

Influence of Special Needs Education Policy on Access to Secondary School Education By Learners With Hearing Impairments In Nandi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine influence of Special Needs Education Policy on access to secondary school education by learners with hearing impairments in Nandi County, Kenya. The study was informed by the Multiple Intelligences theory and the Dewey theory of Progressivism. The findings showed that majority of the respondents were aware of the Special Needs Education Policy Framework of 2009 and believed that the policy was being implemented. Majority of the respondents felt that the implementation of the policy had positively affected learners' enrolment in schools but recognized that there were still several challenges that were acting as barriers to school access by learners with hearing impairments in Nandi County. Further, the respondents observed that the implementation of the Special Needs Education Policy had led to a slight improvement on transition of learners with hearing impairments from primary to secondary schools in Nandi County. The influence of the Special Needs Education Policy on retention of learners with hearing impairments was deemed to be marginally small in schools in Nandi County. The results also showed that there were cases of learners dropping out of school because of a number of reasons including financial problems, lack of motivation to be in school and cultural factors, among others. In order to improve access to school education by learners with hearing impairments, respondents gave their opinions on how the challenges could be handled including the need to train more teachers to teach learners with hearing impairments, provision of adequate learning materials and the need to fund the special units/schools for the hearing impaired in the county, among others. The study recommends that the Government should set clear guidelines on how the Special Needs Education Policy can be implemented and coordinated. The study also recommends increase of necessary support for the secondary and primary school/units for the hearing impaired in the county so as to improve access to school education by children with hearing impairments.

Keywords: special needs policy, hearing impairment, access to education

Background to the Study

The Ministry of Education developed the Special Needs Education Policy document in order to provide a framework for the planning and implementation of Special Needs Education devoid of all barriers that inhibit access to quality and relevant education. It is therefore important to evaluate and find out whether the implementation of the policy is producing the outcomes that the government envisages.

Disabled persons, especially children, face a host of problems as a result of their special needs. Many children with special needs live in hostile, bleak environments, where their safety and security is compromised and their future jeopardized. They are disempowered and marginalized, have no opportunity for advancement and largely remain voiceless as a result of inbuilt social, cultural, economic prejudices, violence and abuse. Their rights are frequently violated since existing legislation suffers slow implementation (Republic of Kenya, 2009).

Kenya's earliest efforts for organized care and provision of Special Needs Education (SNE) dates back to the late 1940s, with much involvement of the religious institutions, notably the Salvation Army Church and much later the Anglican, the Catholic, the Methodist and the Presbyterian churches in establishing special schools and institutions for children with hearing, visual, physical and mental disabilities in various parts of the country where they had missions. According to Republic of Kenya (RoK) 2009, since then the management of most of these institutions has been taken over by the Ministry of Education (MoE).

In most societies in the world, education is seen as one of the most promising paths for individuals to realize better, more productive lives and as one of the primary drivers of national economic development. It is in this recognition that on attainment of political independence in 1963, the RoK, households and the private sector collectively endeavored to enhance the development of education in the country (Institute of Policy Analysis & Research, 2003). The RoK since time past has been committed to the provision of equal access to quality and relevant education and training opportunities to all Kenyans including those with special needs (RoK, 2009).

While the Government of Kenya is committed to achieving EFA goals by 2015, the delivery of education to all learners irrespective of their physical or mental state has been sluggish due to several bottlenecks. Apart from

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challenges such as differential trends in access and participation in education, poor performance in sciences, mathematics and languages; and declining completion rates, is the challenge of access to SNE to all deserving learners. Majority of learners with special needs and disabilities actually do not access educational services especially the post-primary level of education (RoK, 2009) because of challenges such as lack of adequate educational facilities and resources, financing, low stakeholder support and lack of qualified SNE administrators (RoK, 2005).

World Health Organization (WHO) (2006) observes that approximately 3.5 million people representing 10% of Kenya's population are people with disabilities. These are the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups and experience discrimination at all levels of society. Indeed in Kenya, like in most other developing countries, educational opportunities for learners with special needs and disabilities are a major challenge to the education sector. Majority of learners with special needs and disabilities actually do not access educational services especially the post-primary level of education.

Various Education Commissions have recommended policy guidelines on SNE including The Presidential Working Party on Education and Training for the Next Decade and beyond (Kamunge Report, 1988); The Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training (TIQET) (Koech Report, 1999) and the Task Force on Special Needs Education: Appraisal Exercise-(Ko'chung Report, 2003). A number of the recommendations by these Reports have been implemented. Recent policy initiatives have focused on the attainment of Education for All (EFA) and in particular, Universal Primary Education (UPE). The key concerns are access, retention, equity, quality and relevance, and internal and external efficiencies within the education system. One of the recent policy initiatives is the Sessional Paper No.1 of 2005 on Education, Training and Research (RoK, 2005). The policy sets out clear policy guidelines for all education sub-sectors, including (SNE), with the intention of putting in place positive measures to facilitate access to education by children with disabilities by addressing the obstacles to equal rights to education.

Following closely to the above initiative was the MoE's Strategic Plan (RoK, 2009) which stated that SNE aims at assisting persons with special needs realize their full potential. It estimated that 26,885 out of 1.8 million school going-age populations with special needs were enrolled in the few special education schools, units and integrated programmes including 1,130 integrated special units and 8 special schools offering secondary school education programmes. The National Special Needs Education Policy Framework (RoK, 2009) is the most current policy initiative. The policy is a comprehensive translation to legislation of the government's commitments to providing SNE. Among other provisions, the policy comprehensively covers interventions on access and relevance of SNE. With the implementation of these policies, a key undertaking of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) is to achieve universal access to education and training for all learners including those from disadvantaged and vulnerable communities (Ojiambo, 2009). To ensure that these policies live to this promise, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of the implementation of the policies is important. This need is even more critical at a time as this when the nation has a new constitution, Vision 2030, and a new government.

