

EFFECTIVENESS OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RUIRU AND RARIEDA SUB COUNTIES, KENYA

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Abstract

This paper conducted a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of SNEP implementation on access in public secondary schools in Ruiru and Rarieda Sub Counties, Kenya. Education is a fundamental human right and plays a crucial role in imparting knowledge and skills that enable beneficiaries to function as agents of economic and social change. The SNE policy was introduced in Kenya in 2009 as a strategy to address the needs of learners with disabilities in the education sector. Despite the implementation of the SNE policy, significant improvement in the provision of education to SNLs in terms of access has yet to be realized in the Ruiru and Rarieda sub-counties. The study adopted the causal-comparative research design. A sample of 10 principals, 82 SNLs and 57 teachers were selected using purposive, stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling techniques. Data was collected using the Principals' Interview Guide, Teachers and Special Needs Learners Questionnaires and an Observation Checklist. The reliability of the teachers' and students' questionnaires was estimated and found to be 0.835 and 0.799, respectively. The findings showed that the difference in the effectiveness of SNE policy in promoting SNLs' access to education between the Rarieda and Ruiru sub-counties was statistically significant, $t(42) = 2.075, p = .044$. The study concluded that improvements in SNLs' access to education in Ruiru were higher than in Rarieda. The study recommends that the government create awareness among stakeholders of opportunities for education for PLWDs created by the SNE policy.

Key terms: Comparative analysis, education policy, effectiveness, implementation, special needs.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The SNE policy, introduced in Kenya in 2009, was designed to address the unique needs of learners with disabilities in the education sector. It aimed to provide clear guidance and create awareness among education stakeholders about these unique needs. The policy framework targeted key areas such as assessment and intervention, access to quality and relevant education, conducive environment, health and safety, specialized facilities and technology, inclusive education, curriculum development, capacity building and development, participation and involvement, advocacy and awareness creation, partnership and collaboration, gender mainstreaming in SNE, research and documentation, disaster preparedness, resource mobilization, and guidance and counselling. The development of this policy was a critical step towards providing education to SNLs in Kenya, but its success ultimately depends on its implementation.

Implementation refers to executing a decision or plan (Khan, 2016). Regarding government policies, implementation is where various agencies and departments responsible for respective policy areas are formally accountable for actualizing related policy actions (Bullock & Lavis, 2019). The key players in the implementation of SNE policy are the government itself through the Ministry of Education, KISE, School Boards of Management, and education stakeholders such as Faith-Based Organizations (FBO), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and development partners (Kiru, 2018).

The success of a policy implementation is often expressed in terms of realising its objectives. With regard to SNE policy, they include advocacy and awareness creation, conducive environment, promotion of access and inclusive education, specialized facilities and technology, adjustments in curriculum among others (Ireru et al., 2020). Despite the implementation of SNE policy, Kenya still experiences challenges and barriers that curtail access to educational opportunities for students with disabilities (KISE, 2018). According to Chomba et al. (2014), the challenges experienced during the implementation of the policy were inadequate physical facilities and instructional materials modified to accommodate the needs of PLWDs, curriculum and assessment. This suggests that the policy was ineffective in promoting SNLs' access to education, inclusion in regular secondary schools and professional training of SNE teachers.

Inclusion was one of the strategies for enhancing the education provision to SNLs advanced by the SNE policy. Inclusion in education refers to an approach where learners and trainees with disabilities are given appropriate educational interventions within regular learning institutions with proper accommodations and support (RoK, 2018). It is about adjusting learning institutions so that everyone, regardless of their differences, can have a chance to interact, play, learn, work, experience the feeling of belonging, and experiment to develop their potential and difficulties (RoK, 2009). It entails adjustments in school environments to accommodate SNLs in terms of physical facilities, instructional materials, classroom management, content delivery and assessment (Mbiti, 2021).

