

Alternatives to School Exclusion in Ghana: Changing the Rhythm of Dealing With Truancy in Ghanaian High Schools

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Abstract

In this article, school disciplinary exclusions in high schools in Ghana are highlighted to explore alternatives to school exclusions. The 2017 budget and the preceding budgets of the Republic of Ghana clearly indicate that the bulk of the nation's expenditure is spent on education. Part of the 2017 budget is especially targeted at making the senior high school (SHS) education free in Ghana beginning 2017-2018 academic year. Needy students have been the thrust of this investment to widen the broader spectrum of academic opportunities in Ghana. This government initiative has the potential to enhance access to secondary education in Ghana. In the education policy context, this kind of investment is expected to yield enhanced academic outputs beyond the exam results. In the estimation of this article, these outputs include creating an enlightened society, equipping Ghanaian students with appropriate value judgment, providing equitable access to education, and developing a sense of creativity through educational activities. However, the rampant student exclusions in Ghanaian high schools put the academic career of these students into jeopardy. It is in the light of this that this article provides a focused discussion on the contextual understanding and alternatives to school disciplinary exclusion in Ghana.

Keywords

school, discipline, policy, inclusion, alternatives

Introduction

The central concern in this part of the discussion is to examine the concept of school disciplinary exclusion in line with the focus of this article. This kind of exclusion is commonly referred to as suspension in Ghanaian high schools. Blyth and Milner (1996) define exclusion as “the means by which the headteacher of a school can prevent a child or young person from attending the school, either for a fixed period (not exceeding fifteen days in any single school term) or permanently” (p. 3). This type of exclusion does not include a child absenting himself or herself from school, even though the child can be excluded from the school for this kind of truant behavior.

Disciplinary exclusion from school takes different forms. In the first place, exclusion can be caused by the students themselves by acts of truancy or withdrawing from the school or the classroom voluntarily (this could be traceable to teacher actions or inactions). Second, some students are excluded because of their inability to participate in the school curriculum or extracurricular activities. Third, some students are excluded from school because the schoolteachers have judged the person's behavior to be irreconcilable with the school's rules or the school's standard ways of maintaining

order (Kane, 2011; see also Carlen, Gleeson, & Wardhaugh, 1992; Cullingford & Morrison, 1996; Hayden, 1997). This third group is the focus of this article. The students in this context are excluded from the school indefinitely or for a specific period of time (internal or external).

Drawing on the field data and from researchers such as Kane (2011), Hayden (1997), Blyth and Milner (1996), Cullingford and Morrison (1996), and Carlen et al. (1992), this article offers a contextual definition of school-sanctioned disciplinary exclusion in Ghana as a form of punishment, which permits the school authority to exclude the student(s) from teaching and learning in the classroom and from school activities. This type of exclusion involves internal, external, and indefinite exclusions. The disciplinary exclusion regime in Ghanaian high schools is enhanced through the combination of constant surveillance and regulation (see Ball, 2013; Dandeker, 1990; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Foucault, 1977,

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2003; Kenway, 1990; Slee, 1995; Webb, McCaughtry, & MacDonald, 2004) by school management, teachers, and school prefects. These tools (surveillance and regulation) account for the identification of perceived misbehavior and associated punishment. In the following, contextual descriptions of the various forms of student exclusion in Ghanaian schools is presented.

Internal exclusion is the situation where students are excluded from teaching and learning in the classroom, and are expected to do “hard labor” (i.e., carrying of stones, slashing of weeds, cleaning of gutters, fetching water) within the school for a period not exceeding 2 weeks. External exclusion involves excluding the student from classroom and school activities (including teaching and learning) for a specified period of time, which is determined by the school authority. Indefinite exclusion involves excluding the student from all school activities for an indefinite period until the student is recalled by the school (see Ghana Education Service [GES] Unified Code of Discipline for Secondary/Technical Institutions (GES Unified Code of Discipline), n.d.; Ibrahim, 2017). This could be a permanent exclusion as the school could refuse to recall the student. This article describes this type of disciplinary measure as a *de facto* dismissal.

