

From policy to practice: Inclusion and the education of the deaf child in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper examines and analyses the challenges that inclusive education poses for children who are deaf and school going. Some of the challenges discussed following Antia and Levine (2001), include but are not limited to: Linguistic diversity, procedural differences and language proficiency. We argue in this paper that as far as inclusion is concerned, the school is just a “place” and one of the circumstances where inclusion can be practiced. However, there are also other experiences such as: the home, family, childcare and other socializing cases that cannot be precluded because of their importance. We further argue that to some extent, students who are deaf may still require a special education environment especially, as Rosenqvist & Gustavsson (1993) assert, it is important to maintain some concepts of difference in humans since in one way or another it may reinforce a person’s sense of identity, peculiarity or proficiencies. The lack of recognition of differences, most of the time in an inclusive setup pose numerous challenges. In this paper we strongly advocate for the bi-bi approach (bilingual- bicultural approach), but we also believe that there is need to relook, rethink and evaluate inclusion policies in a flexible way, taking cognizance of the distinction between the “general class or school for all model” and the “special school model” so as to show that there is a place for special schools, and special units within schools. Research must be conducted to develop inclusive education policies that recognize the importance of having a range of schooling options for students with disabilities and in particular students who are deaf.

Keywords: Mainstreaming; Inclusion; Integration; Education of the Deaf

1. Introduction

Inclusive education (I.E.) has been presented as the panacea for all the problems of learners with disabilities in many parts of the world. UN agencies such as UNESCO and others have been in the forefront in advocating for the same. The whole philosophy of I.E. is hinged on human rights through the human rights based approach (HRBA) which started taking precedence after 1977. Prior to that the focus was on the basic needs approach which focused primarily on identifying essential requirements of people and either supporting the capacity to better delivery of service or recommend for the fulfillment of those needs. After 1997, however, there was a shift of paradigm and the focus changed to working towards meeting people’s rights, rather than the needs of beneficiaries. In 1997 the UN programme for reform that sort to incorporate human rights standards and principles into issues affecting people and thus prioritizing human rights as a cross cutting issue was launched.

A statement of common understanding was released in which programming in all socio-economic sectors for example education, health and others were to be guided by human rights principles. This basically meant that development strategies were meant to be as inclusive as possible to benefit all. The distinction between the basic needs approach and the HRBA made the latter more palatable because it became apparent that: When a need is not fulfilled, people will be dissatisfied where as if a right is not respected it gives rise to a violation, and its redress or reparation can by law be

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legitimately claimed. A HRBA also strengthens the capacity of duty bearers (usually governments) to appreciate, defend and assure these rights while at the same time building the capacity of the right holder to be able to claim their rights. A HRBA focuses on the poor and vulnerable groups to ensure their inclusion and empowerment. UNFP [1]

In light of HRBA, education is viewed as a human right, like any other right as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) Article 26 which states that “everyone has the right to education.” Education is thus viewed firstly as a human right and also as a pathway to human development since it plays an important role not only in individual’s lives but also in the life of a nation. UNESCO [2].

The clamour for Education for all (EFA) under which inclusive education can be discussed ought to be seen from this light. It is argued in some quarters that EFA opens frontiers and amplifies chances and freedoms and that it is a contributor to encouraging tranquility, democratic practices and economic growth as well as in the improvement of health and reduction of impoverishment. The main aim of inclusive education or what is also known as Education for All (EFA) is growth that is sustainable. But, the question is has EFA worked in all countries the same way or are there challenges that may be unique to individual countries or that cut across all in as far as inclusion is concerned?

1.1. What is inclusion?

UNESCO, one of the major players in I.E., views inclusion as a way of contending with and reacting to the differences in the needs of all learners increasingly involving them in different cultures and communities and therefore increasing inclusion within the education setup. The aforementioned can be achieved by changing and altering the content, viewpoints, composition and a plan of action which encompasses a familiar foresight which includes children of age brackets that are suitable while also trusting that the state is responsible for educating all children. UNESCO [3]. The above definition of inclusion by UNESCO does not view inclusion as a philosophy or an educational approach solely for children with disabilities, instead it views it as an approach that is important in ensuring children from all marginalized groups – children with disabilities being one such groups achieve their right to education.

Inclusive education generally strengthens education for continued growth, and for it to be lifelong and for all. It also gives access of all levels of society to educational opportunities. UNESCO [4]. Bii and Taylor [5] solidify this broad concept on I.E. when they define it as an education system which considers the measures that must be taken to ensure the provision of relevant education where all children learn together. These two definitions anticipate the support links that are there between the ‘special schools’ and mainstream school systems and that I.E. should include the education systems at all levels, and not just take a school-by-school method.