Unfortunately, information on the influence of the SNE policy on access to secondary school education by learners with hearing impairments is limited. Secondary school education is critical in any education system because of the crucial role it plays in catalyzing national development. Consequently, maintaining a high students' enrolment at this level especially in secondary schools should be a priority for the government. However, access to secondary school education for children with hearing impairments has been a challenge (RoK, 2009). Other challenges include lack of clear guidelines and support to the implementation of an all-inclusive education policy, lack of sufficient data on children with hearing impairments and inadequate tools and skills in identification and assessment (RoK, 2005). In light of these challenges, the SNE policy seeks to provide guidelines to implement the recommendations of the various Committees and Commissions and to respond to the needs of stakeholders in education, particularly for those in the field of SNE in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

The implementation of the SNE policy was expected to see increased enrolment, retention and transition of learners with hearing impairments in schools since it addresses these challenges among others. Notwithstanding the enumerated benefits accruing from the aforementioned SNE policy framework, provision of SNE in Nandi County to the learners with hearing impairments has been sluggish, having experienced several bottlenecks from the year 2010 when the policy was implemented. First, there are critical shortcomings and challenges facing the SNE sub-sector in the county, including declining access and transition to secondary school education by learners with hearing impairments. There have also been declining enrolment rates at primary and secondary school levels in the county from the period when the SNE policy came into being. Another major gap identified with the National SNE policy framework is that it does not have implementation guidelines that would ensure the actualization of the strategies given in the county. These critical shortcomings and challenges facing the SNE sub-sector in the county have not been investigated. The task of this study was therefore to find

out the influence of SNE policy on access to secondary school education by learners with hearing impairments in Nandi County.

Objectives of the Study

- (i) To determine the influence of the SNE policy on secondary school enrolment by learners with hearing impairments in Nandi County.
- (ii) To examine the influence of the SNE policy on transition of learners with hearing impairments from primary to secondary schools in Nandi County.
- (iii) To establish the influence of the SNE policy on retention of learners with hearing impairments in schools in Nandi County.
- (iv) To find out the views of education stakeholders comprising of the learners with hearing impairments, their teachers and EARC coordinators on the appropriate strategies that would help more learners with hearing impairments in Nandi County access secondary school education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Retention and Transition Rates of Learners with Special Needs

The Government of Kenya acknowledges that educational opportunities for learners with special needs and disabilities are a major challenge to the education sector (RoK, 2009). Majority of learners with special needs and disabilities in Kenya do not enroll for educational services. For instance, in 1999 there were only 22,000 learners with special needs and disabilities enrolled in special schools, units and integrated programmes. This number rose to 26,885 in 2003 and 45,000 in 2008, which compares poorly with the proportion in general education (RoK, 2009).

In 2008 there were 1,341 special units and 114 public special schools in the country which included vocational and technical institutions that cater for learners with special needs and disabilities (RoK, 2009; Glennerster, Kremer, Mbiti & Takavarasha, 2011). This is still inadequate despite the government's commitment to support the provision of equal access to education by all children. Indeed, according to Mugo, Oranga and Singal, (2010) the situation of enrolment and transition of learners in SNE can be termed as deplorable. Based on a report by the Commission of Inquiry into Education System of Kenya (RoK, 1999), of the three million people with disabilities, 25% (750,000) were children of school-going age, of which only about 90,000 (12%) had been identified and assessed. Worse still, only 14,614 were enrolled in educational programmes that catered for their needs, less than 2% of the estimated total, and about 16% of the assessed total. The report estimated that more than 90% remained excluded from the education system.

Examining school transitions in this set-up, it is notable that the total enrolment for children with disabilities in 2003 was 152,399 in primary schools, and 7,026 in secondary schools. With eight years in primary and four years in secondary school, it indicates that only less than 10% of pupils completing primary school education could transit to secondary schools during the year. The picture is worse when one considers the transition rates from secondary school to university. In regard to this, an attempt by Mugo, Oranga and Singal (2010) to identify the probability of blind students transiting to university got a transition rate of only 0.7%. Based on this observation, they argued that it would be expected that the transition rates for those with hearing impairments averages at near zero considering that education for those with physical and visual impairments constitute the most developed sub-sectors in Kenya.

Secondary school education is critical in every country for a number of reasons (Mwaka, Musama & Kafwa, 2011). First and foremost, it is central to development because it provides insights, skills and competencies that are needed for economic growth and national development. Secondly, it is at this level that youngsters consolidate their basic knowledge gained in primary school and acquire the common culture that will allow them to be useful citizens in a peaceful society. Providing education as a right is an obligation of all governments and requires that they translate their National Commitments into legislation (Wachiye & Nasongo, 2010). This goal will only be achieved when the universal right to education extends to individuals with special needs and disabilities in the country. Indeed, a review of a number of government policies on education reveals the government's commitment to making education including secondary school education available to all its citizens (RoK, 2005; RoK, 2009; RoK, 2012). The most comprehensive and current education policy in Kenya for SNE is the National SNE Policy Framework of 2009 (RoK, 2009).

Strategies to Promote Access to School by Learners with Hearing Impairments

It can be inferred from the previous sections that the challenges that learners with hearing impairment face in their pursuit for secondary school education are numerous. Apparently, it is clear that supply-side factors play a major role in influencing participation of learners with disabilities such as hearing in secondary school education in Kenya. Such supply-side factors include provision and expansion of physical facilities in schools. However, expansion of physical infrastructure, in particular, may imply demand for more teachers and, therefore, the need for increased budgetary allocations for secondary education (Kinuthia, 2009). Thus, for all learners and especially those with hearing impairments, it is important that the supply-side options are evaluated against

government policy targets as a basis for identifying feasible strategies for improving household access to secondary school education within existing resource constraints.

