PEDAGOGICAL AND CURRICULUM ISSUES IN TEACHING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN REGULAR CLASSROOMS: CLASSROOM PRACTICES, MANAGEMENT AND ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of inclusive education has gained importance as a means of enhancing the quality and accessibility of education for children with special educational needs (SEN). These children frequently face social and physical barriers that impede their ability to enter the workforce and receive an education, which can be detrimental to the social and economic advancement of a nation. There exists various pedagogical approaches to guarantee education for children with special educational needs. However, the inclusive approach sets itself apart from the rest by advocating for equal participation of SEN students in mainstream schools, where they sit in the same classes with their other, and non-SEN counterparts. The inclusive approach states that so as to lessen or completely remove the social, academic, and physical barriers that SEN student's encounter in ordinary classrooms, governments and educational institutions must offer the necessary resources, both human and material. In order to improve the human capital acquisition of students with special education needs, inclusive education strives for social cohesiveness and a less biased educational approach. The assumption that children with special needs are as fundamentally competent as students without impairments underpins both the classroom and the school system. Therefore, instruction is provided to students in the least restrictive setting possible. For all learners, general education is the top choice for placement, meaning that they are as much as possible alongside their peers who do not have disabilities. Respecting, recognizing, and addressing the diversity and individuality of students is the cornerstone of effective inclusive education. The needs of every student must therefore be taken into account by education systems.

Keywords: assessment, classroom management, classroom practices, inclusive education, special needs education.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Kenya acknowledges that every learner with a disability has the right to inclusive education, which is the process of developing or enhancing an educational framework that caters for the requirements of all students and trainees. This clearly suggests that all students with disabilities should have the chance to learn alongside their peers without impairments in a regular classroom setting.

In order to support the provision of SNE services, the National Education Sector Plan (NESP, 2013-2018) (MoE, 2014) recommended reviewing the 2009 SNE Policy and developing guidelines for its implementation. The background information and recommendations that

followed prompted the policy's review process, which began in 2016 and resulted in the creation of the Education and Training Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities (2018). The policy aligns the provision of education and training with the Kenyan Constitution of 2010, the Basic Education Act (2013), and Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 on Equitable, Inclusive Quality Education and lifelong learning for all. The policy framework acknowledges the significance of inclusive education in this regard by highlighting the necessity of all students learning alongside one another in an inclusive educational environment.

The policy enacted in 2018 calls for inclusive education for learners with disabilities to be considered as an overarching principle, recognizing the nation's need to move toward including learners and trainees with disabilities into regular learning and training institutions, while learning with their peers without disabilities and receiving reasonable accommodations. A significant and alarming number of learners with disabilities are out of school despite the existence of legislation supporting inclusive education (MoE, 2014). Dropout rates are high in regular schools due to stigmatization, inappropriate curricula, poorly equipped institutions of learning, and inadequately trained teachers. Inclusive education improves learning outcomes for all students and trainees, is cost-effective, and expands access to education for students and trainees with disabilities when given the proper support, resources, and enforcement.

The government has been implementing recommendations of Working Parties/Task Forces/Commissions/Committees through five-year Strategic plans like the NESSP 2013-2018, NESSP 2018-2022 and now NESSP 2023-2027, being one of such plans. Specialized educational materials, equipment, assistive devices, and adapted technology are necessary for students with impairments to access curriculum. In addition to a shortage of equipment, there are insufficiently qualified human resources to support learning and training in the fields of braille transcribers, scribes, translators of sign language, learner support assistants, house parents, nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech therapists. Furthermore, the curricula in the Age-based and Stage-based Pathways are not sufficiently modified for students with exceptional needs at every level. The monitoring reports show that a large number of institutions are deficient in these resources, which limits their ability to provide special needs students with instruction and training.

The evaluation and placement of students with special needs in educational institutions have suffered as a result. The reason for this is because Educational Evaluation and Resource Centres (EARCs), which offer vital special education services to students with special needs, are understaffed and do not have useful evaluation instruments. To better coordinate the available resources and facilitate efficient planning and decision-making, an integrated special needs education data system is consequently required. The MoE should work to make sure that students with special needs and disabilities are included in all educational levels in order to fulfil the goals outlined in the NESSP 2023–2027 plan. After receiving thorough training, teachers will be qualified to provide a variety of easily accessible learning opportunities that are customized to meet the individual needs of every learner. Concurrently, research, if done, can serve as the cornerstone for evidence-based practices, allowing for the ongoing enhancement of instructional strategies and materials. This way, educational institutions can lead the way in implementing evidence-based practices and can modify their approaches to best meet the needs of students with a wide range of needs.

Furthermore, by promoting a developing network of educational institutions to incorporate specialized training and research, it is necessary to increase the reach and impact of SNE programs. In the end, this will improve possibilities for the personal and professional development of people with disabilities by fostering a culture of inclusion and diversity throughout the educational system.

