

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KISII COUNTY, KENYA

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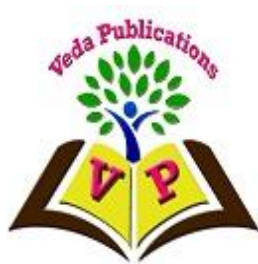
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Abstract



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This paper investigates the teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in public primary schools in Kenya. It particularly explores the influence of the teachers' demographic variables on the perceptions of inclusive education in the regular school system. The study is guided by the positioning theory which puts emphasis on within the framework of discursive psychology and requires close analysis of cues that participants use to position themselves, their listeners, and others. The analysis adopted the Ex Post Facto criterion group research design to identify the causative relationship between the demographic indicators and inclusive education practices. The respondents (n = 333) were regular primary school teachers in Kisii Central Sub County of Kisii County, Kenya. There were five research questions that guided the current study which were translated into ten hypotheses which were tested using the one – way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The findings reveal that the participants presented mixed opinions on the general philosophy of inclusive education based on their demographic factors. The difference among age cohort ($F(14,329) = 2.629; P < .001$), level of qualification ($F(14,311) = 8.94; P < .001$) and teaching experience ($F(12,163) = 18.03; p < .001$) were found to have statistically significant influence on regular teachers' perceptions of inclusive education. However, the findings showed that gender ($F(14, 300) = 1.385; p > .001$) and training in disability education ($F(13,316) = 3.84; P > .001$), did not have significant influence on regular teachers' perceptions of inclusive education. The study has revealed that a number of teacher demographic factors significantly influence teacher's perceptions in inclusive education classrooms in the general school environments. These include teacher's age, level of educational qualification and teaching experience. The gender and training in disability of the teachers however do not influence the teachers perceptions.


Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Perceptions, Primary Schools*

Teachers'.

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Introduction

The transformative change agenda which started in 2012 is dedicated to implementing, sustaining and scaling change that produces unprecedented results without sacrificing the historic commitment of community institutions to access, opportunities and equitable outcomes. In education, it has been recognized that inclusive pedagogy forms the basis of achieving the 21st century change towards sustainable development of countries.

The concept of inclusive education, according to Sudha and Indu (2015) has its origin in special needs education. It has however, with time evolved into a series of stages from “segregated instruction” to “mainstreaming” and “integrated education”. In the course of its development, education systems have explored different ways of responding to children with disabilities, and those that experience difficulties in learning. Teachers are considered an important catalyst for the success of this endeavour as reflected in The United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2015) report. The success of inclusive education, therefore, depends largely on the teachers’ demographic variables such as age, level of qualification, teaching experience, gender and training among others. Consequently, teachers’ need a more detailed understanding of learners in particularly precarious life circumstances and adverse socio-economical settings to make them feel welcome and comfortable to learn irrespective of their ethnic groups, language, religious, social class, gender, sexuality or disability. The education and training does greatly influence their perceptions in the classroom as they attend to the learners with disabilities.

The constitution of Kenya 2010 (Article 549(b)) gives specific right to persons with disabilities to access educational institutions and facilities that are integrated and that are compatible with the interests of the person. The Special Needs Education (SNE) Policy Framework (2009) was drafted to address the plight of learners with disabilities. The subsequent review of the policy in 2013 aligned it to the Kenya vision 2030, the Constitution of Kenya, the Sustainable Development Goals (goal 4) as well as the National Curriculum Reform: This, eventually lead to the development of the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities (2018) which recommends the need to undertake research on inclusive education periodically and set up a data and evidence structure for effective knowledge, learning and improvement as one of its theme. Deku and Vanderpuye (2017), argue that, given the role of teachers in the implementation of inclusive practices in education systems, it is important to study teachers’ views on inclusive schools. This assertion purposes the current appraisal of the perceptions of general education teachers in primary schools. They further remark that educating children with Special Education Needs (SEN) in inclusive environments is an emerging venture involving several challenges. These challenges invoke the need for the transformation of teaching training curricular to include resources and pedagogies that are relevant and that meet the demands of inclusive education which should address the general education teachers’ knowledge, skills and emotions about inclusion. The above assertions formed the basis of the current research which explored how demographic factors influence the regular primary school teachers’ perceptions of inclusive education.

