

The Relationship Between Training of Assessors and Appropriate Placement of Children with Special Needs. The case of Uasin Gishu County. Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed support levels for placement of children with Special Needs Education in Uasin Gishu County in Rift Valley province. The objective of the study was to determine the relationship between training of assessors and appropriate placement of children with Special Needs. The study adopted the theory of Planned Behaviour that relates to intention of behavior. A descriptive survey design was employed for the planning and execution of the study. Stratified, Simple Random and Purposive sampling techniques were used in choosing the sample size. The target population which is also the sample for the study included Education Officers, assessors at the education assessment centres, affected parents and Special Needs Education Teachers. The research instruments used to collect data were questionnaires, interview schedule and Observation checklist. Data collected was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The study findings revealed that the country was still far from achieving education

for all as attested by the fact that over 1.8 children with SNE had not been assessed and placed in appropriate programmes despite the governments' effort of setting up EARCs in all the districts with the aim of taking the services closer to people. The study findings are expected to benefit educational planners in recommending for allocation of more resources for training, in-service and equipping the centres for better performance, enhance sensitization of parents and general public about the functions and value of assessment centres. It is further hoped that the findings of the study will bring about greater awareness with regard to the value of the assessment centres

Key Words: Placement, Special Needs

Background

It is estimated that 500 million people in the world are disabled, that is one in every ten people. Among these, 60-80% live in rural areas, where there are virtually no services to meet their needs. From estimates somewhat in the world, about 140 million of the disabled are children and 160 million are women with disabilities (WHO, 1999). UNESCO reports that 90% of children with disabilities do not attend school (United Nations Website 2009). The vast majority of the world's 450 million disabled persons live in developing countries today. It is estimated that by year 2025, the developing world will account for more than 80% of the worlds' disabled population (Nobel, 1981).

In many countries of the world, families with physically challenged children carry with them a burden of social stigma, which impedes social and economic welfare. The resultant effects have been exclusion, isolation and marginalization from the mainstream community life. Efforts to integrate them into the mainstream life have been met by socio-cultural and economic barriers among other factors (Ndinda, 2005).

The provision of rehabilitation and education services for the disabled is justified not simply as a humanitarian gesture, but because a disabled citizen is entitled to special help without which he cannot benefit effectively from his status as a citizen, and also because the productivity of the disabled is a valuable element in the national economy (Hagan, 1981). He further suggests that disabled persons have a right to access special services, which they require in order to effectively function and to contribute to himself/herself, as well as to his/her community to the fullest extent possible.

The capacities and skills of staff at all levels within SNE should be commensurate with the tasks they perform given that the success of special needs services and education depends on provision of specialized human and institutional capacity (GOK, 2009). Drudy and Kinsella (2009) underscore the need to creating the conditions for the furtherance of inclusive education with focus on the need to examine the availability of expertise, the development and sustainability of structures and the integration of processes across services if progress towards a more equitable education system is to be achieved.

As systems became more inclusive in Botswana, professional development was particularly important because of the major new challenges that faced special needs experts who had to respond to a greater diversity of student needs. It was for this reason that a three year special needs education awareness course that laid emphasis on practical training rather than theoretical study was started in all institutions involved in teacher training (Dart, 2006). This is consistent with the comments of Malatsi & Okumbe (2002) who reported that both in-service and pre-school teacher training in Botswana is provided to special education teachers and that all colleges of education offer introductory level of special education. However this is contra to Abosi (2002) comments that there was inadequate training and supply of personnel to meet challenges posed by implementation of inclusive education.

For teachers who request for specialised training in special education in Greece, there are opportunities to follow postgraduate studies in the university Departments of Education. However, a shortage of specialised teachers is still evident; the statistical data reveal that the ratio of SEN students to special education teachers is 14.06 : 1, while the national ratio of non-SEN students to ordinary teachers is not more than 9.45: 1 (Koutrouba, 2008).

