

The Role of Educational Assessment Resource Centres in Promoting Inclusive Education in Kenya

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Abstract: *Emphasis on ensuring inclusive, equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all is well document under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. The underlying principle behind the 2030 sustainable development is the recognition of human dignity and the quest of not leaving anyone behind. However, unless marginalization and discrimination of some groups of people based on such aspects as ethnicity, race, sex, religion or disability are eliminated through embracing inclusive practices, we are far from achieving SDGs. Kenya Institute of Special Education conducted a national survey on children with disability and special needs in education that estimated disability prevalence among children at 11.4%. One of the objectives of the survey was to determine the quality of programs and services offered by educational assessment centres (EARCs). This survey used cross-sectional research design. Primary data was sourced from head teachers, teachers, Educational Assessment and Resource Center officers and non-governmental organizations and partners in education. Questionnaires, checklists and interviews were used to collect data. Findings revealed an imbalance in the distribution of staff in EARCs whereas; the majority had training in the four traditional disability areas posing a challenge in the assessment of other disability areas. Though EARCs are aware of inclusive practices, data revealed that they did not give inclusion the first priority during child placement option. The study concludes that there is need to strengthen and empower assessment offices in support of inclusive practices, enhance specialized training on functional assessment and the value of inclusive practices in decongesting special schools.*

Keywords: SDG, EARC, CSO, disability, inclusive practices

1. Background Information

Inclusive education is a universal phenomenon expressed differently in various countries, and different contextual realities may either support or constrain the process of making education more inclusive (Kim, 2012; Terzi, 2014; Talley & Brintnell, 2015). The aim of any just society should be to empower all individuals to attain self-sufficiency in life regardless of their sex, race, cognitive ability or disability or any other stratifying aspects.

The 17 sustainable development goals adopted in New York are focused on embracing the need for economic progress that leaves no one behind and gives everyone a fair chance of leading a decent life. However, unless marginalization of persons with disabilities is significantly reduced if not eliminated, it is difficult to break the disability-poverty chain (Bourke & Mentis, 2014). The SDG 4 acknowledges the importance of education for all "Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning." Embracing inclusivity need to start from early years of schooling through to employment.

Studies show that at least 10% of the world's population constitutes persons with a disability out of which 79% have never accessed primary education (WHO, 2011; Elder, Damiani, & Oswago, 2016). Further, about 80% of persons with disabilities live in Sub-Saharan Africa. The national survey on children with disability and special needs conducted by Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE, 2017) reveals that 11.4% of children between 3-21 years have a disability. Also, the study showed that at least 52% of these children with disability are not enrolled in school. It was also found that 72% of these children live in rural areas and

27% live in urban centres. This is nothing but practising education exclusion.

Kenya has numerous policies and other legal instruments in support of inclusive education but has not managed to implement these standards (Bourke & Mentis, 2014). For instance, the National Special Needs Education Policy Framework (2009) emphasizes the need to increase access, enhance retention, and improve quality and relevance of education to all. It also stresses on strengthening early identification and assessment to ensure equal opportunities in the provision of education. In the last decade, there seem to be efforts to dismantle educational exclusion and enabling inclusion in Kenya such as increasing capitation for children with disabilities, training teachers on inclusive education and creating the Directorate of Special Needs (SNE) within the ministry of education (MoE).

The immediate, positive appeal of theoretical inclusive education has caused a general feeling of goodwill in Kenya, and everyone wants to see it working. Despite this actual implementation of inclusion in education is not as evident as is widely discussed. Careful integration of policy and actual practice plays a crucial role in achieving inclusion and subsequent sustainable development goal 4. This paper examines the glaring gaps and disconnects between society's goodwill to practice inclusion as expressed by policy and the actual practices of inclusion in education in Kenya.

