

Teachers' Views about Teaching Children with Disabilities in Primary Schools in Tororo District, Uganda

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the teachers' views towards teaching children with different categories of disabilities in primary schools in Tororo district. Across sectional survey research design was used. The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative research approaches to gather data from 79 respondents who included teachers and Head teachers in inclusive primary schools in Tororo District, selected using purposive and random sampling techniques. The study also found that teachers' views on teaching children with disabilities did not have any significant relationship with inclusion in primary schools in Tororo District. It was concluded that teachers' views on teaching does not have any significant relationship with inclusion in education of children with different types of disabilities in primary schools in Tororo District, However, results from qualitative data indicated a great concern about the negative attitude teachers have and face with pupils of learning disabilities. The study recommended the following: The government through the Ministry of Education and Sports should harness change of attitude of various stake holders by sensitizing them about the benefits of inclusion of learners with disabilities in education. This can be achieved through teacher training course reviews to include sign language to all teachers so as to equip them with the skills of communication to cater for learners with disabilities in class.

Keywords: Teachers' views, children, disabilities, primary schools, Tororo District

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INTRODUCTION

Education has been acknowledged as one of the most important investments a country can make in its people and its future (GPE, 2018). It plays a key role in human, social and economic developments thus, a powerful agent of change and improved health and livelihoods, contributes to social stability and drives a long-term economic growth within societies. Nelson Mandela once made a famous quote saying "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". Education, particularly inclusive education, is able to reduce discrimination through enabling children with and without disabilities to grow up together, (Hays, 2009) gives children with disabilities skills to allow them to become positive role models and join the employment market, thereby helping to prevent poverty, (World Development Report, 2018).

Secondly, inclusive education has been established as a significant policy direction with respect to including children with disabilities in regular or mainstream schools globally, (Sandeep, 2016). The Global Initiative on Out of School Children (2015), however, reports that even if children with disabilities can gain access to school, they are particularly disadvantaged by non-inclusive teaching methods, inflexible curricular and examination systems. This finding points to teacher factor as one fundamental area that should be looked into to ensure success of inclusive education. It seems that no study has been focused to establishing teachers' perception towards inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classrooms in primary school context in Uganda. It is therefore, worth to get insight of teachers' perceptions towards inclusion of children with disabilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many nations around the world have adopted national and/or international mandates calling for inclusive education for students with special educational needs. There remain some questions as to how the process of alignment and reorganization is being received by professional educators responsible for the operationalization of these policies, (Harkins and Fletcher, 2015). The role of teachers in inclusive education diverges from its traditional paradigm to one where teachers must possess the capacity to create such a learning environment which motivates and scaffolds participation of all learners in the process of learning, (Gargiulo and Metcalf, 2013). Main et al., (2016) also observe that in mainstreaming, traditional attitudes and beliefs regarding teaching students with disabilities, as well as their perception in society play an important role. Teachers' beliefs have a significant impact on their readiness to work in an inclusive educational environment, (Wang et al., 2011; Thibaut et al., 2018). In corroboration, Dyson and Forlin, (1999) emphasize that significant developments in educating learners with disabilities and learning difficulties need to include a commitment by teachers to create mainstream schools capable of educating all learners. European Agency for Development of Special Needs Education [EADSNE], (2012b), also emphasize that "inclusion largely depends on teachers' attitudes towards learners with Special Educational Needs, their view of differences in classrooms and their willingness to respond positively and effectively to those differences." When teachers are apprehensive about implementing inclusive practices, they tend to overtly or covertly use teaching practices that may exclude students with diversities from participating in a range of classroom activities and experiences. Studies indicate that teachers who truly believe in inclusive education initiatives and have positive attitudes towards implementing inclusive education in their classes have been reported to use teaching practices such as co-operative learning and peer tutoring that promote inclusion in their classes (Avramidis and Kalyva, 2007; Schwab et al., 2015; Sharma and Jacobs, 2016).

