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A Review of Ghana's Teacher Education Curricula and the Special Child: The Missing Links

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Abstract

Inclusive education is a cornerstone of Ghana's commitment to providing quality education for all children, including those with special needs. However, the effectiveness of inclusive practices relies heavily on the preparedness of teachers. This review critically examines the existing teacher education curricula in Ghana with a specific focus on the inclusion of special needs children. Through an extensive analysis of literature and policy documents, this review aims to identify the gaps and missing links in teacher education curricula regarding the education and support of special needs children. Key areas of investigation include the coverage of special education topics, the incorporation of inclusive pedagogical approaches, and the development of attitudes and competencies necessary for working with special children. The findings shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the current curricula and provide recommendations for improving teacher education programs to better meet the needs of special children. By addressing the missing links, Ghana can strengthen its teacher education system and enhance the inclusive education practices, ensuring that special children receive the necessary support for their educational journey.

Keywords: Special Child, Curricula, Education, Teacher, Inclusive Education, Development.

Introduction

Inclusive education is a fundamental principle of Ghana's commitment to providing quality education for all children, including those with special needs. A crucial factor in the success of inclusive education lies in the preparation and training of teachers to effectively address the unique needs of special children within the classroom. Ghana's teacher education curricula play a pivotal role in shaping the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of future educators in relation to special needs children. However, the extent to which these curricula adequately address the needs of special children and equip teachers with the necessary competencies remains a subject of concern. This review aims to critically examine Ghana's teacher education curricula, identifying the missing links and proposing recommendations for enhancing the preparation of teachers for inclusive education.

Ghana has made significant strides in advancing inclusive education through policy reforms and initiatives. The Education Act of 2008 (Act 778) underscores the government's commitment to inclusive education, emphasizing the right of every child, including those

with disabilities, to access quality education (Government of Ghana, 2008). The policy framework provides a solid foundation for inclusive education, but the translation of these policies into effective practices necessitates a comprehensive and inclusive teacher education system.

Several studies have highlighted the challenges and gaps in Ghana's teacher education curricula concerning special needs children. A study conducted by Teye and Amedahe (2015) revealed that teacher education programs in Ghana often lack specific courses or modules on special education. As a result, pre-service teachers may graduate without the necessary knowledge and skills to address the diverse learning needs of special children. Another study by Adjapong (2016) emphasized the need for inclusive education to be integrated across all teacher education curricula, ensuring that future teachers are adequately prepared to create inclusive learning environments.

The existing teacher education curricula in Ghana primarily focus on general pedagogical principles, content knowledge, and classroom management techniques, often neglecting the specialized knowledge required to support special needs children (Amoako-Sakyi et al., 2019). Without adequate training in special education, teachers may lack the ability to identify and address the unique learning needs of special needs children, resulting in limited inclusion and reduced educational opportunities for these students.

Moreover, the development of positive attitudes and inclusive dispositions among teachers is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive education. A study by Yendork (2017) highlighted the need for teacher education programs to foster positive attitudes towards special needs children and equip teachers with the skills to create an inclusive and supportive classroom environment.

To bridge the gaps in Ghana's teacher education curricula, it is imperative to undertake a comprehensive review and analysis of the existing frameworks. This review aims to critically examine the coverage of special education topics, the incorporation of inclusive pedagogical approaches, and the development of attitudes and competencies necessary for working with special needs children within Ghana's teacher education curricula. By identifying the missing links and proposing recommendations, this review aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts in Ghana to enhance teacher education programs, improve the preparation of teachers for inclusive education, and ensure that special needs children receive the support and quality education they deserve.

Research Methodology

This review employs a systematic approach to examine Ghana's teacher education curricula and their coverage of special education for the inclusion of special needs children. The following methodology outlines the steps undertaken in this comprehensive review.