Vickerman (2007), details that only 29% of higher education institutions (HEIs) in England offered trainees mandatory modules in SEN. This is in line with Winter (2006) findings which indicate that trainees can receive as little as 10 hours of training on SEN issues. Miller (2008) concludes and suggested that in reality nothing had changed in relation to the number of trainees who had received specialist training and urged the government to restart negotiations with the teacher development authority to ensure that SEN training became a compulsory part of all initial teacher training programmes.

Surveys of the qualifications of the staff of special schools in NSW Australia found that only 60% of the staff had special education qualifications (Stephenson et al, 2010). The development

of the special needs education staff force is therefore, crucial, particularly in countries where other kinds of resource are relatively scarce (UNESCO, undated p. 42). O’Gorman et al (2009) established that there is a direct correlation between the acquisition of skills and knowledge gained through accredited professional development courses and assessor efficiency. In order to achieve reliable results, assessment calls for well- trained personnel; this is not a true case here in Kenya (Kochung, 1988).

Special education in Kenya has been provided in special schools and units attached to regular schools in areas of hearing, visual, mental and physical handicapped but more recently, it is provided through integration of the same in regular schools with accompanying support services (GOK, 2005).

Kenya like many other developing countries, realized that early detection and intervention are essential for successful rehabilitation of children with SNE (UNESCO 1988). Although lacking the resources available in developed countries, in 1984 the ministry of education in collaboration with the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) launched district level programmes for identifying children with SNE. Since the EARCs were established they have had a big impact on special education services in Kenya in terms of many children being assessed and placed appropriately for early intervention and many parents of these children being reached through dissemination of information through public barazas, church meetings and hospitals (GOK, 1999).

The instruments used for assessment in EARCs, were those developed in 1984 for screening purposes, which is not effective enough to accurately identify children with special needs (Kochung, 1988). Apart from this they have not been standardized since 1984 when DANIDA the main funder withdrew its support (GOK, 1999). Based on assessment results of EARCs, the children are categorized as deaf, blind, mentally handicapped, physically handicapped or emotionally disturbed. In many instances, assessment in Kenya takes place only when the child has been noticed to have problems (Njoroge, 1989).

In order to achieve reliable results, this kind of assessment calls for well- trained personnel, which is not a true case here in Kenya (Kochung, 1988). Kristen & Wabuge (1987) reinforced this by reporting that other functions of centres include: integrating children into special schools; organizing short term courses for parents; referring children for medical attention; providing

equipment; running seminars for teachers, administrators, health professionals and collecting information on handicapped children for special education planning and research.

Provision of existing Information and Communication services remain largely inaccessible and unaffordable to persons with special needs and disabilities. Different SNE services have not adequately integrated the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT). Disabilities require specific approaches to meet their information and communication needs. This requires heavy investment and increased funding levels. This is a challenge that the government and partner organizations have to address in the delivery of SNE services (GOK 2009).

Development partners and other actors in the education sector play a major role in facilitating early identification, assessment and placement of learners with special needs and disabilities as well as provide resources and services which are integral to early identification, assessment and intervention of children with special needs and disabilities. An integrated approach is necessary for various government ministries, partners, stakeholders and parents for improved service delivery of SNE. (NGOs), (CBOs), (FBOs), the private sector and bilateral and multi-lateral organizations form a core group of partners with whom the government collaborates in the implementation of SNE (GOK, 2009).

Lack of awareness about issues surrounding learners with special needs and disabilities by service providers, policy makers, community and other stakeholders at large is a common problem. There is low level of advocacy and lobbying for the rights of persons with special needs and disabilities by parents, communities and disability organizations. Issues relating to special needs and disability are not given prominence in public meetings and the media.

In some cases, local communities are not aware of special needs programmes and EARCs within their localities. MOE officers and other government officers are not fully sensitized on SNE. There is lack of awareness and sensitization among the general public. Also, lack of accurate data on SNE hampers proper national planning and provision of effective services to persons with special needs (GOK, 2009).

