

Disability and Education in Kenya

Dr Stephen Nzoka

Kenyatta University, Kenya

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper contents that disabilities do not necessarily become handicaps when appropriate services are timely secured to reduce the severity of a disability be it behavioral, cognitive, visual or physical Barraga; Shool (1986). To this end, education plays an indispensable role towards this accomplishment.

At the achievement political independence, fifty six years down the line, Kenya recognized education as a basic human right and a powerful tool for human resource of national development. Since then, all policy documents and educational reports in the country have constantly retaliated the importance of education to be the key to eliminate the three social upheavals namely: poverty, disease and illiteracy(African socialist 1965; Abbot, S. & McConkey, R. 2006)

Certainly, it may readily be agreed that this political recognition of education as a basic human right covered all Kenyans, including those with disabilities. Hitherto, however, one wonders how far successful has this fight been for able bodied citizens let alone those with disabilities. How active has the government and the entire community been in championing the educational, social and political participation of persons with disabilities and what role have persons with disabilities themselves played and continue to play with regard to their pertinent and basic human development? Gachathi (1976) observed that nearly all children with disabilities, through education, could be helped to overcome limitations imposed upon them by their disabilities to live happily and constructively with the rest of their counterparts in society (Sessional paper No 1 2005)

Definition of terms

The term 'disability' is not a disease. It's rather a condition which makes someone unable to use a part/s of his/her body effectively. The causes vary from disability to disability although they might have a high correlation. These causes include heredity, disease, injury, speech disorders, behavioral emotional disorders, deformity of organs, physical and health impairments, hearing impairments, visual impairments mental retardation, gifts and talents, autism and learning difficulties among others Ndurumo (1993). All in all,

Education is the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, values, and practices and believes.

Inclusive education refers to all students, regardless of any challenges they might have, being placed in appropriate general education classrooms that are in their own

neighborhood schools to receive high quality education; intervention and supports that would enable them to meet the success in the co curriculum (Bui quart 2010)

Special needs education is education for students with disabilities, in consideration of their individual educational needs, which aims at full development of their capabilities and at their independence and social participation. Special Needs Education is carried out in various forms, including in resource rooms, in special classes (both are in regular schools), and in special schools named "Schools for Special Needs Education" (Mwangi, L. 2013:Muuya, J. 2002)

All in all the philosophy of special educational needs maintains that all children have similar educational needs and that they should all be provided with the same learning experiences but with some areas of the curriculum being adapted to suit their disabilities KICD (2017); Kamunge (1988)

II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Indeed, formal education for persons with disabilities has undergone significant changes of which a few deserve to be mentioned here. The first phase was institutional education in which the learners were required to reside within the institution for the whole term of learning away from home. This was particularly so for learners with hearing impairment and those with visual impairment among whom the writer was. This was the trend between 1940s and 1970s. These schools were mainly established and sponsored by various churches which included the salvation army and the catholic church and later the government of Kenya. Since the cost of special needs education was much greater than that of a 'normal' child, families and community gave it lower priority. Teachers required special training which was quite limited (Ndurumo 1993; Anderson, 2004).

The second phase was educational integration. The phase became practical between 1970s and 2000s. Following comparative studies carried out in the west by Hampshire (1975; Kusajima 1974; Nolan and Kederis 1969). These studies showed a lot of similarities in learning between braille and print so that these learners could learn together. In Kenya, Kamunge, (1988) observed that majority of learners with visual impairment, for example, could be educated in regular schools through using special equipment and professional guidance. The report argued that it was necessary for the young learners to stay with their parents in order for them to get parental love and care while attending local integrated primary and secondary schools. The report viewed this educational approach for persons with disabilities to be more

cost effective and more beneficial to the learners social exposure and recommended residential schools for learners who were severely handicapped Christensen (1986) and the Draft Policy (1981)

The third and current phase was inclusive education (Sessional No 1 2005). The paper states, '*special education has for a long time been provided in special schools and special units attached to regular schools. Recently we have changed to inclusive education through regular schools however, special schools and units continue to cater for children with special needs in the areas of hearing, visual and physical challenges. This leaves out other areas of special needs such as gifted and talented, psychosocially different, autism, multiply handicapped, specific learning difficulties and communication disorders*' pg. 49. However, this change is still on paper rather than on the ground despite Kenyans ascension to inclusion in 2002 (Mwaura 2010).

III. EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION

By definition, inclusive education refers to schools, centers of learning that are open to all children and for this to happen, teachers, schools and systems need to change so that they can better accommodate the diversities that pupils have and that they are included in all aspects of school life. It also means the process of identifying any barriers within school that hinder learning and reducing or removing these barriers (Draft policy on special needs education 2006; sessional paper No 1,2005 and the persons with disabilities ACT 2003). Through these policies, the government of Kenya has committed itself to provide free education to all children with disabilities in their varied needs and learning environments, ensure equal access to educational training programs at all levels, support and encourage inclusive education through provision of financial materials and support services, ensure early identification, educational assessment and placement of children with disabilities. This means that all schools should be made accessible to all children irrespective of their disabilities, provide special educational support to the girl child; retain teachers in regular schools to cater for children with special educational needs; intensify monitoring supervision and quality standards to ensure that learners with special educational needs are provided for freely without discrimination, maintain and increase support for special educational institutions catering for children and youth who cannot benefit from normal education due to their severe disabilities, expand for educational services for youth with disabilities, collaborate all other stakeholders to provide a conducive learning environment that takes care of special needs of children with disabilities, promote the designing and development of appropriate, technical, assistive devices and learning materials; review the educational curriculum and reform the examination system to provide necessary adaptations to cater for the needs of all learners with disabilities, adapt and adopt communication systems to be appropriate for learners with special education needs in all centers of learning; train, motivate and retain specialist

educators in the special education sector; incorporate special education needs in the special need schools; promote and reinforce education assessment and special services throughout the country; promote opportunities for persons with disabilities in secondary, tertiary, and university education through various means, including affirmative action in admission and bursaries for support; establish and promote adult education; recognize and provide certificates for persons with disabilities who have attained some level of education (Ministry of Education 2006)

IV. WHY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?

As I have argued elsewhere, Nzoka (2007), inclusive education similar to charity essentially begins at home. In this sense, it's just a way of life varying from family to family and community to community. In any good family, all children are included and considered equally important and related to all that goes on in the family. Analogously, any good school should be able to include all learners with their diversities. This view fits quite well with the Agra seminar (1998) and South African policy both of which view inclusive education to be broader than formal schooling. It includes the home, community, non-formal and informal systems. It acknowledges that all children can learn. It enables educational structures systems and methodologies to meet the needs of all children. It acknowledges and respects differences in children's' age, gender, ethnicity and language. It's a dynamic process which is constantly evolving according to the culture and context. It is part of a wider strategy to promote an inclusive society (Stubbs 2002).

Indeed, all children with disabilities—the adults of tomorrow—have the right to quality education through inclusion as it was unanimously agreed by the regional conference on inclusive education in Kisumu (2004). *All children have a right to quality education within inclusive environment and this education must be culturally appropriate and enable them to maximize their potential. The inclusive education process does not only provide education but also empowers and sustains development of the entire community. In inclusive education, the needs of learners such as those with hearing impairment and those with visual impairment can be effectively addressed. The participation of the family and the wider community is an integral part of the inclusive educational process as the ultimate goal is to maintain the children in their families and communities* (Kenya and UNESCO 2004-2005)

The standard rules on equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities (1993) require that children who are disabled be educated as an integral part on the mainstream on condition that the system is properly resourced and of high quality. This is because inclusive education should promote democracy in schools and community. This was brought out quite clearly in the Salamanca statement 1994 thus *children, including those with a disability, have a wide diversity of characteristics. Difference is normal. Schools need to*

accommodate all children. Disabled children should attend their neighborhood schools. Democratic community participation and learning are essential in inclusion. Child centered pedagogy. Flexible curriculum should adapt to children not vice versa. Inclusion is essential to human dignity and the enjoyment of full human rights. Inclusive schools benefit all children because they create an inclusive society. Inclusion creates and improves the efficiency and effectiveness of educational system.

