



Implementing Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy in Basic Schools: Leadership Challenges and Practical Strategies for Headteachers

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Abstract

This article examined the implementation of Ghana's 2015 Inclusive Education Policy in basic schools, focusing on the leadership role of headteachers. Drawing on international frameworks such as Salamanca and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), national policy documents, and empirical literature from Ghana, the paper analyzed key challenges, including limited resources, inadequate teacher preparation, infrastructural barriers, rigid curriculum and assessment systems, and weak stakeholder collaboration, across rural and urban contexts. Using a rights-based and inclusive leadership lens, it argued that headteachers are pivotal in translating policy into practice through vision-setting, culture-building, capacity development, resource mobilization, and community engagement, yet they are faced with significant challenges. The article concluded with practical, context-sensitive strategies for headteachers and implications for leadership training and policy support to advance inclusive, equitable basic education in Ghana.

Subject Areas

Education Administration

Keywords

Inclusive Education, Inclusive School Leadership, Headteachers, Ghana Basic Schools, Community Engagement, Children with Disability

1. Introduction

Inclusive education, the practice of educating all learners together in mainstream

schools, has become a global priority, rooted in the belief that every child has a fundamental right to quality education regardless of ability or background [1]. International frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement of 1994 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) of 2006 [2] underscore that schools should accommodate “*all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions.*” Ghana has committed to these principles by ratifying the CRPD in 2012 and developing a national Inclusive Education Policy in 2015 [2], aligned with UNESCO’s Education for All and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Inclusive, Equitable Education) [1] [3]. This policy aims to transform Ghana’s basic education sector (primary and junior high schooling) into a system where “*all persons... are entitled to equitable access to quality teaching and learning,*” transcending physical location and fostering participation and friendship among diverse learners.

Despite strong policy commitments, implementing inclusive education in Ghana’s basic schools presents significant leadership challenges. Headteachers, who are the frontline leaders of basic schools, play a pivotal role in translating inclusive education policy into practice. They must ensure that children with disabilities and other special educational needs are welcomed and supported in regular classrooms, even as they grapple with constraints like limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, unprepared teachers, and societal attitudes. These challenges can be particularly acute in resource-constrained contexts; for example, many Ghanaian schools lack disability-friendly facilities and teaching aids, and a 2017 survey found that over 75% of teachers viewed the country’s nascent inclusive education program as “not successful” in their schools [3]. The realities can differ between urban and rural schools as well, as urban schools often face overcrowded classrooms and competitive high-stakes examinations. In contrast, rural schools frequently have fewer trained staff and more rudimentary facilities, exacerbating issues of access and quality [4] [5].

This article explores the implementation of Ghana’s Inclusive Education Policy with a focus on leadership challenges and practical strategies for headteachers in basic education. The study draws on academic literature, policy documents, and international frameworks from UNESCO guidelines, the Salamanca Statement, and UNCRPD to provide an academically rigorous yet practice-oriented analysis. Key sections include a literature review of inclusive education in Ghana and globally, the theoretical framework guiding inclusive leadership, a discussion of major challenges such as resource limitations, teacher attitudes, infrastructure gaps, and stakeholder collaboration with comparisons of rural vs. urban contexts. It has provided recommendations with actionable strategies for headteachers. The goal is to offer insights that are both scholarly and directly applicable in school leadership training, ultimately supporting Ghana’s headteachers to create more inclusive schools.

As authors, our positionalities shape how we understand and interpret the implementation of Ghana’s Inclusive Education Policy. The first author contributes

as an educator with sixteen years of teaching experience in Basic Schools and now serves as the District Secretary of the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT). Her positionality is shaped by long-term classroom practice, deep familiarity with the instructional and emotional needs of learners, and firsthand exposure to the challenges teachers face in implementing inclusive education within constrained environments. In her current GNAT leadership role, she also engages with broader policy debates, teacher welfare concerns, and system-level negotiations. This dual identity—as both practitioner and advocate—enables her to critically examine how national policy intentions translate into everyday school realities and teacher experiences.

The second author writes as a practicing headteacher of a Basic School in Sampa in Bono Region of Ghana, bringing grounded, day-to-day leadership experience from a rural context where resource constraints, cultural beliefs, and community expectations strongly influence inclusive education practices. His insights are informed by direct engagement with the District Assembly, teachers, parents, and learners with diverse needs, allowing him to speak from an insider perspective on the practical realities and tensions school leaders navigate in accommodating the Inclusive education system. Together, our perspectives reflect both school-level leadership realities and teacher-centered policy experiences, enriching our analysis of inclusive education implementation in Ghana and beyond.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Inclusive Education: Global Context and Frameworks

The push for inclusive education is grounded in decades of international consensus-building. The Salamanca Statement [1] was a landmark, affirming that “*every child has a fundamental right to education*” and that inclusion should be the norm: children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) should be educated in regular schools wherever possible, with schools adjusting curriculum and teaching to meet diverse needs [1]. The Salamanca Framework for Action argued that inclusive schools are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes and improving education for all. In 2006, the UNCRPD reinforced these ideas as binding rights. Article 24 of the UNCRPD obligates states to ensure an “*inclusive, quality and free primary and secondary education*” for persons with disabilities in the communities in which they live [6]. Ghana, as a signatory, is required to move from segregated schooling toward inclusive, neighborhood schools for all children. Likewise, UNESCO and UNICEF have promoted inclusive education as key to achieving Education for All and the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing equity and the inclusion of marginalized learners, including girls, rural children, children with disabilities, etc. These global frameworks provide not only moral and legal imperatives but also technical guidance on inclusive policies. A consistent theme is the need for system-wide reform: policy and legislation updates, curriculum adaptation, teacher training, and resource allocation to support inclusive practices [1].

In line with these international commitments, Ghana's Ministry of Education launched its Inclusive Education Policy in 2015 (officially rolled out in 2016). The policy defines inclusive education as a value-based approach whereby *all* learners are entitled to quality education that meets their diverse needs in a common learning environment. It builds on Ghana's constitutional guarantees of Free, Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) and non-discrimination, as well as prior initiatives in special education. Notably, Ghana's 1992 Constitution [7] and 2006 Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715) [8] had affirmed the right to education for persons with disabilities, but implementation remained limited. The 2015 Inclusive Education Policy marked a shift from viewing special education as a separate system toward an "*all-inclusive approach*" within the regular education system. It was developed through multi-stakeholder consultations with government agencies, including Education, Health, Gender and Social Protection, Civil Society, and International Partners, notably UNICEF, which supported its development. The policy is accompanied by Standards and Guidelines for Inclusive Education and a detailed Implementation Plan for 2015-2019, which outlined steps such as teacher training, infrastructure audits, community awareness campaigns, and the provision of assistive devices. The Education Strategic Plan 2010-2020 had already endorsed inclusive education [9], and the current Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2018-2030 [10] gives priority to improving physical infrastructure and transforming special schools into resource centers to support inclusion in mainstream schools. For example, Ghana plans to convert existing special schools (which historically served only students with disabilities) into technical resource centers that assist regular schools with training and materials.

