for PWDs.

Keywords: disabilities in Ghana, inclusive education, challenges, opportunities, special education.

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INTRODUCTION

Ghana's progress toward inclusive education for children with disabilities has a long and significant history, beginning in 1936 with the establishment of special education programs under the Department of Social Welfare. Initially, these efforts were limited in scope and predominantly focused on charity-based approaches rather than rights-based frameworks, reflecting the prevailing global attitudes toward disability during that era (Naami et al., 2023). Over the years, Ghana has endeavored to shift toward more inclusive policies, culminating in the enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Act (Act 715) in 2006. This legislation represents a critical milestone in affirming the rights of individuals with disabilities (Government of Ghana, 2006). Nevertheless, despite this legislative advancement, significant challenges persist in the effective implementation and enforcement of the associated policies.

The Persons with Disabilities Act was enacted to create a legal framework for individuals with disabilities across social, educational, and economic sectors. Key provisions of the Act mandate that public buildings and institutions be made accessible to persons with disabilities, ensure the implementation of inclusive education, and provide safeguards against discrimination in employment and other areas (Government of Ghana, 2006). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the Act has been undermined by the absence of the necessary legislative instruments for its implementation. For example, while the legislation specifies a ten-year transition period for public and private buildings to improve accessibility, actual compliance remains low due to insufficient enforcement mechanisms (Naami et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the insufficient funding allocated to disability programs significantly exacerbates the challenges faced in this area. The Special Education Division of Ghana's Ministry of Education, responsible for overseeing the implementation of inclusive education policies, has experienced chronic underfunding. Its proportion of the educational budget declined from 0.7% in 2010 to a mere 0.4% in 2012 (Naami et al., 2023). This persistent lack of financial resources restricts the division's capacity to provide essential infrastructure, comprehensive teacher training, and adequate learning materials to support children with disabilities. As a result, the educational system, despite its legislative objectives, continues to struggle to meet even the most fundamental standards for accessibility and inclusivity.

A significant gap in policy exists in Ghana concerning the alignment of its disability legislation with international frameworks. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), ratified by Ghana in 2012, advocates for comprehensive, rights-based approaches to disability inclusion. Nevertheless, Ghana's Disability Act (Act 715) has not been harmonized with the UNCRPD, resulting in numerous inconsistencies between national disability policy and global best practices. For instance, while the UNCRPD underscores the importance of inclusive education as a fundamental right, Ghana's current practices remain fragmented, with many children with disabilities assigned to special schools rather than integrated into mainstream classrooms (Senadza et al., 2019).

Moreover, the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks further exacerbates these challenges. Several initiatives outlined in the Persons with Disabilities Act have not been implemented due to a lack of effective oversight and accountability. For example, the mandate for inclusive infrastructure in educational institutions and public facilities is infrequently enforced, rendering many buildings inaccessible to individuals with disabilities. Additionally, the lack of a centralized database to monitor the progress of disability programs and the allocation of disability-related resources results in notable inefficiencies and inequities in service delivery.

The relationship between education and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities (PWDs) is an important factor in enhancing social inclusion and reducing poverty in Ghana. Education is not only a fundamental human right but also a powerful tool for improving employment prospects and promoting financial independence. However, despite significant strides in promoting educational inclusion for persons with disabilities in Ghana, challenges continue to limit access to quality education and, consequently, employment opportunities.

The level of educational attainment is strongly correlated with employment opportunities for PWDs in Ghana. Research indicates that individuals with higher levels of education have better chances of securing stable and well-paid jobs (Morgan, 2023). This holds for persons with disabilities as well, although they often face additional barriers that hinder their ability to access and complete formal education. For many PWDs, the

completion of secondary or tertiary education can significantly enhance their employability by equipping them with the skills and qualifications necessary to enter the workforce.

However, despite the importance of education in improving employment prospects, access to education for PWDs in Ghana is still limited. Only a small proportion of children with disabilities complete secondary school, and even fewer pursue higher education (Naami et al., 2023). Many children with disabilities drop out of school early due to a combination of factors, including physical and social barriers, lack of trained teachers, and societal stigma (Opoku et al., 2021). As a result, many PWDs enter adulthood without the necessary educational credentials, making it harder for them to compete in the job market.

This study addresses the significant mismatch between the legal framework for inclusive education in Ghana, the limited resources available for its effective implementation, and the resulting barriers that prevent persons with disabilities (PWDs) from accessing quality education. Despite Ghana's legislative efforts, particularly through the Persons with Disabilities Act (Act 715), which emphasizes inclusive education, the practical realities present serious challenges. These challenges contribute to a fragmented education system that fails to fully support children with disabilities. Additionally, the implementation of inclusive education policies remains weak, largely due to the absence of robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. This gap highlights the difference between policy intentions and their practical application, which continues to hinder the educational attainment of PWDs.

Education is closely linked to employment opportunities, social inclusion, and financial independence. By improving access to quality education, PWDs would be better positioned to pursue higher levels of education, which is essential for improving employment prospects. Addressing the challenges would align Ghana's policies more closely with international standards such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and would ensure that Ghana's education system becomes more inclusive and equitable for all children, including those with disabilities.

The aim of the study was to explore these systemic gaps or challenges in the implementation of inclusive education policies and their impact on PWDs in Ghana. This study sought to identify the key barriers preventing effective policy implementation and provide recommendations for addressing these barriers to improve access to education and employment for PWDs.