Studies on the effectiveness of policies in the promotion of the inclusion of SNLs in regular learning institutions have generated mixed results. ElZein (2009) found that parents in Lebanon felt that providing their children with inclusive education was equivalent to providing high-quality education to their children, similar to that given to students without disabilities. Hayes and Bulat (2017) noted that funding and lack of resources for inclusive education were significant challenges in Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Damiani et al. (2021) noted that Kenya had made considerable progress in the provision of

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inclusive education, as evidenced by national and international instruments, policies, and statements related to inclusive education, resource allocation and professional training of SNE teachers. Manzi (2011) noted a need for awareness creation among local communities, a curriculum for pupils with special needs, a clear policy framework for implementing SNE, training of teachers and funds for the inclusive education programme. These mixed results imply that there were areas for improvement in the SNE policy implementation with regard to the successful inclusion of SNLs in regular schools.

Successful implementation of the SNE programme requires the services of various professionals who can assist in identifying, referring, and providing education to persons with disabilities (RoK, 2019). The lack of trained teachers who can handle SNLs in learning institutions remains the biggest challenge of all in the spectrum of integrating students with disability in regular schools (UNESCO, 2011). Another challenge is that secondary school teachers are trained to teach either general education or special education (Mabele, 2019). This practice has led to the training of teachers who need the necessary skills to teach SNLs in an inclusive setting. This explains why professional training was one of the objectives of SNE policy.

Kinuthia (2018) defines training as facilitating a trainee's acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes towards a discipline through a well-structured study and instruction programme. Teacher training in Kenya falls under the following categories: early childhood development and education (ECDE), primary, diploma, and graduate teacher education (Tabot & Too, 2017). Teacher training can also be done through less formal activities such as workshops, seminars, and conferences (MoE, 2009). Teacher training colleges and universities offer these programmes, which awards one with a certificate, diploma, or degree.

Professional development ensures teachers can manage and teach SNLs in an inclusive environment (Donath et al., 2023). Daniela and Ecaterina (2022) noted that many teachers were trained with no expectation of having students with disability in their classes, making related policy implementation a nightmare. Yuwono and Okech (2021) found that curriculum design and large classes with SNLs posed a severe challenge to primary school teachers in Uganda who are not well trained. Tabot and Too (2017) concluded that integrating SNE into the primary teacher education curriculum needed improvement to provide SNE skills to teacher trainees. Longore et al. (2023) study noted that very little SNE content is covered during primary school teacher training. These challenges affect the effectiveness of the SNE policy and call for remedial measures if its objectives are to be realized.

This background shows that the SNE policy aimed to enhance education provision to SNLs. It also indicates that implementation of the policy has not been effective, as evidenced by the unsatisfactory achievement of its objectives, such as the low number of SNLs who have access to education, inadequate provision of resources and unsatisfactory adjustments in regular schools to accommodate the needs of SNLs and shortage of trained SNE teachers. The background further shows that Rarieda and Ruiru were among the sub-counties experiencing problems implementing the policy. This study compared the effectiveness of SNE policy implementation in public secondary schools in Ruiru and Rarieda sub-counties, Kenya. The two sub-counties have contrasting demographic composition; Rarieda had a population of 134 558, whereas Ruiru had 371,518. In addition, Rarieda had a disability rate of (4.2%) while Ruiru's rate was (1.2 %). Ruiru is peri-urban and cosmopolitan, whereas Rarieda is rural and has many public day secondary schools. Despite differences in the demographic compositions and disability rates, the two sub-counties have a joint shared mandate and effective implementation of SNE policy. These two sub-counties,

therefore, provide an ideal setting for an intra-national comparative study to determine the effectiveness of the SNE policy implementation, specifically concerning SNLs' access to education, inclusion, and professional training of teachers.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is essential in individual lives since it equips them with knowledge and skills and assists them in developing mentally, socially and spiritually so that they are all-round persons (Lessa et al., 2018). It also improves the ability of individuals to utilize and preserve the environment for productive gain and sustainable livelihood (Brown, 2020). Further, education plays a significant role in nations' socio-economic and political development (Nyenze, 2016). Behlol et al. (2019) contend that the progress and prosperity of a country depend upon the quality of education maintained by its educational institutions.