Special needs in the context of clinical diagnosis and functional development refers to those individuals who need support due to physical, mental, or psychological problems. If a child has a learning disorder or impairment that makes learning more challenging for them than it is for other kids their age, then they are said to have special education requirements. Their behavior, conversation, or academic work may be problematic. The quality of education received by all children can be gauged by how conventional schools handle their students with special needs (UNESCO, 2015).

Special needs are classified into four primary categories:

- **Communication needs:** speech or language impairments
- **Sensorial needs:** deafness, vision impairment
- **Developmental needs:** down syndrome, autism, intellectual impairment
- **Learning needs:** specific learning disabilities

Genetics; parental health and habits (such as smoking and alcohol consumption during pregnancy); birth-related problems; illnesses the mother may have had during pregnancy or the infant may have had at a very young age, and other variables can all contribute to special needs in children; with the mother or kid being exposed to high concentrations of pollutants in the environment, including lead. There are instances when your child's particular requirements are immediately apparent. Sometimes it won't be evident. This will rely in part on the kind and severity of any special needs or disabilities your child may have. For example, a physical impairment like eyesight or deafness could show symptoms right away. On the other hand, milder forms of learning disabilities, such as dyslexia or dysgraphia, could be more difficult to identify. One can better comprehend the difficulties their children may face in the future by obtaining an early diagnosis or detection. The criteria listed below describe how to diagnose Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in children and, if so, what kind of condition they have:

- The kid may exhibit characteristics such as trouble pronouncing words (for instance, a word such as "spaghetti" may be pronounced as "pasgetti"); bad spelling, and sluggish and erroneous reading, or even words in a sentence can be transposed (said out of the correct order); for example words such as "I rest my case" may be read as "I case my rest", as a symptom of **language-based learning impairments.**
- Indicators of **sensory needs** in children can include their incapacity to read words written in textbooks, whiteboards, as well as their inability to clearly hear the instructor during a presentation.
- Among many other symptoms, children with **developmental needs** may exhibit non-responsiveness to stimuli, difficulty forming friendships or relating to peers, repetitive behaviours, difficulty participating in conversations, incapacity to speak by the time

they are 16 months old, talking too much, interrupting or intruding on others, fidgeting with hands or feet or wriggling while seated.

- Some of the symptoms associated with **learning disabilities** include, but not limited to, difficulties holding a pen or pencil while writing numbers and letters, inability to recognize letters, lack of interest in reading, inability to comprehend instructions given in the classroom, and poor comprehension of instructional material.

2.0 CLASSROOM PRACTICES FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS IN A REGULAR CLASSROOM

The goal of inclusive education is to establish learning environments where all students can participate in classroom instruction with their classmates. In the context of special education, this entails creating lessons and teaching methods that provide all children with disabilities access to the curriculum. Personalized instruction that meets each student's unique needs yields the greatest results from this method. This paper primarily focuses on ways that general education classrooms can create inclusive practices that help to provide all students with disabilities with the least restrictive environment possible to the greatest extent possible, even though many students with special needs receive special education services in special education programs and classes. The premise of inclusive education is that every kid has a right to share an educational environment (Cobley, 2018).

It is possible to give children with disabilities greater chances of success by using inclusive practices in special education across the curriculum. To let the students work on a project in small groups with similar needs, the teacher can, for instance, employ flexible grouping. It takes deliberate work to provide inclusive learning environments in schools where all students are accepted, included, and given the tools they need to succeed (Peters, 2003). Five inclusive education initiatives are suggested in this paper, which can support the development of more equal environments for learners with special needs;

1. Learn to understand your students

By taking the time to get to know each student's unique needs, teachers are better able to customize their lessons and foster a friendlier learning atmosphere. For schools and classrooms to become more inclusive, developing a good rapport with students is essential. It can be quite beneficial to demonstrate to pupils your concern for their achievement and your dedication to assisting them in realizing their full potential. To get things rolling, educators might use these five techniques;

 i. Show attention in the interests and activities of your students. Inquire about their preferred subjects, literature, motion pictures, sports teams, and other areas of interest.
 ii. Inquire about their difficulties and areas of strength from them. Find out what their preferred learning style is, what subjects they struggle with the most, and what past successful tactics they have used.
 iii. Discover the nature of their impairment. Examine the specific impairment and the accommodations available to enable them to participate in the general education program.
 iv. Engage the family. Enquire about the interests, needs, and preferences of the child from the parents or guardians.

    v.   Take heed of their opinions. Find out from your students' opinions about the classroom atmosphere and what they would want to see improved.