The governments' effort in dealing with access and equity in the provision of education and training to children with special needs have however, encountered numerous challenges some of which include; lack of clear guidelines on the policy implementation of integrated education, inadequate tools and skills in identification and assessment and lack of data on children with special needs.

The situation was further compounded with inadequate infrastructure, inadequate facilities and lack of equipments. Inadequacy among teachers to handle children with special needs, inadequate and expensive teaching and learning materials, inadequate supervision, and lack of coordination among service providers and others exacerbated the situation. Although the Ministry of Education in Kenyawas working diligently to increase and improve resources for educating children with disabilities, they still had difficulty mandating uniformity (Kiarie, 2006). The United Nations estimates that 10% of any community in the developing countries is disabled (WHO 1980). In Uasin Gishu District little had been done to establish the magnitude of disability, the distribution of people with disabilities, their age, sex, type of disability or severity of disability. Consequently, the district was ill prepared to tackle the issue. If it was then assumed that approximately 10% of the districts population was disabled in one way or another, it meant that there were 68,000 persons whose needs had to be taken into account (Uasin Gishu District Development Plan 2002-2008).

Despite County Uasin Gishu having three assessment centres situated in Eldoret East, West and North, only one was fully functional. The service profile for disabled persons in the district included some educational programmes run by the Ministry of Education, the Catholic Church, Moi University and occasional assistance to individual persons with disabilities by the National Fund for the disabled.

The needs of disabled persons range from prevention of disabilities, cure of curable conditions, early childhood identification of disabled children, appropriate education and rehabilitation services, inadequate staff, sustainability of programmes and adequate support services (Uasin Gishu District Development Plan, 2005-2010).

Methodology

The study was conducted in Uasin Gishu County in Rift Valley province. The study adopted a mixed methods research design leaning towards quantitative survey because it had nominal, ordinal and ratio data. A Quantitative survey strategy was adopted to test the objectives by examining relationship among variables. These data was measured so that numbered data could be analyzed using statistical procedures. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey since data was collected at one point in time. The study targeted all three Educational Assessment and Resource Centres (EARCs), 2 special schools and 45 special units, 3 district education officers, 10 assessors in the EARCs, 47 SNE teachers and 47 affected parents in Uasin Gishu County.

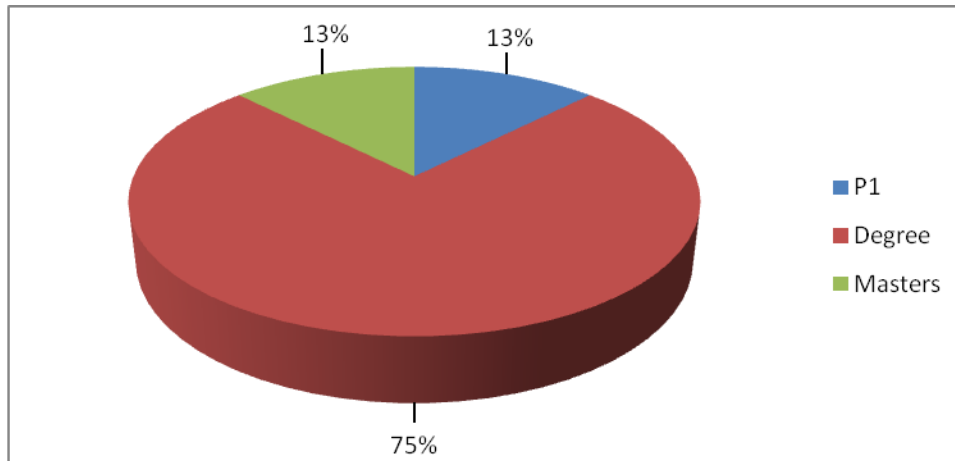
Education officers, affected parents of special needs children, assessors and SNE teachers in special schools and units were selected. Stratified sampling was used to stratify Uasin Gishu County into 3 districts namely Wareng, Eldoret East and Eldoret North. The schools were stratified into special schools and special units. The schools were stratified further into Hearing Impaired, Visually Impaired Physically handicapped and mentally handicapped. Simple Random sampling was used to sample respondents from 45 Special units, 47 affected parents' and 63 SNE teachers in special units. 3 education officers and 2 special schools were picked purposively. Questionnaires, observation and Interview schedules were used as the main tools of collecting data. A pilot study was carried out in one EARC in the neighbouring Nandi County at an interval of two weeks in order to ensure that the instruments were without ambiguities and that they solicited the intended responses. The researcher used the internal consistency technique to test reliability of instruments in investigating the level of support mechanism offered to assessment centres. The researcher then used Cronbach's coefficient Alpha methods to compute how items correlate among themselves. Validity relates to precision and accuracy, therefore the standard deviation and the error term were to be determined within the sample to ensure that there was minimal variance. This was done through piloting. Descriptive statistics employed included mean, standard deviation, frequencies while inferential statistics were basically the correlations and ANOVA test.

