



TEACHER SUPPORT FOR PUPILS WITH LOW VISION IN SELECTED REGULAR SCHOOLS IN THE ASHANTI REGION, GHANA

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Abstract:

The purpose of the study was to ascertain the support teachers provide for pupils with low vision in regular classrooms in the Sekyere South District, Agona. The descriptive survey research design was used for this study with a sample size of 100 respondents. A purposeful sampling technique was used to select the sample, and the instrument employed to collect data was a questionnaire. Data were analyzed using frequencies, mean and standard deviations. The findings revealed that there were varieties of real objects and other materials in the schools for teaching and learning. For example, with large shapes, large-print charts available in the schools for teaching pupils with low vision. The findings also revealed that there are resource teachers, guidance and counseling services, eye screening, and audiological services available in all the schools.

Keywords: teacher support, low vision, regular classroom, resource teacher

1. Introduction

The need for support for pupils with low vision in general education classrooms in Ghana is critical because regular school teachers do not have the necessary skills to teach to the differential needs of the pupils. In the context of this research, support refers to assistance in the form of human and materials teachers, parents, or other professionals provide to pupils who are seen struggling to meet their personalized learning needs to enable them to cope with learning in regular education classrooms. A study by Avoke and Yepkle

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(2006) showed that there are students with mild disabilities and special educational needs in regular education classrooms in the Winneba Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. Also, the Sekyere South Education Office and Special Education Division of the Ghana Education Service suggested that a significant number of children in the regular schools at Kona circuit have learning needs that hinder their academic performances (Sekyere South Education Office, 2012). This trend suggests that pupils need to be adequately supported if they are to progress academically.

The Salamanca Declaration of 1994 proposes individuals with special needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs, regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society achieving education for all. Moreover, they provide adequate education to the majority of children and improve the sufficiency and, ultimately, the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system cited in (Hayford, 2013). The government of Ghana has, in principle, adopted inclusion as its official policy. Consequently, its educational strategic plan seeks to include all children, including those with disabilities in the mainstream by 2015 (Hayford, 2013).

At the moment, there is a large number of pupils with low vision in the regular schools at the Kona Circuit in the Sekyere South District but are not benefiting from the broad range of curriculum experiences, arising in part from the absence of relevant intervention from teachers (Sekyere South Education Office, 2012). UNESCO (2000) also has stressed that the importance of support is to ensure that all students who have included a benefit from the school program; otherwise, regular schools become a dumping ground for students with disabilities and special needs. These authors' views suggested that when regular schools are adequately supported or have the right support, they provide numerous benefits to students with special needs.

According to Ocloo, Hayford, Agbeke, and Gadagbui (2002), many children with special needs in regular schools go through education without any support; as such, some of them drop out of school and those who managed to go through end up with poor grades. In a study by Hayford (2008) among basic schools in Winneba and Swedru Districts, many pupils continually perform academically poorly because teachers lack skills and knowledge to address the special educational needs in the classrooms. Many of the pupils reportedly became frustrated and anxious during classroom activities because they did not receive any support from teachers or their peers. Some of these pupils failed, repeated class, and some of them eventually dropped out of school (Hayford, 2008).

However, literature shows that in the United States of America, students with special needs in regular schools are provided with support. This is in the form of special assistance, including when necessary, individualized instruction from specialists (Hardman, Drew & Egan, 2005). The general education teachers also receive assistance from specialists. Professionals such as resource teachers or special education consultants participate in planning educational programs for students with special educational

needs, provide suggestions for the modification of general education classroom activities, and supply of unique materials and equipment. In addition, there are supports depending on the needs of the student. The supports include physical assistance and therapy, counseling and psychotherapy, modified learning environments, assistive learning devices, and behavioral modification techniques. In line with this, Alley and Deshler (1997) have noted that issues concerning child support, guidelines or directions play central roles in classroom teaching and learning.

1.1 Research Objective

The main objective of this study was to find out how teachers support learners with low vision in selected regular basic schools in the Sekyere South District in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.