With this consideration in mind, any policy aimed at the expansion of primary school education should be accompanied by strategies to expand secondary school education given expected future implications (Ngware, Onsomu, Muthaka & Manda, 2006). Besides, secondary school participation levels by learners with hearing impairments and of course all learners in Kenya largely depend on what is happening in primary school education. According to Ngware, Onsomu, Muthaka and Manda, (2006) the specific strategies for expanding and improving secondary school education include expansion of secondary schools infrastructure, reducing costs of secondary school education to household, improving teacher utilization, improving efficiency and effectiveness of bursary scheme, partnerships and local resource mobilization, assisting communities to strengthen their poverty mitigation measure and bridging the gender and regional gap in secondary schooling.

Issues and Constraints addressed by the SNE Policy

As noted earlier, there are several challenges relating to access and equity in the provision of education and training for learners with special needs and disabilities in the country (RoK, 2012). Lack of guidelines to support Inclusive Education implementation, and data on children with special needs and disabilities in and out of school poses a major challenge to learners with special needs and disabilities (RoK, 2009). Inappropriate infrastructure, inadequate facilities and lack of equipment for the learners with special needs and disabilities included in regular institutions is also a major challenge. These challenges have been comprehensively addressed in the SNE Policy Framework (RoK, 2009; RoK, 2012).

Other challenges noted and addressed by the SNE Policy include the current examination system which is limiting and rigid, denying the majority of learners with hearing impairments opportunities for higher education, lack of coordination among service providers and inadequate supervision and monitoring of SNE programmes (RoK, 2009; RoK, 2012). It is therefore the objective of the SNE policy to address these challenges to increase access to quality and relevant education for learners with HI at ECDE, primary, secondary, tertiary and university levels (RoK, 2009). As enshrined in the policy framework MoEST aims at enforcing equal access and inclusion of persons with special needs and disabilities in education and training programmes at all levels, intensify monitoring, supervision and quality control in all schools to ensure children with hearing impairments are provided for without discrimination and ensure timely provision of learning and teaching materials in accessible formats.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a descriptive case study research design. Both primary and secondary sources of data were critical in this study. The target population was 193 and used a sample of 135 that represented 69.4% of the population using stratified and simple random sampling techniques while secondary data was collected using records and reports from special units/school for the hearing impaired and the Educational Assessment and Resource Centre coordinators within the county. Primary data was collected through the administration of questionnaires. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative data which was analyzed using frequency distribution tables, means, numbers, percentages and thematic presentations.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the field were coded and cleaned to remove outliers or missing values and categorized manually according to the questionnaire items using frequency distribution tables, means and percentages. The coded data was then transferred to a computer sheet and was processed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented according to the objectives of the study. As Martin and Acuna (2002) observe, SPSS is able to handle large amount of data, and given its wide spectrum of statistical procedures purposefully designed for social sciences, it is also quite efficient and time saving. Frequency tables, bar graphs and pie charts were used to analyze the quantitative data. The responses to open-ended items (qualitative data) in form of phrases and sentences were organized followed by creating categories, themes and patterns related to the research questions. This was analyzed and reported by descriptive narrative (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Categories of Respondents

The respondents who participated in this study were stratified into seven categories. Figure 1 shows that most of the respondents were students from the secondary school for the hearing impaired, comprising 63 (46.67%) and primary comprising of 41 (30.37%).

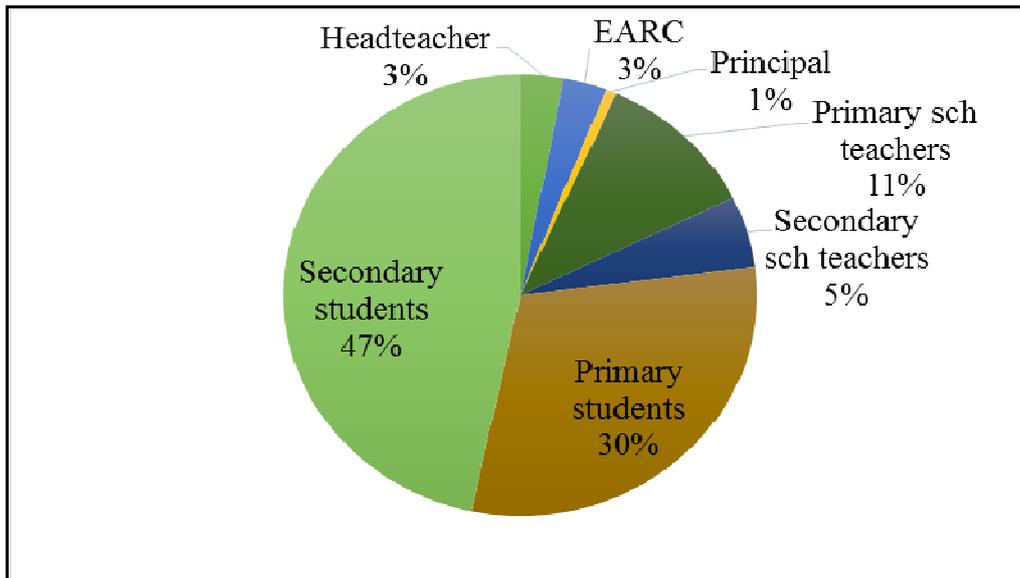


Figure 1. Percentages of Proportions of Various Categories of Respondents

Since Nandi County has only one Secondary School for the Deaf, only 1 (0.74%) secondary school principal participated in this study. Furthermore, the education sector in Kenya involves a number of stakeholders and players. In broadest terms, they include the government, the private sector, the public and the Non-Governmental Organizations and groups. In the context of the current study, the stakeholders were determined and stratified with the aim of collecting data from the administrators, educationists and learners. The results shown therefore are a true reflection of proportion of these stakeholders in Nandi County as education for learners with hearing impairments is concerned.

Levels of Education of Respondents

The findings show that 12 (38.71%) of the respondents who were teachers and the EARC coordinators had attained diploma level of education. However, as presented in figure 3, this compared well with 11 (35.48%) of the respondents who had attained degree level of education. The large number of respondents who had diploma level of education as compared to other levels of education attained by the respondents was mainly due to the fact a significant proportion of them were drawn from special units/primary school for the HI in which case most of the teachers were diploma certificate holders. In addition, teachers with certificate level of education are to be found in primary schools. Only 3% of the respondents were masters' degree holders showing the significantly low number of the respondents who had attained that level of education.

