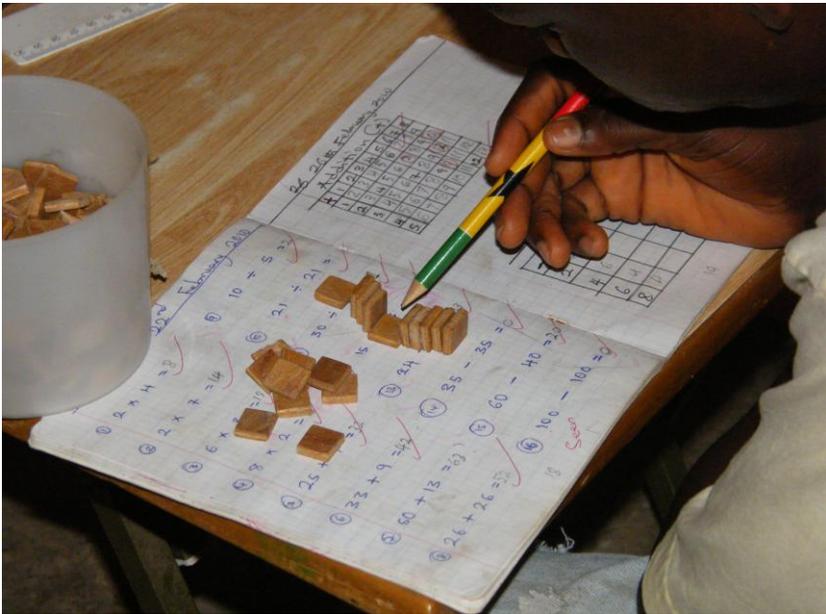




Children with Learning Difficulties in Public Basic Schools in Ghana

*A study involving local stakeholders in Greater
Accra Region*



December 2011

Special Attention Project

Preface

This survey was funded by Disability Rights Fund (DRF), USA. Special Attention Project (SAP) likes to thank DRF for their continued support to promote the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, implementation of which would greatly benefit children with specific learning disabilities in Ghana. SAP is also grateful to Emmanuel Anguah Afriyie, Mumuni Abdul-Karim, Edmund Kwame Botchway, Ishmael Hammond and Edward Osae Amoako who carried out the data collection.

Summary

Special Attention Project (SAP) explored the situation of children with learning difficulties in public basic schools in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Findings are that teachers and other stakeholders do identify children who have specific learning difficulties, but knowledge levels on Specific Learning Disabilities and relevant legislation and policies is low.

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Introduction

Special Attention Project (SAP) became operational in 2008, in response to findings that a lot of children who live in the streets of Accra face severe difficulties when they are integrated back into mainstream education. A significant number of children who make a living in the streets have been to school in the past, but dropped out because they found it difficult to keep up with the curriculum. These children are commonly called ‘slow learners’.

SAP operates an educational centre for out-of-school children at Kaneshie. Nearly all children who participate in the Education Programme show typical symptoms of Specific Learning Disabilities (SpLD). Children are given individualised education (reading, writing, mathematics) whereby their learning programme is adjusted to individual abilities and learning style. Still, progress is slow and for many children re-integration in the mainstream is no immediate option.

In order to help prevent more children from coming to the streets, SAP initiated research and advocacy on children with learning difficulties in Ghana. There is little information about this group. SAP found that among the parents and former teachers of the children awareness on this issue is generally low. Learning difficulties and behavioural problems are often attributed to spiritual causes.

SAP also trains Resource Teachers (Special Needs Teachers) of the Ghana Education Service. Resource Teachers are posted at Districts and Clusters of basic schools to support pupils with special educational needs. Their professional training did often not include Specific Learning Difficulties, while in mainstream schools they encounter many pupils who express the signs and symptoms.

This study was carried out as part of SAP’s effort to fill in the information gap on children with learning difficulties and to identify key areas for awareness creation, advocacy and training.

Part I Context and Outline

1. Context

This section provides a brief overview of Special Education in Ghana and legal provisions concerning children with Specific Learning Difficulties.

1.1 Special Education in Ghana

‘Special Education’ has been a reality in Ghana for many decades. There are schools for children with visual impairment, hearing impairment and intellectual impairment, managed by the Special Education Division (Sp.Ed.) of the Ghana Education Service. More recently, ‘Inclusive Education’ has been adopted by GES, meaning that children with special educational needs should not be separated from other children but that they should learn together whenever possible. Sp.Ed. has now posted ‘Resource Teachers’ to districts and clusters of schools in five (5) regions; their mandate is to assist children with special educational needs in the mainstream schools.