It appears however that sometimes inclusion as an ideology addresses the education of students with disabilities (SWDs). Seen in this light then, its philosophy is that both students with disabilities and those that are non-disabled learn together in general education classrooms. What this means is that inclusion does not subscribe to the idea of special schools or the separation of students with disabilities from their non- disabled counterparts. This approach in our view does not seem to conform to the concept of inclusion as a product of the human rights based approach (HRBA) to education as articulated in the Salamanca Statement, and represented in the realization of the obligation to endeavour for ‘schools for all’ – or institutions that include everybody, commemorate diversity, assists acquisition of knowledge, and answers to needs of the individual. UNESCO, [6].

The education for all or “school for all” approach, envisages schools that adopt the “general classes” model advocated for by (Luckner, Hyde & Power) [7, 8]. They see the “general class” model as part and parcel of the overall inclusion process. This may involve the designing of an inclusive school or the school system at the beginning or it may be made to accommodate and accept all students and to be open-minded and receptive to their differences and personal needs eventually, because “it is simply the fair, ethical and equitable thing to do” Mastropieri & Scruggs [9] or “because it is the right thing to do” Winzer, [10]. For example, learners who are deaf should attend the schools in their locality that they would have attended were it not for the fact that they were deaf. The question that this begs is: are those schools ready to accommodate children who are deaf? This general class model is pitted against the special schools model. The two models, the general class model and the special class model give us the two divides between the pro inclusions vs. the anti- inclusion debates which we will discuss shortly. Before that let us discuss some of the laws internationally and locally that support this concept of I.E

1.2. Legislation that supports IE

The Universal declaration of Human Rights covers all the rights that are enjoyed by all people. However, there exists certain groups of people that have customarily been casualties of violations because they are weak and vulnerable and thus need exceptional safeguards for them to equally and effectively enjoy their human rights. There are various human

rights instruments set up to ensure additional safeguards for persons in such groups which include: women and girls; refugees; children; internally displaced persons (IDPs); stateless persons; national minorities; indigenous peoples; migrant workers; persons with disabilities (PWDs); elderly persons; persons with HIV and AIDS and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. This paper however focuses on children with disabilities. Some of the human rights safeguards and important declarations internationally that are used to safeguard the rights of these group and which I.E. emanates from include:

- The International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD),
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
- the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990),
- The UN International Year of Disabled Persons and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (WPA) adopted by the UNGA 1982.
- The United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992).
- The 'Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities' (1983-1992).
- The Millennium Development Goals. Now sustainable development goals.
- The UNESCO Education for All goals
- The UNICEF's 2002-05, Medium-Term Strategic Plan [11] which clearly stated that 'all children have access to and complete an education of good quality' as UNICEF long-term goal,

Locally, there is the Kenyan framework of Education for All, the Kenya government implementation of the Millennium Development Goals now the Sustainable development goals, and the fact that Kenya is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities is also part of the safeguards motioned earlier –Oracha [12]. The Kenyan constitution 2010 is said to one of the most progressive in the world in terms of the bill of rights – chapter 4, which devotes to the principle of equality and non-discrimination. Article 10 outlaws any form of discrimination based on any of specified grounds including but not limited to race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language, birth or disability. Article 43(f) on economic and social rights incorporates the right to education. Article 54 specifically deals with persons with disabilities.

Apart from the constitutional provisions mentioned above, in Kenya the Persons with disabilities Act (2003) also exists [13], article 18 prohibits any person or learning institution from denying any person with disability admission. The special needs of PWDs must always be taken into account by learning institutions. Kenya also developed a Special Needs Education policy to address demanding matters pertaining to the education of learners with disability. The policy was generally geared towards the achievement of the Education for All (EFA) by 2015 in line with the commitments by the Government of Kenya at both the global and national levels. Similarly, the Education Act 2013 profiles the necessity of increasing accessibility, enhancing retentiveness, improving the standards and pertinency of education, strengthening a system of identifying learners with disabilities early and assessing then and ensuring that provision of education provides equal opportunities for Children with Disabilities. Bii and Taylor [14]

1.3. Arguments for and against inclusion

The education of the deaf, which is the concern of this paper, has gone through transformative phases some of them quite controversial. However, the oralism debate on communication modes i.e. Manualism vs. oralism, pits advocates of naturally occurring Sign language or what has come to known as the bilingual-bicultural education vs. advocates of numerous communication modes that use manual coding such as Signing Essential English (SEE). Similarly, one of special types of interventions that the deaf community in Kenya battling with in their education is I.E. Let us examine here the arguments that have been advanced for or against this education intervention known as I.E.

