

Barriers To Inclusive Education For Learners With Visual Impairment In Four Primary Schools In Kisii County, Kenya

Namwaki Wakube Janet (M.ed)

Special Needs Education, Kenyatta University, Kenya

Dr. Chomba M. Wa Munyi (Ph.D)

Senior Lecturer, Department of Special Needs Education,
Kenyatta University, Kenya

Abstract: In this article, the authors present a summary of findings of a study conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's thesis in special needs education. The study sought to investigate barriers to inclusive education for learners with visual impairment in Kisii County, Kenya. It was based on four primary schools in Kisii County. Kisii County was appropriate for this study because it has got very low enrolment of learners with visual impairments in primary schools. This study was guided by Vygostky's social/ cultural learning theory. Literature was reviewed to support the research topic while a descriptive survey design was adopted. The target population consisted of all school administrators, teachers, sighted learners and learners with visual impairments from the four primary schools. The sample size was 60 respondents. Purposive sampling and simple random techniques were used to sample respondents for the study. Data collection instruments included questionnaires and an interview guide. The questionnaires consisted of both closed and open-ended questions which gave room for opinions. An interview guide was also used for learners with visual impairments. Data were organized descriptively and thematically. The findings indicated that there were barriers to Inclusive Education for learners with VI in the four primary schools in Kisii County. They included; lack of training in SNE by most teachers, lack of resources/materials and other facilities, unmodified environment, negative attitude towards inclusive education and towards learners with VI. The study recommended that, the Kenya Intergraded Education Programme should ensure that special education services and resources are made adequate to learners with VI in Kisii County. Teachers trained in Special Needs Education should make sure that all educational materials for learners with visual impairments are provided in the appropriate media for instance in large print or in Braille. Finally, special education teachers in charge of the resource rooms should assist in modifying the physical environment with a view to making it conducive for learners with visual impairments.

Keywords: Barriers, Inclusive Education, Learners, Visual Impairment

I. INTRODUCTION

Learners with visual impairment are educationally vulnerable when they are in an inclusive setting because they are likely to begin school late, repeat years and drop out of school early (ICEVI, 2010). The projection of Kenya Census (2009) indicated that there were 331,594 persons with visual impairment in Kenya. WHO estimated the number of persons with visual impairment in Kenya at 620,000 in 2011 (GoK, 2010).

According to the statistics available at Kisii County Resource Centre, by September, 2011, 577 children had been

identified and assessed as having visual impairments. Of these, only 50 learners were enrolled in schools. Kisii County has over 20 special units for learners with SNE, but only 2 are for learners with visual impairments. According to the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Right (1948), all children have a right to education regardless of their handicap, ethnic backgrounds or social status. This implies removal of barriers that may hinder education progress for these learners in an inclusive setting. This was also echoed by the World Conference Education For All (1990) held in Jomtien Thailand, which emphasized diversification of education to

accommodate all learners with disabilities, where it urged all countries to promote universal provision of primary education.

In addition, the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) reported great concern for learners with special needs being enabled to learn in a conducive environment. This included adjustment of anything in the education sector that hindered imparting knowledge and skills to the learners, such as those with visual impairments. The call for inclusive education has attracted increased involvement of governments and interested groups to seek access to education for the majority of persons with disabilities who are still unreached (UNESCO, 1994). The creation of inclusive schools has become a promising way forward for all countries (Kisanji, 1998). According to Pivik and MacComus (2002), inclusion involves the reorganization of mainstream schools in such a way that every school is capable of accommodating all learners regardless of their disabilities. This is because regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating a welcoming community, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. The schools provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost of effectiveness of the entire education system.

African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Congo and Algeria have integration for learners who are physically and visually handicapped by setting units within the regular schools and adapting the curriculum to facilitate direct integration.

However, their governments are now advocating for inclusive education for those learners (UNESCO, 2001). One of the challenges facing education services for learners with VI is the inclusion of these learners in a regular school. With regard to the education of children with special needs in Kenya, some of the commissions on education since independence came up with various recommendations. The Kamunge Commission (1988) was the first commission that went to special institutions and interviewed many stakeholders on special education. The commission investigated specific categories of learners with special needs education. It also stressed on proper training of regular teachers and the use of an appropriate curriculum for learners with disabilities. Efforts to improve access to provision for basic primary education to learners with visual impairments can only be achieved by educating them in regular inclusive classrooms as the right for every individual to equal educational opportunities (UN, 1992).