The growth and development of education is significantly and indisputably the teacher and denying teachers the essential means to foster learning in the general classroom is a crime against children’s future and violates international law. It has been argued that education is strongest in those societies which value and support their teachers and public education systems. de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2011), note that, given the necessary legislation, resources and support, teachers can play a pivotal role in the successive and effective implementation of inclusion. Reiterating on the Education for All (EFA) programme, UNESCO (2010), asserts:

“ The goal of education for all will only be achievable when all nations recognize that the universal right to education extends to all and when all nations act to establish or reform public education systems that are accessible to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities ” (p.2)

This forms the basis of inclusive education which can be thought of as a philosophical approach that seeks to address barriers to learning and participation, and provides equal opportunity to learn with resources to support learning and participation which overall is destined to promote opportunities for all children to participate and be treated equally in educational systems.

Research suggests that teachers’ demographic variables such as their age, gender, level of qualification, training in inclusive pedagogy and teaching experience play significant role in teachers’ perceptions of inclusive education (Tiwari, Das & Sharma, 2015).

Age is a teacher variable that has been investigated for its relationship with teachers’ perceptions toward inclusive education. You, Kim and Shin (2019), in their study found that teachers’ beliefs toward more recent educational practices is greatly influenced by their age. Teachers’ age plays a remarkable role in accommodating and tolerating children in early childhood settings, Weston (2015), asserts that, younger teachers and older ones are more accommodating and tolerating than the middle-age ones who may be passing through home stress. In support of Weston’s view, it was found by Eiserman, Shisler and Healey (1995) that teachers across age groups held moderately positive perceptions of including children with special needs into regular education classroom. Contrary results have been reported however, Schidt and Vrhovnik (2015), found that teachers in their 20’s had more positive beliefs towards inclusive education than those in their 30’s, 40’s and 50’s, in their study on attitudes of teachers towards the inclusion of children with special needs in primary and secondary schools in Slovenia. Further, a no significant correlation between teacher age and their perceptions for disabled learners has been reported by Lee, Kang and Jung (2016). Apparently in the Kenyan scenario, literature is scanty on the influence of age on teachers’ perceptions. This study purposed to reconcile the inconsistent findings of the previous research.

The influence of gender on teachers’ perceptions on inclusive education suggest that teacher’s gender does have a significantly influence. Odebiyi (2016), in his study in Nigeria found that gender did not have significant influence on teachers’ perceptions of inclusive early childhood education. Similar results were obtained by Chireshe’s (2002) study, who found no significant differences between male and female special educational needs in – service teacher trainees’ views on inclusive education.

On teachers’ level of qualification influence on their perceptions, Ghani and Ahmad (2012), contend that different types of teachers and their academic qualification do influence their perception of the implementation of inclusive education, while perception and degree of competence varies with special education teacher having higher degree.

Traditionally, the pre-service training of mainstream training involved minimal modules in the teaching of learners with special needs. This background inevitably impacts on the teaching and accommodation of children with SEN. In their research findings, Waitoller and Artiles (2013), emphasize the development and expansion of teacher training programs that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills for inclusive education among the teachers to increase their positive perceptions towards inclusive education. Inclusion practice essentially requires mainstream teachers to adapt pedagogy and teaching programmes to accommodate the included learners. This has been confirmed by Odebiyi’s findings; that teachers indicated the need to increase practical skill training and field experience. Additionally, Kim and Chung (2012), in their study, indicate that, the teachers reported the greatest need for more training for educating children with disabilities in order to successfully implement inclusive education.

The teachers' teaching experience in inclusive education is greatly influences the teaching skills they select to use and hence their perceptions of inclusion can vary greatly, ultimately affecting the success of inclusive education in general primary schools. This assertion has been supported by Lancaster and Bain's (2010) comparative study, whose findings showed that teachers who had more opportunities to interact with children with disabilities during their teacher training period tended to support inclusion. Lee, Yeung, Tracey, and Barker (2015), in their study on 'What teacher characteristics matter in inclusion of children with special needs in early childhood education', found a positive correlation between teachers' experience with children with disabilities and their positive perception of inclusive education. Further evidence in support of this has been documented by (Lee and Kim, 2012; You, Kim and Shin, 2019).