Early implementation efforts included pilot programs. It is important to mention that by the mid-2010s, inclusive education was piloted in hundreds of schools across several districts, with reports indicating 379 schools in 70 districts were trailing inclusive practices as Ghana prepared for nationwide roll-out [11]. Nevertheless, the report further noted that the country maintained a network of 28 special schools and 24 special "unit" classrooms for children with more severe disabilities. These special institutions are largely in urban centers, underscoring the rural-urban disparity in available services. Consequently, mainstream basic schools, which are primarily in rural areas, are the default option for most children with disabilities, heightening the importance of equipping those schools to serve diverse learners.

1.1.2. Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education in Ghana

A growing body of research and evaluations over the past decade reveals a gap between policy ideals and school-level reality. This section highlights some of the challenges. In the first place, many schools lack the human, material, and financial resources needed to support inclusive education. A case study in Ghana's Volta Region found that the Ghana Education Service faced a lack of material resources and insufficient financial provisions for children with special needs [12]. Basic schools often do not have enough specialized teaching and learning materials, as-

sistive devices such as Braille books, hearing aids, or even consistent funding for minor modifications. Financial constraints also translate into large class sizes, which teachers have said make it difficult to give individualized attention to all students, especially those with special needs [13].

Another critical resource gap is the shortage of special education teachers or resource persons. Ghana's policy calls for posting "special education resource teachers" to support inclusive schools, but in practice, there are too few. A qualitative study in Effutu Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana revealed that "headteachers did not have an adequate number of Special Education Resource teachers, often a single resource teacher had to cover multiple schools, stretching their capacity" [14]. Moreover, even when such teachers are posted, retaining them is difficult. Many leave for further studies or better opportunities, resulting in high turnover and discontinuity of support [14]. This finding highlights a systemic challenge where well-trained special educators are not incentivized to remain in basic schools.

Again, classroom teachers are the linchpin of inclusion, yet many Ghanaian teachers feel unprepared for this role. Surveys indicate that a majority of teachers have negative or ambivalent attitudes towards inclusive education, often stemming from a lack of training and confidence [15]. In one study, 59% of teachers reported their pre-service preparation for inclusive education was "*not adequate*," and over 55% felt "*not competent*" in teaching learners with disabilities in regular classes [16]. Consequently, 76% of those teachers believed the curriculum in use was not suitable for inclusive classrooms, and about 75.9% rated the overall success of inclusive education in their school as poor [16]. Qualitative findings echo these concerns: teachers often do not know how to differentiate instruction or manage diverse learning needs, and some harbor misconceptions such as children with intellectual disabilities "cannot learn" or will slow down the class [6]. Such attitudes can lead to subtle or overt resistance. For instance, some teachers sometimes sideline pupils with disabilities in class, or in extreme cases, discourage their enrollment [17]. Notably, headteachers' attitudes also matter: an NGO report observed that "many headmasters and teachers" in Ghana still believe children with intellectual disabilities are incapable of learning, and some headteachers even refused to let students with disabilities sit exams, fearing that lower scores would "spoil the whole school" performance statistics [5]. These practices are in direct violation of the Inclusive Education Policy and illustrate the deep attitudinal barriers that inclusion faces.

Furthermore, physical accessibility and school infrastructure pose major challenges, particularly in older schools and rural areas. Inclusive education demands that the school environment be accessible and safe for all students. However, the general physical environments of many schools, especially those in rural areas, leave much to be desired, as one Ghanaian study notes [6]. Common issues include classrooms located up steps or upstairs with no ramps, narrow doorways unsuitable for wheelchairs, lack of accessible toilets, uneven terrain, poor lighting

and ventilation, and absence of simple assistive infrastructure like rails or signage. In the teacher survey mentioned earlier, about 61.7% of teachers rated their school's physical environment as "*not satisfactory*" for inclusive education [16]. Rural schools often operate in basic structures, sometimes mud or makeshift buildings, with no electricity or running water, making it even harder to accommodate particular special needs. Urban schools generally have better buildings, but can still be overcrowded and not physically adapted. The contrast is evident in examples from the Effutu case study, where one headteacher proudly noted that his school was "*disability friendly*", having added access ramps (walkways) to classrooms so that children with mobility impairments or visual impairments could reach their inclusive classrooms [14]. This illustrates that improvements are possible; yet such schools are the exception. Many schools lack funding or technical know-how to implement universal design features and must attempt low-cost improvisations, if any. In short, infrastructure remains a fundamental hurdle to full inclusion.

Moreover, Ghana's basic education curriculum and assessment system, until recently, has been relatively rigid, with high emphasis on standardized testing. Adaptation of curriculum content and teaching strategies to diverse learners has lagged. The Inclusive Education Policy and Guidelines promote the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and individualized support plans, but teachers often lack resources or training to operationalize these. Additionally, support services like assessment centers, speech or occupational therapy, and counseling, which are common in well-resourced inclusive systems, are scarce in Ghana's public basic schools. Typically, only regional or district offices have special needs assessment centers, meaning rural children must travel for assessments. The policy envisioned inter-sectoral collaboration with Health, Social Protection, etc., but at the school level, headteachers may struggle to access specialist services.

In all these challenges, research across contexts has identified school leadership as a crucial factor in the effective implementation of inclusive education. Principals or headteachers set the tone for inclusion, allocate resources, and influence whether teachers and the community embrace the change. A review by [18] notes that heads of schools are an important source of support in promoting inclusive practices through the mobilization of resources and fostering collaborative teaching cultures. [18] argues that headteachers must often plan strategically to secure aides, adaptive technologies, and training opportunities for their staff. In Ghana's context, the Headteachers' Handbook (a policy guide by the Ghana Education Service) now includes guidance on inclusive education leadership, indicating the official expectation that headteachers champion the policy's implementation. Empirical studies in Ghana are emerging: [14], for example, documented that headteachers face distinct challenges (as discussed above) but also found that some proactive strategies, like using a portion of the school's Capitation Grant to buy assistive materials, or liaising with the District Education office for extra support, were being employed by effective headteachers [18]. Another study in a dif-

ferent region found that headteachers who actively admitted learners with special needs and worked to accommodate them helped set the stage for inclusion. In contrast, without a leadership push, teachers were less likely to accept those students in practice [19]. All this literature suggests that while Ghana's inclusive education journey faces many hurdles, the role of headteachers is central to overcoming those hurdles. It also indicates that targeted training and support for headteachers could significantly improve outcomes.

In summary, the literature highlights that Ghana's basic education system stands at a critical juncture: the policy framework and international support for inclusive education are in place, but implementation is uneven. Headteachers operate at this nexus of policy and practice, contending with resource scarcities, capacity gaps, and cultural attitudes. The following theoretical framework will outline how the study conceptualizes inclusive leadership and change management in schools as a basis for examining these issues, before it delves into a detailed discussion of the challenges and strategies for headteachers in making inclusion work in both rural and urban school contexts.

2. Theoretical Framework

Implementing inclusive education in schools requires not only policy directives but also a guiding theoretical framework that informs leadership practices. This article adopts a two-pronged theoretical lens: 1) a rights-based inclusive education framework rooted in the social model of disability, and 2) an inclusive leadership perspective within educational leadership theory.