According to the Task Force Report (2003), there was need for the Kenya Government to implement inclusive education so that it could cater for the increased educational demands of learners with special needs. Out of about 8 million children who were in primary schools that time, it was estimated that there were about 1.9 million children in the regular classes without the necessary support because most teachers were not aware of implementing inclusive education. The report also revealed that those children with disabilities who had been identified, assessed and placed in schools were only 26, 885 in the year 2003. Out of that number, only 4,802 (0.2%) were learners with visual impairments. The small number of primary schools including learners with visual impairments and the low enrolment of these learners indicate

that there are barriers to the inclusive policy that need further investigation.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to investigate barriers to inclusive education for learners with visual impairments in four primary schools in Kisii County. Five objectives were formulated to guide the study and stated as follows:-

- ✓ To investigate the opinions of teachers, school administrators and learners towards inclusive education of learners with visual impairment in the four primary schools in Kisii County;
- ✓ To find out the training backgrounds of teachers in the area of inclusive education in the four primary schools in Kisii County;
- ✓ To establish the availability of teaching/learning resources for the support of effective inclusion of learners with visual impairment in the four primary schools in Kisii County;
- ✓ To find out the role of special curriculum in the four primary schools in Kisii County;
- ✓ To examine environmental factors influencing educational provisions for learners with visual impairment, in the four primary schools in Kisii County.

It was hoped that the results of this study would guide the Ministry of Education in reforming and structuring programmes for inclusive education for learners with visual impairment so as to improve the service delivery. It was also hoped that the study could give insights to problems experienced by the teachers and learners in an inclusive setting, and come up with suggestions and possible solutions to the problems. Lessons learnt from this study were to be used to improve the implementation of the inclusive policy. The findings would also improve the teachers' attitudes and enhance the enrolment of learners with visual impairment in the regular schools.

III. METHOD

The study adopted descriptive survey research and utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods in collecting data. This was appropriate because no single method is adequate in investigating a problem with rival causal factors (Patton, 1990). The design was also relevant because it is used to assess attitudes and opinions about events, individuals or procedures (Gay, 1992). The researchers used questionnaires which catered for quantitative aspects, while the interviews formed the main thrust of the qualitative aspects. The qualitative strategy is the best way of getting in-depth information including sensitive and personalized experiences which are unlikely to be obtained with other methods (Kane, 1995). The quantitative method was applied to get information from school administrators, teachers and sighted pupils. Thus, the descriptive design was most appropriate for this study for investigating barriers to inclusive education for learners with visual impairments in the four primary schools in Kisii County.

The study locale (Kisii County) was preferred for this study because it has over 600 primary schools and only four primary schools in the County were including learners with visual impairment. The locale was also selected because of its accessibility to the researchers.

Singleton (1993) argues that an ideal sight for any study should be easily accessible to the researchers. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the four primary schools in Kisii County. The schools were selected because they included learners with visual impairment. Some of them had enrolled learners with visual impairment whom they later transferred to special schools due to lack of learning resources. From the selected schools, purposive sampling was also used to sample out teachers for the study. This involved teachers who were teaching learners with visual impairments, those who had more contact with them and those who were most experienced in the field of special needs education. The logic and power for purposive sampling lie in selecting information sample for in-depth study (Patton, 1990). The researchers used simple random sampling to select both learners with and without visual impairment. Upper primary pupils were preferred because they could easily respond to the interview. In selecting the sample, gender parity was considered. The four school administrators were the key informants for the study.

The study sample size comprised of four school administrators, twenty regular teachers, twenty learners with visual impairment and twenty sighted learners. A total of sixty participants were selected for this study. This number represents at least more than 20% of the teachers, and learners in the four schools, which is adequate to contribute a sample in a study of this nature (Gay, 1992). To achieve the objectives of the study, the researchers used questionnaires which consisted of both open and closed-ended questions and an interview guide.

