



SYSTEM AND SCHOOL-LEVEL RESOURCES FOR TRANSFORMING AND OPTIMISING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS: WHAT GHANA CAN LEARN

Francis R. Ackah-Jnrⁱ

Griffith Institute for Educational Research
Griffith University, Australia

Abstract:

Resourcing inclusive education is increasingly becoming a critical issue for education systems and schools. It is identified that providing adequate and sustainable resources help to transform and optimise implementation of inclusive education. This paper thus examines system and school-level resources considered essential for practising inclusive early childhood education. The extant literature reveals successful inclusive education in early childhood settings requires multifaceted and integrated resource architecture, and the paper argues further that the availability of such resources 'smooth-drive' inclusive practice and is defined largely by 'effective' system and school leadership. In order to promote quality inclusive education and enhance the work of teachers, early childhood settings and schools need to be resourced adequately. Resourcing inclusive education should be considered an investment to develop and build the capacity of early childhood settings and to empower teachers, and overall to augment system and school-level leadership. The review has implications for IECE globally and for Ghana.

Keywords: resources, supports, leadership, inclusive education, inclusive early childhood education, early childhood settings

1. Introduction

Resources - and their interface with policy and program implementation - have always been a significant component of educational practice. Resourcing Inclusive Education (IE) practice is essential for education systems and schools, and especially for teachers, the primary agents of change. Resources shape practice and program effectiveness. The purpose of this paper is to review strategic system and school-level resources for transforming and optimising Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE). I first

ⁱ Correspondence email: fr.ackahjnr@yahoo.com;

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2261-4092>

consider the meaning of the words “transform” and “optimise” in order to situate their implication for resourcing IE in Early Childhood Settings (ECS).

To transform is to change in composition or structure (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transform>), and to optimise means to make something as perfect, effective or functional as possible (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/optimise>). While ‘perfection’ is ideal, and beyond the scope of this paper, combining the meanings of these two words shows that IE can be more effective through system and school changes, embedded with prudent application of resources. The transformation and optimisation of IECE may not be instant, immediate and radical, but it should lead to improved practices or outcomes. In this change process, resources play a facilitative and functional role, justifying the need to resource IE.

The paper is driven by four key arguments: First, resources matter (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018) and the availability of resources strengthen the capacity and preparedness of schools and teachers to respond to the needs of all children, enabling schools to attain educational and systemic goals. Second, system and school leadership that provides shared vision and valuing of educating all children defines the availability of resources. So, I argue further that how relevant any country, for example, Ghana, perceives IE reflects in the resources available, allocated or invested for practice. Third, IE offers educational, social, political and economic incentives, which warrants that ECS and schools are adequately resourced to implement it effectively. Last and of significance, the most compelling reason to invest resources for inclusive schools is the relevancy of early childhood for *all* children with and without disability and special educational needs, and global concern for quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) for *all* children (Bredekamp, 2011; Darragh, 2010).

Significantly, as IE is a changing and evolving practice, mostly driven by contextual factors, it requires ongoing and renewing resources and support. The evidence is that schools that are adequately resourced are more likely to succeed than those that struggle to get resources. Allocating resources to inclusive ECS and schools generally is a major way of building and developing system capacity, investing in positive educational change (Barrett, 2014) and promoting positive attitudinal changes and mindset among teachers and society at large. The ‘mere’ presence of resources can spark perceptual changes among teachers, I argue. Therefore, as demands for inclusive systems and schools increase, there is need to *reconsider* and vision the resource architecture for implementing IE: What essential system and school resources are available? What is the role of resources? In the next sections of this paper, I examine these issues in detail, the definition and relevance of resources, and key system and school-level resources. Also included is a general discussion of implications of resourcing IECE globally and for Ghana. The paper first defines IECE to foreground the need for resources.

2. Defining inclusive early childhood education

Research globally indicates that interpretations of IE are changing and evolving. Although this is not misplaced, the goal is to develop best practices, principles and pedagogies that support enhanced and sustainable inclusive programs for all children. Inclusive early childhood education or IE in ECE defiles a single definition and nomenclature nationally and internationally, and within education systems and schools, but having a clear understanding is important for practice. In attempts to 'smooth-drive' IE, Stubbs (2008) argues a case for a clarified definition on three fronts: the principles and values ascribed to IE may produce different outcomes; definitions of IE evolve with changing practices in contexts and cultures; and more importantly, the wrong axiom that IE is another version of special education. Following Stubbs' position, I believe that with a clarified or consensual definition, multiple confusion-matrices that often characterise IE could be limited. Because effective policy and program implementation depends on 'local' interpretations, the *prevailing* understandings of IE to a large extent influence practice and practice expectations.