In both external and indefinite, the student is perceived to have committed a serious offense and could not be accommodated in the school. This requires the student to move away from the school premises to his or her home or a different location other than the school. The sole purpose of the disciplinary exclusion in Ghanaian high schools is to reform: Make the student(s) conform to the set standards and deter the other students from committing similar offenses (see GES Unified Code of Discipline, n.d.).

The school system, most especially senior high schools (SHSs) in Ghana, continue to fail several young people by the constant exclusion of students from classroom and school activities. School exclusion is one of the most serious responses to student indiscipline behavior in Ghanaian high schools. This kind of exclusion could affect the outcome expected of the free SHS system as the essence of the free SHSs by the government of Ghana is to enhance skills, competence, inclusion, and participation. This is what Parsons (1999) describes as “access to resources, opportunities, . . . and life chances” (p. 37).

The need for educated and skilful workers in Ghana is critical if Ghana is to be able to compete favorably with the advanced economies in the world. This requires that favorable teaching and learning environment is created for Ghanaian students (see Baker, 1998; Door, 2014; Hayes, Richardson, Hindle, & Grayson, 2011; Kyriacou, 2014; Kyriakides, 2012; Strahan, Cope, Hundley, & Faircloth, 2005). Drawing on Kane (2011), this article considers exclusion as violence against Ghanaian students, and a threat to the national economy. The interpretation of violence against students has been stretched to include ostracizing students, “name calling and dirty looks” (p. 105). This type of violence

against students should be minimized in Ghanaian high schools to allow students to explore their potentials in the schools. The following research question was addressed to explore the alternatives.

Research Question 1: What are the alternatives to school disciplinary exclusion in dealing with truancy in Ghanaian SHSs?

Method

This article employed a qualitative case study approach. It draws its theoretical underpinning from Foucault’s (1977) concepts of regulation and surveillance and conceptualization from Parsons’ (1999) work on school inclusion and participation. Parsons’ (1999) work was instrumental in understanding reasons for school exclusion, consequences of student exclusion, and alternatives to school exclusion in Ghana. The article derived its validity from the selected theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of Foucault (1977) and Parsons (1999). This is based on the fact that the utilization of appropriate theories for analysis in research, most especially in case study, is a critical requirement (see Bryman, 2015; De Vaus, 2001; Yin, 2018). As noted by Ball (1995), “the absence of theory leaves the researcher prey to unexamined, unreflective pre-conceptions and dangerously naïve ontological and epistemological a priori” (pp. 265-266). Drawing on Ball’s (1995), this article used the selected theoretical and empirical works to examine the epistemological and ontological constructions, which govern school discipline in Ghanaian senior high schools. It explored the potential of how alternatives to violent disciplinary measures can be examined relying on Foucault’s (1977) concepts of regulation and surveillance as tools for analysis and Parsons’ (1999) work on school inclusion and participation.

To understand the issues regarding the various alternatives to the current disciplinary measures, an analysis of the GES Unified Code of Discipline, the guidelines that regulate disciplinary processes of schools in the country, was carried out. This was complemented by semistructured interviews with participants in four selected senior high schools located in Northern, Brong Ahafo, and Upper East regions of Ghana. The choice of the three regions was informed by the need to understand how school disciplinary issues are managed across different socioeconomic and cultural settings. Thus, the article examined the disciplinary management processes in areas of similar socioeconomic and cultural circumstances (Northern and Upper East regions) in relation to that of another (Brong Ahafo region), which is of different socioeconomic and cultural context.

In all, 24 research participants across the four senior high schools in Ghana were interviewed. Specifically, six research participants were purposively selected from each school for in-depth interviews and these were the school head teacher, senior housemaster, two classroom teachers, and two

students. The four senior high schools represented the case, but it included what De Vaus (2001) describes as “multiple levels or components” such as school management (head teachers and senior house masters), classroom teachers, and students (p. 220). The interviews were conducted in English language as it is the medium of instruction in Ghanaian schools.

This research was part of my PhD studies and, as such, ethical clearance and permission were sought from Keele University and GES before the research was conducted.

