

Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs - How Inclusive is it?

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Abstract

"Inclusive education: the way of the future" was the theme of discussion at the 48th Session of the International Conference on Education in Geneva, Switzerland in 2008. This was in recognition of the importance of education, to empower and equip all with skills and knowledge. Many countries have realized that the future of every nation depends on the quality and effectiveness of its education. An uneducated portion of the population is a liability to the nation as it is dependent, and offers little contribution to national development. It is therefore imperative that every nation, invests in educating all its citizens to enable them contribute towards its progress. The inclusive education paradigm is based on the human rights concept that removes inequality and barriers while eliminating historical circumstances of educational marginalization and exclusion. It is a process whereby the capacity of an education system is strengthened to reach all learners irrespective of their cultural, social, learning background or ability. It endeavours to educate all children to the maximum extent appropriate to them and to their ability. It is a consequence of several international declarations and efforts geared towards achieving Education For All (EFA) such as the 1989 United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the 1990 Jomtien World Declaration on EFA, the Salamanca World Conference on Inclusive Education of 1994 and the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action. However, despite being the desired practice in education, it may not always be achievable due to issues in teacher orientation, training, national education systems, resource availability, financial, social, and other barriers, which render this practice expensive and difficult to attain. In the midst of all the adversity, it is nonetheless the duty of the teacher to implement this policy. Every teacher has a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that they meet every learner at their point of need and develop them to their full potential. This paper discusses the teacher's ethical role in educating children with disabilities amidst all these barriers. It brings out the ethical dilemma faced by teachers in providing an inclusive education and utilizes qualitative methods of study such as content analysis. It is a library research analyzing related studies in this field, to document and recommend ways of improving education to make it more inclusive and meaningful to all children.

Keywords: *Ethics, Inclusive Education, Special Needs Education*

Introduction

The policy of inclusive education, the desired educational provision practice, observes that all children, irrespective of their differences and abilities, should be educated in the same schools where possible, and that the school should adapt itself to the needs of all children (Kamere, 2004). Indeed "Inclusive education: the way of the future", was the theme of discussion at the 48th Session of the International Conference on Education held in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2008. This policy comes within a global historical backdrop where due to political and social backgrounds of different nations, education was differentiated on the basis of colour, ability, creed, religion and even linguistic orientation. As an improvement to the policy of segregation, and in an attempt to combat inequality and promote human rights, integration, also referred to as mainstreaming, was born where all children would be taught in the same classrooms or in different units or wings of the same school. In this policy, learners were required to fit into and adapt themselves to the school system, hence perpetrating the inequalities it was meant to fight.

The socio-economic realities of integration are such that one group is viewed as the 'mainstream' and the (other) is not; where one group has to 'push-in' to the activities and settings occupied by the other (Thornbull *et al.*, 1995, p. 116).

In this policy, schools only admitted children with special educational needs, SEN, but made no attempt to accommodate their special learning needs. This disadvantaged and excluded SEN learners who had difficulties fitting in the school system as it is. Inclusive education was therefore mooted to take care of the deficiency of integration. This education goes beyond integration in that it requires the school to make changes and adapt itself to the needs of all children. It calls upon the school to identify problems faced by learners with SEN and identify the facilities they need in order to accommodate and educate them to their optimal level irrespective of their differences, condition and situations (Kamere, 2004).

In inclusive programmes, the diverse needs of all children are accommodated to the maximum extent possible within the general education...driven by a vision of schools

as a place where all children learn well what we want them to learn, schools become creative and successful environments for...the children they serve (Thornbull *et al.*, 1995, p. 116).

Often children with SEN, who include children with disabilities, CWD, are often segregated or marginalized in education. They are often left out of the educational process because they demand more attention from the already over worked teacher, and specialized facilities from schools which, more often than not, are burdened with financial constraints and run down facilities to further be expected to meet the special needs of these children. Indeed the question here is:

If schools are failing to provide adequately for the majority of those who attend them, how can they be expected to meet the educational needs of the least able and the handicapped who will require additional resources and staff for which finance is unavailable? (Booths & Potts, 1983, p. 207).

This paper highlights the moral obligation teachers have to provide CWD with an appropriate education suitable to meet their needs.

Materials and Methods

This is a desk-based research utilizing qualitative methods to examine and synthesize information from a wide range of literature, studies and policy and convention documents to construct arguments on the ethical issues surrounding the education of children with SEN. It is, however, limited to the teachers' ethical conduct towards these students in regard to their education.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by a theoretical framework borrowed from Pontefract (2002), who derives ideas on children's cognitive development from theories of Piaget (1953), Vygotsky (1987), Bruner (1960). These theories recognize the value of active involvement of children in their own learning, the knowledge and experiences they bring to the learning process and the place of the instructor in this process. The interactions of all these are vital to education.