Though definitions of IE are often context-specific, this paper adopts a holistic perspective and defines IECE as the right to equal educational and social experiences for all children with and without disability aged 0–8 years in the same ECS (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 2012; Winter, 2007). It also conceptualises IECE broadly within the UNESCO's framework of IE—transformative practice that emphasises and promotes access, active participation and engagement in school program activities and routines and community settings. Inclusive early childhood education is thus an essential commitment to and preservation of all children's right to *effective* and *active* learning, playing and developing together in inclusive settings (Winter, 2007), where marginalisation, discrimination and disadvantage are identified, eliminated or minimised. Irrespective of the context, I argue that IE should aim to educate and socialise all children and privilege them with more and better opportunities that enhance their functioning, development and growth. Consequently, Ackah-Jnr and Danso (2018, p. 2) claim that the ultimate effect of, enhanced inclusive [early childhood] education practice implementation will [therefore] inadvertently bring aboard the [early] *inclusion-ship* (sic) many diverse [and capable] learners, liberating, empowering and enabling them to rise and realise their potential, and to make [modest, significant or] meaningful contributions to self and society generally.

Clearly, IE offers educational, social, political and economic incentives, and is fundamental to lifelong learning, education and development, but without resources, can there be meaningful practice? Implementing quality and equitable IECE will require adequate and sustained resources.

2.1 Defining resources for inclusive education

I argue that with changing definitions of IE, there is also the need to reconceptualise resources. Whilst definitions of resources vary in research and general use, in this

paper, the use of the term resources extends to the varying forms of support systems. Resources are supports; and supports are resources.

Resources are defined as the cosmopolitan of available help, necessary things, ongoing and desired assistance, and input, enabling schools and teachers to implement IE (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018). The authors identified professional support, motivational support, human support and funds/material support as critical resources for IE. Resources also refer to time, talent, personnel, and funds that support system goals and priorities (Barrett, 2014). Two dictionary meanings that further extend our understanding of resources are presented: The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/support>) defines support as 'to keep (something) going'. In addition the Dictionary.com views resources as stock or supply (e.g., money, materials, and staff) that can be drawn on by a person or organisation to function effectively (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/resource>).

From the definitions, it is evident that provision of resources enables the functioning and efficacy of ECS and schools; and resources play facilitative roles. Available resources act as enablers of IE, whereas lack of resources is a barrier. Resourcing IECE should be continuous and on-going, and involves *re-sourcing*—refilling, renewing and refuelling for *best* and *improved* practice. I use *re-sourcing* to project and stress the understanding that *resourcing* ECS and schools may be a *never-ending process*, entailing *envisioning* and *refocusing*, like attempts to promote IE for all. It is important that schools and teachers must have recourse to resources: stock, sources and supplies, not when they are in difficulty; and resources should be readily available when needed or to be drawn upon. *Resources* should therefore serve as wheels, levers and drivers or oilers or lubricants for *sustaining* the process, practice and provision of IE.

2.2 Relevance of resources

Resources matter and are invaluable (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018) and they serve as the cornerstone of good IE practice (Mortier, Van Hove, & De Schauwer, 2010). Many researchers have identified the need to resource IECE (Barrett, 2014; McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westing, 2013; Mortier et al., 2010; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011; Smith et al., 2012; Thousand & Villa, 2005). As an example, Mortier et al. (2010) found that students, teachers, support persons, and parents perceived resources as a good thing. More importantly, resources enable teachers to respond to all children with a range of needs, and to maximise children's participation, engagement, learning and interactions in ECS.

Adequate supports also ensures inclusive programs and program personnel, especially teachers, are ready for children with a range of characteristics and needs in ECS (Odom et al., 2011). Resources further strengthen the capacity of schools, principals and teachers to provide effective leadership (Barrett, 2014; Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2014; Foreman, 2011; Fullan, Cuttress, & Kilcher, 2009) and to manage complex educational change (Thousand & Villa, 2005). Resourcing ECS and schools

therefore create conditions, processes and functions, to moderate, buffer and necessitate IE. Hence, resources must underpin successful inclusive policy, program and practice.