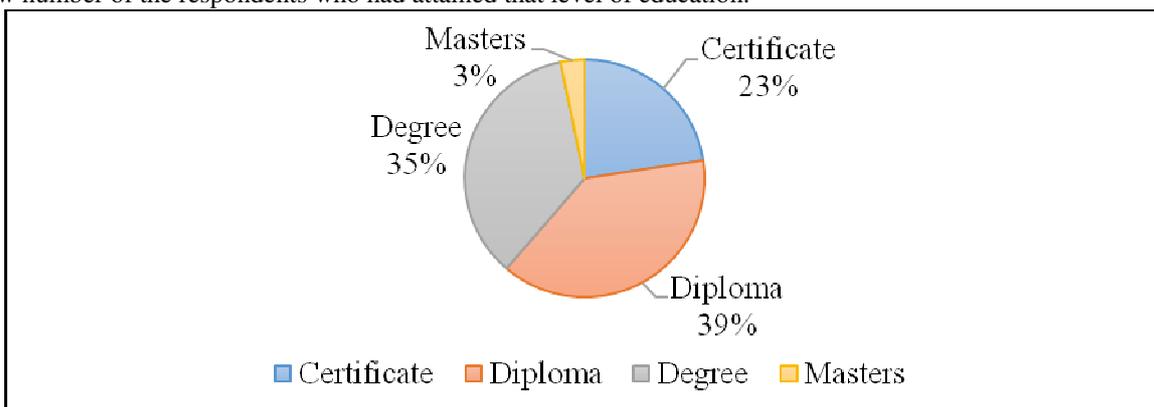


Figure 2. Education Level of the Respondents

Figure 2 presents the percentages of data analyzed in the study concerning levels of education of the learners who participated in the study. They were drawn from both special units/primary and secondary schools for the hearing impaired.

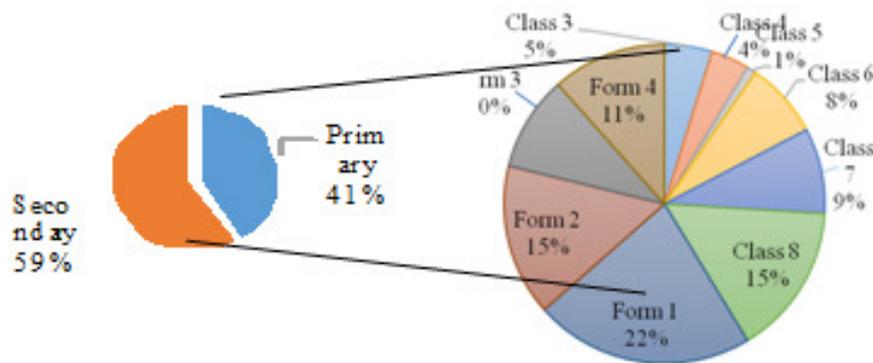


Figure 3. Levels of education of the Learners

Overall, students in Form One were the majority with a proportion of 23 (22.12%) of the learners whereas 1 (0.96%) was from Class Five. The findings reveal that learners from special units/primary schools comprised 41 (41.34%) of the respondents while those in the Secondary School for the Deaf comprised 63 (58.66%) of the respondents.

The disparities observed between the proportions of respondents from special units/primary and secondary schools were caused by differences in the response rate between the two categories of respondents. Secondary school students had a higher response rate than the special units/primary school learners which was associated with differences in the ability to fill the questionnaires.

Level of Awareness about the SNE Policy

The findings presented in figure 4 reveal that 92 (88.46%) of the respondents who were learners were aware of the government's initiatives to provide education to learners with special needs. In this regard, they gave examples such as: provision of trained teachers, provision of learning materials including textbooks and building of classrooms.

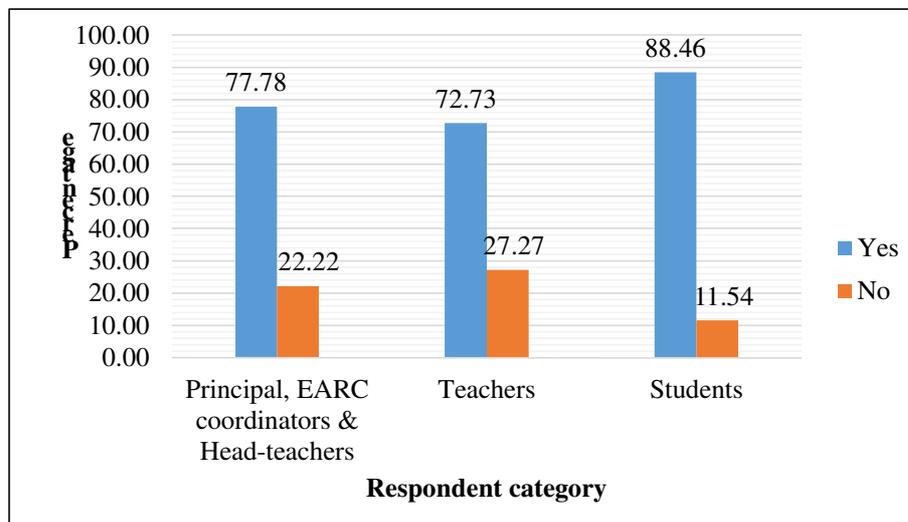


Figure 4. Percentage Responses on Awareness of the Existence of the SNE Policy

Though it is likely that the learners had not in person read the policy framework, it can be postulated that indeed they were aware of the efforts that the government was putting in place to provide them with education. In addition, when the policy was launched, Christoffel-Blinden Mission (CBM) and its SNE partners among other resolutions, agreed to support the MoEST to inform actors at all levels in the actual implementation process of policy framework (Christoffel-Blinden Mission in Kenya, 2014). CBM targets the people affected by disability by supporting programmes - including health-care, rehabilitation and education and livelihood opportunities - run by local partner organizations. It is also likely that the respondents had learnt of the policy from other sources including official meetings, public barazas and from the media.