Literature Search

A thorough literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies, research articles, policy documents, and reports related to Ghana's teacher education curricula and special

education. Databases including ERIC, Google Scholar, and JSTOR were searched using keywords such as "Ghana," "teacher education," "curriculum," "special education," and "inclusive education." The search was limited to publications from the past 10 years to ensure the inclusion of recent developments in the field.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The identified literature was screened based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Included studies focused on the examination of teacher education curricula in Ghana, their coverage of special education, and the identification of gaps or missing links. Studies that provided insights into inclusive pedagogical approaches, attitudes and dispositions, and the overall preparedness of teachers for inclusive education were also included. Non-English publications and studies unrelated to Ghana or teacher education curricula were excluded.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data from the selected studies were extracted using a standardized data extraction form. Key information including author(s), year of publication, research design, sample size, focus areas, findings, and recommendations were recorded. The extracted data were synthesized and analyzed thematically to identify common themes, trends, and gaps in the teacher education curricula pertaining to special education.

Synthesis and Interpretation of Findings

The synthesized findings were then interpreted to identify the missing links in Ghana's teacher education curricula concerning special education. These findings were compared and contrasted with existing policies, guidelines, and international best practices in inclusive education. Through this comparative analysis, recommendations were developed to address the gaps and improve the preparation of teachers for inclusive education in Ghana.

Quality Assessment

The quality and rigor of the included studies were evaluated using appropriate criteria, such as the relevance of research questions, methodology, sampling techniques, data analysis, and the validity and reliability of findings. This quality assessment was conducted to ensure that the findings were based on robust and reliable research.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this review. The findings are based on the available literature, which may not encompass all relevant sources. The review is also limited to publications in English, potentially excluding valuable insights from non-English sources. Additionally, the review focuses specifically on Ghana's context, and the findings may not be directly transferable to other countries or regions.

Results

Ghana's Teacher Education Curricula, Policy, and Beliefs

Teacher education curricula, policy frameworks, and the underlying beliefs and attitudes of educators collectively shape the quality and effectiveness of teacher preparation in any educational system. In the context of Ghana, these factors play a crucial role in shaping the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teachers, ultimately influencing their ability to provide quality education.

This comprehensive literature review critically examines the existing body of literature to explore Ghana's teacher education curricula, policy frameworks, and the underlying beliefs that impact teacher preparation. The review aims to identify key themes, gaps, and recommendations for improving the alignment between teacher education curricula, policy, and beliefs in Ghana.

Teacher Education Curricula

Ghana's teacher education curricula form the foundation of pre-service teacher training. Several studies have examined the content and structure of these curricula. Nsiah-Gyabaah (2017) emphasizes the need for comprehensive and relevant coursework that covers both theoretical and practical aspects of teaching. The review suggests that Ghana's teacher education curricula should incorporate subject-specific pedagogical content, instructional strategies, classroom management techniques, and assessment practices. The inclusion of these components ensures that future teachers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the demands of the classroom.

Policy Frameworks

Policy frameworks in Ghana provide guidance and direction for teacher education. The Education Act of 2008 (Act 778) emphasizes the importance of inclusive education and the provision of quality education for all children, including those with special needs (Government of Ghana, 2008). This policy framework highlights the commitment of the Ghanaian government to promote inclusive practices and underscores the need for teacher education programs to align with these principles. However, the literature indicates that there is a gap between policy intentions and actual implementation, highlighting the need for stronger policy enforcement and support.

Beliefs and Attitudes

The beliefs and attitudes of educators significantly influence teaching practices and student outcomes. Studies have examined the beliefs and attitudes of Ghanaian teachers towards teaching and learning. Adu-Gyamfi and Jantuah (2018) found that teachers' beliefs about students' abilities and their role as facilitators of learning had a significant impact on instructional practices. Positive beliefs and attitudes towards students' potential and the importance of student-centered approaches were associated with more effective teaching

practices. To enhance teacher education, it is essential to address and challenge any negative beliefs and biases that may hinder inclusive and student-centered instruction.

Alignment between Curricula, Policy, and Beliefs

Alignment between teacher education curricula, policy frameworks, and the beliefs and attitudes of educators is crucial for fostering effective teaching practices. Adequately aligning these elements promotes consistency and coherence in teacher preparation. The literature suggests that there is room for improvement in achieving this alignment in Ghana's context. Ensuring that teacher education curricula reflect the principles outlined in policy frameworks and addressing any discrepancies between beliefs and instructional practices can contribute to the effective implementation of educational policies and the improvement of teaching quality.

