

Inclusive Teaching-Learning Strategies to Meet Academic Needs of Learners with Special Needs in Kenya (A Case of Kakamega East Sub-county)

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ABSTRACT

The national education system has been characterised by inadequate educational management practices and facilities that do not respond well to the challenges faced by Learners with Special Needs (LWSNs). These learners are gradually and deliberately pushed out of the school system because schools are not sensitive to their learning styles and background. The purpose of this study was therefore to assess the extent to which inclusive teaching-learning strategies were employed to meet academic needs of learners with special needs in public primary schools in Kakamega East Sub-county. The study objective was to; determine the extent to which the teaching and learning strategies were employed to meet the academic needs of learners with special needs in primary schools. The study was based on the theory of Normalisation and it made use of the descriptive survey research design. The target population was 90 head teachers, 999 teachers and one Educational Assessment and Resource Centre (EARC) coordinator. The schools were stratified according to zones and simple random sampling was used to select, 18 head teachers and 200 teachers, while the EARC coordinator was selected by the purposive sampling technique. Instruments for data collection were the questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis. Content validity was used to determine the validity of the research instruments while the test-retest method was used to test reliability using the Pearson Product moment of correlation coefficient (r) value. Data was then analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics and the results were presented in form of frequency tables. The research findings revealed that teachers lack relevant skills to meet the academic needs of LWSNs and they rarely address learners' needs through the individualised education programmes (IEP). The researcher recommended that regular inspections should be carried out in schools as a follow up measure of ensuring that inclusive education and its management practices are implemented to the latter. Teachers who are not trained in special needs education (SNE) should be given an opportunity to undergo training so as to equip them with the necessary skills and attitudes towards LWSNs. IEP need to be developed for every learner with specialneeds in learning, learners with special needs need to be involved in class activities.

Key words: Teaching-Learning Strategies, Learners with Special Needs, Special Education

Background to the Study

Benoit (2013), on an overview of the education system in Kenya, indicated that despite all the recommendations sited above, the implementation of inclusive education and its management practices is moving at a very slow pace. This is because the process is hindered by vague guidelines that describe the implementation of an inclusive policy, insufficient data on children with special needs (CWSNs), ineffective assessment tools, curriculum, and a lack of qualified professionals.

The Disability Act of 2003 provides a comprehensive legal framework, which outlaws all forms of discriminative treatment of PWDs. Article 18(1) of this act states that: "No person or learning institution shall deny admission of a person with a disability to any course of study by reason only of such disability, if the person has the ability to acquire substantial learning in that course". This gives an opportunity to PWDs to access education and participate as equal members of society.

On the other hand, the children's Act of 2001 harmonizes all the existing laws and policies on children into one document and aims at improving the well being of all children irrespective of whether they are disabled or not. The Gender Policy on Education of 2001 singles out education for LWSNs, and goes further to stress that the government should provide an enabling environment through flexing the curriculum, providing trained personnel, equipment and facilities and ensuring accommodative physical infrastructure for LWSNs.

Current teachers are the real implementers of inclusive education and its management strategies and as such, they have to be supported and trained continuously. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond

to the diverse needs of their learners, accommodating both different styles of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities (UNESCO, 2006).

Ngugi (2002) noted that, inadequate educational facilities, poor and rigid teaching approaches, overloaded and expensive curriculum, rigid assessment procedures based on mean score competition which does not consider LWSNs are poor teaching and learning strategies that impact negatively on effective implementation of inclusive education and its management practices. Ngugi (2002) therefore further recommended that curriculum diversification, adaptation of examinations and alternative ways of measuring learners' competence are teaching and learning strategies that will promote inclusion in education.

Inadequate resources are yet another factor that impact negatively on the implementation of inclusive education management. Hay et al (2002) emphasized that teacher preparedness for inclusive education depends on the high quality of professional preparation of teachers at pre and in-service level to equip them for and update their knowledge in meeting the needs of a diverse classroom population. Antia et al (2002) noted that Inclusive education also requires close collaboration between regular class teachers and a range of other people that is working in collaboration with other service providers with an aim of addressing the diverse needs of LWSNs.

According to a study by Booth et al (2000) on developing learning and participation in school, the following conditions demonstrate that learning effectively revolves around inclusion and its management practices. These conditions are; Lessons are responsive to learning diversity; Learners are actively involved in their own learning, Learners are taught by other learners during free time, Teachers assist through the individualised education programme, Teachers' expectations are realistic and based on recognition of their strengths and weaknesses, the curriculum, activities, materials and equipment are adapted and modified so as to suit learners' needs and learners are given extra instruction time when necessary.