1.2 Research Question

This research question was raised to guide the study

- How do regular teachers assist pupils with low vision to participate in teaching and learning activities?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Assistance that Teachers Provide for Pupils with Low Vision

Pieces of literature have identified the following resources as supports that teachers can provide to pupils with low vision in their school. The resources have been delineated into two, namely; human resources and material resources. The human resource consists of personnel in the area of special education, which provides services for children with special educational needs. In the context of this study, the following human resource supports are considered:

2.1.1 Itinerant/Resource Teacher Services

For general education teachers to be effective and efficient in providing support for pupils with low vision in their classrooms, they rely on the services of the itinerant or resource teachers. This service aims at placing and supporting visually impaired individuals in regular classes to enable them to achieve the best in learning. Resource teachers are specialists who are trained and attached to the district education offices. They go from school to school to identify, assess children and plan management programs for regular teachers to enable them to support pupils with low vision in their teaching and learning (Special Education Department, 2007).

Baine (2001) pointed out that these specialists are consultants who travel from school to school to assist teachers in methods of assessment, instructions, materials preparation, and equipment building. Okyere and Adams (2003) opined that in most of the mainstream schools in Ghana, specialist teachers of the visually impaired provide resource room support. The bulk of the teachings are done by the regular classroom

teachers, while the exercises of the visually impaired are transcribed by the resource teacher for the regular teacher to mark. In another area of support, specialist teachers also help the students identify landmarks to help them orient themselves to their environment.

According to Okyere and Adam, resource teachers provide in-service training for the other teachers on how to manage the visually impaired child in learning. The techniques and methods of teaching some subjects are demonstrated for the regular classroom teacher to adopt. In the community, the resource teachers target the schools, the clinics, as well as going to homes to educate students and parents on disability issues. The provision of these services, in most cases, helps pupils with low vision to adjust in general education, and they benefit from their education (Okyere & Adam, 2003).

According to Haring and McCornick (1990) cited in Ntim (2003), an essential part of the resource teachers' job is to produce an understanding atmosphere in which pupils with visual impairment can express and learn to deal with their feelings about their disabilities. He also helps pupils with visual impairment to cope with the attitude of sighted pupils. With the encouragement from the resource teacher, pupils with visual impairment learn to communicate their needs. To summarize the above roles, Ocloo (2011) suggested that resource teachers need to; (a) to recommend any child/youth suspected of having a vision problem to be checked by an ophthalmologist or optometrist. (b) to recommend access to specialized equipment and materials to support children/youth that are visually impaired, monitor the functioning of such equipment, and arrange for the provision of appropriate vision-specific teaching aids. (c) to carry out direct teaching duties in areas such as braille, orientation, and mobility, language, concepts, social skills, independent living skills, use of low vision aids, listening skills, keyboarding skills, assertiveness training, organizational skills, visual efficiency, and post-secondary counseling. (d) to prepare materials in an alternate format or adapt the environment to ensure access to information for the student with low vision. (e) to develop the Individualised Education Programme (IEP) for pupils with low vision. (f) put reading assignments into braille, large print, or in tape-recorded form. (g) to provide guidance and counseling services to the child and the parents. (h) provide medical knowledge involving the anatomy of the eye and its implications for the education and development of the visually impaired pupils. (i) to act as a consultant for vision screening programs. (j) help in providing skills in teaching orientation and mobility. (k) to serve as a member of a diagnostic team in Special Education. (l) develop specialized learning materials (Ocloo, 2011).

As part of the ISSP team, resource teachers identify the services required by pupils with low vision and to facilitate delivery with appropriate support agencies by liaising with them as required (e.g., Ophthalmology, Optometry, Speech-Language Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, APSSEA, Neuromotor Division of the child Health Program at the Janeway Child Health Centre) conduct workshops and in-services training with teachers, parents, and administrators relating to the education of children/youth who are blind or visually impaired (Mintah, 2008).

2.1.2 Psychological Support

Regular classroom teachers count on the services of the school psychologists in order to support pupils with low vision in their schools. An essential member of the multidisciplinary team is the school psychologists. In many instances, teams are chaired by school Psychologists because of their training and expertise in the administration and interpretation of standardized tests. In addition to carrying out test-related tasks, school psychologists also collect data from regular teachers on pupils by observing them in their classrooms and interviewing regular teachers who work with the pupils with visual impairments in order to assist them. Many school Psychologists are trained as consultants to assist regular classroom teachers in designing, implementing, and evaluating pre-referral interventions and behavior management systems (Konadu, 2010).