1.3.1. Arguments for inclusion

When learners with disabilities are incorporated into general education classrooms or classrooms that accommodated both learner who are non-disabled with those with disabilities, the following benefits accrue according to Armstrong, [15] among other supporters; it enhances social interaction leading to understanding diversity. It also creates a society that is open minded and which can work and interact with people from different places. It assists teachers to learn new techniques for their own betterment, enhances collaboration between the special education teacher and a co-teachers to deal with areas of the students weaknesses. I.E. gives learners with disabilities a chance to thrive academically away from segregation, It also Increases learner participation and thus reduce exclusion, by ensuring that all learners access a quality education by right. It also brings Children with disabilities into the established social life and learning. Finally, it enhances acceptance and the contribution made to school life by those with disabilities is valued.

The Inclusionists aim at schools becoming agencies for social change, altering the perceptivity of how people from diverse situation view each other. Thus inclusionists have a critical mindset of what they call 'special education.'

1.3.2. Arguments against inclusion

According to the American Institute of Research [16], the following are some of the sentiments against inclusion: it is believed that inclusion changes the learning environment for the non-disabled students. It is feared that when we mix students with disabilities with those who are non-disabled in the general education, they (disabled students) will disrupt their learning. Proponents of this view feel that I.E. is expensive to implement. Also, the place of segregated units within schools is a controversial topic that requires serious thought. There is also the debate as to whether what is being advocated for is inclusion or integration. One serious question about the implementation of I.E. is whether teachers have the skills to adapt to inclusive classroom methods, and whether students with most severe disabilities may benefit at all when they placed in regular classrooms.

It is important to be cognizant of the fact that in the general debate on general class or special schools or inclusion vs. special education, a very important aspect of inclusion gets lost and that is the fact that the school is just one of the inclusion experiences and we cannot preclude others such as: the home, family, childcare and other socializing experiences, all of which are important as this paper argues. Bagga, [17] argue that in some countries, the education of the deaf as compared to regular education is perceived differently socially, philosophically, culturally. However, linguistically the status of deafness, sign language and of the deaf communities is recognize. In countries that have adopted a clear cut understanding of people who are deaf and consider them as community with a distinct culture and also a language minority, there isn't much difference in terms of regular or deaf education but for modalities. Apart from schooling it is important to note that inclusion encompasses other range of experiences like the home, family, child care and other interactive encounters that are equally important or more important –Woll, [18]

Therefore, to attain equilibrium, to a certain degree, there is need to segregate schooling of students who are deaf so as to make it more responsive to their special needs – Croyle [19]. Such schools would carry on in the provision of some distinct or specialized education and schooling for students who are deaf. In this way they help enable them prepare for their future endeavors grounded on how they evolve according to their terms, and the use of their indigenous language or first language also referred to as mother tongue – Kenya Sign Language. This greatly contributes to the achievement of a strong perception or what we can call, a Deaf identity, Bat-Chava, [20]. This requires the development of inclusive education policies that acknowledge how important it is to have a range of options for students with disabilities in terms of their schooling.

After all not everyone is thrilled with the idea of integrating students with disabilities into the mainstream classroom environment, Tornillo. [21]. Tornillo, further argues that inclusion, as it is too often executed, does not cater for the provision of classroom teachers with the necessary resources or means, pedagogy, and any other reinforcement necessary to enable them impart knowledge to learners with disabilities in their classrooms. Accordingly, learners with disabilities are not provided with proper, expert attention and care, and at the same time the learning by regular students in such schools is constantly disrupted.

Key issues emerge in this debate include: lack of proper resources, lack of proper training and other forms of support for teachers in mainstream schools, the disruption of regular student's education, ignorance and apathy about inclusion among ministry of education officials, and lack of serious funding for inclusive classroom. The other concern is whether the mushrooming of units for the deaf in regular schools has to do with adding up the numbers so as to get more funding for the regular schools in Kenya. The question we ought to ask here is: which direction is Kenya following? Are we practicing full inclusion, partial inclusion, integration or mainstreaming or some version of all these?

1.4. Integration, mainstreaming and inclusion

1.4.1. Integration

We adopt the definition by Foreman [22] and Ashman and Elkins [23] who define "integration" as a situation where a student attends a more "inclusive" school setting than that of a special school— the student can attend a class in a special school or a class in a regular school.