2. Data

Primary data was collected from the field using computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI). Data was collected from households, schools, EARCs, NGOs and MoE

Officials. During the survey, real-time data received electronically across the 47 Counties and stored on institute servers. The raw data was encrypted with passwords and stored by Kenya Institute of Special Education and can be accessed by authorized individuals for the purpose of academic and professional support [Note: Access to the survey data must be for the purpose of informing policy and advancement of disability mainstreaming and improvement of special needs education].

3. Methodology

The study used cross-sectional descriptive research design. The two-stage random sample was used to select representative households. The stratified random sampling method was used to select head teachers and teachers of both primary and secondary schools and non-governmental organizations across the country. Purposive sampling was in the section of educational assessment and resource centres. The aggregate sample for the study comprised of 4700 households, 530 head teachers, 1920 teachers, 1728 teachers, 46 educational assessment and resource centres and 81 Non-governmental organization all with an average response rate of 90%. Semi-structured questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussions and observation checklists were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data from respondents. Deliberate measures such as use of sign language and other necessary adaptations were put in place to ensure inclusive inquiry during data collection.

All data was transmitted electronically from the field immediately after collection. Quantitative data was received in SPSS format while qualitative data was received in audio format. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS V.23 while qualitative data was first transcribed and put in Ms Word format than analyzed using NVivo V.11. Since data analysis was independent of each other, the two were triangulated to minimize response bias and reported as follows.

4. Findings and Discussions

The findings showed that a higher proportion of staff in EARCs in Kenya has training in four disability areas; Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment, Mental Disability and Physical Disability in that order. An average of between 2 and 5 (1.6% and 4%) officers are trained in Gifted and Talented, Autism, Deafblind, Learning Difficulties, Emotional and Behaviour Disorders. If children with disabilities are to receive appropriate and quality education, it is necessary for them to have legal statements from recognized institutions that label them as learners with disabilities and therefore legible to special services and support while at school. EARCs should be the starting point. When there are few officers trained in some areas of

disabilities such as autism and deafblind, the initiative for early identification and intervention becomes less efficient.

The study found a more significant positive correlation between EARCs training and the number of children assessed than between disability prevalence and number of children assessed ($r = 0.73, P < 0.05$; $r = 0.64, P < 0.05$ respectively). This finding concurs with (Van Swet, Wichers-Bots, & Brown, 2011) who concludes from their study that well trained personnel are crucial in disability identification and early intervention and (Bourke & Mentis, 2014) says that lack of assessment experts results into misdiagnosis of some emerging disabilities.

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted taking assessment of children with disability as a dependent variable. Training of EARCs in specific disability areas and disability prevalence were the independent variables. The Table below shows a summary statistics of the linear regression model;

$$Y_i = -204.38 + 6.04X_{1i} + 83.22X_{2i}$$

Where

Y_i = Total number of children assessed for the i^{th} disability

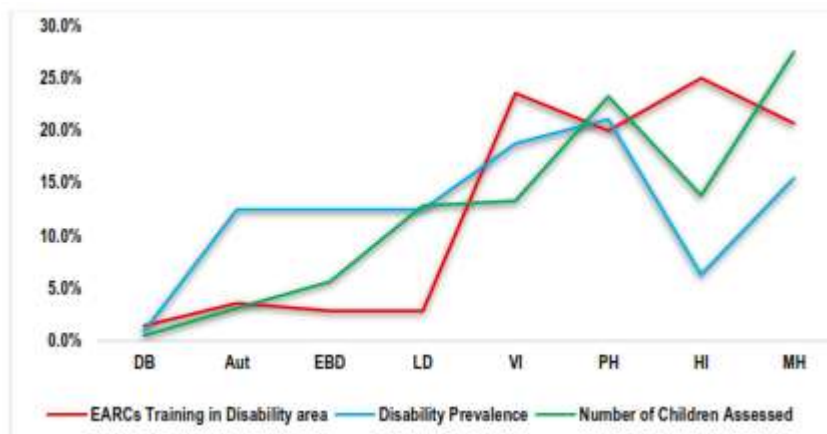
X_{1i} = The prevalence rate for the i^{th} disability