Secondary school education is geared towards equipping learners with knowledge, skills and attitudes to meet the needs of students who end their education after secondary school and those who proceed to higher education (Mackatiani et al., 2023). Secondary school education is critical first because it provides insights, skills, and competencies for economic growth and national development (Lessa et al., 2018). Secondly, at this level, youngsters consolidate the basic knowledge they gained in primary school and acquire cultures that will allow them to be valuable citizens.

Mutungi (2018) found that most schools needed appropriate and adequate teaching-learning materials and physical facilities, thus disadvantaging several learners with special needs in society. Long'ore et al. (2023) noted that the government's financial support for special needs education was untimely inadequate. A study by Chitiyo et al. (2019) indicated that teachers felt inadequately prepared to teach students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. These studies (Mbiti, 2021; Muhombe et al., 2015; Nanyama & Bota, 2019) suggest that the SNE policy has not been effective, given the limited success in the achievement of its objectives. This calls for an inquiry that examines its effectiveness.

Effectiveness is the degree to which something is successful in producing the desired results (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). In the context of this paper, effectiveness is expressed in terms of how successful the SNE policy was in promoting SNLs' access to education. Muhombe et al. (2015) conducted a study on the effectiveness of the Special Needs Education policy on access to secondary school education by learners with hearing impairments in Nandi County. The findings showed that most respondents were aware of the SNE policy framework of 2009 and believed that it was being implemented. The majority of the respondents also felt that policy implementation had positively affected learners' enrolment and transition in schools, but its effect on retention was marginally small. The findings further showed that there were cases of learners dropping out of school due to financial problems, lack of motivation to be in school, and cultural factors.

The literature review of this theme reveals that efforts have been made to promote access to education through policy frameworks such as FPE, awareness campaigns, provision of facilities and other initiatives. Some progress in promoting access to education has been witnessed in Indonesia (Kurniawan & Rofiah, 2018), India (Limaye, 2016), Nandi (Muhombe et al., 2015) and Mombasa (Mbiti, 2021). However, SNLs' access to education still needs to improve across all levels of education in Kenya and sub-counties such as Ruiru and Rarieda (Onsomu et al., 2022). Access to education by SNLs is one of the objectives of the SNE

policy. Its unsatisfactory implementation could explain the lack of SNLs' access to education in the two sub-counties. Studies done elsewhere have shown that inadequate policy improvement can derail the realization of its objectives (Kiriba, 2020). An examination of published works reveals a need for more literature with regard to the evaluation of the effectiveness of SNE policy in enhancing SNLs' access to education in Ruiru and Rarieda. Filling this literature gap was one of the motivators of this study.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the causal-comparative research design. This design identifies cause-effect relationships between independent and dependent variables or examines the consequences or causes of differences among or between groups (Shongwe, 2022). It is recommended to identify and analyse causal relationships between variables in situations where variables are not manipulated and examine existing differences between or among groups to derive causes (Higuera, 2023). The design was deemed appropriate because this study did not involve any manipulation of variables.

Data was gathered using the Principals' Interview Guide (PIG), Teacher Questionnaire (TQ), Special Needs Learners Questionnaire (SNLQ) and an Observation Check List (OCL). The questionnaire was chosen because it is efficient, economical, practical, and allows for the use of a large sample (Eduwem & Ekoiso, 2021). Zelt et al. (2018) contend that the instrument is ideal for surveying people who are dispersed over a wide geographical area where travelling demands on the researcher would be excessive. The interview guide was chosen because conducting interviews utilizes less time and minimizes bias and subjectivity (Doody & Noonan, 2017).