1.4.2. Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming on the other hand, involves combining learners with disabilities into the same classrooms with their non-disabled counterparts. This can happen at a particular time of the day depending on the learner's skills. At times,

the learners with disability can be made to studying in a separate room with the necessary resources or “self-contained classroom.” This environment is advantageous to the learner since they have a more heart-to-heart or personalized time with their trained special education teachers and aides. Mainstreaming can also be viewed as the act of removing a child from a special education self-contained classrooms and putting him/her into a regular classroom– which is considered the mainstream of schooling. Regular classrooms in this case are considered to be the mainstream while special schools are not. However, Mainstreamed students may feel isolated in regular schools thus the feeling inclusion may not always follow.

1.4.3. Inclusion

Inclusion is more often than not regarded as the result of a process in which a school or schooling system takes care of the personal, social and learning needs of all students. Powers [24] declared “inclusion as an attitude not a place”; since it is possible to “integrate” learners without them feeling “included.” For the successful implementation of inclusion, it is required to “extend the scope of the ordinary school (p. 37)”. In I.E. teachers specialized in special education would be required to attend regular education classrooms for the purpose of assisting the special education students in that environment instead of handling them in their own classrooms in the special schools. Inclusion can be characterized in the following two basic ways:

- Partial inclusion: consists of an educational set up where students with disabilities learn mostly in regular classes and their special needs are evaluated and encouraged, as far as possible, within this set up. Partial inclusion is better described as integration because it provides for limited withdrawal of individuals or groups based on needs and individual programs. Partial inclusion presupposes that training and support services are always available in the school as required.
- Complete inclusion, takes place where all students both those with disabilities and those who are non-disabled learn in the same classroom all the time. Inclusion on these terms is based on the presupposition of a school structure that is different from the normal ordered structure, and a routine which is also far less organized. This model draws inspiration from its concerns for ensuring equality of opportunity and the honest and upright considerations in reference to the education of those with disabilities as determined at Salamanca in 1994. Complete isolation is strongly supported by those involved in rights movements.

Any school set up to cater for students with disabilities or any special educational needs school which may accommodate learners with severe learning disorders, physical disabilities or behavioural problems qualifies to be called a special school. Such schools at times may be specifically designed, staffed and provided with resources to come up with fitting special needs education for children with additional requirements. Special schools educating these students with special educational needs try to address their individual differences and needs.

In Kenya, the general policy is education for all. As to whether this translates into practice especially in the education for children with disabilities (CWD) is another story. From the above distinction between integration, mainstreaming and inclusion it is not clear what education for all for CWD means. In Kenya today, there is the existence of special schools, we don't think inclusion takes place in its pure or full form. What we may have is partial inclusion or integration and a little of mainstreaming here and there. In deaf education, the situation is more complex with the mushrooming of units in almost all regular schools that cater for deaf learners. In this regard then inclusion is more of inclusion of place, whereas it should focus on the programs provided regardless of where it is done. Thus it may be pointless to have a child sit in a regular school classroom while the programs being undertaken are not right. This does not amount to inclusion to the contrary the child may feel left out and thus excluded. I.E. needs to be about inclusion both in place and in inclusive programs. Inclusion has mostly focused on the place where the student is being taught, however, real inclusive programs that also include the kind of programs offered regardless of the place they are offered are the key. It is not always true that when a learner with disabilities is integrated in a regular school, then inclusion is taking place. The programs being used must be right since they matter.

In any case Integration into a regular school for students with disabilities may not benefit all children the same way. For some students, the most advantageous environment, in which they can maximize their learning, could be in a special school. Other students with disabilities may be taught and be able to maximize their learning most appropriately when taught in their homes or a community learning environment or for some in a hospital setting. The most important thing that will determine the future of the student, however, is the standard of the programs offered. According to Hyde & Power, [25], Luckner [26], this leads to some learning institutions or certain school systems to adapt an institutional structure and methods for students who are deaf that can be divided into more “special” and “separate” rather than using the model that places students with disabilities in general classes/regular school which many consider to be the focal point for the whole processes of inclusion. Drawing from experiences involving some people who are deaf and

people who are hard of hearing in integrated schools, the authors below, show that they specifically talked of the loneliness they often felt and how they also felt socially isolated, even if they ended up academically successful eventually. Leigh, [27]; Gregory, Bishop & Sheldon, [28]; Byrnes, et al. [29].

1.5. Challenges deaf learners may face in IE

Anita and Levine [30] list the following as the main issues facing inclusion in the education of learners who are Deaf: language diversity, differences in methodology and language capability.