Conceptual framework

The philosophy of inclusion and inclusive schooling has become prevalent as evidenced in recent international and national legislation. Adherents of inclusion support the philosophy that all students, including those with disability, be placed and receive appropriate educational services in general education classroom, with provision of all necessary support and assistance (Howell, 2006). In response to the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on special Needs Education (1994), which in part calls upon governments to adopt the principle of inclusive education by accommodating all children in regular schools regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. Kenya developed the National Special Needs Education Policy Framework to address critical issues related to education for learners with disability. The framework launched in 2010 was committed to create a conducive environment for learners with disabilities in order for them to have equal access to quality and relevant education.

Various researchers in the field of education have attempted to examine the success of inclusion, as well as the perceptions of general educators towards the inclusion of learners with disabilities in general classroom. There have been arguments for and against inclusion in the regular education classroom. Such arguments have linked demographic and contextual variables like the teacher's age, gender and level of qualification; severity of the students' disability and perceived confidence of mainstream educators to teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education (Subban and Sharma, 2006). In another study, Odongo (2012) identifies large class sizes, teacher training, student needs, resources, previous experience and involvement of classroom teachers in all stages of inclusive policy development and decision making, as important factors influencing inclusive education practices in Kisumu County, Kenya. The strong motivation in the current study, therefore, has been to determine whether factors such as those examined in the above studies have impacted on teachers' perceptions of inclusion in Kisii County.

Within the context of this study, the researcher utilized the positioning theory as postulated by Davies and Hare' (1990) to explain the relationship among the variables identified in the study. The positioning theory developed within the framework of discursive psychology requires close analysis of cues that participants use to position themselves, their listeners, and others. According to this theory individuals view the world from a certain position and hence self-positioning guides the way in which individuals act and think about their roles, assignments and duties in a given context. Similarly, teachers' self-described beliefs help to explain how they position themselves in the classroom. Particular to this study, this perspective will enable the researcher examine how general education teachers in public schools in Kisii Central Sub County position themselves as 'inclusive teachers' and others may position themselves as content teachers focusing on general education and more specifically to nondisabled students only. Odongo (2012) asserts that, whatever the positions that teachers' take, that position directs and motivates them in the way they interact with students in the classroom. Of importance in this study is, do general education teachers in Kisii Central Sub County hold negative or positive perceptions of inclusive education because they have been positioned in

that manner or not. The theoretical framework enabled the researcher to specifically focus on how regular teachers' demographic characteristics position their perceptions in regard to the inclusive practices.

The current study has been conceived in the context of the demographic factors that impact on teachers' perceptions of inclusive practices in mainstream public schools. The background variables explain the characteristics or demographics of the study population. The background variables focused on the following constructs: gender of the teacher, which in this case is considered a potential factor influencing perceptions of teachers on inclusive education. Another construct is the age of the teachers, of interest also in this study was teaching experience, training in disability education, and level of qualification of the teachers in which the professional development was sought.

Perceptions are the individual internal interpretation of the information gathered from personal experience within their immediate environment, one forms conclusions about, and reacts to, those around them based upon their perceptions of the situations at hand. This depends upon how people actually see and interpret the world around them. This subjective reality includes the individuals thought, feeling, values, beliefs, convictions and conclusion. Behavior is understood from the vantage point of this subjective perspective (Corey, 2001). The perceptions of regular primary school teachers' were operationalized into three levels: Ability of the student and how it impacts on the perceptions of the teacher towards inclusion, the potential of the student and the student outcomes. It is envisaged that the three levels greatly influence the perceptions that teachers hold toward inclusion of students with disabilities in the general classroom and are critical for the success of inclusion. The study purposed that a good understanding of the relationships between the five variables will help educators, policy makers and other stakeholders come up with appropriate strategies to improve the quality of education provided to learners with and without disabilities in inclusive education classrooms in the 21st century and beyond.

