

ASSESSMENT OF PHYSICAL FACILITIES FOR INCLUSION OF PUPILS WITH PHYSICAL CHALLENGES IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN BUNGOMA COUNTY, KENYA

Hesborn. M. Chonge
Beth. N. Wambugu, PhD
Esther. N. Kiaritha, PhD
Moi University
Kenya

The practice of special needs education (SNE) in Kenya began from an inclusion education premise with the Special Needs Education Policy, which makes inclusive education the norm rather than the exemption. The focus of inclusive education is to remove barriers within the education system that bar pupils with physical challenges from accessing education in regular schools just like typical pupils. However, as much as there is a move toward inclusion of pupils with physical challenges in regular schools in Kenya, it is unclear whether adaptations for attaining inclusive schools are theoretical or a reality for a pupil with physical challenges to feel accommodated. The specific needs of pupils with physical challenges bring into focus the need of modifying the school facilities to enhance learning activities and counteract challenges. This paper therefore aimed to assess how well schools said to be inclusive are prepared to accommodate pupils with physical disabilities. The study utilized mixed method research approach, where both phenomenology and descriptive survey research designs were employed. The study findings indicate that there are inadequate adaptations in sanitary facilities, pavements and ramps, and provision of mobility devices. The study established that most schools lack playgrounds and related provisions for adapted games.

Keywords: Inclusion, physical facilities, physical challenges

INTRODUCTION

The National Special Needs Education Policy Framework in Kenya (GoK, 2009) refers to Inclusion as the philosophy which focuses on the process of adjusting the school so that all the pupils with physical challenges can have the opportunity to interact, play, learn, work and experience the feeling of belonging, and capacity to experiment and develop in accordance with their potentials. With inclusion, schools ought to put measures in place to adapt to the needs of the

pupils. This paper assumed that there have been shifts in terms of what is required to offer full inclusion over the years and therefore inclusive schools must adhere to the requirements to enhance inclusiveness.

Policies such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) advocated that regular schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. As the government of Kenya makes strides in implementing inclusion, various adaptations will be required to enable schools to adequately accommodate pupils with physical challenges. This study intended to assess the physical adaptations made in Kenya to foster full inclusion.

According to Johnsons (2008), adaptation is the process of modifying facilities, so that schools can accommodate all pupils including those with physical challenges. These adaptations include among others, any modifications put in place outside the classroom but within the school compound, aimed at enabling pupils with physical challenges to ease mobility and access to all areas, thereby allowing participation in all school activities.

There is a dearth of information on levels of preparedness for inclusion of pupils with physical challenges in the established inclusive schools. This study addressed this research gap, where the focus was on the availability of physical resources within inclusive public primary schools in Bungoma County.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study aimed at addressing the lack of information on availability of physical resources through an assessment of physical adaptations put in place for the inclusion of pupils with physical challenges in inclusive public primary schools in Bungoma County.

METHODOLOGY

Mixed method research approach was employed to allow a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods of research. According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), qualitative and quantitative approaches to research are complementary and where appropriate, they should be combined to maximize the strengths and minimize the limitations of each. This approach gave full, rich, and deep descriptions that brought out the true picture of the parameters under study.

The study targeted four registered inclusive primary schools for pupils with physical challenges, and a target population comprising 354 pupils with physical challenges and four head teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select all

the four inclusive schools in view of their small number. Though the schools were the main unit of analysis, the opinions of the pupils and head teachers were used to support observational data. In total, a sample of 142 respondents drawn from upper classes (standard 4-8) was selected purposively based on the class attended. They comprised 138 pupils and four head teachers.

Questionnaires, interviews and observation schedules were used to collect data. Pupils with physical challenges responded to the questionnaires items, while the head teachers were interviewed. Observation of physical adaptations was also done and captured through photographs to facilitate data analysis while reducing time in data collection. Data analysis was done through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The research findings were presented in narrative and descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Information of Pupils with Physical Challenges

The demographic information of the pupils with physical disabilities in terms of school and class was obtained to provide parameters that supported the study although some of the parameters were not directly under study. The four schools were denoted as A, B, C and D. Standard four to eight pupils were selected based on the assumption that they were able to comprehend the questionnaire items with very minimal assistance and optimum accuracy. Table 1 shows demographic information for pupils. Most of the schools had least number of physically challenged pupils in Standard 8.