METHODS

Systematic Review

One study technique for gathering, assessing, and synthesising the body of current literature in an organised and transparent way is a systematic review (Tran et al., 2021). This systematic review's main objective was to compile the results of previous studies to comprehend the potential and difficulties facing Ghana's special education system. This methodology highlights the potential for development while identifying important themes and barriers that impact inclusive education through an examination of peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, reports, and other academic sources (Naami et al., 2023; Opoku et al., 2021). A literature search, the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, quality evaluation, and thematic analysis were the steps that this review went through. By taking these actions, a thorough and rigorous understanding of Ghana's special education system and its effects on disabled students was guaranteed.

Data Collection Process

This systematic review examined the current challenges and opportunities of special education in Ghana using the techniques described by Arkey and O'Malley (2005). Finding pertinent research, choosing it, charting the data, and synthesising the results were all

steps in the review process. Crossref, EBSCO, PubMed, Cochrane, and ProQuest were among the databases used in the search to obtain data on challenges and opportunities. MeSH descriptors include "special education," "challenges," "opportunities," and "inclusive education". These search phrases were derived from these terms. Only works published between 2019 and 2025 were included in the review of the literature.

The search encompassed position statements, dissertations, government reports on incident figures, textbooks, peer-reviewed journal papers, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses. Additionally, Boolean operators such as "or" and "and" were used. When required, ancillary or related research was incorporated. After removing 26 duplicates from the 111 articles that the first search yielded, 85 items moved forward to the first screening. Sixty-two full-text articles remained for examination after 23 of them were eliminated as non-research or opinion. Finally, 25 studies, which included 13 mixed studies (qualitative and quantitative), 10 qualitative studies, and 2 policy documents that looked at the challenges and opportunities of special education and focused on Ghana, satisfied the requirements.

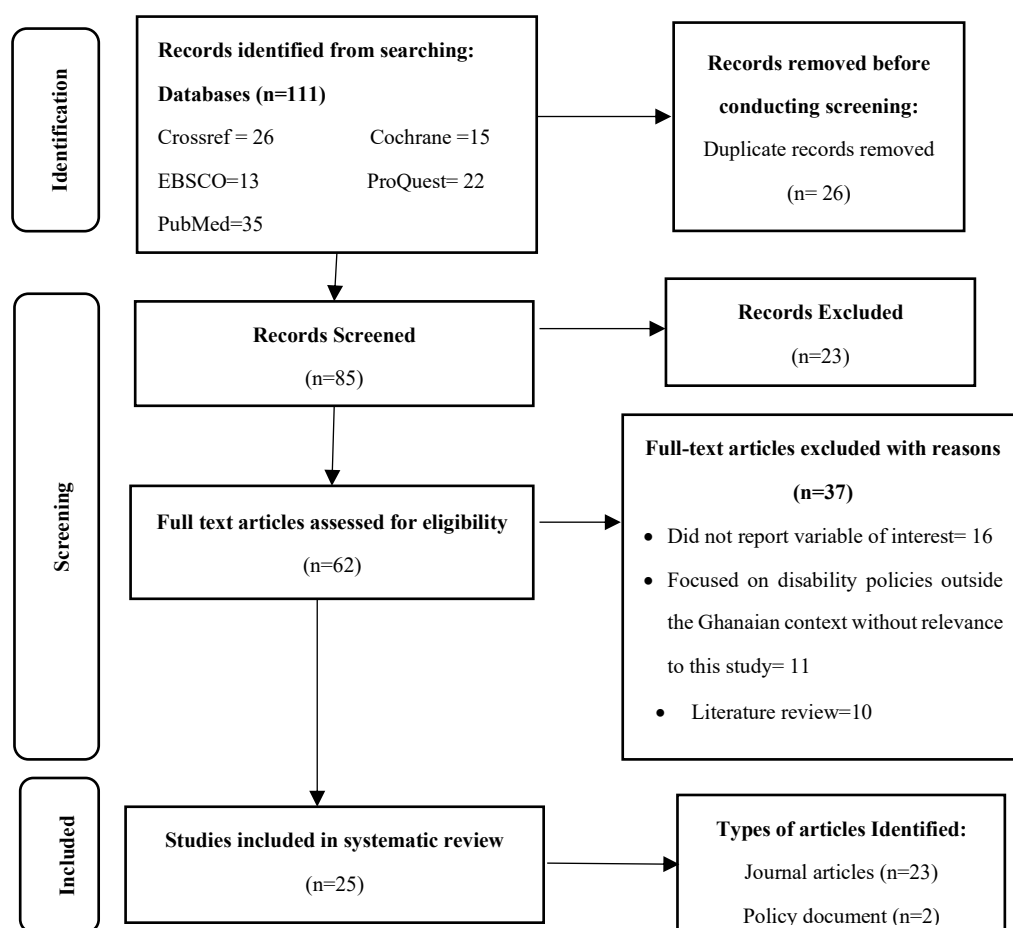


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram of search results and the screening process

RESULTS

Challenges

Significant Infrastructural and Systemic Barriers

One of the most critical challenges confronting special education in Ghana is the significant infrastructural and systemic barriers that hinder children with disabilities from obtaining quality education. Educational institutions throughout the country, particularly in rural and under-resourced areas, frequently lack the necessary resources to support students with disabilities. Essential infrastructure, including ramps, accessible restrooms,

and braille signage, is often conspicuously absent, rendering many educational facilities physically inaccessible to students with mobility, sensory, or other disabilities (Odame et al., 2020). Consequently, a substantial number of children are compelled to abandon their education or forgo it entirely, thus perpetuating cycles of poverty and social exclusion.

