

EVALUATION OF THE LEVEL OF AWARENESS AND SUPPORT OFFERED BY RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS FOR APPROPRIATE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN KENYA: A CASE OF UASIN GISHU COUNTY

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Abstract: The study assessed support levels for placement of children with Special Needs Education in Uasin Gishu County in Rift Valley province. The objective of the study was to evaluate the level of awareness and support offered by relevant stakeholders in placement of children with Special Needs. The study adopted the theory of Planned Behaviour that relates to intention of behavior. A descriptive survey design was employed for the planning and execution of the study. Stratified, Simple Random and Purposive sampling techniques were used in choosing the sample size. The target population which is also the sample for the study included Education Officers, assessors at the education assessment centres, affected parents and Special Needs Education Teachers. The research instruments used to collect data were questionnaires, interview schedule and Observation checklist. Data collected was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The study findings revealed that the country was still far from achieving education for all as attested by the fact that over 1.8 children with SNE had not been assessed and placed in appropriate programmes despite the governments' effort of setting up EARCs in all the districts with the aim of taking the services closer to people. The study findings are expected to benefit educational planners in recommending for allocation of more resources for training, in-service and equipping the centres for better performance, enhance sensitization of parents and general public about the functions and value of assessment centres. It is further hoped that the findings of the study will bring about greater awareness with regard to the value of the assessment centres.

Keywords: Support, Special Needs, Placement.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that 500 million people in the world are disabled, that is one in every ten people. Among these, 60-80% live in rural areas, where there are virtually no services to meet their needs. From estimates somewhat in the world, about 140 million of the disabled are children and 160 million are women with disabilities (WHO, 1999). UNESCO reports that 90% of children with disabilities do not attend school (United Nations Website 2009). The vast majority of the world's 450 million disabled persons live in developing countries today. It is estimated that by year 2025, the developing world will account for more than 80% of the worlds' disabled population (Nobel, 1981).

In many countries of the world, families with physically challenged children carry with them a burden of social stigma, which impedes social and economic welfare. The resultant effects have been exclusion, isolation and marginalization from the mainstream community life. Efforts to integrate them into the mainstream life have been met by socio-cultural and economic barriers among other factors (Ndinda, 2005).

The provision of rehabilitation and education services for the disabled is justified not simply as a humanitarian gesture, but because a disabled citizen is entitled to special help without which he cannot benefit effectively from his status as a citizen, and also because the productivity of the disabled is a valuable element in the national economy (Hagan, 1981). He further suggests that disabled persons have a right to access special services, which they require in order to effectively function and to contribute to himself/herself, as well as to his/her community to the fullest extent possible.

Frederickson et al (2002) asserts that the individual role of all stakeholders must be considered if a truly integrated approach to special educational needs provision is to develop. Development partners and other actors in the education sector play a major role in facilitating early identification, assessment and placement of learners with special needs and disabilities as well as provide resources and services which are integral to early identification, assessment and intervention of children with special needs education. An integrated approach is necessary for various government ministries, partners, stakeholders and parents for improved service delivery of SNE (GOK, 2005).

Special education in the USA receives financial support through a combination of federal, state and local funds based on three main categories of indicators usually distinguished as: input funding based on the number of children with special needs in a school, throughput funding based on the functions or tasks that have to be undertaken or developed and output funding where resources are allocated on the basis of achievement scores (added-value: the higher the achievement, the more funds) (Fletcher-Campbell et al, 2003). The government of Botswana recognizes the important role played by NGOs in provision of services to SNE children and therefore, gives grants that assist in identification, detection, physiotherapy and placement (Malatsi & Okumbe, 2002).

In Rwanda and Ethiopia, government policy and planning documents highlighted the need for partnerships between government, parents, communities, schools, NGOs and the private sector. They explain the importance of regular and participatory consultations, outline stakeholders' roles and responsibilities in education, and stress that the documents were written in consultation with stakeholders (Ingrid, 2009). On the contrary, Abosi (2002) reported that in Botswana the biggest challenge is the negative attitude of parents and guardians towards children with special and lack of public education to create awareness so that they can have a positive attitude towards assisting learners achieve their full potential.

