

STATUS OF THE TEACHING OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN INCLUSIVE PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF IGANGA DISTRICT

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The education of students with special needs is becoming a top priority but challenging in the 21st century in primary schools. According to the American Institute for Research, \$50 Billion was spent on special education services in the 1999-2000 school year. The costs have gone up by approximately 60% since that time. The average expenditure for a special needs child almost doubles the average costs of services for other children. In 1991 Parliament established the Uganda National Institute of Special Education to train special education teachers. In 1992 the Ugandan Government “established a policy on ‘Education for National Integration and Development’, pledging to support special needs education by providing funding and teacher training. Though teachers for special needs have been trained, it has remained a challenge on the performance of learners with special needs and this is attributed to teacher’s Status into the teaching of Children with Special needs. Thus the purpose of this study.

Keywords: Special needs education, disabilities, academic performance

Introduction

Special needs education (SNE) is an affirmative action designed to facilitate educational approaches and programs especially designed to meet the of persons having special learning needs (Government of the Republic of Uganda, 1995). Equitable access to education and social services is the right of every individual. Children with disabilities have a right to access social services including education. The government of Uganda designed a number of policies to ensure that children with disabilities can access education. These policies include: Uganda National Institute of Special Education Act (1995) which instituted special needs education (SNE), the constitution of Uganda (1995) and the persons with Disability Act (2006). SNE was designed as an affirmative action to facilitate education approaches & programs specially designed for persons with special learning needs.

In consonance with the government constitution (1995), Uganda has put in place the Persons with Disability Act (2006) and has also ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008). Both instruments demand for access, equity and quality as regards educational services for persons with special learning needs. To meet those requirements, the Ministry of Education and Sports

put in place a Department responsible for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. In 1992, the Ugandan Government “established policy on ‘Education for National Integration and Development’, pledging to support special needs education by providing funding and teacher training.

Learners with barriers (special needs) arising from disability conditions usually require specialized support services (e.g. Sign language interpreters, Braille transcribers etc.), specialized teaching methods, access to resource rooms, and use of specialized technology to access curriculum.

Learning support for children with Special needs in Uganda is provided in special schools and in special classes (units) integrated in the ordinary schools. Body impairments differ from physical, mental, visual and emotional and each impairment form affects the learning process differently and can be detrimental to the performance of pupils.

Statement of the Problem

Although the Government of Uganda has tried to establish inclusive schools for Special Needs Education, trained teachers in Special Needs Education, there is a gap to ensure that inclusive learning can be boosted and all impaired children have access



to education which is their right as per the Education Act 2008 and article 36 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. (2006). According to Ssenkaaba (2017), a New Vision investigation into education for children with disabilities in primary schools reveals that; schools of Children with disabilities lack of essential scholastic materials, inadequate curriculum and absence of trained teachers. These have conspired to frustrate access to education for children with Special Needs. The findings also revealed that Schools of Special needs in Iganga have inadequate special needs equipment, inadequate support for Special Needs Children from the Government and Parents. Though teachers are trying to their work amidst the challenges mentioned above are hindering the learning of Children with Special Needs. There was a need arises therefore, to examine the teacher's Status into the teaching of children with special needs on academic performance in inclusive primary schools of Iganga district.

Research Questions

1. What are the categories of children with special needs in primary schools?
2. What is the status of training and equipping teachers with skills of handling children with special needs?
3. What are the challenges hindering the teaching of children with special needs?
4. What can the government do to address the challenges hindering the teaching of children with special needs?

Research Methodology

This study used the descriptive survey design to determine the status of the teaching of children with special needs of inclusive primary schools in Iganga District. Thirty teachers and two head teachers were selected from the 2 inclusive primary schools in Iganga District. Specifically, questionnaires, reviewed literature from the library and interviews were used to complement the information on the teacher's status into the teaching of children with special needs on academic performance in inclusive primary schools of Iganga district.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher put two ethical issues into con-

siderations and these were informed consent and confidentiality. The researcher informed the respondents about the purpose of the research so the respondents were stimulated and participated willingly. They were informed about the objectives of the study and so forth.

