

# Opinions of Primary School Teachers Towards Inclusive Education in Central Kenya

Chomba M. Wa Munyi

School of Education, Department of Special Needs Education, Kenyatta University, Kenya

## Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the opinions of primary school teachers towards inclusive education in Central Kenya. The sample size (N=500) represented all the teachers in the study area pursuing a diploma course in special needs education at Kenya Institute of Special education (KISE) through distance learning, and therefore, inferential statistics was not necessary. Teachers' opinions were reported by questionnaire designed specifically for this study while from this instrument answers to the six research questions were also sought. Data analysis in this study was conducted using the statistical analysis software (Statistical Package for Social Science, SPSS version 11.5 for windows). The specific analysis included the descriptive data and cross-tabulation yielding the chi-square statistics. All the data were reported in form of descriptive Statistics-percentages, frequencies and mode where applicable. The results of the study revealed that teachers' perceptions towards inclusive education in Central Kenya were positive. In addition, respondents strongly agreed that in order to prepare teachers for inclusive education, in-service training programs were needed (M=4.64). Further, they expressed the view that students with special needs had the right to receive education in mainstream classes (M=4.49). However, the statement that the country was not ready for inclusive education was rated low (M=2.44) implying that respondents disagreed with the statement.

**Keywords:** Opinions, Inclusion, Inclusive education, Special Needs Education, Teachers

## 1. Introduction

Inclusive education is widely accepted as a solution to the problem of expanding educational opportunities for children with special needs. Many special needs educators are of the view that it is an advanced approach to the desired and meaningful social inclusion of learners with special needs.

In many cases, however, the practical application of this approach only serves to provide a mechanical and partial solution to the problem of social and academic segregation of students with special needs. Placing children with special needs in ordinary classes in regular schools, as is often the case, without meeting their special learning needs in full cannot be considered as a step forward in special needs education.

Whereas multiple factors may influence the students' academic and social outcomes in the inclusive environment, one significant factor is teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards inclusive education (Joann Migyanka 2006). Avramidis, Byliss and Burden (2000) found that, although two-thirds of teachers surveyed in their study agreed with their general concept of inclusion, only one-third of the teachers believed that he/she had sufficient time, skill, training and resources necessary for implementing inclusive programmes. Other related factors include administrative support, curriculum and appropriate resources.

A review of literature indicates that a number of studies have been conducted dealing with high school and college teachers' attitudes towards children with special needs and inclusive education, but few studies have been conducted which address themselves to the attitudes of primary school teachers towards inclusive education in East Africa. If teachers were to be supportive of inclusive education, then as change agents in the community, they could help to ensure the success of inclusive education programmes.

On the other hand, should teachers be reluctant to support inclusive education, the chance of achieving success would be limited. Even official mandate from the ministry of Education would not easily circumvent the effect of such negative outlook. Teachers in inclusive schools are now expected to rise to the challenges of an increasingly diverse classroom (Peterson & Beloin 1992), adjust their teaching strategies to accommodate varying learning styles (Kortman 2001) and to be psychologically and practically prepared to take on the dynamic role of inclusive educators (Mullen 2001).

If the teachers reject inclusive education, how can we expect acceptance by the school community? Attitudes research regarding inclusion has provided varied results. Variables such as teachers' gender (Avramidis *et al.*; Van Reusen *et al.*, 2001), age (Cornoldi Terreni, Scruggs & Mastopieri 1998), level of qualification in special education (Clayton 1996) and the severity of the disability (Agran, Alper & Wehmeyer 2002; Kuester 2000) have previously been investigated as factors that may shape teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities.

According to Bradshaw and Lawrence Mundia (2006), there are three types of variables which seem to influence inclusion:-

- Child related variable;
- Teacher related variable; and

➤ Educational related variable.

Teacher related variable indicates teachers' efficacy/in-service, experience and teachers' belief about students. Studies reinforce views that causes in special education acquired during pre or in- service training are associated with less resistance to inclusive practices (Avramidis *et al.* 2000; Bell *et al.*, 1999; Van Reusen *et al.*, 2000). It would appear that, older and more experienced teachers seem to foster less positive attitudes than younger teachers (Cornoldi *et al.*, 1998).