Three respondents were involved in this study: principals, teachers and SNLs. All 10 principals and 82 SNLs took part in the study, meaning that the census method was used to select them. The number of teachers who participated in the study was determined using Kerlinger's formulae (Kerlinger, 1983), which recommends 30% of the accessible population. Given that the accessible population of the teachers was 189, the sample size of this group was:

$$n = 30/100 \times 189$$

$$n = 57 \text{ (rounded up to a full number)}$$

Stratified proportionate sampling was used to determine the number of teachers in each sub-county using Thompson's (2002) formula. The formula is:

$$n_h = n \frac{N_h}{N}$$

Where

h was the stratum

n was the sample size,

n_h was the subsample for each stratum,

N_h was the population of the stratum

N was the accessible population.

For example, the number of teachers that were drawn from Ruiru was calculated as follows:

$$57 \times \frac{53}{189} = 16 \text{ teachers.}$$

$$189$$

The number of teachers drawn from Rarieda was 41, given that 16 were from Ruiru. At the sub-county level, the number of teachers from each school was also determined using stratified proportionate

sampling. Lastly, simple random sampling methods were used at the school level to choose those who participated in the study. Table 1 presents the sample distribution.

Table 1: Distribution of the Samples Population by Sub County

Respondent	Sub county		Total
	Ruiru	Rarieda	
Principal	3	7	10
Teacher	16	41	57
SNL	15	67	82

Data files were prepared using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) computer application, and the coded data was keyed into them. The files were cleaned by correcting data entry errors, labelling missing data and deleting implausible values. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages and means were used to summarize and describe data. A comparison of access to special needs education learners by Sub County was conducted using the t-test at a .05 level of significance. The t-test was selected because it is recommended for comparing means measured at intervals or ratio scales of two independent sample groups (Pallant, 2016). Data generated by the open-ended items were organized in themes pertinent to the study objectives and summarized using frequencies and percentages.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The teachers were asked to rate how the implementation of the SNE policy had been successful in promoting SNLs' access to education. The participants' responses to the items were scored, and their means were computed and transformed to an overall mean score of effectiveness for each sub-county, as shown in the table below. These results indicate that the teachers, students, and principals felt that some progress had been made in enhancing SNLs' access to education as a result of the implementation of the SNE policy.

Table 2: Mean scores of items on the effectiveness of Implementation of SNE policy in Promoting SNLs Access to Education

Objectives	Ruiru n = 12		Rarieda (n = 32)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Integrating Special Needs Learners in Regular Classes	2.75	0.75	2.28	0.85
Adopting a curriculum that is sensitive to the needs of Special Needs Learners	2.67	1.07	2.34	0.97
Developing physical infrastructure for Special Needs Learners	2.75	1.29	2.56	1.13
Acquiring instructional facilities for Special Needs Learners	2.42	1.16	2.28	0.85
Enrolling Special Needs Learners in school at the right age	2.58	1.08	2.91	1.20

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Adopting instructional strategies that suit the needs of Special Needs Learners	2.42	0.90	2.19	0.78
Ensuring regular class attendance by Special Needs Learners	3.25	1.22	2.50	0.95
Promoting active participation in learning by Special Needs Learners in the classroom	2.83	1.03	3.19	0.82
Creating a conducive environment where Special Needs Learners can study	3.17	1.03	2.56	0.95
Enhancing Special Needs Learners progression rates	3.17	0.94	2.44	0.98
Reducing drop-out rates among Special Needs	2.67	1.37	3.28	1.11
Promoting Special Needs Learners participation in co-curriculum activities	2.83	0.72	2.63	1.07
Increasing the completion rates of Special Needs Learners	3.08	1.16	2.97	1.20
Overall mean	2.81	0.31	2.63	0.25

