Heart and Mind in Conflict:
Teaching Special Needs Children in a Developing Nation

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A cross sectional design with a qualitative approach was used to purposively sample Special Education teachers at Dzorwulu Special School (a public institution) and Reyo Paddock School (a private institution) in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Face-to-face interviews were employed, complemented with in-class observations. Four key areas identified included challenges in working with the children, colleagues, parents, and the institutions. The respondents were able to cope with the noted challenges by using individualized educational programs, parental involvement, and using their own resources to secure logistical needs when necessary. This study concluded that the respondents complained of being drained out partly due to the challenges in handling different children with different needs in the same classroom, and the fact that the classes were mostly overcrowded. The study recommended that to minimize burnout of the respondents, school management should devise strategies that will promote collaboration and team work among the staff.

Keywords: **Special Needs, Challenges, Coping Strategies**

INTRODUCTION

Every child is unique in terms of how they relate with people around them; however, some children are not able participate in and benefit from the educational provisions that are considered appropriate for the majority, unless special accommodations are made to support their learning (Adam, Clark & Swain, 2000). Special Needs is a larger umbrella under which medical issues, behavior issues, developmental issues, learning issues, and mental health issues fall. Children with any of the above-mentioned conditions require different forms of teaching strategies, specially designed equipment, and other tailor-made logistics if learning is to take place, therefore, special needs education is considered a challenging field. However, nations especially third world countries, face heavy challenges in the provision of adequate logistics suitable and appropriate for

people with special needs. This challenge bedeviling developing nations is due to disinterest of successive governments to include people with special needs in their plans, so as to make adequate provisions for them. For this reason, private individuals and teachers have emerged at the front lines of special needs education in such places, and they try to provide support with their own limited resources.

Billingsley (2004) suggests that lack of logistics, coupled with little systemic support for special needs education in general, contributes to the high burnout rate of teachers in such professions. Parental attitudes comprise another contributing factor that makes teaching children with special needs in developing countries (like Ghana) difficult. Ferry, Fouad & Smith (2000) identified several different parental attitudes that have negative implications. First, they believe that some parents of children with special needs are disinterested in the welfare of their children and simply neglect to provide adequately for them. In the developing world, such special needs children are sometimes believed to be a curse (Ferry, Fouad & Smith, 2000; 2010; Fullerton & Guardino, 2010; Guardino & Fullerton). Some parents feel shy about having such babies. The disinterest in these children produces a kind of repulsion on the part of the parents, which may result in shying them away and having no involvement with their child's education or even interact with their teachers (Ferry, Fouad & Smith, 2000; Fullerton & Guardino, 2010; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010). Another group of parents are overly protective: these parents place unrealistic expectations on their children and teachers. Such unreasonable expectations can cause frustrations for both the child and the child's teachers. Both parental attitudes can negatively affect the children. For instance, showing disinterest in the children can make the child less motivated, while overprotective parental attitude often diminishes the child's confidence and makes it harder for them to learn (Fullerton & Guardino, 2010; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010) or do things for themselves.

The nature and characteristics of the children themselves place challenges on their teachers. Restlessness and mood swings have been identified as attributes associated with children with special needs (Ferry, Fouad & Smith, 2000). Such attributes have been argued as being the main contributors to inattentiveness in the classroom (Fullerton & Guardino, 2010; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010; Schilling & Schwartz, 2004). Therefore, educators teaching children with special needs must learn how to deal with these problems, as well as devise various teaching aids and strategies appropriate for the full benefit of the children. What makes such situation even more challenging in developing nations like Ghana is that a typical class for children with special needs may have children with various kinds of challenges, requiring different attention and strategies. The implication here is that a teacher in such a class must have the ability to produce lessons to suit each child and provide differentiated instructional

materials, as well as individualized teaching; a situation that can be challenging for most, if not all teachers.