In addition, Ngugi (2002) noted that, other teaching and learning resources in an inclusive setting include, observation by teachers of preferential sitting arrangement for LWSNs in the classroom setting, teaching/learning activities should focus on the needs of the whole child rather than focusing on measurable out comes, there are adequate assistive devices, LWSNs are given additional time during both internal and external examinations, Parents of LWSNs participate in evaluation and placement decisions for their children and that all learners take part in activities outside the classroom.

Booth et al (2000) further noted that, indicators for mobilising teaching and learning resources include; utilization of Community resources; full exploitation of Staff expertise and using learner differences as a resource for teaching. When attention is paid to learning that is effectively orchestrated, the focus shifts to inclusive measures that move beyond the classroom walls to include the acquisition of learning support materials outside the physical environment of the classroom.

Mobilisation of resources also constitutes of, practitioners, ranging from private medical and paramedical practitioners, such as psychologists and therapists, to primary health care workers employed by NGOs or Disabled People's Organisations. Teachers should aim at making LWSNs realise that they have something unique to offer and which should be seen as a resource in itself.

The implementation of free primary education (FPE) in 2003 which was a move to realize the Millennium Development Goals, led to an influx and inclusion of new categories of LWSNs in public schools apart from the four traditional disability areas. This therefore led to increased demands from parents and teachers and overstretched the ministry's resource. The varying categories of disabilities and the range in

severity in our educational institutions have resulted to emergence of a continued debate on the viability of inclusive education (MOE, 2009).

Statement of the problem

In as much as Kenya is embracing the philosophy of inclusion and even gone further and formulated a national policy framework on SNE, the national education system has been characterised by inadequate educational management structures and facilities that do not respond well to the challenges faced by LWSNs (Ministry Of Education, 2009). In Kakamega East Sub-county, out of the total enrolment of 47,754 learners in public primary schools, 4720 are LWSNs (Education Office - Kakamega East Sub-county, 2014). This is in conformity with the WHO assertion that 10% of a given population comprises Persons With Disabilities. In Kakamega East Sub-county, cases of dropouts, repetition of classes, poor academic performance among learners with special needs, and use of teaching-learning strategies has been reported to be on increase. The rights of these learners to acquire basic education and progress further academically are violated since they are gradually and deliberately pushed out of the school system. It was unknown how the extent to which teaching-learning strategies was employed to meet the academic needs of learners with special needs in Kakamega East sub-county, Kenya.

Therefore, this necessitated the present study on extent to which teaching-learning strategies were employed in public primary schools to meet the academic needs of learners with special needs in Kakamega East sub-county, Kenya.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which teaching-learning strategies were employed in public primary schools to meet the academic needs of learners with special needs in Kakamega East sub-county, Kenya.

Objectives of the Study

The study objectives were to;

1. Determine the extent to which teaching-learning strategies are employed by teachers to meet the academic needs of Learners with special needs in public primary schools in Kakamega East Sub-county, Kenya.

Research Methodology

The study employed descriptive survey research design. The target population was 90 head teachers, 999 teachers and one Educational Assessment and Resource Centre (EARC) coordinator. The schools were stratified according to zones and simple random sampling was used to select, 18 head teachers and 200 teachers, while the EARC coordinator was selected by the purposive sampling technique. Instruments for data collection were the questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis. Content validity was used to determine the validity of the research instruments while the test-re-test method was used to test reliability using the Pearson Product moment of correlation coefficient (r) value. Quantitative data was analysed using both descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages; and inferential statistics such as multiple standard regression and the results were presented in form of frequency tables. Qualitative data was analysed thematically.

Results and Discussion

To find out the teaching and learning strategies put in place by teachers to meet the academic needs of LWSNs in public primary schools, teachers were asked to respond to a 14 item scale ranging from 'not at all' to always. The responses were tabulated in frequency counts and percentages as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Teaching and Learning Strategies