1.5.1. *Language diversity/differences*

Anita and Levine (op cit), writing in the US context observe that, in a regular integrated school, language diversity creates hurdles to common communication, enculturation, co-education or shared learning and relationship building. This is because most hearing students in such situations communicate using spoken English, whereas their deaf counterparts use American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary language of communication. In Kenya where Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) is the predominant mode of communication for the deaf, mixing deaf students in a regular school would also create the same barriers to shared communication. This would require either all non-hearing impaired students in all the regular schools learn KSL or alternatively all teachers become competent in KSL. Although this would be the easier option given that people who are deaf having lost their hearing faculty cannot make use of their vocal-auditory channel for communication, hearing people have the capacity to learn the visual-gestural language that people who are deaf use for communication. However, the question is how realistic will it be to expect all teachers and workers in an I.E. system to learn Kenyan sign language so as to enable learners who are deaf to achieve shared/common communication, enculturation, collaborative learning and relationship building? Because of their difference in language use, if put together with majority hearing children, deaf children are likely to suffer isolation and to some extent low self-esteem thus socially integration may not be the best option for them. The language issue in I.E. for the deaf is of such significance as summed up by UNESCO, Bangkok [31]: Language has a key role to play in inclusion and it is also central in all human endeavors including how we express and identify ourselves. An acknowledgment of how people value their own languages promotes true participatory development that can achieve results that are truly long lasting.

We cannot therefore ignore the fact that the language of learning in the Kenyan schools is normally English and sometimes Kiswahili both of which are spoken or oral. The deaf on the other hand use KSL which is visual and signed. Schools for the deaf therefore have a paramount role to play in the development (emergency and growth) of KSL. If you remove the schools for the deaf you may also be sounding a death knell to the language. Okombo and Akach [32] argue about the importance of the creation of communities of deaf persons both in the schools and other deaf institutions as the most significant impetus environmentally, for the evolution and advancement of Kenyan Sign Language. Majority of children who are deaf and who are born of parents who are hearing arrive in school with survival signs or home signs and end up being assisted by children who are deaf and also born by deaf parents and who have KSL as their heritage language. KSL is used in the home and helps in generating pride in their identity as well as fostering connections with home and community. Cummins [33]. Within a short time children who are deaf and born by hearing parents are able to transform the home signs they bring to school into a complete language through assistance from children who are deaf and come from a background of deaf parentage. Klima and Bellugi [34] sum up this very well when they indicate that what the learners who are deaf and have deaf parentage bring to schools appears at first as a loose collection of pantomime or gestures however with time and use over generations, it develops into fully-fledged language with a considerable degree of systematic features, which are organized in a hierarchical order that is expect of any human language.

1.5.2. *Modality differences*

Anita and Levine [35] observe that modality differences happen because many learners who are deaf, especially those with acute hearing losses, cannot acquire language (spoken) through the auditory channel or through hearing but they acquire language through a visual channel so as to be able to access English or ASL and other academic subjects. The same is true of KSL vs. English or Kiswahili. English and Kiswahili use acoustically conveyed sound based patterns while Kenyan sign language primarily uses manual communication to transfer meaning. KSL does this by a combination of hand shapes, Hand location, palm orientation and hand movement, and facial expressions (non-manual signs) to express a speaker's thoughts simultaneously.

In as far as ASL is concerned, they note that despite the fact that the nature of incidence of deafness is low, children who have hearing parentage, often endured and experienced the lack of attainable access to a group of signers who are highly proficient in their language at school and out of school because they have no role models. Both the hearing and deaf learners therefore have limited opportunities to communication through a shared language or methods, even if they are

integrated in the same classrooms. The same has been noted in studies done in Norway and Australia. In Kenya, KSL being a minority language, most children learn it in schools. Unlike spoken language that is learnt horizontally mostly from one generation to another or from parent to child, KSL is learnt vertically in schools for the deaf as pointed out earlier – mostly from child to child. Therefore in a scenario where a child who is deaf was to share a classroom with a child who is hearing, their communication would not be shared through mutual language and thus creating a barrier to inclusion. This is not to mean that deaf children cannot learn a spoken language like English or Kiswahili far from the truth, they can learn any spoken language using KSL but again the modality of use will be different. While the hearing will be able to speak these languages, the deaf would learn them for the purpose of reading and writing them. As it is in Kenya today most deaf are marginally literate in English and majority don't know any Kiswahili thus effectively locking out the two spoken languages as means of communication through mutual language through reading and writing.