Research Questions

This paper addresses the following research questions:

1. How does the teachers' age influence their perceptions of inclusive education?
2. What is the relationship between the teachers' gender and their perceptions of inclusive education?
3. How does the teachers' academic qualification influence their perceptions of inclusive education practices?
4. To what extent does the primary school teachers' training in inclusive education influence their perceptions of inclusive education practices?
5. What is the influence of primary school teachers' teaching experience on their perceptions of inclusive education?

Methodology

Research design

This study utilized the non experimental quantitative research methodology. Emphasis was on measuring teacher demographic variables and their influence on inclusive education. This allowed the researcher to compare the respondent's perceptions on inclusive education. Consequently, the study adopted an Ex Post Facto's co-relational (or casual) research design. The design was considered suitable for it allowed the researcher to investigate the cause of the differences in the teachers' perceptions of inclusive education.

Respondents of the study

The respondents of the study were 330 teachers. These were regular primary school teachers in public primary schools in Kisii central sub county, Kisii County, Kenya. The respondents were selected using the simple random sampling strategy. Using this technique, the researcher assembled the teachers in the staffroom and isolated those who were willing to participate in the study and administered the questionnaires. A research permit was granted by the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) which enabled the researcher to proceed to the field for data collection.

Instrumentation

A two-part self-designed questionnaire was used to collect data. The first part contained items on the background information of the regular primary school teachers including their age, gender, qualification level, training and teaching experience. The second part elicited responses on their perceptions of inclusive practices.

Validation and reliability

The research instrument composed of items on demographic information and the perceptions of regular primary school teachers. Content validation of the items was done by my two supervisors, who being experts in the field rigorously examined the items and made suggestions that were incorporated before administering the questionnaires for data collection.

The reliability of the items was estimated using Cronbach Alpha technique to test the internal consistency of the items which gave an alpha value of 0.629 compared to 0.693 on standardized items. This alpha value was considered reliable and internally consistent. The researcher visited the selected schools and personally administered the questionnaires to the respondents. The data collected was analyzed using frequency count, percentages and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The scores obtained on the individual items from the Likert type scale were summed across participants. The derived total scores reflected frequencies, percent, valid percent and cumulative percent. Relevant frequencies, total proportional percentages were also computed for the different variable levels and reported. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was used to test and make statistical inferences. Hypothesis testing was done for the research hypotheses of the study using the parametric one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) technique. According to Pallant (2005), a Tukey post hoc test was performed as a conservative assessment of the ANOVA pair wise comparisons. The null hypotheses were rejected if the p-value is less than 0.001 at a critical value of 0.5 (95%).

Findings and Discussion

The following are the results of the gathered data in determining the perceptions of regular teachers' of inclusive education practices, which formed the basis to accept or reject the hypotheses that guided the study.

Table1. Age distribution of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative %
Below 30	58	17.6	17.6
31-40	128	38.8	56.4
41-50	126	38.2	94.5
Above 50	18	5.5	100.0
Total	330	100.0	

The age of the respondents was considered an important characteristic that can influence the teachers' perceptions of towards inclusive practices. The findings of the study show that majority of the teachers lied between 31-40 years (38.8%) and 41-50 years (38.2%). From the above results, it can be concluded that majority of the sampled teachers had been in the teaching profession for a considerable period.

Table 2. Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Male	187	56.7	56.7
Female	143	43.3	100.0
Total	330	100.0	

Table 4.2 indicates that, 187 of the sampled teachers translating to 56.7% comprised of male and 143 of the sampled teachers translating to 43.3% comprised of female. These results indicate that in the sample, male teachers were more than female teacher. This is a condition that could not be controlled because in obtaining the schools in the sample random sampling was used and therefore no prejudice whatsoever.

Table 3. Teachers' educational qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage %	Cumulative %
P1	87	26.4	26.4
Diploma Education	173	52.4	79.8
Bachelor of Education	60	18.2	98.2
Master's in Education		1.8	100.0
Missing system	6	1.2	
Total	4	100.0	

From table 4.3 majority 173 (52.4%) of the sampled respondents had a diploma in education, P1 teachers composed of 87 (26.4%). This shows that majority of the respondents had exposure to various techniques of handling children at primary school level and the main question is how their perceptions of inclusion of children with disabilities relate in their endeavor to nurture this category of learners.