Teaching And Learning Strategies	Not at all f (%)	Rarely f (%)	Often f (%)	Very often f (%)	Always (%)	Mea n	Std
LWSNs have special classes to address their special needs	104(52.0)	28(14.0)	24(12.0)	12(6.0)	32(16.0)	2.2	1.51
LWSNs are taught by other learners during free time	68(34.0)	56(28.0)	28(14.0)	12(6.0)	36(18.0)	2.46	1.46
Teachers have no time to listen to LWSNs and therefore redicle them	100(50.0)	60(30.0)	28(14.0)	12(6.0)	0(0.0)	1.82	1.07
Teachers assist LWSNs through the individualised education programme	52(26.0)	60(30.0)	40(20.0)	24(12.0)	24(12.0)	2.54	1.32
LWSNs are labelled by their teachers and peers	76(38.0)	36(18.0)	52(26.0)	20(10.0)	16(8.0)	2.32	1.29
Teachers' expectations of LWSNs are realistic and based on recognition of their strengths and weaknesses	28(14.0)	40(20.0)	52(26.0)	36(18.0)	44(22.0)	3.14	1.35
The curriculum, activities,materials and equipment are adapted and modified so as to suit learners' needs.	56(28.0)	52(26.0)	36(18.0)	16(8.0)	40(20.0)	2.66	1.47
LWSNs are given extra instruction time when necessary	68(34.0)	48(24.0)	40(20.0)	32(16.0)	12(6.0)	2.36	1.26
The teaching/learning activities focus on the needs of the whole child	60(30.0)	40(20.0)	36(18.0)	36(18.0)	28(14.0)	2.66	1.43
Classroom discipline is based on mutual respect for all learners	28(14.0)	52(26.0)	36(18.0)	28(14.0)	56(28.0)	3.16	1.44
There are adequate assistive devices that are used by LWSNs	104(52.0)	36(18.0)	28(14.0)	24(12.0)	8(4.0)	1.98	1.23
LWSNs are given additional time during both internal and external examinations	60(30.0)	64(32.0)	12(6.0)	24(12.0)	40(20.0)	2.6	1.51
Parents of LWSNs participate in evaluation and placement decisions for their children	64(32.0)	52(26.0)	32(16.0)	28(14.0)	24(12.0)	2.48	1.38

Overall mean and standard deviation

2.49 1.36

From the results in table 1, the overall mean of 2.49 and standard deviation of 1.36 indicates that the teaching/learning strategies are not effective towards the implementation of inclusive education and its management practices. In fact majority of the teachers, 104(52.0%) stated that LWSNs do not at all have special classes to address their special needs.

A good percentage 100(50.0%) also stated that teachers do not at all have time to listen to LWSNs and attend to their needs. The curriculum, activities, materials and equipment are also not at all adapted and modified so as to suit learners' needs as stated by 56(28.0%) of the respondents and supported by 52(26.0%) who found out that they are rarely adapted. These results are not consistent with Ngugi(2002) findings that curriculum diversification, adaptation of examination and alternative ways of measuring learners competence are teaching and learning strategies that will promote inclusion in schools.

The Multiple standard regression, as shown in table 1 revealed that teaching and learning strategies was also a unique predictor of effective management strategies. This implies that effective inclusive education management practices would better be reflected through teaching and learning strategies. The magnitude of the effect was high, ($\beta=.465$, $p<.05$).

The results implied that a great variation in the measurement of the change of management practices into better practices would be caused by a reflection in better teaching and learning strategies. However, management practices were not up to the standards of bringing the students with disabilities into a better class.

The interview schedule with the EARC coordinator revealed that there is lack of improvement as far as the implementation of inclusive education management practices are concerned due to the current teaching learning strategies in our learning institutions.

The EARC noted that,

LWSNs do not benefit academically from our learning institutions full of educational management systems that offer overloaded curriculum which is characterised by rigid assessment procedures based on mean score competition. These are poor strategies that reflect lack of adoption of the required management practices initially put in place. But we are assessing them to find a solution

These results are not in tandem with Ngugi (2002) who recommended that curriculum diversification and adaptation of examinations are teaching and learning strategies that will promote inclusion in education. Instead, the schools still base on mean scores in subject despite rigidity in their curriculum. It is therefore clear that the teaching learning strategies put in place have not been effective.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results indicated that teachers were not supported and trained continuously to implement inclusive education and its management practices and thus the approach they use to accommodate learners with special needs was not an appropriate method. This was reflected by their unpreparedness to listen to learners with special needs, teachers did not have time to listen to them and therefore ridicule them, the teachers did not recognise and respond to the diverse needs of their learners. LWSNs have no special classes to address their special needs as reported by 104 (52.0%) of the teachers. Another aspect of poor

management practices was lack of involvement of parents of Learners with special needs to participate in evaluation and placement decisions for their children. The overall mean of 2.8 and standard deviation of 1.38 indicates that the teaching-learning strategies were not effective towards the implementation of inclusive education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the study recommends that;

For inclusive practices to be effective in teaching-learning strategies, teachers need to involve learners with special needs in class activities, parents be involved in school activities involving learners with special needs, extra time be provided for learners with special needs to complete assignments, an individualised educational programme be developed for learners with special needs in each class. In addition, learners with special needs be taught special subjects such as Braille and Kenya sign language to enhance their communications skills in class. Teachers need to be inserviced how to handle learners with special needs in class.

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