Overcoming The Challenges Facing The Visually Challanged Integrated Pupils In Kenyan Schools

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Abstract
Education of children with special needs in ordinary schools has received considerable attention in recent years and continues to be a major concern in the field of special education and indeed education in general. Today, this practice of integration or mainstreaming is based on the belief that the ordinary classroom offers the optimal learning situation without segregation, and it is thus the best place to educate a child (Kaufman. 1978). It exposes children with special needs to a broader curriculum which benefits them psychologically and socially since it does not limit their interaction to only other handicapped children. This paper discusses the results of a research study that was carried out to identify challenges facing the integration of visually impaired pupils (VIPs) and the possible solutions to these challenges. This purpose was achieved using research questions that sought to identify the difficulties faced by the VIPs, causes of these difficulties, their effects and possible solutions. The design of the study of the study was a combination of ex post facto and naturalistic. Data was collected using questionnaires for teachers and pupils. However, due to the nature of the disability and the inability of the research to read Braille, the questionnaire for the pupils were administered as in depth interview. The target population consisted of all the VIPs and the teachers in integrating primary schools in Kisii County. Simple random sampling was used to sample out 30 pupils and 20 teachers.

Introduction
Education remains one of the key indicators of development. It imparts knowledge, skills and attitudes for survival and develops a child to an individual who can effectively participate in nation building. Special education is important for human capital development as it prepares those who are most likely to be dependents to become self reliant (Republic of Kenya, 2005). Traditionally, education for students with disabilities was provided in segregated schools, classes or institutions, often designed to cater for a specific category of disability. Many of these centers were started by voluntary organizations setting up their schools for students with a specific disability, and were maintained as governments increasingly assumed responsibility for the education of all students (Jenkinson, 1997). The reasons for establishing segregated schools and classes for children with disabilities are varied. According to Gary and Vaughan, 2007, economies in the provision of special instructional methods, aids and equipments could be more easily achieved if students with a specific disability such as sensory impairment or hearing impairment were congregated in a limited number of settings rather than dispersed over many schools. Similarly, specialist teachers
could be more concentrated in a single school enhancing the development of professional expertise in a specialized area. Secondly, students with disabilities could benefit from the smaller classes provided in special schools or units, where they would receive more one-to-one attention and instruction could be pitched at a level appropriate to their needs. Thirdly, segregated schools are less threatening to children with disabilities than the regular school, and thus encouraging a feeling of security and enhancing the self-esteem of students with disabilities by avoiding continual comparison of their achievements with those of other, more competent students. Finally, placing children with disabilities in regular classes is seen as disadvantaging non-disabled students by creating undue demands on teaching and other resources (Gary and Mark, 2007: 23-24).

Education of children with special needs in ordinary schools has received considerable attention in recent years and continues to be a major concern in the field of special education and indeed education in general. Today, this practice of integration or mainstreaming is based on the belief that the ordinary classroom offers the optimal learning situation without segregation, and it is thus the best place to educate a child (Kaufman. 1978). Children with disabilities thus need the companionship of their typical age peers; they need the same experiences of achievement and opportunities to grow into adolescents and adults who have interesting and satisfying lives. Above all, they need to develop self respect and a sense of belonging. Despite the push towards integration, a substantial numbers of students/ pupils with disabilities remain in segregated educational settings. In some cases, schools have not taken up the challenge to adopt to meet the needs of these students; in others parents have shown reluctance to move away from the settings that have provided so much support for their children while in others the attitude of the normal pupils towards these exceptional children has been negative (Jenkinson, 1997: 5).

The Salamanca Statement in 1994 was unequivocal in asking the international community to endorse inclusive schooling when it said, ‘all children must have access to mainstream schools…; regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes… they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system’ (UNESCO, 1994). The rights of disabled children to be educated in the mainstream are spelled out in Article 23 of the convention which reminds politicians and education decision makers that a child with a disability should not be excluded or discriminated against. It calls for a child to be educated in a manner that will allow the child to achieve the ‘fullest possible social integration and individual development’ (UNESCO. 1989: Article 23).

In 1997, the UK government’s Green Paper on special educational needs asserts that ‘the ultimate purpose of special education needs provision is to enable young people to flourish in adult life. There are therefore strong educational, as well as social and moral grounds for educating children with special needs with their peers’ (DfEE 1997 as quoted by Gary and Mark, 2007: 131). Mainstreaming/integration thus expose children with...
special needs to a broader curriculum which benefits them psychologically and socially since it does not limit their interaction to only other handicapped children. Due to the above benefits, many countries have legislated the policy on integration. Some of the countries are the United States of America in 1975, Sweden in 1965, Scandinavian countries in 1960, Romania in 1990, Uganda in 1992 etc. In Kenya the approach has received considerable attention through the education commissions that mainly lay the foundation of Kenya’s education policies.