Findings

Professional Qualification of Assessors

The study sought to establish the professional qualification of the assessors as illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Professional qualification of assessors

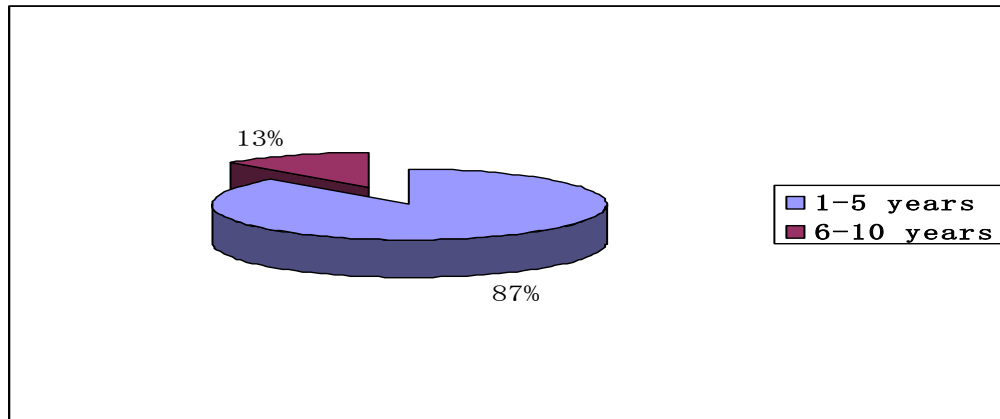


The level of professional qualification of assessors varied during the study indicated that {75%} of the assessors were degree holders, {12.5%} had a master's degree and {12.5%} had a P1 professional certificate which is also the minimum qualification for employment as a primary school teacher. The findings revealed that most of the assessors had high qualifications an aspect that enhanced assessment of SNE children before placement. The success of special needs services and education depends on provision of specialized human and institutional capacity GOK (2009). The findings are in line with those of Dart (2006) which amplified the fact that professional development is particularly important because of the major new challenges that face school assessors today. Assessors have to respond to a greater diversity of student needs amidst resources that are relatively scarce. There is need therefore to build capacities of the assessors through training in response to emerging challenges in special needs.

Experience as an Assessor

It was necessary to establish the work experience of assessors. This was meant to assist the researcher to ascertain the relationship between level of experience and the ability to skillfully assess and its effect on placement of SNE children as shown in figure 2.