The results indicate that the item mean scores of Ruiru were between 2.42 (SD = 0.90) and 3.25 (SD = 1.22), while those of Rarieda ranged from 2.19 (SD = 0.78) to 3.28 (SD = 1.11). The mean scores of items such as ensuring regular class attendance by SNLs' (M = 3.25, SD = 1.22), ensuring regular class attendance by SNLs" (M = 3.17, SD = 1.03) and enhancing SNLs' progression rates' (M = 3.17, SD = 0.94) for Ruiru were moderately high given that they were measured out of 5. Similarly, 'reducing drop-out rates among SNLs' (M = 3.28, SD = 1.11) and 'promoting active participation in learning by SNLs in the classroom for Rarieda also posted moderately high mean scores. This implies that the implementation of the SNE policy made the learning environment more conducive to SNLs, promoted their active participation in learning and boosted their progression and completion rates in both sub-counties. These results concur with those of Limaye (2016), who showed that implementing PLWD policies and programmes had improved their access to education. Limaye's study showed that 25 per cent of PLWDs had received education up to the primary school level, 11 per cent had middle level (eight years), and 9 per cent had attended school for nine or more years.

The results further show that the overall mean scores for Ruiru (M = 2.81, SD = 0.31) and Rarieda (M = 2.63, SD = 0.25) were low, given that a 5-point scale was used. This is an indication that implementation of SNE policy still face challenges and has not been very successful in promoting SNLs access to education. These findings are in harmony with those of Mbiti (2021) which found that policies such as SNE policy, Free Primary Education (FPE) and Subsidized Secondary Education (SSE) had enabled many children with physical disabilities to access and be retained in schools. However, there were several factors which hindered access and retention of learners with

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disabilities, such as inadequate financial support, lack of assistive devices, environmental and architectural modifications, qualified enough teachers and other personnel and poverty at the household level.

The teachers equally identified several benefits associated with implementation of the SNE policy. Among these were creating opportunities to provide SNLs with education in regular schools (38.6%), construction of appropriate infrastructure (29.5%) and adopting teaching-learning that meets the needs of SNLs (20.5%). On the other hand, the SNLs felt the implementation of SNE policy had provided them with equal opportunity to learn (41.8%), giving them opportunities to fully participate in co-curriculum activities (28.4%) and work as a team in class (17.9%) among others. The principal also indicated that they believed that the implementation of the SNE policy had enhanced SNLs' access to education. They based these views on the fact that implementation of the policy had improved stakeholders' awareness of funding, construction of appropriate physical facilities, provision of teaching-learning materials, and capacity to enrol and support SNLs through the secondary school cycle.

On challenges faced during implementation of the SNE policy that hinder SNLs' access to education. The SNLs identified a lack of skilled personnel (36.4%), inadequate infrastructure (27.3%) and a low level of awareness among stakeholders (18.2%) as some of the main challenges. These results imply that lack of understanding and inadequate resources were the main obstacles to the enhancement of SNLs' access to education. The principals also revealed that implementation of the SNE policy had yet to be able to address resource inadequacies. The data further revealed that besides resource inadequacies, there were socio-economic challenges associated with perceptions of PLWDs and the inability of their families to support them, late enrolment, high dropouts, transition and completion rates.

These results show that lack of awareness, inadequate resources, social economic challenges, and wastage were the main bottlenecks to SNLs' access to education. Similar observations were made by Mbiti's (2021) study. The study noted that several factors still hindered access and retention of learners with disabilities despite the implementation of related policies and programmes. The factors included inadequacy of financial support, lack of assistive devices, proper environmental and architectural modifications, qualified enough staff and poverty at the household level. It means that these obstacles to the implementation of the SNE policy need to be addressed by the government and school managers for enhanced SNLs' access to education.

Regarding the improvement in access to education, the teachers were of the opinion that more staff should be employed (40.9%) and appropriate infrastructure should be constructed (29.6%). They further proposed that SNE policy awareness campaigns be organized (18.2%) and completion rates be boosted (11.4%). The teachers were also of the opinion that improvements in the implementation of SNE policy and SNLs' access to education could be achieved by organizing

awareness campaigns to enhance their acceptance, participation, inclusion and integration in society. Employing more staff with appropriate infrastructure will improve academic, social, communication, and peer relationships.