2.1. Rights-Based and Social Model Framework

At its core, inclusive education in Ghana is underpinned by the notion of education as a human right and by the social model of disability [19]-[21]. The social model posits that it is society's barriers, such as inaccessibility, inflexible pedagogy, and prejudice, rather than individual impairments alone, that exclude children from education. This contrasts with the old "medical model," which focused on deficits in the child. Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy explicitly embraces this paradigm shift, emphasizing that the education system must adapt to the learner, not vice versa. International instruments like the Salamanca Statement and UNCRPD provide the normative backbone: Salamanca asserted that "regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes... and achieving education for all" [1]. The UNCRPD requires "reasonable accommodation" and individualized support to realize inclusive education as a right. The theory of change here is that by transforming school environments, teaching practices, and mindsets, barriers to learning can be removed and all children can succeed. This framework justifies why headteachers must advocate for changes in their schools, for example, adding a ramp or adjusting a teaching method is not just a technical choice but a fulfilment of a child's right and potential. It also means that leadership success is measured not only by

test scores but by how well the school includes and educates *every* child, a perspective increasingly reflected in Ghana's education quality discussions.

2.2. Inclusive Leadership Framework

Leading an inclusive school calls for a leadership style that is collaborative, visionary, and equity-focused. The study draws on the concept of the inclusive leadership in education framework, which has been described as an approach that appreciates diversity, invites and welcomes everyone's contribution, and encourages full engagement in decision-making [22]. Inclusive leaders value human rights and are conscious of others' perspectives and systemic inequities. In practical terms, an inclusive school leader avoids autocratic, top-down management; instead, they work to foster equitable and horizontal relationships among staff and stakeholders, breaking down traditional hierarchies that might silence certain voices, such as special educators, parents, or students with disabilities. This perspective aligns well with this study and transformational leadership in education. Inclusive leadership suggests that effective school change, like implementing inclusion, is achieved by spreading leadership responsibilities across a team; headteachers empowering teachers, forming committees, and engaging the community in leadership roles. Transformational leadership, meanwhile, involves inspiring and motivating staff around a shared vision, and managing change through support and example.

In the context of inclusive education, scholars like [23] have identified key leadership functions: advocating for inclusive values, building teacher capacity, developing collaborative problem-solving, and restructuring the organization to be responsive to all learners. The Inclusive Leadership model that the study adopts emphasises that leaders need to be trustworthy, reliable, capable of listening, communicating a vision, and building consensus among diverse stakeholders [22]. Headteachers must bring together teachers, parents, and others to create a shared vision of inclusion and then drive the development of policies and practices to realize it. This often means establishing a collaborative process for school improvement that involves all stakeholders, including teachers, support staff, parents, and even students, in examining barriers and jointly problem-solving. For example, an inclusive leader might form an "inclusive education committee" at the school, delegate responsibilities like one teacher coordinates referral and support for SEN students, another handles community outreach, etc., thus operationalizing distributed leadership.

In sum, the theoretical stance is that inclusive education is a rights-driven reform that necessitates inclusive leadership at the school level. A headteacher guided by these principles will focus on removing barriers (physical, pedagogical, and attitudinal), and will leverage collaborative, participatory leadership styles to engage the whole school community in the change. This framework will shape the discussion of specific challenges and guide the formulation of practical strategies: it will consider how headteachers can act as advocates, resource mobilizers, ca-

capacity builders, and culture shapers to overcome the challenges in implementing inclusive education in Ghana's basic schools.

3. Discussion

Implementing Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy in basic schools has proven to be a complex undertaking. Headteachers, as the on-site leaders, encounter a web of interrelated challenges spanning from tangible resource shortages to intangible cultural attitudes that they must navigate. This section discusses the major challenges in detail, with attention to how they manifest in both urban and rural settings. It also analyzes why the issue of Inclusive Education requires leadership interventions, setting up the basis for the recommendations that follow.

3.1. Leadership Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education

Implementing inclusive education in Ghana places significant demands on headteachers, whose leadership practices directly shape the success or failure of school-level inclusion. Although Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy of 2015 [24] outlines a national commitment to equitable participation for all learners, translating these ideals into everyday practice remains complex. Headteachers frequently operate within challenging conditions marked by limited resources, insufficient teacher preparation, infrastructural barriers, and deeply rooted attitudes toward disability. As instructional, administrative, and community leaders, they must navigate tensions between policy expectations and the realities of basic school contexts, particularly in under-resourced rural communities. Understanding these leadership challenges is essential for designing effective strategies that enable headteachers to foster truly inclusive learning environments.

One of the foremost challenges is the chronic resource constraint faced by many Ghanaian basic schools. This includes shortages of specialized human resources, lack of materials and assistive devices, and insufficient funding streams. While the national policy envisages that each school or cluster of schools would have access to special education resource teachers and peripatetic support staff, the reality is far from that ideal. The Effutu Municipality case study illustrates this gap vividly: headteachers reported that they did not have an adequate number of Special Education Resource Teachers for the implementation of inclusive education. The few special educators assigned had to cover multiple schools, making their workload excessive and their support sporadic [14]. This situation is common across districts – resource persons are too few for the demand. Moreover, due to limited incentives, those who are posted often leave. As [14] noted, many go on study leave or transfer to other positions, and headteachers find it difficult to retain such teachers in their schools. In rural districts, the problem is exacerbated: special educators often prefer to be in towns or near higher education institutions so that rural schools may have virtually no access to such expertise. Headteachers then shoulder the burden of guiding inclusion without specialist support.

Large class sizes and teacher workload are other challenges in implementing

Inclusive Education in basic schools in Ghana. Ghana's basic schools often have large class enrolments (sometimes 40-60 pupils per class in urban areas), a result of both population growth and the success of enrollment drives like FCUBE. With such numbers, giving individual attention, which is crucial for learners with special needs, is challenging. [13] has argued that high pupil-teacher ratios strain even well-intentioned teachers, leading to less effective inclusion. This is a resource issue: more teacher posts or teaching assistants would alleviate it, but funding constraints keep staffing lean. In rural areas, class sizes might be smaller on average. However, many rural schools are multi-grade (one teacher teaching multiple grade levels together) due to teacher shortages, which similarly reduces the attention any one child, especially one with difficulties, can get.

Again, effective inclusion often requires specific materials like Braille textbooks and embossers for visually impaired students, sign language materials or FM systems for hearing impaired, manipulatives and visual aids for those with intellectual or learning disabilities, etc. Ghana's policy and the UNESCO Universal Design for Learning concept call for making teaching/learning material accessible to all learners and reflecting diversity in content [24]. However, budget allocations for these materials are limited. The Capitation Grant, which is the small per-pupil grant given to public schools by the government to support basic operational needs, often is barely enough for chalk, registers, and exams, let alone specialized tools. As a result, most mainstream schools have *no* Braille or large-print books unless an NGO donates some; few have any assistive technology. A 2009 study by [12] found that even within special needs services in Ghana, material resources and funding were insufficient, highlighting that mainstream schools get even less support. For headteachers, this means they operate in an environment of scarcity, having to "do more with less." Urban schools may occasionally receive corporate donations or have PTA funding to purchase materials, whereas rural schools rarely have that luxury.