Contextualizing the Findings

Contextual Understanding of Policy and Practice: School Disciplinary Exclusion in Ghanaian High Schools

Disciplinary exclusion from high schools in Ghana comes in three forms: internal, external, and indefinite. In all these exclusions, the disciplinary committees of SHSs in Ghana are responsible for sanctioning student exclusion from schools using the disciplinary code. However, the decisions of this committee should be endorsed by the head teacher. It is significant to state that decision making in Ghanaian high schools regarding student exclusion is a micropolitical (see Ball, 1987) process. The head teacher uses this decision-making process to advance his or her interest of portraying the school as a well-disciplined school and to exhibit his or her control within the organization. This is achieved through his powers to grant final approval regarding the decisions of the disciplinary committee on school exclusion except in cases of dismissal of student from school.

In situations of the dismissal of students from the school, approval is required from the board of governors of the school. What is intriguing in this context is that the head teacher of the school sometimes can intentionally allow a student to be on indefinite exclusion without a recall to the school. This is possible because the head teachers are highly instrumental in matters relating to the implementation of the outcome of the decisions of the disciplinary committees. This sometimes makes the student to look for another school or terminate his or her education most especially if the parents are unable to secure admission to another school for the excluded student. This implies indirect dismissal or permanent exclusion.

This article interprets this kind of posture (exclusion as a deterrent measure) of school leaders and teachers who are expected to serve as surrogate parents as deepening the culture where student exclusion from school dominates the policy prescriptions and practices in senior high schools in Ghana (see Ibrahim, 2017; GES Unified Code of Discipline, n.d.). Paradoxically, the findings of the research in the four senior high schools in Ghana revealed that the majority of the teachers and students (26 out of 28) think that disciplinary exclusions cannot be the panacea to solving

behavior challenges of students in senior high schools in Ghana (also see Fenning et al., 2016). Therefore, the claim of Fenning et al. (2016) that “a myriad of evidence collected over many years indicate that suspensions are not effective in their desired outcome of reducing undesirable behaviors” is justifiable in the context of this article (p. 105).

School discipline (“anatomy-politics,” Ball, 2013, p. 45; see also Foucault, 2003) and regulation (“biopolitics,” Ball, 2013, p. 45; see also Foucault, 2003), in this context GES Unified Code of Discipline, n.d, are achieved through surveillance to manage the students and classify them for punishment (see Foucault, 1977, 2003). These findings as contained in this article should guide education policy makers and practitioners in Ghana.

The findings of the research further revealed that some students feel happy when they are excluded from school externally or indefinitely as this will give them the chance to stay away from school. Moreover, the findings of the research suggest that excluding students (in cases of dismissal or withdrawal) from school, in some cases, led to early termination of their education.

Schools are part of the means through which education is extended to members of the community to nurture individuals in the community. Therefore, exclusion from school, most especially in the manner that it is done in Ghanaian high schools, is paradoxical (see Parsons, 1999). This article provides alternatives to school’s exclusion, which can change the situation in Ghanaian schools.

This article also examines some categories of offenses (as prescribed by policy) that attract exclusion from school to demonstrate the justification for deconstructing the current policy and practices on school exclusion. They are presented in the following: In all the four schools where this research was conducted, when the offense of flouting the authority of the head and teachers is committed for the second time, the person is punishable by exclusion. This is to be determined by the disciplinary committee. This kind of exclusion can be in the form of internal, external, and indefinite. In one of the schools, it is extended to include flouting the authority of school prefects or senior students. Ibrahim (2017) argues that this is an “open cheque” (p. 120) handed over to teachers and school authority without defining the limit of their powers.

Second, wee (marijuana) possession and smoking attracts exclusion and withdrawal from school. In the estimation of this article, students who are excluded from school for possession or smoking of marijuana eventually join groups/gangs of “wee” smokers in the communities. Ibrahim (2017) argues that as part of positive behavior management strategies, these students need the support of the schools to quit wee smoking and reform their habit; this is better than excluding them from the schools.

Also, use of mobile phones on campus may attract the punishment of exclusion. Students in three of the four schools who were caught with mobile phones in school were

punished in the form of internal exclusion, with hard labor alongside asking the students to destroy the mobile phones at a school gathering.