Observational studies on teachers' perception on use of inclusive practices have further provided meaningful insight about how consistent they are with their self-reported beliefs, (Schwab et al 2015; Hemmings and Woodcock, 2011; Jelinder et al., 2010). The results indicate that teachers who accepted ownership of teaching students with disabilities were more likely to have positive attitudes towards inclusion and were thus more effective with all students including those with and without special educational needs. In the same vein, Saloviita, (2020) found out that teachers' general attitude towards inclusive education appeared relatively positive with majority of the teachers believing that children with special educational needs can be effectively supported in

mainstream classrooms and only a minority believing that the best result is achieved by placing the learner in a special education classroom. Teachers' previous training and experience in special needs and inclusive education have been appraised by different studies as having bearing on teachers' perception on inclusion of children with disabilities. Lipson and Wixon, (1997) as quoted in Akinyi et al. (2015) assert that teachers' knowledge and belief about teaching and learning are the most influential factors in the success of inclusive classroom. Das et al (2013) examined the current skills of regular primary and secondary teachers in Delhi, India in order to teach students with disabilities in inclusive education settings. They reported that nearly 70% of the regular school teachers had neither received training in special education nor had any experience teaching students with disabilities. Findings from studies carried out in the US, Australia and Canada among general education teachers reveal that approximately two thirds of the teachers had positive attitudes towards the basic idea of inclusion though only smaller percentage expressed readiness to accept children with special educational needs into their classroom, (Scruggs and Mastropieri 1996; de Boer et al., 2011).

Relatedly, Ne et al., (2011) found out that many teachers in South Africa were ill prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners in inclusive classrooms, hence development of negative attitude towards inclusion. This assertion may not be peculiar to Uganda context as traditionally teacher training curriculum did not include special needs education thus, mainstream teachers were not trained to address barriers to learning but the transition towards inclusive education has obliged them to accept the full spectrum of learners and practice inclusive pedagogies in their classrooms. In view of the above, Robin, (2017) and Heiman, (2001) remark that proper formulated curriculum, better training on Special needs education, cooperation by all stakeholders, new oriented teaching methods and carefully structured field experiences are very important factors that affect the self-efficacy and confidence of teachers thus influencing their perception towards inclusive education.

Mittler (1993) observes that without adequate professional training and continuous updating of knowledge, we are in danger of abandoning tomorrow's children to yesterday's ideas and methods. He further affirms that no matter how clear our vision of what we want to achieve and how schools and services should develop, progress depends on the attitude, knowledge, skills and understanding of all those who are in day-to-day contact with children with disabilities. Nguyet & Ha, (2010) uphold that for inclusive education to succeed, it is vitally important that teachers, principals and other education stakeholders maintain a positive attitude towards inclusion and must be firmly convinced of the benefits that inclusive practices bring to all children. They

further emphasize that even if inclusive education is mandated by law, it will never succeed without the enthusiastic support of its practitioners, (Wood, 2007).

All the above authors seem to contend that, teachers' views of teaching children with disabilities is crucial for inclusive education to thrive and teachers are central in implementation of reforms or innovations in education including inclusive education, hence, it is imperative to empower them with relevant skills and attitudes to enhance their creativity and enthusiasm to promote inclusive education, (Wodon, et al., 2018). This study investigated how teachers' views to teaching children with disabilities impact inclusion of learners with disabilities in primary schools Tororo district.

METHODOLOGY

Across sectional design was used because the study collected both qualitative and quantitative data as Amin, (2005) and Creswell (2012) recommend. Data was collected from 79 respondents from the five primary schools that practiced inclusive education in Tororo District who included, Head teachers and teachers selected using simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect data from respondents and analysis was done descriptively and thematically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers views towards teaching children with categories of disabilities

Data on Teachers views towards teaching children with disabilities was gathered with questionnaire using ten items rated as 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Not sure, 4-Agree and 5-Strongly agree. It was also measured using interview items and the views obtained were recorded in (Table 1).

According to (Table 1), majority of the respondents on the item that learners with disabilities could not be accepted by the rest of the class disagreed indicated by 65% of the responses, the 28% of the responses agreed while the 7% of the respondents were not sure. The mean of 2.32 implied that teachers' views towards acceptance of learners with disabilities by the rest of the class were relatively negative. The standard deviation of 1.49 meant that the views of the respondents were related.