X_{2i} = Number of trained EARCs in the i^{th} disability area

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
Regression Intercept	-204.3751	1280.220	-0.159641	0.8794
Disability Prevalence	6.044184	4.425344	1.365811	0.2302
EARCs' Training	83.21774	43.90056	1.895596	0.1165
R-squared	0.654836	Mean dependent var	2970.750	
Adjusted R-squared	0.516770	S.D. dependent var	2240.580	
S.E. of regression	1557.533	Akaike info criterion	17.81959	
Sum squared resid	12129546	Schwarz criterion	17.84938	
Log-likelihood	-68.27836	Hannan-Quinn criter.	17.61866	
F-statistic	4.742934	Durbin-Watson stat	2.288823	
Prob(F-statistic)	0.069994			

Clearly, from the results above the marginal leverage of EARCs training on the assessment process is higher at 83.2 compared to that of disability prevalence at 6.0. This implies that successful assessment depends more on experts available than it does on the prevalence of that disability by more than 14 times. Also, 52% of successful assessments are linearly dependent on the prevalence of the disability in the population and availability of expertise. This then leaves room to interrogate other household factors such as social, economic, cultural and religious factors that may constitute up to 48% of the successful assessment process.

The figure below presents a visual description of the interrelationship among training of EARCs, assessment of children with disabilities and prevalence rate of each disability.



Comparison of EARCs Training, Disability Prevalence and Number of children assessed in Kenya [January 2015 - December 2016]

From the figure above, we see a linear trend among the three variables. Disability domains such as deafblind and autism which have the least number of trained personnel in EARCs also register the least number of children assessed. On the other hand, disabilities such as hearing impairment and mental disability which have the highest number of trained personnel also register the highest number of children assessed.

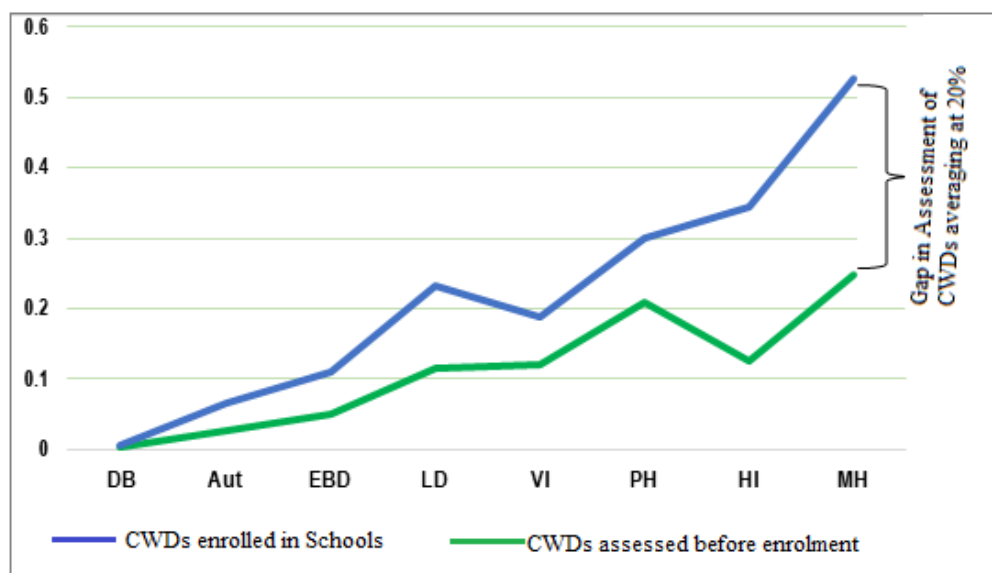
After successful assessment of children with disabilities, placement options available may open or close the door for early intervention. The findings of the study show that there are more integrated secondary schools than special secondary schools in Kenya. Further, it was shown that the highest proportion of EARCs officers at 49% prefer placing children with disabilities in integrated programs, 22% prefer special schools, 20% prefer regular schools. This trend promotes segregation rather than inclusivity in the education sector. It was however discovered that the current deployment letters from the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) do not compel Curriculum Support Officers – Special Needs Education (CSO- SNE) [EARCs are currently referred to as CSO under TSC appointment] to promote inclusive practices.

