

Special Needs Education (SNE) in Kenyan Public Primary Schools: Exploring Government Policy and Teachers' Understandings

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Abstract

This research focuses on Special Needs Education (SNE) in Kenyan Public Schools: Exploring Government Policy and Teachers' understandings. At a time when Kenya is introducing reforms with a view to addressing broad national objectives and providing universal primary education (UPE) after the enrolment increases arising from the free primary education declaration (FPE), it was important to establish teachers' understandings on SEN. The study undertaken in 27 primary schools in urban, municipal and rural parts of Kenya. A phenomenological qualitative approach was mainly used and data were collected from teachers through a survey comprising: (i) 159 self-administered questionnaires ii) Nine in-depth interviews. From the results of a pilot study, necessary adaptations were made for the main study. The data provided insights to teachers' teaching strategies, impacts of mainstreaming, factors that prevent the participation of children said to have SEN, challenges in meeting the diverse needs in the classroom and the support they may require in providing more engaging and effective learning instructions. The findings show that many teachers lack a repertoire of learning and teaching strategies appropriate for addressing barriers to learning and providing individualized approaches in the classrooms. Some teachers were positive about teaching children said to have SEN but lacked the infrastructure of support and guidance, were confused by different terminologies and found the concept of SEN not to be enabling. What teachers are calling for is more training to help them develop strategies which are responsive to the identified learning difficulties. Through Documentary Analysis of the Kenya National Special Needs Education (SNE) Policy Framework, Ministry of Education (MoE, 2009), it was identified that the policy is difficult and ambiguous for teachers to implement. The policy fails to include salient definitions to facilitate a common way of addressing children said to have SEN which results in them being labelled. The recommendations of the research that children's unique needs be made transparent and addressed using effective individualized education plans to influence and maintain high expectations, positive and enriched ways of teaching in order to improve the learning opportunities as well as other extracurricular activities. The national policy should be revised to include feasible targets in order to facilitate on-going evaluation and embed definitions of key words which are pivotal to planning, assessment, identification, provision and placement of children said to have SEN. Suggestions for further research have also been included.