Educating the Special Needs Child in Ghana

The education of special needs children in Ghana is an essential aspect of promoting inclusivity and ensuring equal opportunities for all learners. This comprehensive literature review critically examines the existing body of literature to explore the education of special needs children in Ghana. The review aims to identify key themes, challenges, and effective strategies employed in the education of special needs children. By understanding the current state of special education in Ghana, this review seeks to provide insights and recommendations for improving educational practices and outcomes for special needs children.

Legislative Framework

Ghana has made significant strides in establishing a legislative framework to support the education of special needs children. The Persons with Disability Act (Act 715) provides the legal basis for ensuring the rights, welfare, and education of persons with disabilities in Ghana (Government of Ghana, 2006). This act emphasizes the provision of inclusive education and reasonable accommodations to enable special children to access quality education. However, despite the existence of legislation, challenges persist in the implementation and enforcement of inclusive practices.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is recognized as a fundamental approach for providing quality education to special needs children. The literature highlights the importance of inclusive practices in Ghanaian schools. A study by Asare-Bekoe and Kuyini (2017) found that inclusive education positively impacted the academic and social development of special needs children. Inclusive practices, such as collaboration among teachers, individualized instruction, and adapted learning materials, were identified as key factors contributing to the success of inclusive education programs.

Challenges and Barriers

Several challenges and barriers affect the education of special needs children in Ghana. Limited resources and infrastructure pose significant obstacles to the implementation of inclusive education. A study by Amedahe and Teye (2015) revealed that inadequate funding, lack of specialized equipment, and inaccessible physical facilities hindered the provision of quality education for special needs children. Additionally, a shortage of trained teachers in special education and negative societal attitudes towards disability further contribute to the challenges faced by special needs children in accessing education.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

The preparation and professional development of teachers play a critical role in the education of special needs children. The literature suggests the need for specialized training and support for teachers to effectively address the diverse needs of special needs children. Training programs that provide knowledge and skills in areas such as differentiated instruction, individualized assessment, and behavior management are crucial for teachers working with special needs children (Etsibah, 2019). Ongoing professional development programs that focus on inclusive pedagogies and strategies further enhance teachers' ability to create inclusive learning environments.

Collaboration and Parental Involvement

Collaboration among stakeholders and parental involvement are key factors in promoting the education of special needs children in Ghana. Studies emphasize the importance of collaboration between regular and special education teachers, administrators, and support professionals in ensuring effective inclusive practices (Amedahe & Teye, 2015). Additionally, involving parents in the education process through parent-teacher partnerships and parent support groups enhances the support network for special needs children and promotes their educational success.

The education of special needs children in Ghana is a complex and multifaceted endeavor that requires the collective efforts of educators, policymakers, parents, and the broader society. While Ghana has made progress in establishing a legislative framework and promoting inclusive practices, challenges such as limited resources, inadequate teacher preparation, and negative societal attitudes persist. By addressing these challenges through targeted interventions, enhancing teacher training programs, and fostering collaboration and parental involvement, Ghana can create an inclusive education system that ensures the equitable access and quality education of special needs children.

Teacher Education Curricula and the Special Needs Child

Teacher education curricula play a vital role in preparing educators to meet the diverse needs of students, including special needs children. In the context of Ghana, ensuring the inclusion and effective education of special needs children is a priority. This literature review critically examines the existing body of literature to identify the gaps and missing links in

Ghana's teacher education curricula concerning the education and support of special needs children. The review highlights key areas such as the coverage of special education topics, inclusive pedagogical approaches, and the development of attitudes and competencies necessary for working with special needs children. By understanding the current state of Ghana's teacher education curricula, this review aims to provide insights and recommendations for enhancing the preparation of teachers for inclusive education.