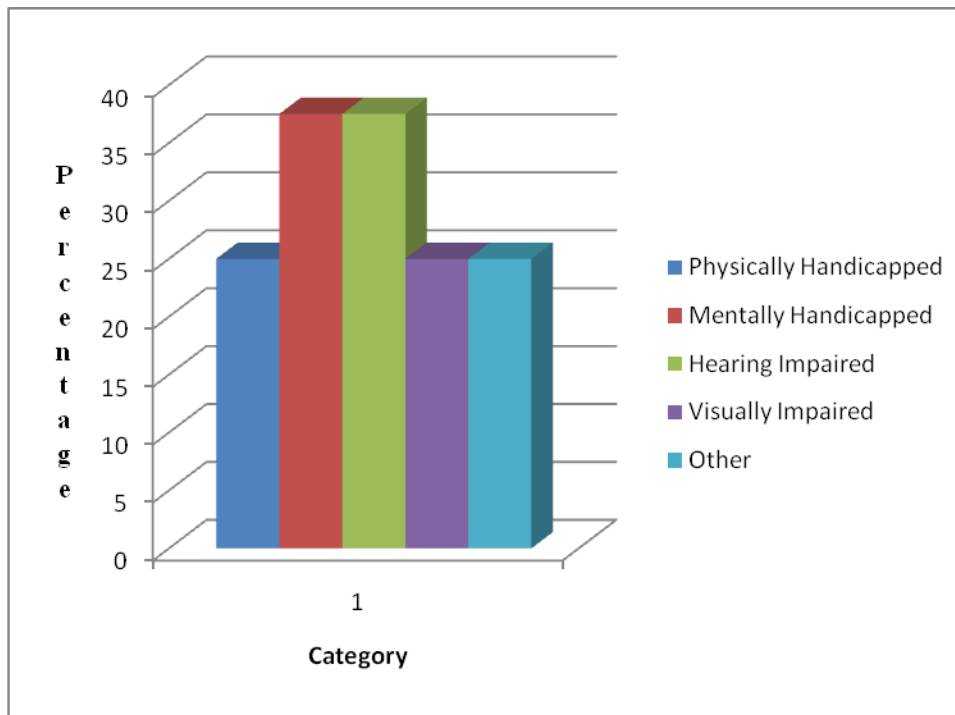
Figure 2: Experience as an assessor



Majority of the assessors {87.5% } had work experiences of less than 5 years while {12.5% } had an experience of between 6 to 10 years. This was attributed to the fact that experienced assessors opted for employment elsewhere leaving inexperienced assessors thus hindering achievement of enhanced placement. This finding correlate well with the GOK (2009) report which stated that SNE assessors do not have an established promotional structure or scheme of service and this could be the reason why many of them opt for other forms of employment with better terms. This calls for a concerted effort on the part of the government to ensure that there is an established scheme of service for SNE personnel so that experienced assessors can be retained to carry out assessment.

Courses Undergone

The study sought to find out from assessors the special education categories they had specialized in as summarized in the figure 3.

Figure 3: Area of Specialization

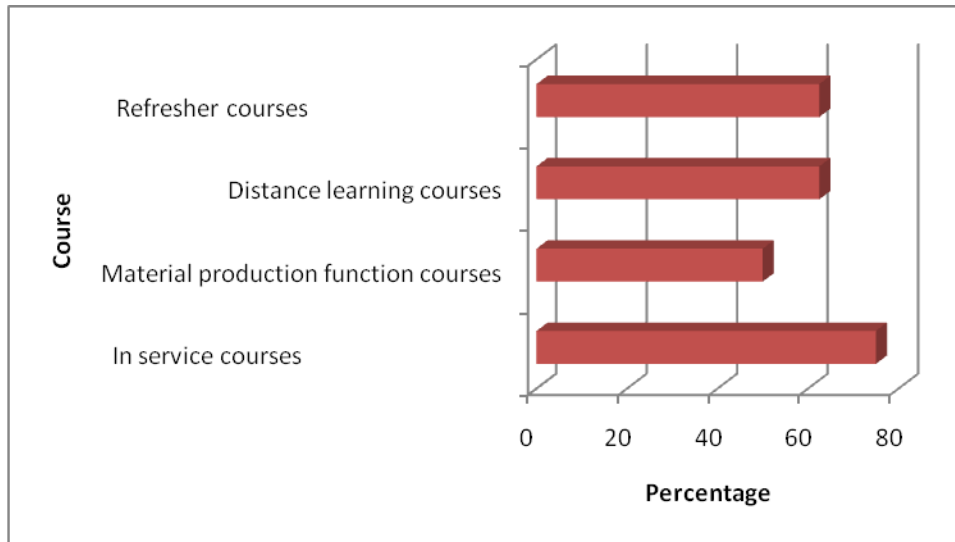
The findings revealed that {37.5%} of the assessors had specialized in hearing and visually handicapped categories while {25%} specialized in mental, physical and other categories. This is way below average {50%} and also worrying given that the success of special needs services and education depends on provision of specialized human and institutional capacity. This implied that the assessors were not in a position to handle assessment of children with different handicaps since they had not undergone all the courses and this could result in many children either being left out of the school system or being placed wrongly.