A close examination of enrollment of children with disabilities in schools revealed that on average, each special school in Kenya has at least 11 children on the waiting list compared to integrated schools which have an average of 6 children on the waiting list and this is why role of assessment officers in achieving inclusion cannot be underestimated. The study also found that 63% of successful

placement of children in appropriate schools (whether special, integrated or regular as the case is fit) depends on comprehensive multidisciplinary assessment.

According to the study by (Muuya, 2002), other than SNE teachers, other professionals such as therapists, social workers, audiologists, nutritionists and regular teachers must be involved in the assessment process. This study, however, established that less than half of assessment centres in Kenya involve audiologists, nutritionists and speech therapists. Vision therapists and regular teachers are rarely involved in the assessment process. Despite genuine efforts by some assessment officers to carry out their duties efficiently, the study shows that there is a severe shortage of equipment, some lacking the fundamental resources such as office space. In fact, 76% of these centres use old and obsolete equipment for assessment.

Another stunning result revealed is that 72% of regular schools in Kenya enrol at least a child with disability every year. It was found that these children are admitted to school without assessment. Taking a child with a disability and placing them in a regular school without an expert referral is an act of education exclusion (Talley & Brintnell, 2015). These children with disabilities are expected to have equal opportunity to access quality education just like others in the same class. To achieve this, teachers must develop and successfully implement individualized education programs to cater for learners' specific needs (Bourke & Mentis, 2014).



It was found in this study that only 17% of teachers in regular schools had training in special needs education out of which the majority at 56% only have certificates in inclusive education. All the teachers who have training in special needs education appreciate the need for IEP and some are committed to the extent of preparing IEP for children with disabilities in classes. However, there is entirely no implementation of the same due to what they termed as heavy workload.

5. Conclusions

Based on the evidence in this paper, we conclude that EARCs or curriculum support officers SNE as currently referred to by TSC play a minimal role in supporting inclusive practices. Given that EARCs/CSOs SNE, are critical in assessment, placement and early intervention, their minimal role makes Kenya as a country not ready for meaningful inclusion. This is evidenced by the presence of children with disabilities in the regular school system but has insufficient teaching and learning resources as well as necessary support services to make schooling meaningful to them.

Further, a severe shortage of trained personnel in areas such as autism, deafblind, learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties among other has resulted in underdiagnosis or misdiagnosis of disabilities. Finally, the poorly functioning multidisciplinary teams within the assessment centres in Kenya possess significant handicaps in achieving inclusion. This process has affected transition rates of children with disabilities because there is no team dedicated to the development and implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEP) beyond the foundational levels of education.

6. Recommendations and Policy Implications

Out of the findings of this study and subsequent conclusions, the researcher makes the following policy recommendations:

- Fast track the implementation of the revised national policy on inclusive education to enhance access to

education and make schooling meaningful for children with disabilities

- Equip and enhance assessment and resource centres to facilitate early identification, assessment and early intervention from early childhood education years
- Enhance and rationalize staffing in educational assessment centres to facilitate assessment of learners with disabilities and special needs in education
- Rationalize teaching staff trained in special needs education in all schools that enrol learners with disabilities according to the Ministry of Education Policy on teacher-learner ratio
- Device mechanisms to support teachers trained in SNE in regular schools to be a position to champion the agenda of inclusion
- There is need for policy guidelines on the development and implementation of individualised educational programmes for learners with disability in support of inclusive education
- Develop EARC capacity building courses to enable them to embrace inclusion thus help in decongesting special schools

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