In 1964, the Kenya Education Commission chaired by Ominde recommended that ‘children with impairment are capable of receiving education and training in regular schools provided special considerations are given to their needs by teachers’ (Republic of Kenya, 1964: Recommendation 132). The 1976 report of the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies chaired by Gachathi recommended that ‘special education would follow a policy of integration of the handicapped in society, especially in cases where the handicap has been adequately compensated by facilities’ (Republic of Kenya, 1976: Recommendation 166). In 1988, the Kamunge Report and the ensuing Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988 recommended the integration of children with disabilities into regular formal school in order to enhance their enrolment and participation in formal schooling (Republic of Kenya, 1988). Following these recommendations, an integration policy was introduced in 1990 to allow the handicapped children to be integrated with the non-handicapped children. The same year, the Kenya Integrated Education Program was started by the Ministry of Education to coordinate the activities of the integrating schools. In the more recent Sessional Paper No. 5 of 2005, the government commits itself to 'design and implement programs that enhance inclusive education in all institutions' (Republic of Kenya, 2005: Section4.23)

In spite of the benefits of integration, majority of the special needs children in Kenya are in special schools ‘where there are specialized equipments and instructional materials, appropriate physical facilities and medical services’ (Guralnick, 1978: 72). According to the Ministry of Education, Statistics Unit, in 2008/2009, the enrolment of the visually impaired in primary schools stood at 2,944. Out of that only 1417 are in integrated programs. In Kisii County only 145 are in integrated programs and majority of these are not educable. This is even after the government committed itself in the Sessional Paper No. 5 of 2005 ‘to provide support to each public primary school to begin removing barriers that make the school environment unfriendly to challenged learners. The schools were also given grants to facilitate procurement of the necessary teaching/learning materials and equipments’ (Republic of Kenya, 2005: Section4.23). The low enrolment may be as a result of a myriad of challenges that this research will seek to unveil.

Factors which influenced the Movement towards Integration

The movement towards integration of students with disabilities came about as a result of a number of interrelated influences

a) Integration as normalization

Normalization refers to utilization of means which are as culturally normative as possible, in order to establish and/or maintain personal behaviors and characteristics which are as culturally normal as
possible (Jenkinson, 1997: 12). Categorizing people with disabilities into groups that are separate from the mainstream of society immediately removes them from the cultural norms that they should have been following. Segregated settings are seen as ‘artificial and non-formative, as well as counter-productive because transfer from such settings into a normative setting would require considerable adjustment that would not be necessary if the individual were integrated from the start’ (Jenkinson, 1997: 36).

According to Gary and Vaughan, 2007: 13, integration consists of those practices and measures that would maximize a person’s potential participation the mainstream of the culture. This would include living and moving about in the community in ways that are typical for the person’s age group, and using community resources, including those that serve the general public rather than specialist agencies. Thus in education normalization would mean making maximum use of the regular school system – the system that is used by the mainstream community – with minimum dependence on segregated facilities.

b) Criticism of Special Education

Evans and Weld (1989) argues that special schools are constructed to serve the purpose of the wider system rather than the inhabitants of the institution, they exist primarily for the convenience of the mainstream system rather than for the purpose of helping or improving the lives of those who are directed to the special system. Dunn (1968) pointed out the shortcomings of separate education for students with a mild intellectual disability. He supported his criticism with four main arguments:

- **Academic Achievement** – Dunn cited research which showed that students with intellectual; disabilities placed in special classes achieved no better academically than students of comparable ability placed in regular classes. Differences that did occur tended to favor regular class placement

The Detrimental Effects of Labeling associated with Placement outside the Mainstream - Placement in segregated settings was itself responsible for people with disabilities being labeled and excluded from the mainstream of society. Diagnostic procedures based on administration of standardized tests tended to categorize the student under a particular label, with damaging effects both on teacher expectations and on the student’s own self-concept.

The social-economic imbalance in Special Education – Mittler (1992) drew a connection between poverty and special education needs, and the links between inadequate health care, disease and malnutrition on the one hand, and the whole range of disabilities on the other. Dunn (1968) attributed this to unfair methods of identification, in particular to culturally biased measures of intelligence which favored the upper class and disadvantaged those from impoverished backgrounds.