Table 1

Distribution of Pupils with Physical Challenges by School and Standard Attended

Number of pupils with physical challenges by school and class attended						
School	Standard 4	Standard 5	Standard 6	Standard 7	Standard 8	Total
A	15	12	15	22	6	70
B	7	10	8	11	4	40
C	2	6	3	4	3	18
D	2	1	1	3	3	10
Total	26	29	27	40	16	138

Physical Adaptations for Inclusion of Pupils with Physical Challenges

The respondents were asked what outdoor adaptations were in place in their schools through a questionnaire for pupils and interviews for head teachers. Additionally, an observation guide was utilized.

Adapted Toilets

In School A, it was revealed that there are adapted toilets. The toilets have wide doors and raised toilet seats allowing use of mobility devices such as wheelchairs from within. However, a number of anomalies were observed; firstly, the toilets lack holding rails to enable pupils with physical challenges to use them with ease. Some of the toilets are sullied and lacked modern toilet seats, making it hard and uncomfortable for pupils with physical challenges to sit on the minimally raised concrete seats available. This situation presents a health hazard to them. Though the school has built adapted toilets, it has failed to ensure all structural adaptations are in place to create a hygienic and conducive environment for inclusion.

Secondly, it was also noted that some of the adapted toilets are located far away compared to the regular toilets where pupils with physical challenges have difficulty accessing them due to the physical terrain. As a result, some pupils opt to use the un-adapted toilets which are very hard to access especially when using mobility devices. For example, a pupil was observed trying to access an un-adapted toilet, she had to leave her wheelchair outside and crawl into the toilet using hands and legs. This presents health hazard to the pupil.

The third anomaly was narrow toilet doors that hinder entry of wheelchairs into the toilet. As a result pupils have to crawl into the toilet. In addition, the toilets were not cleaned regularly. This contravenes the provisions stipulated in various policies including the Persons with Disability Act of 2003 (GoK, 2003b) and the SNE Policy (GoK) 2009. These findings are consistent with the findings of Mukhopadhyay, Nenty, and Okechukwu (2012) who found that the majority of the schools lacked accessible adapted facilities such as toilets.

In School B, it was observed that adapted toilets were present. These toilets are clean, raised and with supportive metallic bars ensuring easy access. In addition, the toilet seats though concrete were well raised. Plastic mobile toilets ('potties') were also provided for young pupils and cases requiring such facilities. Therefore, this inclusive school has well adapted sanitary facilities. This was confirmed by data collected from the pupils. Majority (98%), of the pupils reported that the toilets were present and very accessible. This clearly shows proper interpretation of the requirements for inclusion based on the SNE Policy (GoK, 2009) which emphasizes the need for barrier free environments within the education system.

In School C, there were no adapted toilets, so pupils with physical challenges have to use regular toilets used by their peers which have narrow doors and do not accommodate mobility devices. In School D, there was only one adapted toilet. Although the toilet was fixed with holding bars and was raised, it was located far away with no ramps or walkways leading to it, thus hindering accessibility. The entrance into the toilet facility had hanging wires which can harm pupils accessing it. Furthermore, the toilet was surrounded by tall grass indicating that it was rarely used.

Physical inaccessibility and lack of hygienic safety were considered to be the greatest challenges hindering inclusion in the schools where sanitary facilities were concerned. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) posits that when confronting the challenges of building an inclusive school, current consideration must be taken into account such as toilets. During the interviews, all the four head teachers blamed the lack of proper sanitary facilities on lack of funds.

Assistive Devices

The government task force report contained in the Kochung Report (GoK, 2003a) notes that learners with physical challenges require assistive devices such as wheelchairs and walking frames or crutches to facilitate their independent mobility. Otherwise, the pupil's psychomotor development is hampered. The study established through questionnaires and observation that the schools have assistive devices such as wheelchairs, walking sticks, walkers and crutches to help pupils with physical challenges to move around the school compound. Most (70%) of the pupils, particularly those with severe physical challenges in the selected inclusive schools reported that they have access to assistive devices owned by the schools. However, it was observed that the said devices were inadequate in number and size, while other mobility devices were in a state of disrepair.