‘Special Education’ in Ghana was and still is strongly focused at the ‘traditional disabilities’ (sight, hearing, intellectual and physical). Special Education Teachers are trained to teach pupils with any of these disabilities, and programme areas of Sp.Ed. are accordingly. Children with normal intelligence but a learning difficulty in a specific area (for example reading or mathematics) are not formally recognised as children with special educational needs and there are no provisions for assessment and support.

1.2 Specific Learning Disabilities

Specific Learning Disabilities (SpLD) refer to learning difficulties in a specific area; for example reading or mathematics. The individual has no particular problems in other areas: a child with a mathematics disorder may perform well in reading. It is therefore fundamentally different from intellectual disabilities

whereby the intelligence level of an individual is below average, affecting all learning abilities.

Specific Learning Disabilities include:

- Dyslexia: difficulty in reading, writing and spelling;
- Dysgraphia: difficulty in writing;
- Dyspraxia: motor difficulties;
- Dyscalculia: a difficulty performing mathematical calculations;
- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD): concentration difficulties with heightened activity levels and impulsiveness;
- Asperger's syndrome and Autism: social communication difficulties;

There are very few possibilities for screening and testing on SpLD in Ghana. The Ghana Education Service (GES) does not have the facilities to screen or test. As a result, there is not much information on children with Specific Learning Disabilities in Ghana. Statistics from other countries however suggest that up to 10% of children in any population have a specific learning disability.

1.3 Disability Act

In 2006 the Disability Act (Act 715) was approved by Parliament, after years of lobbying by the disability movement. The Act provides for Persons with Disabilities in the areas of employment, education, health care, transportation, justice administration, and access to public places. It also provides for establishment of a National Council for persons with Disabilities, which was established in 2009.

The definition of 'disability' in the Act is a general description covering 'physical, mental or sensory impairment', and specifies 'visual, hearing and speech disability'. This does not clearly include persons with specific learning difficulties.

The Act does provide for free education for children with disabilities, but rather focuses at designates schools in each region which provide the necessary facilities for persons with

disabilities. The Act also mentions that the government should establish special schools for individuals whose disability makes it impossible to be in mainstream schooling. Admission in school may be refused when a child is assessed and found to be in need of special schooling. These provisions do not promote Inclusive Education.

1.4 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

At the time of this survey, the Government of Ghana had ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) but had not yet signed it. Civil Society Organisations were then busily campaigning to get it signed. The Convention outlines obligations of governments towards citizens with disabilities, and provides a rights framework. As a legal document it is more extensive and comprehensive than the Disability Act. A significant difference is that the Convention includes ‘intellectual impairment’ in its definition of ‘disability’. It also emphasises the right of children with disabilities to access education on an equal basis with other children, in the community in which they live. Governments who sign up to the Convention commit themselves to providing support to facilitate effective education of children with disabilities within the general education system.

1.5 Education Act

In the Education Act 2008 (Act 778) Article 5 captures ‘Inclusive Education’ and states that ‘design’ and ‘infrastructure’ of schools need to be disability friendly. Parents should take a child with a disability to school. And the last provision is a definition of ‘Inclusive Education’, which speaks of a value system which holds that all persons who attend an educational facility should have equal access to learning, which transcends the idea of physical location but promotes participation, friendship and interaction. The obligations of the education system as described here seem to be restricted to (physical) infrastructure, and are not specified in terms of learning support that should be provided in order to achieve ‘equal access to learning’. Though ‘screening of all children on admission’ is stated as a duty of the Education

Service, it does not specify what children are to be screened for. It is unclear whether this includes learning disabilities.

1.6 Education Strategic Plan 2010-2020

In the Education Strategic Plan 2010-2020 the guiding principles for education for children with disabilities have been formulated as follows:

The delivery of education to young people with disabilities and special educational needs is informed by three guiding principles:

- *The right to education*
- *The right to equality of educational opportunities*
- *The right and obligation to be included in and participate fully in the affairs of society*

The Strategic Goal is:

Provide education for excluded children (including those who are physically and/or mentally impaired or disabled, slow/fast learners, orphans, young mothers, street children, those from deprived areas, slum children, and poverty victims) by including them, wherever possible, within the mainstream formal system or, only when considered necessary, within special units or schools.

Strategies include:

- 1. Include disadvantaged children within the existing education system or provide special facilities for them.*
- 2. Include all children with non-severe physical and mental disabilities within mainstream institutions.*
- 3. Provide special schools or education units for those severely disabled.*

The Strategic Goal seems much more 'Inclusive' than any of the current legal provisions, by emphasising inclusion in the mainstream. It also mentions 'slow / fast learners', which refers specifically to (dis)abilities related to learning.

