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USAGE OF SELECTED RESOURCES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MAINSTREAM PRIMARY SCHOOLS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FROM A KENYAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study assessed the effectiveness of the use of selected teaching/learning resources in the implementation of Inclusive Education (I.E) for Special Needs Education (SNE) learners in mainstream primary schools. Focusing on the organisational effectiveness of the school management in meeting the needs of Special needs Learners, research questions explored the following: the availability of the selected teaching/learning resources, effectiveness of the use of available teaching /learning for Inclusive Education, challenges in the use of available teaching/learning resources and possible improvements with regard to the implementation of Inclusive Education for Special Needs Learners in mainstream primary schools. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Out of 150 schools that had integrated Special Needs Learners in Bungoma Count, Kenya, 20% were stratified, proportionately and randomly sampled. Purposive sampling was used to obtain the participants; head teachers, regular, and special teachers. The sample comprised of 30 head teachers, 120 regular teachers and 8 special teachers (total 158). Data were collected using questionnaires for 30 head teachers, 120 regular teachers, interview schedules for 8 special teachers and observation schedule. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study findings reveal that the integration of inclusive education has not been accompanied by support structures; educators lack the knowledge in handling the available resources, the available learning resources are inadequate and inappropriate. The study recommends that Ministry of education and school managers can implement inclusion smoothly and effectively through a variety of vehicles including in-service opportunities, professional support groups, mentoring activities, monitoring the degree of collaboration between general and special educators and improving the school setting to accommodate learner diversity. In addition, the government should improve on funding to cater for facilities and modification of structures.
Key words: *inclusive education, special needs learners, teaching/learning resources.*

Introduction

Globally, education systems were constructed to include some children and not others. In the past, this differentiation meant that some children because of individual deficits could not cope within the ordinary educational system (UNESCO, 1993). However, World Education Forum in Dakar Senegal established the new Millenium Development Goals of providing every girl

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and boy with the primary school education by 2015 and assessing progress towards Education for All (EFA) since Jomtien. EFA also identified Inclusive education as one of the key strategies to address issues of marginalization and exclusion. The government of Kenya has been implementing measures to improve participation of Special Needs Learners in Mainstream Primary schools. Under Free Primary initiative, capitation grants are provided to the special needs learners to begin removing existing barriers that make the school environment unfriendly. Despite this effort by the government access to education by those with special needs remains limited as contended by Njoka et al (2012) in their study of equitable basic education in Kenya, found out that special needs education had not been given adequate attention and that only 39 out 96 schools sampled were implementing Special needs Interventions. It is to this effect that this study sought to explore the effective use of selected teaching/learning resources as an intervention to improve the inclusive practices in mainstream schools in Kenya. According to a study by Margaritoiu (2010), the availability and utilization of resources in an inclusive school sets the pace for the improvement of practical conditions for inclusion. The resources also enhance the learning and teaching experienced by all students, regardless of circumstances. Resources in this study will include the school infrastructure, Assistive equipment, material, knowledge and skills teachers have acquired, through training and experience. All these resources can be drawn upon when dealing with differences in the school and classroom environment. However, it has been argued that problems faced by teachers are mainly practical and therefore teachers look for answers that can be applied in the very near future (Meijer, 2003).

Children with disabilities must be given maximum learning opportunities and school must be developed in a way that foster easy access to classroom resource rooms, playing fields and more so the toilets and the library. Glassgow and Hicks (2005) argued that the biggest barrier that one could find in inclusive schools is one that does not accommodate children with disabilities but rather rejects them. The implication would be that inclusive settings in classroom organization, path access-ways and other school facilities must be accessible by children with disabilities to foster learning. Rombo (2007) referred to school environment to what was going on in the schools/classroom contacts. This is explained in reference to school architecture and disability conditions that would dictate the way the school environment would be organized. These indicated the way movement and mobility was fastened inside and outside classrooms or entire school setting. The space accommodates children with different physical impairment conditions, in particular, those with wheelchairs, craters or callipers. Rombo, therefore, suggested that the issue of spacing is closely associated with children's safety particularly for children with impairments such as learning, vision and those with physical disabilities. From her study, a notable issue was that frustration stress and anxiety was created. The implication of this finding shows that organization of the school environment is significant to the creation of the inclusive settings (Mpya, 2007). Therefore accessibility of the school environment is a school resource that can enhance enrolment of the challenged learners. According to Rombo (2007), provision should be made for children with disabilities to have an open access to facilities and premises. This is in accordance with the Kenyan Disability Act of 2003 (section 21), where persons with disabilities are entitled to a barrier–free and disability–friendly environment to enable them to have access to buildings. Gronlund, Lim and Larsson (2010) articulated that Inclusive Education requires support of both equipment and skills, though resources required to cater for disabilities can be expensive and scarce. They further acknowledge that these equipments are not used at all in mainstream schools because children with disabilities are contested and hence their effort is mainly identifying these children and making them go to special schools. In a study by Valeo (2008) found out that inclusive education programme could be successfully implemented if the level of the teaching competence was increased. The opportunities to attend courses that are related to inclusive education programme have to be created. In addition, Manisah, Mustapha and Zalizan (2006) noted that exposure to inclusive education is important