Table 4. Training focusing on education of students with disabilities

	Frequency	Percent %	Cumulative %
Yes	120	36.4	36.4
No	210	63.6	100.0
Total	330	100.0	

From table 4.4, the results indicate that 120 (36.4%) of the sampled teachers indicated to have received training focusing on the education of students with disabilities while majority of them 210 (63.6%) had not received any training. The question arises, does the training have an influence on the teachers' perceptions of and attitudes towards learners with disabilities.

Teachers' teaching experience**Table 5. Teachers' teaching experience**

Years	Frequency	Percent %	Valid %	Cumulative %
<5	24	7.3	13.6	13.6
<9	8	2.4	4.5	18.2
<14	18	5.5	10.2	28.4
Above 15	126	38.2	71.6	100.0
Total	176	53.3	100.0	
Missing system	154	46.7		
Total	330	100.0		

From table 4.5 a total of 176 (53.3%) indicated that they had taught in inclusive settings while 154 (46.7%) did not indicate. These results show that a majority of the sampled teachers had taught in inclusive settings and therefore the results were tenable for analysis.

In Table 6, shows the ANOVA interactions between demographic variables and the teachers' perceptions of inclusive practices.

Table 6. ANOVA interactions between demographic variables and teachers' perceptions

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	sig.
Age Cohort					
Between groups	23.355	14	1.668	2.629	0.000
Within groups	199.869	315	.635		
Total	223.224	329			
Gender					
Between groups	7.949	14	.331	1.385	0.111
Within groups	71.744	300	.239		
Total	79.692	324			

Qualification						
	Between groups	48.874	14	3.491	8.941	0.000
	Within groups	121.436	311	.390		
Total						
Training in IE						
	Between groups	155.330	13	.410	1.824	0.039
	Within groups	71.034	316	.225		
Total						
		226.364	329			
Teaching experience						
	Between groups	116.041	12	9.670	18.303	0.000
	Within groups	86.118	163	.528		
Total						
		202.159	175			

From Table 6, the following inferences can be made. The alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship between teachers' age and their perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools is tenable. The null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between teachers' age and their perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools is rejected. This is based on the results of the one-way ANOVA in table 6 which reveal that $F(14,329) = 2.629$, with $p < 0.001$, at a critical value of 0.05 (95%). This shows that the regular teachers' age influences their perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools in Kisii County. The findings are consistent with previous studies such as Schmidt and Vrhovnik (2015) whose findings revealed that age of teachers' showed a statistically significant difference in the perceptions towards inclusive education.

On gender, the results in Table 6 indicate that the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between regular teachers' gender and their perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools is accepted. The alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship between regular teachers' gender and their perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools is not tenable. This inference is based on the one-way ANOVA revealed that $F(14,329) = 1.385$, with $p > 0.001$, at a critical value of 0.05 (95%). Therefore the results show that there is no difference between regular teachers' gender and their perceptions of inclusive practices. Similar findings are indicated by the findings are consistent with previous studies elsewhere Chireshe (2002) and Odebiyi (2016).

From Table 6, the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between teachers' qualification level and their perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools is rejected while the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship between teachers' qualification level and their perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools is

tenable. This is based on the results of the one-way ANOVA in Table 6 which reveal that $F(14,329) = 8.941$, with $p < 0.001$ at a critical value of 0.5 (95%). This shows that the regular teachers' qualification level influences their perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools in Kisii County. These results are consistent to those of Odebiyi (2016), who in his study on teachers' willingness to implement inclusive early childhood education curriculum in Nigeria, found that there was no significance difference among the teachers' qualification in their perception of inclusive early childhood education. The findings of the current study concur with Ghani and Ahmad's (2012) study findings in which they found that teacher's academic qualification influenced their perceptions towards implementation of inclusive education.