Regardless of challenges, educators of children with special needs are charged with the tasks of ensuring that their students are progressing towards the same set standards as their non-impaired peers. In the light of this, the special education teacher must do much more than simply follow a fixed and prescribed curriculum, because the teacher constantly has to adapt to the specific and unique special needs of the individual child. Thus, the teacher should be knowledgeable about the abilities of, and circumstances in which the child learns best (Wolfendale, 1993). This influences the preparation of lesson plans for an entire class since various individuals in the class have differing ways of appreciating and understanding lessons that are taught (Hellriegel, Jackson & Slocum, 1999; Steenkamp, 1979). Further, some of the children with special needs have communication impairment and disciplinary problems which teachers must deal with. Therefore, teachers of such children must be mentally and emotionally prepared and have patience and empathy in order to be able to give adequate and relevant support to the children. This challenge is relatively less in the mainstream education process (Schilling & Schwartz, 2004).

It is therefore not surprising that teachers of children with special needs often feel drained and experience emotions such as guilt, anger, and irritation. These take a heavy emotional toll on them, resulting in exhaustion and stressing situations, which could affect the teachers' personal health and family life (McGrath, 1995). Billingsley (2002; 2004) estimated that 50 percent of special education teachers leave their jobs within five years and half of those who make it past five years will leave within 10 years.

In Ghana, there have been some attempts to introduce inclusivity in special needs education; however children with special needs are still predominantly taught in separate schools. Unfortunately, various successive governments only train a limited number of specialist teachers whose numbers are insufficient, as compared the current needs. Given the country's severe budgetary constraints, the exclusion of children with special need is the least costly choice. Notably, therefore, the training of special education teachers is not a priority (cf. Anson-Yevus, 1988).

The literature on special needs teaching has documented some challenges teachers of such children face; however, not much is known about the particular stressors that special needs teachers face in Ghana and how they cope with these challenges. This study therefore sought to investigate the challenges teachers face and coping strategies adopted, in two Special Needs schools in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana.

Methods

This study adopted a cross-sectional design with a qualitative approach to investigate the challenges and coping strategies adopted by teachers teaching special needs children. The approach systematically unearthed the subjective understandings of the respondents regarding the variables under study. After ethical clearance from the University of Ghana, two special school units, a public (Dzorwulu Special School at Dzorwulu) and a private (Reyo Paddock School at East Legon) in Accra, the capital of Ghana, volunteered to provide information for this study. The Dzorwulu Special School is a public institution with boarding facilities, employing fifteen teachers in total. Reyo Paddock School is a private institution employing eight teachers.

The target population was educators who taught the children with special needs in these two schools. The sample population comprised all 15 teachers from Dzorwulu Special School and all eight teachers from Reyo Paddock School. An interview guide and an observational instrument were used to collect data from the respondents. The interview was conducted after an appointment was made with each school and each respondent. On the day of the interview, the respondents were visited in their respective classrooms where they volunteered information. As respondents provided information, their responses were recorded with an audio recorder. The observational instrument helped to observe the processes that went on in the classrooms.

Data from the interviews conducted was categorized into common themes that emerged from the interviews (Merriam, 1998). These themes were explicated on three levels. First, a description of each theme was provided. Next, each theme was exemplified with supporting quotations from participants, and lastly, coping strategies of each category was explained. Before arriving at these various themes, field officers met immediately after each data collection period to discuss issues of interest found and compared notes from interviews conducted. This helped to collectively build themes around the responses before the recorded data were transcribed critically and thoroughly from the interviews. Critical examination of the data was done before coming up with categories from the small units of the transcript (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for analysis. Related categories were grouped while unique ideas that could not be grouped with other categories became sub–themes.

Findings and Discussions

Results of the study were grouped into four pre-determined themes under challenges faced and coping strategies adopted to manage the identified challenge. The four main themes were:

    1. Challenges with children and coping strategies adopted
    2. Challenges with colleague teachers and coping strategies adopted

3. Challenges with parents and coping strategies adopted

4. Institution and management and coping strategies adopted.

Challenges with Children

Respondents in this study described three challenges that were a reflection of their job responsibilities and job design. These were various challenges that teachers of children with disability had to endure in pursuit of their profession. They included: short attention span; different physical challenges assigned to a single class and behavior control challenges.

Short attention span. One of the commonly mentioned challenges among the respondents in both institutions was the fact that it was very difficult to make the children focus during teaching. For instance, some of the respondents remarked that:

The children lose focus easily and I think this is as a result of their disabilities.