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in order for teachers to understand the form of education programme as well as understanding their role in implementing inclusive education, on the other hand Margaritoiu (2010) argued that teachers of inclusive school reported that they were ill prepared when they entered the professional arena, although they had sufficient subject knowledge, it was felt that they needed more generic teaching skills necessary for teaching diverse population, i.e., teaching strategies, differentiating curriculum, managing challenging behaviours. However, adjustments towards the pedagogical aspects can be trained internally by experienced teachers to the regular or new teachers through collaborative teaching between mainstream and special together indirectly. Therefore, reinforce a cooperative spirit in implementing inclusive education in mainstream primary schools (Tomlison, 2005). New Brunswick Association for Community living (2007) identified lack of knowledge and skill as a systematic barrier to the implementation of inclusive education. It is argued that lack of adequate pre service training particularly for the Anglophone teacher, is the reason for the barrier. Hence, the issue has been known for some time and therefore correcting it will require the effort of the department of education to overcome what would be considered the recalcitrance of some faculties of education.

Mainstream schools in Kenya have to ensure children with disabilities have to be accommodated making their environment barrier free. Whilst realising inclusion of these pupils in mainstream education, teachers need to try and enhance the level of resources and differentiate between pupils with respect to the amount and type of resources available to them.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

The study was exploratory in nature. This is best when used to discover ideas and insights. The method yields useful information concerning the nature of a phenomenon (Cohen et al, 2000) the study adapted a survey study design that helped to obtain pertinent and precise information concerning the current phenomena. This design was considered appropriate to collect information, gather opinions and record attitudes from head teachers and teachers regarding the use of selected teaching/learning resources available in relation to the implementation of inclusive education for Special Needs Learners in Mainstream primary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya. The approach of the study was more of qualitative than quantitative as the ultimate concern was to probe into the various unexplored dimensions of a phenomenon rather than establishing specific relationship among the components. The study was carried out in Bungoma County as it seemed to have a record of more special needs programs compared to other Counties in the Western region of Kenya.

Sample Selection

The target population for the study was public primary schools that had integrated learners with special needs in Kenya from (Bungoma County) of the Western region, Out of 150 schools, 20% were stratified, randomly and proportionately sampled within the 8 administrative districts of the county basing on Gay (1992) who considers the percentage as minimum for smaller samples. The schools were stratified according to the 8 administrative districts and proportionately randomly selected according to the number of the schools in each district. This procedure brought on board 30 schools for the study. The participants in this study were purposively sampled. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique that allows a researcher to use respondents that have the required information with respect to the objectives of the study (Cohen et al, 2000). The participants included: Head teachers, as they are in charge of the implementation of inclusive education programme, class teachers of lower primary (standard 1-4). Crite-

rion sampling was used to select 8 special teachers in charge of resource rooms representing 8 administrative districts of the county using the results of the survey. The technique sets forth a criteria before selecting the participants (Creswell, 1998). This method was useful for identifying cases from a standardized questionnaire. The selection of schools depended on the results from the questionnaire data with maximal variations in responses to variables in the study.

Instrument and Procedure

The instruments used in the study included questionnaires, observation and interview schedules. Two questionnaires were developed, one for the head teachers and the other for regular teachers. The questionnaire was used in part one to generate data on the background of head teachers and teachers, part two was filled by head teachers only on the category and population of Special Needs Learners, part three was meant for both head teachers and regular teachers on statements relating to effective use of teaching and learning resources, where rating was to be made indicating the respondents' perceptions of how the use of teaching/learning resources for special needs learners ought to be (desired) on the right hand side. While on the left hand side rating showed respondents' perceptions of what there is (actual practice) on the ground on the use of teaching/learning resources for special needs learners. The participants indicated the degree of actual practice demonstrated on a liker slanting five point scale with the highest point '5'representing frequent demonstrations of specific practice while '1' representing non-demonstration or absence of a specific practice. Finally part four of the questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions for both the head teachers and regular teachers to allow the participants give their free opinion on challenges and way forward pertaining to the use of teaching/learning resources in the implementation of inclusive education for special needs learners.

An observation checklist was used to determine the availability of instructional resources, both material and equipment and physical structures; accessibility of classrooms fields and toilets.