The 55 % of the responses on the item that it will be difficult to give appropriate attention to all learners in an inclusive classroom agreed, the 29% of the responses disagreed while the 16% of the responses were not sure.

The mean of 3.24 meant that the respondents reportedly agreed with the teachers views that it could be difficult to give appropriate attention to all learners in an inclusive class. Therefore, it is important to examine the attitudes of educators toward the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular settings as their perceptions may influence their behaviour toward and acceptance of such students (Hammond and Ingalls, 2003; Cawey et al., 2002). This confirms that teachers' knowledge and belief about teaching and learning are the most influential factors in the success of inclusive classroom. The 70% of the responses agreed on the item that teachers in the selected area were concerned that their work load could increase if they had learners with disabilities in class. The 19% disagreed while the 11% of the responses were not sure. The mean of 4.25 implied that teachers were highly concerned that their work load would increase if they had pupils with disabilities in class.

The 66% of the respondents disagreed on the indicator that they received adequate support from the school administration when learners with disabilities were enrolled. The 23% of the responses agreed while the 11% of the responses were not sure. The mean of 2.22 implied that teachers in the selected primary schools did not receive adequate support from the school administration when learners with disabilities were enrolled. The standard deviation of 1.31 meant that the views of the respondents were related.

The majority of the responses on the item that having children with disability in class exposed the teacher and other learners to getting disability highly disagreed indicated by 80% of the responses. The 12% of the responses agreed while the 8% of the responses were not sure. This meant that having learners with disabilities in class did not expose the teacher and other learners to disabilities in the selected primary schools. The mean of 1.64 meant that having learners with disabilities did cause disabilities to teachers and other learners in the selected primary schools.

The responses fairly disagreed on the item that teachers in the selected primary schools were concerned that they did not have adequate knowledge and skills required to teach learners with disabilities indicated by 56% of the responses. The 31% of the responses agreed while the 12% of the responses were not sure. The mean of 2.50 meant that teachers in the selected primary schools did not have adequate skills to attend to learners with disabilities. The standard deviation of 1.20 implied that the views of the respondents did not significantly differ. In connection Van Reusen, et al., (2001) caution that the success of inclusive programs may be at risk if regular classroom teachers hold negative perceptions toward the inclusion of students with disabilities but did not show the teachers views towards teaching learners with different types of disabilities which this study examined.

Table 1: Responses on teachers' views towards teaching Learners with disabilities in Regular classrooms.

Indicators	SD	DA	N	A	SA	M	St. dev.
Learners with disability will not be accepted by the rest of the class	45 %	20 %	07%	15%	13%	2.32	1.49
It will be difficult to give appropriate attention to all learners in an inclusive class	18 %	11%	16%	40%	15%	3.24	1.33
I am concerned that my work load will increase if I have learners with disability in my class	15%	04%	11%	45%	25%	4.28	6.00
I receive adequate support from school administration when learners with disabilities are enrolled in my class	40%	26%	11%	16%	07%	2.22	1.31
I feel having learners with disabilities in class exposes the teacher and other learners to getting disability	69%	11%	08%	11%	01	1.64	1.10
I am concerned that I do not have the knowledge and skills required to teach learners with disabilities	26%	31%	12%	30%	01%	2.50	1.20
Parents of children without disability may not like the idea of placing their children in same class with learners with disabilities	26%	26%	08%	30%	10%	2.72	1.38
The overall academic standard of school will be affected because of learners with disabilities	42%	24%	10%	19%	05%	2.21	1.31
My performance as classroom teacher will decline if I teach children with disabilities in class	40%	26%	08%	15%	11%	2.29	1.41
Supporting all children to learn in class including learners with disability is every teacher's responsibility	18%	12%	11%	16%	43%	3.55	1.56

Source: Field Data 2023

The respondents on the item that parents and teachers with children without disability did not like the idea of placing their children in the same classrooms where there were learners with disabilities disagreed indicated by 52% of the responses. The 40% of the responses agreed while the 8% of the respondents were not sure. The mean of 2.72 meant that parents and teacher in the selected primary schools with children without disabilities hesitated to place their children in schools with children with disabilities. The 71% of children who reported facing a lot of difficulty seeing with glasses were attending school compared to about 36% of children who had a lot of difficulty with self-care but did not examine teachers' views on teaching children with disabilities in the selected primary schools which the study examined.