Teachers' training on education of students with disability was investigated in the current study. Results in Table 6 indicate that the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between teachers training on inclusive education of students with disabilities and their perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools is tenable while the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship between teachers training on inclusive education of students with disabilities and their perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools is rejected. This is based on the results of the one-way ANOVA which revealed that $F(13,316) = 1.824$ with $P > 0.001$ at a critical value of 0.5 (95%). This shows that the regular teachers' training in student disability education does not influence their perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools in Kisii County. Inclusive education pedagogy is a recent discourse in the teaching profession. Effective assessment and instruction in inclusive education entails training in some modules on student disability education. In the current study, results have indicated that the null hypothesis for this was accepted. The results reveal that teachers' perceptions of inclusive education are not influenced by their training in student disability education. The findings of the current study seem inconsistent with previous studies. For example Mngo and Mngo (2018), in their study on Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusion in a Pilot Inclusive Education Program in Cameroon, concluded that teachers' were more likely to be supportive of inclusive education if they had training in special education as opposed to those who did not have any training.

On teachers' teaching experience the results in Table 6 reveal that the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between teaching experience and their perceptions of inclusion in public primary schools is rejected and the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship between teaching experience and their perceptions of inclusion in public primary schools is considered tenable. This is based on the results of the one-way ANOVA test where $F(12,183) = 18.303$, $P < 0.001$ at a critical value of 0.5 (95%). This shows that regular teachers' teaching experience influences their perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools in Kisii County. From Table 5, a relatively high proportion of 38.2% of the respondents had teaching experience above 15 years. The teachers' direct interaction with students with disabilities and the hands-on experience of teaching those students are associated with teachers' positive perceptions about inclusive education. The results concur with those of (Mngo and Mngo (2018); Subban and Sharma (2006)) who found that teachers support of inclusive practices grew in the early of their career, as experienced teachers are uncomfortable with inclusive practices.

Similar inferences to those of the current study are also reported by Odebiyi (2016) in his study: introduction of inclusive early childhood education in Nigeria school system, who concluded that the more the pre-primary and primary school teaching experience the more positive their perception of the benefit and effectiveness of inclusion. You, Kim and Shin (2019), also in their study reported that teaching experience is positively associated with teachers' positive perceptions about inclusive education, similar previous findings that teaching experience significantly affected teachers' perception of inclusive education (Tiwari, Das & Sharma, 2015; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013).

In the literature it has been indicated that learning in the inclusive classroom has positive values for both children with and without disabilities. The studies emphasize that teacher variables are vital in determining the successful implementation of inclusive education. Teachers' perceptions particularly have been identified to form the core for successful implementation of inclusion. Otherwise, the programme is deemed to fail from inception. Based on this argument, the current study aimed to investigate regular primary school teachers' perceptions of inclusive education. The factors considered were age, gender, level of qualification, training in inclusive practice and teaching experience of the teachers in public primary schools in Kisii Central Sub County, Kisii County, Kenya.

The findings of the current study underscore the need for substantial shift in the provision of learning opportunities and development of skills for all children in the same classroom who traditionally have been excluded. Basically, there is a call on all stakeholders in the education sector to engage in serious steps to invest in teacher training, ongoing professional development, funding for the implementation of the Special Needs Education Policy of 2018, and financing of important services and provision of essential equipment for inclusive classrooms that are rarely available in public primary schools. The findings of the study confirm that these shortcomings have negatively impacted in the success of inclusive education. Indeed, for successful implementation of inclusive education in public primary schools, educational leaders at national, county, and sub county levels have to actively address teachers' concerns identified in this study.

This study revealed that out of the total participants, 36.4% had received some training focusing on education of students with disabilities while 63.6% had not. The statistical test revealed that there is a significant relationship between teachers' training focusing on education of students with disabilities and their perceptions; $F(13, 316) = 0.039$. As a result, the government should ensure the introduction of special education courses in the teacher training colleges. This assertion is conversant with the findings of (Mngo and Mngo (2018), who in their study on Teachers' perceptions of inclusion in a pilot inclusive education program in Cameroon identified the absence of courses and programs for education of people with disabilities in teacher training colleges in Cameroon as a major drawback to the implementation of inclusive practices in regular schools. In Kenya, MOE (2018), has indicated that despite the long history of teacher training at various levels, there is evidence to suggest that the educators are lacking knowledge on training in disability. Further, a survey on children with disabilities and special needs in education conducted by the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) in 2020 revealed that there are few teachers trained in special needs in regular primary schools hence impeding service delivery to learners with disabilities. Therefore, the findings of the current study confirm the ever prevailing scenario which should be remediated urgently. The Ministry of Education therefore needs to implement with speed its policy provision on "access to quality and relevant education and training" as envisioned in the SNE (2018) framework.