Coverage of Special Education Topics

Research indicates that the coverage of special education topics in Ghana's teacher education curricula is limited. A study by Teye and Amedahe (2015) found that teacher education programs often lack specific courses or modules on special education. This gap hinders the development of teachers' knowledge and skills in addressing the unique learning needs of special children. The inclusion of comprehensive and specialized coursework related to special education is crucial to equip teachers with the necessary tools to support inclusive practices.

Inclusive Pedagogical Approaches

Incorporating inclusive pedagogical approaches within teacher education curricula is essential for preparing educators to meet the diverse needs of special needs children. However, the literature suggests that these approaches are not adequately emphasized in Ghana's teacher education programs. Amoako-Sakyi et al. (2019) highlights the need for teacher education curricula to promote inclusive practices such as differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, and collaborative teaching models. These approaches can enhance the ability of teachers to create inclusive learning environments and accommodate the individualized needs of special children.

Attitudes and Competencies

Developing positive attitudes and competencies among teachers is crucial for fostering inclusive education. Yendork (2017) emphasizes the need for teacher education programs to cultivate positive attitudes towards special children and equip teachers with the skills to create inclusive classroom environments. This includes developing teachers' understanding of diverse learning styles, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to adapt teaching strategies to meet individual needs. However, the literature suggests that the development of these attitudes and competencies is often lacking in Ghana's teacher education curricula.

Based on the gaps identified in the literature, several recommendations can be proposed to improve Ghana's teacher education curricula for the inclusion of special needs children. First, there is a need to incorporate specific courses or modules on special education within teacher education programs. These courses should cover topics such as understanding different disabilities, assessment and individualized planning, and inclusive instructional strategies.

Second, teacher education curricula should emphasize inclusive pedagogical approaches, providing future teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to create inclusive learning environments. This includes training on differentiated instruction, the use of assistive technology, and collaboration with other professionals to support special learning needs of children.

Finally, teacher education programs should focus on developing positive attitudes and inclusive dispositions among future teachers. This can be achieved through activities such as field experiences, exposure to inclusive classrooms, and reflection on personal beliefs and biases.

Ghana's teacher education curricula require significant improvements to effectively prepare teachers for inclusive education, particularly regarding the education and support of special needs children. Enhancing the coverage of special education topics, incorporating inclusive pedagogical approaches, and developing positive attitudes and competencies among teachers are critical steps to bridge the existing gaps. By implementing these recommendations, Ghana can strengthen its teacher education system and ensure that future educators are well-equipped to provide inclusive education for all children, including special needs children.

Ghana's Teacher Education and the Special Needs Child: The Missing Link

The education of special needs children in Ghana is a crucial aspect of promoting inclusive education and ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners. An essential factor influencing the success of special education programs is the teacher education system, which plays a pivotal role in preparing teachers to effectively support and meet the unique needs of special needs children. This discussion explores the missing link between Ghana's teacher education and the education of special needs children, as identified in the existing literature.

Inadequate Special Education Content

One of the primary missing links is the inadequate coverage of special education content within Ghana's teacher education programs. Research has shown that teachers often lack the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively address the diverse needs of special needs children (Ofori-Atta & Oduro, 2017). The curricula tend to focus more on general education principles rather than specialized techniques and strategies required to support special children. This gap results in teachers feeling ill-prepared to provide appropriate instructional interventions, accommodations, and support to meet the unique learning needs of special needs children.

Limited Practical Experience

Another missing link is the limited practical experience provided to pre-service teachers in working with special needs children. While theoretical knowledge is essential, practical experience is vital for developing the necessary skills and understanding the challenges

associated with teaching special needs children. Studies have highlighted the importance of field experiences, internships, and practicum placements in inclusive classrooms to enhance teachers' ability to apply theory to practice (Yendork, 2019). However, such practical experiences are often limited or absent from teacher education programs in Ghana, hindering the development of practical skills and competencies needed to effectively support special needs children.

Insufficient Focus on Inclusive Pedagogies

Inclusive pedagogies, which involve adapting teaching methods, resources, and assessments to meet the diverse needs of learners, including special needs children, are crucial for effective inclusive education. However, the literature suggests that Ghana's teacher education programs often do not sufficiently emphasize inclusive pedagogies (Asare-Bekoe & Kuyini, 2019). Teachers may not receive adequate training on differentiated instruction, individualized support, and the use of assistive technologies and materials. This missing link hinders the ability of teachers to create inclusive learning environments and deliver instruction that meets the specific needs of special children.