Finally, traveling outside the school without permission attracts exclusion as a punishment.

The above explanations are the few instances to demonstrate that issues precipitating exclusion in Ghanaian high schools may be trivial.

Reasons for School Exclusion in Ghanaian High Schools

This article draws on Parsons (1999) to discuss the explanations provided by the school leaders and teachers for the current policy and practice regarding school exclusion in high schools in Ghana. The categorization of the issues promoting exclusion can be done in three ways. These factors are socioeconomic factors, institutional factors, and individual factors.

The socioeconomic and cultural factors (Parsons, 1999) as they relate to the context of this article include punitive orientation; this research revealed that teachers have the feeling that punitive disciplinary measures are the only way to reducing behavior challenges in schools. Teacher perceptions and policy prescriptions that punishment should be reformatory and painful creates the condition for the widespread student exclusion (GES Unified Code of Discipline, n.d.). This article describes the current state of the policy on student suspension as “hazardous policy.”

Second, poor living conditions in some homes lead students, in some instances, to exclusion from school. For instance, poverty has driven some students, especially female students, to undesirable sexual relations to earn some money to meet some basic needs. In some instances, these relations have led to sexual exploitation or violence against female students. The resultant of this exploitation could be unwanted pregnancy, which the Ghanaian SHSs policy describes as sexual offense punishable by permanent exclusion from school (GES Unified Code of Discipline, n.d.).

The institutional factors include lack of school effectiveness, leadership, and staff skill (Parsons, 1999); the skills of school leaders and teachers on behavior management are significant. The article suggests that school leaders and teachers have inadequate skills on behavior management, which could be accountable for the rate of exclusion in Ghanaian SHSs. Another factor is inadequate initial and in-service training in class management and interpersonal skills (Parsons, 1999); the study further revealed inadequate preparation on class management and interpersonal skills for teachers and school leaders coupled with the lack of continuing professional development (CPD) on behavior management for Ghanaian high school teachers.

Moreover, lack of locally available support to maintain students in school (Parsons, 1999) and the absence

of multiagency and community support for students are affecting management of student behavior challenges. The study revealed the absence of multiagency collaboration and community support for student behavior challenges as well as the overly high interest of school leaders and teachers to maintain positive image of the school at the expense of keeping the perceived bad students in the schools.

Finally, individual factors include decision making influenced by deviant peers and low self-esteem among Ghanaian high school students (see Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005; Cullingford & Morrison, 1996; Day & Bakioglu, 1996; Ibrahim, 2017; James, 2003; John, 1996; Knightley & Whitelock, 2007; Kyriacou, 2014; Lawrence, 1981). The low self-esteem is necessitated by the prevalence of violent disciplinary measures (including caning, beating) in the schools (Ibrahim, 2017). The deteriorating relationship between the school authority and the students is accountable for some of these issues or triviality leading to violence in SHSs in Ghana. In the following, this article discusses the consequences of student disciplinary exclusion in Ghanaian high schools.

Consequences of Student Exclusion in Ghanaian High Schools

This article, in this section, examines the consequences of school exclusion in Ghana to demonstrate that the use of exclusion results in serious societal problems and issues (see Hemphill & Hargreaves, 2009). The following are the main factors:

Loss of instructional time and issues of permanent exclusion: The field data revealed that instructional time is lost when students are excluded from teaching and learning/school because internal exclusion requires that a student stays away from the classroom and, at the same time, does some type of manual work. Also, a student on indefinite or external exclusion is required to stay away from school and is, at the same time, prevented from attending class. In all these situations, instructional time is lost.

School disciplinary exclusion can help get rid of the student in the school and provide short-term relief for the school but the concern should be both short- and long-term benefits. Two students demonstrated the need to stop school disciplinary exclusion in the following quotes:

... external suspension should be stopped because ... s/he may not get time to study and come back ... when s/he comes back it can affect him/her. (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 210)

... Also, indefinite suspension should be stopped. My brother was given indefinite suspension and in fact I went to the house and we were chatting and he told me that he wouldn't attend school again. (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 210)

Drawing on this article, exclusion (suspension and dismissal) of the students from school might affect the schooling or learning opportunities of the students.