Additionally, the researcher did not disclose the names of the respondents during the research process. All issues concerning the researcher and the respondents were not revealed to anybody outside the circle and also assured the respondents that the data collected will be used for academic purpose only. Before data collection started, the researcher obtained a letter of introduction from the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton Dean of School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences and permission to conduct research in Iganga District, Uganda.

Findings of the Study

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act was passed in Dublin by the Government into law in July 2004. Special educational needs are defined in this act as:

A restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition (NCSE, 2014).

Children with special educational needs are children with a variety of different disability such as health and mental health conditions that require special intervention, services, or support. Parenting a child with special needs can be particularly challenging (Kirk, Gallagher, Coleman, & Anastasiow, cited in Udoba, 2014). Inclusive Education needs to be part of the whole school equal opportunity policy; in this case children with learning difficulties, girls' and boys' learning needs would be incorporated into the curriculum and the school learning environment.

Most Common Categories of Children with Special Needs According to Number Affected

Table 1

Categories of Children with Special Needs

Categories of Children with Special Needs	Rank
1. Blind/Eyesight impairment	#1
2. Deaf/Ear/Hearing Impairment	#2
3. Physical Handicapped	#3
4. Mental Impairment	#4
5. Dumb/Talking Impairment	#5

Table 1 shows the common categories of children with special needs according to number affected. The findings of the study revealed that in the two inclusive schools where the research was conducted one school had only blind/eye sight impairment children. In total were 50 pupils of which some were deaf/blind and some were totally blind. The second school had the five categories of special needs that is deaf/blind children, blind children, dumb/talking impaired children and children with mental impairment and physical handicap were not noticed though the respondents claimed to have some in the two schools where the research was conducted.

Table 2

Attendance in Formal Trainings/Seminars

Formal Training/Seminars Attendance on handling Special Needs	Frequency
1. Blind/Eyesight impairment	17/32 (53%)
2. Deaf/Ear/Hearing Impairment	14/32 (43%)
3. Physical Handicapped	18/32 (56%)
4. Mental Impairment	13/32 (40%)
5. Dumb/Talking Impairment	11/32 (34%)

The majority of special needs children in the two schools where the research was conducted were blind/eye sight impairment, deaf/ear/hearing impairment and dumb/talking impairment. The findings concur with the Uganda Population and Housing Census Report (2002), which showed that four out of every 25 persons in Uganda are persons with disabilities.

Ways of Training and Equipping Teachers with Skills of Handling Children with Special Needs



Table 2 shows the responses of formal trainings/seminars attendance on handling special needs in Iganga Districts, Uganda. The table shows that teachers were trained in handling different categories of special needs children and the highest number of teachers were trained in handling children who are physical Handicapped represented by 56%. According to the Hong Kong Review of Rehabilitation programme plan (1998/99), a physically handicapped person is defined as a person who has a disability of locomotors and neurological origin which constitutes a disadvantage or restriction in one or more aspects of daily living activities, including work. Physical handicaps may cause various degree of weakness and incoordination of the limbs which may affect mobility, posture and manual dexterity. Other physical problems such as heart disease may cause poor exercise tolerance and low level of physical fitness. All these affects pupils ordinary school routine and limit the ability of academic performance. 17 out of 32 teachers were training in handling Blind/Eye sight impairment children represented with 53%. According to World Health Organization (2013), there are estimated 19 million children are vision impaired. Of these, 12 million children have vision impairment due to refractive error. Around 14 million have irreversible blindness, requiring access vision rehabilitation services to optimize functioning and reduce disability.

Some teachers were trained to handle deaf/ear/hearing impairment represented with 43%. According

Table 3

Challenges

Challenges	Rank
1. Few trained teachers in special needs education	#1
2. Inadequate facilities to use	#2
3. Inadequate support by parents with children of special needs.	#3
4. Inability of the students to read due to visual/eye impairments	#4
5. Inability of the students to write and do other things due to physical handicap	#5
6. Inability of students to participate in co-curricular activities	#6
7. Lack of concentration in class	#7
8. Lack of a strong memory and Low IQ due to mental impairment	#8
9. Loss of morale and lack of interest in learning	#9
10. Inability to express or analyze issues, discuss or answer	#10

