


Chapter 14

An Examination of Enablers, Barriers, Challenges, and Interventions in Kenya's Diverse Classrooms: Navigating Inclusion

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the enablers, barriers, challenges and educational interventions in varied classrooms in Kenya. Kenya has undergone substantial changes compelling the introduction of numerous legal reforms, policy frameworks and interventions designed to address the diverse needs of learners particularly those from marginalized groups, children with disabilities and students dealing with socioeconomic challenges. This chapter will focus on the execution of special needs education (SNE) programs, teacher professional development programs, use of assistive technology, community-based inclusive education (CBIE) projects and school infrastructure improvements. The learning experiences highlighted will allow for understanding how teachers and students in Kenya identify, assess and improve inclusive education

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Kenya has diverse classrooms that are a reflection of the diversity of the Kenyan population. Diversity in terms of ethnic/tribal, language, religion, socioeconomic background, culture, among others. Kenya has over forty-five (45) ethnic groups, several religious groups, variable financial statuses and other differences which influence its educational system. Among the student population there is an ethnic makeup of Kisiis, Luos, Kambas, Kikuyus, Maasai, Kipsigis among others that is a mirror image of the ethnic communities in Kenya. Each and every tribe exhibit its own distinctive customs, worldviews, cultural practices., traditions, language etc. To celebrate this diverse heritage, teachers must create inclusive learning environment that respect and appreciate the differences. Kenya has two official languages

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namely English and Kiswahili which are used in schools however the ethnic languages are also used amongst students especially in rural areas. Teachers encounter language barrier because these students use multiple ethnic languages which affects the performance of students and may be problem to the teachers. Multilingualism can be improved through cultural consciousness and perceptive flexibility. Students in these classrooms also come from different religious affiliations such as Seventh Day Adventists, Muslims, protestants, Roman Catholics, Legio Maria Hindus, Buddhism, Orthodox, Judaism, and other traditional African religious backgrounds in Kenya.

Classrooms in Kenya have students who come from wealthy and poor families, rural and urban areas and different genders. It is believed that schools in urban centers have better and adequate amenities as opposed to rural schools. The Government has tried through its various programs like free basic education, free sanitary towel program, free lunch to reduce inequities and improve gender parity in classrooms. Policies such as Special Needs Education Framework supports and integrates children with disabilities therefore attesting that many classrooms in Kenya offer exceptional chances to encourage inclusivity and respect for all in a diversified community.

The idea of inclusive education is a basic human rights that continues to face intricate and changing hurdles, in numerous countries including Kenya. Kenya has been struggling with providing equitable and high quality education to all children such as those with disabilities, those from low income families and those living in rural and conflict affected areas. There are extensive obstacles affecting the complete involvement of a majority of students in mainstream classrooms regardless of the policy developments and the acceptance of inclusive education frameworks. As such educational interventions such as infrastructure development, community participation, teacher training programs, national and institutional policies and addition of assistive technologies become essential in addressing these obstacles so that all children can access equitable and high quality education.

All nations including Kenya, make every effort to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 that calls for universal access to inclusive and equitable and high quality education, have implemented the policies and programs that aim at integrating children with special needs and those from low income families, underrepresented groups at local, regional and national levels. UNESCO (2020) contends that all students should have access to high quality education regardless of the socio-economic background, cultural background or ability which encourages diversity in Kenyan classrooms. In Kenya, legal and policy frameworks such as Basic Education Act of 2013 and Special Needs Education Policy of 2009 have been implemented to support its inclusive education policy and remove obstacles for intervention initiatives. Other interventions include teacher training and development at public and private institutions like Teacher Service Commission (TSC), Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE), teacher colleges and universities offer programs that embrace inclusive practices, the problem still continues as lots of teachers are not sufficiently equipped with the skills essential to meet the various requirements of learners.

Inclusivity can be further supported through usage of assistive technologies such as digital tools, braille materials, hearing aids and e-learning platforms which are enablers. But there is still insufficient incorporation and approval of these technologies in rural and underserved areas. Community-based programs are also critical in dealing with the challenges of inclusion. For example, the Sauti Kuu Foundation has effectively carried out community –based inclusive education initiatives in both informal urban and rural settings. The infrastructure upgrades in facilitating inclusive education is yet another intervention that tries to eradicate physical obstacles such as inaccessible school buildings, poor sanitary amenities and shortage of appropriate resources. These efforts are however thwarted by logistical and financial challenges.

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