In School A, it was observed that most of the pupils needing assistive devices were provided with wheelchairs. However, even though assistive devices are provided, some of the pupils had outgrown the size of the chair, while other devices were not fully functional and required repair. Furthermore, other pupils required special or modified wheelchairs, due to the nature of their conditions. For instance one boy was using a wheelchair which was much smaller and lacking in a footrest. The pupil had monoplegia with short stumps in place of his hands. He needed a wheelchair with extended pads for resting his legs and arms. The pupil may experience physical challenges due to inability to sit straight on the wheelchair; this makes him very uncomfortable. In addition, he may develop a secondary disability because of the inappropriate sitting position.

In School B, pupils have access to assistive devices which help them in mobility. However, it was observed that not all the pupils in need of these devices were provided with them. One pupil was observed 'propelling' himself to class through crawling with difficulty around the school compound.

In School C, it was observed that the inclusive school has only two devices including a walker and one wheelchair. It was therefore clear that only two pupils with physical challenges could access the mobility assistive devices at a given time. In School D, there was only one assistive device.

According to the GoK (2009), most parents in Kenya cannot afford assistive devices for their special needs children because such devices are expensive and out of reach of the majority of parents. Therefore, it can be argued that most pupils with physical challenges lack assistive devices because the burden of purchasing the devices is left to poor parents who cannot afford them.

The head teachers concurred arguing that the government funds allocated to schools are not enough to purchase many devices. Consequently, poor parents leave their already disadvantaged children to suffer the realities of disability and poverty. This makes inclusion of pupils with physical challenges unreachable currently.

Ramps and Walkways

The study established that some inclusive schools have constructed ramps and walkways to aid free and safe movement of pupils with physical challenges. Ramps have been constructed for easy access to building facilities such as classes, dining halls, dormitories, toilets and main offices. The observational data revealed the following:

In School A, it was observed that the school has constructed ramps and walkways in the most common areas such as parade grounds, classroom entrances and main offices. These enable pupils with physical challenges to move from one point to another with ease using a wheelchair. The ramps and walkways also facilitate access to water points. School A has therefore provided most of the required physical facilities that ensure safety and reduce the effects of disability on mobility that are necessary in an inclusive school.

In School B, it was observed that ramps and walkways were present. However, some of the walkways and ramps were damaged and thus could not facilitate free movement of pupils with physical challenges using wheelchairs. The wheelchairs were required to be pushed by other pupils in some places, failure of which may result in accidents. In Schools C and D, it was separately observed that there were no pavements or walkways. The schools have constructed ramps that lead to only two out of several classrooms.

These scenarios disregard the task force report of the Kochung committee (GoK, 2003a) which advocates provision of necessary materials and facilities in the regular schools targeted at inclusion. The report also demands barrier free environments within schools including construction of ramps, adapted toilets and pavements among others.

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of studies conducted by Mukhopadhyay, Nenty, and Okechukwu (2012). These researchers found that in the majority of schools, walkways were absent and ramps present

were inaccessible to learners with physical challenges; for example, some of the ramps were too steep for students with physical disabilities to move about independently. Therefore, such structural barriers tend to limit independent access to classroom, school activities, and impact negatively on participation in curricular and co-curricular activities, and ultimately hinder inclusion of learners with physical handicaps.

All the head teachers agreed independently during interviews that where there were no pavements, the grounds were levelled. However, it was observed that although Schools C and D have levelled surfaces, the surfaces were become muddy and slippery during the rainy season. Three of the head teachers elaborated that the government provides meagre funding for construction and maintenance of environmental facilities such as ramps and walkways. These scarce resources are rarely used for the intended purposes given the many pressing needs of the developing schools.

Adapted Games

Through an observational schedule, it was revealed that out of the four inclusive schools involved in the study, only school A had adapted playing grounds and adapted playing equipments for pupils with physical challenges. The school playing grounds had been modified to suit the needs of the pupils with physical challenges. It was also discovered through questionnaires and interviews that all the schools lacked modified rules for guiding co-curricular activities.

In School A, there are adapted netball and football fields. It was observed that the football field had smaller goal posts measuring 1.44 meters high and 3.66 meters long compared to the standard goal posts of 2.44 meters by 7.32 meters respectively. However, the height and the length of the goal posts are always adjusted depending on the severity of the physical challenges of the pupils playing. It was further established through observation that the adapted netball field contained broken bricks which were hazardous to pupils during play.

