



Inclusive education activities towards competences of learners with learning difficulties in basic education schools of Rwanda

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Abstract

Inclusive Education is problematic in several countries including Rwanda and has been held back by a number of factors including negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. School administrators and teachers have not sufficient skills so that they can manage inclusive schools and it requires several and regular training to be equipped with necessary knowledge and get sensitized on how to introduce inclusive practices. The study examined the contribution of strategies implemented in inclusive education for competences of learners with learning difficulties in Rwanda basic education schools. The sample of 148 respondents were selected including 6 School Managers, 3 Sector Education Inspectors, 69 teachers and 70 parents of learners with disabilities. The findings showed that there are strategies which contribute and influence the developments of competences of students with learning difficulties and disabilities in inclusive education such as identification of learners with special needs, assessment plan for learners with special needs, methods of teaching and learning adapted to individual needs for improving learners critical thinking and problem solving, class participation. The researcher provided recommendations and conclusions depending on the findings of the research.

Keywords: inclusive education, learning disability, special educational needs (sen)

1. Background of the study

Both a human rights perspective and the widely held conviction that education is essential to both individual well-being and societal development are at the core of Education for All (EFA), the international commitment to guarantee that every child and adult receives a basic education of high quality. However, some children who are considered to need special education or disabilities have not received enough attention from EFA to date. In the fight for universal primary education access, children with impairments have mostly gone unnoticed. It has become obvious that the objectives of EFA will not be met for children with impairments unless specific steps are taken to help them get over the obstacles. A number of children with a wide range of special educational needs are notable in the Rwandan society. These include children with disabilities, those who are talented and gifted, those with different developmental disorders, as well as children with varying intrinsic and extrinsic challenges. It is of great importance that awareness is developed within the Rwandan community with which to address the children's specialized educational requirements in order for them to enjoy equal opportunities as their peers and grow into independent and productive adult citizens able to make contribution to their country's development. It is also important for their personal development. This is achievable when they are educated and trained as the majority is still submerged into ignorance and poverty.

The Education Sector Policy on exceptional Needs Education of 2017 responds to this group of students and satisfies the national commitment to address education as an equal right for all citizens and to help people with exceptional educational

needs reach their full potential. Education is a key factor in human development, for it constitutes a bridge from ignorance to knowledge, from exclusion to participation. It constitutes a vital and instrumental element for people to get involved in all areas of life. It is crucial that learners with disabilities and other specialized educational requirements attend school with their peers who are not impaired. They will benefit from behavior modeling and group-based educational activities like peer tutoring and collaborative learning in this situation, which will help them succeed academically and socially. In our country like in many others in the world, children with disability have been historically excluded from Education mainstream. People with disabilities face discrimination and community exclusion and most of parents whose children are disabled in one way or another prefer to enclose them at home; they even hide them feeling embarrassed to have such kids.

1.1 Problem statement

The students with SEN and disabilities need to learn together with their peers within their own communities so that they can learn from one another, copy their behaviors understand each other and accept each other's differences. To ensure Quality Education and Education for all children, students with SEN and disabilities should have trained teachers in this matter; and resources should be available in the school settings. The big challenge is that some parents lack awareness, teachers lack specific methodologies, while schools and community leaders lack required strategies to equip students with learning difficulties with required competences, skills and knowledge. The knowledge and skills teachers need to reach all students in today's schools has significantly expanded where

technological tools and learning strategies are put in practices.

1.2 Specific objectives

To examine the strategies implemented in inclusive education schools for competences of learners with learning difficulties in Rwanda basic education schools.

1.3 Significance of the study

Due to his knowledge of how inclusive education affects the performance of students with learning disabilities, the researcher himself will also benefit from the study's findings. The results of this study could also be used by curriculum designers to develop a curriculum that would focus on and address the diverse needs of all students in an inclusive environment, to assist and advise educators on how to deliver inclusive education by providing the necessary teaching and learning resources, to promote excellence in the administration of teaching and learning, and in how schools use support services. The findings of this study will provide an insight to policymakers, practitioners, educationists, development partners, the civil society, the local community, the districts and sectors 'authorities in order to raise awareness on inclusive education and put into effect their input for its implementation in Rwanda.