The respondents on the item that the overall academic standards of the schools could be affected because of learners with disabilities disagreed indicated by 68% of the responses, the 24% of the responses agreed while 10% of the responses were not sure. The mean of 2.21 signified that the overall academic performance in the selected primary schools could not be affected because of having learners with disabilities while the standard deviation of 1.31 meant that the views of the respondents did not significantly differ. Nguyet and Ha, (2010) opine

that for inclusive education to succeed it is vitally important that teachers, principals and other education stakeholders maintain a positive attitude towards inclusion and must be firmly convinced of the benefits that inclusive practices bring to all children. The respondents on the indicator that the performance of classroom teachers could be affected if learners with disabilities were admitted disagreed as indicated by 66% of the responses. The 25% of the responses agreed while the 8% of the respondents were not sure. The mean of 2.29 meant that the performance of classroom teachers in the selected primary schools could not decline because of having children with disabilities while the standard deviation of 1.41 meant that the views of the respondents did not significantly differ. In an international comparison.

The majority of the respondents on the item that supporting all children to learn in a class including learners with disabilities is every teacher's responsibility fairly agreed indicated by 59% of the responses. The 30% of the responses disagreed while the 11% of the responses was not sure. The mean of 3.55 meant that supporting all children to learn in class was fairly done in primary schools in Tororo District. The standard deviation of 1.56 implied that the views of the respondents were

Table 2: Average index on teacher's views towards teaching learners with disabilities.

Statistic		Value
Mean		23.82
95% Confidence interval	Lower	21.85
	Upper	25.80
Median		23.22
Standard deviation		8.52
Range		71.00
Skewness		+3.94

Source: Field Data 2023

similar on this indicator. In connection to the above findings, Van Reusen, et al. (2001) caution that the success of inclusive programs may be at risk if regular classroom teachers hold negative perceptions toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. Teachers are perceived to be an integral component in the implementation of inclusive education and their role cannot be over emphasized. Several studies indicate that teachers' perception is the key to the success of inclusive programs, as they are critical to the process of including students with disabilities into regular classes (Hemmings and Woodcock, 2011; Jelinder et al., 2010). Findings from studies carried out in the US, Australia and Canada among general education teachers reveal that approximately two thirds of the teachers had positive attitudes towards the basic idea of inclusion though only smaller percentage expressed readiness to accept children with special educational needs into their classroom, (Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1996; de Boer et al., 2011). In agreement, Saloviita, (2020) found that teachers' general attitude towards inclusive education appeared relatively positive with majority of the teachers believing that children with special educational needs can be effectively supported in mainstream classrooms and only a minority believing that the best result is achieved by placing the learner in a special education classroom. However, Samsu, (2010) argues that all policies and efforts for facilitating inclusive education will not be fruitful if the persons who have major responsibility in implementing it like teachers were not well equipped with certain knowledge, skills and values.

The researcher generated average responses on the teacher's views towards teaching Learners with disability in Regular classrooms and the responses obtained were recorded in (Table 2).

According to (Table 2), the mean of 23.82 at the 95% confidence interval between 21.85-25.80 classes bound implied that teacher's views towards teaching learners with disabilities in regular classrooms was poor. The standard deviation of 8.52 meant that the views of the respondents did not differ. The positive skewness of +3.94 implied that teacher's views towards teaching learners with disabilities in regular classrooms were poor. In agreement Nel et al., (2011) found out that many teachers in South Africa were ill prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners in inclusive classrooms,

hence development of negative attitude towards inclusion. Das et al. (2013) examined the current skills of regular primary and secondary teachers in Delhi, India in order to teach students with disabilities in inclusive education settings. They reported that nearly 70% of the regular school teachers had neither received training in special education nor had any experience teaching students with disabilities but they showed positivity in inclusion of children with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms.