Suggestions by SNLs on how to strengthen the SNE policy and boost SNLs access to education reveals that availing more facilities (37.3%), strengthening support systems (22.4%), not over protecting SNLs (13.4 %) and organizing SNE policy awareness campaigns for all stakeholders (13.4 %) were the major suggestions made by the students. These results show that proposed ways of improving implementation of the SNE policy and SNLs' access to education revolve around resources, support systems and awareness campaigns. Similar recommendations had been made by Owuor's (2014) study. The study recommended that the Ministry of Education provide additional financial support to facilitate the acquisition of specialized facilities, teaching/learning resources, and staff employment. It also proposed that sensitization programmes which target stakeholders who may still have negative attitudes towards the inclusion of SNLs in regular schools be launched.

Additional analysis was done to differentiate the effectiveness of SNE policy in promoting SNLs' access to education between public secondary schools in Rarieda and Ruiru Sub Counties. The independent sample t-test was used to establish whether the difference in the effectiveness of SNE policy in promoting SNLs' access to education between public secondary schools in Rarieda and Ruiru sub-counties was significant. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Difference in the Effectiveness of SNE Policy in Promoting SNLs' Access to Education between Public Secondary Schools in Rarieda and Ruiru Sub Counties.

Sub-county	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value
Ruiru	12	2.81	0.31	42	2.075	.044*
Rarieda	32	2.63	0.25			

The results in Table 3 above indicate that the mean scores of both Ruiru (M = 2.81, SD = 0.31) and Rarieda (M = 2.63, SD = 0.25) were low, given that the rating was based on a 5-point scale. This means that the implementation of the SNE policy needed more success in addressing SNLs' access to education issues in the two sub-counties. These findings concur with those of KISE (2018), which indicated that 11.4 per cent of children aged between 3 and 21 years in Kenya had special needs and disabilities, and a significant number of these children were enrolled in schools. KISE also noted that the dropout rates among this category of learners were high. The results further show that the difference in the effectiveness of the implementation of SNE policy in promoting SNLs' access to education between the two sub-counties was statistically significant. This indicates that Ruiru promoted SNLs' access to education more than Rarieda. This may be due to the location of the sub-county; Ruiru is peri-urban and located near Nairobi, while Rarieda is

situated in a rural setting. Limaye (2018) noted that SNL's access to education in urban locations is higher than that in rural areas due to differences in socioeconomic conditions.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions: Access to education by SNLs is one of the objectives of the SNE policy (RoK, 2009). These findings show that some improvements in SNL's access to education were realized after the implementation of the SNE policy. The findings further show that Ruiru was more successful in promoting SNLs' access to education than Rarieda despite the challenges encountered. The challenges included factors like inadequate resources and need for more awareness among others. The government and school managers should consider these challenges to effectively implement the SNE policy and enhance SNLs' access to education. Kiriba (2020) argues that unsatisfactory policy implementation can derail the realization of its objectives. The enquiry on comparative analysis of the effectiveness of SNE policy in promoting SNLs' access to education in public secondary schools in Ruiru and Rarieda sub-counties rated Ruiru at 2.81 while those from Rarieda rated it at 2.63 based on a 5 points scale. The test of difference indicated that the effectiveness of SNE policy in promoting SNLs' access to education between Rarieda and Ruiru sub-counties was statistically significant in favour of the Ruiru, $t(42) = 2.075$, $p = .044$.

Recommendations: The study recommended that awareness creation among stakeholders of opportunities for education for PLWDs be enhanced. Promotion of advocacy and sensitization of parents and guardians to take up a more active role in the education of their children should take centre stage. Further recommendations were the mobilization of children with disabilities at the grassroots level, which should go a long way in promoting SNLs' access to education. The curriculum should also be reviewed to ensure that it adequately meets the needs of learners with disabilities by adjusting it according to their needs.

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