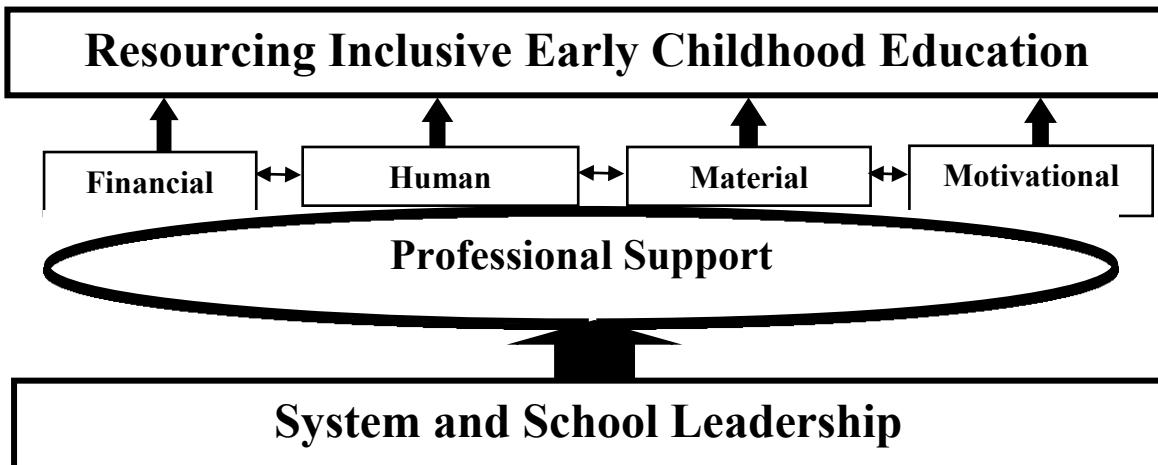
2.3 System and school-level resources

Research has indicated that there are varied and essential resources and supports for implementing IE (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018; Barrett, 2014; Bond & Castagnera, 2006; Mortier et al., 2010; Odom et al., 2011; Thousand & Villa, 2005), which could be conceptualised as system and school-level resources. I categorise these resources as explicit and implicit, but they function complementarily. Explicit resources include finance and materials, while implicit resources are accumulations and repertoires of knowledge and skills and internal motivation. As much of the real work of inclusion takes place at the school or classroom level, without system resources, IE could be challenging and problematic for teachers. The effective synergy of system and school-level resources is therefore key to leveraging, driving and buffering IE.

School-level resources are the resources that are 'readily' available from within ECS or schools and the immediate community. These include essential supports from headteachers, teachers and children, as well as parents, other school-related activities and input from the local community and education department. School-level resources are the fundamental and building blocks for IE. Whereas school and system level resources may be available, their effectiveness depends on recognition, utilisation and value-addition (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018).

On the other hand, system-level resources, the broad-based supports, emanate from central government, the larger education system and wider community. System resources usually are beyond the capacity of individual schools and are difficult to provide without government or external support. System-level resources include national policy and legislation on IE, funds and other critical infrastructural facilities, and teaching and learning materials. Together with school-level resources, system-level resources create conditions, motivations and enabling environment for inclusive practice. Both system and school-level resources are however interdependent and inseparable, and their availability and adequacy are critical to successful IECE.

Figure 1 shows key system and school-level resources. In resourcing and implementing IECE, finance is the chief resource, which also ensures the availability and provision of other relevant resources. Professional support is in the form of professional development (PD) and learning, and is an elemental resource for 'readying', enhancing and empowering teachers and other educators for inclusive education. I consider professional support as the bridge and anchor of successful inclusive education practice. Overall, system and school leadership form the basis of effective resource architecture, and they determine the availability of other key resources. System and school-level resources discussed in this paper include PD, finance, motivation, leadership, human support, and material and technical support.



2.3.1 Professional support

Professional support is a key system and school-level resource that fosters teacher preparedness, efficacy and commitment to IE. Professional support includes teacher training and PD that underpins successful IECE (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Deiner, 2013; Frankel, Hutchinson, Burbidge, & Minnes, 2014; Odom et al., 2011; Purdue, 2009). It is identified that training and PD enables early childhood teachers to acquire knowledge, skills and on-going supports (Odom et al., 2011). For Smith et al. (2012, p. 42), training/PD is a springboard for “creating positive attitudes and allaying apprehensions and concerns of teachers for IE.”

Professional support occurs in the form of pre-service and in-service training and other teacher education programs. Both pre-service training (before entry to the field) and PD (in-service, on-the-job training and support or continuing education) are the main vehicles for effective IECE (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Forlin & Sin, 2017). Whereas pre-service training fosters the nurturing of favourable attitudes and building teacher confidence, continuous PD, including in-service training enables teachers to deepen their knowledge and skills. Overall, professional support improves teachers’ professionalism and makes them to stay more current.

Though quality training is critical to inclusive practice, most studies show teachers lack adequate preparation and experience for IECE (Deiner, 2013; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2007). The lack of training may account for teachers’ resistance and reactivity to inclusive practice. Frankel et al. (2014, p. 386) however found pre-service teachers knowledgeable of children with developmental disabilities and delays, and such knowledge serves as “initial professional capital” for IE. To foster teacher efficacy, pre-service teachers viewed early and continuous hands-on exposure to children with diverse needs important for developing more accepting attitudes and fewer concerns in IE settings (Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005).

Researchers (Mitchell & Hegde, 2007; Purdue, 2009) have specifically reported that some in-service teachers have inadequate knowledge of disability (i.e., specific disabling conditions or challenges) and specific strategies for educating children with disability in ECE settings. These teachers, like pre-service teachers, need knowledge of

inclusive curriculum and pedagogical skills. To enhance early childhood personnel preparation for IE, Mitchell and Hegde (2007) found that in-service teachers perceived knowledge of disability areas, hands-on training, workshops, program visitations and additional coursework are critical. To foster best inclusive practices, both pre-and in-service teachers need appropriate PD and learning opportunities.

