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Teachers' Perceptions on Inclusive Education and the Effectiveness of School Assessment for Learners with Disabilities in Public Primary Schools within Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract:

This study explored the special needs of teachers' understanding of inclusive education, analyzed the types of assessments administered to students with disabilities, and evaluated the efficacy of school assessments for learners with disabilities in public primary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study was guided by Vygotsky's social-cultural cognitive theory. A mixed-method concurrent triangulation design was applied, and all 52 public primary schools, headteachers, Special Needs Education teachers, and education officials were included in the study. Data were collected through questionnaires, institutional questionnaires, and interview guides and analyzed using SPSS and thematic analysis. The findings revealed evidence of teachers' knowledge of inclusive education and the use of different types of assessment methods. The findings also revealed that the assessments were both effective and ineffective. The study recommends the provision of proper assessment tools and training of teachers on assessment methods for learners with disabilities and a review of the existing assessment practices.

Keywords: Perceptions, inclusive education, efficacy, effective, Ineffective, and assessment methods

1. Introduction

Inclusive education is based on the principle that all students should have access to the same educational opportunities and resources, creating an equitable environment for all learners. This concept is embedded in early Greco-Roman philosophy, initiated by Socrates, Plato, and Isocrates, and is further outlined in various international conventions safeguarding the right to education (Adiela & Achinewhu, 2021). The philosophy of inclusion emphasizes that every student should be provided with equal access to support, accommodations, and resources that enable them to reach their full potential. It is a paradigm shift from segregation, through mainstreaming and integration, to inclusive education, wherein those with and without disabilities are equal participants in the learning process (Majawa, 2014; Pandit, 2017; Saravanakumar & Paarizhi, 2018).

Inclusive education is widely recognized as important, but understanding and acceptance of it among educators are still lacking. Teachers may lack the knowledge and skills to implement it in their classrooms, and research on its effectiveness in promoting the development of students with disabilities is limited. Further research is needed to better understand the challenges and successes of inclusive education. Studies of assessment practices and inclusive education for students with disabilities are being conducted worldwide to bridge this gap. Douglas et al. (2016) emphasized that inclusive school assessment is focused on including students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Saravanakumar & Paarizhi (2018) also stressed the importance of researching assessment methods that meet the needs of individuals with disabilities, as it is crucial for successful inclusive education.

In the United Kingdom, many learners deemed 'vulnerable,' especially those with special needs, remain marginalized (Harry & Klingner, 2014). The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2013) promotes the assessment of students based on achievement standards or individual goals, noting that each state and territory may have different approaches to assessment and reporting. In Hong Kong, China, the examination-driven education system has led to teacher fear and hostility toward children with special needs (Meng & Poon-McBrayer, 2013).

Malinen (2013) also notes difficulties in implementing Inclusive Education in China. Unfortunately, there is a lack of understanding among teachers of inclusive education, assessment methods, and their effectiveness in promoting the holistic development of students with disabilities. This research aims to address this gap by evaluating Nairobi County teachers' understanding and acceptance of inclusive education and assessing the effectiveness of inclusive education in developing students holistically.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Various research studies have been conducted on inclusive education, assessment practices, and learners with disabilities. Dyssegaard and Larsen (2013) used a meta-analysis approach to examine inclusive education's academic and social effects on learners with disabilities. The findings revealed that learners with disabilities attending inclusive education have better academic achievements, well-being, and relationships than those attending special schools or classes. Similarly, Oh-Young-filer (2015) meta-analysis revealed that most learners with disabilities in inclusive settings performed better academically and socially than those educated in less inclusive settings.

Other researchers, Baker, such as Wang & Wellberg (1995) and Katz & Mirenda (2002), cited in Hehir et al. (2016), concur that inclusive education yields educational benefits for students with disabilities. Additionally, Rampanor (2015) studied the effectiveness of School Intervention Tests (SITs) in assessing learners with special educational needs in Gaborone community junior secondary schools in Botswana. The study's findings revealed that the effectiveness of SIT depends upon the availability of positive attitudes and support toward inclusive education by the school management team, teachers, parents, and external stakeholders. The findings also showed that informal assessment was done by administering class exercises, quizzes, tests, and examinations.