2. Outline of this study

2.1 Aim and coverage

This study explores conditions in public basic schools in the Greater Accra Region concerning children with learning difficulties. Specific questions that were explored:

- Do Teachers and Parents recognise learning difficulties in pupils?
- What are knowledge levels of Teachers and Head teachers on legal provisions and policies relevant to children with learning difficulties?
- What are views of parents and other stakeholders in public basic education on how children with learning difficulties can be supported?

2.2 Methodology

The data collection was carried out by five (5) research assistants who first received training on:

- The legislative and policy documents which were subject to this study;
- Specific Learning disabilities in children.

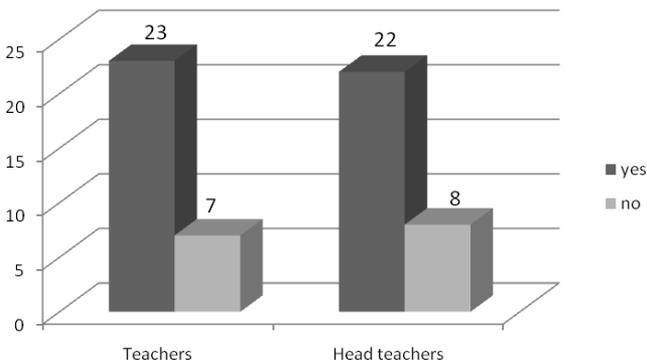
Majority of data collectors had been part of a previous research by SAP and are familiar with the organisation and its aims.

Thirty (30) basic schools were selected in the Greater Accra region, spread over nine (9) of the ten (10) districts. Selection was balanced in terms of urban / rural and in terms of provisions by the Ghana Education Service (especially the presence / absence of a Resource Teacher). In each school, the Head Teacher, one (1) Teacher, one (1) parent, one (1) representative of the Parent Teacher Association and one (1) representative of the School Management Committee was interviewed. Data collectors used questionnaires to structure the interviews and to record answers. Previously, permission to carry out this survey was applied for and granted by the Greater Accra Regional Director of GES.

Part II Data

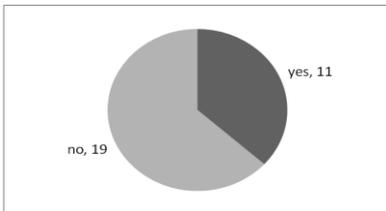
1. Children with learning difficulties in Public Basic Schools

Teachers and Head teachers were asked if they have been teaching children with specific learning difficulties. Majority (about 75%) claim they have:

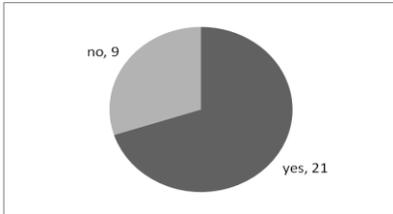


3.1. Have you been teaching a child with specific learning difficulties?

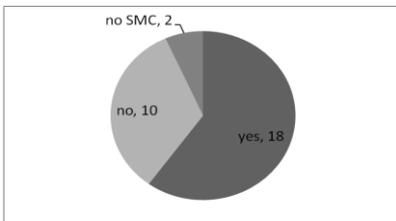
Parents, PTA members and SMC members were asked if they know a child who has specific learning difficulties:



3.2. Parents: do they know a child with specific learning difficulties?

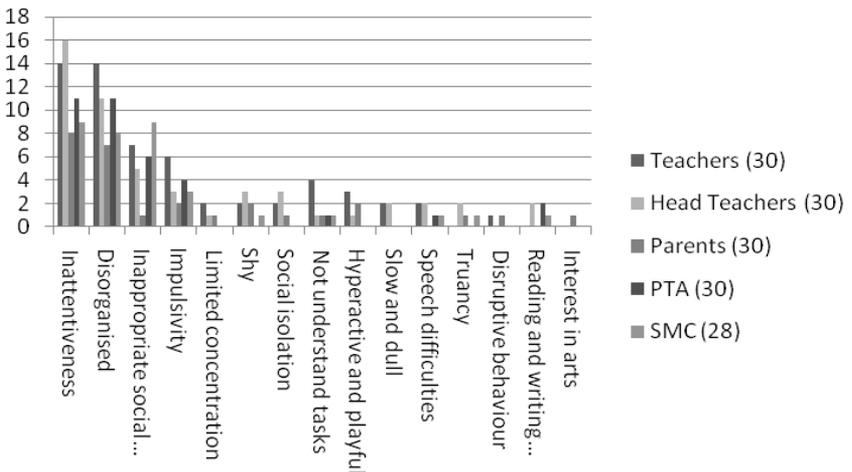


3.3. PTA Members: do they know a child with specific learning difficulties?



3.4. SMC Members: do they know a child with specific learning difficulties?

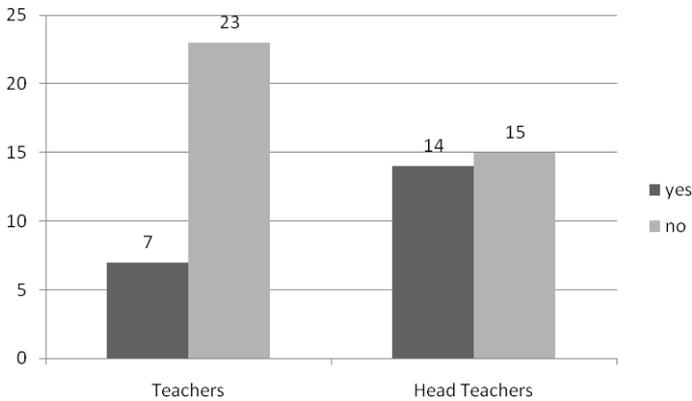
Majority of respondents answered in the affirmative. They were then asked to mention characteristics of the children with learning difficulties they knew.



3.5 Characteristics of children with learning difficulties

Respondents clearly recognised behavioural and social problems in children with learning problems. Inattentiveness and lack of self-organisation stand out, while inappropriate social behaviour and impulsiveness are also seen as common characteristics. Other answers point at problems children with learning problems have in relation to their peers, as well as shyness.

Teachers and Head Teachers were asked if, in the course of their career, they had seen children with learning difficulties drop out from basic school. Here we see a significant difference between the answers of Teachers and the answers of Head Teachers:

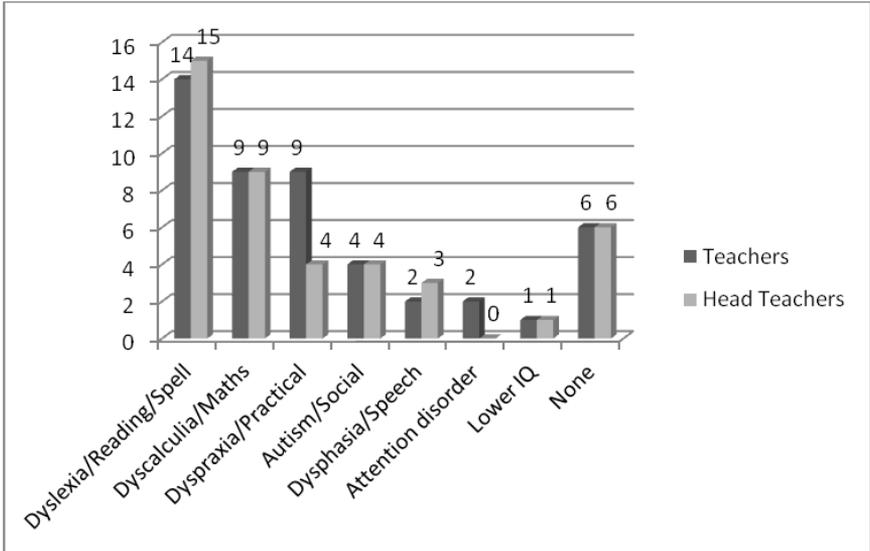


The difference can be explained by the fact that Head Teachers are privy to the entire data on attendance in the schools as against the individual attendances that the individual Teachers have access to.

One Head Teacher declined to answer. Of the remaining respondents nearly 50% confirmed that they had witnessed children with specific learning difficulties stop schooling prematurely.

2. Knowledge on Specific Learning Difficulties

Professional respondents (Teachers and Head Teachers) were asked to mention types of Specific Learning Difficulties. The table shows the responses:



2.1 Types of Specific Learning Difficulties

Respondents also mentioned general disabilities, which are not specific learning difficulties: Hearing Impairment (9) and Visual Impairment (11). Hearing and visual impairments are not specific learning difficulties, though they could contribute to the aggravation of specific learning difficulties e.g early age hearing problems could contribute to poor reading and writing skills. One respondent said: 'Students engage in trading activities and become too tired to concentrate'.