to Amuge and Kibwika (2010), a person is deaf blind when he/she has a severe degree of combined visual and auditory impairment or it's a condition where there is a combination of visual and hearing loss that causes severe communication disorder or other developments of learning needs. The findings also revealed that they are some children who are born blind and acquire a hearing loss later in life and they are those born with normal vision and hearing but later lose some or all of these senses due to accidents, illness or aging. They are some who are born deaf blind and some born deaf or hard of hearing and later in life they acquire vision loss. Deaf blindness affects the three domains of children development that is the cognitive, the psychomotor and affective domain. That is why it was necessary to train teachers to acquire knowledge and skills of handling such category of special needs children. Historically, an association known as Uganda Association for the Deaf/Blind (UADB) was formed, and in the same year a unit for the Deaf blind was started in Buckley high school in Iganga District one of the schools where this research was conducted. Some teachers represented by 40% were trained to handle children with mental impairment and 34% represented teachers who were trained to handle children with Dumb/Talking impairment.

Challenges Hindering the Teaching of Children with Special Needs

Table 3 shows the responses on the challenges hindering the teaching of children with special needs as follows: There are: few teachers trained in special needs education, inadequate facilities to use by teachers, inadequate support by parents with children of special needs, inability of the students to read due to visual /eye impairment, inability of students to write and do other things due to physical handicap. The results of the study concur with the results of the study that was conducted by Ssenkaaba (2017), a New Vision investigation into education for children with disabilities in primary schools found out the following challenges hindering the learning of

Children with Special needs: schools of Children with disabilities lack of essential scholastic materials, inadequate curriculum and absence of trained teachers. According to UPE policy, the parents are to provide scholastic materials, school uniforms and basic requirement for survival of their children, such as providing for the feeding of their children during school time.

Ways the Government Can Do to Address the Challenges Hindering the Teaching of Children with Special Needs

Table 4

Suggestions to Address the Challenges

What the Government can do to address the Challenges hindering the Teaching of Children with Special Needs.	Rank
1. Implement inclusive learning system of UNESCO	#1
2. National Housing Policy catering for PWD	#2
3. Patterning with donor communities to give support like wheel chairs and learning tools	#3
4. Promotion of special needs education	#4
5. Establishing study centers for the blind and deaf or children with learning disabilities	#5
6. Sensitizing guardians, parents, general public and local leaders of the concern of PWDs	#6
7. Promoting universal education	#7

Table 4 shows the responses suggested what the Government Can Do to Address the Challenges Hindering the Teaching of Children with Special Needs as follows: implementation of inclusive learning system of UNESCO, Patterning with donor communities to give support like wheel chairs, Promotion of special needs education, Establishing study centers for the blind and deaf or children with learning disabilities, Sensitizing guardians, parents, general public and local leaders of the concern of PWDs and promotion of Universal Primary Education. The findings of the study concur with what the Government of

Uganda is doing like a number of policies has been put in place to ensure that children with disabilities can access Education. These policies include: Uganda National Institute of Special Education Act, 1995 which instituted Special Needs Education (SNE), the Constitution of Uganda (1995) and the Persons With Disability Act (2006).SNE was designed as an affirmative action to facilitate educational approaches and programmes specially designed for persons with special learning needs

Discussion on the Challenges Hindering the Teaching of Children with Special Needs



The findings revealed that there are inadequate teachers trained in special needs Education. The head of special needs department at Buckley high school in Iganga (Uganda) said that they are few teachers with sign language skills hardly enough to support all pupils with hearing impairment, one of the pupils in the same school said that at times they go without an interpreter this makes them hard to follow what is being taught. It was also revealed that; Schools are finding it hard to support pupils with disabilities because of the high costs involved in hiring and maintaining specialists' teachers and setting up structures. Trained teachers are equally expensive to hire and maintain. The teachers who were interviewed said that instructors being hired by the School are very expensive and with a lot of assignments in different schools.

Although the special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy (2011), states that the teacher: student ratio for blind is 1:3 and that of the physical impaired is 1:20, none of the schools studied observe this policy requirement. Both schools where the research was conducted that is Buckley High school and Bishop Willis Demonstration Primary School had similar challenge of inadequate special needs education teachers.