Additionally, implementing inclusion involves incurring some extra costs, such as modifying infrastructure, printing individualized learning materials, and training staff. Ghana's government budgetary allocation, with support from donors, has provided some funds for schools. For example, through the implementation plan, some schools received disability grants or grants for minor works. However, these have not been large-scale or sustained. The Effutu study concluded that a lack of adequate financial support from the Ministry and local education office posed a challenge to headteachers and was a root cause of the material resource gaps [14]. Schools that did succeed in making some inclusive improvements often did so by reallocating existing funds. For instance, in the [14] study, some headteachers reported using a portion of their Capitation Grant to acquire basic resources for special needs pupils. However, doing so can be a double-edged sword: that money might have been meant for other pressing needs, and the grant itself is small. Rural schools, in particular, depend heavily on the capitation grant and rarely have external donations, so any attempt to channel funds toward inclusion comes at the

expense of other supplies. In urban areas, more diverse funding, for example, better-off parents contributing, can help. However, not all urban schools have rich PTAs, many urban public schools serve low-income communities, too.

[25] contend that the resource constraint challenge is foundational because it intersects with every other issue. A lack of resources can demoralize teachers (affecting attitude), impede infrastructure development, and limit stakeholder engagement [25], for example, if a school cannot even afford to print brochures or hold meetings to sensitize parents. For headteachers, tackling this challenge often means being resourceful and seeking support beyond the normal government provisions, a topic that has been explored in the recommendations section.

3.2. Teacher Attitudes, Skills, and Training Gaps

Teacher attitudes, skills, and training gaps pose a challenge to inclusive education. Even with the necessary resources, inclusive education hinges on teachers' willingness and ability to adapt their teaching for diverse learners. In Ghana, many headteachers find that teacher attitudes and skill gaps are a significant barrier to implementing inclusion. Some teachers and headteachers carry entrenched beliefs that are at odds with inclusion. According to [26], some believe children with disabilities "are incapable of learning," especially children with intellectual or developmental disabilities. In this study, the majority (82%) of teachers were of the view that children with disabilities have low IQ and are slow learners... some teachers insisted that children with disabilities would be incapable of participating in an inclusive classroom [26]. These low expectations can lead to neglect or outright exclusion. The anecdote from the NGO Kekeli Ghana, where headteachers refused to allow students with disabilities to take crucial exams, fearing they would bring down the school's average, is telling [5]. It reflects a mindset that prioritizes school performance metrics over the rights of every child. Additionally, some educators worry that focusing on students with special needs will take time away from others. These attitudes may be more pronounced in highly competitive urban schools where pressure for high exam results is intense, but they exist in various forms everywhere. In rural areas, teachers might face less exam competition pressure. However, there may be cultural stigmas about specific disabilities, for instance, misconstruing disability as a result of witchcraft or parental sin, which still occurs in some communities, that affect how teachers perceive disabled children. A teacher who pities a child with a disability rather than seeing them as a capable learner, or conversely, one who is fearful or uncomfortable around disability, needs guidance and a mindset shift.

Teacher surveys in Ghana consistently show that many teachers do not feel confident teaching in an inclusive classroom. This is often due to a lack of training, both pre-service and in-service. Until recently, Ghana's teacher education curriculum had minimal content on inclusive education, a point the *Frontiers in Education* (2023) article by [27] addresses, noting that even Colleges of Education only began substantial inclusive education training after the 2018 reforms. Thus,

a generation of teachers was trained with little exposure to special needs pedagogy. When suddenly faced with, say, a blind student or one with autism in their class, teachers can feel at a loss, anxious about how to teach them or manage behavior. This can manifest as resistance, like “I cannot teach this child; someone else should handle them,” or an appeal to revert to special schooling. In the Ashanti Region, a study found teachers’ top concerns included insufficient training and inadequate support, which led to frustration and burnout [28]. For headteachers, turning around these feelings is difficult if they themselves have not been trained in inclusion, as many headteachers are veteran teachers from the same system, per [27] study, often lacking specialized knowledge but now expected to lead others through it.

The Ministry of Education and development partners have organized various workshops and short courses on inclusive education for teachers and headteachers since 2015. However, coverage is uneven. Urban teachers in pilot districts may have benefitted from multiple trainings, while a rural teacher in a non-pilot district might have never attended any formal training on inclusion. The literature suggests that even when workshops occur, follow-up and practical coaching are limited [14]. Teachers might learn the theory of differentiated instruction or child-centered methods, but not see them modeled or get feedback on trying them. Also, training often focuses on general awareness but not specific skills, for example, how to adapt a mathematics lesson for a child with dyslexia. Without continuous professional development and on-site support like a resource teacher or mentor, teachers revert to traditional lecture methods that do not serve diverse learners well. The Inclusive Education Policy Implementation Plan recognized this and called for continuous in-service training and the establishment of learning communities among teachers, but actualizing that has been slow due to resource constraints.

It should be noted that in the Ghanaian context, both pre-service and in-service leadership preparation offer only partial support for the demands of inclusive education. Although national policy frameworks and some university-based leadership programs reference inclusion, issues of disability, differentiated instruction, and school-community collaboration are often treated as peripheral topics rather than core leadership competencies. Similarly, in-service training for headteachers tends to be short-term, policy-oriented workshops that focus on disseminating guidelines rather than building practical skills for managing diverse classrooms, reallocating resources, or engaging families and communities around inclusion. As a result, many headteachers enter and remain in their roles without sustained, practice-focused preparation for implementing the Inclusive Education Policy, which reinforces the leadership challenges identified in this study and underscores the need for the context-specific strategies we propose.

3.3. Inadequate Infrastructure and Inclusive Environment

Inadequate infrastructure and an inclusive environment are contributory factors.

Physical and logistical barriers within the school environment present another major challenge for headteachers. An inclusive school environment entails more than just ramps; it includes classroom layouts, furniture, sanitation facilities, and even the organization of the school day to accommodate all learners' needs. Ghana's basic schools vary widely on these fronts, but many fall short of the standards needed for full inclusion. As noted by [6], a significant number of schools lack basic accessibility features. A child using a wheelchair or crutches may find it impossible to enter classrooms with high steps or narrow doorways. In some schools, classes are held on upper floors with no elevators or ramps effectively barring any child with a mobility impairment from those classes. Even one-story schools often have rough ground, making movement difficult. Toilets (latrines) are another critical issue: many schools have pit latrines in rural areas that are not accessible to children with physical disabilities, and no alternatives. The absence of accessible toilets has been documented as a reason older girls with disabilities drop out [29]. If they cannot use the school toilet, they stop coming. [29]'s study notes: "the social structures such as school building, ramps and toilet facilities for physically disabled people are not friendly ... and this may lead to dropout from school" (p. 38). Water access can also be an issue for children with certain needs, for example, those who may have medical conditions requiring water/cleanliness.