Limited Collaboration and Multidisciplinary Approaches

Collaboration among teachers, parents, and other professionals is essential for the successful education of special needs children. However, the literature indicates a lack of emphasis on collaboration and multidisciplinary approaches within Ghana's teacher education programs (Amedahe & Teye, 2015). Teachers often lack the knowledge and skills to effectively collaborate with special education teachers, therapists, and other professionals in developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and implementing appropriate interventions. This missing link hampers the holistic support and interventions that special children require to thrive academically and socially.

Addressing the Missing Links

To address the missing links between Ghana's teacher education and the education of special children, several recommendations can be made based on the literature. First, there is a need to revise teacher education curricula to include comprehensive and specialized coursework on special education. This should cover topics such as understanding disabilities, assessment techniques, individualized instruction, behavior management strategies, and the use of assistive technologies. Additionally, increasing practical experiences through field placements and internships in inclusive classrooms is crucial to provide pre-service teachers with firsthand experience in working with special needs children.

Teacher education programs should also integrate inclusive pedagogies into the curricula, emphasizing differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, and individualized support strategies. Furthermore, fostering collaboration and multidisciplinary approaches

by incorporating training on collaborative practices and partnerships with special education professionals and parents can enhance the support network for special needs children.

The missing link between Ghana's teacher education and the education of special needs children highlights the need for curriculum reforms, increased practical experiences, a stronger focus on inclusive pedagogies, and enhanced collaboration among educators and professionals. By addressing these missing links, Ghana can better equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, and practical experiences necessary to provide effective and inclusive education for special needs children.

Discussion

The education of special needs children in Ghana is a critical aspect of promoting inclusivity and ensuring equitable access to education for all learners. An important factor that influences the success of special needs education programs is the teacher education curricula that prepare teachers to work effectively with special needs children. This discussion explores the missing links in Ghana's teacher education curricula concerning the education of special needs children, as identified in the existing literature.

Limited Emphasis on Special Education Content

One of the missing links in Ghana's teacher education curricula is the limited emphasis on special education content. Several studies highlight the need for comprehensive and specialized coursework that focuses on the unique needs of special children (Amedahe & Teye, 2015; Teye & Amedahe, 2015). However, the literature suggests that the current curricula lack in-depth coverage of special education topics, such as understanding various disabilities, assessment techniques, instructional strategies, and behavior management approaches specific to special children. As a result, teachers may not be adequately equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to address the diverse needs of special children effectively.

Insufficient Practical Experience

Another missing link is the limited practical experience provided to pre-service teachers in working with special needs children. While theoretical knowledge is essential, practical experience in real classroom settings is crucial for developing effective teaching strategies and understanding the specific challenges faced by special needs children. Studies indicate that pre-service teachers in Ghana often have limited opportunities for supervised practical experiences in inclusive classrooms (Teye & Amedahe, 2015). This lack of hands-on experience may hinder their ability to apply theoretical knowledge effectively and adapt instructional practices to meet the needs of special children.

Inadequate Training on Inclusive Pedagogies

The literature also highlights the need for more extensive training on inclusive pedagogies within Ghana's teacher education curricula. Inclusive education aims to create supportive

and engaging learning environments for all learners, including special children. However, the review of literature suggests that teacher education curricula in Ghana do not sufficiently address inclusive pedagogies (Amedahe & Teye, 2015; Yendork, 2017). This gap results in a lack of understanding among pre-service teachers about the strategies and approaches needed to effectively include special needs children in regular classrooms. To address this missing link, it is crucial to integrate inclusive pedagogies into teacher education curricula, emphasizing collaboration, differentiated instruction, and individualized support for special needs children.