Correlation between this question and the question whether respondents have been teaching a pupil with a learning difficulty is as follows:

	Teachers who have <u>not</u> taught child with SpLD	Teachers who have taught child with SpLD	Head Teachers who have <u>not</u> taught child with SpLD	Head Teachers who have taught child with SpLD
Teachers who could <u>not</u> name any SpLD	4	2		
Teachers who did name at least one SpLD	3	21		
Head Teachers who could <u>not</u> name any SpLD			4	2
Head Teachers who did name at least one SpLD			4	20

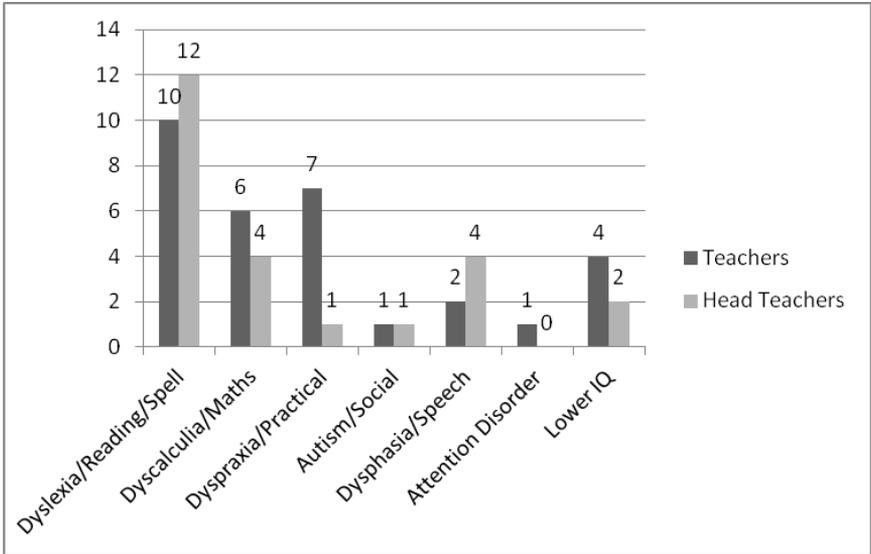
2.2 Correlation between teaching and knowledge

The high correlation between teachers who could name at least one Specific Learning Disability and those who have taught a child with a learning disability, does indicate two things: that teachers who receive some level of knowledge on Specific Learning Disabilities are better able to identify and offer help to children with learning difficulties. It does also indicate that Teachers who in their practice identify that some of the children perform below the class average in specific areas of learning, are able to put a name to it when the details about the same are revealed. The same applies to the Head Teachers who could name at least one Specific Learning Disability and those who have taught a child with learning disabilities.

(Head) Teachers who could not name at least one Specific Learning Disability and those who have not taught a child with learning disabilities does not in any way suggest that these (Head) Teachers never had a child with Specific Learning Disabilities in

their class, but rather goes to confirm the conviction that knowledge about Specific Learning Disabilities and a consciousness to identify and help pupils who perform below the class average, play complementary roles in identification of Specific Learning Difficulties.

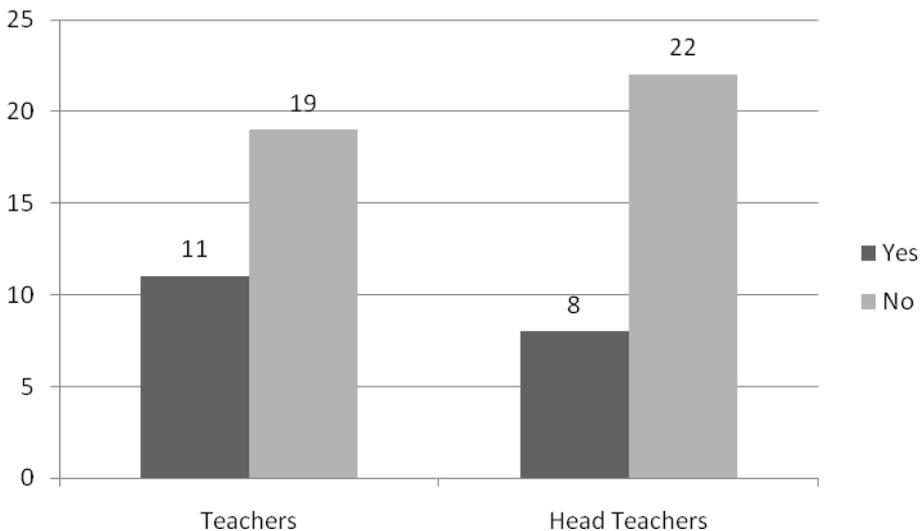
Respondents were then asked which type of learning difficulty they had encountered in their pupils.