Classroom space and furniture add to the challenges of people living with disabilities. Inclusive classrooms ideally need enough space to maneuver for wheelchairs or simply for teachers to move around to assist students, and flexible seating arrangements. However, overcrowding in urban schools means classrooms packed with desks, leaving little room to move. Traditional fixed benches, common in Ghanaian schools, can be a hindrance if a child with an orthopedic impairment needs a different seating arrangement or more space. Furthermore, if a student needs specialized equipment like a Braille or a communication device, the classroom has to accommodate that. The study by [6] found that few classrooms are designed with these considerations; most are built to standard specifications without thought for the diversity of users. Some rural classrooms are makeshift (under trees or sheds), while those may ironically be more flexible in layout, they present other problems like exposure to weather, which can be particularly harsh on children with specific disabilities or health issues.

Aside from classrooms, the overall campus needs consideration: assembly grounds, libraries, labs, and pathways. A truly inclusive school would have continuous accessible pathways, for example, ramps with railings connecting buildings, clear signage with Braille or at least bold lettering and symbols for those with low vision, and accessible emergency exits. Ghanaian basic schools are far from this ideal, even many newly built schools do not fully adhere to universal design, despite building codes. The Policy's Standards and Guidelines for [24] do specify requirements for new school construction to be disability-friendly, but implementation lags at the local level. Headteachers often have limited control over infrastructure, which the government or District Assemblies usually provide, but they

are the ones who must deal with the consequences daily.

In light of these issues, headteachers are challenged to both advocate for better facilities and to improvise interim solutions. Some proactive headteachers have found ways to make small changes: for example, relocating a class to a ground-floor space when a student with mobility impairment enrolls, even if it means swapping classrooms between grade levels; or involving community members to build a simple wooden ramp at an entrance. The recommendations section will discuss how headteachers can leverage local resources and partnerships to gradually improve their school's physical inclusivity while pushing for broader support.

3.4. Navigating Policy, Curriculum, and Rigid Evaluation Systems

Another layer of challenge lies in the education system structure itself, the curriculum and examination system, as well as clarity or lack thereof in policies and support structures. Headteachers often have to reconcile the ideals of inclusive education with the demands of a standardized curriculum and high-stakes exams. It is important to emphasize that Ghana's basic education curriculum has not been able to undergo reforms because it has not distanced itself from the colonial-inherited one. [30] in his article "*Contemporary Legacy in Ghana's Education*," he noted that even though Ghana is an independent state, its curriculum is still not independent (p. 10). Dabie argues that there are certain policy aspects in our curriculum that need to be redesigned to serve Ghanaian students properly. In terms of the Inclusive Education Policy, it was the 2019 standards-based curriculum, which incorporates more inclusive pedagogy in theory [29]. However, teachers frequently report that the curriculum is crowded and not readily amenable to individual modifications. As earlier mentioned, over 76% of teachers in one survey felt the curriculum used in inclusive schools was "not appropriate" [16]. This likely refers to both content and pedagogy, for example, a teacher might feel that the syllabus moves too fast for a child with a learning disability, or that topics are abstract and lack the multi-sensory approach that some learners need. The Salamanca Framework [1] urged that schools should adjust their curriculum, organization, and teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of all learners, but making these adjustments at the school level is tough when national exams are uniform. Headteachers face the dilemma of how much to encourage curriculum differentiation. If a teacher significantly adapts material for a child, say, simplifies it or skips certain topics in favor of functional skills, will that child then fail the standardized test? This is a genuine concern that can make teachers stick strictly to the syllabus despite a child clearly not grasping it, they feel national requirements tie their hands.

The competitive nature of Ghana's Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), the exam at the end of junior high schooling that determines entry into senior high school, influences even primary school behaviors. Schools are often informally ranked by BECE performance; headteachers' reputations can hinge on these results. This can create perverse incentives to exclude or marginalize stu-

dents who might lower the average. The Kekeli Ghana example of headmasters barring students with disabilities from exams demonstrates this problem in extreme form [5]. Even without outright exclusion, there has been subtle discouragement per the authors' job and experiences, for example, telling a student's family that perhaps they should not register the child for the exam because it will be "too hard for them". The national policy and the law forbid such discrimination, but enforcement is weak if local leadership does not buy into inclusion. Another angle is that exam accommodations for students with disabilities, for example, extra time, braille or large print papers, sign language interpreters, have not been widely implemented or publicized in Ghana. Headteachers may not even know these are possible or how to request them. Until very recently, only a small number of learners with disabilities progressed far enough in school to sit for the BECE. For example, in 2023, the Volta Region recorded 32,400 BECE candidates, yet only 22 were candidates with special needs, highlighting how rarely students with disabilities reach this high-stakes transition point [31]. This pattern reflects broader African research showing that enrollment and progression for children with disabilities remain consistently low, despite national commitments to inclusive education [32]. Collectively, these patterns help explain why Ghana's BECE system has relatively few established norms for accommodating candidates with disabilities. This examination issue places an extra burden on headteachers to advocate for fair assessment conditions.

There has been an issue of policy clarity and support structures at the basic education level in Ghana. While Ghana has a robust national policy document, at the school level, there can be confusion or a lack of clear guidelines. For instance, how exactly should a headteacher proceed if they have a child with a particular disability and their teachers are at a loss? The policy suggests referral to district support or resource centers, but such support may not exist nearby. Some districts have Inclusive Education Coordinators or Special Education coordinators, but their capacity is stretched. Headteachers often navigate a trial-and-error path, consulting any experts they can find. This uncertainty can be stressful and may lead to inconsistent approaches between schools. A headteacher with a proactive special education background might implement strong inclusion. At the same time, another in a similar school might effectively sideline the student, due to a lack of knowledge or fear of doing the "wrong" thing.

Moreover, inclusive education is a stated national priority, but the accountability mechanisms are still evolving. Headteachers are typically accountable for enrollment numbers, attendance, and exam results, not explicitly for inclusiveness or learning outcomes of children with disabilities. There is currently no strong system that holds schools accountable if, say, they have zero children with disabilities enrolled, which could indicate exclusion. Nor are there incentives; a headteacher who invests lots of effort and slightly lowers exam averages in the short term by embracing all learners might not be rewarded in the current scheme of things. This systemic issue means headteachers must rely on intrinsic

motivation and moral leadership, rather than extrinsic rewards, to champion inclusion.

In facing these systemic and policy-level challenges, headteachers often need to become advocates and negotiators. They might have to lobby their Education Directorate for specific accommodations or interpret policy for their staff and community. The headteacher's leadership is about making inclusion a lived reality even when the system is not fully aligned, a formidable task that requires knowledge, courage, and sometimes creative bending of rules, for example, finding ways to internally assess a child's progress if the standard exams are not suitable. The recommendations of this study will address how headteachers can be supported and how they can themselves push for more inclusive policies at the micro level.

3.5. Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Engagement

Inclusive education does not happen in a vacuum within the school walls; the broader community and stakeholder environment influence it. Headteachers must act as liaisons and leaders not just to teachers and students, but also to parents, community leaders, local government officials, and NGOs. Managing these relationships and building a supportive coalition is a crucial challenge.