The respondents were very concerned about the short or lower attention span of their pupils. Javan, Framarzi, Abedi & Nattaj (2014) were of the view that most children with challenges with learning and intellectual disorders may have problems with cognition and memory leading to the inattentiveness in the children. Consequently, the children learn very slowly and in little bits and are unable to commit things to memory (Javan *et al.,* 2014). Other researchers (Evans & Lovell, 1979; Fullerton & Guardino, 2010; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010; Schilling & Schwartz, 2004) identified other issues they believe could also account for short memory as; absentmindedness, lack of concentration and disruptive behaviors among these children. These characteristics have been argued as impacting negatively on their ability to perceive, retrieve, recognize, learn, and to form concepts and information. The respondents were of the view that because of their pupils short attention span, one needs to have patience and come up with various strategies such as putting them in a routine on particular concepts and/or information for a long time as they could take in bits at a time.

Another factor mentioned by respondents that influences the children's learning is the environment in which the learning takes place. For instance, the respondents stated:

The environment in which the teaching and learning takes place is very important.

Researchers (Dye & Bavelier, 2010; Lane, Smither, Huseman, Guffey, & Fox., 2007) argued that the physical classroom environment could influence the way students behave. For instance, the seating arrangements, lighting, and class organization, can influence students' behavior and attention to academic tasks. It is therefore not surprising that the teachers indicated if the classroom was stimulating enough; they believed that the short attention span with the accompanying short memory could be managed appreciably. Research (e.g., Dye

& Bavelier, 2010; Lane et al., 2007; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010) found an inverse relationship between engaging physical classroom settings and disruptive behaviors of children. Thus, if the classroom was arranged in such way that pupils felt engaged; there was little likelihood that they would be disruptive. These researches affirmed the importance of the physical classroom environment on both the academic and other relevant social behaviors of children. The other implication that could be drawn from the impact of the physical classroom environment and pupils' academic engagement was that when the classroom was haphazardly arranged and fairly disorganized, the children could lose focus easily (Evans & Lovell, 1979; Guardino & Fullerton, 2010; Schilling & Schwartz, 2004) and could be disruptive as well.

The respondents from the Dzorwulu special school complained that, in addition to the children's physical challenge, inattentiveness was directly related to the age of the child. For instance, children between the ages of 4-8 years tend to have a lower attention span compared to children between the ages of 9-15 years. Some of the respondents remarked that:

> We spend more time with the children who are for example 10 years than the 15-year-olds when teaching phonetics, because the younger ones have shorter attention span which gets relatively better as they grow older.

The respondents continued further that this process slowed down the rate at which the syllabus could be completed per the academic year. Another down side of this short attention span was biases associated with sharing attention among pupils by instructors. Teachers tended to concentrate a bit more on those pupils who paid more attention in class or comprehended better at the expense of those who were slower.

Different physical challenges assigned to a single classroom. The study showed that typically in a particular class, there were different children with different physical challenges and needing different specialized and tailor-made care from the same teachers. The respondents claimed that they knew they had to use unique teaching methods in teaching children physically challenged. Thus, meaning a variety of teaching methods and approaches had to be employed within a particular teaching period. Some of the respondents remarked:

> When I teach a particular subject (for instance mathematics) I will have to use different methods for all the children to help them learn something.

The findings are in direct agreement with the assertions made by Ferry, Fouad & Smith (2000) that teachers teaching children with special needs must have the ability to produce lessons to suit each child and provide differentiated instructional materials as well as individualized teaching but cautioned that such a situation could be challenging for most teachers if not all of them. The

respondents were of the view that adopting different methods and approaches in teaching the same topic was very frustrating and tiring. Such a feeling drained the teachers and produced different emotional experiences such as anger and irritation. In the view of McGrath (1995), teaching children with special needs could produce feelings of exhaustion and stress which could affect the teacher's personal health and family life.

Another issue raised by the respondents was the issue of overcrowding. The respondents unanimously complained that they have so many pupils requiring diverse needs in a particular class and therefore to come up with different teaching methods and approaches for each of them could take forever, a situation they believe is very challenging and energy draining. This could probably be the main cause of the feelings of frustration among the teachers.