2.3 Types of Learning Difficulties encountered in pupils

Again, Hearing Impairment (12) and Visual Impairment (10) were mentioned as specific learning disabilities.

Teachers and Head Teachers were asked if they had ever received any training on children with learning difficulties.



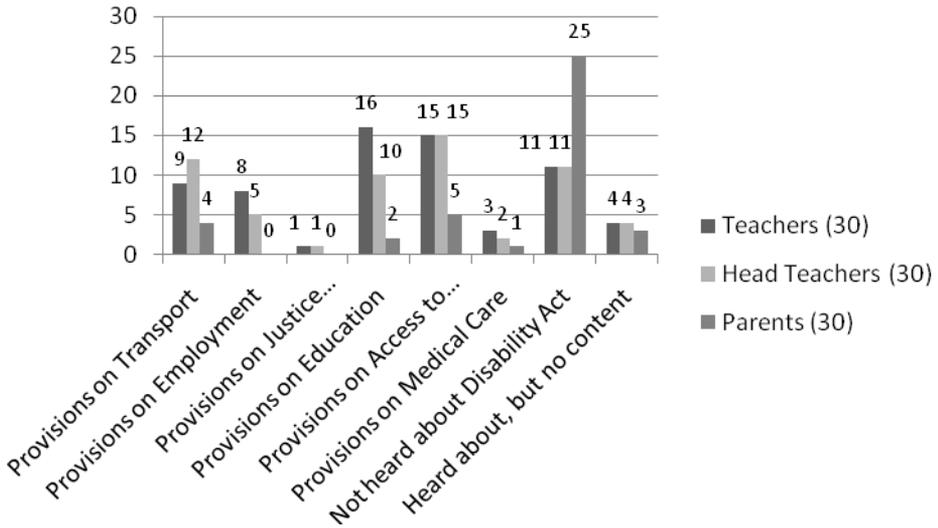
2.4 Training on learning difficulties

Teachers seem to have been more exposed to training on learning difficulties. From this data we see that the number of respondents who received training is much lower than the number of respondents who identified children with specific learning difficulties in their classrooms. This again confirms that teachers are able to identify children who perform below average without having theoretical knowledge on the issue.

One of the Head Teachers who answered 'yes' had actually attended a training programme by SAP.

3. Knowledge on (legal) provisions for children with learning difficulties

Teachers, Head Teachers and Parents were interviewed on their knowledge of the Disability Act (715); they were asked to mention provisions from the Act, which were recorded according to category:



3.1 Knowledge on Disability Act

From this table it appears that only 50% of the professional respondents (Teachers and Head Teachers) know some content of the Disability Act, while randomly selected parents of public school children hardly know about it.

A significant detail is that Teachers seem to know more about provisions for persons with disabilities concerning Education, than Head Teachers do (16 provisions mentioned against 10).

Generally, provisions on access to public places are best known.

The following table shows the number of provisions mentioned per respondent who knew about the Act; this excludes respondents

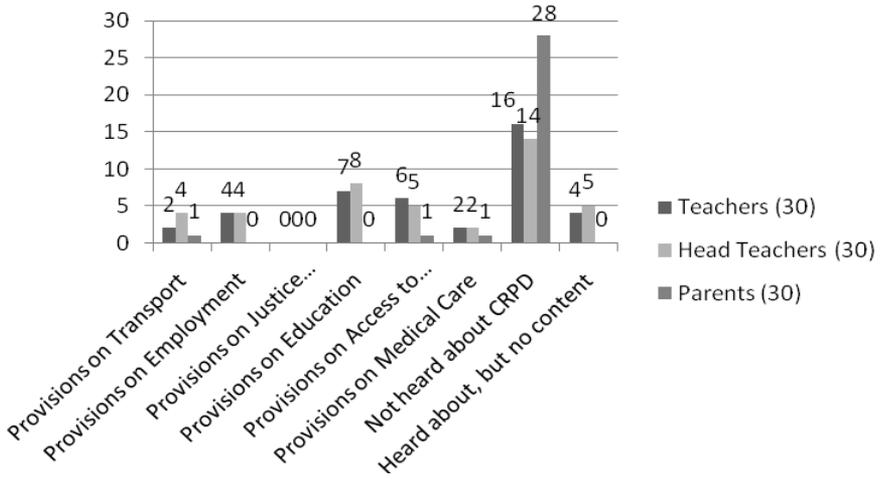
who had not heard about the Act or did not know anything about the contents:

	Teachers (15)	Head Teachers (15)	Parents (2)	Total (32)
Provisions on Transport	0.6	0.8	2.00	0.78
Provisions on Employment	0.53	0.3	0	0.4
Provisions on Justice Administration	0.06	0.06	0	0.06
Provisions on Education	1.07	0.67	1	0.8
Provisions on Access to public places	1.00	1.00	2.50	1.09
Provisions on Medical Care	0.2	0.13	0.5	0.18
Average				0.55

3.2 Provisions mentioned per respondent (Disability Act)

This shows that respondents who were somehow familiar with the Act averagely could mention less than one provision per category.

