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LINKING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND TRANSFORMATION OF LIVES: A CASE OF KAKAMEGA COUNTY KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Education is one of the roadmap to ensure implementation of SDGs and the Kenyan Vision 2030. Goal 4 of SDGs ensures inclusive and equitable quality of education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In respect to the goal the education system in Kenya has undergone considerable changes since the introduction of Universal Free Primary Education in 2003 and free secondary education in 2008 as a way of implementing inclusive education. The Ministry of Education also has a special needs education policy that is intended to improve the quality and access to education for children with special needs. Despite this Kenyan government commitment to inclusive education in its quest to provide basic education to all school going age children, the access and retention rates of learners said to have special educational needs in schools is still very low compared to other African countries. It was due to this trend that the researcher was set to establish teachers' attitude regarding inclusive education in public inclusive primary schools in Kakamega County. The research employed a descriptive survey research design using interview guides to get data from 22 class teachers in public inclusive primary schools. Findings indicated that many teachers lack a repertoire of learning and teaching strategies appropriate for addressing barriers to learning and providing individualized approaches in the classrooms. Some teachers were positive about teaching children said to have SEN but lacked the infrastructure of support and guidance and some expressed that the concept of inclusive education is not to be enabling. The study recommends all primary school teachers to have more training in the area of special education to help them develop strategies which are responsive to the identified learning difficulties of learners with disabilities.

Keywords: *Disabilities, development, Inclusive education, Transformation of life*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion in the context of education is the practice, in which students with special educational needs spend most or all of their time with non-disabled students. UNESCO (2001) developed a policy of inclusion for the disabled into the system of education by stating the following: Inclusive education starts from the belief that the right to education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more

just society. Inclusive education takes the Education for All (EFA) agenda forward by finding ways of enabling schools to serve all children in their communities as part of an inclusive education system.

Inclusive education is concerned with all learners, with a focus on those who have traditionally been excluded from educational opportunities such as learners with special needs and disabilities, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities. Inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the child and to reject the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. A premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil, and educational rights. Inclusive schools no longer distinguish between "general education" and "special education" programs; instead, the school is restructured so that all students learn together (UNESCO, 2006). All students can learn and benefit from education and schools should adapt to the needs of students, rather than students adapting to the needs of the school. Individual differences between students are a source of richness and diversity and not a problem. The diversity of needs and pace of development of students are addressed through wide and flexible responses so long as those responses do not include removing a student with a disability from a general education classroom. (Wanzare, 2002).

In Kenya, paradigm shift to inclusive education was initiated through a number of key documents including: sessional papers, circulars, reports and different task forces working towards specific aspects in education. The first document was universal free primary education by the ruling party by then KANU Manifesto (1963), followed by the Education Act (1968) – Cap 211 (revised in 1980) which stated that nobody would be refused admission or excluded from school on the any grounds (MoE, 2009, p.15). That was the first time inclusive education policy was mentioned in Kenyan schools. More reports and commissions were included in education but this study will only mention those related to inclusive education. Among them were; the Kenya Education Commission commonly known as Ominde-Commission (Republic of Kenya, 1964).The Commission resulted in Sessional Paper No. 5 of 1965 which expressed education as an economic venture rather than a social service creating equal economic opportunities for all citizens (Republic of Kenya, 1965b). However, this was considered as segregating those who may be unable to work due to disabilities. Then another committees++, the Committee on Care and Rehabilitation of the Disabled, Ngala Mwendwa (1964) was formed. The Ngala Mwendwa committee resulted in the formulation of Sessional Paper No.5 of 1968 whose recommendations were implemented in the early 1980s' when the government started to pay increased attention in the field of SNE. The first draft of SNE policy was recommended. Later the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies (NCEOP), the Gachathi Report (1976), focused on co-ordination of early intervention and assessment of children said to have SEN, creation of public awareness on causes of disabilities in order to promote prevention measures and research on the nature and extent of 'handicaps' for provision for these children. This is still an issue to date. That is why the research seeks to establish effectiveness in implementing inclusive education policy on learners' academic achievements.

Later, a number of commissions of inquiry into the Education System in Kenya, such as Koech Commission Report recommendations were accepted. The Koech Commission led to the setting up of the Kochung Report (2003). The Kochung Report (2003) was set to examine the challenges individuals with SEN face. This report led to the launching of the SNE draft policy and eventual launch of the SNE policy in 2009.The recommendations provided by the Gachathi Report in 1976 set good grounds and pace for SNE where parents and other people would understand the issue of disability; this still stands as an issue to be dealt with to date. This research established teachers' perception of inclusive education policy.