Emotional pains leading to violence in school: It is reasonable to say that issues of school exclusion inflict emotional pain on students (Clark, 2004; Gershoff, 2002; Gil, 1975). These issues of exclusion and their attendant emotional pains promote a standoff between the teachers and the students leading to violent conflict. Friends and sympathizers of excluded students who feel a sense of unfairness regarding disciplinary exclusions could resort to violent demonstrations. It is clear that “when children no longer feel restrained, they are in a state of ferment that makes them impatient of all curbs, and their behaviour shows it even outside the classroom . . . a class without discipline is a mob” (Durkheim, 1961 cited in Carlen et al., 1992, p. 11).

School exclusion increases crime rate: The increasing exclusion of students from Ghanaian senior high schools promotes the vulnerability of students to engage in crimes. The possible increase of crime rate in Ghanaian communities could be attributed to exclusions especially when these students are not supervised, as parents alone cannot keep an eye on them. Two of the teachers indicated in the following excerpts that when the students are excluded from school, some of them do not go home and, possibly, engage in various crimes including armed robbery and sexual trade. This situation also demonstrates the lack of cooperation between the school and parents. One of the senior house masters and an assistant head teacher in Ghanaian high schools emphasized this assertion in the following statements:

. . . they just go and roam. Some of them may not even go home especially the females . . . (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 171)

. . . they become dropouts and we are battling with armed robbery issues here and there. (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 171)

The time to look at the school disciplinary exclusion policy and practice to reduce crimes and other social vices is now. Alternatives to school disciplinary exclusion can help in the prevention of gang membership, as suitable school activities will redirect the energies of the youth. In the following, this article offers the various alternatives to school disciplinary exclusion.

Exploring Alternatives to School Exclusion in Ghana

In this section, this article provides the various alternatives to help minimize exclusion of students from Ghanaian schools. The focus of the discussion is to present alternative means of managing student behavior in Ghanaian high schools, taking into consideration some understandings of Parsons (1999) regarding school inclusion and participation. These views include socioeconomic and cultural factors and institutional factors. These factors are discussed in the following in relation to the context of this article.

The socioeconomic and cultural factors include the following:

Student supportive programs (see Parsons, 1999): For students who are excluded from teaching and learning in the classroom or school for 1 week or more, an alternative means of education should be arranged at home or in school. This calls for collaboration between the schools, the Ghanaian social welfare department, and the metropolitan/municipal/district assemblies in Ghana. This kind of multiagency collaboration is what Whitty (2008) describes as an “active collaboration with other professionals, para-professionals and non-professionals from a range of possible disciplines” (p. 42; see also Shain & Gleeson, 1999). According to Parsons (1999), largely, in some countries such as Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Austria, the Republic of Ireland, and Luxembourg, anytime a student is to be expelled from the school, the head teacher finds another placement (school) for the person before the exclusion takes place. This article posits that the collaborative supportive role to be played by the stakeholders in Ghana demands that if a child is to be excluded permanently or indefinitely from one school, alternative arrangements should be made for the enrollment of the student at another suitable school.

Education for community building and democratic participation (Parsons, 1999): Education should be geared toward building communities. This requires helping students through the educational process to become useful to themselves and their communities (see Ibrahim, 2017). Bush and Middlewood (2005) emphasize the essential “need to establish the interconnectedness of home, school and community . . .” (p. 9). The school should develop links to the communities in the catchment areas and allow the citizenry to participate in decision making involving the school. Also, an opportunity for students to share their concerns should be created, and students should be supported to feel safe expressing their views. This situation can possibly promote good citizenship and character development (see Kane, 2011).