Three questionnaires were developed for school administrators, classroom teachers and sighted learners to find out their opinions towards inclusion of learners with visual impairments. A questionnaire can be appropriate for a number of reasons. For instance, (Kerlinger, 1973), observes that a questionnaire is widely used in research because it is possible to give similar or standardized questions to the subjects. This makes it possible to compare responses from different subjects on the same questions. Use of questionnaires enables the researchers to collect a relatively wide range of information from a relatively wide large sample in a short period of time, and at reasonably low cost. Furthermore, it is also possible to reach distant subjects by either posting the questionnaires or delivering them to the respondents personally.

The questionnaires for the teachers and school administrators were divided into three sections. The first section comprised the personal information of the respondents. The second section comprised close-ended questions inform of a Likert scale. The last section had both open and closed-ended questions. The open-ended questions gave the teachers room to give their opinions to the inclusive education for learners with visual impairment. The questionnaire for the sighted learners had both closed and open-ended questions.

An interview guide was designed to elicit information on the opinions of the learners with visual impairment towards

inclusive education in these schools. This was deemed appropriate as the interview method of data collection is flexible and can be adapted to a variety of situations. The interview guide and the questionnaires were therefore used to solicit information on the barriers to inclusive education for learners with visual impairment. The researchers conducted a pilot study in Endiba Primary School in Nyamira County. The school was selected because it provided an environment and population similar to the intended population for the study. The purpose of piloting was to discover any weaknesses in the instruments and elicit comments from respondents that would assist in improvement and modification of the instruments. The population of the pilot study consisted of one school administrator, two teachers, three sighted learners and three learners with visual impairment.

The researchers got authorization to carry out the research from the Ministry of High Education, Science and Technology through the National Council for Science and Technology through Graduate School, Kenyatta University. After the permit was obtained, the researchers then informed the County Education officer of Kisii County, as well as the schools of the intention to carry out the study. According to Kothari (2005) subjects of a study must be informed of the nature of the researchers in a clear and understandable language. Informed consent must also be documented and the researchers' need to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality. In the study, the researchers put all the above into consideration, in addition to respecting the teacher's and learners' wishes to participate in the study. The researchers as much as possible encouraged the research participants to participate in the study. This was achieved through establishing rapport with the respondents through interaction and prior preparation.

Before data collection, the researchers carried out a familiarization tour to the schools under study. The school administrators introduced the researchers to their teachers and learners who then explained the purpose of the study and how it could help the learners and the educators. The researchers planned with each headteacher on the convenient day for data collection. They were assisted by a research assistant to administer the questionnaires to the illegible respondents in order to collect data. The respondents were given a duration of one week to fill the questionnaires. The researchers also conducted exhaustive formal and informal interviews with the learners with visual impairment.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers analyzed the five objectives of the study and obtained the following results which reflect the major findings of the study:

First, the demographic features of the respondents featuring in the study included, age, gender and professional qualifications, among others. The findings of the age of the learners revealed that learners with visual impairment were slightly older than their sighted peers, they ranged between 11-16 years. The sighted learners ranged between 9-14 years. Learners with visual impairment who were over 15 years were in class seven, while the sighted learners who were between the ages of 13-15 years were in class seven. The results on the

gender of the teachers and the school administrators revealed that the majority of the teachers were females. Also, only one female teacher was a school administrator. At the same time, data on age of the teachers and school administrators showed that the majority of the teachers were in the age bracket of 40-50 years, while the majority of the school administrators were over 50 years.

Second, the rating of the opinions of the teachers and the school administrators revealed that both the teachers and the school administrators had positive attitudes towards inclusive education. All the 15(100%) of the teachers either strongly agreed or agreed to the following statements; inclusion promotes confidence in learners with visual impairment, all children have a right to education in any school, inclusion increases the number of friends for learners with visual impairment when in an inclusive setting. On the other hand, 14(93.3%) of the teachers disagreed that; learners with visual impairment should remain in special schools. The same percentage also disagreed with the fact that including a learner with visual impairment in a regular classroom had negative effects on the social and academic development of the sighted learners. They also disagreed that the attention given to the learners with visual impairment, in an inclusive setting was at the expense of the sighted learners. 4(100%) of the school administrators agreed that inclusion promotes confidence in learners with visual impairment. 3(75%) strongly agreed that all children have a right to education in any school, and inclusion increases the number of friends for learners with visual impairment. The administrators also disagreed with the fact that learners with visual impairment should remain in special schools, and 3(75%) did not agree to the statement that attention given to the learners with visual impairment was at the expense of the sighted learners.