Self-paced Curricula - Dunn’s (1968) final argument against segregated special education and in favor of integration was that advances in the development of individualized, self-paced curricula in regular education would allow students with disabilities to be accommodated in the regular class, if they were provided with a program designed by a specialist teacher to meet their needs and in which they could progress at their own pace. Integration could be made possible by racial departures in school organization, involving a greater emphasis on team teaching, ungraded classes and flexible groupings (Jenkinson, 1997: 16).

c) **The Least Restrictive Environment**
The least restrictive environment is the environment that least restricts the interaction of students with their non-handicapped peers—that is, the regular school. Warnock Committee (Warnock, 1978) distinguished three separate dimensions of integration. Locational integration refers to special units or classes set up in regular schools, or a special school and a mainstream sharing the same site. Social integration refers to students with disabilities sharing extra-curricular activities which are designed to encourage social interaction with their peers. Full integration could be achieved only through functional integration, in which students with disabilities participate with their age peers on an equal basis in educational programs, using the same facilities and resources.

**Arguments for Integration**

Educating pupils with special needs in ordinary school is a concern of education system throughout the world. Arguments for integration largely rest on the right of all people to participate in their communities and on the experience of the negative effects that exclusion has on their lives and those of others. While there are also very important human, economic, social and political reasons for pursuing a policy and approach of inclusive education, it is also a means of bringing about personal development and building relationships among individual, groups and nations (UNESCO, 1994).

Integration refers to the education of pupils with special needs in ordinary schools. It provides ‘a natural environment where these pupils are alongside their peers and are freed from the isolation that is characteristics of special school placement’ (Hegarty, 1981: 11). There are various reasons for the movement of opinion in favor of integration. Inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights. The integration of children and youth with special educational needs is best achieved within inclusive schools that serve all children within a community (UNESCO, 1994: 11). Article 2 of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education states that ‘those with special education needs must have access to regular schools, which should accommodate them within child centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs’ (UNESCO, 1994: iii).

Kirk (1972) criticized special schools and noted that ‘even though a special school provides an opportunity for thorough training, certain disadvantages of an institution setting become apparent – routine, formality, segregation, lack of family life and so forth: (Kirk, 1972: 12). Herwett and Forness (1984) concur with Kirk (1972) on the issue of special schools and notes that special schools not only segregate the handicapped but they also stigmatize them as having needs different from those of ordinary people. In regard to formative age and integration in society, Herwett and Forness (1984) pointed out that ‘the handicapped person being away from his community during the formative years of his life not only finds himself unable to adjust socially when he finally joins the wide society after school, the society finds it difficult to accept, understand and give him an opportunity to participate in social-economic or political life’ (Herwett and Forness 1984: 314). Today, then, the principle of integration is strongly advocated by all concerned in reactions to the segregation practices of the past. Proponents of integration argue that the benefits of integration are
two-fold: social-ethical and psychological-educational.

**Social-Ethical Arguments**

Education is one of the primary mechanisms for the transfer of social values from generation to generation. Inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights. It is within this context that those with special educational needs can achieve the fullest educational progress and social integration (Guralnick, 1978).

**Psychological – Educational Arguments**

Infants come equipped with reflexes triggered by certain environmental events. As the child’s reflective behavior interacts with the environment, control of the infant’s motor responses gradually shifts from involuntary to voluntary activation (Guralnick, 1978). Interaction with the environment results in the child’s development. Integrating handicapped and non-handicapped children has the potential to create a more demanding environment for the handicapped child, an environment that may assist in the continued development of the child’s behavioral repertoire. Such an environment would be ‘naturally’ more demanding because of the presence of the normally developing child (Hegarty, 1981). Not only may the physical environment be filled with more interesting objects and persons, but also the non-handicapped peers may expect and encourage behavior that would produce significant changes in the handicapped child’s repertoire (Hegarty, 1981).