Psychologists are professionals trained in the science of human behavior and learning. They have expertise in the area of cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional development (Avoke, Hayford, Ihenacho, & Ocloo, 1998) cited in Konadu (2010) stated that psychologists offer services to both students with 'normal' and 'abnormal' development. The school psychologist uses information gathered from evaluation procedures to advise teachers about how to stimulate children, both those with and without disabilities, to learn. They offer parents strategies to combat the numerous behavior problems pose by children, including those with disabilities. These functions in the view of the authors are quite similar to those performed by the guidance coordinators in our second cycle schools.

According to Avoke et al., (1998) though the function of a school psychologist cannot be underscored, these professionals are entirely missing in the provision of specialized services for students in Ghana.

3. Methods

The research design used for this study was a descriptive survey. The use of the descriptive survey allows for easy description and calculation of data. In this study, the population comprised all pupils with and without low vision, regular classroom teachers, and headteachers of Kona Educational Circuit. In all, a total of 1272 respondents were targeted. This was made up of 964 pupils without low vision, 261 Regular Teachers, 22 Headteachers, and 25 pupils with low vision.

3.1 Sample

Ten public schools were sampled for the study. They can be identified as schools A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, and J. The sample size was 100 respondents. Eighty (80) regular classroom teachers who doubled as school-based resource teachers that are eight from each school and 20 head teachers were covered. This sample was considered appropriate because they rendered services directly to the pupils with low vision in their schools and could, therefore, provide relevant information on the support teachers provide for pupils with low vision.

3.1.1 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the regular school teachers and headteachers. The choice of this technique was influenced by the fact that the schools of focus were practising the pilot inclusive education project and had, therefore, been the target for the study. All teachers and head-teachers became a target and were involved.

3.2 Instrument

The instrument employed to collect data was a questionnaire. The choice of this instrument was informed by the fact that descriptive survey research, as indicated by Creswell (2009), lends itself to a questionnaire. The researchers used the questionnaire as the research tool because he intended to seek information from many teachers and head-teachers about their opinions on the support services for pupils with low vision in regular classrooms. The questionnaire was a Likert scale type made up of 24 close-ended items prepared for teachers and head-teachers in the Kona circuit basic schools. This was developed to elicit information on the main variables raised in the research questions.

The Likert scale type items had a rating on five points scale involving; 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. This type of data gathering was appropriate for the study because it was in line with the assertion of Robson (2005) who commends that a Likert scale makes respondents enjoy responding to questions posed by the researchers since in many cases, respondents are just not ready to cooperate in a giving data. The questionnaire was structured into three sections. Section A was devoted to how regular teachers assisted pupils with low vision to participate in teaching and learning activities and was made up of eight questions.

3.3 Ethics

Informed consent was therefore obtained from the authorities of the school before the commencement of the study. A pre-visit was then paid to the school to book appointments with school authorities and teachers. The appointments were made such that it was possible to meet all teachers that were involved in the study as a group in one place at their respective schools. During the pre-visit, the researchers took the letter to the school detailing the purpose of the study. The researchers kept all data from respondents confidential.

The researchers told the participants of the right to participate voluntarily or withdraw from the study at any stage if they deemed it appropriate to do so. The anonymity and privacy of participants were guaranteed by asking them not to write their names on the questionnaire.

3.4. Demographic Data of Respondents

Table 1: Gender of the Respondents

Demographic Factor	Respondent Subgroups	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Males	65	65
	Females	35	35

Source: Field Data, 2020.

Results in Table 1 illustrate the data on the gender of the respondents. The results show that the majority (65%) of the respondents were males, while 35% of them were females. It, therefore, follows that there were more male respondents than females in this study.

Table 2: Age of the Respondents

Demographic Factor	Respondent Subgroups	Frequency	Percentage
Age in Years	20-30	10	10
	31-40	12	12
	41-50	45	45
	51-60	33	33

Source: Field Data, 2020.

Results from Table 2 indicate that majority 45% of the respondents in this study were between the ages of 41-50 years, 33% were within 51-60 years of age, 12% were 31-40 years of age, whilst the remaining 10% of the respondents were within the age brackets of 20-30 years. The mean age of the respondents was 45.5 years.

4. Analysis of the Results

The main theme extracted for analysis was assistance that teachers provide to pupils with low vision in a regular class.

