

# Special Needs Education: A Basic Human Need.

Dr. Stephen Musila Nzoka  
Kenyatta University, Kenya

## I. INTRODUCTION

If a typically growing and developing child needs education to better its life in the process psychologically known as nature-nurture controversy, how much more will a child with a disability need education be it specially or regularly offered?

In fact, 'specialty' should refer to the facilities and equipment used by the learner with a special need to access education whilst education remains constant. Indeed, the end justifies the means. In any case, education equalizes opportunities, modifies human behaviour, makes a learner self-reliant while reducing the effects and stigma brought to bear by the various impairment all of which are mainly developmental. These disabilities are brought about by intellectual impairments, learning difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, speech and language disorders, emotional and behavioral disorders, visual impairments, autism spectrum disorders, physical impairments, multiple handicaps as well as those with gifts and talents. Consequently, early educational and medical interventions would be necessary to both minimize individual differences found in these people and render them productive, self-dependent and responsible members of society. I personally bear witness.

## II. DEFINITION OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

Special needs education describes any instructional strategy that attempts to provide an appropriate form of education to learners whose physical or mental condition makes other instructional methods unsuitable and ineffective. Thus, learners with hearing impairment learn mainly through Kenya sign language. Learners who are visually impaired chiefly learn to read and to write using braille through the sense of touch and large print by those who have low vision (Nzoka 2021). Further, these categories of such learners include, but not limited to:

- Intellectual deviations such as gifted and talented learners and those learners with intellectual challenges i.e. mental retardation, cerebral palsy.
- Sensory impairment i.e. those learners with auditory impairment and visual impairment.
- Those learners with communication disorders such as learning disorders, autistic spectrum disorders and speech and language impairment.
- Behavior disorders including learners with autism, emotional disturbance, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and social maladjustment.
- Multiple and severe disabilities namely, severe physical and intellectual handicaps, cerebral palsy,

mental retardation and brain damage (Ndurumo 1993).

### *Objectives of special needs education*

Being an integral part of general education cycle, special needs educational program ensures:

- Learners with exceptionalities access formal, informal and non-formal education in the least restrictive environmental setting.
- Learners with special needs are exposed to a child-centered curriculum which is comprehensive enough to meet their individual needs.
- An empowered classroom teacher. This becomes key in ensuring the classroom teacher is able to cater for the needs of all learners particularly those with special needs.
- Learners who are at risk and those who are gifted and talented are catered for.
- Learners realize their right to education with their non-disabled peers.
- Provision of activities of daily living skills and attitudes aimed to habilitation, rehabilitation, social integration and personal adjustment to the environment.
- Screening, identifying, assessing and providing timely intervention, correction and rehabilitation.
- Promotion and sensitization of social awareness of the learners' needs and address strategies of alleviating the effects of their impairment.
- Promotion and inclusion of learners with special needs in their education, training and employment.
- Provision and use of adopted curriculum, adapted curriculum, specialized curriculum and specialist curriculum which facilitates acquisition daily living skills among learners with special needs.
- Developing individual gifts and talents to the maximum through individualized educational programs (IEP)
- Development of positive self-concept, self-acceptance, self-discipline and self-determination of learners with special needs.
- Assistance of learners with special needs through guidance and counseling to anticipate leaving relatively descent, adequate and independent economic lives in the future.
- Developing measures to prevent impairments in order to control and limit disabilities (Ministry of Education 2006).

### III. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

The following historical phases form the background to Special Needs Education

#### 1. *Phase one: The Extermination phase*

This phase was characterized by poor treatment, ostracism, neglect and even extermination of persons with disabilities world over particularly in ancient Greece and Rome since time immemorial.

This is because any disability implied poor health hence no individual contribution to the community welfare (Ndurumo 1993).

#### 2. *Phase two -the ward status phase*

This phase fell within the first century AD and during the Judaistic period and early Christian era ( John 9 and Acts 3) in which care and compulsion for persons with special needs were exercised through charitable organizations, giving of alms, food, clothes, shelter and medical care. Thereafter, Asylums, monasteries and nunneries were established to meet these basic needs (Mwaura 2009). This was a turning point in the plight of persons with disabilities. Indeed general education and social acceptance began to dawn afar.