Limited Focus on Collaboration and Multidisciplinary Approaches

Collaboration among teachers, parents, and other professionals is essential for providing holistic support to special needs children. However, the literature suggests that Ghana's teacher education curricula do not adequately emphasize collaboration and multidisciplinary approaches (Yendork, 2017). Teachers need to be prepared to work collaboratively with special education teachers, therapists, and other specialists to develop individualized education plans and provide appropriate interventions for special needs children. Enhancing the curricula to include training on collaboration and multidisciplinary teamwork can strengthen the support network for special needs children and improve educational outcomes.

Addressing the Missing Links

To address the missing links in Ghana's teacher education curricula concerning the education of special needs children, several recommendations can be made based on the literature. First, there is a need for curriculum revisions to incorporate specialized coursework on special education topics, including understanding disabilities, assessment techniques, instructional strategies, and behavior management approaches specific to special needs children.

Practical experiences in inclusive classrooms should be provided, allowing pre-service teachers to apply their knowledge in real-world settings. Integrating inclusive pedagogies and collaboration skills into the curricula is crucial to equip teachers with the necessary skills for inclusive education. Additionally, professional development programs for in-service teachers should be designed to provide continuous training and support in working with special children.

The review of literature on Ghana's teacher education curricula and the special needs child reveals the missing links that need to be addressed to ensure the effective preparation of teachers in meeting the needs of special children. These missing links include limited emphasis on special education content, insufficient practical experiences, inadequate training on inclusive pedagogies, and limited focus on collaboration and multidisciplinary approaches.

By incorporating these elements into teacher education curricula and providing ongoing professional development, Ghana can bridge the gaps and better equip teachers to provide inclusive and quality education to special needs children.

Conclusion

The review of Ghana's Teacher Education Curricula and the Special Needs Child reveals several missing links that need to be addressed to ensure the effective preparation of teachers in meeting the unique needs of special children. These missing links include inadequate coverage of special education content, limited practical experience, insufficient focus on inclusive pedagogies, and limited emphasis on collaboration and multidisciplinary approaches. Addressing these gaps is crucial for promoting inclusive education and providing quality education for special children in Ghana.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that Ghana's teacher education system takes the following steps to address the missing links:

1. First, there is a need for continuous review and revision of teacher education curricula to ensure they align with current educational trends, research findings, and policy guidelines. This review should incorporate relevant and practical coursework that addresses the needs of diverse learners and promotes inclusive practices.
2. Curriculum Enhancement: Revise the teacher education curricula to incorporate specialized coursework on special education. This should include comprehensive coverage of topics such as understanding disabilities, assessment techniques, instructional strategies, and behavior management approaches specific to special needs children.
3. Practical Experience: Increase practical experiences for pre-service teachers through field placements, internships, and practicum opportunities in inclusive classrooms. This will provide them with hands-on experience in working with special needs children and help bridge the gap between theory and practice.
4. Inclusive Pedagogies: Integrate inclusive pedagogies into the teacher education curricula, emphasizing differentiated instruction, individualized support, and the use of assistive technologies. This will enable teachers to create inclusive learning environments and cater to the diverse needs of special children effectively.
5. Collaboration and Multidisciplinary Approaches: Foster collaboration among teachers, parents, and other professionals by incorporating training on collaborative practices and partnerships with special education professionals. This will strengthen the support network for special needs children and facilitate holistic interventions.
6. Policy frameworks should be strengthened through enhanced implementation strategies, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms. This includes providing clear guidelines and support for the integration of policy objectives into teacher education programs.

7. Efforts should be made to address the beliefs and attitudes of educators through targeted professional development and reflective practices. This involves creating opportunities for educators to critically examine their beliefs, challenge biases, and develop a strong commitment to inclusive and student-centered education.
8. Aligning teacher education curricula, policy frameworks, and the beliefs of educators is vital for improving the quality of teacher preparation in Ghana. Enhancing the content and structure of teacher education curricula, strengthening policy implementation, and addressing the beliefs and attitudes of educators are key steps towards achieving this alignment.

By implementing these recommendations, Ghana can enhance the effectiveness of its teacher education system and ensure that future teachers are well-prepared to meet the diverse needs of all categories of learners and contribute greatly to educational excellence.

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