2.3.3 Financial support

Financial resourcing, by far, is the most fundamental support for IE (Barrett, 2014; Foreman, 2011). Adequate and effective use of funds will ensure ECS and schools have relevant resources. Funds are necessary for procuring material resources and for developing human capital, but their availability is often constrained by declining budgetary allocation from government and education departments (especially in developing countries) or at the system level. Other economic demands and the shared vision and value of educating all children (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018) may also stand in the way of effective financing of IE. This, in turn, may result in little to no provision of other essential resources.

Lack of funds signals a capacity gap in the education system, and is more likely to culminate in the lack of knowledge, resourcefulness and leadership that brings about change in inclusive settings (Barrett, 2014). It is thus reasonable to provide adequate funds for building the capacity of schools and empowering teachers professionally. But lack of funds should not be used as an ‘escape button’ to promote exclusionary practices.

2.3.4 Motivational support

Motivation plays a significant role in education(Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste , Lens, & Deci, 2006), and for IE specifically (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018; Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2010), it is highly necessary. Motivating teachers enhances positive attitude and belief development. Reasonably, teachers with high levels of motivation are more willing and likely to accept, teach and include all children, regardless of disability. Motivation drives inclusive practice, which can make all teachers to *stretch out and reach out to more* children in early childhood settings.

There are many incentives of an effective motivation system at the system and school level. Recently, Ackah-Jnr and Fluckiger (2018) found that differential motivation from both system and school level promoted IECE. Different forms of internal and external motivation, including passion, incentives and reduced class size were identified as crucial to sustain teachers' efforts and their willingness to include children with disability. Such motivation also impacted teachers' pedagogical practices, preparedness and valuing of children. Inasmuch as teachers have primary responsibility of teaching all children, including those with disability, some teachers felt they needed 'extra motivation' to compensate for the seemingly increased burden or workload IECE brings (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018). An effective motivation system from government, education department or school should undergird IE to ensure

inclusive programs are devoid of resistance, nagging ad other complaints from teachers and educators.

2.3.5 Leadership support

In the extant research literature, effective leadership that includes support from leaders at all levels of the national and local education system, and school is strategic for IE (Billingsley et al., 2014; Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Loreman, Forlin, & Sharma, 2014). Such system and school leadership is the greatest resource that defines the course of inclusive practice, reflecting in the presence or absence of other key resources. System and school leadership must synergistically drive the IE agenda, manifesting as positive attitudes and resource provision, and knowledge and skills set for practice (Kearney, 2011). The synergy of a positive and effective system and school leadership is what is required to underpin, propel and transform IECE.

System leadership goes beyond the legal and policy environment that central government and education officials provide, to include adequate funds, authentic teacher training and other necessary supports (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018). Such leadership provides strategic direction, supervision and knowledge that create conditions for teachers and headteachers at the school level to also utilise their ideas, energies and expertise for practice. System leadership thus serves as buffer for schools and teachers to overcome difficulties and uncertainties in implementing IE.

Strong school-level leadership is identified to spark effective IE (Billingsley et al., 2014; Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Kearney, 2011). Principals, the gatekeepers, models and change agents, set the precedence for IE. Although their leadership takes different forms, principals' positive attitudes influence staff attitudes and behaviours, and their acceptance of children with disability (Kearney, 2011). Principal leadership is essential in creating a vision of a school community that respects and values all learners and teachers, and in establishing a supportive climate for IE (Billingsley et al., 2014; Causton & Theoharis, 2014).

Supportive leadership within IE programs and at the system level is a key resource (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Loreman et al., 2014; Odom et al., 2011). Loreman et al. (2014, p. 172) identified in an international review that schools with strong leadership effectively serve greater numbers of students with disability in regular classrooms. Supportive leadership can further reduce teachers' feelings of anxiety, frustrations and isolation. As Hoppey and McLeskey (2013, p. 4) add, principal leadership is instrumental to "lubricating the human machinery" or providing support for teachers so that they could do their best to enhance successful IE. Such leadership also fosters a nurturing and caring environment for staff, buffering faculty from external pressures associated with high-stakes accountability, and high-quality PD for teachers.

2.3.6 Human resources

A wide array of human resources or support is available at the system and school level for IE, but what matters is the collective contributions of such resources. Compelling

evidence shows that IECE requires quality and differential human resources (Allen & Cowdery, 2015; Deiner, 2013; Foreman, 2011; Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011; McLeskey et al., 2013; Mortier et al., 2010; Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2013). Hemmings and Woodcock (2011) in their survey-based study with a cohort of 138 pre-service teachers in a large regional Australian university ascertained the types of support for IE. The findings identified eight most critical supports: aide support, support from other colleagues, physical resources, programming support, PD programs, parental assistance, funding, and "other support." This indicates human resources are a key part of transforming inclusive practice.

Among others, teachers are the primary and leading human resources at the school level. It is identified that to improve IE, some teachers take personal responsibility to extend their knowledge base in appropriate pedagogical skills (Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011), while others participate in professional learning communities (Fullan et al., 2009). Consequently, teachers who are willing to support themselves are likely to seek useful information and skills to mitigate the challenges in including children in ECS. These teachers may look beyond their own capacity and expertise: collaborate with other teachers in the spirit of collegiality, partner with other professionals, and use their ingenuity to support IE. In ECS, these teachers can create a pool of resources. Three other essential human resources are discussed further.