Face to face interview was held with special teachers. This provided for qualitative and in-depth explanation of the results of the questionnaires. The interview focused on the availability of teaching/learning resources, how the school set up has been designed to accommodate special needs learners especially those with physical impairments, the extent to which the regular teachers were using the available teaching/learning resources, the challenges and general advice to the Ministry of education, school managers and teachers regarding the implementation of inclusive education.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done both quantitatively and qualitatively. For quantitative data, descriptive statistics for the questionnaires and observation schedule items were summarized in the text and reported in tabular form. Frequency analysis was conducted to identify valid response percentages for all questions in the survey. The results were tabulated and summarized in tables. For qualitative data, the text obtained through the interview was analyzed thematically. The tables and descriptions were for three categories of participants. These were head teachers, regular teachers and special teachers. The responses were grouped under the following themes:

   i.   The availability of selected teaching/learning resources for special needs learners in mainstream primary schools.

   ii.   Effective use of teaching/learning resources for special needs learners in mainstream primary schools.

iii.   Challenges encountered in the use of available teaching and learning resources for special needs learners in mainstream primary schools.

iv.   Opportunities for improving the use of teaching/learning resources for special needs learners in mainstream primary schools.

In each table, the percentages were computed and then used in detail analysis in chapter four alongside the description of the interviewees' responses. The five point Likert scale was used to establish the perceptions of both head teachers and regular teachers towards the use of teaching/learning resources.

Results of Research

*Availability of Selected Teaching /Learning Resources for Special Needs
Learners in Mainstream Primary Schools*

Provision of instructional materials, assistive equipments and organisation of the school environment is essential for improvement of practical conditions of inclusion. The study examined the availability of the resources and organisation of the school environment. Only 6 (20%) of the schools had books for Special Needs learners compared to 24 (80%) of the schools that had none. A few of the schools 9 (30%) had spacious classroom while most of the schools 21 (70%) did not have spacious classrooms. Only 6 (20%) of the schools in the study population had special desks for learners with physical impairments compared 24 (80%) of the schools that had none. A paltry of the schools 7 (23.3%) had designed fields that were accessible while most 23 (76.7%) remained unfriendly to the physically impaired learners. A few 5 (16.7%) of the schools had school buildings with ramps while most 25 (83.3%) of the school buildings had stair cases that remained restrictive to learners with special needs.

In the interview with special teachers confirmed that the available resources were inadequate as the head teachers rarely made considerations in purchasing special needs requirements despite the government's capitation made to these schools. The special teachers observed that head teachers have not taken the integration of special needs learners seriously as most of the requests they make in favour of special needs learners are normally treated as not urgent. This can be attributed to negative attitudes emanating from a lack of training in special needs education that was evident in their demographic data that revealed none of the head teachers in the sample population had the training in special needs education.

*Effective Use of Teaching/Learning Resources for Special Needs
Learners in Mainstream Primary Schools*

A comparison of the results from 30 head teachers and 120 teachers revealed that a majority of the head teachers had complete contradicting perceptions on nine indicators of effective use of teaching/learning resources except item number seven concerning the school having protective measures for safety of Special Needs learners where both the head teachers 17 (56.7%) teachers and teachers 58 (48.4%) disagreed that the school had protective safety measures for special needs learners. This may imply that most of the schools lacked policy guidelines in enhancing safety of Special needs learners in mainstream schools. However, on the remaining nine indicators, wherever teachers agreed on the item, head teachers disagreed and vice versa. The head teachers seemed to perceive that the problem with the use of teaching and learning resources for Special needs learners has to do with the incompetency of teachers and not necessarily the inadequacy and inappropriateness of the resources available in the

schools. But, on the other hand, teachers' results showed that the problem with the use of teaching and learning resources was due to the inadequacy cited by 69 (57.5%) of the teachers and inappropriateness cited by 95 (79.2%) of the same teachers. The teachers ruled out the problem emanating from their incompetency.

Interview with special teachers confirmed the results of the head teachers indicating that the teachers lacked the knowledge and skills to handle the resources. Most of the special teachers observed that regular teachers were indifferent towards the use of Special education materials because they felt it was not part of their responsibility. One of the participants noted that even when they volunteered to assist the regular teachers, they always had excuses not to participate. When the special teachers were also asked whether in their considered opinion the learning resources improved the SNE learners academically, half of the participants, 4 (50%), were affirmative, while the remaining half, 4 (50%), were negative. The findings imply that the use of available resources had fetched minimal results in improving Special Needs Learners academically. However, most of the participants, 6 (75%), admitted that there was a substantial improvement in the social skills. Most of them noted increased interaction of these learners with their peers.