2. Establish a culture of positivity

Establishing a pleasant and inclusive culture has a significant impact on both regular education and special education classrooms. It is possible to foster this supportive environment for students with impairments by;

    i.   Defining precise guidelines, procedures, and behavioral support
    ii.   Providing positive reinforcement for students who meet their learning goals
    iii.   Fostering a culture of respect for others
    iv.   Helping students develop their social skills
    v.   Promoting candid dialogue and constructive criticism
    vi.   Fostering an environment of tolerance and assistance

Students with special needs will feel encouraged, accepted, and respected by other students in a regular classroom when there is such a positive culture in place.

3. Provide customized teaching

One of the most important elements of inclusive education is tailored instruction. It entails adjusting the curriculum to each student's unique requirements and skills. Teachers must comprehend the unique demands of each student with a disability and provide individualized instruction to meet those needs. Providing extra assistance in the form of modified assignments, differentiated instruction, or small-group instruction may be necessary to achieve this. Giving learners options and letting them participate in goal-setting and decision-making are also crucial. Moreover, educators ought to let pupils work at their own speed and offer them comments on their advancement. Through providing tailored education, educators can guarantee that every student has the chance to realize their maximum potential.

4. Be understanding and accommodating

To ensure that all learners have an equal opportunity to succeed, accommodation can help level the playing field. There are several other accommodations that can be made, such as longer rest periods, assistive technology, and modified assignments. Teachers can also offer several methods, such as oral evaluations, graphic organizers, and visual aids, for pupils to demonstrate how they have acquired knowledge. To determine the tactics that work best for each student, it is crucial to collaborate with their family. In conclusion, it is vital to consistently assess and modify accommodations as needed to guarantee that learners can thrive in the educational setting.

5. Employment of technology

Students with impairments can take part in educational activities that they would not be able to complete without the use of assistive technology. Adaptive pencils and magnifiers are examples of low-tech assistive technology in the classroom. High-tech assistive technology includes speech recognition software and augmented communication equipment. Students with

disabilities might benefit a lot from assisted technology by becoming more independent and taking part in activities in general education classrooms that they might not be able to accomplish without it. In order to help learners succeed in the classroom, teachers ought to be knowledgeable about the various assistive technologies available.

3.0 CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS IN A REGULAR CLASSROOM

The goal of inclusive classroom management is to provide all students, irrespective of their identities, experiences, or skills, with a safe and encouraging learning environment. Embracing diversity by making every learner feel appreciated, respected, and supported in their educational path is the idea of inclusion. There are numerous and enduring advantages to inclusive classroom management. Teachers may guarantee better academic results, higher student engagement, and beneficial influence on mental health, improved teacher-student relationships, and real-world readiness by establishing a supportive learning environment that meets the requirements of a wide range of students. Special education classes are no longer the exclusive domain where children with exceptional needs can be found; they may now be seen in the dining hall or on the playground. These kids flourish when they are around their friends. When planning lessons for an inclusive classroom, teachers are expected to use their imagination and creativity. Implementing straightforward, individualized teaching practices for kids with special needs makes running an inclusive classroom easier. This paper proposes the following classroom management strategies for children with special needs;

1. Establish and display classroom rules in a visible location

The minimal, fundamentally acceptable levels of behavior should be made very obvious to every student in your class. It is imperative that both the educator and the student consider and approve these guidelines together. Each party signing should serve as proof of this. As part of the regular schedule, the instructor ought to assign the pupils to read the rules aloud in shifts. The teacher is responsible for making sure that every student is aware of the classroom rules and the repercussions for breaking them. Adhere to the regulations at all times. To help the students own the rules, it might be beneficial to let them participate in their creation. Nonetheless, the regulations should be updated frequently to reflect the demands of the students and evolving times.

2. Pay attention to all of the students

Resolving disagreements among students in your class is a very crucial aspect of this. Let the youngsters explain everything to you about how the incident came about; what saddened them, and why. Additionally, provide opportunities for students to seek explanations and ask questions during the delivery of the lesson. This makes students feel included and involved in the learning process.

3. Schedules and other key data should be displayed clearly

Creating a sense of inclusivity for all children can be achieved by making small modifications like this one. For example, some kids with (ASD) Autistic Spectrum Disorders and those with dyslexia and dyspraxia features experience difficulties staying organized. For this reason,

making timetables visible to all students makes them and other students feel more engaged in the learning process. Therefore displaying timetables clearly helps them, and the rest of the learners, feel involved in the school day. When a schedule is readily visible, children can mentally prepare for their favourite or least favourite activities by anticipating them. Post additional important material on display boards for everyone to view, such as terminology, details, or ideas related to the lesson you are currently teaching. This aids learners in answering questions and completing challenging tasks, as well as serving as a reminder of earlier knowledge.