Despite these findings, a comparison in an experimental research design study by Hua, Therrien, Hendrickson, Woods-Groves, Ries, and Shaw (2012) concludes that further research should be undertaken to examine the effectiveness of intention on reading comprehension in learners with disabilities. Equally, Pratt (1998) adds that to guarantee student achievements and grades that can reflect the learning priorities are established, assessment needs to be carefully planned, conducted, and subject to ongoing analysis, evaluation, and improvement. As a result, there is a need for further education and training for teachers to better understand and effectively implement inclusive education in the classroom. Additionally, further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive education in promoting the holistic development of students with disabilities and to identify any areas where improvements can be made. The current study sought to fill this knowledge gap.

1.2. Research Questions for the Study

The study was guided by the following Research Questions:

- How do teachers view inclusive education for learners with disabilities in public primary schools in Nairobi County?
- What inclusive education school assessment methods exist for learners with disabilities in public primary schools within Nairobi County?
- How effective are inclusive education school assessments for learners with disabilities in primary schools within Nairobi County?

1.3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that underpinned this study was grounded in Vygotsky's cognitive theory. Developed by Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), the cognitive theories comprised the Social-Cultural theory developed in 1931, and the theoretical fundamentals of Defectology were established two decades later in 1993 (Smagorinsky, 2012). These two theories were selectively employed to inform this study, as the first provided insight into how learners without disabilities in a regular school environment may be best supported, while the second addressed the unique needs of learners with disabilities.

Vygotsky's theory also emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive learning environment that promotes student collaboration and peer interaction (Yaghoubi & Farrokh, 2022). In the inclusive classroom, students with disabilities can benefit from interactions and collaborations with their non-disabled peers, which can serve as a means for internalizing knowledge and skills. In addition, Vygotsky's theory also highlights the importance of cultural and historical contexts in cognitive development, which means that the inclusive education system should also be culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of different students (Kholomogorova, 2016).

1.3.1. Vygotsky's Social-Cultural Cognitive Theory

The Social-Cultural Cognitive Theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky in the early 20th century, emphasizes the role of social interactions in developing cognitive abilities. According to Vygotsky, cognitive development occurs through internalizing knowledge and skills that are initially acquired through social interactions with more knowledgeable individuals (Ardila, 2016). In the context of inclusive education, this theory can be applied by understanding that students with disabilities may have different cognitive abilities compared to their non-disabled peers. However, through social interactions with teachers and peers, students with disabilities can internalize the knowledge and skills necessary for their cognitive development.

The Theoretical Fundamentals of Defectology, developed by Alexander Luria in the early 1990s, is an extension of Vygotsky's Social-Cultural Cognitive Theory (Bazhukova et al., 2020). This theory focuses on the study of the development

of individuals with disabilities and emphasizes the importance of understanding the individual's unique strengths and weaknesses rather than focusing on their deficits. Luria's theory highlights the importance of creating an individualized education plan for students with disabilities, which takes into account their unique needs and abilities.

In the context of inclusive education, the Theoretical Fundamentals of Defectology are applicable by focusing on the individualized needs of students with disabilities. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the unique strengths and weaknesses of each student with disabilities, and it encourages the development of individualized education plans that take into account the specific needs of each student. Additionally, this theory emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that promotes collaboration and peer interaction among students.

Both Vygotsky's Social-Cultural Cognitive Theory and Luria's Theoretical Fundamentals of Defectology emphasize the importance of social interactions in cognitive development and the internalization of knowledge and skills (1962). Both theories also highlight the importance of understanding the unique strengths and weaknesses of students with disabilities and creating an individualized education plan that takes into account their specific needs. These theories are applicable in the context of inclusive education by providing students with disabilities with appropriate support, guidance, and opportunities for social interactions and collaborations with their peers, to promote their cognitive development in a culturally responsive and sensitive manner.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Perspectives on Inclusive Education

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) found that while the enrollment of students with disabilities in primary education has increased globally, there is still a significant gap in their enrollment and participation in secondary education (Kiuppis, 2014). This study identified a research gap in understanding the barriers that students with disabilities face in accessing secondary education and in developing effective interventions to improve their enrollment and participation. In the United States, Rosenbaum (2018) found that while inclusive education practices have increased in recent years, there is still a lack of understanding among teachers on how to implement these practices in the classroom effectively. The study identified a research gap in providing teachers with the necessary training and support to implement inclusive education practices effectively.