Level of Awareness on the Implementation of the SNE Policy

The findings presented in figure 5 indicate that 6 (66.67%) of the respondents agreed that there has been some effort to implement the SNE policy. An additional of 1 (11.11%) strongly agreed whereas 2 (22.22%) were not

sure of this view. 12 (54.55%) teachers who participated in this study indicated that there has been some effort to implement the policy.

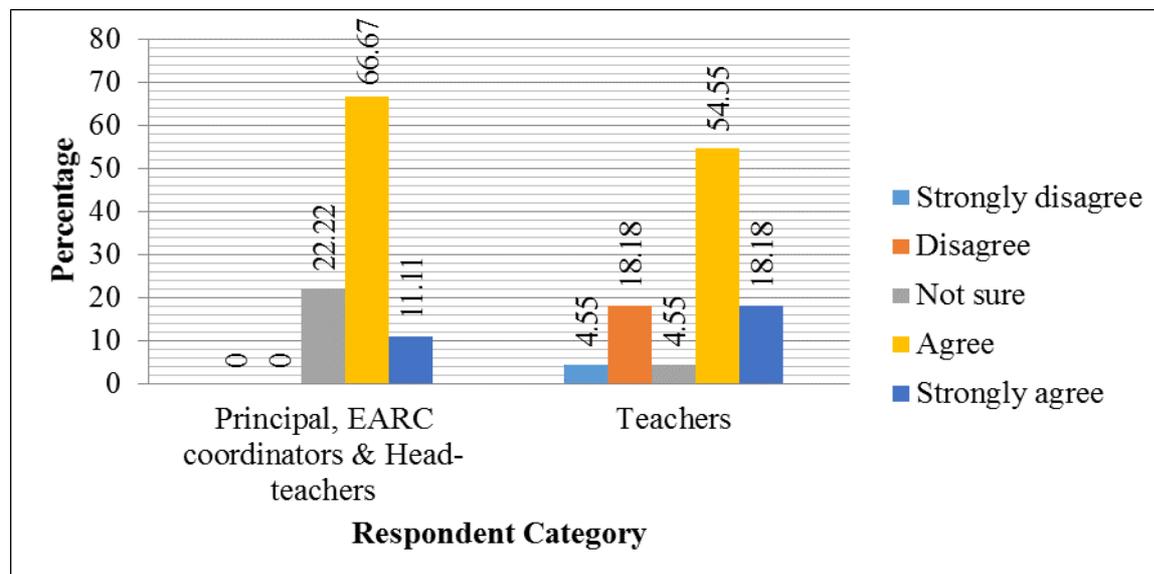


Figure 5. Percentage Responses on whether there has been an effort to implement the SNE policy

As reported in the Kenya Disability Newsletter (2012), the implementation of the SNE policy framework began in the year 2010 after it was launched, with the government placing emphasis on Inclusive Education and provision of additional grants to help facilitate the implementation of the policy. The funds are provided to secure learning and sports materials, assistive devices and /or modification of school structures to ensure full accessibility to learners with disability (Kenya Disability Newsletter, 2012).

In addition, as noted by Williams, (2014), to address the marginalization of children with disabilities, and its limiting outcomes, the Kenyan government committed themselves to Inclusive Education. To this end, according to Williams, (2014), Kenya's updated SNE policy of 2009, has been the driving force behind the transition. In its early stages of implementation the SNE policy is working to include a greater number of children with hearing impairments in education. Progress has been made in providing specialized equipment, creating environments without physical barriers, and building capacity by incentivizing staff to attain Special Needs Education Diploma certificates. Nevertheless, these achievements are mainly taking place in schools for the SNE including schools in Nandi County as shown by the high number of respondents who agreed that implementation of the SNE policy is on-going.

Influence of the SNE Policy on Secondary School Enrolment

The objective of the study sought to determine the influence of the SNE policy on secondary school enrolment by learners with hearing impairments in Nandi County. The objective was guided by the research question: How does the SNE policy influence secondary school enrolment by learners with hearing impairments in Nandi County? The respondents were asked to state the influence of the SNE policy on transition of learners with HI to secondary schools.

After analyzing data from the secondary school principal, EARC coordinators and the head teachers of special units/primary schools for the learners with HI, the findings reveal that 6 (66.67%) respondents agreed with the view that the implementation of the SNE policy has led to an increment in the number of enrolment in school (figure 7). Only 1 (1.11%) of the respondents disagreed with this view whereas 2 (22.22%) were not sure of the influence of the SNE policy in improving enrolment in school.

Figure 6 also shows that in the case of the respondents who were teachers did not differ significantly in their views on the influence of the implementation of the SNE policy in improving enrolment in school. However, it can be inferred from the figure that half of the respondents, that is, 6 (27.27%) agreed and an additional 5 (22.73%) strongly agreed. It will be rightly said that these results highlighted the perceptions of the respondents on the success of the implementation of the SNE policy framework in enhancing school enrolment by learners with HI in Nandi County. It further reveals that by working with actors in the county, MoEST through capacity building and collaboration with teachers and other stakeholders including the EARCs, more learners with special needs were being placed in schools than before.