The lack of inclusive infrastructure in schools is a major obstacle to achieving universal access to education for persons with disabilities. Many classrooms are designed without considering the needs of students with disabilities, resulting in narrow doorways, steep stairs, and uneven floors that hinder mobility (Tudzi et al., 2017). For visually impaired students, the absence of tactile materials or braille resources creates further challenges, limiting their ability to fully participate in classroom activities (Opoku et al., 2021). Similarly, students with hearing impairments often struggle due to the lack of sign language interpreters or assistive listening devices, making it difficult to engage in lessons.

Transportation to educational institutions presents a substantial challenge for students with disabilities in Ghana. The public transportation systems are predominantly inaccessible, characterised by a lack of ramps and designated spaces for individuals who use wheelchairs (Odame et al., 2020). A study conducted at the University of Cape Coast revealed that the floor heights of campus shuttles exceed established accessibility standards, thereby making it nearly impossible for wheelchair users to board without assistance (Odame et al., 2020). These transportation barriers significantly contribute to low school attendance rates among children with disabilities, particularly in rural regions.

A significant systemic challenge within Ghana's educational framework is the insufficient number of adequately trained teachers capable of effectively supporting students with disabilities. A substantial proportion of educators in public schools lack training in inclusive teaching methodologies and disability-specific pedagogies, rendering them ill-prepared to address the varied needs of their students (Opoku et al., 2021). For instance, a teacher who has not received training in Braille may find it challenging to assist a visually impaired student, while those without knowledge of sign language cannot facilitate effective communication with hearing-impaired students. This deficiency in teacher training presents a considerable obstacle to learning for students with disabilities and exacerbates existing educational inequities.

Special education in Ghana faces chronic shortages of funding, teaching and learning materials, assistive equipment, and accessible infrastructure. This limits the effectiveness of both special and inclusive schools (Asamoah et al., 2023; Kumedzro, 2019; Nyaaba et al., 2021). Physical school environments are often not disability-friendly, with inaccessible buildings and a lack of assistive devices, making participation difficult for students with disabilities (Hamenoo & Dayan, 2021).

Many educational institutions encounter challenges due to insufficient teacher training and a lack of specialised equipment and instructional materials that are critical for fostering inclusive education. Important resources, such as adaptive desks, assistive technologies, and sensory aids, are frequently unavailable or prohibitively expensive for schools to procure. This scarcity of resources restricts the ability of schools to cultivate an environment conducive to the educational success of students with disabilities (Tudzi et al., 2017). As a result, numerous children with disabilities are relegated to special schools, which are often underfunded and located in areas that are difficult to access, rather than being integrated into mainstream classrooms.

Policy Implementation and Monitoring Gaps

The Persons with Disabilities Act (Act 715) of Ghana mandates the accessibility of educational facilities; however, compliance remains insufficient due to inadequate enforcement and monitoring mechanisms (Government of Ghana, 2006). Many educational institutions and local governments are either unaware of the specific requirements established by the Act or lack the necessary financial resources for implementation. Although

the legislation stipulates a ten-year transition period for public buildings to be made accessible, numerous schools have yet to undertake significant modifications (Naami et al., 2023). The lack of penalties or accountability measures for non-compliance further compromises the effectiveness of the Act.

Furthermore, systemic underfunding of special education programs exacerbates these issues. The Special Education Division of the Ministry of Education in Ghana, responsible for executing inclusive education policies, has consistently received minimal financial support, hindering its ability to address prevalent infrastructural deficiencies (Naami et al., 2023). In the absence of substantial funding increases, initiatives aimed at enhancing accessibility and inclusivity within educational institutions are unlikely to progress effectively.

The infrastructural and systemic challenges present in Ghana significantly impact the educational outcomes of students with disabilities. A considerable number of these children discontinue their education due to a combination of physical barriers, inadequate support services, and pervasive societal stigma (Opoku et al., 2021). Among those who continue their education, a marked disparity in academic achievement exists in comparison to their non-disabled counterparts, as they encounter substantial obstacles resulting from their environments. This educational inequity not only limits their prospects for higher education but also hampers their employability, thereby perpetuating their marginalization within society.

Stigma and Socio-Cultural Barriers

Persistent negative societal attitudes, cultural stereotypes, and stigma toward disability hinder the inclusion and support of children with special needs. These attitudes affect both the school environment and broader community, leading to discrimination and social exclusion (Ackah-Jnr & Appiah, 2025; Nyaaba et al., 2021).

Stigma and socio-cultural beliefs represent significant barriers to the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Ghana, particularly within the educational sector. Despite legislative advancements, such as the Persons with Disabilities Act (2006), and a growing awareness of disability rights, negative societal attitudes and entrenched cultural norms continue to obstruct the full integration of children with disabilities into mainstream educational environments and society. These socio-cultural challenges are multifaceted, encompassing not individual attitudes but institutional practices, public perceptions, and broader cultural and spiritual beliefs regarding disability.