In addition, the lack of training in the field of inclusive education could lead to less positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream settings (Clayton 1996; Men love, Hudson & Sutter 2000) , while increased training has been associated with more positive attitudes in this regard (Briggs, Johnson, Shepherd & Seabrook 2002; Harvey 1985; Power 2002).

Another cited variable makes reference to the perceived confidence of the mainstream educators. Teachers who perceive themselves as confident enough to include students with disabilities appear to hold more positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Avramidis *et al.*, 2000). Besides, previous experience in educating students with disabilities may allow the mainstream teachers to view inclusive educational practices more positively (Avramidis *et al.*, 2000).

The nature and the severity of the disabilities influence the teachers' attitudes. Florin (1995) found that acceptance of inclusion was lower for children with an intellectual disability than children with a physical disability. This seems to be a tendency also in other studies (Soodak, Podell and Lehman 1998; Al-khatteeb 2002; Al-khatteeb 2004; Al-khatani 2003) whereas, in the Clough and Lindsay (1991) study, the majority of teachers surveyed ranked the needs of children with emotional and behavioral difficulties as being most difficult to meet, followed by children with disabilities, children with visual impairments and children with hearing impairments in descending order.

Teaching experience is cited by several studies as having an influence on teachers' attitudes. Clough and Lindsay (1997) found that younger teachers and those with fewer years of experience have been found to be more supportive of inclusion. Florin's (1995) study showed that acceptance of a child with physical disability was less for those with six to ten years of teaching. The most experienced teachers with more than 11 years of teaching were least accepting. Similar results were reported by (Leyser *et al.* 1994) who also found that teachers with 14 years teaching experience or less had significantly higher positive scores in their attitudes to inclusion than those with more than 14 years. They found no significant difference in attitudes to inclusion among teachers whose teaching experience was between four, five and nine years, and ten and fourteen years. In the Robert and Lindsel (1997) studies, teachers who taught students with physical disabilities in their class were more positive in their attitudes than teachers with no experience of inclusion.

Later, in her study, Lisa Kathleen Robinson (2004) found out that, special educators were more positive than general educators and that educators with 16 -30 years of teaching experience, in contrast to educators with 1-15 years of teaching experience had more positive perception towards inclusive education. Another factor that attracts considerable attention is the knowledge about children with special needs education during pre and in-service training. This is an important factor in improving teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion. The importance of training in the formation of positive attitudes towards inclusive education was supported by the findings of Al -khatteeb (2002) and Beh-Pajoooh (1992).

Marchesi (1998) found that professional training of teachers was reported to be one of the key factors of successful inclusion. In the Siegel and Jausovce (1994) study, in-service training was highlighted as an effective way of improving teachers' attitude towards inclusion. Teachers' belief about students also affects their acceptance of inclusion. If teachers believe students' problems are as a result of interaction between the students and the environment, they are more able to successfully meet students' needs (Bradshaw, Lawrence Mundia 2006). If they believe in a more pathognomic perspective, where the problem is inherent in the students, their interaction with the students or teaching is less effective (Soodak, Podell & Lehman 1998; Stanovich & Jordan 1998).

Leyser *et al.* (1994) found that high school teachers display more positive attitudes towards inclusion than primary schools'. This was supported by Avramidis, Byliss and Burden (2000) and Hanwi (2003) who found that high school teachers showed more positive attitudes towards inclusion than primary school teachers. With regard to gender, Alghazo and Naggar Gaad, (2004) reported that male teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are more negative than female teachers, while no gender difference was reported by Berryman (1989).

Heiman (2004) identifies four different models of inclusion:-

- ❖ In-and-out;
- ❖ Two-teachers;
- ❖ Full inclusion; and
- ❖ Rejection of inclusion.

In her study of inclusive education in United Kingdom and Israel, Heiman (2004) found that most of the teachers in the United Kingdom and Israel thought that in-and-out model would be more effective for the

students with learning disabilities. These teachers believed that this approach would enable students with disabilities to benefit from two worlds: the special instruction they needed together with regular lessons and interactions with their peers in regular settings. The two-teacher model was somewhat popular in Israel and less so in Britain. According to this model, two teachers teach simultaneously in the classroom with one of them who has had training in SNE, concentrating on the students with disabilities. Small percentages of teachers in both countries thought that full inclusion is the right model to apply within the regular classroom. They thought that with additional support and co-operation between teachers and with the services of educational systems, full inclusion could succeed and be the most beneficial for all. Some teachers in both countries rejected inclusion completely. The teachers in this group thought that it would be better for students with disabilities to study in separate classes, according to special programmes, so that they could progress at their own pace. They felt that such model is more effective since special needs students in inclusive class would never be able to reach the academic level of mainstream students.