Table 3: Highlights Responses with Respect to Assistance that Teachers Provide to Pupils with Low Vision

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	S.D
1. I use models of objects in teaching pupils with low vision.	45	26	2	12	5	1.95	1.25
2. Tactile materials are accessible for pupils with low vision in my school.	30	40	2	9	9	2.18	1.27
3. There are varieties of real materials/objects in my school for teaching pupils.	3	7	0	40	40	4.18	1.02

4. I collaborate with specialists when preparing TLMs for pupils with low vision.	21	33	8	22	6	2.54	1.27
5. I adapt instructions and materials in order to assist pupils with low vision to learn with ease.	9	27	2	25	28	3.41	1.43
6. Collaborative learning is practiced in my class.	6	11	2	50	21	3.76	1.14
7. Optical and non-optical devices are available in my school for assisting pupils with low vision.	10	8	5	40	27	3.73	1.28
8. The instructional conversation is practiced in my class.	33	29	10	8	10	3.74	1.33
Overall mean						3.19	0.54

Source: Field Data, 2020.

Note: Means were calculated from a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

4.1 The Assistance that Teachers Provide to Pupils with Low Vision

The result from the findings in Table 3 showed that teachers assisted pupils with low vision in various ways. For instance, with a mean score of 4.18, teachers provided varieties of real objects in their schools for teaching pupils with low vision. Real objects such as fruits, plants, and counters, among others, help pupils with low vision to understand concepts taught in class. Real objects are readily available in localities that teachers can rely on to teach pupils with low vision. Unlike those with normal vision who learn a great deal from incidental everyday observation, students with vision impairment may need direct access to objects, materials, procedures, and operations to gain knowledge and to integrate information into concepts. Real materials help pupils with low vision attain to their high level of active development through the use of appropriate instructional objectives and use of materials. Pupils who manifest many inconsistencies in their behaviors are those who are not able to attain enough development in this aspect of the affective domain. This finding concurs with the sentiments made by Ocloo (2011), who noted that in education, realia are objects from real life used in classroom instruction by educators to improve students' understanding of other cultures and real-life situations. The author gave examples of such objects as a ball, comb, scissors, toothbrush, zipper, a string of beads, and spoon, among others. Again, the author stated that instructional materials help pupils with visual impairment understand concepts easily in the sense that they add concreteness to verbal explanation and description. Real objects, as aids, give warmth and true-life experiences to pupils with visual problems. Pupils with low vision, for instance, can use their residual vision to see, handle and play with these concrete materials, which eventually assist them in registering the concept permanently in memory, and this facilitates easy to recall (Ocloo, 2011).

The result from the findings in Table 5 further revealed that collaborative learning is one of the assistance teachers used in their various schools in order to help pupils with low vision learn with ease. This agrees with the findings of Mastropieri and Scruggs

(2010), who noted that in the learning process, students differ in capabilities perceived by teachers. Students with low ability will learn from their fellow capable peers. Collaborative learning among students of different learning capabilities and learning needs in an inclusive classroom has proved to be effective in promoting academic achievement, a positive attitude towards the subject, and improving social interaction among students.

Furthermore, it was revealed from the findings in Table 5 (a mean score of 3.73) that optical and non-optical devices were available in the schools for assisting pupils with low vision. Optical devices such as eyeglasses, magnifiers, and telescopes use lenses to increase a person's residual vision. They are generally prescribed by a medical specialist, while non-optical devices do not incorporate a lens and do not need to be prescribed by a specialist. Things like large prints, braille and braille writer, tape recorders, book stands, recorded and talking, books and calculators, are examples of non-optical devices. Optical devices play a crucial role in enhancing vision and reducing visual disability in pupils with low vision. This inline with Spungin (2002), who said that the role of both optical and non-optical devices is to improve vision and increase the functionality of students with visual impairments through the use of other senses. It is the role of a teacher to encourage students with visual impairment to use optical devices and assistive technologies to help them with vision.

5. Findings of the Study

The analysis of the data revealed that teachers provided varieties of real objects in their schools for teaching pupils with low vision. The findings also revealed that collaborative learning was one of the assistance teachers used in their various schools in order to help pupils with low vision learn with ease. Furthermore, it was revealed that optical and non-optical devices were available in the schools for assisting pupils with low vision.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

It emerged from the study that several real objects, as well as optical devices, were provided by teachers to assist pupils with low vision in the schools. The researchers recommended that teachers who teach should be given in-service training to update their skills and knowledge in managing resources available for pupils with low vision. Again, resource teachers should cooperate and collaborate with teachers in order to ensure adequate resource utilization for pupils with low vision in basic schools.

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