Parents are key stakeholders in a child's education as real teaching and learning begin from them at home and continue till they grow [13]. For successful inclusion, parental support and understanding are essential. In Ghana's context, there is a spectrum of parental attitudes. Many parents of children with disabilities, especially autism, are highly eager for them to attend regular schools, seeing it as a chance for social integration and a quality education [17]. These parents often advocate strongly for their children, which can be a great asset if harnessed well. However, they may also be anxious about whether the school will truly cater to their child's needs or whether their child will face bullying. On the other hand, some parents of children without disabilities may have reservations. They might worry that a teacher's time will be "diverted," or that their own child will learn negative behaviors, or fear the unknown if they have not encountered disability before. Headteachers frequently have to mediate between these concerns. For example, if a new student with an emotional/behavioral disorder enters a class and has some disruptive episodes, other parents may complain. The headteacher must handle this diplomatically, reassuring them while also protecting the rights and dignity of the child with special needs. Engaging parents through sensitization meetings or PTA discussions about inclusion can preempt misunderstandings. In rural areas, where community life is tight-knit, getting village elders and parents on board can essentially make or break an inclusion effort. In some cases, community members might initially resist, influenced by stigma or even superstitions; but once the school demonstrates that the child is learning and not a "danger" or "burden," attitudes can shift to pride and acceptance. There are stories in anecdotal reports of rural communities initially hiding away children with disabilities [5]. However, after inclusive education outreach, those children were brought to

school, and villagers began assisting them proactively, a transformation often led by the school leadership's outreach. A report by the Ghana Government and NGO Consortium [33] indicates that many families hide children with special needs at home because having a disability is a shameful thing for the child and the family. Nevertheless, the initiative aims to pilot this approach in two districts of Ghana to influence change in attitudes amongst the wider community.

In Ghana, especially in rural and peri-urban communities, traditional leaders (chiefs, queen mothers) and religious leaders have influence. A headteacher who actively involves these figures can gain community backing. For instance, a headteacher might invite the local chief to visit the school and see the inclusive classroom or ask a pastor/imam to mention inclusive education in their sermons, given that many Ghanaians are religious and may respond to a message of compassion and inclusion framed in faith terms. Conversely, if such leaders hold negative views or are not consulted, they can foment opposition by telling parents that a disabled child in class is a bad omen, in the worst cases. Thus, community engagement is not just public relations; it is a necessary leadership skill to ensure the social environment around the school is welcoming.

Also, collaboration with the Ghana Education Service (GES) and the Local Government has been helpful. A headteacher cannot do it all alone within the school; support from the District Education Office and the District Assembly (local government) is important. This includes getting access to itinerant peripatetic teachers, school health nurses, or social workers if available. Ghana's inclusive education framework calls for a multi-sectoral collaboration. For example, if a child has an impairment, ideally, the health sector should provide assistive devices and medical support, while social protection might help the family financially. In practice, these links are weak at the local level. Headteachers often have to personally reach out: for example, contacting the district Special Education Coordinator to schedule an assessment, or lobbying the Assembly Member (local elected official) to allocate some funds from the community development budget to build an accessible toilet. The Effutu study recommended that headteachers, through the Municipal Education Directorate and Municipal Assembly, should liaise with the University of Education, Winneba, to get special education trainees to assist in schools [14]. This is a good example of leveraging local institutions, in this case, a nearby university, to support inclusion. [14] has also suggested contacting organizations like the Ghana Federation of the Disabled and NGOs for material and financial support. These are essentially leadership tasks: networking and partnership-building. Urban headteachers might have easier access to NGOs or corporate sponsors simply by proximity. In contrast, rural headteachers might rely more on government channels or faith-based organizations present in the area. The challenge is that not all headteachers have experience in these advocacy and partnership roles; traditionally, a headteacher was seen primarily as an instructional leader and administrator within the school. Inclusive education expands that role to community mobilizer and fundraiser, which can be daunting.

Within the school, another stakeholder group is the students themselves. The success of inclusive education can be significantly enhanced if peers are supportive and empathetic. On the flip side, bullying or social isolation can derail it. Headteachers must cultivate a school culture of inclusion, one where differences are celebrated and where bullying is actively discouraged. Initiatives like inclusion clubs, peer buddy programs, or celebrating an “Inclusive Schools Week” can make inclusion tangible to students. Many Ghanaian schools have Anti-Bullying Policies and Child Protection Policies now implemented by the Ghana Education Service, partly due to national directives and campaigns like Safe Schools. Ensuring these are enforced, especially to protect vulnerable SEN children, is a leadership responsibility. For example, a headteacher might train the student prefects or leaders to be “inclusion ambassadors” who look out for any teasing of a disabled classmate and promote kindness. While this might seem minor compared to infrastructure, it is critical for a child who feels accepted and has friends that they are far more likely to thrive and stay in school.

In essence, the challenge and opportunity of stakeholder collaboration is that headteachers must extend their influence beyond the classroom to the community and policy spheres. They must build trust and a shared vision with stakeholders. It is challenging because it involves communication skills, sensitivity to cultural context, and often extra time and effort outside the regular administrative duties. However, studies of inclusive school reform, such as [34] multi-site study in two U.S. districts, have shown that moving toward inclusion depends on school-wide collaboration and reconfigured support structures, especially closer working relationships between general and special educators and stronger partnerships with families, rather than on individual teachers working alone. Ghanaian headteachers must adapt this principle to their local realities, whether that means having tea with village elders to discuss a disabled child’s schooling or writing proposals to NGOs for support. It is important to note that a headteacher’s inability to solicit stakeholder collaboration and community engagement may critically result in challenges affecting inclusive education prospects.

It is also crucial to emphasize that meaningful implementation of inclusive education requires that students with disabilities be recognized not only as beneficiaries of support but also as active contributors to school decision-making. Incorporating student voice can take multiple forms. Schools may establish disability-inclusive student councils or advisory committees where students have opportunities to express their needs, suggest improvements, and participate in shaping school policies. Additionally, integrating structured student feedback into Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or child support team meetings ensures that educational decisions reflect their lived experiences and preferences. Teachers and headteachers can also facilitate regular feedback forums, accessible suggestion platforms, or peer-support groups that empower students to articulate challenges related to teaching, learning materials, and school climate. Such strategies move schools beyond tokenistic participation and position students with disabilities as

partners in building inclusive environments, aligning with global rights-based education frameworks. Having detailed the landscape of challenges, ranging from resources, attitudes and training, infrastructure, systemic constraints to stakeholder engagement, it is clear that headteachers require a multifaceted approach to lead inclusive change.

3.6. Contextual Differences in Rural and Urban School Inclusive Leadership in Ghana

A synthesis of the findings reveals that headteachers' leadership approaches differ significantly across rural and urban settings due to variations in infrastructure, staffing patterns, and community dynamics. Rural schools often face acute shortages of trained teachers, limited assistive materials, and fewer external support services, requiring headteachers to depend heavily on community participation, improvised learning aids, and informal partnerships. In contrast, urban schools typically benefit from stronger NGO presence, better-trained personnel, and more stable funding streams. However, they also face challenges such as overcrowding, heightened parental expectations, and bureaucratic constraints. These contextual contrasts suggest that leadership strategies for implementing inclusive education, whether resource mobilization, community engagement, or staff capacity building, must be uniquely tailored to the socioeconomic and structural realities of each environment. A one-size-fits-all model is insufficient for the differentiated demands of inclusive schooling in Ghana.