The opinions of the sighted learners towards inclusion and learners with visual impairment were positive. This was because, when the sighted learners were asked whether they interacted and socialized well with the learners with visual impairment, 16(80%) of those learners accepted that they interacted and socialized well with the learners with visual impairment. Over 90% of the sighted learners reported different ways in which they assisted the learners with visual impairment. They said, they read for them, guided and walked with them, worked with them in classes and played games with them. Quite a good number said they enjoyed sharing classes with the learners with visual impairment because they were also created by God.

On the side of the learners with visual impairment, their positive attitudes towards being included in the mainstream was attributed to their responses when asked whether they enjoined learning with the sighted learners. 19(95%) of those learners reported that they enjoyed being included in the four schools. At the same time, 7(65%) preferred joining secondary schools which practiced inclusive education after sitting for their KCPE. Those visual impairment learners also reported how they were assisted by the sighted learners both in class and outside the classrooms. In general, the study indicated a relatively high level of acceptance and interaction among the teachers, sighted learners and learners with visual impairment in the four primary schools.

Third, the findings indicated that the majority of the teachers were diploma holders, others were P1 holders and degree holders. These teachers were generally trained to teach learners without disabilities. In regard to training of teachers in Special Needs Education, a few 3(20%) of the teachers were trained and 1(25%) of the school administrators was trained. Since the majority of the teachers were not trained in SNE, to some extent, this would hamper the inclusive education due to lack of trained teachers. Training of teachers is important to the success of the learners with visual impairment (Burugu, 2005). The qualification of teachers is paramount if learners have to achieve. Teachers need to have skills necessary to meet the instructional and special needs of all the learners.

Fourth, the findings on the enrolment showed that there was low enrolment of learners with visual impairment in the four primary schools. The figures provided by the school administrators showed that there were 31 learners with low vision and 14 learners who were total blind in the schools. At the same time, the administrators also reported 18 cases of learners who had dropped out of the schools. School administrators were asked to give reasons for the low enrollment. The reasons included: lack of trained teachers and funds; negative attitudes towards inclusion, the unmodified curriculum and environment; lack of resources and other materials and lastly parents/guardians' ignorance.

The study sought to find out the resources used by the learners with visual impairment as a result of which it established that the schools had seven Brailleurs, seven slates and stylus, six optical devices like magnifiers, one computer and one typewriter. There were a few braille books and braille paper. When asked to comment on the availability of those resources and facilities majority of the teachers and the school administrators reported that the resources were quite expensive and were not locally available. The school administrators also said that the resources were inadequate. The study also observed that most of the Brailleurs, the computer and the typewriter were old and needed replacement. The researchers established that, the specialist skills taught in the four schools were orientation and mobility, braille skills, typing skills and activities for daily living.

The few teachers trained in SNE were effectively implementing the special curriculum, although the challenge here was that there was no time allocated on the school timetable for those skills to be taught. The teachers had to look for their own extra time to teach those skills. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to say that inclusion for the learners with visual impairment was being implemented in the four schools.

Fifth, the findings on the physical environment in the four schools revealed that only one school had cemented pavements. All the four schools had spacious classrooms for easy movement and buildings well-arranged in the compounds for easy movement. The study also observed that two of the schools had very steep grounds which made it hard for the learners to move around the compounds. There was also another school which did not have enough classes for both sighted and learners with visual impairment. Despite that, there were many other positive observations in the schools. There was enough light in the classrooms and the desks were large enough to accommodate the Brailleurs and braille books.

Regarding barriers to inclusive education for learners with visual impairment, the teachers reported the following: lack of resource/materials and other special facilities, lack of trained personnel and this included the teachers, braille transcribers, computer technicians and others. They also cited unadapted curriculum, lack of funds and environmental factors.

V. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that learners with visual impairment in Kisii County learned alongside their sighted peers in the mainstream schools and that teachers, school administrators and sighted learners had positive attitudes towards inclusive education for learners with visual impairment. According to Vygotsky's social cultural theory the teachers and school administrators in an inclusive setting, assisted the learners with visual impairment to acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes that helped them to reach the level of potential development. The knowledge and skills the learners acquired enabled them to fit in the social economic and political affairs of the schools and the community. In this context, the findings of the study would be used to enhance implementation of inclusive education in regular schools.