The same respondents were asked to mention provisions from the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);



3.3 Knowledge on CRPD

Comparing this table with the table on the Disability Act it is clear that knowledge levels on the CRPD are significantly lower. The percentage of professional respondents who do not know anything of the contents is about 66% as against 50%. Two out of thirty parents knew about the CRPD and could mention some content. Interestingly, Head Teachers score better on knowledge on Education provisions than Teachers, while for the Disability Act it was the other way round. Education is also the best known category, as against Access to public places for the Disability Act.

The following table shows the number of provisions mentioned per respondent; excluded are the respondents who did not know anything on the contents of the Convention.

	Teachers (10)	Head Teachers (11)	Parents (2)	Total (23)
Provisions on Transport	0.2	0.36	0.5	0.30
Provisions on Employment	0.4	0.36	0.0	0.34
Provisions on Justice Administration	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Provisions on Education	0.7	0.72	0.0	0.65
Provisions on Access to public places	0.6	0.45	0.5	0.52
Provisions on Medical Care	0.2	0.18	0.5	0.22
Average				0.34

3.4 Provisions mentioned per respondent (CRPD):

The average is lower than for the Disability Act, while the number of knowledgeable respondents is also lower.

Respondents were asked to mention principles of Inclusive Education as projected by the Ghana Education Service. The following responses were seen:

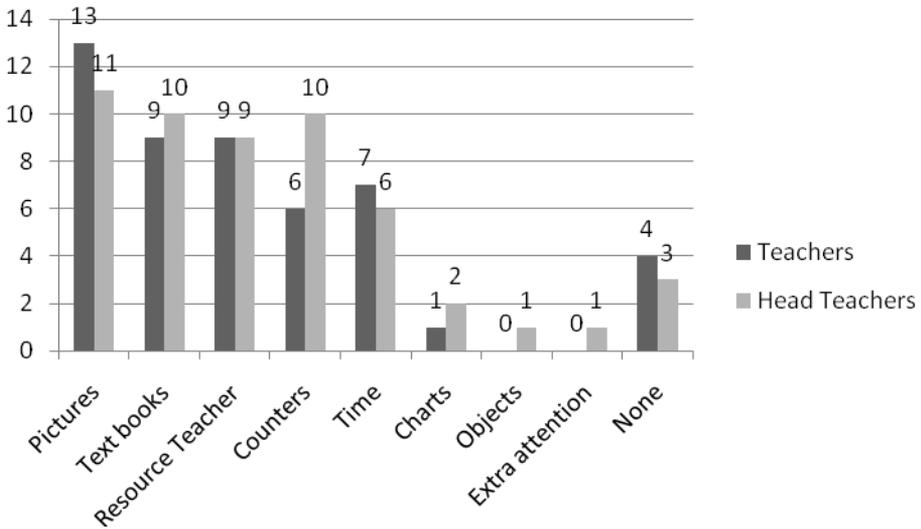
	Teachers (30)	Head Teachers (30)	Total (60)
All children can learn & benefit from education	18	19	37
All children have right to education & equal opportunities	10	7	17
Children's view is listened to and taken seriously	7	7	14
Individual differences are a source of richness and diversity and not a problem	5	6	11
Not heard about Inclusive Education	9	8	17
Heard but could not mention content	0	2	2

3.5 Principles of Inclusive Education

Only Teachers and Head Teachers were interviewed on this, and about 1/3 of respondents claim not to have heard about or to know anything about Inclusive Education. Respondents who were familiar with Inclusive Education were strong on the principle that all children can learn, no matter their disability.

4. General conditions in the schools with regard to children with learning difficulties

Professional respondents were asked what materials and resources they had available to teach children who have learning problems. Head Teachers mentioned what was generally available in the school, while Teachers answered for their own class.



4.1 Materials and resources:

Answers from Teachers and Head Teachers are more or less the same, as they are from the same schools. Nine (9) out of thirty (30) schools had a Resource Teacher from the Ghana Education Service.

Both groups were interviewed on the Teacher : Pupil ratio. Teachers answered for their own class while Head Teachers answered for the school.

