Teachers' Involvement in Developing School Policies for Inclusive Education in Regular Primary Schools in Siaya County, Kenya

Michael Ooko Odeny

Department of Special Needs Education, Maseno University, Kenya

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.101100183

Received: 30 October 2026; Accepted: 11 November 2026; Published: 23 November 2026

ABSTRACT

Inclusive education requires school policies that support learners with diverse educational needs. Although Kenya has legal and policy provisions for educating persons with disabilities, their translation into school-level guidelines remains a concern. This study examined teachers' involvement in developing inclusive education policies in regular primary schools in Siaya County, Kenya. A descriptive survey design involved 194 teachers trained in inclusive education and 65 head teachers from 65 schools. Questionnaires, interviews, observation and document analysis were used. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-tests, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Teachers' involvement was limited. The highest mean scores concerned encouraging admission of all learners (M = 2.76), periodic assessment (M = 2.69), orientation of newly appointed teachers (M = 2.67) and allocation of funds for learners with disabilities (M = 2.56). The lowest means concerned collaboration with related service providers (M = 1.04), Kenya Sign Language and Braille (M = 1.10), and accessible school buildings (M = 1.18). Head teachers reported school policies on funding in 40.0% of schools, teacher orientation in 24.6%, admission in 23.1%, and collaboration in 6.2%. Only 3.1% had relevant policy and legal documents. Interviews further showed that only five of 21 head teachers reported having inclusive education policies. The study concludes that teacher participation and school-level policy arrangements were inadequate. It recommends strengthening teacher involvement, ensuring access to relevant policy documents and establishing mechanisms to monitor inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive education, school policies, teacher involvement, regular primary schools, disability, Siaya County.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is increasingly recognized as a fundamental approach to promoting equity, equality and access to meaningful educational opportunities for all learners, irrespective of their abilities, disabilities, backgrounds or individual circumstances. It emphasizes the removal of barriers that limit learners' participation, achievement and development within the education system. However, admitting learners with disabilities into regular schools does not necessarily mean that such schools have become inclusive. Genuine inclusion requires deliberate changes in school organization, teaching and learning practices, physical infrastructure, institutional policies, resource allocation and attitudes towards individual differences. Schools must therefore establish appropriate institutional mechanisms to ensure that every learner receives the necessary support to participate meaningfully in educational activities.

School policies constitute an important foundation for achieving inclusive education because they provide direction, establish institutional expectations and define the responsibilities of teachers, administrators, parents and other stakeholders. In inclusive schools, policies should address admission procedures, physical accessibility, identification and assessment of learners, curriculum adaptation, communication, allocation of resources, teacher preparation and collaboration with relevant service providers. Such policies help translate national educational commitments into practical institutional guidelines that inform decision-making and everyday school operations. Without clear institutional policies, the implementation of inclusive education may depend largely on individual teachers' initiatives rather than an organized and sustainable school-wide approach.

Kenya has established several constitutional, legislative and policy provisions to promote the educational rights of persons with disabilities. Article 54 of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) recognizes the right of perso-

ns with disabilities to dignity, access to educational institutions and facilities, appropriate communication methods and assistive materials. Similarly, the Basic Education Act (2013) provides a legislative framework for the provision of basic education, while the Persons with Disabilities Act (2003) provides for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. The National Special Needs Education Policy Framework (2009) further outlines the government's commitment to improving educational access and participation for learners with special educational needs.

Despite these commitments, the existence of national legislation and policy frameworks does not automatically guarantee their effective implementation at school level. Regular primary schools must interpret these provisions and translate them into practical institutional guidelines that respond to the educational needs of their learners. This requires school administrators and teachers to understand relevant policies and participate actively in developing school-based strategies for addressing barriers to inclusion. Where such institutional arrangements are absent, learners with disabilities may experience inadequate support, inaccessible facilities, inappropriate assessment procedures and limited access to specialized learning resources.

Teachers are particularly important in the development of school policies because of their direct and continuous interaction with learners. Through classroom instruction and other school activities, they encounter challenges relating to communication, mobility, learning materials, assessment and participation. Their experiences provide valuable information for identifying institutional gaps and formulating appropriate policy responses. Consequently, involving teachers in policy development can promote ownership, improve the relevance of institutional guidelines and strengthen accountability in implementing inclusive education.

Ainscow and Booth (2011) emphasize that developing inclusive schools requires systematic changes in school cultures, policies and practices. Their perspective suggests that inclusion should not be regarded merely as placing learners with disabilities in regular classrooms but as a continuous process of identifying and removing barriers to learning and participation. Therefore, teachers should participate not only in implementing inclusive education policies but also in identifying institutional priorities, developing guidelines and evaluating their effectiveness.