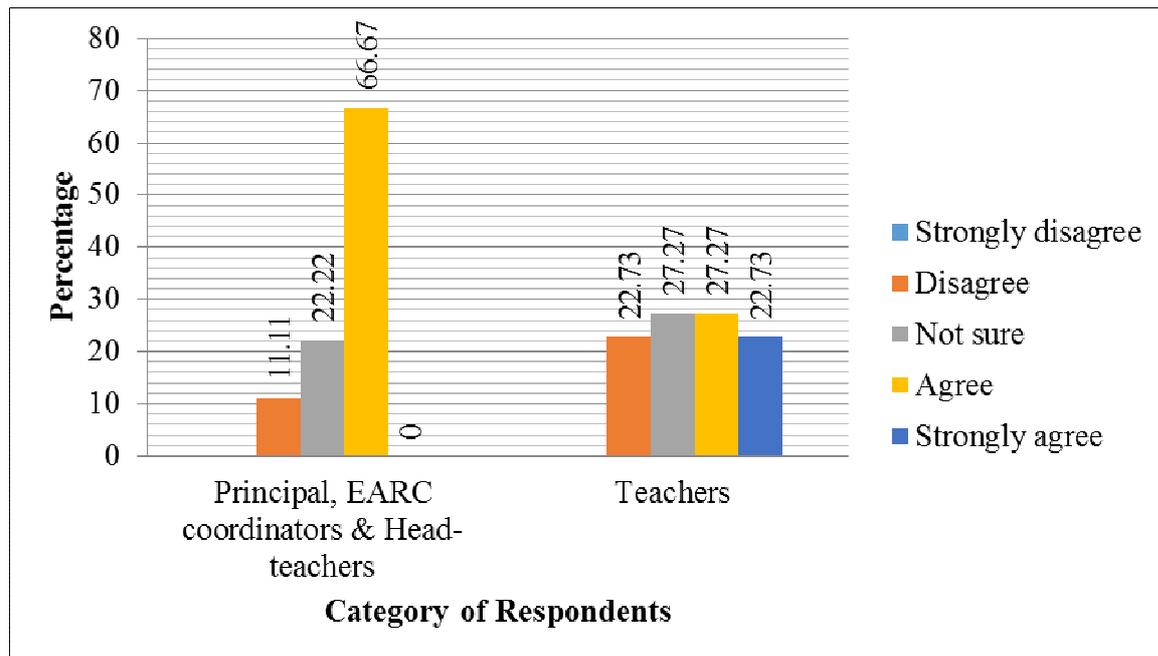


Figure 6. Perceptions of the Respondents on the influence of the SNE Policy on School Enrolment by Learners with HI

Gita, Kabli and Rigler (2006) observe that the aim of accepting education is to overcome the barriers of learning and to include all students into the learning process. By implementing the SNE policy, the ultimate goal is to ensure that all children with disabilities including those with hearing impairments get the opportunity to education. This can only be realized if the barriers to education are removed. While the SNE policy provides a framework for handling the barriers, a number of authors have cited that Inclusive Education is the most common approach to address the educational needs of all children including children with hearing impairments (Pathy, 2010; Ruijs, Van der Veen & Peetsma, 2010). According to Idol (2006), inclusion means that students with special needs attend general school programmes and are enrolled in age-appropriate classes for 100% of their schooling. Since this has been one of the areas that the government has put on a lot of emphasis, it is likely that the implementation of the SNE policy is indeed promoting enrolment in the units for the hearing impaired established in ordinary primary schools in Nandi County.

Problems of Accessing School

Figure 7 presents the respondents' take on the existence of challenges to education access by learners with hearing impairments.

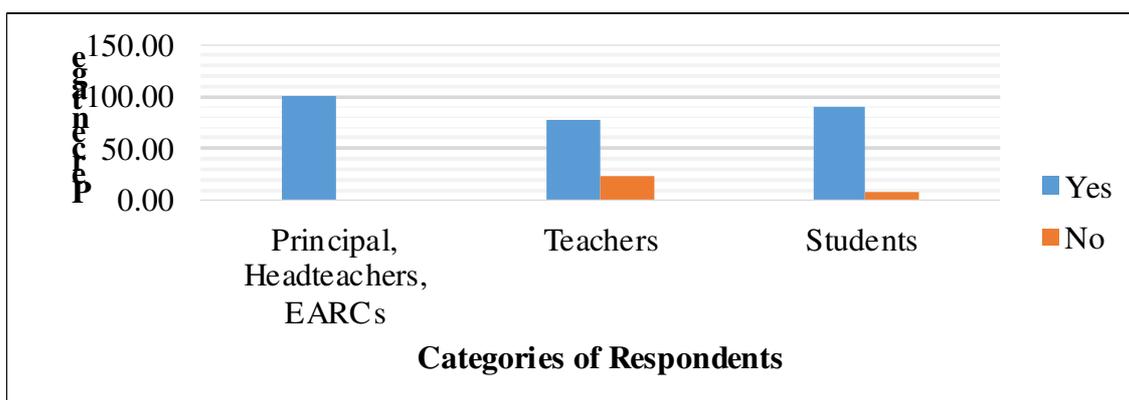


Figure 7. Percentage of responses on whether learners with HI face

Challenges When Accessing School Education

The study reveals that 9 (100%) of the respondents who included the secondary school principal, head teachers of the special units/primary school for the HI and the EARC coordinators indicated that challenges existed. Furthermore, 20 (90.91%) and 81 (77.88%) of the teachers and students respectively said that challenges existed. (Teachers, $\chi^2 = 14.727$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.001$, students, $\chi^2 = 32.346$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.001$).

These results show that challenges do exist that are hindering access to secondary school education by learners with HI in Nandi County. In a study by Glennerster, Kremer, Mbiti and Takavarasha (2011) on access to quality education in Kenya, it was noted that while the FPE programme has increased access to primary school education especially among poorer households in Kenya, ancillary costs of primary school education (such as school uniform) continue to hinder the educational attainment of many children especially those with disability (Glennerster, Kremer, Mbiti & Takavarasha, 2011). A number of challenges such as the poor quality of education policy and content; concerns with the relevance of the curriculum; the poor quality of teachers; a lack of quality teachers' training and teaching methods; poor school buildings and safety; accountability issues; effective local and national assessment tools; inadequate research funds and institutions; lack of quality educational leaders and lack of partnership with stakeholders among others have been pointed out.