#### 3. *Self-emancipation phase.*

This came during the renaissance (15 to 19<sup>th</sup> century) in which some individuals with special needs, through their own initiatives, distinguished themselves as musicians, leaders, engineers, teachers, lawyers, interpreters and philosophers. They had evidently demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that given opportunities, social acceptance and care, persons with disabilities could be educated, productive and assimilated in the society (Lowenfeld 1989)

#### 4. *Special schools phase*

Special schools also known as residential schools were established in Europe, America and Africa mainly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in that order. Special schools were organized categorically i.e. schools for learners with Hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical impairment, mental retardation, emotional and behavioral disorders, language and speech disorders respectively. This type of residential education resulted in varying cultures, experience and entities isolating learners with special needs from their homes and communities. Besides, their teachers were expected to have additional training in sign language, braille, orientation and mobility among other skills. Further, residential schools were usually located away from homes, villages, locations and counties weakening family-child bonds, alienating children from family life and local employment in the community. Residential schools accommodated so

few learners and the cost of special needs education was so high. Educational integration gave a cheaper alternative.

#### 5. *Educational integration phase*

This phase remained fashionable and current world over 1960s and 1970s. Integration aimed at placing or mainstreaming learners with special needs into a regular school irrespective of whether the child would effectively learn and be socially accepted (Gallagher 2000).

The learners' academic success in integration was normally characterized by the learners' ability and or inability to cope with school conditions such as bullying, use of special equipment, individualized support, a special teacher, following the school curriculum, a special environment, special instructional techniques to meet their special needs, adequate resources for their education, attend school and express oneself properly. Finally, teachers in the integration model focused their attention on an individual learner rather than the whole classroom environment (Gallagher 2000)

#### 6. *Inclusive education phase*

This phase started in the 1980s to the present. In its approach, inclusive education is popularly intended to replace all other educational model as its cheap and cost effective. In addition, it takes care of the marginalized and excluded as well as learners who drop from school. Kenya ascended to it in 2001. It refers to restructuring schools to include all learners, typical and those with special needs. It's the organization of the school so that all students, with or without disabilities assigned to it learn together. The model recognizes that all learners are different and that the schools as well as the education system need to change so as to meet their individual diversity (UNESCO Guidelines)

### IV. ADVANTAGES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Numerous studies have been conducted in countries where inclusive education has taken roots. Several of these studies have concluded that inclusion has had tremendous benefits for both learners with special needs and those without. Among them are:

- ✓ Developing a better understanding and acceptance of other learners.
- ✓ Learners with special needs do as well or better academically in general classrooms as they do in special needs classrooms.
- ✓ Learners with special needs have more instructional time in general education classrooms than in special needs education classrooms.
- ✓ Teachers generally support serving learners with special needs in general education classrooms because

they have experienced positive professional outcomes for themselves

- ✓ It helps learners with special needs to develop socially.
- ✓ Everyone is granted an equal education. A chance to succeed prepares the learners with special needs for a future that they might otherwise not have had.
- ✓ Finally, inclusive education enables learners with special needs develop a sense of pride in their performance for they actually feel that they have accomplished something.

## V. COMPONENTS OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

In reference to the definition of special needs given above, it is evidently clear that special needs education is an entire system of education which is quite comparable to a set of connected things, ideas, concepts, objectives and methods that work together and harmoniously for a particular purpose namely to graduate a relatively well educated, productive and well reliant citizen despite his/her disability (Nzoka et al 2022)

Various components of special needs should work together in harmony in order to achieve this goal. Some of these components include:

### *Special*

*This term here implies extraordinary, abnormal, and unique. In a sense, whatever is special must be above average or below average. Gifted and talented learners, for instance, are intellectually above average and have unique needs that call for a special approach in the classroom so as to meet them such as academic acceleration, enrichment and curriculum compacting. The opposite would be true of learners with mental retardation. Yet all children with special needs have as much a right to achieve higher and higher levels of literacy as do children with normal potentialities (Rex 1995)*

### *Needs*

*In general, all children have individual needs in point of time. Most of such needs, however, might be temporally and short-lived for instance basic needs (Maslow 1972. Compare such passive needs with a need for sight, hearing, speech, legs, arms, brain to name but a few. These lifelong needs are not only individual based but also make them heterogeneous in nature and their effects vary from category to category yet the use of special communication skill such as Kenya sign language, braille, Augmentative and Alternative communication, assistive devices plus appropriate instructional strategies and conducive environment. These needs are timely intervened and compensated enough to enable the learners and to fairly lead independent and productive lives (Constitution of Kenya 2010).*

### *Education*

*Obtained formally, informally or non-formally, education is simply the process of preparing and equipping learners*

*to be happy and useful members of Kenyan society. For a given individual to be happy, they must learn and accept social and national values. To be useful. They must actively work towards the maintenance of themselves, families and this society (KICD 1999).*

*'Consequently, no person or learning institution shall deny admission to a person with a disability by any course of study by reason only of such disability if the person has the ability to acquire substantial learning in that course. Learning shall take into account the special needs of the person with a disability with respect to the entry requirements—pass marks—curricular exams—auxiliary services—class schedules—physical education and other similar considerations. Special schools and institutions especially for the deaf, the blind and the mentally retarded, shall be established to cater for formal education, skills development and self-reliance' (The Persons with Disability Act-18 page 295)*

### *School curriculum*

Owing to the heterogeneity of persons with special needs already alluded to in this paper there are four types of curriculum worth mentioning here.