**Barriers to efficient servicing of students with visual impairments**

Visually impaired children need intervention beyond what their sighted peers require. From the very beginning of their lives, people with visual impairments, need to be taught the basics of every day functioning. What sighted individuals note as everyday tasks need to be learned and practiced by the visually impaired. Research indicates that children with visual impairments "differ from their sighted peers in some areas of intelligence, ranging from understanding spatial concepts to a general knowledge of the world" (Hardman, 1993). Other areas children with visual impairments differ from their sighted peers are speech and language development, educational and social development, and orientation and mobility. It is indicated in research that children with visual impairments "are at a distinct disadvantage developing speech and language skills because they are unable to visually associate words with objects" (Hardman, 1993). In some instances these children may develop vocabulary words and use them out of context because they have no way of connecting them with any concrete meaning. Children need special training when acquiring vocabulary and speech and language skills. Also special training in orientation and mobility and the basic life skills is needed. Students need to learn strategies to help them move about efficiently and safely. Visually impaired children also need a lot of practice with skills such as eating, drinking, and bathing. These special needs may bring issues of mastery and competence into view. Thus, not only special educational intervention is necessary but social intervention as well. Thus, visually
impaired students need intervention and assistance beyond what their sighted peers need.

Certain factors present problems in the efficient servicing of students with visual impairments, most significant of which is lack of funds (Waihenya, 2000). Lack of funds makes it impossible to provide required grade level text books and leisure reading materials and to maintain Braille machines. It also makes it impossible to buy basic specialized equipments along with learning and teaching materials for curriculum areas that are adapted to meet the needs of students with visual impairments.

Kenya also lacks professionals in the area of special education in general (Karugu, 1994). Lack of an adequate number of trained personnel for students with visual impairments presents obstacles to efficient servicing of the population. A survey conducted by the Kenya Institute of Special Education in 1989 revealed that up to 50% of teachers working with students with disabilities were untrained in the field. Although it has been about twenty years since this study was conducted, the field continues to experience a dire need for trained professionals (Kiarie, 2004). Obstacles also exist in the area of adaptations of materials for students with visual impairments. In order to cater for the diverse conditions of learners with special needs, the curriculum for regular children is adopted and/or adapted. Currently KIE has completed adapting the syllabi for Primary Mathematics, Primary Science, Primary Social studies and Primary Physical Education to suit learners with visually impairment; (KIE, Special Education Unit, 2009). Others like English and Kiswahili, which are core subjects, are yet to be adapted.

There are devices that assist the visually impaired students experience a smooth integration process into a general education classroom in the public school system. Particularity there are devices that help visually impaired students with mathematics and reading skills. Partially sighted individuals may need systems to magnify printed text. Also, large print books are needed to assist in making reading easier. In addition to these devices, optical aids such as corrective glasses may be used. Completely visually impaired students may need to use Braille reading material. As children grow older and reading becomes more extensive, tape recordings, records, and even sighted readers are employed. Also talking calculators and computers may be used to help the student with complex mathematical concepts. These devices, programs and architectural changes help visually impaired students get their special needs met and provide a smooth structure for integration into a general education classroom. These devices are a challenge in most schools in Kenya (KUB, 2009).

Research Methodology

This research design used was a combination of ex-post facto and naturalistic design. Kisii has 3 schools that integrate the VIPs. The total number of respondents was 50, 30 pupils and 20 teachers. These respondents were randomly sampled. Data was collected by use of questionnaires and interview guide. There were two sets of questionnaires, one for the teachers and the other one for the visually impaired pupils. However, the one for the VIs was administered as an interview owing to the disability of the pupils and the inability of the researcher to read Braille.
Data Analysis
The frequency count of the respondents was processed and tallied to give the total raw scores. The raw scores showed how each pupil rated each item in the questionnaires which were then converted to percentages.

The findings of the Study
The respondents were asked to give reasons for and against integration. All the pupils (100.0%) and 91.7% teachers reported that being in an integrated schools improves socialization with the sighted persons. The VIPs therefore learns to live in the ‘normal’ world and this creates a positive societal attitude. Through socialization, 83.3% of the teachers feel that integration improves the self concept of the VIPs and this reduces dependence. 90.1% of the pupils feel that the sighted pupils are of great help. This is because they are guided and directed in the compound and they also dictate words and reads the board for them. Competition was also mentioned as a reason why an integrated school would be preferred to a special school. Though the percentage of the pupils (63.6%) is fewer than for the teachers (83.3%), competition was sighted as one way in which the VIs and the sighted view each other as equals. This encourages healthy competition in school activities in preparation for competition in the job market. However, not all felt that integration is helpful. One hundred percent of the teachers and pupils feel that a special school would be the best place for a VI because they are specialized equipments and facilities. This seems to suggest that the integrated schools are lacking the facilities required by the VIPs. 75.0% of the pupils feel that the sighted pupils are mean to them and therefore a special school would provide almost all pupils ‘like me’. However, 66.7% of the teachers feel that a pupil in a special school stands a better chance of being sponsored than in an integrated school. Finally 66.7% and 83.3% of the teachers felt that an integrated school lacks special educators and the environment is not well adapted respectively.