1.5.3. *Language competence*

The concept of linguistic competence or linguistic proficiency was introduced by Chomsky. [36]. Language competence is a system of language knowledge owned by native speakers of a language. It differs from linguistic performance, which refers to the way a language system is used for purposes of communication. Deaf people who have learnt sign language have native speakers' competence in the same. However in Kenya most teachers of the deaf are hearing and unfortunately have little or no competence in KSL at all. The teachers therefore need to be equipped with KSL skills for teachers as a prerequisite for effective performance of their jobs. Teachers of Language specifically cannot escape the fact that they need to be competent or fluent signers to be able to lay the foundation that other teachers in the school set up can build on in terms of teaching academic subjects. Okombo et al. [37], assert that: the teacher can play this pivotal role if they develop the following capacities:

- They must be fluent in KSL as a language used for communication across the curriculum and particularly as a medium of instruction.
- They need to be competent in teaching skills i.e. Skills and knowledge of teaching KSL as a language in terms of:
 - Understanding the Basic KSL linguistics ... [including] KSL language skills;
 - Understanding the Methodology of teaching and assessing a non-spoken language – KSL.

The question that begs here then is what happens if most teachers in schools for the deaf as is the case are not KSL competent? What will happen when you take their learners and integrate or mainstream them into a regular school in the name of inclusion?

1.6. **The role of the home, the family, childcare and other socializing experiences**

How does the fact that most children who are deaf and have hearing parents and live or have lived in a hearing environment throughout their childhood affect their socialization? Communication is a prerequisite for socialization. The lack of hearing for most such children is a big stumbling block to their socialization since it presents challenges in how they relate with family members, how they make friends, and how they participate in societal activities. This can be so because more often than not deaf children are isolated in the sense that they may be the only ones in a certain locality. Thus the involvement of parents with children who are deaf in the lives of their deaf children is paramount. They must make all efforts to be able to communicate with them by making a deliberate effort to learn KSL.

Hearing parents who have children who are deaf must be made aware that deaf children are normal and that theirs is a communication challenge occasioned by their unique communication needs. Such parents must also be made to understand that it is important that their children learn KSL. In as far as care giving is concerned, hiring care givers that are also competent in KSL or are willing to learn KSL must be encouraged. This eventually will inspire children who are deaf to feel like coming back home from school. If there is lack of communication in the home, children who are deaf normally don't feel like going back home during the holidays but would rather stay in school where there is some communication. All these socializing agents are important steps towards inclusion especially for the partially deaf or those using amplification. Hearing Parents and other stakeholders should also note that it is necessary to have them introduced early to sign language and the knowledge of many languages and that integration with strong family support for sign language usage, is the best way to prepare their children who are deaf for their effective participation in society in future. (WFD [38]).

1.7. **Is inclusion conducive for deaf school going children?**

For students burdened by impairments that affects the functions of one or more of their senses, especially those with sensory impairments such as visual and hearing impairment mainstream schooling poses particular challenges for

them. Owing to the expense of human support needed. Some may dismiss the cost argument by saying that when you put all students together regardless of their special needs you cut costs. If we are rooting for inclusion then children who are deaf must be integrated into mainstream schools with adequate support services that may include: specialized teachers of the deaf, trained and qualified interpreters, trained teacher aides, competent KSL teachers, and trained speech therapists all of whom must also be integrated in with the regular teachers. In addition it might be necessary that regular teachers and students also learn KSL. In our opinion this whole scenario of mainstreaming deaf children in regular schools is a rather difficult fit to achieve. It would require massive investments to establish the necessary infrastructure in the regular schools which in our view are already overstretched. Inclusion may also require a lot of adaptations, accommodations, and modifications. The changes required by a student may prove quite important when his or her classroom placement is considered. The changes can come in the form of accommodations and modifications.

Curricular adaptations is viewed as transformations that are acceptable in the educational surroundings that permit equal opportunity for students to get accessibility, results, benefits, and levels of achievement. That is to say, curricular modifications should permit students with disabilities to participate in an encompassing environment which compensates for their deficiency as learners. This is well put. However, in the Kenyan situation there may have been no meaningful curriculum adaptation that sets to compensate for learners with disability weaknesses. The other issue is whether these curriculum adaptations lower the standards or quality of education for learners with disabilities?

This brings us to the other aspect of adaptation which is accommodation. Accommodation requires that students with disabilities read the same material and be examined using the same tests that their non-disabled peers are given. Modification on the other hand refers to adaptations of the curriculum which mostly alters or brings down expectations or standards. For example Students who find reading difficult could instead be encouraged to read the simplified version of published texts. While this enable these students participate in classroom discussions, it however lowers reading level expectations. As far as accommodation is concerned in deaf education in Kenya, it can only be possible if children who are deaf are taught KSL and examined in KSL. This means that students who are deaf are taught academic subject and language in a language they understand – KSL. Then and only then can they compete effectively academically with their hearing peers. This we feel can be done effectively in Special schools such as those for the deaf and not in regular schools.