The study further established that learners who were visual impairment and those who were sighted assisted each other in various ways. For instance sighted learners read for and guided learners with visual impairment in the schools. In addition, the two categories of learners participated together in games and group activities where they assisted one another on difficult tasks. It is, therefore, important for sighted learners to be provided with opportunities to better understand visual impairments. Sighted learners should be given instructions to acquire knowledge and competency on peer assistance and advocacy. A good number of teachers reported that learners with visual impairment lacked resources such as Braille machines braille books, low vision devices and others. The educators should therefore ensure that all educational materials are provided in appropriate media for instance, large print, regular print, Braille or audio taped materials. Learners with visual impairment must continuously receive attention of special needs education from special teachers either through direct instruction, or through consultation depending on their individual needs.

The findings of the study indicated that the majority of the teachers of the sampled schools were not trained in SNE. Therefore, the few teachers who were trained should collaborate with members of the educational team on methods and techniques for including learners with visual impairment in daily routine activities and learning experiences. Special education teachers should also recommend seating requirements and other environmental and physical modifications such as lighting, controlling and glare reduction on learning surfaces as well as modifying the environment at large.

Teachers who are not trained in SNE should know that they will be called upon to teach concepts to learners with visual impairment that must be acquired through visual impairment. Therefore, teachers in the inclusive programmes ought to be knowledgeable, competent and creative on how to

teach such concepts using other modalities of learning other than visual impairments. Teachers must plan and carry out activities that will help learners with visual impairment gain as much information as possible through practical experiences. Special education teachers should provide support, consultation and materials to untrained teachers in SNE, while teaching learners with SNE in their classes. This will help removing the barriers towards learners with visual impairment and enhancing the enrolment of those learners in the mainstream.

REFERENCES

- [1] Burugu, P. K. (2005). Factors Affecting Implementation of Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs in Primary Schools in Muthioya Division, Murang'a District. M.Ed Thesis. Kenyatta University.
- [2] Gay, L. R (1992). Educational Research Competencies for Analysis and Application (3rd Ed). Paris: Meril Publishing Company.
- [3] GoK, (1999). National Development Plan 2002-2008. Effective Management for Sustainable Economic Growth and Poverty. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- [4] Hunt, N. and Marshall, K. (2002). Exceptional children and Youth. An Education to Special Education. (3rd edition). Boston: Hughton Muffin Company.
- [5] ICEVI, (2010). The Educator. Inclusive Education.
- [6] Kane. R. (1995). Seeing yourself: Research Handbook for Girls' Education in Africa: Washington D.C. World book. E D I. Learning Resources Series.
- [7] Kerlinger, F. (1973). Foundations of Behavioural Research. 2nd Ed. New York. Holt and Winton Inc.
- [8] Kisanji, J. (1998). The March towards Inclusive Education in Western Countries: Retracing the Steps. International Journal of Inclusive Education.
- [9] Meijer, C. (1996). Integration in Europe: Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs Trends in 14 European Countries. Middlefart, Denmark.
- [10] Ministry of Education (2001). Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. 2001 – 2004. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- [11] Patton. (1990). Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods. New York: Sage Publishers.
- [12] Pivik, J. and McComus, J. (2002). Barriers and Facilitators to Inclusive Education. Exceptional Children. Marclaflamme University of Ottawa, Canada.
- [13] Singleton, P.A. (1993). Approaches to Social Research. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [14] Task Force, (2003). A Report of the Task Force on Special Needs Education Appraisal Exercise. Ministry of Education. Kenya.
- [15] UNESCO (1994). World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Equality, Salamanca Statement (Final Report). Paris: UNESCO.
- [16] United Nations (1990). Committee of the Rights of a Child. New York: United Nations.
- [17] United Nations, (1990). Convention on the Right of a Child. New York: United Nations.
- [18] Vygotsky, L. S. (1993). The Fundamentals of Defectology. The collected work of L. S. Vygotsky, vol. 2

(Rieber, R. W and Carton, A. S. Eds). N Y: Plenum Press.

[19] World Health Organization (1992). Management of low vision children report of WHO consultation. Bangkok.

IJIRAS