Behavior control challenges. The respondents further mentioned behavioral control challenges associated with their pupils. They described their pupils as getting easily hyper, difficult to calm down and they found it difficult to follow instructions. Some of the respondents said:

> *The children mostly fight and cry and are difficult to calm down when hyper and can easily get furious in the class.*

According to the respondents, it is not easy to calm the children down in class and what makes this situation more challenging was they tended to engage in risky and dangerous behaviors such as throwing objects, head banging, self-biting and throwing tantrums. According to McGill, (1999), such behavior put the children and others around them at risks. This eventually had a significant impact on their quality of life. Having several of such children in a class with few teachers to manage them becomes very stressful, challenging and emotionally draining.

Some studies (e.g., Billingsley, 2002; 2004; Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Boyer, 1999; Busch, Pederson, Espin, & Weissenburger, 2001; Conderman & Stephens, 2000; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998; Kilgore et al., 2003; MacDonald, 2001; Scruggs, Boon & Carter, 2001; Whitaker, 2000) found that students who exhibited such risky and dangerous behaviors are likely to have wide-ranging academic and behavioral problems and their teachers struggled to develop effective instructional and management strategies.

The respondents were of the view that overcrowding in their respective classrooms is adding to behavioral challenges of children. They explained that some of the children had problems having many people around them at a given time. With so many pupils around them, such children get aggravated and remain so for longer periods of time. However, the only responsibility of the teacher is to teach and not to address behavioral challenges. In essence they cannot do much about this situation.

Coping Strategies with Children

The respondents brought out a range of coping strategies employed to ameliorate the stress and challenges they encounter with children. These strategies have been grouped into five broad themes and discussed below.

Employing individualized educational programs. Individualized Education Program (IEP) is intended to meet the educational goals of physically challenged and explains how their challenges affects the learning process. The IEP provides information on the children's current performance levels and suggests the special services and/or the supports that should be provided to the individual student who have challenges with learning (Smith & Simpson, 1989). This program has an embedded advantage of making it easier for teachers to follow, track and trace the performance of their students and be able to design something specific for each student. If followed, teachers would not get too frustrated about the time spent per student (Smith & Simpson, 1989).

Some respondents from Reyo Paddock School stated how they use this strategy:

> We group and share the children among ourselves. The children are many, so each teacher attends to one child at a time especially when the disability is severe. We employ this to take care of each child and to meet his or her needs based on his/her disability.

Analyzing what respondents do in line with the main purpose and focus of the IEP, it was realized that there were some differences with the IEP, for instance the students' performance levels were first identified before the support needed was provided, but what respondents did was to group the pupils together based on the similarity of their challenges not necessarily their performance levels. Respondents from the Dzorwulu Special School however, did not use the IEP in teaching their pupils.

Giving incentives. This approach was noted with respondents at the Dzorwulu Special School. The respondents indicated an approach used to calm the pupils was to bait them with incentives notably toffees and biscuits. This was inferred from this quote of the respondent:

> Toffees are sometimes given to the pupils when they are hyper to calm them down.

Although research (Clark & Estes, 2002) has proven that providing incentives had a tendency of increasing motivation and performance. It must be mentioned that the strategy could have dual effect as the pupils could exploit the situation and use it manipulate their teachers. This is because they may build the idea that it was good to act out, as that situation could be rewarding. Once the pupils got to this point, it would be difficult for the teachers to manage this

situation, However, some of the respondents also mentioned that they gave out incentives to motivate their pupils. They said:

> Toffees and biscuits are given out especially when a pupil shows signs of improvement or does something good to get them motivated or encouraged.

By doing this, the respondents confirmed Clark and Estes' (2002) statement that incentives had a tendency of increasing motivation and performance. Further, such practices were also embedded in the principle of Applied Behavior Analysis (Wahler & Fox, 1981). This is an incentive-based principle which sought to reward good and acceptable behaviors with the intent of helping the pupil keep repeating the acceptable behaviors and also motivating others observing to emulate.