2. Literature review

According to Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E., Dorn, S., & Christensen, C. (2006), inclusive education refers to the inclusion of both children without disabilities and kids with special needs in regular classroom settings. By providing a variety of educational services to enable all children with special needs to learn as best they can in accordance with their skills and requirements, inclusive education establishes the proper educational practices used in general education institutions (McLeskey, Hoppey, Williamson, & Rentz, 2014). All stakeholders when inclusive education is practiced create a school climate built on acceptance and belonging both inside and outside of the school, as defined by Salend (2016).

This entails the duty to use inclusive education techniques for students with special needs, especially in general education settings. These instructional strategies include developing structures, using evidence based techniques, and improving curriculum and instructional design. Suitable inclusive educational methods should combine ideas from each of these ideologies since the inclusive education theory is regarded to be backed by three main theories. This allowed teachers to successfully determine what to teach each learner. As a result, the following concepts are each presented in both theoretical and practical terms to promote the practice of inclusive education:

2.1 Practices for inclusive education based on behaviorism

Theoretically, according to Nalliah & Idris (2014), one of the earliest and most fundamental theories of learning is behaviorism. A typical psychological paradigm is behaviorism, which is suggested by the comparison of learning to an accumulation of stimulus-response pairings (Harold &

Corcoran, 2013) (Doolittle, 2014). Behaviorists claim that the theory's purpose is to impart knowledge of reality to students (Hickey, 2014).

Behaviorism arises when consequences are linked to the stimulus or reaction, which is then followed by reinforcement in order to be maintained (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). According to Abramson (2013), the behaviorist approach is still essential and is still seen as a scientific endeavor despite receiving a lot of criticism over the years.

According to Harold and Corcoran (2013), the key behaviorism tenets that shape education are, in a nutshell, that behavior is learned, that the environment in which it occurs, that teaching cannot happen without learning, that changing behavior is a result of learning, that behavior is governed by what happens after actions, and that there needs to be an emphasis on the observable.

Because of the emphasis placed on students' conduct and performance when handling stimulus materials, Ertmer & Newby (2013) contend that behaviorism application in inclusive educational environments is a feasible element of behaviorism-based inclusive education approaches.

Behaviorists evaluate students as they learn in order to decide when to start teaching and the best reinforces to use. The following are the duties of a teacher, according to Ertmer and Newby (2013): (1) identifying the cues that can elicit the students' desired responses; (2) planning practices where prompts are paired with the target stimuli that are anticipated to elicit the responses in the natural setting; and (3) creating a learning environment where students can respond appropriately in the presence of those target stimuli and receive reinforcement for those responses.

2.2 Practices for inclusive education based on cognitivism

Theoretically, cognitivism emphasizes a person's ability to reason, recall, take stock of oneself, and want to learn. Piaget held that "the ability to learn and the method of learning are distinct during each developmental stage" (Evgeniou & Loizou, 2012). The cognitive approach places special emphasis on the learner's mental activities that shape answers and highlights the mental planning, goal-setting, and procedural organizing processes. Cognitive theories assert that learning should be purposeful, systematic, and able to link newly learned information to previously acquired knowledge. The importance of cognitive processes in learning, such as remembering, thinking, reflecting, abstracting, and metacognition, is also highlighted by cognitivist approaches (Petersen, 2014).

As a result, for cognitivist training to be effective, it needs to be based on a student's existing mental models or schema (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). A focus is clearly placed on mental information processing and interactions as a means of guiding student learning in cognitivism-based inclusive education techniques, which practically apply cognitivism in inclusive educational contexts (Ertmer & Newby, 2013).

The ability to learn new material as it is presented, past knowledge, and educational background are all factors that students are encouraged to discuss and make connections with.

For instance, teachers employ instructional strategies including framing, outlining, mnemonics, concept mapping, and advance organizers to fulfill the cognitive demands of kids with exceptional educational needs (West, Farmer, & Wolff, 2012). Using a variety of instructional strategies centered on learning activities, such as note taking (Boyle & Rivera, 2012), underlining (Swanson, Orosco, & Lussier, 2014), summarizing (Wittrock & Alesandrini, 2012), writing to learn, outlining and mapping, and application of the PQSR method, is one way to implement cognitively based inclusive education practices. According to Al-Shammari & Hornby (2014), the use of these teaching practices in general education classrooms with special needs students has received positive feedback.