Some scholars such as Rosenqvist and Gustavsson [39] have argued that what is required is a more diverse, model of inclusion which would reflect in a better way the diversity of learners who are deaf and are currently mainstreamed in general education classes. These models would also include the needs of learners who are likely to reap psychological and social benefits in communication and culturally also benefit from the use of their Mother tongue – Kenyan sign language in regular classes in a comprehensive manner. In no way does this indicate any form of “exclusion”, but rather shows an inclusive model that approves the maintenance of certain individual idiosyncrasies or group attributes. Some observers support the need for human beings to preserve some notion of difference which in one way or another may reinforce ones sense of identity, peculiarity or proficiency (Rosenqvist & Gustavsson. (Opcit)

The World federation for the Deaf (WFD) an international non-governmental organization set up to engage in the promotion of rights of people who are deaf worldwide asserts that: students who are deaf work best in a multilingual environments which not only promotes but also cherishes both their cultural and linguistic identity, that respects and acknowledges the differences of their experiences and options which optimizes their linguistic, academic, social and, in the long term, economic results.

Another challenge of an I.E. for deaf children may include the potential for conflict between teachers and parents. Parents with children in regular schools may feel that by integrating learners with disabilities (LWD), their children are being given a raw deal. They may feel that disruptions in general education classrooms are likely to happen when students with disabilities are included, especially students with the most severe disabilities or multiple disabilities. Thus is it possible for students with severe or multiple disabilities to benefit from placement in regular classrooms? Another potential source of conflict between teachers and parents would be whether the teachers have requisite skills to adapt to inclusive classroom methods. Many parents may feel that teachers in regular schools have no training to handle LWD.

1.8. Way forward

We must remember that opposing inclusion does not imply advocating exclusion. But clearly, there seems to be a disconnect between the educational policy of inclusion or education for all and the practice on the ground in Kenya. Despite the numerous human rights instruments both internationally and locally that seems to place education as a human right and the numerous safeguards put in place to safeguard PWD, the education policy and the practice in Kenya as far as learners who are deaf are concerned, does not reflect and respect their diversity as learners. It is not enough

to have policy statements or descriptions of programs for children with disabilities that include references to inclusion but on the ground the reality is totally different.

Specific disability groups have raised strong concerns and sometimes have resisted inclusion. The fact that the greatest concern and opposition to Inclusive education emanates from many in the deaf community is not surprising. Cohen [40] an anti inclusionist points out the unsuitability of inclusion for most students with hearing impairments. He also pointed out the connection between communication among peers and how critically important it is to all the learners cognitive and social development. However, because most learners who are deaf are unable to read lips or speak in regular classroom settings, it effectively hampers their ability to fully access communication-and consequently their ability to fully develop cognitively and socially-including how they use sign language. He identifies research that show how students who were deaf and who enrolled in schools for the deaf greatly gained intellectually because of use a common language and shared culture, as compared to those who are deaf but were in mainstreamed classroom settings. The use of a sign-language interpreter in an educational set up especially in an inclusive classroom does not make things better since students who are deaf still have a high probability of missing out on a sense of acceptance and belonging, chances of interacting with one's peers etc. These are the same experiences that were selected as rationales that determine inclusive environments by those who advocate for inclusion, it is important to point out that when communication in the classroom is facilitated through a sign language interpreter, it is likely to hamper the academic development of learners socially, emotionally, and even academically. This also happens in informal communications such as with friends and with peers, or when taking part in extracurricular activities, such as dating, etc. these activities also cannot be well-facilitated through the involvement of a third-party – the interpreter.

Concern is also raised by parents of children with more severe disabilities about the type of opportunities available for their children to enable them to learn and develop basic life skills while integrated in a regular classroom set up. They fear that their children will be scorned by the non-disabled learners thus they treat inclusion cautiously. Consequently, many proponents of anti inclusionism advocate for residential schools or special schools with a community of SL users that include students, teachers and workers as the more appropriate educational placement option for students who are deaf.

Proponents of this view, which we concur with, recognize why individualized attention is important and have to be part of the educational requirements of students with learning disabilities for them to progress academically. This individualized attention can be achieved primarily through specialized teachers who work individually with each learner or sometimes in small gatherings, usually in a resource room setting.