In Ghana, as in numerous other regions of sub-Saharan Africa, disabilities are frequently interpreted through the framework of traditional beliefs that link them to spiritual or moral shortcomings. Disabilities may be perceived as divine punishment for transgressions or as resulting from supernatural phenomena, including ancestral curses, malevolent spirits, or witchcraft (Mfoafo-M'Carthy et al., 2020). Such cultural beliefs profoundly impact the perception and treatment of individuals with disabilities (Mfoafo-M'Carthy et al., 2020). For instance, children with disabilities may be regarded as "cursed" or "undesirable," leading to a prevalent cultural stigma that impedes their inclusion in community activities, particularly in educational settings.

The manifestation of this stigma takes various forms. Families of children with disabilities, especially in rural communities, may opt to conceal their children or remove them from public view to mitigate social embarrassment or ridicule. Consequently, many children with disabilities are deprived of essential opportunities for socialisation and education. This cultural outlook contributes to elevated dropout rates among students with disabilities in Ghana, as these children may be barred from attending school or face exclusion after enrollment (Naami et al., 2023).

For families of children with disabilities, the societal stigma can be devastating. Parents may experience feelings of shame, guilt, or even fear of social ostracism. This often

results in parents keeping their children at home to avoid the discrimination they might face at school or in public spaces. Research shows that parents of children with disabilities are often reluctant to seek formal educational opportunities for their children, fearing that their children will not only face academic challenges but also emotional and social isolation (Opoku et al., 2017). This social exclusion is particularly acute in rural communities, where traditional beliefs hold more sway, and access to information about disability and inclusive practices is limited. In urban areas, while there may be more awareness of disability rights, socio-cultural prejudices persist, and families still face significant challenges in finding schools and communities that will accept their children without discrimination (Naami et al., 2012).

Barriers to Education and Employment

A lack of inclusive educational facilities and support services, such as sign language interpreters, braille materials, and adaptive learning technologies, constitutes a major barrier to education for students with disabilities (Tudzi et al., 2017). Many schools lack the infrastructure to accommodate students with disabilities, and even when students with disabilities do manage to enroll, they often face challenges in accessing quality education due to these limitations.

Moreover, there is a lack of awareness among teachers about how to address the unique needs of students with disabilities (Opoku et al., 2021). The absence of disability-focused training in teacher education programs means that many educators are ill-equipped to provide the necessary support for disabled students. This often results in disabled students receiving less attention, lower expectations, and fewer educational opportunities than their non-disabled peers (Opoku et al., 2021). This lack of educational support leads to a lower completion rate for disabled students and, ultimately, a reduced ability to transition successfully into the workforce.

Opportunities

Policy and Institutional Support

The Ministry of Education's Education Strategic Plan (ESP) promotes inclusive education as the future direction, encouraging the integration of children with special needs into mainstream schools while maintaining special schools for those requiring more intensive support (Issaka et al., 2022). National policies now require pre-service teacher training in inclusive education, aiming to equip all teachers with the skills to support diverse learners (Issaka et al., 2022). Special schools continue to play a vital role, offering dedicated teachers, varied learning activities, and preparatory support for children with intellectual disabilities (Hervie, 2023).

The government's dedication to inclusive education is among the changes in Ghana's special education scene. The Inclusive Education Policy Framework, which promotes mainstream schools to accept students with special needs, is one of the inclusive policies that the Ministry of Education has continued to prioritise (Novignon, 2025). This has resulted in more children with disabilities being enrolled, infrastructure improvements, and teacher training initiatives that enhance inclusive classroom pedagogy.

A growing opportunity lies in the integration of assistive technology to support students with special needs. With support from international organisations and the private sector, schools in urban and peri-urban areas have begun using low-cost digital tools such as screen readers, speech-to-text applications, and audio-based learning platforms (Bubeng & Amo-Darko, 2024). These interventions not only enhance learning outcomes but also promote independence and social inclusion for students with disabilities.

Moreover, universities and teacher training colleges are gradually incorporating inclusive education modules into their curricula. According to Elliason (2025), there has been a shift towards practice-based PhD models in education that emphasize research and

intervention in real-world inclusive learning environments. This evolution offers future educators and researchers a platform to engage deeply with the challenges and possibilities within Ghana's special education sector.

Community-based programs are also creating opportunities for localised impact. NGOs and grassroots organisations such as Lady Volta Green Tech Academy are integrating vocational training with inclusive education for women and youth with disabilities (Yeboah, 2025). These initiatives blend empowerment, education, and economic development, offering an alternative model for special education in rural Ghana.

Additionally, donor-funded projects have supported infrastructure and policy development, especially in underserved areas. For instance, USAID and UNICEF have funded teacher capacity-building workshops, inclusive school designs, and the development of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs), especially for learners with autism, hearing impairment, and intellectual disabilities (Amo-Antwi et al., 2025). These collaborations significantly boost local education departments' ability to implement inclusive practices.

DISCUSSION

In the educational context, stigma plays a critical role in the segregation of children with disabilities. Teachers who are not properly trained to handle the unique needs of students with disabilities may harbour biases that further marginalise these students. The lack of disability-awareness training in teacher education programs means that many educators hold inaccurate or harmful beliefs about the abilities of students with disabilities (Opoku et al., 2021). These negative attitudes affect how teachers interact with students, often leading to lower expectations and a lack of encouragement for disabled students.