4. Recommendations

Under this section, we articulate a set of actionable recommendations and strategies for headteachers in Ghana's basic schools to lead inclusive education. Implementing inclusive education is critical, but undoubtedly challenging; however, headteachers are not without agency. There are practical strategies and leadership practices that can help surmount the challenges outlined. Both research and on-the-ground experiences inform these strategies, and they are intended to be contextually relevant, acknowledging resource constraints and the Ghanaian educational environment for both rural and urban areas. Each recommendation aligns with the inclusive leadership approach, emphasizing collaboration, innovation, and advocacy. Headteachers and school leaders can adopt and adapt these strategies in their schools and use them in training programs for current and aspiring headteachers.

In the first place, headteachers need to develop and communicate a shared inclusive vision. A headteacher's first step is to set a clear, inspiring vision for inclusive education at the school. This means articulating to staff, students, and the community that "*every child belongs*" and that the school is committed to supporting all learners. One practical action is to incorporate inclusive values into the school's mission statement or motto. For example, a school could adopt a motto like "*Education for All - Achieving Together*" and regularly reference it in assem-

blies and meetings. Headteachers should communicate expectations that teachers will try to include all children, and that discrimination or low expectations are not acceptable. By framing inclusion as a collective goal, the headteacher invites all stakeholders to take ownership. Research on successful inclusive schools emphasizes that a strong leader's vision can align the school culture with inclusive ideals [1] [35]. In practice, this might involve storytelling by sharing success stories of students with disabilities who have thrived from within the school or other schools, to build belief in the possible. It is also important to set specific targets: for instance, "*This year, our goal is to ensure every child can participate in sports day and every exam*"; such goals make the vision concrete. The headteachers' role also includes accountability. Headteachers should incorporate inclusion-focused goals and metrics into their School Performance Improvement Plans (SPIPs) to create internal accountability.

Second, beyond slogans, headteachers must cultivate a day-to-day school climate of respect, empathy, and cooperation. Some strategies that can be adopted include anti-bullying campaigns and peer sensitization, where the school organizes talks or drama on disability awareness to encourage students to be supportive classmates. Establish a "buddy system" or peer support program: pair students with and without disabilities to study or play together, which can improve social inclusion and reduce stigma. Celebrate diversity in school events, for instance, during Ghana's cultural day, also highlight communication in sign language, or have an inclusive education week where each day, something related to inclusive values is done through posters, quizzes, flyers, etc. Inclusive leadership literature notes that "listening to student voice" is important [35]. Headteachers can create forums like student council meetings or suggestion boxes to gather all students' input, including those with special needs, about their school experience. If a student with a disability has a particular talent, be it academic, artistic, sports, or even being punctual, find ways to recognize and showcase it, as this sends a message to the whole school that every student values. A welcoming school climate not only benefits students with disabilities but also creates a more supportive environment for all learners, aligning with the Salamanca assertion that inclusive schools are the most effective means of building an inclusive society [1].

Third, teachers are the change agents in the classroom. Headteachers should proactively seek to improve teachers' skills and comfort in inclusive teaching. While systemic training programs might be limited, a headteacher can implement school-based professional development by organizing in-service workshops on practical inclusive strategies. Headteachers can invite a special education specialist within the community to conduct training on topics like managing an inclusive classroom, differentiating instruction, or preparing individual education plans. Promote peer learning among teachers. If one teacher has successfully included a child with, say, a hearing impairment by using visual aids and written instructions, have them share this experience and techniques with others at a staff meeting. Encourage teachers to plan lessons to include diverse learners jointly, as this fos-

ters distributed leadership and collective problem-solving [35]. Encourage teachers to pursue further professional development in special needs through distance or part-time courses, and facilitate it by adjusting their schedules if possible. According to Ghana's policy and international best practice, continuous teacher development is key. The payoff is significant: when teachers feel more competent, their attitudes improve. As one study noted, equipping teachers with skills and knowledge can reduce their resistance to inclusion and improve outcomes for students [36]. Headteachers should therefore be relentless in seeking any training opportunity. If formal avenues are lacking, they can utilize free online resources or request materials from NGOs like Inclusion Ghana or international partners that often have teacher guides. It is also worthwhile setting up a small resource center in the school, such as a shelf in the office or library, with books, guides, and teaching aids on inclusive education, so teachers have something to refer to.

Fourth, improve physical accessibility and classroom accommodations gradually. While major infrastructure changes may be beyond a headteacher's immediate capacity, many small-scale improvements can make a big difference. The headteacher can conduct an accessibility audit of the school with their staff and even some students. Walk through the campus as if they had a disability: identify the most urgent barriers, such as a step that can be turned into a ramp, a narrow door that can be widened, tables and objects that can be moved from the walkway, etc. Also, encourage teachers to arrange desks flexibly. If a child has a hearing impairment, seating them in front and arranging desks in a U-shape can help them see the teacher and classmates. If a child uses crutches or a wheelchair, ensure aisles are wide enough and remove unnecessary furniture. These adjustments cost nothing but thoughtfulness. To support visually impaired students, print large, clear labels for classrooms, offices, etc., to help those with low vision or cognitive difficulties navigate. Create visual schedules or use picture cards for students who benefit from structure, which is common in autism-friendly practices. Again, inclusive use of technology should be consciously considered to serve all students, especially those with disabilities. In a study conducted by [37] on "*Closing the Opportunity Gap by Bridging the Digital Divide in U.S. Schools*," it was noted that when technology is inadequate or unavailable, it is the low-income students and those with disability who are at the most significant disadvantage. Even if the school has computers, as some have an ICT lab, the headteacher should see if students with special learning needs can use them. In urban schools with ICT labs, schedule time for students with disabilities to practice computer literacy, it can empower them and compensate for other limitations. It is important to emphasize that these physical and environmental changes not only benefit students with disabilities but also create a more comfortable learning environment for everyone in the school environment. Each slight improvement also builds goodwill, as parents see the school taking concrete action, which boosts confidence in the inclusion program.

Furthermore, strengthening stakeholder collaboration and communication is

critical. Parental engagement is critical in achieving inclusive education in schools. A study conducted by [25] on “*Parental Involvement in School Environments*” showed that holding orientation sessions for parents at the start of each school year to explain what inclusive education is and how it benefits all children is effective. During PTA meetings, the headteacher can include an agenda item on inclusive education and update parents on progress. For example, “this term we enrolled two children with visual impairments, here is how we are supporting them,” and address questions. For parents of children with disabilities, create a welcoming environment in the form of a parent support group where they can share experiences and even advise the school on what their children need. The headteacher or a guidance teacher could facilitate periodic meetings of this group. Such inclusion of parents is known to improve trust and collaboration [14]. Student involvement by promoting inclusive student leadership is key. For instance, include students with disabilities in the student leadership or class prefect system, even if informally, as assistants; if they cannot perform all duties, their representation sends a message. Start clubs like a Sign Language Club or Disability Awareness Club where interested students (disabled and abled) can learn and advocate together. This not only empowers those students but also creates peer advocates who can influence their parents and community as well.