On the basis of the above discussion, it could be said that the SNE policy (RoK, 2009) is very vital to achieving the goal of achieving education for all persons those with hearing impairments. This means that by mainstream education, the SNE policy is bound to open the doorway to education for a number of children with disabilities including the hearing impaired.

Factors that Hinder Access to School Education by Learners with HI

The perceptions of head teachers and the EARC coordinators on the factors that are hampering access to school education by learners with HI are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 : Percentage responses from the Head teachers and the EARC coordinators on the Factors that are Hindering Access to School Education by Learners with Hearing Impairments

Attribute	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Not Sure %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
1. Financial problems.	0.00	0.00	0.00	33.33	66.67
2. Lack of awareness by parents/guardians.	0.00	11.11	0.00	66.67	22.22
3. Lack of physical facilities in the school.	11.11	0.00	22.22	33.33	33.33
4. Lack of curriculum for learners with hearing impairments.	11.11	22.22	22.22	33.33	11.11
5. Lack of teaching/learning resources.	0.00	33.33	11.11	44.44	11.11

All the respondents in this category agree that the learners faced financial problems. These comprised 33.33% who agreed to this and an additional 66.67% who strongly agreed. The findings also reveal that 66.67% agreed and 22.22% strongly agreed that lack of awareness among parents and guardians was a challenge to the learners. In addition, 33.33% agreed whereas 33.33% strongly agreed that there was lack of physical facilities in the schools. It was noted that although most of the respondents (33.33%) felt that lack of curriculum for learners with HI and learning resources (44.44%) were also challenges to them, a significant proportion of the respondents also disagree as shown in the same table.

It is worth noting that the government in coming up with SNE policy appreciates the fact that there exist numerous challenges to education's access by learners with special needs (RoK, 2009). RoK (2005) observes that majority of learners with special needs and disabilities actually do not access educational services especially the post-primary level of education because of challenges such as lack of adequate educational facilities and resources, financing, low stakeholder support and lack of qualified special needs education administrators.

It can be postulated that the challenges of lack of curriculum for learners with hearing impairments and lack of teaching resources are not major problems as previously thought. However, according to the head teachers and the EARC coordinators who participated in this study, financial problems and lack of awareness among parents and guardians are serious problems that are hindering learners with hearing impairments from accessing school education.

According Glennerster, Kremer, Mbiti and Takavarasha (2011), school fees had been a major barrier to education in Kenya. This view is supported by the fact that the introduction of FPE in 2003 improved the Gross Enrolment Rate in primary school from 87% to just over 100% (World Bank, 2004 as cited in Glennerster, Kremer, Mbiti & Takavarasha, 2011). Yet despite the FPE related enrolment and access gains, other important barriers to access remain which have been addressed in the SNE policy. In particular, while enrolment is now high on average, among the children with HI enrolment remains an issue.

Perception of Teachers on the Factors that Hinder Access to School Education by Learners with HI

Majority of the respondents (40.91% agreed and 50.00% strongly agreed) that learners with hearing impairments face challenges that include financial problems in accessing school education. Lack of awareness by parents and

guardians on the provision of educations for the learners with HI was supported by half of the respondents whereas 40.91% strongly agreed with this proposition. In addition, lack of teaching/learning resources in schools is also a challenge to the learners according to 40.91% of the respondents who strongly agreed. Table 2 presents the information.

Table 2: Perceptions of Teachers on the Factors that are Hindering Access to School Education by Learners with Hearing Impairments

Element	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Not Sure %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
1. Financial problems.	4.55	4.55	0.00	40.91	50.00
2. Lack of awareness by parents/guardians.	0.00	0.00	9.09	50.00	40.91
3. Lack of physical facilities in the school.	18.18	22.73	4.55	27.27	27.27
4. Lack of curriculum for learners with hearing impairments.	13.64	18.18	4.55	22.73	40.91
5. Lack of teaching/learning resources.	18.18	18.18	0.00	31.82	31.82

These results do not vary considerably compared to the results from the headteachers and the EARC coordinators on the challenges hindering access to school education by learners with HI. However, according to the teachers, in addition to financial problems (50.00% who strongly agreed) and lack of awareness by parents and guardians (50.00% who agreed), lack of teaching/learning resources is also a significant problem as inferred from the nearly two-thirds of the respondents who said so (that is, 31.82 agreed and 31.82% strongly agreed). Indeed, inappropriate infrastructure, inadequate facilities and lack of equipment for the learners with special needs and disabilities included in regular institutions are among the major challenges that have been comprehensively addressed in the SNE Policy Framework (RoK, 2009; RoK, 2012).

Perception of Learners on the Factors that are hindering them from Accessing School Education

Responses presented in Table 3 sought to gauge the attitude of the learners to a number of factors that may influence their access to school education.

Table 3 :Perception of Learners on the Factors that are hindering them from Accessing School Education

Element	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Not Sure %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
1 My parents/guardians support me to be in school.	12.50	2.88	2.88	26.92	54.81
2 I like to be in this school.	7.69	2.88	6.73	24.04	58.65
3 The learning resources such as textbooks, charts, and maps are enough for learners.	2.88	3.85	19.23	30.77	43.27
4 My teachers are supportive/friendly.	3.85	0.00	6.73	35.58	53.85

The findings reveal that majority of the learners (comprising of 26.92% who agreed and an additional 54.81% who strongly agreed) their parents/guardians support them in school. 8.65% of the respondents strongly agreed that they like to be in school. Furthermore, the findings reveal that 43.27% of the learners agreed that learning resources such as textbooks, charts and maps were adequate for them. In addition, 53.85% agreed and an additional 35.58% strongly agreed that teachers were supportive and friendly.