In Kenya, Phasha and Runo (2017) found that despite the adoption of inclusive education policies in primary schools, there is a lack of understanding among teachers on how to implement these policies effectively. The study identified a research gap in providing teachers with the necessary training and support to implement inclusive education policies in primary schools effectively. Ohba and Malenya (2022) also found that there is a lack of research on the effectiveness of inclusive education in promoting the academic achievement and social inclusion of students with disabilities in Kenya. This research gap highlights the need for further research to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive education in Kenya.

2.2. Types of School Assessments

Educators generally have positive attitudes toward inclusion, but their practices may not align with those attitudes (Motala, 2015). For example, some teachers may not fully commit to including students with disabilities in all aspects of the classroom. Additionally, teachers may feel hindered by the paperwork required for assessments for students with disabilities, which may be a barrier to accurate assessments. To improve inclusive education and assessment outcomes for students with disabilities, it is essential to consider the resources available to teachers and provide guidance on appropriate assessment methods and formats (Phasha & Runo, 2017). Further research is needed to understand the barriers and benefits of inclusive education and to improve the assessment process for these students in public primary schools.

2.3. Effectiveness of School Assessment Practices for Learners with Disabilities

Research has consistently demonstrated that assessment practices for learners with disabilities are an area of concern globally. In the United Kingdom, many vulnerable learners, particularly those with special needs, remain marginalized (Harry & Klingner, 2014). In Australia, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2013) advocates to assess students against achievement standards or individual goals. In Hong Kong, China, the examination-driven education system has exacerbated teachers' fear and hostility toward children with special needs (Meng & Poon-McBrayer, 2013).

Stiggins and Chappius (2012) posit that effective assessment practices enable middle-level teachers to differentiate instruction by providing a more comprehensive understanding of student's understanding throughout the learning process. A study by Rampanor (2015) examined the effectiveness of school intervention tests (SIT) in assessing learners with special educational needs in Gaborone community junior secondary schools in Botswana. The findings indicated that the effectiveness of SIT is contingent upon the availability of positive attitudes and support for inclusive education among the school management team, teachers, parents, and external stakeholders.

Beth (2015) conducted a study in Rwanda on the academic impediments students with Visual Impairments encounter in the colleges of the University of Rwanda. The findings revealed that while students with Visual Impairments were given extra time during the examination, they still performed poorly due to questions that were not adapted to suit their needs. Moyo (2012) conducted a study in Uganda on access to education for children with disabilities and their

implications for Education for All. His findings revealed that the examination timetable did not accommodate children with disabilities.

Kimondiu (2012) argues that in Kenya, assessments that do not take into account the special needs of learners with Physical Disabilities have led to poor academic achievements. Odoh (2016) adds that the inability to read and write braille negatively impacts the academic performance of students with Visual Impairments, and the availability of braille materials plays a critical role in the performance of students with visual impairments in academic subjects. Rigaud (2017) concludes that even when children with disabilities are enrolled in school, they are often excluded from learning as the curriculum has not been adapted to their needs or teachers do not have the time or capacity to provide individualized support and learning assistance.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-method paradigm (MMR) with a survey design for quantitative data and a phenomenological for qualitative research design.

3.1. Location of the Study

This study focused on understanding the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding inclusive education and school assessments for learners with disabilities in public primary schools within Nairobi County, Kenya. A mixed-method research paradigm was employed, which combined both quantitative and qualitative research methods. To this end, a survey design was used to gather more generalizable data, and a phenomenological design was utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions.

All 52 public primary schools that had learners with disabilities, all headteachers in those schools, as well as 206 special educational needs teachers in primary, special, and secondary schools in Nairobi County, were targeted. However, a sample size of 40 public primary schools was specifically chosen based on the inclusive education programs they were implementing. Additionally, headteachers were chosen from the selected schools, and a random sample of 80 Special Needs Education teachers was assigned. A purposeful sampling method was used to select the Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs).

Data were collected using questionnaires, interview schedules, and document analysis, which were subsequently piloted in one of the county primary schools in Nairobi to assess the reliability and validity of the instruments. Following the pilot test, necessary adjustments were made. Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 24, while qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and themes. This approach helped to elucidate the teachers' perceptions and experiences related to inclusive education and school assessments for learners with disabilities in Nairobi County.