De Boer et al (2010) reported that though the majority of parents were positive in offering support to SEN, those parents of SNE children reported concerns including availability of services in regular schools for individualized instruction. Several variables found which relate to parents attitudes include: social-economic status, education level and type of disability. UNESCO (1994) points out to the role of community, families and the cooperation among educators in ensuring positive schooling outcomes. This is reinforced by Ferguson (2007) revelation that when families get involved in their children's education, the students achieve more, stay in school longer and engage in school more completely.

The United Nations estimates that 10% of any community in the developing countries is disabled (WHO 1980). In Uasin Gishu District little had been done to establish the magnitude of disability, the distribution of people with disabilities, their age, sex, type of disability or severity of disability. Consequently, the district was ill prepared to tackle the issue. If it was then assumed that approximately 10% of the districts population was disabled in one way or another, it meant that there were 68,000 persons whose needs had to be taken into account (Uasin Gishu District Development Plan 2002-2008).

Despite County Uasin Gishu having three assessment centres situated in Eldoret East, West and North, only one was fully functional. The service profile for disabled persons in the district included some educational programmes run by the Ministry of Education, the Catholic Church, Moi University and occasional assistance to individual persons with disabilities by the National Fund for the disabled.

The needs of disabled persons range from prevention of disabilities, cure of curable conditions, early childhood identification of disabled children, appropriate education and rehabilitation services, inadequate staff, sustainability of programmes and adequate support services (Uasin Gishu District Development Plan, 2005-2010).

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Uasin Gishu County in Rift Valley province. The study adopted a mixed methods research design leaning towards quantitative survey because it had nominal, ordinal and ratio data. A Quantitative survey strategy was adopted to test the objectives by examining relationship among variables. These data was measured so that numbered data could be analyzed using statistical procedures. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey since data was collected at one point in time. The study targeted all three Educational Assessment and Resource Centres (EARCs), 2 special schools and 45 special units, 3 district education officers, 10 assessors in the EARCs, 47 SNE teachers and 47 affected parents in Uasin Gishu County.

Education officers, affected parents of special needs children, assessors and SNE teachers in special schools and units were selected. Stratified sampling was used to stratify Uasin Gishu County into 3 districts namely Wareng, Eldoret East and Eldoret North. The schools were stratified into special schools and special units. The schools were stratified further into Hearing Impaired, Visually Impaired Physically handicapped and mentally handicapped. Simple Random sampling was used to sample respondents from 45 Special units, 47 affected parents' and 63 SNE teachers in special units. 3 education officers and 2 special schools were picked purposively

Questionnaires, observation and Interview schedules were used as the main tools of collecting data. A pilot study was carried out in one EARC in the neighbouring Nandi County at an interval of two weeks in order to ensure that the instruments were without ambiguities and that they solicited the intended responses. The researcher used the internal consistency technique to test reliability of instruments in investigating the level of support mechanism offered to assessment centres. The researcher then used Cronbach's coefficient Alpha methods to compute how items correlate among themselves. Validity relates to precision and accuracy, therefore the standard deviation and the error term were to be determined within the sample to ensure that there was minimal variance. This was done through piloting. Descriptive statistics employed included mean, standard deviation, frequencies while inferential statistics were basically the correlations and ANOVA test.

3. FINDINGS

1. Knowledge about Existence of Assessment Centres:

The study sought to find out the source through which affected parents accessed information with regard to existence of assessment centres and services offered within their locality. Their responses were varied as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Knowledge about Existence of Assessment Centres

Source	Percentage
Special Child	13.8%
Local Administration	17.2%
Public Baraza	5.0%
Religious gathering	3.0%
Media	5.8%
Friend	55.2%
Total	100%

The Table 1 above illustrates that {55.2%} of the parents got the information about existence of assessment centres through friends, {17.2%} from local administration while {13.8%} from a special child and the least source of information was religious gatherings, media and public baraza's. The findings indicate that dissemination of information about special needs is limited and hence a need to use all the available avenues to disseminate information to the public about existence and services available for SNE children within their locality. GOK (1999) report did state that since the EARCs were established they have had a big impact on special education services in Kenya in terms of many children being assessed and placed appropriately for early intervention and that many parents had been through public barazas, church meetings and hospitals.

