

An Exploration of Inclusive Education for Children with Special Educational Needs in Kenya Twenty Years after the Salamanca Statement

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Abstract

Kenya is said to be among the few countries of sub-Saharan Africa that have achieved Universal Primary Education, Education for All and achieved most Millennium Development Goals. However, research shows for some children access is limited in mainstream schools, while others lacked access at all. Kenya is a signatory to the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action and committed to creating inclusive schools. This study explores the challenges facing the creation of inclusive schools and efforts being made to include children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. It identified the impact of inclusion for children with SEN after the Salamanca Statement in 1994 and teachers' understanding of disability and inclusive education. It concludes with an analysis of the barriers to inclusion within the mainstream schools studied.

The research strategy explored a single revelatory case for an in-depth understanding of the current inclusion in a Kenyan rural Education Zone through a qualitative paradigm. An interpretive epistemology approach is adopted to construct the interview questions and observations. A representative sample of seventeen teachers from government-funded primary and secondary schools and ten parents in one focus group were the target of this study. What has emerged from the research using thematic data analysis to establish findings, was that mainstream school teachers have limited understanding of disability, special educational needs and inclusive teaching. As with communities in general, stereotyping, discrimination and negative attitudes were found to be more personalised with teachers. In addition, lack of teacher education on special needs, professional development and confidence to teach children with diverse needs in the same classroom with non-disabled peers were significant barriers.

Based on the study's findings, policy shift is recommended to promote inclusive education. Funding is required to enable schools to develop a supportive child-friendly environment that is physically safe, emotionally secure and psychologically enabling, supported by intensified teacher training and professional development. Most of all, there is a need to develop inclusion support materials guided by policy and legislation to support the implementation of inclusive schools. This study contributes to academic knowledge by extending the concept of inclusive education as the most operational means of combating segregation in education, discriminatory cultural ideologies and building cohesive communities. This research will provide insight to teachers, parents, children, communities, policy formulation, and will ignite an inclusion debate in Kenya and other developing nations in a similar position.

Key Words: Inclusion, Inclusive Education, Disabilities, Special Educational Needs, Policy

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