The movement towards reforms of inclusive education philosophy that is cherished by educators and parents of learners with disabilities alike is to the Deaf community a cruel type of assimilation detrimental to their robustness and reproduction. For them schooling that is inclusive is a form of a “forced assimilation”— an “unnatural attempt to make deaf persons hearing” [41]. Concerned with the challenge of continuation across generations, the community of people who are deaf are in support of a strong and well defined special education system in which boarding schools have a big role to play as the key and sustaining factor in the Deaf community. They further argue that since people who are deaf are an acceptable cultural and linguistic group entitled to educational programs that take a strong and distinct special education system into account within the residential framework where bilingual-bicultural education (bi-bi) is promoted.

The bi-bi (Bilingual / bicultural) approach, was initially explored at Gallaudet University in the 1970s. This approach enables children who are deaf to mingle daily within a sign environment. In the Kenyan scenario, it would mean that KSL be the language of learning right from the early childhood education level through to secondary school with emphasis being put on the production and comprehension of signs and on being able to read and write English and or Kiswahili (bilingual). Proponents of this view point also view the world of deafness as unique, gratifying and worthy of preservation, and because of this, they focus on ensuring pupils are exposed to the standard majority spoken word cultures and also to the values found within the signing world (bicultural), that have a rich heritage of folklore, literature and customs. The Bi-bi approach therefore, emphasizes a program of immersion that enables the learners many experiences to be expressed within deaf culture, through interaction with both fellow deaf learners and deaf adults that can serve as role models both in and outside the classroom. This provides the learners who are deaf with self-worth as well as their emotional well-being. Winzer [42]. The bi-bi approach is best exemplified by its use in Australia, where the focus on education is through, Auslan (Australian Sign Language) and English. English is taught to students who are deaf in Australia as a second language through reading proficiency and writing ability. In most educational programmes offered as well as in the school settings, learners who are deaf are enabled to learn about their communities, history, language and culture, and also to learn about the hearing community and culture. This is the intervention strategy we advocate for in this paper – a deaf education that is based on a Bilingual/bicultural approach. For instance, many schools

for the deaf in the United States of America have adopted the bi-bi education. Data submitted by Miller and Moores [43] show that this approach to education of the deaf is already in use in 75% of the huge programs for students who are deaf. On the contrary, other countries are still busy advocating for full inclusion in the education for the deaf.

Shanker [44] in "Where We Stand," asserted:

What full exclusionists don't understand is that children with disabilities are individuals who have diverse needs and for this reason it is possible that some may benefit from inclusion while others may not. They also fail to understand that children who are medically fragile and those with behavioral disorders that are severe in nature when placed in regular classrooms are likely suffer more harm and are hardly assisted especially in a situation where teachers do not have a highly specialized training to deal with their needs. We equally believe strongly that inclusion policies in Kenya need to be relooked, rethought and reevaluated in a flexible way, taking cognizance of the distinction between the general class or school for all model and the special school model so as to clearly indicate special schools, and special units within schools have their place in deaf education as long as such schools and units are sensitive to the needs of learners who are the deaf and follow to a large extent the bi-bi approach. Research must be conducted to come up with inclusive education policies that take into cognizance the importance of having a range of schooling options for learners with disabilities and in particular the students who are deaf.

2. Conclusion

The agitation for inclusive education by inclusionists is commendable since they view separate or special schools for LWD as a form of discrimination. They argue that inclusion enhances social interaction leading to understanding diversity. It also creates a society that is open minded and which can work and interact with people from different places among other things. Because of their perspective, the inclusionists have a critical mindset of what they call 'special education.' However, exclusionists on the other hand argue that in this whole debate a very important aspect of inclusion gets lost because the inclusionists focus is on a "place" whether a special school or an integrated one forgetting that the school is just one of the inclusion experiences and others may include: the home, family, childcare and other socializing experiences, all of which are important. A clear understanding of people who are deaf and regarding them as a community with a distinct culture and language shows us that there isn't much difference in terms of regular or deaf education but for modalities. Learners who are deaf and are integrated in regular schools face numerous challenges that emanate from language differences, modality differences and language competences all of which work against integrating them in those regular schools. In this paper we have appreciated the philosophy behind inclusive education but we have also pointed out that sometimes there may be need for special schools for the maintenance of some concepts of difference in humans since in one way or another it may reinforce a person's sense of identity, peculiarity or proficiencies. Thus some learners with disabilities (especially Deaf learners) may be better off in special school that offer the correct programs and support than in regular school that purport to be inclusive but offer wrong programs for reasons discussed above. Finally, opposing inclusion does not imply advocating exclusion.

Compliance with ethical standards

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No possible conflict of interest in the publication of this manuscript

Statement of ethical approval

The present research work does not contain any studies performed on animals/humans subjects by the author.

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