This was also attributed to lack of sensitization programs an aspect that could be attributed to limited finances. Furthermore, issues related to special needs are not given prominence in public barazas and religious gatherings where a

majority of affected parents can be reached. This reinforces GOK (2009) report which stated that in some cases, local communities are not aware of special needs programmes and EARCs within their localities and hence need to disseminate information to the general public. This calls for greater awareness creation and use of all available and accessible sources to disseminate information about the existence of EARCs and SNE services provided within their locality.

2. First Assessment of Child:

The study sought to establish from the affected parent the age of the child when taken for the first assessment as illustrated in the figure 1.

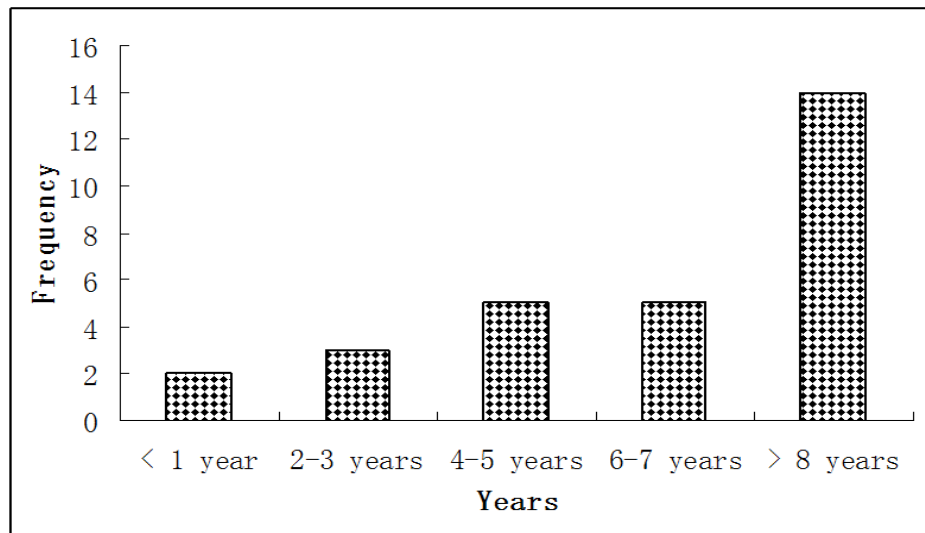


Figure 1: First assessment of Special Child

The findings revealed that the most frequent age for the first assessment of the SNE children was 8 years and the least frequent was 1 year. This was attributed to low level of advocacy and lobbying for the rights of persons with special needs and disabilities by parents, communities and disability organizations.

It was further revealed that many of the affected parents and the community did not access information about special needs at all and when they did, it was after the child was way past the official school going age of six years, an aspect that delayed provision of much needed services. The findings of Koutrouba (2008) stress that identification of SNE students should be realised during the first year of primary school with the use of a special screen-test system, which should be implemented at the start of every school year by the local assessment and support centres on the entire student population.

If early identification and appropriate placement is to be achieved then there is need to increase sensitization and awareness creation programs. This finding reinforces (Warren 1984) report which acknowledges importance of early intervention and placement for these children in order to avoid wrong placement and stigmatization. The report further stresses that in too many children, if disability has not been recognized until too late, the chances for the best remediation have been seriously reduced.

3. Attitude of Community Towards Assessors Work:

The study sought to establish community's general attitude towards assessors work as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Attitude of Community towards Assessors Work

Attitude	Percentage
Very Positive	7.5%
Positive	30%
Negative	50.0%
Very Negative	12.5%
Total	100%

With regard to the general attitude of the community towards assessors work, {62.5%} rated it as negative whereas {37.5%} viewed it as positive. The community is an important actor in facilitating early identification, assessment and placement of learners with special needs as well as provide the needed resources and support which is integral to early identification, assessment and placement. The findings in terms of attitude of community towards assessors work are worrying given that their roles are complimentary and they can serve as valuable resources in support of enhanced placement of SNE child. The optimal learning environment for these children depends largely upon the relationship among teachers, parents, fellow students, society and assessors. UNESCO (1994) points out to the role of community, families and the cooperation among educators in ensuring positive schooling outcomes.

UNESCO (2005) goes further to state that effective placement involves collaboration and change of attitude of both the personnel in the assessment centres and the relevant stakeholders. These change processes towards enhanced placement often begin on a small scale and involve overcoming some obstacles such as: existing attitudes and values, lack of understanding, lack of necessary skills and inappropriate organization. This can be enhanced by advocating for change in attitude and behaviour towards them by engaging in aggressive public awareness activities (Strategic plan for National council for persons with Disabilities, 2006-2009).