Furthermore, children with disabilities may face bullying or verbal abuse from their peers, further entrenching their social isolation and academic disadvantage. In a study on inclusive education in Ghana, Opoku et al. (2021) found that children with disabilities are often labeled as "inferior" or "difficult", which reduces their opportunities for academic engagement and success. This stigma, both internal and external, prevents children from reaching their full potential and diminishes their self-esteem, which can have long-term psychological and social consequences.

Additionally, barriers within the education system, societal attitudes, and discrimination limit employment opportunities for PWDs. Negative stereotypes about disability often paint persons with disabilities as incapable or less productive than their non-disabled counterparts. These prejudices are reinforced in the workplace, where employers may be hesitant to hire individuals with disabilities, fearing the potential costs or difficulties associated with providing accommodations or adaptations (Naami, 2015). In many cases, workplace discrimination leads to exclusion from the labour market altogether.

The Way Forward

Addressing the infrastructural and systemic challenges encountered by individuals with disabilities necessitates a comprehensive strategy that prioritises investment in disability-friendly facilities, educator training, and resource allocation. Schools must be equipped with the necessary features, including ramps, accessible restrooms, and adaptive classrooms. Furthermore, public transportation systems must be redesigned to adequately accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities (Odame et al., 2020).

Educator training programs ought to incorporate modules focused on inclusive teaching methodologies, alongside the effective application of assistive technologies and adaptive learning materials (Opoku et al., 2021). Additionally, the implementation of robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms is critical to ensure adherence to the accessibility standards delineated in the Persons with Disabilities Act.

It is also imperative to increase funding for special education programs. By allocating a greater proportion of the education budget to inclusive initiatives, the government can

address existing resource disparities and ensure that all children, regardless of their abilities, have access to high-quality education. Moreover, fostering community involvement and advocacy can significantly enhance these efforts, elevate awareness, and promote a culture of inclusivity within educational institutions and society as a whole.

The Role of Religion in Disability Perceptions

Religious institutions also play a significant role in shaping societal views of disability in Ghana. While some religious groups promote inclusiveness, others perpetuate harmful stereotypes about disability. In some Christian and traditional religious contexts, disability is sometimes considered a manifestation of demonic possession or a test of faith (Mfoafo-M'Carthy et al., 2020). Consequently, individuals with disabilities are sometimes denied participation in religious activities or subjected to healing practices that may not address their actual needs. These practices not only reflect a lack of understanding about disability but also reinforce the belief that disabled persons are somehow different or less human than others.

In contrast, some religious organisations have made important strides in advocating for the rights of PWDs. For example, some churches have become more inclusive by providing physical accommodation like wheelchair access and offering support for families of children with disabilities. However, such progressive initiatives are still limited, and many communities still adhere to exclusionary religious practices that marginalise persons with disabilities.

The Role of Media in Shaping Perceptions

The media also plays a significant role in either perpetuating or challenging stigma surrounding disability. In Ghana, disability issues are often underrepresented in mainstream media, and when they are covered, they are frequently depicted in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes (Amoako et al., 2020). For instance, persons with disabilities are often portrayed as pitiable or as objects of charity rather than as active, capable members of society. This portrayal deepens societal prejudice and limits the visibility of positive role models for children with disabilities. When disability issues are not represented accurately or sufficiently, the public's understanding of disability remains skewed, and stigma persists.

Strategies for Reducing Stigma

To combat stigma, there is a growing need for educational and awareness campaigns aimed at changing societal perceptions of disability. These campaigns can be particularly effective if they involve people with disabilities themselves in advocacy and awareness-raising activities. Programs like Ghana Somubi Dwumadie, which focus on policy advocacy and addressing stigma through community engagement, have demonstrated that empowering persons with disabilities to speak out and participate in decision-making can significantly shift public attitudes (Ghana Somubi Dwumadie, 2024).

Furthermore, integrating disability education into the mainstream curriculum can help foster an inclusive mindset from a young age. By educating children about disability, its causes, and the capabilities of persons with disabilities, schools can create more accepting environments. Teacher training programs must also incorporate disability awareness to ensure that educators are equipped to challenge their own biases and teach inclusively.

The Role of Vocational Training and Skill Development

Vocational education and training (VET) play a crucial role in improving the employability of PWDs in Ghana. Given that many PWDs may not complete formal education, vocational training provides an alternative route for acquiring marketable skills. However, the availability and accessibility of vocational training programs for persons with disabilities in Ghana are limited. Many vocational centers lack the necessary infrastructure and resources to accommodate disabled students, and the curriculum is often

not tailored to the needs of these students (Naami et al., 2023). As a result, PWDs face difficulties in accessing the skills needed for employment, even though vocational training could be a key pathway to economic independence.

Furthermore, employers in Ghana often lack awareness of the potential contributions that PWDs can make to the workforce. There is a need for more inclusive and disability-friendly employment practices, such as reasonable accommodation in the workplace, flexible work hours, and assistive technologies, to ensure that PWDs thrive in a variety of work environments. Without these accommodations, PWDs are often excluded from the labor force, even when they possess the necessary skills and qualifications (Equal Opportunity Study, 2023).

The Role of Legislation and Social Protection

The Ghanaian government has made important strides in creating a more inclusive labour market for PWDs through legislation such as the Persons with Disabilities Act (2006), which prohibits discrimination based on disability and mandates that 2% of employees in public institutions be persons with disabilities. However, enforcement of these policies has been weak, and there are few incentives for private employers to comply with disability inclusion policies (Naami et al., 2023). This gap in enforcement undermines the potential impact of the legislation and contributes to the continued underemployment of PWDs.