The assessors are key persons in carrying out assessment and placement and it should be mandatory that all of them specialize in all the SNE categories so that children with special needs can get the required attention. This mirrors the governments report GOK (2009); Drudy et al (2009); Nutbrown (2004) assertions that on-going professional development of assessors is a key factor in acquisition of the knowledge, skills and experiences necessary for working with SNE children. There is a great need for assessors to specialize in all categories of SNE given that there is a shift towards inclusive education requiring that they can be posted to work in special school, unit or regular schools.

Usefulness of Courses Attended

The study sought to establish the usefulness of courses the assessors had attended in the last four years as illustrated in figure 4

Figure 4: Usefulness of Courses

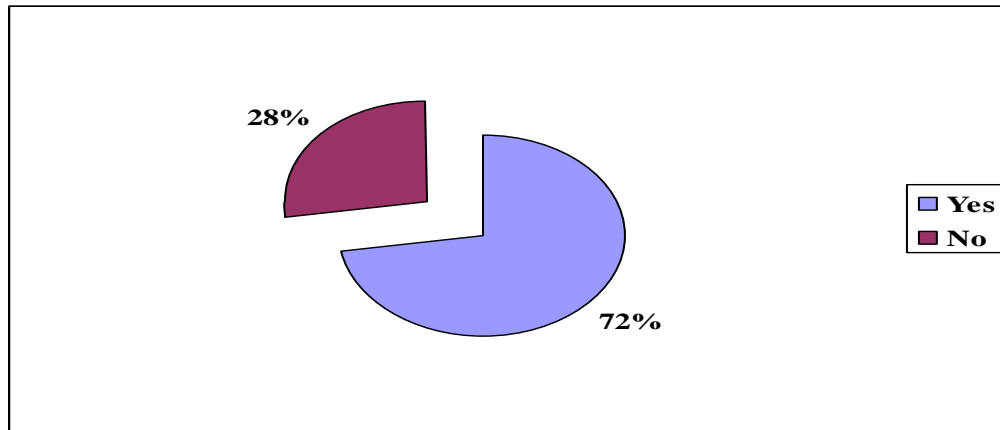


The assessors rated the usefulness of each course attended in the last four years as follows: In service courses {75%}, Material production function courses {50%}, Distance learning and Refresher courses {62.5%}. From the findings, it was revealed that there were assessors who had not undergone any courses since training. Those assessors who had undergone any one of the courses indicated that they were useful and this therefore, calls for provision of opportunities for more staff development to respond to a greater diversity of student needs. Dart (2006); Koutrouba (2008) underscore the importance of professional development in a world where systems are becoming more inclusive, and specialised staff are required to respond to a greater diversity of student needs.

Efficiency of Assessment Centre

The affected parents gave their responses regarding the attention they receive at the assessment centres to be varied as shown in the figure 5.