The attitude displayed by the community towards assessors' work is worrying since it may lead to them not offering the needed support in terms of sponsoring institutions, facilitating improvement of learning facilities and infrastructure and carrying out advocacy. The findings of UNESCO (2005) revealed that communities in the business of education were among the stakeholders who could serve as valuable resources in support of enhanced placement of SNE children. An integrated approach is therefore necessary for various government ministries, partners and or stakeholders and parents for improved service delivery of SNE.

4. Level of Support by Stakeholders:

Rating of the level of support offered to the assessment centres by the relevant stakeholders was measured based on several variables as shown in Table 3. The mean of their responses is summarized on Table 3

Table 3: Level of Support by stakeholders

Support	Low	High
Financial	75%	25%
Material	55%	45%
Spiritual	60%	40%
Political	87.5%	12.5%
Total	100%	100%

Regarding support to assessment centres by the relevant stakeholders it was indicated that {75%} of the respondents were of the opinion that financial support was low whereas 12.5 rated it to be high. As far as political support was concerned {87.5%} of the respondents revealed that it was low while {12.5} felt bit was high. The level of support by the relevant stakeholders is crucial if appropriate placement is to be achieved and from the findings it can be deduced that the stakeholders did not play their roles fully in terms of offering needed support in terms of financial, material, spiritual and political support. This is in contrast with Frederickson et al 2002; MoE 2005 sentiments that the individual role of all stakeholders must be considered if improved service delivery and a truly integrated approach to special educational needs provision is to develop. In view of this, an integrated approach is necessary for various government ministries, partners, stakeholders and parents for improved service delivery of SNE.

5. Sources of Funding:

The assessors rated the various groups funding the assessment centres as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Sources of Funding

Category	Percentage
Ministry of Social Services	2.5%
Ministry of Education	82.5%
Constituency Development Fund	5.0%

Communities	2.5%
Donors	4.0%
Individuals	3.5%
Totals	100

The assessors rated support from the various groups funding the assessment centres. They identified the Ministry of Education at {82.5%} to be the main source of funding to their centres. CDF support was {5%} whereas all the other groups support was minimal at {12.5%}. This implies that the assessment centres cannot operate at its optimal level due to financial constraints. These findings are in contrast with those of Fletcher-Campbell et al (2003) which revealed that special education in the USA receives financial support through a combination of federal, state and local funds. There is therefore, need for other donors to supplement funds from ministry of education which is the main funder given that the assessment process requires a lot of funding and support.

6. Enhanced Placement:

The respondents were provided with a predetermined list of factors which have a direct impact on placement of SNE children and the responses illustrated in figure 2.