Social protection programs such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) initiative, which targets vulnerable groups, including PWDs, offer some support, but they are insufficient in addressing the broader systemic issues of employment access. The National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), which provides health coverage to all citizens, also has limited coverage for services that address the specific needs of PWDs, such as rehabilitation and assistive devices (Badu et al., 2016). Expanding social protection programs and ensuring better access to health services would help reduce the economic vulnerabilities faced by PWDs and support their ability to enter and remain in the workforce.

Improving Educational and Employment Outcomes

To improve the correlation between education and employment for persons with disabilities in Ghana, several strategies are necessary. First, there must be a greater focus on inclusive education policies, ensuring that schools are adequately equipped to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. This includes investing in accessible infrastructure, providing assistive technologies, and training teachers to work with disabled students. Second, the expansion of vocational training programs tailored to the needs of PWDs is critical to enhancing their employability. These programs should be integrated into the broader educational system to provide a seamless transition from education to employment.

Employers should be encouraged to adopt inclusive hiring practices and provide reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities. Legislation should be enforced more rigorously to ensure that PWDs are not excluded from the workforce due to discriminatory practices. Public awareness campaigns aimed at reducing stigma and changing societal attitudes about disability will also play an important role in promoting the inclusion of PWDs in education and employment.

Finally, expanding social protection programs such as the National Health Insurance Scheme and Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) to better address the specific needs of PWDs can help reduce financial barriers and improve access to education and employment.

Community-driven Solutions and Advocacy

Community-driven solutions and advocacy have emerged as powerful tools in addressing the systemic barriers and social stigma faced by persons with disabilities (PWDs)

in Ghana. As formal policies and institutions often struggle to meet the needs of PWDs, grassroots movements and local initiatives have become instrumental in promoting inclusive education, healthcare, and social participation. These community-led efforts not only address immediate needs but also work toward changing societal attitudes, ensuring long-term transformation in the way disability is perceived and supported in Ghana.

In Ghana, grassroots advocacy has played a pivotal role in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities. Community-based organisations (CBOs) and local advocacy groups have been at the forefront of efforts to increase awareness about disability, reduce stigma, and push for inclusive policies. These organisations work directly with PWDs, providing support services such as counselling, legal assistance, and training, while also mobilising public opinion to challenge discriminatory practices (Naami et al., 2023). For example, the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations (GFD) is one of the key advocacy bodies in Ghana that has been instrumental in pushing for policy changes, raising awareness about disability rights, and amplifying the voices of PWDs in national discussions. The GFD and other advocacy organisations have successfully lobbied for the passage of the Persons with Disabilities Act (Act 715) of 2006 and continue to advocate for its full implementation. Their efforts have helped to highlight the issues faced by PWDs in education, healthcare, and employment, and have led to some positive policy changes. However, the work of these organisations is ongoing, as they continue to push for greater accountability and improved conditions for PWDs across the country (Naami et al., 2023).

Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) is another example of a successful community-driven solution in Ghana. CBR is a multi-sectoral strategy that involves the active participation of local communities in the rehabilitation and social inclusion of persons with disabilities. The approach emphasises local involvement in providing services such as physical therapy, education, vocational training, and community sensitisation (Wickenden et al., 2012). In Ghana, CBR programs have been implemented in several regions, particularly in rural and underserved areas where access to specialised services is limited. These programs are designed to be flexible and context-specific, addressing the unique needs of local communities while empowering PWDs and their families to take an active role in rehabilitation and social participation. By focusing on local resources and expertise, CBR programs have been able to bridge the gap between formal services and the everyday needs of PWDs, particularly in areas such as transportation, education, and healthcare (Wickenden et al., 2012).

The participatory development model, which emphasises the involvement of local stakeholders in decision-making, has been critical in ensuring that disability policies and interventions are responsive to the actual needs of communities. In Ghana, community leaders, including religious leaders, chiefs, and local government officials, play an important role in shaping attitudes toward disability. By involving these local stakeholders in disability awareness campaigns and policy discussions, advocacy groups can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for PWDs (Mensah et al., 2022). For instance, local chiefs and religious leaders in Ghana have a significant influence on social norms and can either perpetuate stigma or help break it down. Some advocacy groups have partnered with these influential figures to promote disability inclusion in schools, workplaces, and public spaces. By engaging with local leaders, these groups ensure that disability-inclusive policies are not only adopted at the national level but also embraced by communities that traditionally hold exclusionary views toward PWDs (Grischow, 2021). The involvement of local figures ensures that policies are culturally appropriate and that the change is sustained within the community.

One of the most impactful areas of community-driven advocacy has been in the education sector. In many parts of Ghana, children with disabilities face enormous barriers to accessing education, often due to stigma, lack of infrastructure, and the belief that

children with disabilities are incapable of learning. However, local initiatives focused on awareness and enrollment have demonstrated significant success in increasing the participation of children with disabilities in education. For example, some community-based initiatives have used mapping exercises and sensitization forums to identify children with disabilities who are not enrolled in school and to encourage their families to send them to school. These initiatives often involve door-to-door outreach, meetings with parents and caregivers, and workshops to challenge misconceptions about disability. And highlight the importance of education for all children, regardless of ability (Duorinaah, 2023). Additionally, these campaigns work to ensure that local schools are prepared to accommodate children with disabilities by improving accessibility and ensuring that teachers are trained to support diverse learners.