Diagnostic and ameliorative attitude toward students (see Parsons, 1999): This article argues that, sometimes, poor assessment of the factors that cause the misbehavior of students either in the classroom or in the school is the result of these exclusions of students from schools. Biesta (2009) argues that judgments teachers make daily is one of the critical decisions in the lives of the students, which requires supporting the teachers to make appropriate decisions as their actions affect greatly on students’ learning and creative development (Biesta, 2009). It is in this light that Elliott (2007) claims that “educational research needs to be directed towards the systematic development of a body of knowledge that is capable of informing the practical judgments of teachers” (p. 66). Schools/teachers should move beyond the thinking on what happens immediately when teachers administer these violent punishments toward an assessment of the future impact of these punishments.

Institutional factors include the following:

School policy promoting positive school ethos, consensus, and negotiation (Parsons, 1999): Behavior management is one of the main discourses of schooling and its policy prescriptions must be taken seriously (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). The standard in Ghanaian high schools for managing student behavior is essential (see Kane, 2011). The situations in Ghanaian high schools now (see Ibrahim, 2017) require reforms in policy and practice so as to practice what Ibrahim (2017) describes as positive behavior management, which has the potential to ensure the dignity, rights, and self-concept of students, the real-self and self-esteem (see Ibrahim, 2017; Lawrence, 2006).

If education is meant to equip students with the needed skills, values, and ensure social change (Ibrahim, 2017; Kane, 2011), there is the need to deconstruct the current policy on school exclusion in Ghanaian high schools, taking cognizance of the need for broader social inclusion (Ibrahim, 2017; Kane, 2011; Ball, Maguire, & Braun, et al., 2012). One of the senior house masters (officers responsible for managing student behavior in Ghanaian high schools) did not mince words when he stated that,

There should be an improvement in the policy. Merely suspending students will not help us achieve what we want to achieve . . . instead of suspending . . . GES should come out with something that we probably can do to the students which can help transform the student. (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 125)

Quality training at initial and in-service levels in classroom management and interpersonal skills (Parsons, 1999): Quality in initial teacher training and CPD policy are needed in Ghanaian high schools as these will enhance better classroom and school practices (O'Brien, 2012; see also Bell & Bolam, 2010; Brookfield, 1986; Buckley & Caple, 2004; Day, 1999; Jones, Clark, Howarth, Figg, & Reid, 1989; O'Sullivan, Jones, & Reid, 1988) that can help reduce disciplinary exclusions in schools. O'Brien (2012) claims that the effectiveness and quality of teachers can be enhanced when conscious efforts are made to improve the quality of initial teacher training and continue to develop the skills of teachers who join the teaching profession.

One such teacher training includes training on anger management. This kind of training is necessary as teachers vary in their tolerance levels of student behavior and the amount of time they are willing to spend to resolve a specific student behavior challenge (Hayden, 1997).

Recognition of learning needs (see Parsons, 1999): Teachers use the learning needs of individuals to identify and differentiate students (Slee, 2001). An assessment of student needs (including emotional learning needs) is essential to improve the learning experiences of the students (Hargreaves, 1996; Jenkins, 2010; Sherwin & Stevenson, 2011). This assessment should be participatory in nature, by allowing the students to participate in the discussion regarding the

identification of their needs (Jenkins, 2010; Sherwin & Stevenson, 2011). Needs identification is one of the critical roles of teachers. This role can best be performed by the teachers because they are expected to have better appreciation of the students' needs (Sherwin & Stevenson, 2011). The students may use different routes, depending on their needs, to stay in the school and have the best learning experience. This may require negotiations and compromises on the part of all the parties involved (including students, parents, teachers, and school management; Sherwin & Stevenson, 2011). The needs of students are not static; they change with time. There is, therefore, the need for the school to craft various programs aimed at supporting students in this regard (Ross, Powell, & Elias, 2002).

Inclusive and co-operative relationships with parents and welfare institutions (Parsons, 1999): Although the school is clothed with the power to exclude students from teaching and learning in the school, multiagency discussion on the issue is significant. Student referral units should be established under the department of social welfare in Ghana for student's behavior-related cases that cannot be handled in the schools. The metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies should lead this process. Moreover, in the case of the students facing permanent exclusions (dismissal or withdrawal) from school, arrangements should be made between schools to ensure the transfer of these students to an available school of their choice. This transfer should be done in collaboration with the parents and department of social welfare in Ghana. This is specifically significant to deal with school-based challenges facing the students.