2.3.7 Teachers' peers

Peers of teachers are an important and a complementary source of supports for IECE (Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011; Leatherman, 2007). They are helpful, and they offer collegial environment that enable teachers to mutually share knowledge, exchange ideas and understandings and learn about IE. Inclusive preschool teachers, according to Leatherman (2007), needed interactions with and support from their peers, other than from early childhood administrators, special educators and therapists to accommodate children with disability. These teachers felt comfortable with their peers and valued the support they received from their colleagues.

Support from teachers' colleagues is particularly important where administrators seem to lack knowledge and skills or feel lethargic about IE programs. In such situations, peers of teachers can pool their expertise to help each other and to create supportive environment for inclusive practice. As an example, members of teaching teams can capitalise on the strengths and expertise of other team members to provide greater potential for quality instruction (McLeskey et al., 2013). Team teaching arrangements, according to Foreman (2011), where teachers pair and combine their classes for some or all lessons, give colleagues the opportunity to see others 'in action'. This enables teachers to learn about, draw upon and sharpen their strengths and talents. To foster IECE, some teachers relied on mentors (e.g., former teachers, lecturers or supervisors) involved in teacher training and PD and research for IE (Leatherman, 2007). Peers of teachers can provide moral support and empowerment, enhanced person-to-person interactions and learning avenues, which are often missing pieces in schools. The experience, emotional or practical help and incentives teachers receive

from peers, become sources of hope and comfort that can propel them to have the staying power to lead inclusive practice.

2.4 Children's peers

Peer support from children is a readily available resource (Bond & Castagnera, 2006). It is a natural form of support (Kroeger & Kouche, 2006) where children engage in collaborative roles to support their peers in IE settings. As an underutilised resource (Bond & Castagnera, 2006) in inclusive and general education settings, peer support or tutoring is a cost-effective method used to address the needs of children (McLeskey et al., 2013) and to support the work of teachers.

Research has shown that the utilisation of peer support benefits both teachers and children. Peer support enhances children's self-concept and self-efficacy (McLeskey et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2012). Through peer support children with disability receive social and instructional support, and other assistance from their more 'capable' peers in IE classes. Children without disability also develop increased appreciation and acceptance of individual differences and they sharpen their skills and mastery of certain tasks. While children with disability benefit most from peer support, an effective peer support system results from the collaborative efforts of both teachers and learners in the social and learning environment (McLeskey et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2012).

As the [best] option for providing natural assistance, peer support models include: peer tutoring, peer modelling, peer reinforcement, and cooperative learning (Smith et al., 2012). Often, peer tutoring and cooperative learning are two main peer-assisted learning strategies used to promote children's participation and learning in IE classes. Effective peer support is however a professional responsibility for teachers, requiring adequate training and supervision of children. Importantly, peer tutoring and support has the advantage of ensuring present and future success of IE as all children will learn skills and acquire knowledge and competencies that they can later practise, apply or use in other educational and social settings.

2.5 Parents

Effective parental role and support augment the education of all children. Considerable research highlights the criticality of parent and family involvement in education, and specifically in IECE (Ackah-Jnr, 2010; Deiner, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2013; Winter, 2007). Parent support has the potential to enhance child outcomes and to increase the availability of resources for meeting the needs of children in IE settings (Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011; Turnbull et al., 2013). Other outcomes of parent involvement include improved children's academic success, behaviour and social adjustment, and nurturing of strong home-school connections for ongoing partnership and mutual support (Winter, 2007). To foster IECE, active parent involvement in parent groups, and volunteerism that makes meaningful contributions is also necessary (Turnbull et al., 2013).

Further research indicates parents play crucial roles in the life of all children. Parents' provisions for their children's needs, and parents' positive communication and

collaboration with teachers and ECS enhance IECE (Winter, 2007). Parents provide critical first-hand information about their children, so parents' participation in education-related decisions about their children with disability is critical to IE (Allen & Cowdery, 2015). Parents are children's primary and ongoing teachers and key collaborators (Deiner, 2013), hence to strengthen IECE, schools and teachers need to forge strong partnership with parents.

2.6 Material and technical support

External support and additional staff enhance IECE programs (Mitchell & Hegde, 2007). While qualified teaching assistants and linkages to specialists help teachers to include children (Foreman, 2011), some teachers have attributed successful IE of children with disability to having additional personnel, particularly special education teachers (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2007). Technical assistance is also a key support that is usually provided from IE experts through in-service training, staff development, on-site collaborative consultation, and peer coaching, which enables teachers to include children with diverse abilities (Smith et al., 2012).

Another crucial support for inclusive teachers is classroom teaching and learning materials and specialised equipment (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2007). In a study conducted in two urban school districts in the United States, Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2007) requested general education kindergarten teachers to list resources and supports relevant to accommodate the needs of all children. Results showed teachers wanted three most essential resources: additional classroom materials and equipment (e.g., computers, audio/visual equipment), more staff and aide support, and smaller class sizes. Limited supports, including lack of teaching materials and large classes, inhibit IECE (Deiner, 2013), while small class sizes and quality teaching materials facilitate inclusive practice (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018).