Piaget's work made great contribution to both the theory and practice of the teaching methodology. According to him intellectual growth occurs in hierarchical stages, progressing through the stages of child development, whereby the child acquires a developed pattern of behaviour, called a 'schema' or 'schemata', through their interaction with the environment. Piaget believed in encouraging learners to have experimental minds to enhance cognitive development through interaction with the environment and to nurture the child's natural capacity to develop (Pontefract, 2002). This view point observes that children learn best through being actively involved in learning and their cognitive, affective and psychomotor faculties employed.

Piaget reasoned that a learning process that deprived children of the opportunity to interact with the environment to discover for themselves and one based on ideas of children assimilating new knowledge through transmission, instead of by 'internal activity' was flawed. His view on the importance of participatory learning is of essence to this paper as it guides the study to ascertain whether or not children with special needs, CSEN, participate in learning or whether they are sidelined. It is based on the premise that if the school system is not adjusted to bring out the natural abilities and capacities in CSEN and if education does not take cognizance of the ability of these learners, then the learners become segregated and excluded from the normal class participation and interaction. The teacher therefore needs to engage these learners by creating an interactive, participatory learning environment.

Vygotsky recognizes the crucial role of an adult in enabling learners operate at developmental levels beyond their individual capability, to achieve what he terms as their 'zone of proximal development'. This is the distance between what a child achieves on their own without support, and with appropriate support (Pontefract, 2002). He opines that an individual's ability can be expanded, enhanced and improved by employing suitable cognitive support. This view is also supported by Bruner's idea of the 'scaffolding process', which is basically a process whereby an adult, instructor or a more able peer, supports the learners' thinking to help them move into their zone of proximal development. The level of proximal development attained thereof is as a result of the learners' ability, the complexity of the task, the quality and nature of the support given to the learner, the teachers' characteristics such as the ability to communicate, the knowledge, preparation and ability of the teacher, their experience and understanding and their commitment (Pontefract, 2002). The qualities of the teacher are crucial as they provide the link or bridge between what the learners know and are familiar with and the new knowledge that they acquire. Thus the teacher guides the learners towards a problem solving approach to learning.

In recognition of the critical role of the teacher, Ausubel opines that the teacher leads the learners towards deductive reasoning whereby the learner is exposed to knowledge and is guided through

a process of reasoning from one or more general premises to attain a more and possibly complex conclusion (Woodfolk *et al.*, 2010). The teacher's task is to assist the learners become aware of themselves, of others, of new knowledge and to guide them towards achieving their highest possible level of ability. They provide learners with opportunities to participate effectively and critically in discourse; assess their beliefs, feelings, and values; understand and respect those of others; evaluate competing interpretations through critical examination of evidence, arguments, and alternate view points and make well-informed judgments based on critical analysis. Hence teachers should stimulate in learners, the desire to learn, to synthesis and apply new knowledge to their practical situations. This theoretical framework is relevant to education because it covers all aspects of learning, to know, to do, to evaluate and to be.

The Right to Education

According to Guissani, the importance of the school cannot be downplayed as 'a place where the students' experience life towards total awareness', where they experience life and are made aware of themselves and life as a whole (Guissani, 2001, p. 133). The school is a pivotal point in the socialization of learners, and all the actors in this unit of socialization, the teachers, support staff and peers are important in enabling positive socialization (Ngao, 2005). Therefore, being the place where learners are exposed to the realities of life, the school is very important for the development of an individual and nation as a whole.

There are numerous conventions, proclamations, and legal instruments at both the international and national levels that outline the importance of education and the need for governments to provide Basic Education For All (BEFA), to all its children of school going age. These include the 1948 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; the 1990 Jomtein World Declaration on EFA, the 1994 Salamanca World Conference on Inclusive Education; the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action or the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the 2001 Global Movement for Children, GMC (Kamere, 2004). The Salamanca conference specifically laid ground on the right to education for children with special needs. This conference proclaimed that:

1. Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning
2. Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs
3. Education systems and educational programmes should be designed and implemented taking into consideration the wide diverse characteristics and needs of children with SEN
4. Children with SEN must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs (UNESCO, 1994).

To achieve these and to provide appropriate education to all children regardless of their individual differences, the conference called upon governments and the international community to support inclusive education by formulating policy guidelines and giving it budgetary priority, adopting the principle of inclusive education as law, enrolling all children in regular schools where possible or unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise, planning, monitoring and evaluating educational provision for CSEN among other issues (UNESCO, 1994; DRPI, n.d).