	1 (one) Teacher for
According to Teachers:	47.87 pupils
According to Head Teachers:	45.27 pupils

5. Assistance to pupils with learning difficulties

Parents, members of Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) and members of School Management Committees (SMC) were interviewed on what the schools should do for children who have specific learning difficulties.

Parents suggested the following concerning cooperation with teachers:

- Talk to teachers for extra help
- Both parents and the teachers must help the child to improve on it study capabilities
- Urge teachers to give more
- Give special attention with the help of teachers
- Told teachers to keep an eye on him
- The school is helping a lot

They made the following points concerning their own responsibility:

- Insist on the child to go to school
- Personal monitoring and teaching
- Take time to go through everything that was taught in school when she comes home
- Visit the school often to go through his books with the help of the teacher
- Solving more work with him
- Constantly advising her to stay focused
- Always help by solving more work examples with him

One parent suggested:

- Corporal punishment.

Members of PTA made the following suggestions for teachers:

- Give more attention to the child.
- Ask child to answer more questions in class.
- Give child more work to do.
- Collaborate with School head.

- Know the particular problems of children e.g hunger because of poverty
- Give the child extra support
- Teachers asked to pay attention to such children.
- Pay attention and give special allocation to such children.
- Use gestures, pictures and other methods to help.
- Encourage teachers to pay attention to them since government has not provided enough materials to serve them
- Pronounce the words so that get the words involve eg phonyms, words with similar sounds
- Bring the child closer to the board
- Pay more attention to the child to explain lessons to enable him to understand
- Write boldly in class
- Time is taken to go over what was taught to make sure they understand
- Children with these acts are specially treated from the rest, so that they can be part of main stream
- Encourage the student to be regular in school and to teach them specially

Concerning the parents:

- Talk to parents of such children
- Advice parents to provide basic needs of children.
- Give advice to parents to seek medical help
- Parents are urged to seek help
- Meeting is held with parents with such wards and to advise them on what to do

Concerning Ghana Education Service:

- GES Resource Teacher helps and parents are encouraged to get personal teachers for children at home
- Arranged for a GES Resource Teacher to give special classes
- Most of the time such children are given extra class to improve their learning skills

And in some cases:

- Basically nothing because we don't have facilities
- PTA is not so strong and so we have not been able to do anything
- The PTA organised a meeting purposely on how to help such children and a little response was given. So we are on it

Members of SMC's advised the teachers:

- Give extra time
- Ensure that teachers in the classroom make sure that they sit close to the blackboard
- Writing boldly while teaching so that the child with learning difficulties will understand
- I personally help them by calling them one after the other to teach them after class.
- Treatment is given to such children by taking through the learning process step by step
- Taking them through learning process step by step.
- Ensure that teachers pay special attention to such children to enable them catch up with their colleagues in the class when given a task
- Teachers asked to pay attention to such children.

Concerning the parents:

- Parents are urged to seek help
- Advice is given to parents to help the child to work
- Invite parents of such children and talk to them for improvement
- Consult parents

Concerning Resource Teachers in the schools:

- Refer the child to Resource Teacher
- We have been able to get GES Resource Teacher
- We have been making request to GES for a specialist teacher
- Arranged for a GES Resource Teacher to give special classes with the help of the PTA and concerned public

- School appealing to GES for special needs teacher and trying to procure teaching materials
- GES resource teacher is available to help

On extra support:

- Extra classes needed
- Special classes is organised to improve their learning skills
- Support from NGOs (not specified)

Conclusions

- Majority of teachers in public basic schools claim to have taught children with learning difficulties.
- Majority of parent's representatives confirm they know children with learning difficulties.
- Descriptions given by stakeholders do indicate that they correctly identify children with learning difficulties.
- 75% of Teachers and 80% of Head Teachers confirm they have seen children with learning difficulties drop out from school.
- Current knowledge on Specific Learning Disabilities is derived from experience in teaching children with SpLD combined with other sources of information (theoretical).
- Less than 30% of teaching staff is claim they have received training on identification and management of Specific Learning Disabilities.
- Teacher:pupil ratio is too high to make in-class support for children with learning difficulties a reality without additional resources (esp. teaching assistants).
- There are limited resources available to teachers to assist children with learning difficulties.

Recommendations

- Provision of in-service training on Specific Learning Disabilities for all teachers at basic level.
- Training on Specific Learning Disabilities should be included in curriculum of Colleges of Education and Universities of Education.
- Education on Specific Learning Disabilities through PTA's.
- Extensive research into prevalence and nature of learning difficulties among children in public basic education in Ghana.
- Education of stakeholders in basic education on relevant legislation and inclusive education policies.