- i. adopted or regular curriculum which may require slight or no modifications.
- ii. adapted curriculum to enable learners access instructions.
- iii. specialized curriculum for severely handicapped, multiple handicapped and intellectually challenged learners.
- iv. Specialist curriculum which is largely relates to the needs such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, personal hygiene, environmental care, self-grooming, self-acceptance, orientation and mobility and other activities of daily living. The content of this curricular tends to depend on the particular needs of the learners in question and their educational level; primary, secondary or tertiary.

### *Psych-educational assessment*

Assessment is a dynamic and continuous process of gathering information on learners with special needs for decision making, (Salvia and Ysseldyke 2001, 2016). The process is characterized by four salient stages namely: Screening, identification, eligibility and plan writing. At the same time, medical interventions are essential. This is why institutions for learners with special needs should always be placed near general hospitals and Educational Assessment Resource Centers (EARC) for easy reach when needed (Kim, K. S., & Barbara, T. 2000).

### *Individualized education program*

This is an annual program on which interventions for learners with special needs are based. It is a necessity for each learner with a disability to have as outlined in USA, PUBLIC LAW-94-142, 1975, (Cohen, S., Semmes, M., & Guralnick, M. J.

1979). It's a written statement designed by an individualized education plan team who may include parents, teachers, learners, psychologist, school administrator, nurse, local education agent and a medical doctor. To this extent, special needs education compares quite well with newly introduced Competency Based Curriculum in Kenya as they are both learner centered programs which seek to develop the learners potentialities.

#### *Vocational rehabilitation and training*

Vocational habilitation and rehabilitation are very important processes for learners with special needs. They are necessitated by various impairments that lead to various disabilities as already alluded to in this paper. These disabilities often call for both habilitation and rehabilitation for all persons with special needs except for those with gifts and talents. Both practices enable them to get or regain the lost or affected skills and abilities so as to help the learners to cope with life thus, habilitation and rehabilitation must always include career guidance and counselling. Similarly, training is an essential component to complete formal learning and to impart necessary skills for work, (Kravis, J. 2003).

#### *Inclusive education*

This category supports children with special needs to be educated inclusively provided that they are adequately resourced as outlined Salamanka Policy Statement 1994 (Ling G. U. O. 2019). Benefits of this model include:

- i. Help to break the cycle of poverty and exclusion.
- ii. Inclusive education would enable learners with special needs education get more attached to family and community.
- iii. Inclusive education improves quality of education for all learners.
- iv. Inclusive education can assist overcome segregation and stigma among learners with special needs, the citizens of tomorrow.
- v. Inclusive education can lead to an inclusive society as man is a social being.

### VI. TECHNOLOGY

Technological advancement, with its assistive devices, is increasingly becoming the focus of information and education for all learners with special needs, gifted and talented learners included. Similar to inclusive education, technology does not discriminate against any category of special needs provided suitable software has been installed in the computer for a particular use. It's quite un-appropriate teaching aid and a handy aide at the place of work. Under all circumstances, technology does not replace man's knowledge, skills and capabilities. On the centrally, it augments and confirms them (Kravis, J. 2003).

#### *Special needs education teacher*

The teacher, in any learning situation and level, is the teaching aid number one in the classroom (Ferguson 2008). According

to (Ferguson 2008) the teacher must be able to provide high quality education through a combination of meaningful curriculum, teaching and using relevant supports; show positive attitude towards learners with special needs, have high expectations of social acceptance of non-disabled learners towards learners with special needs and must be competent with relevant skills to meet the instructional needs of learners with SNE. Finally, it may be noted here that without the teacher, there would be no special needs education and no curriculum implementation. Classroom teachers, special educators, subordinate staff and families must work together to promote education for all learners through constant learner monitoring and individual evaluation. The system of education is considered successful when it endeavors the learners needs and when both individual group goals are met (Ferguson 2008).

### VII. CONCLUSION

Special needs education equalizes opportunities for persons with disabilities in life and reduces the effects brought by the various impairments, be they physical or intellectual. In fact, without impairments, there would be no disabilities consequently causing special needs.

The history of persons with disabilities reflects various social developments as well as suffering world over since time immemorial to date.

Inclusive education is currently believed to be the most cost-effective model in which to educate learners with special needs.

Special needs is comparatively reminiscent school of competency based curriculum and requires all stakeholders including parents to be participatory and supportive.

Technology is increasingly becoming indispensable model in special needs education and the life of persons with disabilities

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