## 2. Purpose

The teacher factor is one of the key elements determining the success or failure of inclusive education today. It is for this reason that the present study was conceptualized to investigate and establish teachers' opinions towards inclusive education in Central Kenya.

The purpose of this study was to investigate and document opinions of primary school teachers towards inclusive education in central Kenya and factors that influence such opinions. This was the first time for a study of this nature and magnitude to be undertaken in Central Kenya, involving regular school teachers from Central Province, enrolled at Kenya Institute of Special Education for Special Needs Education diploma course through distance learning. There was no documented evidence indicating that a similar study had been conducted elsewhere in the Country. The following three objectives were formulated for the present study:-

1. To determine the opinions of primary school teachers towards inclusive education in Central Kenya and the relationship between the expressed opinions and demographic information associated with each teacher;
2. To establish the present status of inclusive education in the study area and teachers' preferred categories of children with special needs for inclusion; and
3. To obtain teachers' knowledge level of inclusive education and inclusion competencies required by school heads in Central Kenya.

## 3. Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature. It was designed to obtain the opinions of all primary school teachers from Central Kenya enrolled for Distance Learning at Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE). The data collected, therefore represent the opinion of the total population for this study since the sample included the defined total population of 600 teachers. This also ensured that the sample was representative and robust. The need for pilot study and the use of inferential statistics was therefore not necessary. The region was chosen as geographical setting of this study both for convenience and because of the absence of similar research in the area.

The population for this study comprised 600 teachers from Central Kenya enrolled for distance learning in SNE at KISE. These were regular primary school teachers who had shown interest in pursuing a three-year diploma course in inclusive education.

All of them were at the time of the present study teaching in regular schools throughout the region. They were professionally trained, qualified and issued with a P<sup>1</sup> teaching certificate by the Ministry of Education. In addition, they had a teaching experience of not less than three years, this being one of the entry criteria.

Central Kenya, also known as Mount Kenya region, comprises the entire Central Province and is well served with adequately staffed and equipped schools. Until recently, the pupil-teacher ratio was manageable, but school staffing has posed a major challenge to the government following the provision of the free primary education. In 2002, the teacher-pupil ratio stood at 32.2 in the primary schools and 16.6 in secondary schools according to the Ministry of Education, Statistics Division 2002. This is not the case today. In 2007, the pupil enrolment in 3,189 schools stood at 888,236, out of whom 450,203 were boys and 438,033 were girls.

Of 20,111 teachers, 9,366 were male and 10,745 were female. The pupil-teacher ratio was 43:5 (Ministry of education, Statistics Division, 2007).

A six-part questionnaire was used to collect data from the participants. The first section was designed to gather selected demographic details of the participants. Section 2 contained 20 items and was designed to elicit respondents' general opinions towards inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classes. Respondents were asked to react to statements in the questionnaire, rating their responses on a liker-type classification, with 1 indicating "Strongly Agree" while 5 indicated "Strongly Disagree". Section 3 sought to establish the category of children with special needs that would be recommended by teachers for inclusive education, while the fourth section sought to explore respondents' opinions concerning the level of knowledge of inclusive education

possessed by school heads and teachers. Section 5 sought to establish the present status of inclusive education in the study area and categories of children with special needs being educated in mainstream settings.

Section 6 was developed to solicit respondents' opinions regarding additional competences in special needs education required by teachers' in-charge of school administration (Headteachers). With the assistance of Distance Learning department, Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE), the questionnaire was distributed to all teachers from central Kenya enrolled at KISE for special needs education (SNE). Upon completion, all the questionnaires were collected from Distance learning centers in the study area. Thereafter, the data was computer analyzed.

Quantitative (survey) research data were collected from a population of 500 primary school teachers from Central Kenya enrolled at KISE for SNE diploma in inclusive education. Data analysis in this study was then conducted using the statistical analysis software (Statistical Package for Social Science, SPSS version 11.5 for windows). Data were analyzed using a T-test. A second statistical procedure known as the Pearson Correlation was used to cross-tabulate scores indicating the respondents' opinions towards inclusive education. The specific analysis included the descriptive data and cross-tabulation yielding the chi-square statistics. All the data were reported in form of descriptive Statistics-percentages, frequencies and mode where applicable. A chi-square analysis was also used to determine if any relationship exists between the opinions of the school teachers and certain demographic information associated with each teacher's age, level of education, years of teaching experience as a full-time teacher, gender and designation.