3. Discussion, conclusion and implications: What Ghana can learn

In this paper I purposed to examine essential system and school-level resources for IE. It is noted that despite definitional and conceptual differences, the process, practice and provision of IE should culminate in enhanced education and socialisation opportunities and improved outcomes for all children. Here, I draw conclusions that have manifold implications for IECE globally, and specifically for Ghana, a middle-income developing country. Among others, the conclusions show and draw attention to what governments, education systems and schools can do *better* on one hand, and what teachers, educators and parents, as well as practitioners and society can also do, following global and national recognition of the rationale, importance and benefits of *inclusive*, quality and equitable ECE for *all children*, and enactment of supporting legislation and policies to enable such practice. Simply, how we can *refocus* supports and *envision* for sustainable IE.

As noted, transforming and optimising IECE involves changes in practices, augmented with available resources. These resources, the stock, supplies and sources,

act as wheels, levers and drivers or oilers for enhancing and sustaining IE. From the review, multifaceted resource architecture at the system and school level matters and is significant to practice. Essentially, considering that the journey towards IE or the path traversed to respond to the varying needs of children is often an uncharted and an uncertain terrain or a *re-journeying* for many teachers, there is the need for *adequate* resources and supports. Without (*adequate*) resources, inclusive practice becomes prone to or is saddled with challenges and difficulties, resulting in patronising and indifferent attitudes. Resource availability or allocation thus strengthens the capacity of schools, enabling teachers to lead IE skilfully, knowledgably and purposefully and for teachers to project positive beliefs. Therefore, I agree with Fullan (2007) that changes in (*inclusive*) educational practice requires a shift in beliefs, new materials (resources) and practices.

Education in the early years, a period of rapid growth and development, is fundamental to lifelong learning and is currently a global priority. Ghana recognises *inclusive* ECE as elemental to its present and future human resource capitalisation and developmental agenda process. Unless all young children in Ghana, like elsewhere, have quality ECE that is inclusive and equitable, it may be difficult to optimise children's early and subsequent education rights and attainment of other social and economic benefits that IE provides. With available resources or resourced ECS and schools, this could be a possibility for most children, if not all. So, the importance of the early years, augmented with the educational, social, cultural, economic and political incentives of quality IE for all, is the strongest index for countries such as Ghana to *resource* ECS: Resourcing IE reflects an education system and school values and beliefs about what is important (Barrett, 2014). We need to rethink that even the availability of *basic* resources in schools is crucial to enhancing teachers' work and providing opportunity for all children to learn.

Resourcing IE, whether providing PD, materials or motivation, is about effective and supporting leadership from all and at all levels. The synergy of effective system and school leadership serves as the bedrock of a resourced IE setting. Such leadership largely defines the availability of resources through envisioning, inspiration and creation of change. However, leadership from many principals, teachers and education officials, is usually a missing piece in inclusive practice. Supportive leadership manifests in different forms, but leadership that forges positive attitudes and motivations, based on shared vision, direction and valuing of IE (Billingsley et al., 2014; Causton & Theoharis, 2014), is what is required to ignite or pool resources and energies for IE in ECS and schools. Leadership is thus a non-negotiable resource; a lubricator of the human machinery (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013) of IE, and is critical for smooth-driving practice.

Other insights from the review about resourcing IECE that can transform practice are worth considering: More significantly, teachers and other educators need to redefine their understanding and beliefs about resources. Resources should be seen as 'fluid' and not static; hence the functionality and maximisation of resources depend on effective application and utilisation (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018). Resources may be

available, but it is through effective uses of resources that practice can be optimised. As Stubbs (2008) highlights, resources for IE are *about being* and not just *about having*. This view resonates with the finding that teachers make resources functional (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018). Hence, 'value-addition' and prudent use of resources is critical.

As identified, a variety of resources is needed to transform IE, but to be effective, resources need to be customised or contextualised, considering local forces and conditions of schools and teachers or the education system. The customisation, according to Stubbs (2008), requires unlocking and fully using local resources and redistributing existing resources at the system and school level. As a result, schools must first look within; schools should always be the starting and building blocks for IE despite the nature and quality of the resources available. From a system-wide perspective, customising resources should support in-school needs. The customisation should thus aim to prevent wholesale 'importation' of resources that may be inappropriate and/or contribute minimally to implementing inclusive practice.

Quality human resources are central to IE. The cumulative contributions of human support should augment practice. As revealed, teachers are the forerunners of IECE and the chief resource who make inclusion to happen. Hence, their vital role demands that in optimising IE, teachers are empowered and refreshed continuously to enhance their quality, preparedness and practices. Specifically, teachers need enhanced PD in the form of authentic pre-service and ongoing training and learning opportunities to stay current. In doing so, less cost-intensive but effective inclusive training options, tailored to teachers' and system needs, could be utilised to deepen teachers' knowledge and skills set. As evident in a recent study in Ghana, a few teachers were beginning to take agency to compensate for the lack of support and knowledge for IE. While this is commendable, to foster IE, all teachers require support and motivation to enhance their agency (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2018). Aside from teachers, parents and children should also play effective complimentary roles to support IECE and the work of teachers.