Education as right is enshrined in the fact it enhances the human quality in them. The human rights perspective on education suggests that any denial of an individual in participation in human rights diminishes the quality of life through impairing their capacity to engage in a full and active life (Kamere, 2004). It is therefore important to educate all to make them more functional and fitting in their society. The teacher has a major task to train and educate learners to make them more aware of their reality and to understand it.

Ethics in Education

The Kenyan Persons with Disability Act of 2003 calls for the opening of all learning institutions to all learners irrespective of their ability, and to any course of study as long as they have the ability to acquire substantial learning in that course, and urges all learning institutions to take cognizance of the special needs of CWD, with respect to the entry requirements, pass marks, curriculum, examinations, auxiliary services, use of school facilities, class schedules, physical education requirements and other similar considerations. The government of Kenya has instituted other policies to look into the general wellbeing of people with disabilities, PWD, including the National Strategy for Development, Vision 2030; the National Children's Policy of 2007; the National Policy on SNE of 2007, and the National Policy on PWD of 2006.

However, the objectives of these policies are yet to be realized due to the many challenges impeding their full implementation, such as the low awareness of available educational opportunities for

PWD, societal views on disability, low attitudinal change by society towards disability, the limited access to assistive devices and services by PWD due to ignorance, availability and affordability, gender and geographical disparities; inaccessibility of essential services such as reproductive health, free education accessibility to buildings because of their disability, appropriate teaching materials, costs they face in terms of travel and poor implementation of the policies and legislation due to lack of representation of PWD at the formulation stages. Njogu (2009) outlines the hands-off treatment of matters of disability saying:

Despite its strengths, a close examination of the Persons with Disabilities Act (No.14) of 2003 shows that it does not articulate coherently the key values on which it is founded, including gender equality and non-discrimination, equalization of opportunities for all citizen...Moreover, the 2003 Act seems to be an unaccompanied tool whose provisions are not harmonized and attuned with other domestic legislation. Consequently, implementing the Act becomes a challenge because it is contradicted elsewhere in the statutes. In addition, the disability issues addressed in it require integration into the broader arena of social legislation so as to gain acceptance. More work needs to be done to ensure that the Act is harmonized and implemented and that the rights of PWD are protected at all times.

The Act does not outline how the SEN of all children will be met, nor does it spell out the teacher's role in doing so. No wonder Njogu (ibid.) describes it as an 'unaccompanied tool' lacking guidelines on its implementation. It is also not synchronized to the policy and practice of free primary education (FPE) which allocates Kshs 1020/- to every child annually to support the programme and gives an additional Kshs 2000/- to CWD to meet their SEN. Without guidelines or follow up on the use of this additional money, many school administrators keep this money in 'safe keeping' for CWD or buy them goats, chicken or other items as income generating items instead of using it to on enhancing their education. Without proper accounting and auditing of this money, it is often misappropriated and channelled to personal use by the same custodians of it (Kamere, 2004; UNESCO in Kenya, 2008; Government of Kenya 2008). As a result, the state of Special Education, SE, in Kenya remains wanting and lacking essential facilities.

It is, however, not just the lack of facilities that brings down the state of SE but also the ethical issues in its provision. The commitment of teachers and administrators is of essence. Teachers are central to the learning process, because they lead the students to discover and acquire new knowledge, motivate and provide positive influence to the learners through what, as seen earlier, Bruner called the scaffolding process. Jim Steffan, a management consultant, notes that nothing influenced the behaviour of an individual so strongly than what was perceived to be the expectations of the significant other. In the learning environment, the significant other is the teacher. The teacher impacts on the learner, to build the child (Kamere, as cited in Sanna *et al.*, 2008) but their lacklustre, non-commitment and hands off attitude can destroy the learner. This paper focuses on, the teacher's role in supporting CWD to achieve their zone of proximal development.

The Association of American Educators, AAE and the Kenyan Teachers Service Commission, TSC, were set up to look into issues of teachers' professionalism and establish a code of conduct and ethics for educators, to guide and direct their professionalism and conduct (AAE n.d; Transparency International, Kenya 2010). They appeal to teachers to create a learning environment that nurtures the full potential of all learners, while conducting themselves with conscientious effort to exemplify the highest ethical standards. They outline ethical considerations on teachers conduct, relationship with learners, professional practice, performance, colleagues, parents and community at large. The focus of this paper is the ethical considerations that guide teachers in their relationship with CSEN, and teaching responsibility. Teachers should provide meaningful education that targets at developing the whole person by exciting their innate capacities through interaction with knowledge and experiences and provide opportunity for the development of skills and attitudes (Kamere, as cited in Sanna *et al.*, 2008). They should aim to develop all the structures of the learner 'until they are complete' (Guissani, 2001, p. 51). They should address the life and experiences of the learners and be sensitive to all their diverse needs. This is the greatest challenge educators have and especially those of CSEN in inclusive settings. It is in such situations that the delicate role of the educator is put to test, to educate children with different abilities including those that society has branded 'disabled' and therefore unable to accomplish much, without any bias and prejudice (Kamere, as cited in Sanna *et al.*, 2008).