The researcher generated histogram on teacher's perception on teaching learners with disabilities in regular classrooms as presented in (Figure 1).

According to (Figure 1), the teachers' views towards teaching children with disabilities were poor indicated by the positive skewness in the figure above. Singh, (2016) points out that a number of challenges still suffocate implementation of IE among which are large class sizes, negative attitudes and behaviour on part of both teachers and parents in relation to ability of children with disabilities to learn.

In an interview about the general views of teachers towards teaching learners with disability a respondent reported that most teachers receive these children positively.

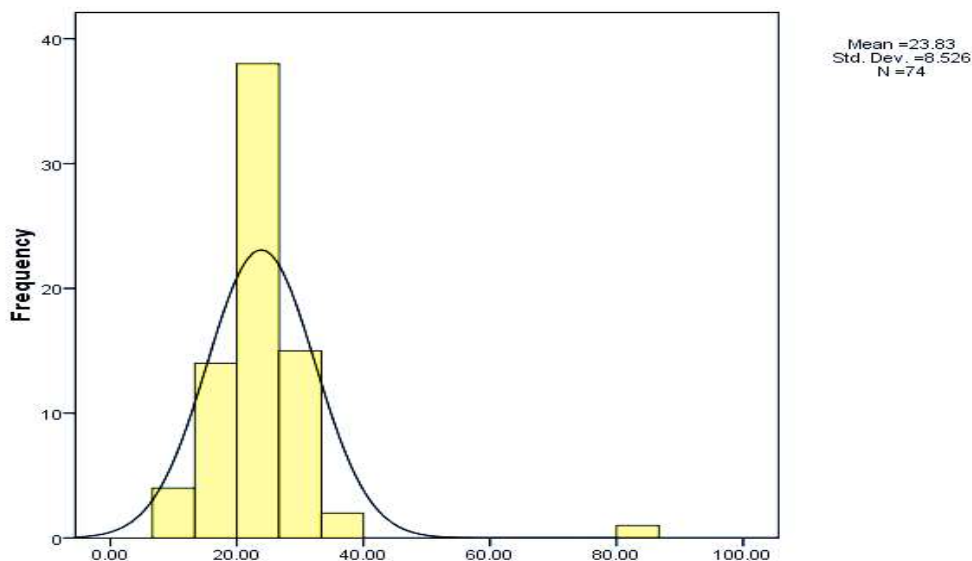
Lack of resources has been the problem usually mentioned in recent studies as another significant factor impeding inclusive education, (Goodman and Burton 2010; Gunnorsdottir and Johannesson, 2014).

The study through an interview investigated the view of teachers towards teaching children with disabilities in regular classrooms and the views obtained were recorded in (Table 3).

Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents reported that teachers had a positive view towards teaching children with disabilities.

However, a respondent said: *Most of the learners with severe conditions may not be able benefit in the general schools due to lack of specialized personnel to handle them.*

The minority of the respondents reported that the views of teachers towards teaching children with disabilities were negative. In the same vein, Saloviita, (2020) found out that teachers' general attitude towards inclusive



Teacher perception to teaching CWDs

Figure 1: Histogram showing Teacher's views towards teaching children with Disabilities in regular schools.

Table 3: Teachers views towards teaching children with disabilities.

Responses	Percentage
Positive view	69
Negative view	31

Source Field Data 2023

education appeared relatively positive with majority of the teachers believing that children with special educational needs can be effectively supported in mainstream classrooms and only a minority believing that the best result is achieved by placing the learner in a special education classroom.

Conclusion

The study found that teachers' views on teaching did not have any significant relationship with inclusion in education of children with different types of disabilities in primary schools in Tororo District. It was therefore concluded that teachers' views on teaching does not have any significant relationship with inclusion in education of children with different types of disabilities in primary schools in Tororo District.

Recommendation

The school administrators should admit all children

including those with disabilities in schools without discrimination. Refresher courses and seminars should be conducted to equip teachers with skills of teaching learners with different forms of disabilities. The government should invest in creating conducive disability friendly learning environment and provision of adapted educational resources to support inclusive education of children with disabilities.

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