#### **4. Results and discussion**

As a result of the chi-square analysis made to determine if any relationship existed between the opinion of teachers and certain demographic data associated with each teacher, the following findings were obtained. There was a significant relationship between the number of years of experience as a classroom teacher and the opinions as to whether inclusion can be successfully implemented in regular schools. This analysis showed that teachers with over seven years' teaching experience felt that inclusion could be implemented at both primary and secondary school levels.

However, since there was significance in only one of the twenty variables tested, the conclusion is that years of experience as a full-time teacher did not yield a significant finding in this study.

If this were significant, it would suggest that the older teachers were more supportive of the inclusion idea and could be used when establishing programmes of this type. This area however, requires further investigation.

The data collected on the general opinions of 500 in-service teachers from Central Kenya enrolled at KISE for distance learning indicate that teachers were supportive of inclusive education. This is reflected by the data that 86% representing 432 teachers were in favour of inclusion. These findings support prior research in this field (Lori Bradshaw, Lawrence Mundia, Pearl Subban and Umesh Sharma, 2006), which reported that in-service teacher trainees in special needs education were more positive about inclusion than their counterparts in regular schools.

A further 94% felt that students with special needs had the right to receive education in mainstream classes. However, teachers felt that the general teaching staff did not support inclusive education and that in-service training programmes are needed to prepare teachers for successful implementation of inclusion. In addition, 87% supported the statement that the average student needs the experience of being in contact with students with special needs in an academic setting. It was for this reason that they agreed with the statement that self-contained special classrooms do not meet the needs of learners with special needs by 55%. These findings are not uncommon since there presently seems to be a controversy in the method of delivering instructions for children with disabilities.

While the new movement of inclusion is now popular, it is not without its critics, who claim that the traditional approach to special education, with its special classes, is still the most effective delivery system. Those who oppose inclusionary practices, such as Kauffman, Lloyd, Baker and Riedel (1995), state that there are not enough properly trained special education personnel to allow the time and concentration necessary to address special needs students' problems effectively. The lack of properly trained special education personnel becomes an even larger problem when special needs students are combined with ill-prepared general education teachers.

As Bradshaw and Mundia (2006) observed, teacher education programs that engage participants in knowledge construction and heterogeneous classroom teaching and learning are necessary, but it is also essential that teacher training institutions provide relevant opportunities for in-service teachers to develop personal philosophies that promote classroom environments supportive of participation and achievement for all learners. Critically informed teachers are central to those processes. A logical starting point would be to insure that teachers acquire and develop proper concept of inclusion.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The present study investigated the opinions of primary school teachers towards inclusive education in Central

Kenya. The results of the study indicated that teachers have a positive perception towards the implementation of the inclusive education programme. While teachers appear accepting and positive of inclusionary programs, there is need for Educational planners and policy makers to incorporate practical and effective instructional techniques that would be useful in the inclusive classroom, into teacher preparation programs and professional development programs.

This view acknowledges the need for additional support, training and expertise for general education teachers since results also indicated that the general teaching staff lacked sufficient knowledge of inclusive education whereas school administrators needed to develop inclusion competencies. Teachers' beliefs and acceptance of the policy and philosophy of inclusive education are significant predictors of the degree to which they carry out inclusive practices. The affective and behavioral components of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion should be subjective to future studies. Besides, factors that in this study have been identified as potentially influencing the opinions of the teachers, such as the nature and severity of their students' disabilities, teachers' previous experience with students with disabilities and contextual factors related to the individual schools should be included in future investigations.

Due to the sampling procedure and limitations of the instrument, the results of this study should be interpreted with caution. The information was limited to responses of questionnaire and therefore subjected to the difficulties inherent in this type of instrument. The confidence which could be placed in the opinion of those teachers responding to questionnaire and the reliability of the questionnaire itself was not above question. Since the study dealt with one selected region (Central Kenya), the data generated from the study were interpreted with caution when generalizing the results to the entire Kenyan rural population.

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