Societal Views and Ethics in Education

Societal views on PWD have evolved from extermination, ridicule, stigmatization, and shunning to what it is today, acceptance. However, the uptake of this new view has been very slow. In Kenya, PWD have for a long time been widely referred to as '*wasiojiweza*' which translates to 'those incapable of doing anything or are unable to fend, care or cater for themselves', in other words 'useless' (Ndurumo, 1993; Kamere, 2004). Disability is often viewed as 'lacking in wholeness' being 'unwhole' and therefore lacking the ability to achieve or do what others can do. This view inevitably, albeit subconsciously, affects the expectations of society on PWD and therefore the kind of education given to CWD, since society will only educate them to be the sort of people it views them to be incapable of achieving much (Kamere, as cited in Sanna, 2008).

Teachers, who form the part of society, are not left out from harbouring such prejudices. This influences their expectations of learners with SEN. This scenario backs a contention put forth by Michael Sadler, often referred to as the father of comparative education, who notes that 'things outside the school matter even more than the things inside the school' (Higginson, as cited in Sislian, n.d.). This is because the school is a unit of the wider society and the actors in the school are part of the wider society. Therefore, teachers influenced by these negative views do not see the value of taxing themselves on learners who will not benefit from their effort. They therefore do not give LWD the attention they need thus, isolating and segregating them, a trend that is adopted by other learners and consequently the whole school fraternity.

Education System and Ethical Considerations

Although rote learning has no place in modern society where information for reference is readily available and easily accessible through technology, multimedia, the media and books (Dean, 2011), it is common in the Kenyan educational system and is often attributed to the loaded curriculum of the exam oriented 8-4-4 education system. The rank or position a school attains in national examinations reflects on the ability of the different subject teachers. Hence teachers use the quickest means possible to complete the syllabus and leave ample time to drill students on how to answer examination questions. Subsequently, the tendency to memorize and reproduce what has been memorized, without employing higher levels of critical analysis and the students' personal experiences and freedom to manipulate knowledge or interact with it, is high. This inevitably disadvantages CSEN who may need personalized attention from the teacher to enable them effectively interact with the curriculum. As a result they are overlooked and isolated.

To secure a good ranking, schools put unorthodox and unscrupulous systems in place, whereby weak learners are forced to repeat classes or register for examinations in smaller schools. In so doing the schools continue to get the FPE money allocated to CWD, which as seen earlier is never audited and is subject to abuse, while passing the poor scores to the smaller schools who in turn charge high exorbitant fees to the weak students registering in their schools. Often CWD fall in this category owing to the challenges in manipulating the curriculum due to their disabilities. Despite the existing difficulties and challenges that plague education in general and that of CSEN in particular, the onus to make the best of a bad situation lies in all actors in education. Wachianga (2010), writing on the provision of assistive services for children with physical disabilities in schools in Kisumu, highlights a case of a physiotherapist in a local hospital, employed by the Ministry of Medical Services and not Education, who was also responsible for children with physical disabilities in various schools in Kisumu. With his heavy workload, the physiotherapist, who ideally should only handle 20-24 SEN students in the gymnasium with each requiring 10-15 minutes – others may require more, attended to all SEN in each school only once a week. This implies that the students were rushed during the services due to their large numbers and limited contact time.

Although this situation depicts a very grim picture of the sorry state in the provision of facilities for children with special needs, it also presents a case of responsibility on the part of the physiotherapist who irrespective of the heavy work load, recognizes the importance of physiotherapy in education and for mobility and is able to schedule and devote time to attend to all learners who need this service, however short the contact hours may be. The effectiveness of this short physiotherapy time is however doubtful. The onus now is on the government to increase the number of staff to take charge of the schools to ensure quality and more effective assistive services.