The Kenya Special Needs Education (SNE) Policy Framework has 15 objectives (MoE, 2009). The SNE policy objectives that are in line with this study are; inclusive education and Capacity building and development. The inclusive education objective aims at increasing enrolment and promoting values which enhance access to education and retention of learners with special needs and disabilities in all learning institutions. The capacity building and development objective is to facilitate provision of effective and efficient professional and support services to learners with special needs and disabilities

in institutions of learning or training (Kenya SNE Policy, MoE, 2009 p10). The stakeholders in this inclusive policy are given as the Minister and Permanent Secretary Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) representatives from; Non-Governmental Organizations', faith and community-based organizations', private sector service providers, members of parliament and union representatives (Kenya SNE Policy, MoE, 2009 p.10 and KESSP, 2005). Kenya Institute of Special Education officials, head teachers and teachers and parents are not mentioned. That is why the researcher is interested in teachers' perceptions of inclusive education policy. Teachers are major translators of inclusive policy into practice in schools.

The Government is committed to provision of inclusive education to all children. It emphasizes inclusive education with particular focus to marginalized groups, especially children with special needs and disabilities. For instance, the Kenyan government has put policies and provisions in place to guide through the implementation of inclusive education. However, the extent to which whether this program of inclusivity has borne results, is still a bone of contention. The teacher training has been identified as one of the key factors in the Promotion of inclusive education (Mwangi, 2013).

The MoE reports indicates that teachers have been trained to adequately assist learners with SEN. The training has either been through pre-service or in-service training where teachers achieve degrees, diplomas and certificates qualifications in either general education or both general and special education from various learning institutions such as Kenyatta, Nairobi, Moi, Maseno and Methodist universities (MoE, 2008). Further, Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) offers training in special education to practicing teachers (Wango, 2011). However, the access and retention rates of learners with SEN in public inclusive primary schools is still very low compared to other African countries. The situation is alarming in Kakamega County where some learners with SEN cannot access and participate in free inclusive primary education. Through the researcher's own experience as a primary school teacher in Kakamega County, it is observed that many learners with SEN drop out of school or experience learned helplessness in schools annually.

Reports indicate that despite the Free Primary Education (FPE) to enhance inclusive education, there is an increase in primary school dropout rates (MoEST, 2012). The MoEST (2015) report also indicates that the enrolment of disabled learners at lower classes is usually 1.5 % that of the entire school enrolment. However, more than ½ % of the disabled learners do not sit for Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) or if they sit KCPE their scores are always below average. Records at the Kakamega County Assessment and Resource Centre (EARC) show that a very small number of learners with disabilities have been assessed and placed in inclusive primary schools yet they are never retained in schools to complete the primary education cycle. The purpose of this study was to assess the perception of teachers regarding inclusive education on learners' academic achievements in public inclusive primary schools in Kakamega County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The study will employed a descriptive survey research design. Data was collected by interviewing respondents to get information about people's attitudes, opinions, and habits concerning inclusive education. Descriptive survey design is an efficient method for collecting data regarding characteristics of the population and current practices, conditions and needs. It is used to explain or explore existing status of two or more variables at a given point in time (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). It was on this basis that the design was adopted to examine the effectiveness in implementing inclusive education policy on learners' academic achievement in Kakamega County, Kenya. Guided by survey design, the study gathered facts, knowledge, opinions and judgment from teachers, deputy head teachers, pupils and education officer, on how they view and implement inclusive education in regard to learners' academic achievement in Public primary schools. The study was conducted in primary schools of Kakamega County. The County is made up of 12 sub-Counties namely Mumias, Matungu, Kakamega Central, Navakholo, Khwisero, Butere, Kakamega North, Kakamega South, Kakamega East, Likuyani, Lugari and Matete. The region is located between 1° 15' North and 0° 3' West longitude and to the East 35° 12' East longitude (ROK, 2003). The total area of the County is about 3,244.9 SQ KM² (ROK, 2003). This area is about 1.4% of the total area of Kenya. The county has a population of 1,660,651

people as per the 2009 population census (ROK, 2010). This presents 11.23%, of the total Kenyan population. The average population density is 515 persons per km². The population growth has fluctuated between 3.4 in 1969 and 0.3 in 2014 (Rok, 2015). Unfortunately 57% of the population live below the poverty line. The study employed questionnaires, focus group discussion, interview schedule and document analysis guide to collect data. Focused group discussion collected information from learners said to have special needs in inclusive public primary schools. This instrument consisted of closed and open items. The FGD had seven pupils from class seven who were involved in the discussion collectively. The discussion was guided among participating members with the researcher who acted as a facilitator. The teacher's interview comprised of researcher made 10 items cutting across the study objectives

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Some teachers revealed that with adequate resources and facilities, learners with disabilities are very talented and some of them perform extremely well even with the limited resources. Inclusive education therefore creates a competitive environment favorable for learning to take place, it enables learners to appreciate each other's shortcomings as well as talents and they use that opportunity to learn from each other. This confers to co-operative teaching and learning which has been found to be effective in improving the time students spend on learning tasks, minimizes classroom behaviour problems, and improves academic and reading performance and learning rate (Meijer, 2004).