4. Sort the classroom by colours

Students can gain a sense of organization and a visual reference point by sorting objects based on colour. Books, desks, centers and supplies fall within this category. It is also well recognized that colour-coding increases productivity and enhances memory. If textbooks were colour-coded, for example, students would spend less time searching for resources and more time studying, and their focus would be directed towards scheduling. A teacher can quickly call on a certain group of students and give them an assignment once their desks are colour-coded. In addition to avoiding the apparent hierarchy that letters and numbers establish, assigning colours is a great approach to support equity in the classroom. Whether the students are in a small group lesson, assembly, or the library, the teacher should also prepare seating arrangements for them. In every facet of the educational setting, this produces ideal learning circumstances. Occasionally, students may also be allowed to select where they want to sit. In order to make any modifications, students should also be given the chance to provide input and express any reservations they may have about their seating arrangements.

5. Provide support to learning by building on prior knowledge

Supporting students to ensure they have equal access to learning is known as scaffolding. Having an inclusive learning environment is largely dependent on this. In order to meet the needs of the students, the instructor should scaffold activities that have the same goals and objectives. Teachers give support by talking to children in different ways. As a child learns the new skill, the teacher can reduce the amount of support they give. A serene, focused learning atmosphere should be established for each student by the teacher. Make sure to indicate precisely when having a group discussion is necessary and appropriate. Whether or not your children have special needs, many of them benefit from being in a tranquil setting.

4.0 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN A REGULAR CLASSROOM

In an inclusive learning environment, assessment is the process of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting data about each student's learning to aid the teachers in a number of decisions related to instruction, intervention, classification, and placement. Assessment involves a series of events that take place over time in the teaching-learning cycle. Preparation and practice, transparency, variety and choice are the key elements of inclusive assessment. Inclusive assessment does not compromise academic standards; it improves the chances of all students to demonstrate their ability to meet the learning outcomes (Florian, Black-Hawkins, & Rouse, 2017).

In order to enhance inclusivity in assessment, educators should contemplate alternate techniques such as open book exams, essay/report-based assignments that target the same (or more suitable) learning objectives as current assessments (Grimes, 2010). The alignment of assessments with learning objectives, pedagogy, and instructional strategies is the responsibility of educators. The child's eligibility for assistance should only be determined following a thorough and personalized initial assessment. The child will then be considered qualified for special education and any other associated services.

Assessment practices in an inclusive classroom should prioritize other methods above paper-and- pencil tasks. Below are some strategies that support and enhance the assessment of learning for children with special needs;

- **Presentation-** this is an oral display of aptitude, expertise, and comprehension. Regarding their task, the youngster can tell stories or respond to inquiries. This relieves the burden associated with written assignments. A small group or one-on-one engagement may be necessary for certain youngsters; bigger groups, however, can be frightening for many students with impairments.
- **Observation-** one of the most effective methods of assessment is to see a pupil in action. It can also be the means by which an educator modifies or improves a particular method of instruction. Small-group observation might take place while the youngster is working on educational activities. Among the things to consider is whether: the child persists? Gives up without effort? Looks for assistance? Considers using different tactics? Gets agitated?
- **Performance task-** the child can complete a performance task while the teacher evaluates their work. By giving a word problem and probing the learner with questions about it, an instructor can, for instance, ask a student to answer a mathematical problem. The instructor is monitoring the student's performance during the task in addition to their attitude towards it.
- **Self-assessment-** for learners to be able to recognize their own strengths and shortcomings, self-evaluation is always beneficial. When done well, self-assessment can help students gain a deeper grasp of what they have learned. The instructor ought to pose a few probing questions that result in this realization.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding a child's unique needs in respect to their appearance, demeanor, and academic success is crucial for educators. Special needs can be categorized as physical impairment, visual impairment, hearing or speech impairment, low mental ability and learning disability. The instructor needs to implement particular corrective measures for every one of these categories. It is expected that teachers act impartially towards their students, and that students engage in normal interactions with one another. The recommendations that follow consider the numerous actions associated with inclusion that should be adopted by governments across the globe to aid the world's effort to meet the 2030 targets;

i.   Government agencies are required to guarantee that every learner has access to high-quality instruction, regardless of their identity, background, or aptitude.

ii. Funding those left behind should be the focus of governments; if millions of people cannot access education, there can be no inclusiveness.

iii. Taking into consideration that no learner is stigmatized or branded, governments should collect data on and for inclusion.

iv. Instructors should receive inclusion training to ensure they are equipped to instruct all pupils.

v. Every child should have access to the same curriculum, which acknowledges diversity and accommodates different learner needs.

vi. When creating policies for inclusion in education, governments ought to include parents and the community in the process.

vii. It is recommended that governments provide opportunities for non-governmental actors to oversee the implementation of their pledges and advocate for individuals who are not included in educational opportunities.

viii. Provision of enough human and material resources to address diversity in education.

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