Figure 5: Efficiency of Assessment Centre

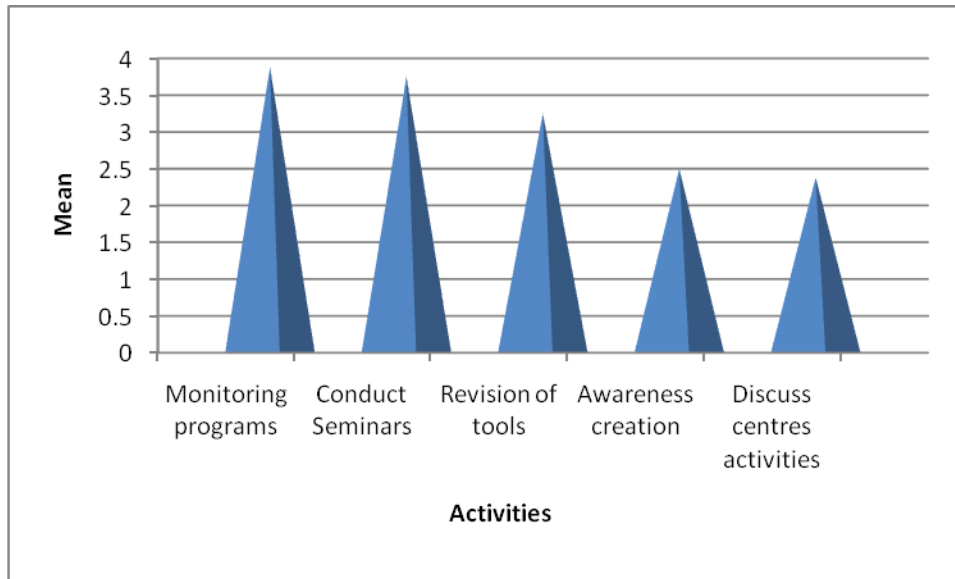


The figure illustrates that {72%} of the affected parents felt they were not accorded required attention at assessment centres while {28%} felt they were treated well. A statistic of {72%} in terms of inefficiency and ineffectiveness does not augur well for the assessment centres. There is need to incorporate the views of the affected parents who felt the assessment centres were not effective and efficient given that they are major stakeholders and their contribution to the success of SNE is crucial. O'Connor et al (2005); Ferguson (2007) urge that assessment process should be carried out in consultation with all affected parents and that when families get involved in their children's assessment and education, the students achieve more, stay in school longer and engage in school more completely.

Activities of Assessors

Activities carried out by assessors were measured based on several variables. Likert scale was used with responses: 1; Very Often, 2; Often, 3; Average, 4; Rare, 5; Very Rare. The mean was then computed as shown in figure 6.

Figure 6: Activities of assessors



With regard to monitoring of SNE programmes half the assessors had responses that were centrally located (mean 3.88) whereas the rest had divergent opinions as indicated by the high standard deviation (.991). In so far as revision of assessment tools was concerned half the respondents had the same responses whereas the rest had varied responses as revealed by the high standard deviation (1.488). There was similarity (mean 2.8) in a few of the respondents' opinions regarding seminars being held for the stakeholders whereas the majority had divergent opinions as indicated by the high standard deviation (1.246). From the above findings the high and varied standard deviations were strong indicators that there was no common approach to rating activities of the assessors.

In general this implied that if enhanced placement was to be achieved, then there was need to compliment the activities of the assessors at the centres by increasing the level of support offered by all the relevant stakeholders. This concurs with GOK (2005) report which emphasized the role played by development partners and other actors in the education sector in facilitating early identification, assessment and placement of learners with special needs and disabilities as well as provide the resources and services which are integral to early identification, assessment and intervention of children with special needs education.