The situation in Siaya County provided an important context for examining teachers' involvement in developing school policies for inclusive education. Although regular primary schools had teachers trained in inclusive education, concerns remained about the extent to which teachers participated in formulating institutional policies to guide inclusive practices. It was therefore necessary to establish whether their professional knowledge and classroom experiences were being incorporated into school-level decision-making.

This article is based on the third objective of Odeny's (2017) doctoral study, which sought to establish teachers' involvement in developing school policies that guide inclusive education practices in regular primary schools in Siaya County, Kenya. The study specifically examined teachers' participation in policy-related activities, including admission of learners with diverse needs, accessibility, assessment, communication, resource allocation and collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 School Policies and Inclusive Education

School policies are essential instruments for translating educational principles, national commitments and legislative provisions into institutional practices. They establish procedures for organizing teaching and learning, allocating resources, managing learner diversity and responding to the educational needs of individual learners. In inclusive education, policies should promote equal opportunities, non-discrimination, participation, accessibility and respect for individual differences.

Booth and Ainscow (2011), through the Index for Inclusion, identify inclusive cultures, policies and practices as interconnected dimensions of school improvement. They argue that developing inclusive schools requires

examining existing institutional arrangements and addressing barriers that prevent learners from participating fully in education. Inclusive policies should therefore provide a framework for ensuring that school structures and procedures accommodate the diverse needs of learners.

At the institutional level, inclusive education policies should address several key areas. These include admission of learners irrespective of disability, accessibility of classrooms and other school facilities, identification and assessment of learners requiring additional support, and provision of alternative communication methods such as Braille and Kenya Sign Language. Policies should also guide the allocation of funds for assistive devices, adaptation of teaching and learning resources, professional development of teachers and collaboration with parents and related service providers.

The availability of such policies provides schools with a common institutional direction and reduces reliance on individual teachers' interpretations of inclusive education. However, policies become meaningful only when they are understood, accepted and implemented by those responsible for delivering educational services. Teachers' participation in their formulation is therefore important in ensuring that institutional guidelines address actual classroom and school-based challenges.

2.2 National Policy and Legal Framework for Inclusive Education in Kenya

Kenya has established a legal and policy foundation for promoting the rights of learners with disabilities. The Constitution of Kenya (2010), particularly Article 54, guarantees persons with disabilities the right to dignity, access to educational institutions and facilities, appropriate communication methods and access to assistive materials and devices. These provisions establish an important basis for developing educational institutions that accommodate learners with diverse needs.

The Persons with Disabilities Act (2003) provides additional protection for persons with disabilities and recognizes their rights to education and participation in society. Similarly, the Basic Education Act (2013) establishes the framework for providing basic education and reinforces the responsibility of the education system to facilitate access to educational opportunities.

The National Special Needs Education Policy Framework (2009) provides further guidance on addressing the educational requirements of learners with special educational needs. It emphasizes improving access, participation and educational support through appropriate interventions and institutional arrangements.

Although these national provisions provide an important foundation, their effectiveness depends on how individual schools interpret and implement them. Regular primary schools require access to relevant policy documents, clear institutional guidelines and adequate professional support to translate national commitments into practice. For example, constitutional provisions on accessibility and communication should be reflected in school procedures concerning physical infrastructure, assistive technology, Braille and Kenya Sign Language. Similarly, provisions relating to educational access should inform admission procedures and the allocation of resources.

The challenge, therefore, is not merely the existence of national policies but also the extent to which schools develop and implement corresponding institutional policies. This makes teachers' participation in interpreting national provisions and developing school-level guidelines particularly important.

2.3 Teachers' Participation in Policy Development

Teachers are central stakeholders in the development and implementation of inclusive education policies. Traditionally, teachers have often been viewed primarily as implementers of decisions made by school administrators and education authorities. However, their professional knowledge and practical experiences make them valuable contributors to institutional policy development.

Teachers interact with learners daily and are therefore well positioned to identify barriers affecting participation, learning and achievement. They can provide practical insights into challenges relating to classroom accessibility, instructional resources, assessment procedures, communication, behaviour support and curriculum adaptation.

Their involvement in policy formulation helps ensure that institutional decisions are informed by actual educational experiences rather than administrative assumptions.

Furthermore, teacher participation promotes institutional ownership and commitment. When teachers contribute to developing school policies, they are more likely to understand their objectives, accept the responsibilities associated with implementation and participate in monitoring their effectiveness. Such involvement can also encourage collaboration between teachers, school administrators, parents and other professionals.