The findings also revealed that there is a significant relationship between teaching experience in inclusive settings and perceptions held by teachers. This indicates the need for ongoing professional training, which should be tailored towards inculcating the special education component in professional development programs. In the study it was also revealed that 28.4% of the participants had no experience teaching in inclusive classrooms. Such teachers can become productive if given a chance to improve their knowledge and skills. This can be achieved through in-service training programs in inclusive education in form of seminars and training workshops. This will enhance adoption of new attitudes and new practices in the regular primary schools. Therefore the national and county governments should fast track and facilitate provision of quality on-going professional development of the educators who have not received formal training in schools on how to manage inclusive classrooms.

Teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms need adaptive and specialized curriculum to effectively handle learners with disability. In the current study it was revealed that 65.5% of the participants felt that the demands of the curriculum make it difficult to implement inclusive practices. This therefore implies that the current curriculum needs to be developed and adapted to take adequate care of students with special needs of different categories. The Ministry of Education and county governments need to conduct research on emerging curriculum needs of learners with disabilities, provide differentiated curricula, intervention programmes and curriculum support materials to suit the diverse needs of the learners with disabilities. As Mngo and Mngo (2018) emphasize, to achieve this, it is important to begin by creating a special workforce to analyze the current curriculum. The government should also facilitate the production, procurement, and distribution of specialized learning resources, assistive devices, and learning technologies.

According to the MOE (2018) report, learners with disabilities require more and specialized material resources for their education than their peers without disabilities. Findings of this study indicate shortage of teaching assistants, adaptation documents, resource teachers and assistive devices in general education classrooms. The government should partner with other education stakeholders such as churches and non-governmental organizations should therefore review and increase budgetary allocation of resources at both individual and institutional levels. This will ensure successful implementation of inclusive education in public primary schools.

Conclusion and recommendations

The results of the current study reveal that several factors influence teacher's perceptions of inclusive practices in public primary schools in Kisii County, Kenya, an indication that in reality the acceptance and growth of inclusive practices in public primary schools remains a challenge. Therefore successful implementation of inclusive education needs to be addressed by the national government, county governments, and education stakeholders such as churches, disability organizations and teachers themselves. The findings indicate that the mixed opinions on the success of inclusive practices were as a result of the educator's age, level of academic qualification, training in special education and teaching experience in inclusive classrooms. .

Research has been focused globally on the importance and effectiveness of inclusive education. In Kenya, however, it is recently that the government embraced on efforts to provide education mechanisms that are destined to include learners and trainees in regular schools to enhance inclusive education. The government is therefore committed to the provision of quality education through inclusive education to ensure that all learners and trainees have equitable access to relevant and quality education. Teacher preparation and their efficacy in teaching students in inclusive settings are most significant at this level. The current study endeavored to identify the factors that influence teachers' perceptions of inclusive practices which can provide a foundation for the sustainability of inclusive education in the Kenyan education system in the 21st century and beyond.

The findings of the current study indicate the need for further research in the following areas:

1. A comparative study on the perceptions of regular primary school teachers of inclusive education with those of the regular secondary teachers in the same study area. Such a study will establish the similarities and differences in the teachers' perceptions at the two levels

2. Teachers' ability to teach in inclusive classrooms is entirely a function of availability of resources. A study can be done to investigate teachers' beliefs about the availability of resources and their opinions about the types of support they may need. Such a study will provide needed information by planners in the education sector.

3. A follow –up study to investigate whether teachers’ perceptions of inclusive practices vary by the type of disabilities in regular public primary schools. This can be an area of interest since the challenges of inclusion of students differ from those with physical disabilities to those with emotional and behavioral challenges.

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