4. Findings

4.1. Teachers' Perception of Inclusive Education

The Special Needs Education teacher's perception of inclusive education as 'education for all' aligns with the definition of inclusive education as stated by Saravana Kumar and Paarizhi (2018), in which all students, including those with disabilities, are equal participants in the learning process. This view also aligns with the philosophy of full inclusion, which is influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Article 28, which states that state parties shall recognize the right of the child to education and make primary education compulsory and available to all. This view emphasizes the importance of providing equal opportunities for education to all students, including those with disabilities, to achieve progressive and inclusive education systems.

4.2. The Types of Assessments for Learners with Disabilities

The findings from the study reveal that the majority of the Special Needs Education teachers (SNE teachers) surveyed (85%) specified the use of assessment rubrics as a method for assessing students with disabilities. Additionally, 75% of the SNE teachers specified the use of oral and aural questions, 71.3% disclosed the use of checklists, 63.8% itemized the use of portfolios, 62.5% selected written tests, and a few (37) teachers mentioned the use of projects. However, a relatively low number of SNE teachers (46.3%) used questionnaires, and only 27.5% used journals. The study also revealed that SNE teachers were non-committal on the type of assessment that exists for learners with Down Syndrome, Albinism, Dwarfism, and Multiple Disabilities, despite these categories of learners being enrolled in the schools. This suggests that more research needs to be done to understand the assessment practices for these specific groups of learners with disabilities.

Disability	Project	Journals	Portfolios	Checklist	Rating scale	Written test	Questionnaire	Assessment rubrics	Observation	Oral and aural Questions
Hearing Impairment	12	7	18	18	9	25	10	21	24	18
Visual Impairment	4	2	5	6	4	5	3	6	6	6
Physical Impairment	4	1	6	6	7	5	3	13	9	11
Cerebral Palsy	3	4	4	4	2	3	2	5	9	5
Intellectual & Cognitive Disability	7	5	8	12	7	7	5	10	12	11
Down Syndrome	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Autistic Spectrum Disorder		2	4	5	4	3	3	4	4	5
Emotional & Behavioural Disorders	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	1
Learning Disability	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Speech & Language Disorders	1	-		1	1	1	-	1	2	1
Multiple Disability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Deaf blind	4		4	4	4		4	4	4	
Albinism	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dwarfism	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Totals (%)	37 (46.3%)	22 (27.5%)	51 (63.8%)	57 (71.3%)	39 (48.8%)	50 (62.5%)	31 (38.8%)	68 (85.0%)	72 (90.0%)	60 (75.0%)

Table 1: The Number of Teachers' Views on Specific Types of School Assessments Practices That Exist for Learners with Disabilities in Public Primary Schools in Nairobi County

4.3. Effectiveness of Inclusive Education School Assessment Practices for Learners with Disabilities in Primary Schools within Nairobi County

To obtain insight into the effectiveness of inclusive school assessments, the researcher sought to gain views from Special Needs Education Teachers (SNET), headteachers, and Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs). Through these findings, it is known that effective assessments should be goal-oriented teaching-learning sequences, with clearly understood learning objectives and productive classroom activities while providing meaningful feedback to students to make them aware of their performances. Furthermore, assessments can serve multiple interests, such as decision-making, communication, or assigning grades. The responses obtained from the SNE teachers showed that opinions varied about the effectiveness of assessments in inclusive schools, with some viewing it as effective and others not.

The findings of the study suggest that the assessments used in the schools effectively promoted equity supported the learning and progress of learners with disabilities, and created a positive and inclusive learning environment. Key factors contributing to the success of these assessments included the promotion of equity through assessment practices, such as allowing learners with visual impairments to use braille in assessments and basing assessments on the abilities of learners with disabilities. Furthermore, a positive attitude of teachers towards learners with disabilities and the fact that learners with disabilities were happy learning with their peers without disabilities likely contributed to the successful implementation of the assessments. This suggests that the inclusive education approach successfully promoted social inclusion and a positive learning environment for all students. Additionally, the progress of learners with disabilities indicated that the assessments were appropriately aligned with their abilities and needs.

4.4. The School Headteachers' Views on the Effectiveness of Inclusive School Assessment Practices

The findings of the study indicate that headteachers had varying perspectives on the effectiveness of inclusive school assessment practices. Some headteachers reported that the assessments were effective, while others stated they were not. The headteachers who considered the assessments to be effective attributed this effect to the specific purpose and design of the assessments. They also noted that the assessments were effective as they reflected the learners'

performance and enabled their proper placement. Additionally, they noted that learners with disabilities were happy to learn with their peers without disabilities and that the assessments helped to improve their self-efficacy. The headteachers also highlighted that learners with disabilities were performing well, progressing to the next levels of learning like their peers without disabilities. Some of them have done the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education and proceeded to high school. Furthermore, the headteachers stated that the Competency-Based Assessments (CBAs) were effective as it does not award marks or grades, and all categories of learners can be assessed using the rubrics.