Nevertheless, several factors may constrain teachers' participation in policy development. These include inadequate access to relevant policy documents, limited professional preparation, insufficient time, weak administrative support and limited opportunities for consultation and decision-making. In some schools, policy formulation may remain largely the responsibility of head teachers and senior administrators, leaving classroom teachers with little opportunity to contribute.

It is therefore important to establish the extent to which teachers participate in developing institutional policies that guide inclusive education. Examining their involvement provides an indication of whether schools recognize teachers as active partners in promoting inclusion or merely expect them to implement decisions made by others.

2.4 Research Gap

The reviewed literature establishes that inclusive education requires supportive institutional policies, effective implementation of national legal provisions and meaningful participation of teachers in school-level decision-making. However, the existence of national frameworks does not necessarily demonstrate that regular primary schools have developed appropriate institutional guidelines or that teachers participate meaningfully in their formulation.

In particular, there was a need for empirical evidence on the extent of teachers' involvement in developing school policies guiding inclusive education practices in regular primary schools in Siaya County. This study addressed that gap by examining teachers' participation in policy-related activities and identifying the institutional arrangements available to support inclusive education.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design with an ex-post facto orientation to investigate teachers' involvement in developing school policies that guide inclusive education practices in regular primary schools in Siaya County, Kenya. The descriptive survey design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect information from teachers and head teachers regarding existing institutional practices, experiences and perceptions without manipulating the study variables. The ex-post facto orientation facilitated the examination of existing school conditions and practices relating to the development of inclusive education policies as they naturally occurred.

3.2 Target Population and Sampling Procedures

The target population comprised 216 teachers trained in inclusive education and 72 head teachers drawn from regular primary schools in Siaya County. Saturated sampling was employed to select 194 teachers and 65 head teachers from 65 regular primary schools. This approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to involve nearly all accessible members of the target population who met the study requirements. The remaining 22 teachers and seven head teachers were reserved for piloting the research instruments.

The involvement of both teachers and head teachers provided an opportunity to examine policy development from different institutional perspectives. Teachers provided information on their participation in developing policies, while head teachers offered insights into school-level decision-making, institutional arrangements and the availability of policies supporting inclusive education.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Four instruments were used to collect data: questionnaires, interview schedules, observation guides and document analysis.

Questionnaires: Questionnaires were administered to teachers and head teachers to collect quantitative information on teachers' involvement in developing school policies for inclusive education. The questions focused on participation in policy-related activities, including admission of learners regardless of their diverse needs, physical accessibility, alternative communication methods, learner assessment, allocation of resources and collaboration with related service providers. The responses provided information on the extent of teacher participation in these institutional activities.

Interview schedules: Interview schedules were used to collect qualitative information from head teachers. The interviews explored how teachers participated in developing inclusive education policies, the activities through which they contributed to institutional decision-making and the challenges experienced by schools in establishing appropriate guidelines. The interviews also provided further explanations of the institutional practices reported through the questionnaires.

Observation guides: Observation guides were used to examine selected school environments and identify physical and institutional arrangements supporting inclusive education. Particular attention was given to evidence of accessibility adaptations and other initiatives intended to facilitate the participation of learners with disabilities.

Document analysis: Document analysis was undertaken to establish the availability of national policy and legal documents and examine evidence of school-level initiatives supporting inclusive education. The analysis of policy documents covered all 65 schools, while a separate examination of implementation indicators was conducted in 17 schools. This provided documentary evidence to complement the information obtained through questionnaires, interviews and observations.

3.4 Reliability of Research Instruments

The reliability of the questionnaires was established through a test-retest procedure involving participants reserved for piloting. The questionnaires were administered on two occasions, and the consistency of responses was examined to establish the reliability of the instruments. The reported test-retest reliability coefficients were 0.78 for the teachers' questionnaire and 0.76 for the head teachers' questionnaire. These coefficients indicated an acceptable level of consistency for collecting data in the main study.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection involved administering questionnaires to the selected teachers and head teachers, conducting interviews with head teachers, observing selected school environments and examining relevant institutional documents. Using the four instruments enabled the researcher to obtain information from different sources and compare reported practices with observed and documented evidence. This triangulation strengthened the understanding of teachers' participation in developing school policies for inclusive education.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, organized and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize responses concerning the availability of school policies and relevant institutional arrangements. Means and standard deviations were used to establish the extent of teachers' involvement in different policy-development activities. Independent-samples t-tests were employed to examine differences between teachers' and head teachers' responses.