Inadequate or lack of special needs equipment. Ssenkaaba (2017) said that lack of essential scholastic materials, hearing aids, Charts, sign language manuals, inadequate curriculum and other support aids has affected the learning of Pupils with disabilities. This was also reported by the teachers of Special Needs Education in all the Schools the research was conducted. The teachers of Special needs in the Schools where the research was conducted said that the Curriculum for Special Needs Education does not help Children with learning disabilities.

The findings also revealed that some trained teachers in Special Needs Education lack the skills and patience of handling slow learners and pupils with Mental Challenges. It was also observed that majority of children with special needs lack of care and support from their Parents, It was also noted that teachers, local authorities, and community members were not supportive to children with special needs. Parents also complained about the inadequate trained teachers to handle children with other categories of special needs like mental impairment, few teachers handling children with hearing impairment, Lack of community sensitization in handling of children with special needs was noticed and some reported that some teachers have negative attitude in handling children with special

needs which affects learning abilities of these children and many children resort to keep their children with Special needs at home.

The Uganda national household surveys of 2009 estimates that 16% of the total population lives with some form of disabilities. Review of literature indicates that children with disabilities are often excluded from enjoying main stream services available to all Ugandans. A report by the Uganda society for disabled children (2011) indicates that 90% of the children with disabilities do not access or enjoy their rights for survival, development protection, participation.

UNICEF (2012) Annual Report states that only 5% of the children with disabilities are able to access education within an inclusive setting of the regular schools whereas 10% access education through special schools and annexes.

Financing resource allocation to special needs education remains low at an average of 0.35% of the entire ministry budget below the recommended 10%. In addition to this the huge variance between the funds approved and funds released further the resource envelopes to support effective implementation of Special Needs Education.

Schools are faced with shortage of equipment due to irregular supply of equipment and lack of capacity of the special Needs Education teachers to operate these equipments which affects the quality of Special Needs Education provided. Teachers also noted that the training provided at the primary teachers' colleges does not furnish teachers with specialized skill to use the equipment. Lack of adequate infrastructure to cater for all children with Special Needs and there are also inadequate vocational materials and learning Aids to effectively help in teaching children with disabilities.

Parents / Guardian attitudes in supporting learners with Special Needs and this has affected the learning of children with disabilities because in some societies children with disabilities is looked at as a curse. Thus some parents were not even ready to send their children to schools but it was a result of much sensitization and again after sending them to school they have failed to provide the basic school requirements and during holidays some they forget to pick their children to take them home. However, the majority of children with special needs do not attend schools or they are enrolled in special schools which keep them away from society. To provide children with special needs with quality education in regular schools, it is

necessary to have a critical look at school policies and practices to make sure that they can properly accommodate all children with diverse education needs.

Some studies (Sanders & Horn, 1998; Bailleul et al., as cited in European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010) show that a competent teacher can support and boost academic achievements of children more than other factors. A teacher who is equipped with necessary knowledge and experience is apparently a leading factor to provide equal opportunities and education for all within inclusive setting. Reynolds (2009, as cited in European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010, p. 7) suggests that a teacher's joint features such as theoretical and empirical knowledge, teaching approach, and values can create a suitable learning environment for all.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teachers have great influence into the teaching of learners with special needs. Because of the increasing categories of children with Special needs in inclusive schools which are few, with inadequate teachers and instructional materials. Special Needs Education should be studied by all teachers undergoing teacher training and refresher courses to be organized for teacher who are working to be equipped with Knowledge of handling children with Special needs. The Government of Uganda on the introduction of Inclusive schools should be backed with the necessary infrastructure and resources at school level to support effective inclusion of persons with disabilities in the main stream system.

The Government to increase on scholarship for persons who may need to train in Special Needs Education and this in line with UNESCO, 2009 which noted that School improvement trends and reforms should aim for inclusive and student-friendly environments for all. Also to provide training and support to teacher trainers to enable the use of participatory methodologies in pre-service and in-service teacher training. This would demonstrate how trainee teachers are expected to teach in the classroom and provide them with reference models. Identify teachers with experience and skills in teaching children with disabilities and ensure they are employed to their best use within the system to support other teachers.