*Challenges Encountered in the Use of Available Teaching and Learning
Resources for Special Needs Learners in Mainstream Primary Schools*

The findings revealed inadequate resources as the main constraint inhibiting the implementation of inclusive education for Special Needs Learners cited by a majority 14 (46.7%) of the head teachers and 42 (35.2%) of the teacher participants. Lack of technical skills was cited second by 10 (33.3%) of the head teachers and majority 48 (39.2%) of the teachers while lack of storage facilities was cited by a few 6 (20%) of the head teachers and 30 (25%) of the teacher participants. The findings seem to agree with Gronland, Lim and Larsson (2010) who articulates that Inclusive Education requires support of both equipment and skills to cater for diverse needs of learners.

Interview with the special teachers confirmed that the resources available were inadequate and that regular teachers lacked the capacity and confidence to handle the resources. They affirmed that the head teachers were negative in spearheading a collaboration between the special teachers and regular teachers. The participants observed that some of the resources were inappropriate because the head teachers do not consult them while acquiring or modifying the school structures. One of the participants noted that the toilets for the physically impaired learners were constructed without the technical advice from the specialists.

*Opportunities for Improving the Use of Teaching/Learning Resources for
Special Needs Learners in Mainstream Primary Schools*

The findings showed improved government funding proposed by 16 (53.3%) head teachers was rated as a first solution and teachers 58 (48.3%) to the constraints mentioned earlier, while training of teachers to equip them with required skills was rated second by 10 (33.3%) of the head teachers, while the teachers 46 (38.3%) felt that establishing resource centres was more crucial than capacity building. These findings stand to agree with a study by Epari (2005) who indicated that funds received from the Free Primary Education kit for primary schools were not adequate to cater for SNE learners.

Interview with the special teachers revealed that improved funding was essential however; one of them noted that mechanisms should be put in place so that funds made for special education should not be directed to other departments. A few 3 (37.5%) of participants affirmed that the school administration should collaborate with school sponsors to assist in acquiring

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some of the assistive equipments. One of the participants observed that their school had a close link with the Association of Physically Disabled that donated some of the wheelchairs to their learners. Most of them 6 (75%) noted that the enhancement of collaboration between special teachers and regular teachers would improve the use of teaching/learning resources for special needs learners.

Discussion

Most of the mainstream primary schools did not score highly in terms of effective use of teaching and learning resources. The findings showed that the teaching/learning materials, assistive technologies were inadequate and even those that were available proved to be inappropriate as cited by most participants 95 (79.2%). The teachers in these schools were not competent to handle the available resources. The findings negate what Margaritoiu (2010) points out: that the availability and utilization of resources in an inclusive school sets the pace for improvement of practical conditions of inclusion. The findings revealed discrepancies between head teachers and teachers on the use of teaching and learning resources. This means there is a serious vacuum in relation to what inclusive education means and how it should work in general education settings

These findings strongly imply that Special Needs Learners are unsafe (insecure), their learning environment is very restrictive evidenced by lack of adequate and inappropriate resources. The accessibility of the school environment is a school resource that can enhance enrolment of Special Needs Learners and therefore a significant creation of the inclusive. These findings are in accordance with Glasgow and Hicks (2005) who noted that the biggest barrier that Special Needs learners find in inclusive schools is one that does not accommodate children with disabilities, but excludes them. The findings seem to point out that the schools had inadequate resources and fewer resources available were inappropriate and, therefore, could not be effectively used. The findings may also imply that lack of policies that guide use of the resources in relation to special education in mainstream schools could be an impediment in the implementation of inclusive education.

Lack of collaboration between special teachers and regular teachers may imply that the school administrators have not provided time and guidelines. This could due to the negative attitude they have towards inclusion as well as lack of training background in special education. These findings are in tandem with Engelbrecht et al (2005) who asserted that educators who lack training in features that make inclusive education work contributes to their laxity in implementing inclusive the results of education.

Conclusions

The Ministry of Education should provide school administrators and educators with support structures and training in features that make inclusive education work. The school managers and educators' lack of knowledge and skills has slackened the inclusive process. This calls for all teacher training colleges to incorporate special education into their syllabuses. The school managers should coordinate and enhance collaboration between special teachers and regular teachers for effective use of teaching/learning resources. The Provision of adequate and appropriate teaching and learning resources may not be enough for successful inclusion, but the techniques to utilize and maintain these resources in general educational settings may achieve desired results. Furthermore, the ministry of education should put measures in place to control the use of capitation meant for special education in mainstream schools. School managers should enhance linkages with professional groups, special schools, development partners and other stakeholders for the purpose of acquiring facilities/books and improve the infrastructure.

Finally, if the management of the mainstream schools can effectively manage and use teaching/ learning resources for special needs education, then implementation of inclusive education will be realised in Kenya.

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