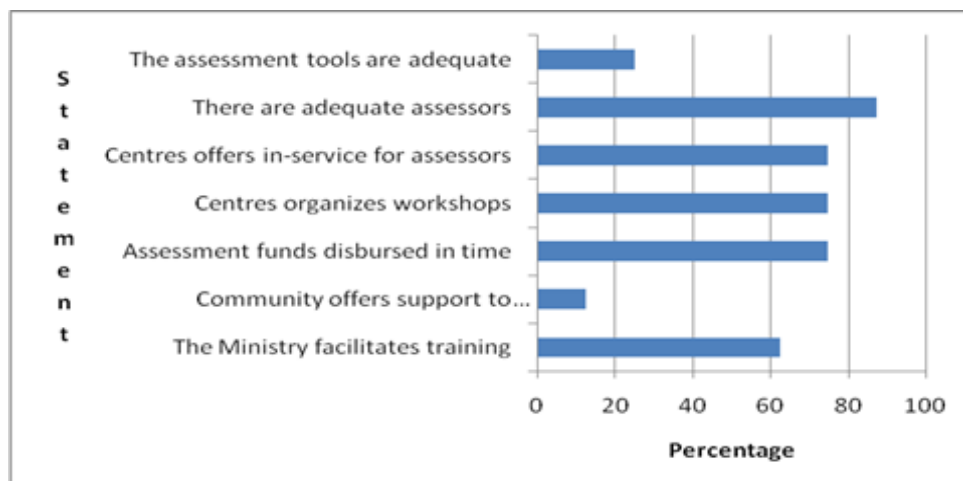


Figure 2: Enhanced placement

The findings revealed that {62.5%} assessors disagreed with the opinion that there were adequate assessment tools while {37.5%} were in agreement. The findings indicated that assessment tools necessary in assessment were inadequate which implied that the level of assessment was low thus affecting achievement of appropriate placement. This is in line with the findings of Kochung (1988) and GOK (1999) which revealed that assessment tools in Kenya are not effective enough to accurately identify children with special needs and have not been standardized since 1984 when DANIDA the main funder withdrew its support.

A good number of assessors at {75%} were in agreement that centers neither offered in-service nor organized workshops for assessors, while {12.5%} were not in agreement. There is therefore need to provide opportunities for more staff development to respond to a greater diversity of student needs. Studies by Dart (2006) and Koutrouba (2008) underscore the importance of professional development in a world where systems are becoming more inclusive and specialised staff are required to respond to a greater diversity of student needs.

A majority of teachers at {87.5%} disagreed with the opinion that community offers support to assessors while {12.5%} were undecided. This indicated that the community was not offering the needed support to assessors for improved service delivery. This is in contra to the UNESCO (2005) report which states that communities in the business of education are among the stakeholders that can serve as valuable resources in support of enhanced placement of SNE children. The findings indicated that there was still a deficiency as far as assessment tools, workshops, capacity building, assessment funds and community support is concerned.

This implies that enhanced placement cannot be achieved if these factors have not been addressed. Infact Kiarie (2006) study findings revealed that the the governments' effort in dealing with access and equity in the provision of education

and training to children with special needs have encountered numerous challenges some of which include; lack of clear guidelines on the policy implementation of integrated education, inadequacy among teachers to handle children with special needs, inadequate infrastructure, tools and skills in identification and assessment and difficulty to mandate uniformity by the ministry of education.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The level of assistance offered by the relevant stakeholders in terms of finances, material, spiritual and political support which is crucial in attainment of appropriate placement was rated to be low as reflected by the findings. It was indicated that (75%) of the respondents were of the opinion that financial support was low whereas 12.5 rated it to be high. As far as political support was concerned, 87.5% of the respondents revealed that it was low while 12.5 felt it was high. In relation to funding of the assessment centres by the relevant stakeholders, the assessors identified the Ministry of Education at {87.5} to be the main source of funding. Support from CDF was {25%} whereas the other groups support was minimal at {12.5%}.

Dissemination of information about SNE services offered by the assessment centres to the community was noted to be low as per the findings. {55.2%} of the parents revealed that they accessed the information through friends, {17.2%} from local administration while {13.8%} from a special child and the least source of information were religious gatherings, media and public baraza's. With regard to the general attitude of the community towards assessors work, {62.5%} rated it as negative whereas {37.5%} viewed it as positive.

The finding in terms of attitude and support of community towards assessors work is worrying given that their roles are complimentary and they can serve as valuable resources in support of appropriate placement of SNE child. This is in contrast with Frederickson et al 2002; MoE 2005 sentiments that the individual role of all stakeholders must be considered if improved service delivery and a truly integrated approach to special educational needs provision is to develop. In view of this, an integrated approach is necessary for various government ministries, partners, stakeholders and parents for improved service delivery of SNE.

5. CONCLUSION

Since the EARCs were established they have had a big impact on special education services in Kenya in terms of many children being assessed and placed appropriately for early intervention and many affected parents being reached through public barazas, church meetings and hospitals. However, there are challenges being experienced by the government in its effort to provide accessible and equitable education for children with special needs who have not been assessed and placed in the appropriate programmes. This is revealed by inadequate assessment tools, inadequacy among teachers to handle children with special needs and low levels of advocacy for the rights of these children. These findings revealed that the country is still far from achieving education for all as attested by the fact that over 1.8 children with SNE have not been assessed and placed in appropriate programmes despite the governments' effort of setting up EARCs in all the districts with the aim of taking the services closer to people (GOK 1999, 2002-2008, 2009). If the necessary interventions are not taken up by the relevant stakeholders then attainment of Education for all and Millennium Development goals will remain a pipe dream especially for children with special needs.

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