Findings indicated that many of them lack a repertoire of learning and teaching strategies appropriate for addressing barriers to learning and providing individualized approaches in the classrooms. Some teachers were positive about teaching children said to have SEN but lacked the infrastructure of support and guidance and some expressed that the concept of inclusive education is not enabling. The finding concur with Ferguson (2008) who asserted that attitudes are closely linked to teachers' strategies for coping with challenges in their daily professional lives. Research from different countries show how several factors contribute to the effectiveness of special education in inclusive settings. Some of these factors range from the nature of the disability (Hodkinson, 2009; Corbett, 2001; Moses, 2000, Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1996), children's behaviour (OFSTED (UK), 2004) and extreme behavioural difficulties (MacBeath and Galton, 2007). Avramidis and Norwich (2002) highlight that teacher's favour the inclusion of children with mild physical and sensory impairments rather than those with learning difficulties, severe disabilities and autistic spectrum disorder.

From interviews most of the teachers again seemed against inclusive education not because they don't want disabled children to get education, but because of the nature of work involved. According to them, inclusive environment require adequate resources in terms of playing materials, teaching and learning materials and even classrooms that are designed to accommodate learners with disabilities. Some teachers made an opinion that their workload be reduced for them to be effectively engaged with learners with disabilities. This was earlier observed that the effectiveness in implementing inclusive education may be at risk if regular classroom teachers hold negative perceptions toward the inclusion of students with disabilities (Van Reusen et al., 2001). Negative perceptions of inclusive education may become obstacles, as general education teachers attempt to include students with disabilities (Baker-Kroczyński, 2002). This study also agrees to the one done by KENPRO (2010), apart from teachers' negative beliefs about inclusion and concern for their professional competency to practice inclusive education, the issue of resources affected the both teachers those trained in special education and those with regular training. Resource issues included the physical such as inaccessible classrooms to learners in a wheel chair, overcrowded classrooms; materials such as Braille and large prints and toilet facilities.

The study also revealed that few learners discriminate their colleagues who are disabled. This situation is noted through playing, sitting positions in class, leaving and in any company as well as in group work discussion. However, with some teachers being observant and educative, they address the issue through guidance and counselling sessions. From literature reviewed it was established that teachers are perceived to be integral to the implementation of inclusive education (Haskell, 2000). Research communicates the view that teachers are the key to the success of inclusionary programs (Cant, 1994), as they are viewed as linchpins in the process of including students with disabilities into regular classes

(Stewart, 1983; Whiting and Young, 1995). Other studies acknowledge that inclusive education can only be successful if teachers are part of the team driving this process (Long, 2001). The deputy head teachers gave their responses by responding to 7 items related to this study. Their findings are as follows (Table 1).

From the table it is clearly indicated that the respondents advocate for inclusive education since it promotes socialization among learners. The finding was also confirmed earlier that activity learning, different seating arrangements and mixed ability groups, group work based on interests, friendships, trust, strengths and support (Florian and Linklater, 2010). The respondents also concurred with teachers who echoed that inclusive education policy has increased enrolment in the school however the learners with disabilities never complete the primary education cycle.

Table 1: Responses by the deputy head teachers

STATEMENT	SA	A	U	D	SD
Inclusive education promotes socialization among learners	6	2	0	0	0
Inclusive education policy has increased enrolment in the school	8	0	0	0	0
Teachers of learners with special needs should have social training	8	0	0	0	0
Learners with special needs transit from lower primary through class eight	0	1	0	6	1
Learners said to have special needs improve in their academic achievements	0	2	0	2	4
Teachers in inclusive schools support children said to have special needs in classes to meet their learning needs	2	3	0	3	0
Learners said to have special needs should have their own special schools as teachers	0	0	0	4	4

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education promotes equality among learners. Learners in an inclusive environment appreciate each other's ability. Furthermore, an inclusive environment promotes socialization, one's self-esteem, confidence and sense of belonging particularly to learners with disability. However, for inclusive education to be effective and attain SDG, there is a need for the government to ensure that human resources and facilities necessary for the program are adequate to support inclusive education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the above findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

- (i) The study recommends all primary school teachers to have more training in the area of special education to help them develop strategies which are responsive to the identified learning difficulties of learners with disabilities.
- (ii) There is a need for the government, school management and other stakeholders to invent ways in which they can provide resources to cater for the inclusive practices.
- (iii) Teachers being main implementers of effective inclusive education, there is a need for the government to include special education training in teachers training colleges and facilitate teachers to go for in-service trainings to improve their skills, and increase their knowledge of inclusivity. Furthermore, it will boost teachers' morale, teaching strategies in providing quality services. In-service training is also important to enable teachers to adapt to the dynamic disabilities among learners.

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