Teaching with real objects. Shinn, Powell-Smith & Good (1997), report that teaching with real life materials and scenarios are the most effective teaching methods. This could be kept in memory and could easily be recalled by the students when necessary. The respondents in this study shared the sentiments of Shinn, Powell-Smith & Good (1997) and noted that it was easier to help their pupils to grasp a concept or pass information if real objects, toys or pictures were used in teaching. A respondent stated that:

> Teaching with real objects makes teaching interesting and quickens the understanding of the children. Teaching in abstract will be a waste of time since children have short attention span.

Using real objects and pictures has the tendency of offering the pupils easier ways of linking concepts to the objects or the pictures used, as the learners can see what they are learning. This confirms the statement that a "picture is worth more than a thousand words."

Challenges with Colleague Teachers

The second challenge that respondents mentioned was associated with their colleagues. Two main themes were identified under this challenge and these are lack of team work and working with untrained teachers.

Lack of team work. It was observed that there was no team work among the teachers in the study schools. In a particular classroom, it was obvious that the collaboration between the teachers was lacking as some teachers were unable to work with certain types of disabilities and felt stuck. Another thing that was observed in some of the classrooms was that some of the teachers did work together while the other(s) work alone in the same class. Meanwhile, they are all responsible for all the children in the class. This attitude affected the co-operation that should exist amongst and between the respondents. Some of the respondents complained passionately about this observation by stating that:

> *Sometimes colleagues do not involve you in decision mak-
> ing concerning activities in the class that we are all teaching.
> Things that could have been done in a group are mostly done
> by few teachers, which are mostly not completed.*

Because of this non-cooperative nature of their colleagues, some of the respondents said they are not able to accomplish much in a day and the whole term, and that it even affects the quality of work output and mostly leads to wastage of resources.

To further express how they feel about such non-cooperativeness among the respondents, some of them stated that:

> *Most times, the hard to manage and disruptive pupil is left
> in the care of only one person, meanwhile if all of us were to
> team up in their management, it would have been easier. This
> normally drains the teacher too much.*

This expression of being left alone could be the main basis for burnouts for the respondents. For instance, Prince and Muller (1981) support the above by stating that the lack of team work mostly results in burnout in most profes-sions and this has caused a lot of these specially trained (especially teachers) to vacate their jobs. The question was posed why the respondents were still at post and not leave if the non-cooperativeness was so draining, and the respondents stated that it was a matter of the mind and the heart in conflict, because regard-less of the strenuousness of their occupation, they derive some level of satisfac-tion in contributing to the lives of their pupils and they get excited and feel successful when their pupils are able to learn even a concept in a whole term.

Working with untrained teachers. This particular challenge was com-mon with the two schools used for the study. Most people respondents were not formally trained as teachers for special needs education. It was found that both the public and the private special needs schools employed untrained teachers to help in the respective classrooms, however, as they stayed on the job for extended periods some of these non-professionals were put fully in charge of some classes because of their experience with children with special needs. Okyere, Amedahe, and Edjah (2002) found in his study on teachers in special needs schools that a significant number of teachers of children with special needs in Ghana are non-specialist and/or untrained.

This finding could probably explain why regardless of the complaint from the respondents most of them are not willing to leave. Possibly, because they held no academic qualifications, though with vast experience, it would be next to impossible to find an opening in a similar institution with probably bet-ter facilities and work conditions in a country with high unemployment rate as Ghana. So, it was wise for them to rather adopt coping strategies and keep their jobs than to voice out their concerns loudly and get fired. Another implication

of this finding could be the non-cooperativeness among the respondents. Possibly, there is a silent nonverbal war between the trained and the non-trained; this could have resulted in the apathy among the respondents within classrooms.

One of the respondents at the Dzorwulu Special School remarked:

> Working with untrained teachers is difficult. In the university we were taught different ways of handling these disabilities, applying different theories; so, if I am to handle a kid with autism, I will apply these theories whereas my untrained colleagues may not know this, and this is not the best and they don't understand anything.

Possibly, instead of helping the non-trained to learn from the trained, their "lack of training" might have become a weapon being used against them and therefore in order not to be constantly looked down on by the trained, the untrained might want to do things alone or probably the trained might not want to associate with the untrained this might be the main basis of the non-cooperativeness found among the respondents.