Qualitative information obtained from interviews, observations and document analysis was organized into themes corresponding to the study objective. The emerging themes were used to explain and complement the quantitative findings, particularly regarding the nature of teacher participation, institutional challenges and

initiatives undertaken by schools. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided a broader understanding of teachers' involvement in developing policies guiding inclusive education practices.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Teachers' involvement in developing school policies

Teachers were asked to indicate the extent of their participation in developing policies to guide inclusive education. Responses from 194 teachers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' involvement in developing school policies for inclusive education

(n = 194)

Policy-related activity	Mean
Encouraging admission of all learners regardless of diverse needs	2.76
Advocating for accessible school buildings	1.18
Encouraging gender parity in appointments to positions of responsibility	1.26
Encouraging use of Kenya Sign Language and Braille	1.1
Encouraging annual inclusive education days	2.29
Disseminating information to parents and the community	1.92
Encouraging periodic assessment of learners	2.69
Encouraging orientation of newly appointed teachers	2.67
Encouraging collaboration with related service providers	1.04
Encouraging allocation of funds for learners with disabilities	2.56

Source: Odeny (2017), Chapter Four, Table 27.

Admission of all learners recorded the highest mean (M = 2.76), followed by periodic assessment (M = 2.69), orientation of new teachers (M = 2.67) and allocation of funds (M = 2.56). The lowest means concerned collaboration with related service providers (M = 1.04), Kenya Sign Language and Braille (M = 1.10), accessible buildings (M = 1.18) and gender parity (M = 1.26). Teachers' involvement was therefore stronger in general administration than in accessibility, communication and specialist support.

4.2 Head teachers' reports on the availability of school policies

Head teachers from 65 schools were asked whether their institutions had policies addressing inclusive education. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Head teachers' reports on the availability of school policies (n = 65)

Policy area	Frequency	Percentage
Admission regardless of diverse needs	15	23.1
Accessibility of school buildings	8	12.3
Gender parity in appointments	6	9.2
Alternative modes of communication	7	10.8
Annual inclusive education days	10	15.4
Information to parents and the community	8	12.3
Periodic assessment of learners	8	12.3
Orientation of newly appointed teachers	16	24.6
Collaboration with related service providers	4	6.2
Allocation of funds for learners with disabilities	26	40

Availability of policy and legal framework documents	2	3.1

Source: Odeny (2017), Chapter Four, Table 28.

Policies on allocating funds were most frequent (26 schools; 40.0%), followed by orientation of new teachers (16; 24.6%) and admission (15; 23.1%). Only 9.2%–12.3% reported policies on accessibility, assessment, communication or gender parity. Four schools (6.2%) reported policies on collaboration, and two (3.1%) had relevant policy and legal documents.

4.3 Availability of national policy and legal documents

Document analysis confirmed that national policy and legal materials were largely unavailable in the 65 schools. One school (1.5%) had a copy of the Children's Act (2001), and one (1.5%) had the Basic Education Act (2013). None had copies of the Persons with Disabilities Act (2003), the National Special Needs Education Policy Framework (2009) or the Constitution of Kenya (2010) among the documents examined.

4.4 Interview findings and school-level initiatives

Interviews with 21 head teachers identified five teacher contributions: encouraging schools to obtain relevant policy documents; sensitizing school communities about disability rights; advocating advisory committees to develop and monitor policies; advising school administrations on policy development; and sensitizing parents about relevant laws. Only five head teachers reported school policies, and just one (HT4) said teachers participated in all five activities.

The interviews also revealed gaps in alternative communication skills. One head teacher reported that two of the school's 11 teachers had inclusive education training, but neither was competent in sign language. The school did not prioritize sign language because it had no deaf learners (HT18). All 21 interviewed head teachers indicated that sign language was not taught in their schools.

Document analysis in 17 schools identified some initiatives. Eight schools had 14 teachers trained in Kenya Sign Language; two had designated Wednesdays as Kenya Sign Language Day; and one held Friday assemblies in sign language, with a learner interpreting. Ten schools participated in an inclusive education celebration at Ngiya Primary School in June 2016. Eight schools had made physical adaptations, including ramps, adapted toilets, wider doors, spacious classrooms, lowered taps and pathway rails. These schools had benefited from the Leonard Cheshire Disability inclusive education project.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that teachers' involvement in developing inclusive education policies was limited and uneven. Participation was more evident in admission, learner assessment, teacher orientation and resource allocation than in accessibility, alternative communication and collaboration with related service providers. This suggests that teachers were more involved in general administrative activities than in measures requiring specialist expertise, coordinated services and changes to the physical environment.