Recommendations

All stake holders should work hand in hand with the Government in the implementation of the vision of Special Needs Education and Inclusive Education Department, which states that; to coordinate and support the provision of Special Needs & Inclusive Education Services to meet the educational needs and rights of learners with special learning needs. This concurs with the Children Statute 2006 section 10 focuses on children with disabilities and states that Parents of Children with disabilities and the state shall provide facilities for rehabilitation and equal opportunity.

Special Needs workshop, formal trainings and seminars to be organized for all teachers in Primary Schools. Conducting regular updates on best practices for managing/implementing Special Needs Education programmes, upgrading of equipment and materials to meet the prevailing standards of teaching and learning for children with special needs is a must.

The Government of Uganda should give a high support to children with special needs through sending support to inclusive schools in time, setting up physical structures and provision of essential scholastic materials for children's with disabilities. This is to concur with the findings of Dennison (2015) who said that in United States has extensive institutional and educational support for teachers who serve children with special needs. A large number of American tertiary institutions offer programs in special education at the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral degree levels. Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary Education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live in reasonable accommodation, Individual's requirements is provided and Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education.

Government should create a budget line with in the UPE capitation grant for purchase of specialized equipment, facilities and materials for children with disabilities. In addition, the school facilities grant should be flexible to include construction of needed infrastructure for SNE in inclusive schools.

The Government should also increase resource allocation for Special Needs Education to 10% of the ministry budget as per the Disability Act (2006). A significant amount of this should be spent on subvention grant to enable Schools Purchase the necessary equipment and provide the learning materials needed



by Children with learning needs.

The remuneration of special needs inclusive education teachers should be improved for maturation & increased retention. This could be a sign of motivation to Special Needs teachers considering that their nature of work requires extra time to the learners than their counter parts with whom they earn the same salary. The Ministry of Education should also come up with other innovative ways of rewarding and motivating Special Needs Teachers on addition to salary.

Strengthen the teaching force through training additional teachers for special needs Children & inclusive education teachers that will effectively deliver on Special Needs Education. Refresher trainings should be arranged for the teachers that were trained and interested teachers to be encouraged to enroll and obtain skills such as sign language, tactile and Braille. This may promote and cause impact in the performance of learners with Special Needs. Ensure all children can access national exams, and provide clear guidelines regarding entitlements to support (readers, sign interpreters, Braille translation, computers, etc.) and any additional time allowances.

Routine monitoring, Inspection and follow-up by the Special Needs District Inspector of Schools and Ministry of Education and Sports to be strengthened in schools to give support and guidance to teachers in managing inclusive education. All Stake holders should participate in sensitization activities and meetings on Special Needs Education to learn from each other and how best each can play a role in the promotion of Special Needs Education.

There is a need to conduct on-going awareness-raising activities to continue to change attitudes in communities. In order to create a supportive, inclusive culture it will also be necessary to raise awareness at all levels within the system so that everyone has a responsibility to support schools to become more inclusive.

The Government should advance coordination and collaboration between ministries with responsibilities for children with Special Needs to provide assistive devices, health checks and other non-educational support for children with Special Needs. To develop a clear national assessment system to identify children's learning needs and entitlement to support, and appropriate educational placements if required.

There is a need to identify best practice from pilot initiatives and incorporate these into a model of inclusive education to be adopted by every school.

Strengthen coordination mechanisms to ensure future work undertaken by INGOs and local NGOs in support of education for children with Special Needs complies with this model, is sustainable and supports the government plan to develop the entire system to become more inclusive. Encourage NGO involvement in developing community support and ensure coverage in the most needed districts where few children with Special Needs are enrolled in school, in areas with low achievement, or schools that have had no support.

To ensure that special school placements can be offered according to need, it will be necessary to review their status and explore options to include them in the overall system, including inspection and quality assurance. It is also essential to ensure increased liaison between government and special schools with a view to special schools acting as outreach centers, utilizing their expertise to support other teachers in mainstream schools.

To encourage parents to take their children with Special Needs to School and this should be possible through sensitization meetings with all stake holders on mindset. This is in line with the Constitution of the Government of Uganda which states that "All Persons have a right to Education" Article 34 of the Constitution of Uganda provide that "a Child is entitled to basic Education which shall be the responsibility of the state and the Parents of a child".

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