Whilst funds remain the fuel and crucial resource among the resource architecture for IE, and they determine the availability of other key resources, beyond funds what schools and teachers do matter. Limited funding regimes or budgetary allocations to education systems, particularly in some Southⁱⁱ countries, affect the level of supports available. Improved strategies for financing education ensure better targeted investments to achieve desired IE outcomes (UNESCO, 2009). Nonetheless, in the face of lack of funds, this calls for innovativeness and resourcefulness of schools and teachers or the reallocation or repurposing of resources for IE (Barrett, 2014). Also, ECS and schools can share or pool resources for common use. If there are available funds for procuring requisite resources, it can prevent situations where lack of resources is used as an escape-button to propagate exclusion. To harness funds, education systems and

ⁱⁱ South refers to countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Central and South America that are substantially economic poorer. As poverty exists within all countries, this meaning is relative (See Stubbs, 2008).

schools can also establish a clear and shared vision for IE, and develop partnership with internal and external stakeholders, and invite contributions from them.

Effective IE is ultimately about *resources*. To sustain quality IE, education systems and schools need to invest more in resources. There should be immediate, short and long-term investment. Without investment in critical resources, quality IECE for all children will remain rhetoric, and attempts to include children may be met with resistance. As all children can learn, investing in IE is beneficial. Investing in resources is a great incentive and approach to build the capacity of schools and teachers (Barrett, 2014; Fullan et al., 2009) for enhancing children's learning, participation and engagement in the education and social programs of schools. As resources matter, the amount of resources invested reflects how effective IE programs could be. Because no single resource is adequate, investing in multifaceted resource architecture is necessary for leading schools inclusively. But due to a complex number of within system and school factors e.g. shared vision and value for IE, and eco-political conditions, not all schools can attract requisite resources. Some schools attract more resources; others limited to no extra resources, which calls for innovation and creativity from education systems and schools.

Summarising, transforming and optimising inclusive practice is an ongoing process of change that requires investment in resources from governments, education systems and schools. Resources should be an important consideration and the anchor of effective IE policy, program and practice. In resourcing IE, concerted efforts are required to enable schools, teachers and community to learn, change, innovate, grow and make a difference (Foreman, 2011) in the education of all young children. Adequate and available resources are needed to foster best inclusive practice; provide the impetus for developing and building the capacity and culture of schools and systems; and empower, enhance and enable teachers to lead ECS and schools inclusively, skilfully and intelligently.

About the Author

Francis R. Ackah-Jnr holds a PhD and has teaching and research-relevant expertise in inclusive education, early childhood and leadership. His special interests include childhood disability and health, education policy, school community partnerships, primary education and education law. He has taught in a number of universities regular and distance programs as (sessional) lecturer, tutor and graduate teaching assistant. Currently, he is a researcher at the Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Griffith University.

References

- Ackah-Jnr, F. R. (2010). A portrait of inclusive early childhood education in Ghana. What we need to know. *Ghana Journal of Health, Physical Education Recreation, Sports and Dance*, 3(3), 139- 152.

- Ackah-Jnr, F. R., & Danso, J. B. (2018). Examining the physical environment of Ghanaian inclusive schools: how accessible, suitable and appropriate is such environment for inclusive education? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-21. doi:10.1080/13603116.2018.1427808
- Ackah-Jnr, F. R., & Fluckiger, B. (2018). *Leading inclusive education in Ghana: The architecture and anatomy of support resources for inclusive early childhood education.* (Manuscript in preparation).
- Allen, K. E., & Cowdery, G. E. (2015). *The exceptional child: Inclusion in early childhood education* (8th ed.). Stamford, USA: Cengage Learning.
- Armstrong, A. C., Armstrong, D., & Spandagou, I. (2010). *Inclusive education: International policy & practice*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Barrett, D. (2014). Resourcing inclusive education. In C. Forlin & T. Loreman (Eds.), *Measuring inclusive education* (Vol. 3, pp. 75-91): Emerald Group Publishing Limited. Retrieved from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1108/S1479-363620140000003020>. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3636201400000030>
- Billingsley, B., McLeskey, J., & Crockett, J. B. (2014). *Principal leadership: Moving toward inclusive and high-achieving schools for students with disabilities*. (Document No. IC-8). Retrieved from <http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/innovation-configurations/>.
- Bond, R., & Castagnera, E. (2006). Peer supports and inclusive education: An underutilized resource. *Theory Into Practice*, 45(3), 224-229. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4503_4
- Bredekkamp, S. (2011). *Effective practices in early childhood education : Building a foundation*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.
- Buyssse, V., & Hollingsworth, H. L. (2009). Program quality and early childhood inclusion: Recommendations for professional development. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 29(2), 119-128. doi:10.1177/0271121409332233
- Causton, J., & Theoharis, G. (2014). *The principal's handbook for leading inclusive schools*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. .
- Darragh, J. C. (2010). *Introduction to early childhood education: Equity and inclusion*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.
- Deiner, P. L. (2013). *Inclusive early childhood education: Development, resources and practice* (6th ed.). Belmont, USA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Foreman, P. (2011). *Inclusion in action* (3rd ed.). South Melbourne, Victoria: Cengage Learning Australia.
- Forlin, C., & Sin, K.-F. (2017). In-service teacher training for inclusion: Best practice models for professional learning. In G. Noblit (Ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. Australia: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.161
- Frankel, E. B., Hutchinson, N. L., Burbidge, J., & Minnes, P. (2014). Preservice Early Childhood Educators' and Elementary Teachers' perspectives on including young children with developmental disabilities: A mixed methods analysis.

- Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 35(4), 373-391.
doi:10.1080/10901027.2014.968300
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change*. London: Routledge.
- Fullan, M., Cuttress, C., & Kilcher, A. (2009). 8 Forces for leaders of change. In M. Fullan (Ed.), *The challenge of change* (pp. 9-20). Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin.
- Hemmings, B., & Woodcock, S. (2011). Preservice teachers' views of inclusive education: A content analysis. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 35(2), 103-116.
- Hoppey, D., & McLeskey, J. (2013). A case study of principal leadership in an effective inclusive school. *The Journal of Special Education*, 46(4), 245-256.
doi:10.1177/0022466910390507
- Hughes, M. T., & Valle-Riestra, D. M. (2007). Experiences of kindergarten teachers implementing instructional practices for diverse learners. *International Journal of Special Education*, 22(2), 119-128.
- Kearney, A. (2011). Exclusion from and within school: Issues and solutions. In R. Slee (Ed.), *Studies in inclusive education*. Amsterdam: Sense.
- Kroeger, S. D., & Kouche, B. (2006). Using peer-assisted strategies to increase response to intervention in inclusive middle math setting. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 38(5), 6-13.
- Leatherman, J. M. (2007). I just see all children as children: Teachers' perceptions about inclusion. *The Qualitative Report*, 12(4), 594-611.
- Leatherman, J. M., & Niemeyer, J. A. (2005). Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion: Factors influencing classroom practice. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 26(1), 23-36. doi:10.1080/10901020590918979
- Loreman, T., Forlin, C., & Sharma, U. (2014). Measuring inclusive education *International Perspectives on Inclusive Education*, 3, 165-187. doi:10.1108/S1479-3636201400000003024
- McLeskey, J., Rosenberg, M. S., & Westing, D. L. (2013). *Inclusion: Effective practices for all students* (2nd ed.). Boston: Pearson Education Inc.
- Mitchell, L. C., & Hegde, A. V. (2007). Beliefs and practices of in-service preschool teachers in inclusive settings: Implications for personnel preparation. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 28(4), 353-366.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10901020701686617>
- Mortier, K., Van Hove, G., & De Schauwer, E. (2010). Supports for children with disabilities in regular education classrooms: An account of different perspectives in Flanders. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(6), 543-561.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603110802504929>
- Odom, S. L., Buysse, V., & Soukakou, E. P. (2011). Inclusion for young children with disabilities: A quarter century of research perspectives. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 33(4), 344-356.
- Purdue, K. (2009). Barriers to and facilitators of inclusion for children with disabilities in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 10(2), 133-143.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54-67.

- Smith, T. E. C., Polloway, E. A., Patton, J. R., & Dowdy, C. A. (2012). *Teaching students with special needs in inclusive settings* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education Inc.
- Stubbs, S. (2008). *Inclusive education: Where there are few resources*. Retrieved from Manchester
<http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/IE%20few%20resources%202008.pdf>
- Thousand, J. S., & Villa, R. A. (2005). Organizational supports for change toward inclusive schooling. In R. A. Villa & J. S. Thousand (Eds.), *Creating an inclusive school* (pp. 57-80). US: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libraryproxy.griffith.edu.au/lib/griffith/reader.action?docID=3002114&ppg=66>.
- Turnbull, A. P., Turnbull, R., Wehmeyer, M. L., & Shogren, K. A. (2013). *Exceptional lives: Special education in today's schools* (7th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education Inc.
- UNESCO. (2009). *Policy guidelines on inclusion in education*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001778/177849e.pdf>
- Vansteenkiste , M., Lens, W., & Deci, E. L. (2006). Extrinsic goal contents in self-determination theory: Another look at the quality of academic motivation. *Educational Psychologist*, 41(1), 19-31. doi:10.1207/s15326985ep4101_4
- Winter, S. M. (2007). *Inclusive early childhood education: A collaborative approach*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.

Francis R. Ackah-Jnr

SYSTEM AND SCHOOL-LEVEL RESOURCES FOR TRANSFORMING AND OPTIMISING INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS: WHAT GHANA CAN LEARN

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](#).