Response to the question on the challenges experienced by the VIPs was sought from both the teachers and the pupils. Teachers felt that lack of enough resource materials, delay in de-brailing their work and untrained staff are the major difficulties the VIPs experience. On the other hand, the pupils felt that failure to carry their machines home, mobility and unfriendly class mates are the major difficulties they experience. 47.4% felt that teachers deliberately ignore them while teaching. This is what the pupils called a ‘black out’. Others identified by teachers were absenteeism, machine breakdown, inability to participate in non formal curriculum, and unfriendly teachers (regular and untrained). The pupils also felt that machine breakdown, inability to participate in non formal curriculum, reading and spelling, ‘Black out’ from teachers and inadequate learning materials were the other main challenges.

These challenges are mainly caused by inadequate funding from the government and other stakeholders from 88.9% of the teachers. In addition, frequent curriculum changes meaning that the production of Braille books takes time. From the literature review, KIE has not adapted all the syllabi. On the other hand, the pupils felt that lack of self confidence (fear) and absenteeism from school are the major cause of the difficulties they experience. Lack of confidence may be as a result of poor self concept which may make them withdraw. They fail to accept themselves
as they are, and as a result they develop negative attitude towards themselves and the society as whole.

The findings of this study found out that these challenges have consequences. The most serious consequence of the difficulties experienced by the VIPs is poor self concept. This is drawn from the response of 100.0% of the teachers. This results in the pupils withdrawing, feeling lonely and neglected. This affects health interaction with the sighted. Another effect was poor performance which was indicated by 94.4% of the teachers. This may be because some of the VIPs are slow learners. Inadequate facilities and equipments to cater for their special needs, low self confidence and negative attitude towards learning may also be other reasons to explain their poor performance. The VIPs also displays outbursts of bitterness probably because of the tension they undergo through as a result of worrying about their future in this competitive world.

Possible solutions to these problems were sought. Some of the solutions suggested by the teachers included; the government should consider taking time before changing the curriculum. This is to allow the adaptation of the curriculum and the production of the Braille materials required by the VIPs. Increase of funding and carrying out sensitization and awareness programs are other recommendations that the teachers felt could solve the problems experienced by the VIPs. 77.8% teachers felt that all teachers should be exposed to special needs education. Others felt that all schools should be encouraged to integrate while others felt that special schools are the best place for the VIPs. This is from the response of 78.9% and 77.8% of the teachers respectively. On the contrary, majority of the pupils’ recommendations have to do with their self concept and attitude. All the 30 pupils felt that the teachers and the pupils should understand them. From the interview it was apparent that the VIPs would want to be treated with sympathy because of their disability. This can be attributed to the response of all the 30 pupils that the sighted pupils should be encouraged to guide them while in school. However, teachers encourage free walking of the VIPs. The pupils especially the partially sighted also felt that the sighted should be encouraged to read for them. Though this would enhance a health relationship between the VIPs and the sighted, it would on the other hand encourage dependency.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, it can be said that integration is a policy which should be supported by all the stakeholders to ensure socialization and improve independence of a handicapped child. From the study, it was apparent that visual impairment is the most expensive handicapped to manage in an integrated school because of the cost in purchasing, maintaining and repairing the materials and equipments they use. This study identified that VIPs are likely to get a ‘black out’ from the teachers than any other handicap. This means that a teacher can opt to ignore the VIPs so that he/she does not sacrifice the time for the sighted who are the majority. It also found out that integrating schools lack special technical and teaching devices for the VIPs. This therefore should serve as a wakeup call to the government to train more SNEs and stock the integrating schools with the required facilities. KIE should also be advised to consider taking time before changing the curriculum and when it is done, it should be simultaneously with Braille material production.
Despite the handicap, the VIPs felt that they have a lot they can share and learn from the sighted pupils. On the basis of these findings, the researcher would recommend that the process of integration be improved and advocated for in all the regular schools. The findings have also identified the cost of teaching a VIP is high. In view of this, the government should increase funding to all primary schools integrating the VIPs. They should also encourage partnership and also collaborate with organizations willing to fund special education. The government should also employ itinerant teachers to ensure that integrated pupils are learning smoothly. Teaching load for teachers dealing with VIPs should be reduced.

References