Consequently, The Persons with Disabilities ACT (2003) in Kenya is right when it declares that no person or learning institution shall deny admission to a person with a disability to any course of study by reason only of such disability, if the person has ability to acquire substantial learning in that course. Pg. 295. This citation clearly illustrates the social, ethical and educational negation that persons with disabilities have been experiencing and still continue to in the society. Thus, thinking in the same line Anderson 2004 observed that while efforts to create an inclusive society are ongoing in the west, in many developing nations among which Kenya is, persons with disabilities continue to be devalued, dehumanized and rejected. This should not be. On the contrary persons with disability should be guaranteed equal opportunities through the elimination of all determined social, physical, financial, religious, ethnic and psychological barriers which exclude and reject full participation in society by all citizens (The Proposed constitution of Kenya 2010) This is possible only in an inclusive education and society. Certainly, Kenya should visualize a society which is fully inclusive and provides equal opportunities and access to services to persons with disabilities. National disability Policy (2006, pg 3)

Finally, inclusive education offers a smooth strategy for promoting effective universal education because it's about creating schools that are responsive to the actual and diverse needs of all children and communities (Stubbs 2002). It is indispensable to enhancing literacy, numeracy and other

communication and advocacy skills to enable persons with disabilities to effectively and meaningfully engage in vital policy debates, political participation, economic development, mobility and orientation, employment, self-reliance and independence. It is to this extent that disabilities would be reduced to mere nuisance.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Abbot, S. &McConkey, R. (2006).The barriers to social inclusion as perceived by people with intellectual disabilities. The Journal of Intellectual Disabilities, 10(3), 275-287.
- [2]. Anderson, D. M., Wozencroft, A., &Bedini, L. A. (2008). Adolescent girls' involvement in disability sports: A comparison of social support mechanisms. Journal of Leisure Research, 40(2), 183-207.
- [3]. Gachathi, P. (1976). *Report of the National Committee on Educational Objectives*. Republic of Kenya. Nairobi: Government Printers.
- [4]. Mwaura, M. Isac (2010). Human Rights Disability and Development in Kenya: a publication of Konrad AdenaeurStiftong; Nairobi Kenya.
- [5]. Muuya, J. (2002). The aims of special education schools and units in Kenya: A survey of head teachers. European Journal of Special Needs Education, 17 (3), 229-239.
- [6]. Mwangi, L. (2013). Special needs education in Kenyan public primary schools: exploring government policy and teachers' understandings. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. London. Brunel University.
- [7]. Ndurumo MM. "Exceptional Children: Developmental Consequences and Intervention.". Nairobi: Longman; 1993.
- [8]. Republic of Kenya. (1964). The Committee on Care and Rehabilitation of the Disabled, the NgalaMwendwa Report. Nairobi, Kenya. Government printer.
- [9]. Republic of Kenya.(1964). Kenya Education Commission Report, the Ominde Report. Nairobi, Kenya: Government press.
- [10]. Stubbs, M.2002. 'Two quantitative methods of studying phraseology in English,'InternationalJournal of Corpus Linguistics7/2: 215-44.
- [11]. http://www.icla.up.ac.za/images/constitutions/kenya_constitution.pdf
- [12]. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000204486>
- [13]. <http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/CommissionReports/Report-of-the-Presidential-Working-Party-on-Education-and-Manpower-Training-for-the-Next-Decade-and-Beyond-March-1988.pdf>