Public education campaigns led by community organisations and disability advocacy groups are essential in reducing the stigma associated with disability. In Ghana, attitudes toward disability are often shaped by traditional and religious beliefs, which view disability as a curse or punishment (Kassah, 1998). To address these misconceptions, advocacy groups have launched public education campaigns designed to raise awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities and to challenge harmful stereotypes.

These campaigns use a variety of media, including radio, television, social media, and community gatherings, to reach a wide audience. By featuring stories of successful PWDs, highlighting the contributions that persons with disabilities can make to society, and sharing information about legal rights and available services, these campaigns aim to shift public perceptions and promote greater inclusion (Amoako et al., 2020). These efforts are particularly important in rural areas, where information about disability rights may be limited, and cultural attitudes are often more resistant to change.

Role of Non-Traditional Service Providers

Non-traditional service providers, such as local religious leaders, traditional healers, and even small-scale business owners, have also been identified as key players in the disability support ecosystem. In Ghana, these non-professional service providers are often more accessible to communities than formal healthcare providers or educators. By collaborating with traditional healers, pastors, and other community figures, disability advocacy groups have been able to integrate culturally relevant approaches to disability care and support into mainstream services (Wylie et al., 2020). This model ensures that disability services are not only medically effective but also culturally sensitive and more likely to be accepted by local communities. For example, some pastors have incorporated disability-inclusive teachings into their sermons and have advocated for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in church activities. Similarly, traditional healers have been involved in supporting the physical rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities, working alongside medical professionals to offer a holistic approach to care (Yekple, 2014). These non-traditional service providers help bridge the gap between formal disability services and the cultural context of Ghanaian society, ensuring that PWDs receive comprehensive care and support.

Religious institutions, particularly Christian churches and traditional African religious groups, hold a central position in Ghanaian society. These institutions often serve as sources of moral guidance and community support, making them powerful vehicles for promoting social change. In many communities, religious leaders are viewed as figures of authority and influence, and their attitudes toward disability can significantly impact how persons with disabilities are perceived and treated.

Some progressive religious leaders have taken an active role in advocating for the inclusion of PWDs in community life, particularly in education, employment, and religious activities. For instance, churches have been instrumental in providing accessible spaces, organising support groups, and encouraging inclusive teachings that challenge

harmful stereotypes about disability. Many churches in Ghana now organise disability awareness programs, support families of children with disabilities, and actively encourage their congregants to embrace disability inclusion (Mfoafo-M'Carthy et al., 2020). Some religious organisations even provide financial assistance or in-kind support for PWDs, helping to cover costs related to education, healthcare, or vocational training. In some instances, pastors and imams have used their platforms to educate the wider community about the rights of PWDs and the importance of social inclusion. By incorporating messages of acceptance and respect into sermons, religious leaders can reshape attitudes and reduce the stigma surrounding disability. This advocacy is essential in a context where traditional beliefs about disability, such as the association with evil spirits or moral punishment, often persist (Kassah, 1998). When religious leaders speak out in favour of inclusion, they can help shift societal attitudes, making it easier for PWDs to be accepted in both social and educational settings.

In many rural areas of Ghana, traditional healers are the first point of contact for individuals seeking medical or therapeutic assistance. These healers use a range of methods, including herbal medicine, spiritual healing, and physical therapies, to treat various ailments, including disabilities. While traditional medicine is often viewed with skepticism by the medical establishment, it remains a deeply rooted part of the healthcare system in Ghana, particularly in areas where access to formal healthcare services is limited.

Traditional healers, who are often trusted members of their communities, have the potential to play a transformative role in the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. In some regions, traditional healers collaborate with healthcare professionals to offer integrated care, which combines medical treatment with traditional healing practices. For example, some PWDs in Ghana seek assistance from both medical doctors and traditional healers for the treatment of conditions such as physical disabilities, mental health issues, and developmental disabilities. In these cases, traditional healers help with pain management, mobility aids, and emotional support, providing care that is often unavailable through formal healthcare channels (Wylie et al., 2020).

Moreover, traditional healers often serve as valuable sources of social support. They are frequently called upon to mediate conflicts and offer counsel to individuals and families dealing with the social stigma associated with disability. Through their influence, healers can promote more inclusive attitudes, encouraging families to accept and care for children with disabilities, rather than ostracising them. By addressing both the physical and psychological aspects of disability, traditional healers can help reduce the burden on PWDs and their families.

In Ghanaian communities, chiefs, elders, and local community leaders wield significant influence. These leaders often mediate important decisions regarding social inclusion and play a pivotal role in advocating for the rights of PWDs. In many rural areas, traditional leaders are often the first to address community issues, including disability. They hold the power to shape public perceptions and provide a framework for community-based rehabilitation.

In some cases, chiefs have led efforts to ensure that persons with disabilities are integrated into local festivals, events, and public life, challenging the belief that PWDs are lesser members of society. Chiefs are also instrumental in convening community meetings where issues of disability can be discussed, and where the collective action needed to support PWDs can be organised. By using their authority to promote the inclusion of PWDs, traditional leaders can influence broader societal norms and encourage communities to prioritise accessibility in public spaces, schools, and healthcare facilities (Wickenden et al., 2012).