In addition to the challenges presented above, the learners highlight a number of other challenges that they face including, financial problem, distance to the school from their homes, a lot of work at home, lack of reading materials while at home, harsh study environment at school including some teachers and other learners and inadequate specialized/assistive devices in their schools. The SNE policy (RoK, 2009) envisages that these challenges can be surmounted. However, it is likely that since the implementation of the SNE policy framework began in 2010, the efforts have not yet brought forth fruits that the learners with hearing impairments in Nandi County can wholly enjoy. Thus, challenges such as financial problems, adequate specialized facilities and assistive devices in schools still remain stumbling blocks for the learner with HI who desires to pursue school education. In addition, the concerns raised by the learners concerning financial problems that they face in school were also pointed out by the majority of teachers as noted in the preceding discussions.

Significance of the SNE Policy in addressing the challenges to Education Access

When the education administrators including the secondary school principal, the EARC co-ordinators and the headteachers of the special units/primary school for the HI were asked whether the SNE policy addresses the challenges hindering children with HI from accessing school education, the findings show that 5 (55.5%) respondents agreed whereas 4 (44.44%) were not sure. These results are presented in figure 8.

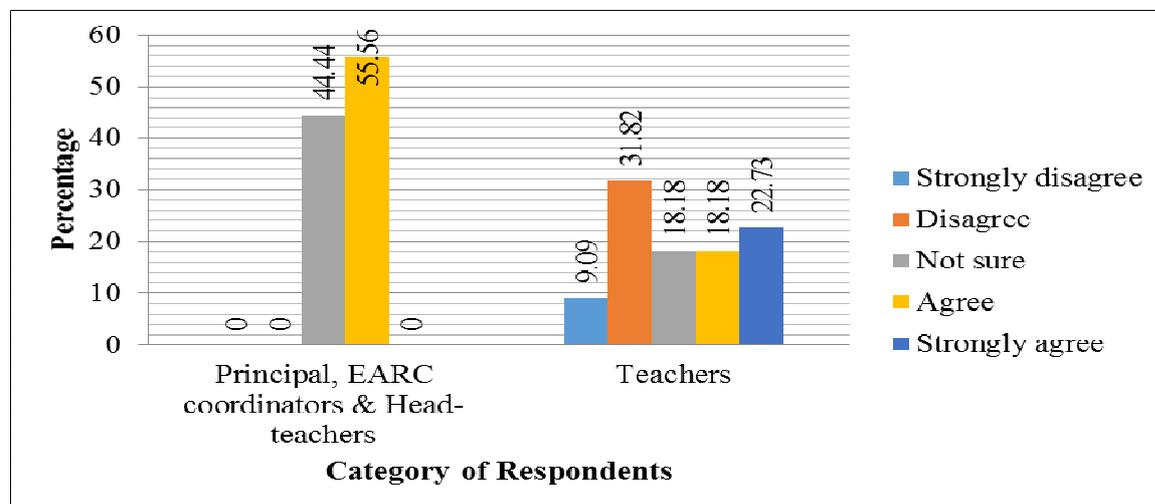


Figure 8. Percentage of responses on whether the SNE policy addresses the challenges hindering children with HI from accessing school education

At the same time, the study also reveals that 7 (31.82%) of the teachers felt that the SNE policy was not addressing the challenges affecting access to school education by learners with HI. However, after pooling the respondents on either side of the scale, the findings show that there were equal proportions of the respondents who support and those who do not support the view. As presented in figure 8, 7 (31.82%) of the respondents disagreed, and the same number also agreed. 2 (9.09%) strongly disagreed whereas 4 (18.18%) of the respondents agreed with an additional 5 (22.73%) who strongly agreed that the SNE policy addresses the challenges hindering children from accessing school education.

This scenario, of the less than half of respondents perceiving that the implementation of the policy is not addressing the factors inhibiting learners with hearing impairments from gaining access to school education could be as a result of a number of factors. Firstly, as noted by African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) (2013), the policy does not have implementation guidelines that would ensure the implementation of the Inclusive Education philosophy and other strategies given in the policy framework document. Secondly, 27.27% of the teachers indicate that they were not aware of the SNE policy framework. Thus, lack of awareness about the policy and how it is being implemented could have prompted the respondents to perceive that the policy is not addressing the challenges. In addition, since the policy was launched in the year 2010, it is likely that the policy is still in its 'early' stages of its implementation with many of the issues addressed in the policy yet to be implemented (Christoffel-Blinden Mission in Kenya, 2014).

Conclusions

The SNE policy has led to a significant increase in secondary school enrolment by HI learners. This is supported by the fact that three quarters of the respondents in the study felt that the implementation of the policy had positively influenced learners' enrolment in schools. However, some challenges still existed that were acting as barriers to learners with HI who should be accessing school education in Nandi County.

Recommendations of the Study

Arising from the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that:

- (i) There is need to maintain and increase necessary support for the special primary units/school for the HI and the Secondary School for the Deaf so as to improve secondary school enrolment by children with HI. This would require ensuring that more education funds from MoEST are allocated to support education for the learners with special needs and disabilities in the county. Additional funds may be raised from Constituency Development Funds as well as from donors and well-wishers. Such financial support is expected to enhance provision of learning materials as well as promote enrolment and retention of learners in school.

- (ii) In order to improve transition of learners with hearing impairments from primary school to secondary school, it is necessary for MoEST and all actors in the education sector to create awareness among learners (both with and without HI), teachers, parents and communities about the need for secondary education for children with HI and other opportunities available for them, whilst at the same time providing the necessary financial support to the learners.
- (iii) In order to ensure retention of learners with hearing impairments in school, it is recommended that the Government of Nandi County and all stakeholders address the challenges that are leading to the high rate of school drop-outs revealed in this study. The Government especially should ensure that all policies in place have implementation guidelines. More so, they should ensure the actualization of the strategies given in the SNE policy as these would go a long way in resolving the school drop-out problem and hence promote retention of learners in school.
- (iv) Finally, there is need to advocate for the establishment of a mechanism that would ensure the interventions given in the SNE policy are adequately implemented. These would ultimately improve access to secondary school by learners with hearing impairments. For instance, the establishment of a National SNE Advisory Council which would among other things offer advice to the education administrators on the implementation of the policy as well as providing timely feedback concerning the successes and failures arising from the implementation process.

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