The limited availability of school policies reinforces this interpretation. Although 40.0% of head teachers reported policies on allocating funds for learners with disabilities, fewer than one-quarter reported policies on admission or teacher orientation, and only 6.2% reported policies on collaboration with related service providers. The finding that only two schools (3.1%) had relevant policy and legal documents is particularly important. Teachers and school leaders need access to national instruments to understand their responsibilities and develop appropriate school-level procedures. This is consistent with Adoyo and Odeny (2015), who highlighted the importance of national policy and legal instruments in guiding inclusive education practice in Kenya.

The absence of documents is significant because the Constitution of Kenya (2010) recognizes the rights of persons with disabilities to access educational institutions and appropriate communication. Schools need to translate these commitments into procedures for accessibility, communication and learner support.

The interview evidence further suggests that general training in inclusive education does not necessarily provide all the specific competencies required. The account by HT18 and the report that none of the 21 interviewed schools taught sign language point to a gap between general preparation and practical skills in alternative communication. The view that sign language was unnecessary because a school had no deaf learners also suggests a reactive rather than anticipatory approach to inclusion.

Some schools nevertheless undertook practical initiatives, including Kenya Sign Language training and activities, inclusive education celebrations and physical adaptations. These efforts were not widespread; schools with physical adaptations had received support through the Leonard Cheshire Disability inclusive education project. External support was therefore important, but isolated projects cannot replace a sustained school policy framework.

Overall, the findings support Booth and Ainscow's (2011) view that inclusive education requires coordinated development of school cultures, policies and practices. Teachers should therefore participate in identifying barriers, formulating school guidelines and monitoring implementation, rather than acting only as implementers of administrative decisions.

6. CONCLUSION

The study established that teachers' involvement in developing school policies to guide inclusive education practices in regular primary schools in Siaya County, Kenya, was generally limited. Although teachers participated in selected policy-related activities, their involvement was neither comprehensive nor consistent across the different dimensions of inclusive education. Their participation was more evident in encouraging the admission of learners regardless of their diverse educational needs, promoting periodic learner assessment, orienting newly appointed teachers and advocating for the allocation of funds for learners with disabilities. However, their involvement in developing policies addressing physical accessibility, alternative communication methods, gender parity and collaboration with related service providers was particularly low. This suggests that teachers' contributions were concentrated more on general administrative activities than on addressing specific barriers that limit the participation of learners with disabilities in regular schools.

The findings further revealed that inclusive education policy development had not been adequately institutionalized in the majority of the schools. Responses from head teachers indicated that policies addressing the allocation of funds for learners with disabilities were available in only 40.0% of the schools, while policies relating to teacher orientation and admission were reported in 24.6% and 23.1% of schools, respectively. Of particular concern was the limited availability of policies addressing collaboration with related service providers, which was reported in only 6.2% of schools. These findings demonstrate that important aspects of inclusive education were not adequately reflected in institutional policy arrangements.

Qualitative findings reinforced the questionnaire results. Only five of the 21 head teachers interviewed reported that their schools had inclusive education policies. Furthermore, only one head teacher indicated that teachers participated in all five identified policy-development activities. This demonstrates that teachers were not sufficiently involved in institutional decision-making concerning inclusive education. It also suggests that policy development in some schools remained largely an administrative responsibility rather than a collaborative process involving teachers and other relevant stakeholders.

The study also established that the availability of national policy and legal documents in schools was extremely limited. Only two of the 65 schools reported having relevant policy and legal framework documents. The absence of important instruments, including the Constitution of Kenya (2010), the Persons with Disabilities Act (2003) and the National Special Needs Education Policy Framework (2009), among the documents examined, presented an institutional challenge. Without access to these documents, teachers and school administrators may experience difficulties understanding their legal responsibilities and translating national commitments into practical school-level guidelines.

Nevertheless, some schools had introduced initiatives supporting inclusive education, including Kenya Sign Language training, sign language activities, inclusive education celebrations and physical accessibility adaptat-

ions. These initiatives demonstrated that progress was possible where schools undertook deliberate action and received external support. However, such activities were not sufficiently widespread to establish comprehensive and sustainable institutional policies.

Overall, the study concludes that the successful implementation of inclusive education requires more than the admission of learners with disabilities into regular schools. It requires supportive institutional policies, meaningful teacher participation, committed school leadership, accessible policy documents, adequate resources and appropriate professional competencies. Teachers should therefore be recognized as active partners in identifying barriers, formulating institutional guidelines and monitoring their implementation. Strengthening their participation would help translate Kenya's national commitments to inclusive education into practical and sustainable school-level practices. Ultimately, inclusive education should become an integral part of school governance, planning and everyday educational practice rather than depending on isolated initiatives or individual efforts.

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