In addition, although School A had adapted playing grounds and equipment, there was no evidence of modified rules during games time to accommodate pupils with physical challenges. Furthermore, there was only one adapted wheelchair for racing, and the adapted netball and football were worn out. Moreover, school A had occasional sports program for pupils with physical challenges mainly taking place during the interschool competitions. In Schools B, C, and D there were neither adapted fields nor adapted sports equipment.

All the pupils with physical challenges (100%) agreed that there were no modified rules or activities during games to accommodate them. They reported that they were left on their own without a teacher present during games; hence, they were often discriminated against and often adopted an observer stance.

Lack of adapted games in the schools visited denies pupils with physical challenges opportunities for becoming proactive in games; therefore many talented pupils are never identified and are consequently denied life opportunities of

showcasing and achieving their maximum potential. This may lower the self-esteem of the pupils with physical challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, we recommend the following in an attempt to foster full inclusion:

1. The government, school administration and educators should ensure that assistive devices for all pupils with physical challenges are provided in the inclusive schools where they are accommodated. This would facilitate their mobility and independence.
2. School administration should ensure that adapted playgrounds and games are available for pupils with physical challenges. They should ensure inclusive schools have the requisite play equipment and assistance. Further, safety of all learners should be assured. In addition, school administration through the teachers should provide modified rules in order to ensure free participation of pupils with physical challenges in games at inclusive schools.
3. All stakeholders should ensure more adapted toilets are constructed to enable pupils with physical challenges especially those using wheelchairs to access them with ease. Such facilities should also be cleaned regularly and constructed nearest possible to classrooms. In addition walkways and ramps leading to the toilets should be constructed to facilitate mobility of pupils and also to save time.
4. The managers of inclusive schools should be orientated on various adaptations required as stipulated in government policy. This will help administrators make informed decisions and also create awareness among the general public through workshops and seminars.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that most of the schools currently referred to as inclusive schools in Bungoma County were ill prepared for inclusion of learners with physical challenges. The available physical facilities and adaptations made were inadequate for inclusive education.

A number of schools involved in the study have made several attempts in adapting physical facilities such as toilets and playgrounds. However, very few schools were adequate in any of the areas studied. Some physical facilities in use such as toilets, mobility devices and playgrounds posed health and developmental hazards to the pupils.

In addition some sanitary facilities were far from the classrooms making them inaccessible despite their presence. Most of the schools also lacked or had limited number of assistive devices such as wheelchairs and crutches for pupils with physical disabilities forcing them to crawl around the school.

Although some of the selected inclusive schools have undertaken construction of ramps to facilitate accident free movement among pupils with physical challenges, the ramps were in disrepair. Moreover, half of the schools lacked walkways, while those available in other schools had potholes, and needed repairs.

The playgrounds available are rarely used by pupils with physical challenges due to lack of supervision and no modified rules or activities during games. The majority of the schools also lack adequate adapted sporting equipment such as racing wheelchairs, while other playgrounds had obstacles that could cause accidents.

REFERENCES

- Gerber, D. A. (1996). *Special education and disability policy*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Government of Kenya. (2003a). (Kochung Report) *A Report of the Task Force on Special Needs Education Appraisal Exercise*. Nairobi, Kenya: Ministry of Education Kenya.
- Government of Kenya. (2003b). *Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 14 of 2003: The Persons with Disabilities Act 2003*. Nairobi, Kenya: Government Printer.
- Government of Kenya. (2009). *The National Special Needs Education on Policy Framework*. Nairobi, Kenya: Government printers.
- Government of Kenya. (2010). *The New Constitution of Kenya*. Nairobi, Kenya: Government Printer.
- Johnson, J. R. (2008). Universal instructional design and critical (communication) pedagogy: Strategies for voice, inclusion, and social justice/change. In *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 37, 145–153.
- Kombo, D. K., & Tromp, D. L. A. (2006). *Proposal and thesis writing*. Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa.
- Mukhopadhyay, H., Nenty, J. & Okechukwu, A. (2012). *Inclusive education for learners with disabilities in Botswana primary schools*. SAGE Open.
- UNESCO. (1994). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. Adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality. Salamanca, Spain 7-10 June 1994.
- Woolley, H., Armitage, M., Bishop, J., Curtis, M. & Ginsborg, J. (2006). *Inclusion of Disabled Children in Primary School Playgrounds*. Retrieved from www.jrft.org.uk/publications/inclusion-disabled-children-primary-school-playgrounds