The role of other stakeholders such as parents in the making of decisions regarding the students in the school is critical (Whitty, 2008). Also, multiagency work permits "more than one agency working with a young person, with a family or on a project" (Lloyd, Stead, & Kendrick, 2001, p. 3). Parents' engagement with the school regarding the behavior of the student will ensure that the needed support is provided to the student (Kane, 2011).

Locally available support to help maintain students in school and increasing high self-esteem of students (see Parsons, 1999): Several alternatives to school exclusion within the school exist to reduce this menace (Parsons, 1999). Drawing on Hemphill and Hargreaves (2009), behavioral contracts stating the conditions under which a student can stay in school, when the situation demands she or he should be excluded, is one of the alternatives. Some of the terms of the conditions could include terms such as training on anger management for school staff, taking away some student privileges such as not allowing the student to participate in any desired activity, and any other relevant assistance that can allow the student to continue his academic opportunities.

The nature of school punishment in Ghanaian high schools as of now affects what Lawrence (2006) describes as

“self-concept” (p. 2): ideal self, self-image, and self-esteem. Therefore, the school should seek to increase the self-esteem of the student.

Other Alternatives

Limited restorative justice approach (see Gonzalez, 2012; Morrison, & Vaandering, 2012; Vaandering, 2014): In this instance, the focus is on peer mediation and issues of conflict resolution. All the students interviewed as part of this study called for their involvement in decision making. Included in this are empathizing with students and maintaining good relationship between students and school staff.

Limiting the powers of exclusion of school management: The power of the head teacher to exclude students from school should be limited to 1 day as it is the case in some parts of Austria (Munn, Lloyd, & Cullen, 2000), and 1 week in the case of sanctioned punishment by board of governors as it is the case in Austria. In Finland, the duration for exclusion is 1 month minimum and maximum 3 months. The decision regarding this exclusion is made by the board (Munn et al., 2000). Also, in Britain, head teachers can arrange to exchange or host students who are perceived to be having challenging behaviors. These kinds of behaviors could also be referred to the special day or residential provision for excluded students, as it is the case in England (Munn et al., 2000). This article argues that indefinite exclusion should be abolished in Ghanaian schools backed by policy.

Appraisal of the Study and Further Research

The study revealed widespread student exclusion issues in Ghanaian high schools, which potentially can affect student inclusion and participation in teaching and learning activities. These revelations direct the attention of Ghanaian government and the other stakeholders in education to the various alternatives of dealing with truancy in Ghanaian high schools. This article also highlights the need for Ghanaian government and schools to demonstrate their willingness to be responsive to the rights and self-esteem of Ghanaian students. This kind of demand is in keeping with the United Nations ratified conventions and treaties such as the UN (2016) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; see Goals 4.1 and 4.a), Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989; see Article 28 (2)), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948).

The study is also clothed with some limitations. These limitations are as follows: The study did not take into considerations perspectives of other stakeholders in education such as the parents, workers of other state agencies such as social welfare department, metropolitan/municipal/district assemblies, and so forth. It is arguable that the perspectives of these stakeholders might not be consistent with the views expressed by school management, teachers, and students, but would be

valuable in minimizing the rampant exclusion issues in Ghanaian SHSs. In this instance, further research could seek to illicit the views of these significant stakeholders on student exclusion in Ghanaian SHSs. Further research could also examine CPD courses that can support teacher professional development to minimize these exclusions. In addition, further studies could investigate the impact of exclusion on crime rates in Ghana.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this article argues that a balance between the need to have a well-disciplined school and the rights or welfare of the students should be established. The policy and practices of these schools should not seek to exclude the same people they seek to educate. Alternatives to school disciplinary exclusion such as those provided in this issue are available to prevent such exclusions. The GES/schools in collaboration with other stakeholders (including state agencies) such as the social welfare department, Parent Teacher Associations, school boards, and the metropolitan/municipal/district assemblies in Ghana should help provide the alternatives as contained in this article. The article interprets the rampant permanent exclusions in Ghanaian schools to mean an indication of schools' inability to meet the rights of Ghanaian young students' education.

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