Coping with Challenges Associated with Colleagues

With this challenge, the respondents in both schools were of the view they just ignore this and keep to their work, as it lies in the hands of management to employ trained teachers or get those untrained but with vast experience get some form of academic training. However, the study found that some of the younger teachers who were untrained had registered for diplomas and degrees in special education offering it in the form of distance education, where they do most of their studies online or during vacations. But this condition was not so with the elderly especially those who had stayed on for longer years.

Challenges with Institutional Management

The third challenge that was also common with the two study schools and was directly attributed to the institutional management was work overload. The second challenge which was specifically associated with the public institution was delays in the release of logistics to aid teaching and learning. These are discussed below.

Work overload. Respondents from both study schools complained that they had to handle too many pupils a time. And the other down side of this is that there could be more than 15 distinct categories of special needs found in a particular classroom to be attended to by few teachers. The respondents were of the view that because of the number of pupils in a class and the different categories of needs to be attended to, they cannot give off their best to their pupils. The respondents, therefore, allege that such conditions could be frustrating. Frustrations and stress associated with work overload was mentioned by Gray-Stanley

and Muramatsu (2011) as having the tendency to result in attrition and worry or anxiety (Veenman 1984) on an individual.

The respondents expressed how stressing and frustrating the work overload is by saying:

> *The number of pupils in the classes is extremely large and had to be handled daily by meeting each child's needs. In fact, it is a struggle to take care of all of them. This is not easy for at all.*

Several disadvantages have been documented as being associated with employee work overload. For instance, McGrath (1995) and Billingsley (2002;2004) mention issues like increases in sick leaves, poor work output and results, high employee turnovers and burnouts with related health issues as being the result of work overload.

The respondents were of the view that the work overload is attributed to the few special needs schools available in the capital city resulting in parents scrambling to get places for their wards, and unfortunately, neither the management of their respective schools, nor the government is doing anything to expand facilities or increase the number of special schools.

Larbi (2011) was of the view that past and present Ghanaian governments have shown their interest in making interventions toward making education accessible to all children, however, there are still only a few schools designed and built for children with special needs in the country and unfortunately these schools are not well distributed across the nation. In addition to the limited number of schools, there are equally a very limited number of teachers who are specially trained to handle children with special needs. It is therefore not surprising that the respondents complained about overcrowding and untrained teachers.

Delay in release of logistics. This challenge is associated mainly with the public school (thus, Dzorwulu special school). The respondents in this institution mentioned that since they had their main source of supply of logistics came from the central government, sometimes it takes unnecessarily too long before teaching and learning aids are released which makes teaching and learning extremely difficult as they must manage or improvise to ensure the continuity of the school term. The respondents stated that:

> *This is a government school and the government does not provide us with the teaching aids and this slows down our work. Sometimes the aids come as late as the end of the term. This is not good at all. We the teachers have to provide some teaching aids ourselves and we lose interest in the job and want to switch to a different job.*

Researchers (e.g., Boyer, 1999; Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Conderman & Stephens, 2000; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998; Kilgore et al., 2003; MacDonald,

2001; Whitaker, 2000) have emphasized the frustrations teachers experience when teaching without the aids and adequate curricular and technical resources. They were of the view that such situations frustrate the learning process of both students and teachers and hinder the progression of learning for the students. Billingsley (2004) adds that teaching without teaching aids reduces the productivity of work done by teachers and must therefore be avoided.

According to the respondents, their school management and administrators often seemed uninterested in whether or not they had adequate resources for teaching and learning. The respondents remarked that:

> *The management and the administration look unconcerned whether we have teaching aids or learning resources. This shows the attitude they have towards disability.*

Varying attitudes towards the disabled people have been reported in various parts of the world including Africa (Amoako, 1975). However, the predominant attitude towards the disabled is either seeing them as hopeless or helpless (Desta 1995). What has aggravated the negative attitude towards the disabled is the African culture and beliefs itself. For instance, Abosi and Ozoji (1985) were of the view that several people in many African countries attribute the causes of disabilities to witchcraft, juju, sex-linked factors, or as punishment from God or some supernatural forces.