In addition to advocating for cultural change, local leaders in Ghana have often worked alongside disability organisations to lobby for policy changes at the national level.

They are key allies in campaigns for better infrastructure, increased funding for disability services, and the implementation of the Persons with Disabilities Act (Act 715). Through their work, these leaders help ensure that disability policies are not only adopted but also enforced within their communities.

Local Businesses: Providing Employment and Economic Empowerment

Local businesses, particularly small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), have also become important players in the disability inclusion movement in Ghana. While the formal sector has historically been slow to hire persons with disabilities, local businesses are increasingly recognizing the potential benefits of hiring disabled workers. Many small businesses in Ghana are family-run or community-based and may be more willing to employ individuals with disabilities, especially if they are given proper training and support. Local business owners can provide employment opportunities to PWDs, helping them achieve economic independence and social inclusion. Moreover, some businesses are now incorporating disability-inclusive practices into their operations, ensuring that their stores, offices, and services are accessible to customers with disabilities. This includes making physical adaptations, such as installing ramps and providing alternative formats for printed materials, as well as employing inclusive hiring practices (Naami et al., 2023).

Collaboration Between Traditional and Formal Systems

The role of non-traditional service providers highlights the importance of a holistic, integrated approach to disability support. While formal systems such as healthcare institutions, schools, and government programs are essential for providing specialised care and services, non-traditional providers can offer a more culturally sensitive, accessible, and community-oriented form of support. By collaborating with traditional healers, religious leaders, and community groups, formal service providers can create a more comprehensive support network that meets the diverse needs of PWDs.

The integration of traditional and formal services is especially important in rural areas, where access to modern healthcare and educational institutions may be limited. Non-traditional service providers often bridge the gap between formal systems and local needs, ensuring that PWDs are not left behind due to geographic, economic, or cultural barriers. This collaborative approach also helps to promote greater social acceptance of PWDs, as it involves a wide range of stakeholders in the process of change.

CONCLUSIONS

Stigma and socio-cultural beliefs continue to be significant barriers to the inclusion of children with disabilities in Ghanaian schools and society at large. While some progress has been made in promoting disability rights and awareness, deep-seated cultural attitudes, especially in rural areas, perpetuate exclusion. It is, therefore, essential to continue challenging these beliefs through education, media representation, and community-based advocacy to create a more inclusive society. Changing public perceptions of disability will require sustained effort across all sectors, but the potential benefits of better educational outcomes, improved social integration, and enhanced quality of life for persons with disabilities are well worth the investment.

The correlation between education and employment for persons with disabilities in Ghana is deeply interlinked, with educational attainment being a key determinant of employment opportunities. However, systemic barriers, lack of infrastructure, societal stigma, and limited vocational training opportunities continue to hinder the full inclusion of PWDs in the workforce. To break this cycle, it is essential to implement policies that ensure access to inclusive education, provide vocational training opportunities, and promote disability-friendly workplaces. Moreover, enhancing social protection programs and ensuring the effective enforcement of existing disability rights laws are crucial steps

toward improving the quality of life and employment outcomes for persons with disabilities in Ghana.

Non-traditional service providers play an indispensable role in the lives of persons with disabilities in Ghana. Through their cultural influence, practical support, and advocacy, they help to fill the gaps left by formal systems and promote a more inclusive society. Religious leaders, traditional healers, community leaders, and local businesses have the potential to drive significant changes by challenging stigma, offering essential services, and creating opportunities for PWDs. To maximise their impact, it is crucial to support the collaboration between non-traditional service providers and formal systems, ensuring that all aspects of society contribute to the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities.

Community-driven solutions and advocacy have been critical in advancing the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in Ghana. Grassroots organisations, local leaders, and non-traditional service providers have played key roles in reducing stigma, increasing access to education, and promoting social inclusion. These efforts not only address the immediate needs of PWDs but also contribute to long-term changes in societal attitudes toward disability. Moving forward, it is essential to continue supporting and expanding these community-driven initiatives, ensuring that they remain inclusive, culturally relevant, and responsive to the needs of all persons with disabilities.

Contribution to Practice and Policy

Identification of persistent challenges such as infrastructural gaps, lack of teacher training, socio-cultural stigma, and insufficient funding provides important insights for policymakers and practitioners for special education to target these issues more effectively.

The findings of the study provide the need for stronger monitoring, more robust funding allocations, and greater community engagement about special education.

Recommendations

The integration of assistive technologies, community-based programs, and targeted stigma-reduction campaigns underscores practical actions that can drive systemic change in the education sector.

A more comprehensive approach to inclusive education with a particular focus on integrating disability issues into mainstream curricula and teacher training programs should be provided.

Limitations

There was insufficient attention to the relationship of disability with other factors, such as gender and poverty, which could further influence the educational outcomes of children with disabilities.

The findings were based on secondary sources, which may not fully capture the lived experiences of children with disabilities or the evolving dynamics of the educational system in Ghana.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should explore the intersectionality of disability, gender, and socioeconomic status in greater detail to understand the compounded barriers faced by specific groups.

Field-based studies that involve direct observations and interviews with children with disabilities, their families, and educators should be conducted to provide a better understanding of the current barriers and opportunities.

Longitudinal studies should be conducted to track the progress of policy implementation and its effects on both educational outcomes and the broader societal integration of persons with disabilities in Ghana.

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