2.3 Empirical literature

The Salamanca Statement acknowledged the urgent need to provide special education services for children, teenagers, and adults within the framework of the general education system (UNESCO, 2016). Both learners with and without disabilities are considered SEN learners. While statistics currently available reflect the number of students by kind of disability, it is important to keep in mind that not all students with disabilities have special education needs, while some students without disabilities do.

People with disabilities continue to be a highly stigmatized group both internationally and in Rwanda, and they have one of the lowest participation and access rates in the schooling of any marginalized group. It is imperative to persistently increase awareness of the rights of children and young people with disabilities to access and participate in education on an equal basis in order to change attitudes both within the system and among the broader community.

According to Hines (2014), giving small-group, individualized instruction, having more special education professionals in the classroom, and assisting in the creation of academic adaptations for all kids who require them all have positive effects on general education students' academic performance. Numerous authors have found improvements in social skills among students who face obstacles to studying in inclusive environments. These students, in particular, have the chance to engage in deep social interactions with their peers who are not disabled. In inclusive environments, appropriate behavior and language can develop, and independence is promoted. Significantly, when these students are educated in inclusive classes, self-esteem is improved. There is evidence that students who encounter learning difficulties and who receive their education in mainstream settings as opposed to isolated environments have a greater number of post-secondary career options. Thus, contrary to the beliefs of traditionalists, some scholars have demonstrated that learners are not disadvantaged by inclusive classrooms but rather gain from them (Lockhart Walton 2016).

The review of the relevant literature linked to inclusive education on the performance of learners with disabilities. An effort was made to improve the performance of learners with

disabilities for long-term, sustainable learning for getting their full potential, skills, attitudes and values.

3. Research methodology

This study's primary goal was to ascertain the contribution of inclusive education on performance of learners with disabilities in Rwandan public primary schools. The analysis of cause and effect relationship between independent and dependent variables will be based on two main research strategies: qualitative and quantitative. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and a correlational research design, research which purpose was to find out the relationship between two or more variables and their cause and effect (Creswell 2013). A descriptive survey research design is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals (Orodho, 2015). In order to characterize a person or a group of parents and teachers, the researcher used a survey research design.

3.1 Sample size

The number of parents, teachers, head teachers, and sector educational officers was taken into consideration by the researcher throughout the sample stage.

In this regard, the researcher took into account 148 respondents who were chosen from the schools of the Kicukiro district:

4. Research findings and discussions

In this this section, the researcher has presented, interpreted and discussed the research findings on the strategies implemented to the development of students competences in Basic education schools of Rwanda.

The implementation of teaching and learning strategies in inclusive education on learner's competences in inclusive schools in Rwandan basic education schools

The findings based on the objective one was presented and discussed to answer the questions of the research questionnaires and the interview guide given to the head teachers and sector educational inspectors as the educationalists, and technicians in charge of education at a school and sector level. According to the research information obtained from the respondents, the following were the results got from the field. As the respondents agreed, the implementations of inclusive education on performance of learners with learning difficulties in Rwandan primary schools were addressed in the following presentations:

a) The teachers' responses to the implementation of inclusive education on competences

To the side of teachers, there was 68 respondents varied to 100%, and all of them were present during data collection stage. Here 68 questionnaires distributed to the teachers that all of them returned filled and gave the following findings as shown in the table 1.

Table 1: Teachers' responses to implementation of inclusive education

| Statements | Strongly disagree | | Disagree | | Neutral | | Agree | | Strongly agree | |
|--|-------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------|----------------|------------|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| Students' special educational needs have been identified and teachers are aware of the kinds of SEN are encountered in their classes | 2 | 3% | 2 | 3% | 0 | 0% | 26 | 38% | 38 | 56% |
| The teaching/learning process is individualized to meet all learners needs and interests. | 3 | 4% | 3 | 4% | 2 | 3% | 24 | 36% | 36 | 53% |
| I have been trained in Special Needs Education. | 0 | 0% | 1 | 1.50% | 1 | 1.50% | 16 | 24% | 50 | 73% |
| I feel comfortable in teaching in inclusive classes. | 0 | 0% | 3 | 4% | 2 | 3% | 24 | 36% | 39 | 57% |
| I have participated in developing individual education plan with parents for student participation | 3 | 4% | 4 | 6% | 1 | 1.50% | 35 | 51.50% | 25 | 37% |
| Average | 2 | 3% | 2 | 3% | 2 | 3% | 25 | 37% | 37 | 54% |