Ethical Considerations in the Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher is very demanding and complex. They must be convinced of their critical role in education, as an authority, a link to knowledge and as a guide to lead the learner to discover new knowledge and experiences without prejudice. They need to be propelled by a drive for fulfilment. Wawire (as cited in Sanna *et al.*, 2008, p. 153) states that 'only an educator who possess a deep

conviction about reality can truly become an authority for the student', and not be like a sales person selling fake items that he has no conviction of. The teacher needs to be convinced about what they are doing, why they need to do it, and how they should do it to be effective (Pratt, 2004). The teacher-student relationship should therefore be one of positive regard and concern even in difficult and frustrating situations. Ngao (2005), writing on the socialization of primary school children with hearing impairments, HI, presents the frustrations their teachers:

It is so taxing. We have to address each HI pupil individually, unlike the case with hearing pupils, whose announcements are generally for all...(since they are easily distracted) ...with their communication being visual, once their attention is attracted by something else, they do not get any more of what is being said. One has to repeat all over again (Ngao, 2005, p. 52).

This portrays the teachers are determination and full commitment to bring out the best in their students even if it means repeating what they had said. Creativity, patience and commitment are therefore essential components of education.

Often teachers confuse their role as teachers with blind authority to view themselves as the sole authority and the learners as subjects, passive recipients of what the teacher deems as worthwhile knowledge, a scenario outlined by Wawire in an analogy of filling empty bottles:

My job is to fill as many bottles as full as possible...I don't care what you think about how you are filled or what you are filled with. You are after all a bottle (Wawire, as cited in Sanna *et al.*, 2008, p. 152).

This scenario does not take into account the feelings and needs of learners, instead the teachers indoctrinate students with what they think is best for them. The student learns to rely on the teacher and becomes fully dependent on them. They do not develop their potential and the teacher-student relationship becomes one of banking information and knowledge by the teacher. Banking education is a term used by Paulo Freire to critique the traditional system of education where learners were regarded as empty containers into which educators deposit knowledge. This system represses critical thinking and knowledge ownership among students and as Freire contends, reinforces oppression by stifling the participation of the students (Higginson, n.d.), which according to Guissani is inappropriate and similar to a robot like delivery of education.

We must be careful to ensure that the process of dependence does not become a dumping down, like a mechanical process where the educator arbitrarily imposes and the student passively receives (Guissani, 2001, p. 54).

This describes a situation where teachers issue communiqués and makes deposits while the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat what has been deposited. In the banking concept of education, the scope of action allowed to students extends only to receiving, filing, and storing the deposits or memorizing what has been deposited, and withdrawing to reproduce it during examinations. This is rote, mechanical and mundane learning, whereby the teacher is the sole authority and source of knowledge, while the students a passive recipient of it.

The classroom environment should be cordial to provide a safe and secure learning environment in which pupils can expect acceptance, respect and even warmth from teachers (Wawire, as cited in Sanna, 2008, p. 153). Teachers should be creative to make the classroom as inclusive as possible to make learners feel part of the whole classroom interaction. CWD have to cope with both the difficulties caused by their disability and the complexities of the syllabus. The teacher therefore should organize their classroom teaching such that all the learners are involved and participate fully in the learning process. Indeed the whole school environment needs to also be inclusive to accommodate all children. Ngao (2005) describes the situation in Machakos School for learners with HI where older students (mentors) receive the new boys into the school to ease their settling in. This mentorship programme promotes inclusive education as each learner is the others keeper and new learners are socialized become fully accepted members of the larger school community. It is the dedication of the teacher and the school management as a whole that determines whether the school is inclusive or whether it segregates some learners stratifying them into different classes based on gender, ability or other differentiation.

Conclusion

Good teacher should critically evaluate their responsibility from an ethical point of view and develop values that promote this. They need to understand themselves, their role and duties in education. Jersild (as cited in Sanna *et al.*, 2008) posits that teachers need to understand the relationship between their inner self-development and the purpose of education:

The teachers' understanding and acceptance of himself is the most important requirement in any effort he makes to help students to know themselves and to gain healthy attitudes of self-acceptance (p. 156).

According to Jersild (ibid.), teachers need to further interrogate themselves to make a self-evaluation of their role, in order to be effective. He raises pertinent questions of self-evaluation viz:

What really counts for me? What values am I seeking? What in my existence as a person, in my relations with others, in my work as a teacher, is of real concern to me, perhaps of ultimate concern to me...as I try to help young people to discover meaning...? (Jersild, as cited in Sanna *et al.*, 2008, p. 156-157)

The ideal situation in education is therefore where the whole education process takes into consideration the different and divergent needs of the actors involved to lead to effective and meaningful education. At the centre of this is the educator or the teacher who must assess themselves and their role for effectiveness and adjust to meet each student's needs. The teacher must value the worth and dignity of every learner, enhance their freedom to learn and provide equal opportunity for all to acquire learning (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). Their primary concern should therefore be the learner, and the development of their ultimate potential. Professional judgment and integrity is therefore of essence.

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