Multiple Regression analysis was carried out using a model, which combines selected independent variables with enhanced placement being the dependent variable. Variables such as

qualification of assessors, assessment tools and support determine the nature of relation with dependent variable (enhanced placement) as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.582	.782		.893	.243
	Assessment tools	1.045	.652	.648	.735	.175
	Qualifications of assessors	.055	.156	.105	1.111	.686
	Awareness/support	.482	.277	.744	.737	.233

a. Predictors: (Constant), assessment tools; qualifications of assessors; awareness/support

b. Dependent Variable: appropriate placement

The table above shows the estimates of β values and gives an individual contribution of each predictor to the model. The β value shows the relationship between the dependent variable (appropriate placement) with each predictor (assessment tools, qualifications of assessors and awareness creation/support). The positive β values indicate the positive relationship between the predictors. The β value for qualifications of assessors, awareness creation and assessment tools were positive indicating a positive relationship. The model was then specified as:-

$$AP = .582 + .648AT + .105A + .744AS + \varepsilon$$

Where:

AP-Appropriate placement

AT- Assessment tools

A- Assessment

AS-Awareness and support

ϵ - Error

The t test was used as a measure to identify whether the predictors were making a significant contribution to the model. The smaller the value of significance the larger the value of t . This implies that the contribution of that predictor is greater. The t results for the individual regression coefficients were assessment tools $t = .735$, qualification of assessors $t = 1.111$, awareness creation/support $t = .737$. The regression coefficients for the variables indicate that the (predictors assessment tools, qualification of assessors, awareness creation/support made a fairly above average but statistically positive contribution to the dependant variable (appropriate placement) as indicated by the values of t .

Regarding relationship between qualification of assessors and appropriate placement the results revealed that qualifications of assessors indeed a weak but positive effect on placement and therefore the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between qualification of assessors and appropriate placement was rejected. The findings are in line with those of Dart (2006) which amplified the fact that professional development is particularly important because of the major new challenges that face school assessors today. There is need therefore to build capacities of the assessors through training in response to emerging challenges in special needs.

It was also revealed that there is a relationship between awareness creation/support and appropriate placement and hence the rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between awareness and support of stakeholders and appropriate placement. This implied that there is statistically significant relationship between awareness and support of stakeholders and appropriate placement. This concurs with GoK (2005) report which emphasized the role played by development partners and other actors in the education sector in facilitating early identification, assessment and placement of learners with special needs and disabilities as well as provides resources and services which are integral to early identification, assessment and intervention of children with special needs education

Summary of findings

In relation to building capacities of assessors the findings indicated that it was way below average {50%} and also worrying given that the success of special needs services and education depends on provision of specialized human and institutional capacity. It was revealed that the majority of the assessors {87.5%} had work experiences of less than 5 years while {12.5%} had an experience of between 6 to 10 years. In relation to courses attended the findings revealed that {37.5%} had specialized in hearing and visually handicapped categories while {25%} specialized in mental, physical and other categories. This implied that the assessors were not in a position to handle assessment of children with different handicaps given that they had not undergone all the courses and this could result in many children either being left out of the school system or being placed wrongly due to incompetence. The findings run contraare to those of Dart (2006) which amplified the fact that professional development is particularly important because of the major new challenges that face school assessors today. There is need therefore to build capacities of the assessors through training in response to emerging challenges in special needs.

Conclusion

Since the EARCs were established they have had a big impact on special education services in Kenya in terms of many children being assessed and placed appropriately for early intervention and many affected parents being reached through public barazas, church meetings and hospitals. However, there are challenges being experienced by the government in its effort to provide accessible and equitable education for children with special needs who have not been assessed and placed in the appropriate programmes. This is revealed by inadequate assessment tools, inadequacy among teachers to handle children with special needs and low levels of advocacy for the rights of these children. These findings revealed that the country is still far from achieving education for all as attested by the fact that over 1.8 children with SNE have not been assessed and placed in appropriate programmes despite the governments' effort of setting up EARCs in all the districts with the aim of taking the services closer to people (GOK 1999, 2002-2008, 2009). If the necessary interventions are not taken up by the relevant stakeholders then attainment of Education for all and Millennium Development goals will remain a pipe dream especially for children with special needs.

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