In Ghana, like other African countries, there are various diversifications in perception towards persons with disabilities. For instance, the Ashantis of Ghana, has a long standing traditional belief which, precluded men or women with physical defects, such as amputations from becoming chiefs or queen mothers. This has been so engrained to the point that even when a sitting chief or a queen mother is found after being enstooled with such defects (such as epilepsy, or amputations of any sort) they are destooled (Sarpong 1974). Therefore, in this part, children with obvious physical or mental defects are rejected. For instance, history has it that, in the olden days a child is killed immediately after birth if he/she is found to have six fingers. Further, mentally retarded children were abandoned on riverbanks or near the sea so that such "animal-like children" could return to what was believed to be their own kind. However, among the Ga from the capital of Ghana, people with disability are treated with kindness, gentleness, and patience because it is believed that such were reincarnated from a deity (Sarpong, 1974).

Therefore, it is interesting for the respondents to mention that their administrators and management have an unfortunate attitude towards the disabled children they managed as this school is situated in Accra, the capital of Ghana, where it is believed that such children are treated with kindness, patience, and gentleness. The implication here is that it could be that those who are in administration may not necessarily be from this place. But regardless of their place

of origin in Ghana, as a public institution, such attitudes are not helpful especially when the government of Ghana has adopted the UNESCO philosophy of inclusion and inclusive schooling (UNESCO 1994). The inclusive education philosophy is progressively being accepted as an effective means by which biased attitudes towards student with disabilities may be reduced (Subban & Sharma 2006). The United Nations standard rules for equalization of opportunities for persons with disability in 1993 entreated member nations to make sure that there are equal primary, secondary, and tertiary educational programs for children, youth and adults with disabilities. Further, governments should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of their educational systems, meaning that equal investments must be made in all forms of the education they are providing.

Therefore, for the respondents to mention that sometimes they must wait for more than a term to receive logistics to teach, could have several implications. Either, the government is still not implementing the terms of the UNESCO agreement, or the managers of the educational systems are not attaching importance to the education of those with special needs and are therefore discriminating against them with regards of logistic allocation and distribution. It could also mean that those managing the special school units are not demanding or pressurizing the Ministry of Education for their supplies. Any of the above implications will have negative consequences on the teaching and learning of educating children with special needs.

Coping Strategies with Institution and Management

Two coping strategies were extracted from the respondents; one was common to both institutions whereas the other was only specific to the Dzorwulu Special School (The public school).

Advising patents to teach children at home. Almost half of the total respondents in both institutions stated that they use this strategy and they believe that the parents have a responsibility in helping them (the teachers) to educate their children. This, the respondents believe that once parents spend some time with the children at home to go over some of the concepts and/or the information, or to even teach the children basic life skills at home, it can help improve the children's memory. However, the respondents were quick to add that they know that not all the parents are capable of teaching or helping their wards at home, but if they at least did try could go a long way to make their work easier. Two of the respondents captured the above sentiments by stating that:

> *We advise parents to teach children at home to help children learn. Not all parents can do this, but it will help if they do it. This will reduce our stress.*

Ozonoff and Cathcart (1998) suggested when children with special needs (specifically autism) are taught at home, it enhances the effective development of their motor and other basic skills.

Using our own resources to teach. This strategy was specific to only the Dzorwulu Special School (The public school). The respondents from here said one of their main coping strategies with delays in release of logistics from the government are to use improvises or buy teaching aids from their personal resources. Some of the respondents said:

> *We sometimes use our own money to buy teaching aids because to wait for the government's supply means you will not teach. So, in order not to lag behind our targets for the term, we use our own resources to get teaching aids.*

The respondents were of the view that they do this because of the compassion they have for the children. Sometimes they admit that it is not cheap but for the sake of the children they must sacrifice and get the aids. Further, they said that what makes their situation even more difficult is that philanthropists seem not to notice them at all, though they admitted that sometimes some individuals and groups do come to their aid, but the frequency and quantum is not significant.