Source: Field data (2023)

As to whether inclusive education is implemented in primary schools on performance of learners with learning difficulties; 54% strongly agreed, 37% agreed and only 3% were neutral. Therefore 3% strongly disagreed and 3% disagreed. As shown by the table 4.9, the questionnaires were given to 68 teachers of selected primary schools of Kicukiro, and the findings showed that the majority of the respondents assumed that inclusive education contributed to the performance of the learners with learning difficulties and they are improving while the minority of the respondents refused the contribution of inclusive education on learners' performance.

b) The parents' responses from the interview to the implementation of inclusive education on performance of learners with learning difficulties

There were 71 parents interviewed. The findings showed that parents have understood the rights to education and importance of inclusive education. A number of participants reported that they noticed developmental problems immediately after birth of their children because they had low birth weight, did not cry while being given birth and were unable to feed on breast. The majority of interviewed parents, 64 of 71 equaled to 90% have revealed that they were aware of their children's disabilities at low age. They are playing an active role, and hence they have developed positive attitudes towards disability in Kicukiro District. The 100% of parents participated in this study reported that at the time, they realized that their children had developmental problems, they had faith that with a closer follow up in health care; their condition could get better. Parents of those students go regularly visit classes as have reported 60 of 71 equaled to 84.5% of those who have been interviewed. This is valuable indication that people in Kicukiro District understood their role in children's schooling.

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c) The Sector Education Inspectors (SEIs) and head teachers' responses from the interview to the implementation of inclusive education

There were 9 interviewed SEIs and head teachers. The findings from the interview given to them to 'the positive changes occurred to students since the inclusive education approach stated being implemented'. The sector education inspectors and head teachers assumed that from 2019 the Special Needs and Inclusive Education policy and its implementation plan has been approved by the cabinet, the approach of inclusive education has provided great changes to the learners with learning disabilities' performance, where the results showed that 9 of 9 respondents equaled to 100% confirm that students with SEN are motivated as well as their peers without SEN, and motivation is a key factor for success.

The respondents assumed that the special needs have been identified through parent survey and pupil record forms as reported by 8 of 9 respondents equaled to 89%. This implies that most of the schools do conduct different survey to identify learners with disabilities for their planning. It is of great importance for school administrators to be informed about different abilities and disabilities of their students as well as their SEN because it is a good start to cater for individual needs, so that every child can learn to the maximum potential.

5. Conclusions

Concerning to the objective one which was to to examine the level of implementation of inclusive education to the performance of learners with learning difficulties in public primary schools, the researcher found out that there was a great contribution played by the implementation of inclusive education.

As shown in the table 4.10 the respondents assumed that the

majority of the teachers, parents and head teachers with sector educational inspectors of Kicukiro district, this approach approved in 2019 by the Rwandan Cabinet, so the Ministry of Education and its organs had the mandate to accelerate the inclusion practices had positive changes to the learners where they learn to respect others, accept differences, and acknowledge different abilities, thereby creating opportunities for new friendships to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes with values.

As it was indicated in the table 4.13 and 4.14 the majority of the respondents assumed that there was great improvement occurred to the learners such as developing their self-esteem, confidence, critical thinking, problem solving creativity in their courses and innovation through what they learnt; the learners should relate the lessons with their everyday life

6. Recommendations

The researcher has addressed the recommendations to all stakeholders in the promotion of inclusive education and learners' competences such as schools, parents and Government of Rwanda. The selected schools should continue to use the inclusiveness approach and child friendly interactive teaching methods because they have contributed more to performance of their learners and found to be effective. The researcher also recommended the schools to improve the level of treating learners with disabilities, and do advocacy to different donors to help them in training their teachers. Schools must also work hand in hand with parents to raise the performances of learners with learning difficulties.

The parents of children with disabilities have to improve their understanding that their children are disabled people in performing different activities in class. The researcher addressed them to continue supporting their children emotionally, psychologically and physically.

The researcher also recommended the Government of Rwanda to more strengthen inclusive education, and still keeping for them the positions in different institutions. Educational officials should work hand in hand with the parents, teachers, and head teachers, the government and the stakeholders in order to improve the implementations of inclusive education..

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