What is more, as a headteacher, it is important to lead by example and adopt inclusive instructional leadership to set the pace. Headteachers should also personally demonstrate inclusive practices. Teach occasionally in classrooms to model inclusive teaching strategies for your staff. For instance, show how to use group work or multi-sensory methods that engage all learners. Make a point to know the individualized needs of each child with a disability in your school and periodically check on their progress, as this shows teachers and parents that top leadership cares about those children’s outcomes, not just overall averages. Use inclusive language in all school communications and avoid labels that stigmatize. For instance, instead of “call the blind boy,” say “*the boy in Class... who is visually challenged should come, and we have provided braille materials for him*”. When teachers or students see the head embracing inclusion, talking to the child with disabilities often, holding high expectations for them, it sets a tone. This echoes what inclusive leadership research suggests: leaders must advocate for inclusion and emphasize student learning and classroom practice through their own actions [35].

Moreover, headteachers should advocate for systemic changes and utilize available policy support. [38] article on “*Challenging the Dominant Knowledge Systems Through Critical Curriculum Studies Education*” argues that the curriculum is the heart of every learning and practice in schools, as it prescribes what to do and what not to do. Therefore, any meaningful change in school policy should emanate from the curriculum structure. While focusing on school-level actions, headteachers should not shy away from pushing for broader support, especially from the national level, where educational decisions are generally made. Since

schools follow bureaucratic procedures, headteachers are to advocate for the local level (through Parent Teacher Association [PTA] and School Management Committee [SMC]) to the district-level Inclusive Education Committees (comprising Education Officers, Health, Social Welfare, and Civil Society Reps). Using the policy documents to their advantage is necessary. For instance, the Inclusive Education Policy Implementation Plan has specified that each circuit should get certain resources to support children with disability [23]. They can cite these in letters or meetings to remind officials of commitments. The Standards and Guidelines for inclusive education can also be used as a checklist to lobby for improvements.

Implementing these recommendations requires initiative and perseverance, but numerous case examples and studies suggest they are effective. For instance, schools that formed strong relationships with parents and disability organizations in Ghana were able to obtain assistive devices and improve teacher training, leading to better student outcomes [14]. Schools where headteachers took the lead in teacher capacity building saw increased teacher confidence and more positive attitudes towards inclusion [39]. Even minor infrastructure fixes, like the installation of ramps in some pilot schools, significantly increased enrollment of children with physical disabilities in those schools, as reported in [40].

In summary, the role of the headteacher in inclusive education is multifaceted – part instructional leader, part community mobilizer, part advocate. By adopting these strategies, headteachers can make pragmatic improvements while also building a school ethos that aligns with Ghana’s inclusive education goals. It is important to note that headteachers themselves need support: training in inclusive leadership, opportunities to share best practices, and backing from higher authorities. Therefore, as part of the recommendations, one could also urge educational authorities to provide regular forums and workshops for headteachers on inclusive education implementation. Nonetheless, even within current constraints, headteachers can lead meaningful change, ensuring that no child is left behind in their schools.

5. Conclusions

Ghana’s journey toward inclusive education in the basic education sector is a testament to the country’s commitment to equity and social justice. The Inclusive Education Policy of 2015 laid a strong foundation, aligning with international frameworks like the Salamanca Statement, the UNCRPD, and UNESCO’s vision of Education for All. It signaled a paradigm shift from viewing children with disabilities as a separate responsibility to embracing them as integral members of every school community. As this analysis has shown, however, the implementation of this policy is a complex endeavor that unfolds in the daily realities of schools and it is here that the role of headteachers is both crucial and challenging.

Leadership challenges in implementing inclusive education in Ghana’s basic schools are manifold: headteachers grapple with insufficient resources and specialized support, work to transform teacher attitudes and competencies, strive to

make physical infrastructure accessible, and engage stakeholders to build a supportive environment. These challenges are not insurmountable, but they do require headteachers to exercise innovative, inclusive leadership. Whether in a large Accra school or a small Suma Ahenkro rural community, the headteacher becomes the linchpin that connects policy aspirations with classroom practice. As our discussion highlighted, many headteachers are already finding ways to make progress from reallocating small funds to buy learning aids, to arranging for community members to construct makeshift ramps, to persuading a skeptical parent to give inclusive schooling a chance. These efforts echo the finding that “*school heads have been seen as an important source of support in promoting inclusive education through their mobilization of resources*” [14] and coordination of collaborative practices.

The comparative reflections on rural and urban contexts underscore that while the core issues are similar, the manifestation can differ. Rural headteachers might face steeper resource gaps but can capitalize on tighter community networks; urban headteachers might have more external support available but face intensifying academic competition. Both settings demand a contextualized approach, and the strategies recommended in this article provide a menu of actions that can be tailored to each school’s circumstances.

Academically, this article has drawn on a range of scholarly and policy sources to ground these strategies in evidence. We integrated peer-reviewed studies that consistently point to key factors like teacher preparedness, leadership commitment, and stakeholder involvement as determinants of successful inclusion [14]. The theoretical framework employed, combining a rights-based perspective with inclusive leadership theory, provides a lens for understanding why these strategies work. For example, viewing a ramp not just as a construction project but as a fulfillment of a child’s right to access education imbues the headteacher’s advocacy with moral authority. Adopting inclusive leadership tenets helps headteachers build the team and consensus needed to drive change.

For use in school leadership training, the insights from this article can be invaluable. Upcoming and current headteachers can learn from both the successes and setbacks documented. Training programs can simulate scenarios and discuss the strategies recommended, such as mentoring teachers or engaging local NGOs. By doing so, they prepare school leaders to become proactive problem-solvers and advocates. In essence, building headteachers’ capacity is building the system’s capacity for inclusion.

In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge that headteachers cannot and should not be expected to do it alone. A consistent message from international frameworks is that inclusive education is a system-wide responsibility. The Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, teacher training institutions, communities, and international partners all have roles to play in supporting headteachers: from providing adequate funding and training to recognizing and rewarding inclusive schools. As Ghana moves forward, policies might evolve, such as incorpo-

rating inclusive education indicators into school performance assessments or expanding special education resource centers, which will hopefully ease some burdens on school leaders. The UN CRPD Committee in the 2024 review commended Ghana's efforts but also likely urged acceleration in implementation [41], indicating that the international community is watching and encouraging progress.

Finally, the heart of inclusive education is leadership with empathy and vision. A headteacher who believes in the potential of every child, and who uses that belief to galvanize teachers, students, and the community, can overcome even significant hurdles. Such leadership creates ripple effects: it combats the "disabling society" mindset and replaces it with a culture of inclusion and high expectations. In a few years, one hopes to see more Ghanaian schools, rural and urban alike, where inclusive education is no longer seen as a special initiative, but rather as "how we do things here."

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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