Challenges with Parents

Three main challenging areas were expressed by the respondents as being associated with the parents of their pupils. It must be noted that two of these were common for the two institutions with one being mainly specific to the public institution.

Lack of cooperation from parents. Parents not cooperating with respondents were identified as one main area that respondents were worried about. The respondents said they are worried because parental involvement with children's education is necessary and important. This view is in line with Koegel, Vernon and Koegel (2009) statement that parental views and involvement are important in the total education and inclusion of children with disabilities. They were concerned about the behavior of some parents who they alleged ignore the guideline instructions they give to them to follow when they are with their children at home and this makes it difficult for the children to maintain and follow the routines and learn. Some of the respondents said:

> *The parents sometimes do not continue with the guideline instructions we give them. The worrying part is some of them are just not interested in anything concerning their own children.*

Busch, Pederson, Espin, & Weissenburger (2001) state that parents of special needs children were sometimes difficult to contact or are slow to respond to requests made by their teachers. According to the respondents, the parents of the children often did not even attend the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and by so doing it would be difficult to help their children with their homework or helping them learn basic life skills and above all sometimes fail to return documents that require their signatures. This makes it difficult to know the real intentions of the parents for their children.

Failure to buy prescribed learning materials. Some of the parents according to the respondents, constantly refuse to purchase prescribed material for their children making some of the children handicapped when teaching and learning is taking place. Some of the respondents remarked:

> *Some parents think it is not necessary to even educate these children, so they do not buy what we prescribe to aid learning, and this makes teaching difficult.*

Abandoning children during vacation. This challenge was specific to Dzorwulu Special School (the public). Some of the respondents in this institution held a common view that parents leave their children in the school even on vacations so sometimes teachers must stay and take care of abandoned children. Two of the respondents stated that:

> *Some parents get frustrated about their children's disabilities and reject these kids. They do not come for them even on vacations.*

The respondents said that such abandonment by parents sometimes shows in the emotional display of the children. Wyden (2015) confirms that when parents abandon their children, especially those with disabilities, it can lead to children having emotional problems.

Coping Strategies with Parents

The respondents mentioned that the only way they cope with these parental challenges is to keep encouraging the parents to get interested and involved with their children's education. This is normally done through Parent Teacher Association (P.T.A) meetings**,** letters, phone calls and sometimes home visits where possible. One of the respondents remarked:

> *Parents are not that cooperative, but we call them and talk to them and encourage them by giving some guidelines on how to live with the children based on the disability, this sometimes makes them cooperative.*

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings, there are a host of conclusions that can be leveraged towards strategies for supporting special needs children, particularly in Ghana. First, the findings indicated that logistics for teaching and learning were better at the private schools, and that this impacted teaching and learning activities. Also, granted that teaching children with special needs in itself is draining, the overcrowded classrooms added more stress for the respondents. Furthermore, some of the parents of the children with special needs were not interested in their children's education: some of the children were often abandoned at the school even during vacations. This made the care and education of such children the sole responsibility of the teachers and added more stress on them. In addi-

tion to the aforementioned, the environment in which teaching and learning took place—including the overcrowding—may have contributed to the cyclical effect of troubling behaviors by some of the children.

Regardless of the challenges faced by the teachers, it was notable that they went out of the way to sometimes use their own resources to purchase teaching and learning materials to support the instructional needs of their students.

In light of the findings of this study, it is recommended that, to reduce the drain and the accompanying stress on the respondents, they should work together in teams, because that is more likely to yield higher impact on the lives of the children. This study also yields some implications for policy and practice. First, the government of Ghana should try to make teaching logistics available on time. This will ensure that children with special needs will get adequate and quality support as well as the stimulating environment needed to aid their learning. Secondly, the schools studied could adopt certain stress-relieving strategies to train their teachers. This, in turn, will help them to meet the learning needs of their special needs children. Finally, the teachers can devise some means of involving parents of the special needs children and help them to understand developmental issues concerning their children. They can also work together to devise various continuous educational instructional materials. These strategies can help parents to complement the instructional approaches implemented in school when their children come home. This has the potential to yield better and synergistic educational outcomes for the special needs children—even in light of the scarcity of resources.

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