4.5. Curriculum Support Officers and Educational Assessment Resource Centers' Views on Effectiveness of Inclusive School Assessment Practices.

CSOs and EARCs emphasized that for an effective school, the assessment must include consideration of the needs of diverse learners, including those with learning disabilities (LWDs). To achieve this, the curriculum-based assessment should be comprehensive and focused on the learning outcomes. Moreover, when necessary, adaptations, accommodations, and modifications of assessments should be considered in different areas of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Finally, the content, duration, presentation mode, and environment of assessments are key parameters in judging the effectiveness of the assessment.

The officers noted that as the assessment focuses on attributes such as knowledge, skills, and attitude, every learner has the potential to be an achiever. Rather than assigning traditional marks, learners are assessed either through rubrics or projects, making the assessment less stressful for both the teacher and the learner. It was further suggested that alternate systems, such as CBC, may be effective for some learners, such as those with Learning and Writing Disabilities, allowing them to excel at college and university levels. However, they may not be universally applicable.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that learners with disabilities are assessed the same way as those learners without disabilities. The assessment methods used in these schools were observation, rubrics, oral and aural questions, checklists, portfolios, and written tests. The least assessment method used was journals.

5.1. Effectiveness of Inclusive Education School Assessment Practices for Learners with Disabilities in Primary Schools

The findings of this study revealed a disparity in the perceptions of Curriculum supports, headteachers, and Special Needs Education teachers (SNE teachers) on the effectiveness of inclusive school assessment practices. While some reported the practices to be effective, attributing this to the purpose and design of the assessments, as well as their contribution to the placement of learners, others stated the practices were ineffective, citing the lack of proper assessment tools, training on how to assess learners with special needs, and understanding of their specific needs. Ultimately, it is clear that the perceived effectiveness of inclusive school assessment practices is different among individual stakeholders. In order to improve the effectiveness of these practices, it is essential to ensure the availability of proper assessment tools and training, as well as to improve understanding of the needs of learners with special needs.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of inclusive school assessment practices:

- *Provide proper assessment tools:* The study found that some headteachers and SNE teachers considered the assessments to be ineffective due to a lack of proper assessment tools. It is recommended that schools provide appropriate assessment tools for learners with disabilities to ensure that their abilities and progress are accurately reflected.
- *Provide training on how to assess learners with disabilities:* The study found that lack of training on how to assess learners with disabilities was a factor that contributed to the perception of some headteachers and SNE teachers that the assessments were ineffective. It is recommended that schools provide regular training to teachers on how to assess learners with disabilities to ensure that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to do so effectively.
- *Understand the needs of learners with disabilities:* The study found that a lack of understanding of the needs of learners with disabilities was a factor that contributed to the perception of some headteachers and SNE teachers that the assessments were ineffective. It is recommended that schools work closely with learners with disabilities to understand their needs and to ensure that assessments are designed and implemented in a way that meets their needs.
- *Review the assessment practices:* The study revealed the non-committal types of assessment that exist for learners with Down Syndrome, Albinism, Dwarfism, and Multiple Disabilities, despite these categories of learners being enrolled in the schools. It is recommended that schools review their assessment practices to ensure they are inclusive and appropriate for all learners with disabilities.
- *Inclusive Education School Assessment Practices:* In order to foster equity among learners with and without disabilities (LWDs), this study recommends assessing them alongside each other. To ensure that assessments are inclusive, it is essential to adapt, modify, and make time variations and modifications to the assessment practices, such as providing additional time for LWDs, altering assessment formats, and offering alternative methods of assessment that are better suited to the needs of those with disabilities (e.g., oral assessments for learners with visual impairments, braille assessments for learners with visual impairments, sign language assessments for those

with hearing impairments). It is further suggested that assessments for LWDs should be based on their abilities and should assess their achievements and progress in the curriculum. Schools and educators should be trained on how to assess learners with disabilities and how to adjust assessments to meet their needs. In addition, providing assessments that are aligned with a competency-based approach is recommended, as it provides a more inclusive assessment of LWDs, enabling them to be assessed based on their abilities rather than their disabilities.

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